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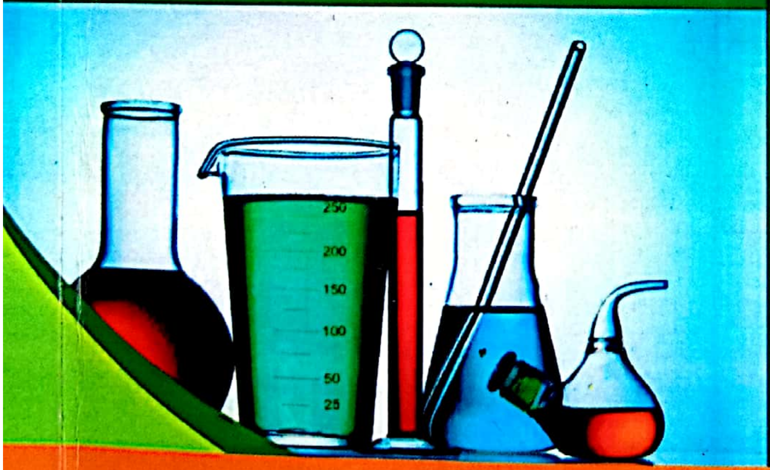

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KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AS A PREDICTOR OF SURVIVAL OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES IN OGUN STATE

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Abstract
This study examined the role of knowledge management in enhancing organisational survival of small and medium scale businesses. It specifically investigated the significance of knowledge acquisition, transfer and application in enhancing the survival small and medium enterprises. The study adopted the exploratory survey research design and the population comprised all owners and managers of small and medium scale business firms in Ogun State. A total of 110 owners and managers of small and medium size businesses were randomly selected to form the sample. A questionnaire tagged Knowledge Management and Organisational Survival Questionnaire was used for data collection and a structural equation modeling (SEM) was adopted for data analysis. It was revealed that knowledge management factors – knowledge acquisition, knowledge transfer and knowledge application had significant positive contribution to organisational survival of small and medium enterprises. The study concludes that knowledge management practices will help small and medium firms to explore problems and create solutions, producing a structure for facilitating efficiency and effectiveness and organisational capability. It was recommended, among others, that SME should adopt, support, commit to, employ and integrate knowledge management practices into their strategic planning and management.

Keywords: Knowledge Management, Organisational Survival, Small and Medium Scale Enterprises.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most significant evolutions in the business environment in recent time is the dawn of the new economy. The dynamic nature of markets has created a competitive incentive among many companies to leverage their knowledge assets as a means of creating value and achieving a competitive edge. In managing business and organisation resources, there has been considerable interest in knowledge management as a result of its capability to deliver to organisations, strategic results relating to profitability, competitiveness and capacity enhancement (Chua, 2009).

Small and medium scale enterprises, like other organisations need a good capacity to retain, develop, organise, and utilise their capabilities in order to remain at the forefront and have an edge over competitors. Knowledge and the management of knowledge are regarded as important features for these and other organisational survival factors (Omotayo, 2015). Proponents of a knowledg (Cania and Korsita, 2015). With this approach, organizations consider knowledge as a strategic lever fe-based approach to competitive advantage argue that the primary purpose of a firm is to create and apply knowledge or the competitive advantage and their business success seems to depend increasingly on the ability to assess, manage and develop their own knowledge as well as to acquire new knowledge (Davenport and Prusak, 1998).

Knowledge, according to Davenport and Prusak (1998), is a fluid mix of framed experience, values, contextual information, expert insight and grounded intuition that provides an environment and framework for evaluating and incorporating new experiences and information. It originates and is applied in the mind of knower. Fassehi (2013) sees knowledge management as a systematic and organised attempt, and a bundle of principles, models, approaches, techniques, and tools that allows businesses to develop and exploit knowledge. Knowledge management is a concept that features two main issues in its evolving path - i) knowledge is a critical resource, rather than land, machines, or capital and ii) organizations generally poorly managed it (Evangelista, Esposito, Lauro, and Raffa, 2010). If more attention were paid to creating, providing, sharing, using, and protecting knowledge, the promise was that organizational performance would improve (Earle, 2001).

In relation to businesses, it is concerned with knowledge in the business about customers, products, processes, competitors and so on, which can be 'locked away' in people's minds or filed on paper or in electronic form (Alegre, Sengupta & Lapiedra, 2013). In addition, Sharrieff (2017) refers to knowledge management as how a company obtains, exploits and stores business intelligence, or the information or knowledge used to make the company function profitably. Grey (1999) defines knowledge management as a process involving identification of critical information, sharing of information, protecting and enhancing the value of information, and leveraging knowledge utility in major organizational level decisions. According Gupta and Govindarajan (2000) Knowledge Management is a process that helps organizations find, select, organize, disseminate, and transfer important information and expertise necessary for their activities.

Evangelista, Esposito, Lauro, and Raffa (2010) explained that knowledge management is the process of continually managing knowledge of all kinds to meet existing and emerging needs, to identify and exploit existing and acquired knowledge assets and to develop new opportunities. It is the management of all kind of knowledge, but only for developing new opportunities. Iandoli and Zollo (2007) see knowledge management as the process of creating, capturing, and using knowledge to enhance organisational performance. To them, it refers to a range of practices and techniques used by organisations to identify, represent, and distribute knowledge, know-how, expertise, intellectual capital, and other forms of knowledge for leverage, reuse and transfer of knowledge and learning across an organisation.

Edvardsson and Oskarsson (2013) were of the view that many firms lack the understanding of how they could create knowledge and how this could translate into competitive advantages or enhanced customer relations of their business. Given the profound role of SMEs in salvaging the economy from prevailing and looming crises, the acquisition, use, sharing and benefit of knowledge becomes imperative in building capabilities to manage such crises. The emphasis on employing a knowledge management strategy primarily lies in its capacity to assist organisations in achieving sustained competitive advantage (Alegre, Sengupta&Lapiedra, 2013: Fassehi, 2013).

Davenport and Prusak (1998) identified the following five processes as constituting knowledge management: 1) Understanding knowledge requirements; searching for knowledge from different sources; finding existing knowledge; and fusing it; 2) Creating new knowledge; 3) Integrating knowledge created externally; 4) Applying existing knowledge; and 5) Re-using knowledge.

Culkin and Smith (2000) observe that in a small business environment, the processes of business planning and decision-making are common limited to only one person or few persons which implies that those people in particular are responsible for recognising the benefits related to knowledge management and that their business operations specifically require close attention (Hofer &Charan, 1984). Amelingmeyer and Amelingmeyer (2005) observe that many small and medium sized firms face resource constraints and existing resources must consequently be used with care, as erroneous decisions will have more serious complications than they would have in large businesses.

The basic duties of managing a company during crisis are to stop negative performance and to provide the basis for new development and opportunities. An organization during the crisis will be faced with an opportunity to revive and requires an approach for its management during and after the crisis (Cania and Korsita, 2015). Due to the constant pressure of time for decision-making, limiting the different tools available and trends of short-term solutions mainly operational problems, crisis management should use appropriate methods and techniques to manage the crisis. Knowledge is one of the most important sources of competitive advantage (Hitt, Bierman, Shimizu and Kochhar, 2001). According to the knowledge-based view of the firm, sustainable competitive advantage is based on exploiting, exploring and retaining a firm's knowledge (Grant, 1996).

Non-availability of sufficient time for strategic issues and lack of financial resources and expertise, very often results in most knowledge being kept in the minds of the owner and some key employees rather than recorded or shared through substitution arrangements (Wong & Bridge et al., 2003). It is clear that small businesses face unique knowledge management challenges that are distinct from those of their larger business counterparts (Edvardsson Durst, 2013). However, there is the danger that smaller firms may lose their distinct characteristics and thus their capability to act especially in the face of any crisis if the procedure for knowledge management in larger firms are adopted and implemented in small and medium scale enterprises.

In fact, the understanding of the organizational theory and practice considerations of KM has mainly been derived from large company experiences. Consequently, the potential of KM seems not fully exploited by small firms (Evangelista, Esposito, Lauro, and Raffa, 2010). Most small businesses have no explicit policy targeted at strategic knowledge management, and they tend to treat KM on an operational level at the level of systems and instruments. SMEs tend to place more emphasis than larger firms on the management of tacit knowledge, and communication channels in SMEs are more likely to be between firms, rather than internal to the organization (Beijerse, 2000; Hutchinson &Quintas, 2008). In some cases, owners and managers of small enterprises try to prevent outflow of knowledge from the company and thereby block knowledge sharing (Bozbura, 2007).

Evangelista et al (2010) in a study on the adoption of knowledge management for small businesses identified three areas for developing knowledge management practices - *Management of market knowledge, Management of technology knowledge* and *Management of relational knowledge.*

While Sparrow (2001) posits that the issues that small businesses will face in knowledge management practices will not be simply a scaled-down replica of large-company experiences, Desouza and Awazu (2006) points the five key peculiarities that differentiate knowledge management practices in SMEs and larger companies – (i) In SMEs there is lack of explicit knowledge repositories, (ii) Common knowledge possessed by members of the SMEs is deep and broad (iii) SMEs by their nature and due to deliberate mechanisms, are skilled at avoiding pitfalls of knowledge loss, (iv) SMEs have a knack for exploiting foreign sources of knowledge and (v) SMEs knowingly or unknowingly, manage knowledge the right way – the humanistic way and technology is never made part of the knowledge management equation.

Different models have been used by researchers to describe knowledge management practices and process and in various ways. This study considered the five main factors in the models of Dahiya, D., Gupta, M., and Jain, P. (2012) and Gholami et al (2013). These are knowledge creation, acquisition, sharing, storage, and application/implementation. However, three of these factors – acquisition, transfer and application are examined in this study.

According to Nwaiwu and Imafidon (2017), *knowledge acquisition* encompasses the development and creation of knowledge. It entails the ability to conceive ideas and solve problems, is a process which results in the development of new knowledge, or in the reorganisation of existing knowledge, in order to render such knowledge usable. Knowledge acquisition is clearly the most important aspect of knowledge management, because it is concerned with the development of skills, new products, better ideas and more efficient processes. *Knowledge transfer* is sometimes taken to be synonymous with knowledge sharing (Yang, 2007). Knowledge transfer means the distribution of knowledge from individual to individual and from team to team, within an institution. Individuals transfer knowledge to their counterparts by means of exchanging ideas, thoughts, beliefs, knowledge and experiences with them while contributing to task execution in teamwork, or informally, through conversations with them. The transfer of knowledge at individual level occurs when an individual is willing to assist, as well as to learn from, others in the development of new skills and competencies. *Knowledge application,* according to King, Chung and Haney (2008) in Nwaiwu and Imafidon (2017), is accomplished in various different ways, including elaboration, thoroughness (facilitation), innovativeness and collaborative problem-solving. Knowledge can also be applied in the development of new products, research and development, and in the improvement of processes and procedures.

Organizational survival refers to the sustained and continued performance of an organisation in face of challenges and competition. Organisation survival encompasses planning and preparation to ensure that an organization can continue to operate in case of serious incidents or disasters and is able to recover to an operational state within a reasonably short period. As such, business continuity and survival include three key elements (Jimoh, 2017) and they are: (i) *Resilience*, that is, ensuring that critical business functions and the supporting infrastructure are designed in such a way that they are materially unaffected by relevant disruptions; (ii) *Recovery*, which requires that arrangements have to be made to recover or restore critical and less critical business functions that fail for some reasons; and (iii) *Contingency*, that is, ensuring that the organization establishes a generalized capability and readiness to cope effectively with whatever major incidents and disasters occur, including those that were not, and perhaps could not have been, foreseen. Contingency preparations constitute a last-resort response if resilience and recovery arrangements should prove inadequate in practice.

The main purpose of this study is to examine the role of knowledge management as a tool for the survival of small and medium enterprises. The study specifically examined the relationship between three success factors of knowledge management – knowledge acquisition, knowledge transfer, and knowledge application with three components of organisational survival – resilience, recovery and contingency.

Statement of the Problem

Organisations of different sizes face a lot of challenges in their day to day operations. As a result, management of firms make efforts and strategies to prevent or resolve crisis situation through appropriate application of knowledge. Knowledge therefore becomes a key driving force of an organisation's success and survival. Gathering and sharing information and knowledge across an enterprise is challenging for any organization. Small businesses often find it especially difficult because they cannot afford the content management systems, intranet tools and other processes that large corporations use to facilitate knowledge transfer. This is also reflected in a literature gap where little research efforts have been carried out on knowledge management in small businesses, despite the fact that small businesses represent the majority of businesses in most countries, as we have in Nigeria, and they make major contributions towards business activities, economic development and employment generation.

To date, there is an abundance of literature describing how various large companies are successfully practicing knowledge management, many overlook the importance of business knowledge like customer purchase habits, developing consumer trends, or the potential impact of the economy on the small and medium firms activities and performance. Since the emergence of various crises are becoming an integral part of modern business, different experts describe today's global economy as a transformation right knowledge economy where the resolution of crisis situation and preventing it require reorganization of the company and appropriate use of knowledge. It is in the light of this that the present study examined how knowledge management practices enhance the survival of small and medium scale businesses organisation in Nigeria.

Hypothesis

For the purpose of this study, it was postulated that:

H_0: Knowledge management factors will not have any significant positive contribution to the survival of small and medium scale enterprises.

Method

This study is an exploratory research and it adopted the survey approach to examine the variables studied. The study was carried out on small and medium enterprises in, Ogun State. The population therefore comprised all small and medium sized firms in Ogun State. However, in sample selection, convenient and purposive sampling were employed as owners and managers of SMEs that were accessible and could be reached during the survey were chosen for the study and the survey was limited to SMEs in pure water production, bread production, fishery, beverage production, rental services and sale of recharge cards. A total of 110 SME owners and managers were eventually used as the sample for the study.

Questionnaire was the main instrument used for collecting data. The Knowledge Management scale of Cho (2010) and Organisation stability scales of Fugate, Stank and Mentzer (2009) were adapted as measurement scales and designed on four-point likert scale. The knowledge management scales featured three success factors of knowledge management – *knowledge acquisition, transfer* and *application*; and the organisational stability scale consists of the three elements of organisational survival – resilience, recovery and contingency. A total of 104 completed questionnaires were returned by the respondents.

The validity of the Knowledge Management and organisational stability Scale used had been determined by Cho (2001) with confirmatory factor analysis ($\chi2/df=1.3$, RMSEA= 0.069, NFI=0.93, NNFI=0.90, CFI=90) and Cronbach's Alpha (α=0.71, 0.75, and 0.85 for each components respectively).

Results

To assess the role of knowledge management in enhancing the survival of small and medium business, three success factors were hypothesized into knowledge management, these are knowledge acquisition, knowledge transfer and knowledge application; and three components of organisational survival - resilience, recovery and contingency were hypothesized into organisational survival. Table 1 shows the distribution of the sample by type of business.

Table 1: Distribution of Sample by Type of Business

Line of Business	Frequency	Percentage
Pure Water	22	21.00%
Beverages	12	11.54%
Rentals	16	15.38%
Fishery	19	18.27%
Mobile Recharge and Services	24	23.08%
Bread and cakes	11	10.58%
Total	104	100%

The above table is represented in the chart below:

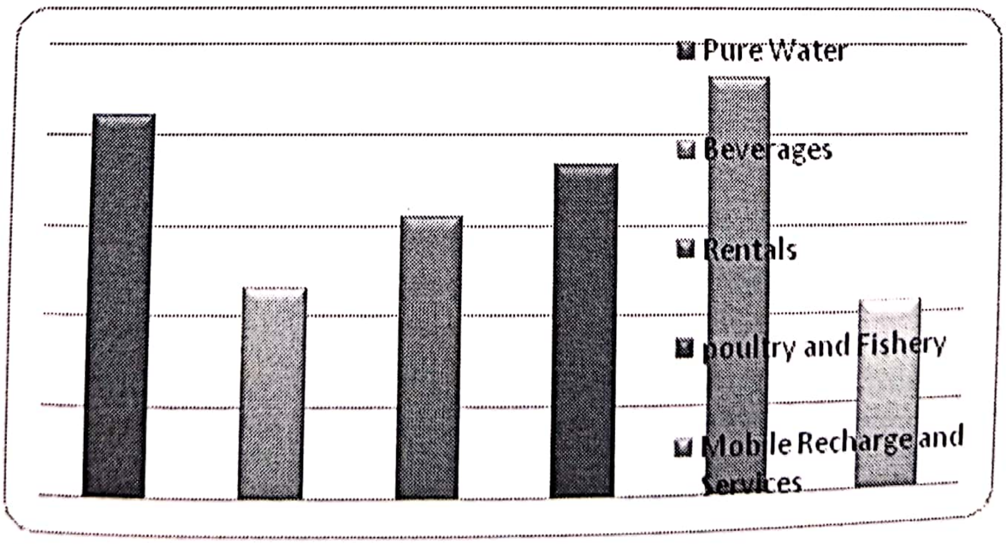

Fig.1: distribution of Sample by Type of Business

Table one above shows that 21% of the sample group were into pure water business, 11.54% fall into beverage production, 15.38% were in rental services, 18.27% were in poultry and fishery business, 23.08% were surveyed from dealers of mobile recharge cards and service business and 10.58% were from bread and cake making businesses.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) of Gholami, Asli, Shirkouhi, Noruzy (2013) was used to estimate the fitness of the model and considered as practical indices to estimate the model fitness. Scores lower than 5 for the χ/df index reveals an acceptable rate; i.e. smaller scores in this index indicate a better fitness of the model. In this study, the $\chi_2$df was 1.051, which attests to the appropriate fitness of the model. An RMSEA equal to or lower than 0.05 is suitable for tested models, but scores above 0.05 and up to 0.08 propose an agreeable error of approximation in the model. Models with their RMSEA at 0.10 and higher are considered to have low fitness. An RMSEA equal to or lower than 0.05 is suitable for tested models, but scores above 0.05 and up to 0.08 propose an agreeable error of approximation in the model. Models with their RMSEA at 0.10 and higher are considered to have low fitness. GFI and AGFI show to what degree the model has better fitness when Compared to the model's non-existence. For the model to be acceptable, GFI, AGFI and CFI should be equal to or higher than 0.90.

Tab le 2: Factor loadings and estimated common variance of the variables

Variables	Knowledge Management	
	Factor Load	Expl. Var.
Knowledge acquisition	0.52	0.42
Knowledge transfer	0.63	0.54
Knowledge application	0.32	0.16
	Organisational Survival	
Resilience	0.57	0.45
Recovery	0.62	0.43
Contingency	0.59	0.48

Table 3: Goodness of fit indices for the second-rank model

Model	χ_2/df	RMSEA	GFI	AGFI	CFI
Scores	1.80	0.058	0.79	080	0.81

The results of table two indicate scores of factor loadings and explain variances for KM practices and organizational survival. Factor loadings for knowledge acquisition, knowledge transfer and knowledge application are 0.52, 0.63, and 0.32, respectively. These factor loadings are statistically significant ($p<0.01$). also the factors of organisational survival, resilience, recovery and contingency are 0.57, 0.62 and 0.59 and statistically significant at $P<0.01$.

Knowledge Management practices in SMEs positively influenced organizational survival ($\beta= 0.41$), the β of which is statistically significant ($p<0.01$). Table 3 shows the goodness of fit indices for the estimated model. As can be seen, the χ_2/df score is 1.8, which lies within the acceptable range. Additionally, the RMSEA score is 0.058, which is lower than 0.08, and is thus within the acceptable range. The scores for AGFI, GFI and CFI, which are 0.79, 0.80 and 0.81, respectively, reveal the acceptability of these scores for the model. In total, one can say the examined model has an appropriate fitness.

Discussion

The three knowledge management factors measured on the scale were knowledge acquisition, knowledge transfer and knowledge application and use and organizational survival components were resilience, recovery and contingency. Results showed that knowledge transfer has higher factor loading compared to other knowledge management factors, and contingency has higher factor compared with other organizational survival components. The results generally showed that the SMEs' knowledge management practices positively and significantly influenced their organisational survival. The result indicates that a keen appreciation of the fact that knowledge management practices can significantly enhance organisational performance and survival of a small or medium scale enterprise.

The result specifically revealed that acquisition, transfer and application of knowledge to marketing strategies, product and substitute performance, use of technology, new innovations, customers' needs and expectation, resource allocation will significantly enhance effective and strategic decisions, productivity, financial performance, staff performance, work relationships, and customer and customer satisfaction in small and medium enterprises.

Conclusion

In the modern dynamic and complex environment, SMEs need to acquire, create, share, save and implement new knowledge in order to make strategic decisions that can lead to improvements in productivity, financial and staff performance, innovation, work relationships, and customer satisfaction When knowledge is recognized, acquired, and stored, SMEs can apply the knowledge to explore problems and create solutions, producing a structure for facilitating efficiency and effectiveness and continued survival of the business.

Recommendations

Small and medium enterprise managers should properly change the workplace culture and environmental circumstances so that employees adopt, support, commit to, and employ knowledge management practices in fulfilling their activities.

Small and medium enterprises could easily collect information from their customers, suppliers and other stakeholders, organize the collected knowledge through modern informational technologies or even traditional means, share the organized knowledge throughout all organizational levels, and finally implement the shared knowledge to overcome challenges and improve performance.

Integrating knowledge management practices as a strategic element should be one of the most important tasks of small and medium enterprises managers.

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