

EFFECT OF LEARNING ORGANIZATION ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

by

OKPIMAH Special Aaron Emoefe, PhD

Business Studies Department, Faculty of Humanities, Social and Management Sciences,
Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo Delta State

Email: okpimahsae@gmail.com, okpimah.emoefe@edwinclarkuniversity.edu.ng

Phone: 08038806889

ABSTRACT

The study examines the effect of learning organization on competitive advantage, a study of selected banks in Warri Delta State, Nigeria. It covers only selected banks in Warri, Delta State. The research design method that was adopted for this study was a cross sectional survey research design method. The population of the study covers all employees of six (6) selected Banks in Warri, Delta State. The population for the study comprised of 515 employees of six (6) selected Banks in Warri Delta State. The sample size of 225 employees was derived using Taro Yamane's formula. The probability sampling method that was employed in this study is stratified random sampling method. Data for this research were gathered from primary source. Measurement of the model reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (CA) based tests. The study findings indicate that the three indicators of learning organization: innovation, facilitative and self-development shows exhibited significant positive effect on Competitive Advantage. The study recommended that Organizations should create a learning organizational culture to develop their innovation performance to achieve competitive advantage.

Key words: Learning organization, Competitive advantage, Facilitative leadership, Innovation, Self-development.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Learning organization are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. The basic rationale for such organizations is that in situations of rapid change only those that are flexible, adaptive and productive will excel. For this to happen, it is argued, organizations need to 'discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels' (Senge, 1990). While all people have the capacity to learn, the structures in which they have to function are often not conducive to reflection and engagement. Furthermore, people may lack the tools and guiding ideas to make sense of the situations they face. Organizations that are continually expanding their capacity to create their future require a fundamental shift of mind among their members (Senge, 1990). Organizations do not organically develop into learning

organizations; there are factors prompting their change. As organizations grow, they lose their capacity to learn as company structures and individual thinking becomes rigid (Pedler, Burgogyne, & Boydell, 1997). When problems arise, the proposed solutions often turn out to be only short-term (single-loop learning instead of double-loop learning) and re-emerge in the future (Senge, 1990.) To remain competitive, many organizations have restructured, with fewer people in the company (Pedler, Burgogyne, & Boydell, 1997). This means those who remain need to work more effectively (O'Keeffe, 2002). To create a competitive advantage, companies need to learn faster than their competitors and to develop a customer responsive culture (O'Keeffe, 2002; Hipsher, Grant, and Don Parks, 1997). Chris Argyris identified that organizations need to maintain knowledge about new products and processes, understand what is happening in the outside environment and produce creative solutions using the knowledge and skills of all within the organization (Argyris, 1999). This requires co-operation between individuals and groups, free and reliable communication, and a culture of trust (Argyris, 1999). Learning organization helps to achieve competitive advantages (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998). In this dynamic business environment all industries and organization experience change and this change is whether driven by competitors, customers suppliers or technology and to remain in the industry, organization are require to continuously learn to cope up with the change. The ability to learn quicker as compared to your competitors might be the only competitive advantage (Muhammad and Abdul, 2015). In nowadays competitive world, survival chances are for organization that can adapt with changes in their environment. Environmental changes, organizations have been forced to constantly seek the best solutions and practices to adapt to their environment and thus gain a competitive advantage (Shahaei & Pourmostafa, 2007).

One result of learning organization is to gain competitive advantage. In the current situation that all organizations are faced with intense competition and constant change in market needs; having sustainable competitive advantage is critical and most stable competitive advantage is valuable manpower. Learning organization is considered empowering factor of human resource in the organization. Nowadays all industries have experienced rapid changes. The root of these changes can be changing needs of customer, competitors, suppliers and technology changes. These changes cause a lot of pressure on organizations until it is flexible to the changes and create added value for their customers and distinguish itself against its competitors; because any organization will not have a sustainable competitive advantage. So learn faster than competitors' area sustainable competitive advantage for organizations (Nonaka, 1994). Companies to gain competitive advantage will need to refresh skills and sources (Wu, & Shanley, 2009). Few research have been done on effect of learning organization on competitive Advantage in the banking sector. Hence, this study on the effect of learning organization on competitive advantage to close the gap.

2.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of this study is to achieve an understanding of how the learning organization affects competitive advantage of an organization. This is done by examining the learning organization of some selected banks in Warri, Delta State, Nigeria.

This study is geared towards providing answer to the following questions

- i. How does innovation affect competitive advantage?
- ii. What is the effect of facilitative leadership on competitive advantage?
- iii. How does self-development affect competitive advantage?

2.1 Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to achieve the objective of the study.

H1: there is no significant relationship between innovation and Competitive Advantage.

H2: there is no significant relationship between facilitative leadership and competitive advantage

H3: there is no significant relationship between self-development and competitive advantage

3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 The Concept of Learning Organization

The term "learning organization", not to be confused with organizational learning, was popularized by Peter Senge (1990). It describes an organization with an ideal learning environment, perfectly in tune with the organization's goals. Such an organization is a place "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole (reality) together (Senge 1990) ."

Organization learning refers to activities within the organization whereas a learning organization is the form of organization (Garavan, 1997). Learning organization is also concerned about how to bring change in the behaviour of different members of organization and bring it to more closely with desired state (Tsang, 1997).

The ability of an organization to acquire knowledge has been connected to be the main source of its competitive advantage (Hussein, Mohamad, Noordin, & Ishak, (2014). Organizations need to change with today's ever changing and dynamic business environment to be successful, and to achieve this, organizations must continue to learn, and implement the changes taught (Muhammad & Abdul, 2015). Organizational learning is about managing the creation of the organization's knowledge, which is the process of acquiring, maintaining and sharing knowledge with the purpose of adapting to the dynamic business environment (Njuguma, 2009).

According to Heinz and Koontz (2005), a learning organization is one that can adapt to changes in the external environment through continuous renewal of its structure and practices.

The dimension that distinguishes learning from more traditional organizations is the mastery of certain basic disciplines or 'component technologies'. The five that Peter Senge identifies are said to be converging to innovate learning organizations. They are:

(1) Systems thinking, (2) Personal mastery, (3) Mental models (4) Building shared vision and (5) Team learning. He adds to this recognition that people are agents, able to act upon the structures and systems of which they are a part. All the disciplines are, in this way, 'concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future' (Senge, 1990). It is to the disciplines that we will now turn.

The underlying philosophy of the learning organization is to enhance the achievement of collective goals by harnessing the reservoir of knowledge, skills and insights of all members of the organization. Depending on the level of commitment of top management to the idea of a learning organization, the benefits for employees may be regarded as central to the exercise or merely as by-products of it (Cole, 2002).

Learning organization theory provides a dubious base for action. The idea of a learning culture, supported by the understanding of how organizations learn provided by organizational learning theory and knowledge management initiatives, has more to offer (Michael Armstrong, 2012).

According to Garvin (1993), a learning organization skilled at creating, acquiring, and transferring knowledge and at modifying its behaviour to reflect new knowledge and insights. He suggests learning organizations are skilled at five main activities: systematic problem solving, experimentation with new approaches, learning from their own experience and past history, learning from the experiences and best practices of others and transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the organization.

A leaning organization is one which sees that learning, training and development are best achieved by collaborative efforts. Every employee from top to bottom is expected to reflect on present practices, suggest better ways of doing things, and collaborate with others to achieve improvements (Gerald & Phil, 2011). Organizations may learn through two major mechanisms: the first is trial-and- error experimentation (learning by doing/experiential learning); the second mechanism is learning from the experience of others such as competitors and suppliers; training and development; external benchmarking; consultants, customers and suppliers; factory visits, trade shows, online data-bases, magazines and journals; mergers, acquisitions, strategic alliances, licensing and franchises. Organizations capture the experience of other organizations through the transfer of encoded experience in the form of technologies, codes, procedures or similar routine (Gerald & Phil, 2011). Learning organizations are not built over night (Garvin, 1993). The first step is to foster an environment that is conducive to learning. In addition, Garvin (1993) recommend opening up boundaries which inhibit knowledge flows and the use of programmes or events designed with explicit learning goals in mind (Garvin, 1993).

3.2 Learning Organization and Competitive Advantages

Learning within organizations is not a stagnant rather a continuous process. It is claimed in literature that a firm achieves a competitive advantage through organizational Learning (Milia & Birdi, 2009). Learning organization learns through its members

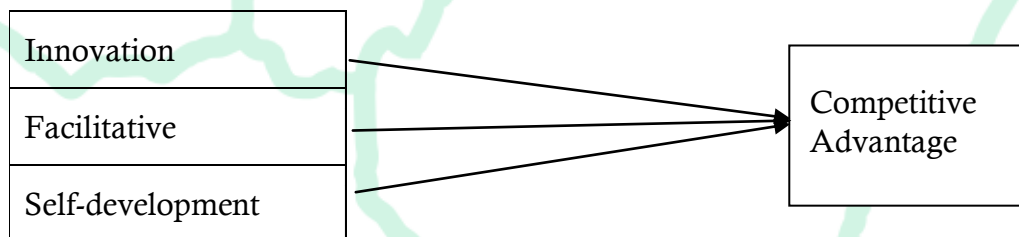
individually and collectively to craft competitive advantages by efficiently and effectively managing internal and external engendered change and many researchers advocated the relationship between learning organization and competitive advantage (Senge, 1990; Brown & Duguid, 1991; Redding and Kamm, 1999). Furthermore, the role of leaders in learning organization is that of a designer, mentor and of monitor who build a shared vision and challenging mental model. Focal points of facilitative leaders are on developing the people around them. They are skilful at motivating people to want to learn and as leaders drove the organizations, it is very possible that leadership style, along with the other values and beliefs of the leader, may have marvellous impact on what type of work environment that is created (Cecil & Gobinath, 2005). Learning organization learns through its members individually and collectively to craft competitive advantages by efficiently and effectively managing internal and external engendered change (Senge, 2004).

Conceptual framework

Independent variable

Dependent variable

Learning organization



3.3 Empirical Review

3.3.1 Innovation and Competitive Advantage

Bello and Adeoye (2018) studied organizational learning, organizational innovation and organizational performance, an empirical evidence among selected manufacturing companies in Lagos metropolis, Nigeria and found that organizational learning had a positive correlation with organizational innovation, and organizational innovation has a positive correlation on organizational performance; they also found that organizational learning has a positive correlation on organizational performance.

Murat, Nilgun and Fulya (2013) examine the relationship between innovation and firm performance. The study explores the relationship between innovation and firm performance in an automotive supplier industry in Turkey. The findings of the study indicates that technological innovation (product and process innovation) has a significant and positive impact on firm performance, but no evidence was found for a significant and positive relationship between non-technological innovation (organizational and marketing innovation) and firm performance.

Masood, Sadia, Muhammad and Saman (2013) studied the effects of innovation types on firm performance: an empirical study on Pakistan’s manufacturing sector. The study

examine the effects of innovation types including product, process, marketing and organizational innovation on different aspects of firm performance such as innovative, production, marketing and financial performance in Pakistani manufacturing companies. The findings reveal the positive effects of innovations types on firm performance.

David, Michael and Robert (2013) study the relationships between innovation, knowledge, and performance in family and non- family firms: an analysis of SMEs. The study seeks to examine the relationship between innovation and knowledge in family versus non-family businesses with regard to performance in USA. The findings indicate that innovation was found to be a significant factor in both family non- family firms was also found to be significant with innovation.

3.3.2 *Facilitative and Competitive Advantage*

Deborah, Tara, Jessica and Allan (1999) study empirical approaches to quantifying interaction intensity: competition and facilitation along productivity gradients. The study examines the relationship between competition and facilitation intensity and productivity in plants in USA. The findings were unexpected and largely inconsistent with existing theory: competition intensity often significantly declined (rather than increased) with productivity and facilitation was sometimes restricted to more productive (rather than less productive) sites. However, there was considerable variation in the pattern among response variables and measure of effect size.

Thomas and Anne (1997) study information technology as competitive advantage: the role of human, business, and technology resources. The study investigates linkages between information technology (IT) and firm performance in USA. The findings shows that Its' alone have not produced sustainable performance advantages in the retail industry, but that some firms has gained advantages by using Its to leverage intangible, complementary human and business resources such as flexible culture, strategic planning- IT integration, and supplier relationships.

Nikolaos, Dimitrios and Georgios (2011) study knowledge management enabler factors and firm performance: an empirical research of the Greek medium and large firms. The study identifies and discusses the critical success factors or enablers that determine the knowledge management effectiveness within organizations, which in turn influence the total performance of the firm in Greece. The findings indicate that knowledge management successful implementation and effectiveness of knowledge management affect firm performance.

3.3.3 *Self-development and Competitive Advantage*

Raja, Furqan and Muhammad (2011) studied impact of training and development on organizational performance. The purpose of the study is to understand the effect of training and development on the job training, training design and delivery style on organizational performance in Pakistan. The findings indicate that training and development, on the job training, training design and delivery style have significant effect on organizational performance and all these have positively affect the organizational performance.

Amir and Amen (2013) studied the effect of training on employee performance. The study examine the effect of training on employee performance and to provide suggestion on how firm can improve its employee performance through effective training programmes in Pakistan. The findings indicate that managers do not recognize the importance of training and its effect on employee performance or they believe that training increases the company cost.

Irene, Vassiliki and Elissavet (2009) studied trainee perceptions of training transfer: an empirical analysis. The study examines trainee characteristics which affect the motivation to learn and transfer and determine the trainees' entry behaviour in Greece. The findings reveal the importance of trainee characteristics in the training transfer process and provide useful insights regarding the design and management of the training programme.

Victor and Apochi (2022) studied continuous development and competitive advantage: Theoretical paper. The main objective of the study was to determine the relationship between continuous improvement practices and efficiency. The findings revealed that Manufacturing firms achieve operational effectiveness and efficiency by continuously improving their products and services through improved processes., on the job training , benchmarking, hiring of expertise and investing in modernized systems of operation.

4.0 RESEARCH METHODS

The research adopted the cross sectional survey research design method. The population of the study covers all employees of six (6) selected Banks in Warri, Delta State, Nigeria. The population for the study comprised of 515 employees of six (6) selected Banks in Warri Delta State (Source: customer service). The sample size of 225 employees was derived using Taro Yamen's formula. The probability sampling method that was employed in this study is stratified random sampling method. Data for this research were gathered from primary source.

Copies of validated questionnaire were delivered to the respondents by hand. The objective of the study and the need for reliable information from them were carefully explained. Copies of the questionnaire were given to the respondents for one week before it was retrieved for analysis.

In this study, the statistical techniques of data analysis that was used include: descriptive statistics, frequency analysis and multiple regression analysis. It was employed to establish the nature of relationship between Learning organization and Competitive Advantage. Multiple regression analysis was used for prediction of outcome, it does not only show positive, negative or no relationship but also tells the strength of that relationship. This statistical tool is found appropriate because it establishes a relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The hypotheses stated for this study was tested using multiple regression analysis.

The content validity was utilized in this study. Thus content validity depends on how well the researchers create items that cover the content domain of the variable being measured. To validate the instrument for data collection, the questionnaire was given to

renowned expert from the field of marketing. Consequently, adjustments and corrections were effected to ensure that it elicits the desired information. Measurement of the model reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (CA) based tests. Since the acceptable measure for CA is 0.7 or higher as recommended by (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994) it means that the instrument is reliable.

Table 1: Reliability test for all items in the Questionnaire
Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.772	.793	16

Table 2: Correlation Matrix among the Indicators of ICT and Competitive Advantage

	Innovation	Facilitative	Self-Development	Competitive Advantage
Innovation	1			
Facilitative	.530**	1		
Self-Development	.752**	.620**	1	
Competitive Advantage	.414**	.482**	.435**	1

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

The correlation analysis as shown in table 2 showed that Innovation exhibited significant positive correlation value with Competitive Advantage ($r = .414^{**}$, $P < .01$). Similarly there is a positive correlation between Innovation and Facilitative ($r = .530^{**}$, $P < .01$). And also Innovation was positively correlated with Self-Development ($r = .752^{**}$, $P < .01$). Facilitative which is the second variable exhibited positive and significant correlation with Self-Development ($r = .620^{**}$, $P < .01$). Also Facilitative has positive correlation with Competitive Advantage ($r = .482^{**}$, $P < .01$). Self-Development which is the third variable has positive correlation with Competitive Advantage ($r = .435^{**}$, $P < .01$).

Table 3: Multi Regression Analysis for Indicators of Learning organization and Competitive Advantage

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	6.279	1.251		5.018	.000
Innovation	.162	.095	.151	1.699	.021
Facilitative	.355	.081	.329	4.397	.000
Self-Development	.124	.102	.117	1.218	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	215.786	3	71.929	26.719	.000 ^b
Residual	576.091	214	2.692		
Total	791.876	217			

a. Dependent Variable: Competitive Advantage

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Development, Facilitative, Innovation

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.522 ^a	.272	.262	1.6407

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Development, Facilitative, Innovation

5.0 DISCUSSION

The study is centred on the effect of learning organization on Competitive Advantage in the Nigerian Banking sector. The results of the correlation analysis involving all the elements of learning organization exhibited positive correlation coefficient values among the elements. This showed that they were appropriate dimensions of learning organization. The results from the multiple regression analysis showed the impact of information and communications technology on Competitive Advantage. The three indicators of Learning organization: Innovation ($\beta = .151, P < 0.01$), Facilitative ($\beta = .329, P < 0.01$) and Self-Development ($\beta = .117, P < 0.01$) exhibited significant positive effect on Competitive Advantage. Table 3 shows that the Learning organization significantly predict the Competitive Advantage, $F(3, 214) = 26.719, p < .005$ this implies that the regression model is a good fit of the data.

The result provided support for the H_1 test result ($r = .021 < .05$) which indicated that there is a significant relationship between Innovation and Competitive Advantage. This is in agreement with Murat et al., (2013) that technological innovation (product and process innovation) has a significant and positive impact on firm performance. This implies that Innovation helps to Learning organization in order to enhance Competitive Advantage.

The findings also reported that Facilitative is found to have significance positive effect on Competitive Advantage ($\beta = .329, P < 0.01$). The findings provided support for the result of $H_2(r = .000 < .05)$ which stated that Facilitative has a significant relationship with Competitive Advantage. This is in agreement with Nikolaos et al., (2011). That Facilitative knowledge management successful implementation and effectiveness of knowledge management affect firm performance.

Furthermore, the result of the regression analysis revealed that Self-Development has positive effect on Competitive Advantage ($\beta = .117, P < 0.01$). This finding is consistent

with the result of H₃ test ($r=.001 < .05$) which indicated that there is a significant positive relationship between Self-Development and Competitive Advantage. This is supported by Raja et al., (2011). The findings indicate that training and development, on the job training, training design and delivery style have significant effect on organizational performance and all these have positively affect the organizational performance, also supported by Irene et al., (2009) whose finding reveals the importance of trainee characteristics in the training transfer process and provide useful insights regarding the design and management of the training programme

6.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, learning organization are organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire and craft competitive advantages by efficiently and effectively managing internal and external engendered change with personal mastery or self-development to build on the core competence of the organization to achieve goal congruence. The study is centred on the effect of learning organization on Competitive Advantage in the Nigerian Banking sector. The results of the correlation analysis involving all the elements of learning organization exhibited positive correlation coefficient values among the elements. This showed that they were appropriate dimensions of learning organization. Furthermore, the results from the multiple regression analysis showed the impact of information and communications technology on Competitive Advantage. The underlying philosophy of the learning organization is to enhance the achievement of collective goals by harnessing the reservoir of knowledge, skills and insights of all members of the organization. Depending on the level of commitment of top management to the idea of a learning organization, the benefits for employees may be regarded as central to the exercise or merely as by-products of it. Leadership is essential to a learning organization and they are facilitators and mentors.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusion of this study, learning organizations should focus:

1. On the importance of trainee characteristics in the training transfer process and provide useful insights regarding the design and management of the training programme to achieve goal congruence and improve information technology.
2. The fact that banks has started to develop innovative product, there is need for infrastructure based on the use of knowledge as a learning process that can support the development of the innovation and through continuous renewal of its structure and practices. Organizations should create a learning organizational culture to develop their innovation performance to achieve competitive advantage.
3. Facilitative knowledge management and successful implementation and effectiveness of knowledge management affect firm performance.

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APPENDIX 1

Innovation

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Means
1	In my organization the number of new products or services is greater than last year						
2	In my organization, average productivity per employee is greater than last year						
3	In my organization, return on investment is greater than last year						
4	In my organization, time to market for products and services is less than last year.						

Facilitative

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Means
5	In my organization, leaders mentor and coach those they lead.						
6	In my organization, leaders ensure that the organization's actions are consistent with its values.						
7	In my organization, leaders continually look for opportunities to learn.						
8	In my organization, leaders empower others to help carry out the organization's vision.						

Self-Development

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Means
13	My organization gives people control over the resources they need to accomplish their work						
14	In my organization, leaders generally support requests for learning opportunities and training.						
15	In my organization, the percentage of skilled workers compared to the total workforce is greater than last year						
16	In my organization, the number of individuals learning new skills is greater than last year.						

Competitive Advantage

S/N	Statement Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Means
17	My organization encourages people to think from a global perspective.						
18	My organization supports employees who take calculated risk.						
19	My organization invites people to contribute to the organization's vision.						
20	My organization encourages everyone to bring the customers' view into the decision making process.						

