

Managerial Competence and Performance of Aluminium Firms in South East, Nigeria

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Abstract: The effective utilization of a firm's precious human resources is crucial to its survival. Aluminium firms are increasingly relying on managerial competencies to enhance the optimal utilization of their human resources. Meanwhile, as a result chronic problems, organizations, especially industrial firms, are behind in understanding the advantages of managerial competencies. To address these shortcomings, the study examined the relationship between managerial competence and performance of Aluminium firms in South East, Nigeria. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. A total population of staff of the twenty (20) selected Aluminium Firms in South-East Nigeria was eight hundred and fifty-two (852) employees. A sample size of 265 employees was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Data were generated using a structured questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient with the aid of SPSS, 20. The results revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between customer focus competence and organisational competitiveness of Aluminium Firms in South East, Nigeria with the values ($r = 0.970$; $P\text{-value} = 0.000$). This relationship could also be described as significant and direct because, as managerial competence resulting from an increase or decrease in customer focus competence, the level of organizational competitiveness in Aluminium firms will also increase or decrease in the same ratio. The study recommended that management should provide customer service training programmes which will improve employees' skills and knowledge for better service delivery, thereby enhancing organisational competitiveness in the industry.

Keywords: Customer-focus Competence, Organisational Competitiveness, Managerial Competence, Aluminium Firms.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technological advances, industrial development, globalization, and the evolution of work, have led to critical changes in the sways and dynamics of organizations, generating new challenges for developing competitive advantage as organization dynamics. Therefore, developing new strategies and tools is necessary to adapt to this reality, where the manager's role is paramount (Minh, 2020). Different sectors in Nigeria have been affected by new economic realities caused by internationalization, globalization, innovation, emerging markets, technology, and others, which invariably create changes in the structure,

strategic development, and decision-making (Guzman, Castorena & Solarte, 2023). From this perspective, it can be inferred that managerial competence and its impact organizational performance are critical factors of competitive sales and employees' efficiency for aluminium firms to achieve better adaptability and competitiveness.

The manufacturing industry like aluminium firms have been considered the engine of the economy's growth and it plays a vital role in sustaining the development of any country locally and globally (Abdulsalam & Zainal, 2022). The ability of any manufacturing firm to succeed or fail depends on an employee behaviour at work. Employee behavioural outcomes depend on various variables such as the competency of various managers and leaders, and given that management competencies are concerned with people's behaviour, identifying and developing the competencies of managers in relation to their decision-making role either on a local or global scale, activities and specific responsibilities will have a significant impact on how employees behave at the workplace because they have been rated the most important factor to success in any business (Hanson, 2020). Most of these wastes include human elements, and organizations should show tremendous respect and empowerment to their people resources by establishing a more favourable working culture and continuous development. This research aims to identify the primary factors impacting management competencies on the behavioural outcomes of employees in selected Nigerian manufacturing organizations. Furthermore, it seeks to identify the critical impediment to implementing various competence programs at various management levels in manufacturing businesses.

Eid and Anter (2021) purport that managerial competencies may enhance present job performance, improve the quality of goods or services, adjust to new technologies, produce a more flexible workforce, and increase employee safety. According to Alabri, Siron, and Alam (2022), managerial competencies have become a critical instrument for managers to attain greater levels of performance, generate better outcomes, get promoted, and secure their job. Aluminium firms are an essential part of the economic growth of nations. However, there is a great challenge to keep their performance in the long term. For this reason, Guzmán, et al (2023) maintain that adopting management systems focused on administrative practices is key to achieving better business performance focusing on competitiveness and efficiency. However, managerial competence can be perceived when considering certain variables in terms of customer focus quality among managers in the firm. This parameter determines the extent which managerial competence can be well understood in relation to organizational performance.

Statement of the Problem

In this era of globalization, many organizations face strong competition, and business survival has become one of the important management concerns. Business survival is not just a financial concern, but it is also a management and employment issue which focuses mostly on managerial competence in terms of customer focus to enhance organizational performance in the area of competitiveness in the organization. Achieving managerial competence involves mastering a diverse set of skills and facing various challenges, including: Skill Diversification, Adaptability, Managing Diverse Teams, Time Management, Decision-Making, Conflict Resolution, Emotional Intelligence, Building and Maintaining Relationships, Leading Change, Performance Management, Strategic Thinking and Stress Management. Managers need a broad range of competencies—leadership, communication, decision-making, problem-solving, and more. Developing proficiency in these diverse areas can be challenging. Adapting to changing business environments, technology, and market trends is crucial. Managers must continually learn and adjust their approaches to stay relevant. Managing teams with different backgrounds, skills, and perspectives requires the ability to understand, respect, and effectively utilize diversity. This can be challenging due to varying communication styles, cultural differences, and conflicting viewpoints.

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Balancing multiple responsibilities, prioritizing tasks, and managing time effectively is a perpetual challenge for managers, especially when dealing with numerous demands and unexpected situations.

Making decisions under uncertainty and with limited information is a common challenge. Managers must be able to make timely and effective decisions, considering various factors and potential risks. Addressing conflicts within the team or between team members requires strong interpersonal skills and the ability to mediate and resolve disputes professionally. Understanding and managing one's emotions and those of others is crucial. Developing emotional intelligence to navigate challenging situations and foster healthy team dynamics can be difficult. Cultivating relationships with stakeholders, team members, and external partners is essential for a manager's success. Maintaining these relationships requires ongoing effort. Implementing changes within an organization can be met with resistance. Effective managers must lead change initiatives and navigate resistance within their teams. Evaluating and managing the performance of team members, providing feedback, and fostering their growth and development is a continuous challenge. Developing a strategic vision and aligning it with day-to-day operations requires the ability to think critically and strategically, which can be a challenge for many managers. Management roles often come with high levels of stress. Managing stress effectively while making critical decisions and dealing with various challenges is vital. Addressing these challenges requires ongoing learning, development, and practice. Successful managers continually refine and adapt their skills to meet the demands of the ever-evolving business landscape. Consequently, to establish the relationship between customer quality focus and firms' competitiveness towards customer satisfaction has remain a burning issue in line with the expectations set in the mission statement of the Aluminium firms as the level of procurements of Aluminium products from neighbouring states of the South East has continued to increased. This is as result of the inability to keep customers satisfied by trying to know their expectations of services offered through their operational decision-making process to enhance their competitiveness in the business environment.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the relationship between managerial competency and the performance of Aluminium Firms in South East, Nigeria. However, the specific objective of the study is to investigate the relationship between customer focus and competitiveness of Aluminium Firms in South East, Nigeria.

Research Question

To what extent does customer focus relate to competitiveness of Aluminium Firms in South East, Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

Ho: There is no positive significant relationship between customer focus and competitiveness of Aluminium Firms in South East, Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Competency and Managerial Competency

Unnikrishnan (2020) defines competence as “the quality or the state of being competent” which means “having the requisites or adequate ability or qualities” or “having the capacity to function in a particular way”. Erkilic, Aytekin and Gazeloglu (2019) define competence as “the ability to do well”. This definition refers to competence as the ability to perform well in a particular task and it does not also identify what the abilities are to make a person competent. Guzman et al (2023) defines competence as

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“the ability to execute activities” and Saruchera (2022) defines it as “the ability to execute something successfully”. While Gitau, Abayo and Kibuine (2020) view it as “the ability to apply knowledge and skills”. All these definitions refer to competence as the ability to apply or execute the job while competency means “the possession of sufficient knowledge or skills”. Competencies are related to knowledge and skills which are required to perform competently. These are needed personal competencies for a person to perform a function. Concerning this concept, Khan, Rehmat, Butt, Farooqi and Asim (2020) identified two meanings of the term “competency”. The first refers to the outputs or results of training which is competent performance. The second refers to the inputs of the underlying attributes required for a person to attain competent performance. They indicated that competency has several meanings depending on its purpose. The definition of Khan, Rehmat, Butt, Farooqi and Asim (2020) implies that competency requires knowledge and skills which are prerequisites for competent performance. In a nutshell, managerial competency refers to the possession of knowledge, skills, behavior, attitude, or values that support the successful management of people. Daouk-Öyry, et al (2021) define it as “a set of employees’ behaviour that must be used for the position that the tasks arising from this position competently mastered.

Customer-focus Competence

Customer focus relates to the ability to understand customer needs and expectations provide extra efforts, delivering extraordinary services to meet their expectations, build a strong brace between organisation and customers and respond to the current and the future customer needs by providing the best services for internal and external customers (Kotler, 2003). Ferri, (2011) argues that hiring qualified employees, and aligning them to the organisation’s strategies will maintain current customer focus. Customer focus competence is the ability to keep customers satisfied by continuously following up customers’ needs to meet their requirements and expectations by developing services and products. Customer focus is another variable of organisational performance in Aluminium manufacturing firms in South East, Nigeria as it relates to the ability of the firms to understand customer needs and expectations, provide extra efforts, delivering extraordinary services to meet their expectations, build a strong brace between organisation and customers and respond to the current and the future customer needs through providing the best service for internal and external customer (Kotler, 2003). Customer-focus performance is the ability to keep customers satisfied by continuously flowing up customers’ needs to meet their requirements and expectations by developing services and products (Kotler, 2003).

Organisational Competitiveness

Competitiveness is a complex concept that expresses a firm's ability to survive in the conditions of competition, by proving products and services that meet high quality standards at competitive prices, both nationally and internationally, in relation to the possibilities and performance of other firms (Porter, 2008). The term competitiveness associated with a company suggests safety, efficiency, quality, high productivity, adaptability, success, modern management, superior products, and optimal costs. The assessment of the company's competitiveness can be done by analysing the economic efficiency in relation to other competitors on the market. In practice, the competitiveness of a company is analysed in terms of two indicators: the yield obtained and the impact of the products/services on the market (Porter, 2008). Experience shows that the yield is regarded as a means of ensuring the profitability of a business (development and achievement of the established economic and social objectives) and not as a goal of the enterprise. Therefore, the basic objective of the enterprise is to satisfy the client and society as a whole, but profit should not be neglected considering that it constitutes an indicator of the company's performance on its competitiveness. Organisational Competitiveness is an ability of a firm that keep or improve its competitive position and returns (Tuan & Mai, 2012). Organizational competitiveness refers

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to an ability of adapting to environmental factors while develop the company business successfully (Porter, 2008). Banton, (2020) asserts that organizational competitiveness is the ability of obtaining organisational value in the long term.

Relationship between Managerial Competency and Performance

For the last few decades, competencies have often been used for the basis of performance evaluation (Cardy & Selvarajan, 2006). The competence measurement indicators, influences behavioural factors relevant to organisational performance and determines the extent the job is carried out. Hence many firms use competency models as a part of their organisational development program to assess behavioural performance indices together with objectives (Özçelik & Ferman, 2006). Accordingly, many scholars (Levenson, et.al, 2006, Ryan, Emmerling & Spencer, 2009) have claimed that evaluation of managers’ competencies provide an effective technique for predicting employees’ job performance. There is a variety of research that clarify the relationship between competencies and employees’ job (task) performance (Liu, 2005; Dainty, 2004; Levenson, 2006; Ryan, et al, 2009). For example, findings of Ahadzie, Proverbs, Olomolaiye, & Ankrah, (2009) study demonstrate the suitability and potential usefulness of their competency-based model that reflects elements of both performance behaviours and outcomes in predicting the performance. Similarly, there are other research (Ryan et.al, 2009) highlighting the validity and utility of competencies in predicting employees’ work performance.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Resource-Based View Theory

Resource-Based View (RBV) is an approach that emerged in 1980 to 1990 which is traceable to the major published work by Barney, (1991). The Core competency of a firm centres of its Resources and Sustained Competitive Advantage by Barney. Resource-Based View is an approach that states that sustainable competitive advantage can be obtained provided a firm engages in development of resources and capacities that remain valuable, rare, inimitable, and not substitutable. The proponents of this view argue that organisations should analyse their internal environment specifically managerial competencies to find out the sources of competitive advantage instead of expending much time in x-raying competitive environmental forces. This theory was formalized by Barney in 1991.

The argument in this theory is that an organisation would eliminate uncertainties and remain competitive advantaged in the external environment if it is able to build internal capacities and potentials which are valuable, rare, inimitable, and have no substitute. Although, Barney argues that not all the resources possessed by organisation will help in conceiving and implementing strategy for occasioning efficiency and effectiveness, the resources that are considered valuable, rare, inimitable, and not substitutable will help an organisation to obtain sustained competitive advantage. Such resources, according to Barney, will help organisations to design and apply strategy that will enhance efficiency and effectiveness better than the competitors in the market.

4. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Zhao and Wang (2023) examined the impact of managerial competence on corporate carbon performance: An empirical study based on Chinese heavy polluters. The aim of the study was to determine the relationship between managerial skill and carbon emission performance using the Shanghai and Shenzhen A-shares data of Chinese heavy polluters from 2014 to 2019. The study adopted exploratory research design and collected through time series from 2014 to 2019 were analysed using stepwise regression technique in order to examine the mediating influence of financing limitations and financial status. Findings indicated that a significant positive correlation exists between managerial

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competence (ME) and corporate carbon performance (CP), and also it revealed that managerial competence (ME) is significantly and negatively related to firms' external financing constraints (KZ) and internal financial position; and that the latter is significantly and negatively related to firms' carbon performance (CP). The study recommended that in order to reduce carbon emissions, businesses are motivated by their social standing and their aversion to risk. Under the policy guidance, stakeholders will become increasingly supportive of carbon emission reduction, and businesses may cater to the needs of their stakeholders to meet their expectations.

A study on distinctive competence in a recessed economy and performance of selected commercial banks in Enugu State, Nigeria was conducted by Chiekezie, Onwuchekwa & Nwobodo (2017). The objective of the study was to examine the influence of employee- customer relationship on adaptability of commercial banks in Enugu State. A descriptive survey research design was employed. A sample size of 144 respondents and 140 customers were selected from three commercial banks in the three senatorial districts in Enugu state. A structured questionnaire was used to generate data which were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient. The results indicated that a positive significant relationship exist between employee-customer relationship and adaptability of selected commercial banks in Enugu State. The study concluded that employee-customer relationship is vital for adaptability and sustainability of organisations toward economic development. The study suggested that organisations should have a strong employee-customer relationship competence so as to improve their performance.

A study on distinctive capabilities and the performance of small and medium size enterprises in Malaysia was conducted by Kim-man (2012). The aim of the study was to examine strategic factors that influence the performance of small and medium size enterprises in the Malaysia manufacturing sector. The study employed a descriptive survey design. A sample population of 100 small and medium enterprises was selected and administered a questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using correlation test with the aid of statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS). The results revealed that there is a positive significant relationship between distinctive competence and the performance of small and medium enterprises. The study suggested that there is need for production expansion, market expansion, competitive forces, facilitation of resources acquisition and technological changes.

Sabath, Laith and Manar (2012) investigated the effect of core competence on competitive advantage and organisational performance in United Arab Emirate. The objective of the study was to examine the effect of core competence, competitive advantage and organisational performance of paint industry in United Arab Emirate. The study decomposed core competence in three dimensions which include; shared vision, cooperation and empowerment. Competitive advantage was decomposed in terms of flexibility and responsiveness. The study adopted descriptive survey design. A structured questionnaire was administered electronically to a total of 77 managers. The data generated were analysed using regression test. The results showed that core competence has a strong and positive impact on competitive advantage and organisational performance while competitive advantage has a significant impact on organisational performance. The study recommended that for organisations to remain competitive and achieve competitive advantages, managers should endeavour to improve organisational performance by managing the dimensions of core competence.

5. METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was adopted. There are many Aluminium firms in the South East Nigeria but for the purpose of this study, the total population of staff of the twenty (20) selected Aluminium Firms in South-East Nigeria is eight hundred and fifty-two (852), which comprise all categories of staff except the out sourced workers. The selection of these firms were based on the firms

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that have been in operation for at least ten years and staff strength above twenty-five (25) employees. Primary source of data formed the major source of data collection used in the study. The study adopted stratified random sampling to select a sample from the target population of 852 employees of the aluminium firms in South East Nigeria. The study grouped the population into twenty strata firms. However, the sample size was calculated using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula as shown below:

$$S = \frac{X^2 NP (1-P)}{d^2(N-1) + X^2P (1-P)}$$

where: S = Sample size, X^2 = Table value of Chi-square for 1 degree of freedom at 0.05% confidence level (3.84); N = Total population size; P = Population proportion (0.5); d = Degree of accuracy expressed as a proportion (0.05). Thus;

$$S = \frac{3.84 (852) (0.5) (1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2 (852-1) + (3.84) (0.5) (1-0.5)}$$

$$S = \frac{817.92}{2.1275 + 0.96}$$

$$S = \frac{817.92}{2.0875}$$

S = 265 respondents.

Therefore, the sample size for the study is two hundred and sixty-five (265) determined from the population of the twenty Aluminium Firms under investigation. The structured questionnaire was face validated by specialists in Measurement and Evaluation Department, Faculty of Education, and Business Administration Department Nnamdi Azikiwe University, to modify, certify and approve and was confirmed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with the aid of SPSS, 20. The analytical technique used to test the hypothesis was the Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient denoted by r and its value is between $-1 < r < +1$ with the aid of Software Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.

$$r = \frac{n(\sum XY) - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{n(\sum X^2) - (\sum X)^2 \sqrt{n(\sum Y^2) - (\sum Y)^2}}$$

Where, r = Correlation Coefficient, x = Independent Variables, y = Dependent Variables, n= Number of Scores. To establish the significance of the result of the correlation analysis, the student t- statistics were used and expressed as

$$t = \frac{r \sqrt{\frac{n-2}{1-r^2}}}{\sqrt{1-r^2}}$$

Where, t = the unknown test of significance, n = the number of observations, r^2 = coefficient of determination, $n-2$ = the degree of freedom, $\sqrt{\quad}$ = root of the numbers, 1 = constant

After the correlation coefficient (r) were determined for each of the hypotheses formulated, the coefficient of determination (r^2) were calculated to find out the total variations in the dependent variable (Y) that is explained by the total variation in the independent variable (X). The results of the coefficient of determinations were subject to t-test (t) and the decision applied to the t-test (t) established the significance of correlation coefficient (r) results as against the critical (table) t-value.

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Out of two hundred and sixty-five (265) questionnaires administered to respondents, two hundred and fifty-four were completely filled and returned. This shows that the non-response rate for the survey is

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4.15% while the response rate is 95.85%. Hence 254 questionnaires were used for the analysis of this study.

Questionnaire Response Rate on Customer Focus

Table 1: Customer Focus

S/N	Question Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
1	My organisation attends to customers in a friendly manner.	3.32	1.118	Accepted
2	Customer complaints are often considered and promptly attended to in my firm.	3.32	1.132	Accepted
3	My firm’s key decisions focus mainly on how to improve customer demand.	3.36	1.150	Accepted
4	My firm’s products line aims at achieving customer satisfaction in the market	3.78	1.136	Accepted
5	We are made to understand that our firm can survive in the market only by focusing on customer needs and expectations.	3.76	1.143	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, July, 2023

The means and standard deviations of questions under customer focus construct is as shown in table 1 above.

Questionnaire Response Rate on Organisational Competitiveness

Table 2: Organisational Competitiveness

S/N	Question Items	Mean	Std. Deviation	Remarks
1	My organisational practices ensure usage of latest technology for research and development.	3.30	1.28	Accepted
2	My firm’s practices ensure that better Aluminium products and services are provided than competitors.	3.31	1.137	Accepted
3	My firm ensures that customers are always satisfied and remains a key priority to its existence.	3.32	1.114	Accepted
4	My firm responds to environmental changes by formulating strategies to enhance its competitiveness.	3.35	1.134	Accepted
5	My firm maintains competitive by Adopting strategic measures that ensures that innovation capabilities are developed.	3.81	1.154	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, July, 2023.

The means and standard deviations of questions under Organisational Competitiveness construct is as shown in Table 2 above.

Test of Hypothesis

Table 3: Correlation coefficient between Customer Focus Competence and Organisational Competitiveness

Correlations			
		Customer Focus	Organisational Competitiveness
Customer Focus	Pearson Correlation	1	.970**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	254	254
Organisational Competitiveness	Pearson Correlation	.970**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	254	254

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The findings presented in Table 3 indicate that the coefficient of correlation for Customer Focus is 0.970, demonstrating a statistically significant relationship with a p-value of 0.000. The statistical significance of the relationship between customer focus and organisational competitiveness is supported by the p-value of 0.000, indicating a positive association. The aforementioned statement implies that there is a positive significant relationship between customer focus and organisational competitiveness.

Discussion of Findings

Findings showed that there is a significant positive relationship between customer focus competence and organisational competitiveness in Aluminium firms in South East Nigeria. The coefficient of correlation of 0.970 indicates a strong positive association between customer focus competence and organisational competitiveness, and the statistically significant p-value of 0.000 reinforces of the significance of the relationship. This provides strong evidence to support the claim that there is a significant positive between these two variables. (Darsono, 2016).

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

With the undeniable merits of managerial competencies, Aluminium firms should prioritize developing managers abilities, skills, and knowledge in order to enhance its performance outcomes because this study concluded that managerial competence dimension, that is, customer-focus competence has a significant relationship with the performance of firms in Nigeria Economy. However, the hypothesis revealed that there is also a positive significant relationship between customer focus competence and organisational competitiveness of Aluminium Firms in South East, Nigeria with the values ($r = 0.970$; $p\text{-value} = 0.000$). This relationship could also be said to be significant and direct as managerial competence resulted by customer focus competence increases or decreases, the level of organisational competitiveness in the Aluminium firms will also increases or decrease in the same ratio.

The management is required to provide customer service training programmes which in turn improves employees needed skills and knowledge to provide quality goods and services for the customers thereby enhancing organisational competitiveness in the industry.

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