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PROCESS MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS COMMUNICATION AS CORRELATES OF EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE IN SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract
The study examined business process management and business communication as correlates of effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Abia State, Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study while two research hypotheses were tested. The study adopted correlational design. The population of the study comprised 1,809 entrepreneurs of small and medium-scale enterprises registered with Abia State Ministry of Trade and Investment. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample 226 SME managers for the study. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. Three experts were used to validate the instrument for data collection. Reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach's alpha and it yielded alpha values of 0.79, 0.81, and 0.77 for the three clusters, respectively. Data analysis was done using Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis. Findings from the study revealed that there was a significant positive correlation between business communication and effective SME performance. No significant positive correlation was found between business process management and effective SME performance. Based on the findings, it was recommended that owners and managers of SMEs should as matter of necessity install a functional communication system for effective communication among all stakeholders of the business enterprise in order to achieve effective performance.

Keywords: Business process management, business communication, effective performance, small and medium scale enterprises

Introduction

Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) are widely recognised in developed and developing economies. They are found in the manufacturing, service, education, agriculture, transport, and construction, among other sectors of the economy. Small and medium scale enterprises dominate the wholesale and retail businesses in Nigeria. No government of any country pays lips service to the development of SMEs due to the conspicuous roles they play in the growth and development of the economy. Igwe, Amaugo, Ogundana, Egere and Anigbo (2018) noted that the increase in attention in SMEs by governments, individuals, institutions and corporate bodies became profound since the economic impact of the 2007/2008 financial crisis on economies globally. Erdin and Ozkaya (2020) also reiterated that unemployment crisis in the 1980s spurred policy-makers to advocate for due attention to SMEs as a way of boosting production and employment in the economy of nations. The inability of government at all levels to absorb every job-seeking youth into its workforce also underscores the reason why SMEs have come to the front burner in recent times, as a way of promoting self-employment. With the advent of globalization and digital information and communication system, SMEs have

witnessed drastic changes in terms of innovation in operations, marketing and efficiency in reaching out to the global society.

This advancement in technology enables SMEs to effectively contribute to economic growth and development by improving performance. Small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria are mostly labour-intensive and thus provide huge employment opportunities to the citizens. Amoah, Belas, Dziwornu, Khan (2022) acknowledged that the challenge of creating employment and reducing poverty in African countries for the past decades is gradually fading out due to the efforts of SMEs. The authors further stated that employment created by SMEs improves the general welfare, standard of living, income levels, and social status of people around the globe including African countries. Agbo (2020) further enumerated other roles of small and medium scale enterprises in Nigeria to include utilization of local resources, equitable distribution of income and supporting the growth of large industries by providing components, accessories and semi-finished goods required by them. Similarly, Okolocha and Mong (2024) noted that SMEs are potential economic energizers that help to keep the economy afloat. The authors further stated that SMEs promote self-reliance and serve as training grounds for budding entrepreneurs and potentials managers of large enterprises. Engagement in SMEs helps individuals to earn income for meeting their basic necessities of life and thereby improve their standard of living. Internally generated revenue of government increases in states or countries where SMEs are present in large number and are effective in operation. Corroborating, Pulka and Gawuna (2022) noted that nations with competent, innovative, creative, proactive, and effectively-performing SMEs would experience rapid economic growth and development through efficient utilisation of human and material resources.

Effective SME performance connotes the ability to achieve the objectives of the business which are broken into short-term, medium-term and long-term objectives. The overall objectives of SMEs irrespective of the time lag are to maximize profit, gain competitive advantage, increase market share, attract and retain competent human resource as well as exist without liquidating in foreseeable future time. Pulka and Gawuna (2022) maintained that these objectives can be achieved when the SMEs initiate, implement and sustain right strategies, decisions and policies that enable them to manage internal and external resources in the external environment. Key indicators of effective SME performance according to Aper and Ushahemba (2021) include revenue size, return on investment, equity, liquidity, financial assets and capital base. Similarly, Uchenna, Sanjo & Joseph (2019) classified effective SME performance indicators into financial and non-financial performance measures. According to the authors financial performance indicators include profit, revenue, earning per share, dividends per share, return on equity, return on asset, among others. Non-financial performance indicators include market share, employees' satisfaction, efficiency, effectiveness, customers' satisfaction, workforce development, on-time delivery, product quality and productivity. Igwe, Ogundana, Egere and Anigbo (2018) opined that as SMEs perform more effectively and efficiently in all the key performance indicators, the overall national economy is improved. Jobs are created, domestic demands are satisfied, standards of living rise, cost of living declines and gross domestic product (GDP) grows.

However, in Abia State the performance of SMEs are not seen to be effective as expected. Aigboje, Akpa, and Egwakhe (2021) noted that small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Abia state are faced with serious challenges such as low profitability, poor turnover and limited market share owing to deficiency in the managerial acumen of the SME managers. The State has not reaped so much from the benefits that accrue from SMEs despite having lots of SMEs across all sectors of the business economy in Aba and other cities. The internally

generated revenue (IGR) of Abia State has continued to be low due to declining performance of SMEs in the State. The State of States Report for the year 2023 revealed that the State's IGR contributed only 18.36% of its total recurrent revenue of 101.59bn in the year 2022. This indicates that 81.64% of the State's total revenue came from revenue allocations from the federal government. This high level of reliance on revenue from federal government attests to the fact the state requires strategic measures to significantly improve its internally generated revenue in order to absorb any shock that can come from shrinkage in revenue from federation account. Furthermore, the report revealed that Abia state ranks 30th in the debt sustainability ranking and ranks 21st most indebted state among the 36 states in Nigeria. Thus, the state suffers heavily in servicing such high internal and external debt especially in this present exchange rate hike as 53.07% of its total revenue amounting to ₦57.10bn was spent on debt servicing in the year 2022.

This worrisome situation makes the state unable to provide adequate infrastructure and essential services such as affordable and adequate access to education, healthcare, electricity, pipe borne water, good road network and security of lives and properties. There have been incessant industrial dispute between labour unions and Abia State government in recent times due to non-payment payment of workers' salaries and other entitlements. Alaribe (2024) reported agitations and threat of industrial action by labour unions in the state due to government's inability to pay civil servants the approved ₦30,000 minimum wage since the year 2019 and ₦35,000 wage award to cushion the hardship resulting from the removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria. Ike (2023) affirmed that Abia State is adjudged as having the worst indices of development as indicated by figures from the national bureau of statistics. The author further stated that while the national unemployment rate is about 33%, that of Abia is 51% with a poverty rate of 31%. This implies that unemployment is very high in the state and that the standard of living of citizens of the state is low due to their high level of poverty. Consequently, there is need to explore measures to promote SMEs and make them perform optimally in order to boost IGR of the state, create employment, improve the standard of living of the people, reduce debt burden and diversify revenue sources to mitigate currency-related risks. Scholars (Uchenna, Sanjo & Joseph, 2019; Agu, Onwuka & Aruomah, 2019; Agbo, 2020) have studied the effects of variables such as entrepreneurial orientation, business challenges and taxation on the performance of SMEs in Abia State, but did not cover the effects of other variables such as business process management and business communication which may also affect the effective performance of SMEs in the State. Hence, this study intends to fill this gap in research findings.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine business process management and business communication as correlates of effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) in Abia State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the:

1. Correlation between business process management and effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria.
2. Correlation between business communication and effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the correlation between business process management and effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria?
2. What is the correlation between business communication and effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The under-listed research hypotheses were tested:

1. Business process management would significantly predict effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria.
2. Business communication would significantly predict effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria.

Literature Review

Business Process Management

Business process management is the process of planning, organizing and controlling every process of business operation geared towards the production and sale of goods to the final consumers with a view to maximize quality and profit. It is also systematic approach to managing and optimizing an organisation's business processes. It involves process mapping, process analysis, process redesign, process automation, process monitoring and process continuous improvement. Novak and Janes (2019) see business process as a comprehensive and coordinated set of connected activities, ranging from purchase of raw materials to sale of goods; which are intended for the adequate satisfaction of customers and to enable a successful business performance of an enterprise in a particular economic environment**.** Business processes management according to Alzoubi and Khafajy (2019) is an organized management method that aims at improving the quality of product and services' development through identifying, designing, modeling, documenting, controlling and improving the business processes to achieve integrated operational results and organization's strategic goals. It is part of quality assurance mechanism and an oversight function of the SME manager and the entrepreneur. Gadenne and Sharma (2019) stated that business process management entails efficient and effective maintenance of production processes without breakdowns and ensuring that it runs smoothly. It supports transparency in production process; improves efficiency in resource allocation and process optimization. Similarly, Kanapathy, Bin, Zailani and Aghapour (2017) posited that business process management checkmates production defects, process bottlenecks and minimizes production cost. It also provides accurate and reliable process information like risk, time, resources and critical constraints (Agbola & Ankrah, 2013). According to Emereole, Bonaventure and Nwaoligbo (2017), process management helps to develop processes that lead to the reliable delivery of exact and agreed customer requirements. Corroborating, Alzoubi and Khafajy (2019) maintained that process management is an advanced management system that helps in achieving efficiency, excellence and creativity. The authors further stated that process management breeds strategic initiatives that lead to the achievement of organizational goals and ensures rational use of the organization's assets.

Exercise of due diligence and commitment in process management can result to reduction in production cycle, duration of operation, forestall the occurrence of hazards or accidents during operations and enhance automation of operations which is in tandem with the present digital dispensation. The competitiveness of every business arises from the competitiveness of its business processes. By adopting business process management, business oranisations can become more viable, responsive and competitive in the market. Alzoubi and Khafajy (2019) maintained that business processes determine the quality, innovation, efficiency and productivity of the enterprise. Business processes in any organization determine operating costs and affect business performance. This is because it is during the implementation of series of activities and functions of the enterprise that costs are incurred and if these processes are not

well managed, abuse and negligent can set in. These abuses may lead to poor quality, incurrence of excessive costs and wastages. Consequently, adequate business process management becomes very necessary. A firm can gain competitive advantage over its competing firms due to possession of good processes of operation. Possession of competitive advantage culminates to high turnover and increased profit which are indices for determining effective performance in a business organization.

Effective Business Communication

The need for effective communication in an enterprise is premised on the fact that everybody needs to be aware of the business goals, plans, strategies, job responsibilities and methods that will be used to achieve the goals. The general public also needs to be adequately informed about the operations and services of the firm. Thus, the way to forestall the occurrence of any communication gap is by installing effective business communication system in the enterprise. Business communication is the flow of accurate information which people need and are entitled to have for a successful completion of jobs within an organisation (Manocha, 2023). It is the exchange of information between the organization and its employees, customers, government authorities, general public and other stakeholders. Such communications could be through newsletter, memo, circular, bulletin, magazines, radio and television announcement and so forth. Business communication is effective when it generates the desired result and at the right time too. By prioritizing clear and concise communication, organizations can create a more collaborative, productive, and profitable environment for all stakeholders. There is greater risk of failure if SME managers do not institutionalise effective communication system as part of its organizational culture. Thus, there is need to establish an official line of communication so that all employees know about updates, policy changes and new processes of operations. Where possible, SMEs managers should involve employees in decision-making and ensure that everybody in every department understands their roles and how they fit in with the rest of the enterprise. Benefits that accrue from effective communication include boosting morale and motivation of employees and customers, interdepartmental coordination and cooperation, teamwork. Others include ability to measure the effectiveness of current policies and procedures to achieve the enterprise goals. Effective communication is very useful in setting benchmark for operations.

Effective communication influences or directs a group to achieve a common goal. Effective communication increases the flexibility required to choose the appropriate modes of operation and maximises productivity (Shannon, 2018). Good SME managers motivate, inspire and build trust relationships based on shared understanding with their customers and employees. This shared understanding can only be achieved when there is effective communication between the firm and all its stakeholders. O'Neill, Hodgson and Mazrouei (2015) pointed out that good communication within an oganisation motivates and engages employees by allowing them to understand current organizational changes and how they should respond. The authors further stated that customers and employees who have constant communication with the owner of the business or SME manager, demonstrate a high level of satisfaction and less inclination to quit their patronage of the business or their jobs.

The benefits of effective communication are far-reaching towards organizational improvement. Information and communication sharing generates quality working relationships, development opportunities, loyalty, trust and commitment to quality operations ((Shannon, 2018). The author further maintained that in converse, lack of effective communications among SME managers, their employees and the general public, results to poor quality of operations, poor product and services and lack of respect and trust. Stacho, Stachova, Papula, Papulova and Kohnova**, (**2019) maintained that when employees and customers of a business entity feel

satisfied through effective and positive communication; their chance of leaving the organization will be slim. The authors added that effective communication is a predictor of employee productivity and customer satisfaction. Effective leadership communication and employee engagement strategies motivate employees to contribute effectively and remain with the organization for a longer period of time. Effective leadership communication is a fundamental organizational success factor. Also, deploying effective communication strategies by SME managers will increase quality of operations and the chances of retaining high-performing employees in the firm.

Methods

Correlational research design was adopted for the study. According to Nworgu (2015), correlational design is a research design that seeks to establish what relationship that exists between two or more variables. Correlational survey design was considered appropriate for this study since it sought to establish relationship between business process management, business communication and effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises without establishing causation of the relationship. This is in line with Wubante (2020) who stated that correlational survey research is used when the researcher seeks to measure, understand and to assess the statistical relationship between two variables with no influence from any extraneous variable and when it is not possible or desirable to experimentally manipulate the independent variable of interest. The study was carried out in Abia State, Nigeria. The population for this study comprised 1,809 managers of SMEs whose businesses are registered with Abia State Ministry of Commerce and Industry. The SME managers were chosen due to their active involvement in the daily management of the business and so the researcher believed that they were in a position to give useful information for the study. The sample size of the study was 226 SME managers. Simple random sampling technique was used to sample participants. Structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used as instrument for data collection. Validity of the instrument was established using three experts in Business education and educational measurement. Also, the reliability of the instrument was established using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software to determine the reliability index of each sections of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha values of 0.79, 0.81 and 0.77 were obtained for the three clusters, respectively and were considered high enough to regard the instrument reliable for the study. The researcher adopted a direct approach in the administration of the instrument using five research assistants. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis were used as methods of data analysis. These methods of data analysis were considered appropriate since the study sought to establish relationship between variables of interest.

Results

Results of data analysis are presented below:

Table 1: Pearson correlations between business process management, effective communication and SME performance

		Process Mgt.	Communications	Effective performance
Business Process Mgt.	Pearson Correlation	.258**	1	-.309**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
	N	295	295	295
Communications	Pearson Correlation	1	.345**	.403**

	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	295	295	295
Effective performance	Pearson Correlation	-.309**	.403**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
	N	295	295	295

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

Table 2: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.309[a]	.095	.089	1.20135	.095	15.408	2	292	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Bus. Process Mgt, Communications

Table 3: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	44.473	2	22.237	15.408	.000[b]
	Residual	421.425	292	1.443		
	Total	465.898	294			

a. Dependent Variable: Effective performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Bus. Process Management, Communications

Table 1 was used to analyse data for answering research questions 1 and 2. The Table shows the result of Pearson correlations between business process management, effective communication and effective SME performance. Results of data analysis in Table 1 shows that business process management (r = -.31, P = .01) does not have significant positive correlation with effective SME performance. This implies that business process management will not lead to effective SME performance of the business. Also, results of data in Table 1 shows that effective business communications (r = 0.40, P = .01) has significant positive correlation with effective SME performance. This implies that entrenching effective business communications in managing SMEs has the tendency to result to effective performance of the business.

Table 4: Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B		Decision
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
1	(Constant)	2.776	.268		10.376	.000	2.249	3.303	
	Process Mgt.	.288	.054	-.306	-5.313	.000	-.181	-.395	Reject
	Communications	.252	.047	.286	5.348	.000	.159	.344	Accept

a. Dependent Variable: Effective performance

Table 4 shows the results of multiple regression analysis regarding the two research hypotheses. Test of hypotheses was done using B-values, t-values and p-values. The results of test of hypothesis as in table 4 show that respondents rejected hypothesis 1 as indicated by the

following statistical values: B = -.306; t = -5.313; $P < .001$. This means that business process management does not have significant positive effect on the performance of SMEs in Abia State, Nigeria. The implication of this result is that business process management would not predict effective SME performance. Also, data in Table 4 shows that hypothesis 2 was accepted by the respondents as indicated by the following statistical values: B = .286; t = 5.348; $P < .001$. This means that effective business communications has significant positive effect on effective SME performance in Abia State, Nigeria. This implies that the application of effective business communication in the management of SMEs, would predict effective business performance.

Discussion of Results

The results of regression analysis showed that process management would not significantly predict effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises, as there was no significant positive correlation between process management of business enterprises and effective performance. This suggests that variations on how SMEs manage their business processes do not significantly and positively impact on their overall performance. This finding implies that while efficient process management is undoubtedly important for organizational effectiveness, it may not be a primary driver of effective SME performance. Other factors such as quality of products and services, public relations, marketing strategies, employees' welfare, customers' satisfaction, etc. may have stronger influence and positive correlation with effective performance of SMEs. Also, the extent of the business process management of an enterprise may also determine if the process will have a direct impact on the performance of the business or not. It is the opinion of the researcher that if business process management is extensively and continuously done in the right way, it may not have direct impact on the business performance in the short-run but in the long-run, it may be a strong predictor of business performance. The finding of this study corroborates with Gosnik and Stubelj (2021) and Usman, Hartani and Sroka (2020) whose study showed a negative correlation and no direct relationship between performance measures and business process management of an enterprise. However, this finding disagrees with Adeoye and Odusanya (2022), Owusu (2020) and Alzoubi and Khafajy (2015) who found that business process management has direct relationship with the productivity of SMEs.

Also, the result of multiple regression analysis showed that effective communication would significantly predict effective performance in small and medium scale enterprises in Abia State, Nigeria. The result of test of research hypothesis 2 revealed a substantial positive impact of effective communication on effective SME performance. The result of the study thus highlights the critical role of clear and efficient communication system within organizations. By fostering transparent communication practices internally and externally, SMEs can enhance coordination, collaboration, and decision-making processes, ultimately driving performance improvements. This result underscores the value of investing in communication strategies and technologies to facilitate information flow and knowledge sharing across various stakeholders of an enterprise. With effective communications, everyone in the organization will know their job roles, performance standard, job expectations, deadline, resources allocated for job roles and work within the ambits of rules and regulations in the enterprise. By so doing, organizational culture is entrenched and it becomes less of an operational issue. Similarly, the customers, suppliers and the general public will build trust and sustain their patronage to the firm due to its effective communication strategies with the external stakeholders. Furthermore, having effective communication channels enables the organization to communicate organisational changes such as restructuring, price changes, methods of operation, changes in customer services, new

methods of delivery, terms and conditions of services, etc. to the customers and the general public at the right time. This, therefore, reduces uncertainties, resistance and fear of the unknown that customers, employees and the general public may have about the organizational changes. These will cumulatively lead to improved business performance of the enterprise as revealed by the study.

The finding of this study agrees with Musheke and Phiri (2021), Masecko and Patricia (2020) whose study revealed that effective communication has a positive effect on organizational performance. Other various research studies by Britney and Kungu (2020), Kalogiannidis (2020), Amdany, Bor and Osodo (2018), Adedayo, Mobolanle and Adeleke (2022) and Yadava, et al. (2022) also established that effective communication has a positive significance influence on the growth of SMEs. Overall, existing scholarly research findings seem to be unanimous on the existence of significant positive relationship between effective communication and effective performance of SMEs. No previous study was seen to have a contrary finding on the effect of effective communication on the performance of SMEs. In view of this, operators of SMEs should institutionalize effective communication in the enterprise for optimum performance.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that the practice of effective business communication by owners and managers of SMEs would lead to effective SME performance. On the other hand, the study further concludes that variations on how SMEs manage their business processes do not significantly impact on their overall performance in the shortrun. Other factors such as quality of products and services, public relations, marketing strategies, employees' welfare, etc. may be primary drivers of effective SME performance.

Recommendations

Heads of Departments and lecturers of Business education in various Universities should put more effort in furnishing Business education library with more current textbooks and other study materials on business communication. This will enable students to have access to the books and other study materials; and study them with a view to improving on their knowledge and competency level in business communication. This is necessary because financial impediments may make it difficult for some students to buy these textbooks for their usage. Also, Managers of SMEs should as matter of necessity install a functional communication system and channels for effective communication among all the stakeholders of the business enterprise in order to improve the performance of the enterprise. Also, owners and SME managers should pay adequate attention to business process management to reduce waste of resources, delays, inefficiencies and hazards in operations. They should also monitor and control business processes to ensure that predetermined standards of operations are not compromised. This, in the longrun, may positively impact on the effective performance of the business.

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