



INTELLECTUAL STIMULATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL SURVIVAL IN TELECOM FIRMS IN RIVERS STATE

Akinnuoye Rotimi Obafemi¹, Emeka J. Okereke², Joseph E. Oshi³

¹DBA Student, University of Port Harcourt Business School, GRA Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

²Department of Finance and Banking, University of Port Harcourt Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria

³Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

The study seeks to examine the relationship between intellectual stimulation on the organizational survival of telecom firms in Rivers State. This study investigates this relationship in the telecommunication firms and for this purpose, data were collected from the 40 managers from 4 key telecommunication firms in Rivers State. Out of 40 questionnaires, 36 were retrieved and were valid for analysis. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and regression analysis were used for the investigation of this relationship. This study found that intellectual stimulation may be used as a tool for the adaptability and innovativeness of telecommunication firms. The study recommends that the management of telecommunication firms should encourage subordinates to re-examine personally established beliefs, assumptions, and values; including those of the leader, which may be outdated or inappropriate for solving current problems.

KEYWORDS: *Intellectual Stimulation, Organizational Survival, Adaptability, Innovativeness, Telecoms*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian telecommunication industry has witnessed tremendous transformation within the last decade and has become one of the viable industries that contribute immensely to the growth of the economy (Oyatoye, Aebiyi & Amole, 2015). According to Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC, 2019), by the end of 2018, telecoms contributed revenue of over 77.42% to the ICT sub-sector Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 9.46% to the national GDP. It was also reported that the deregulation of the sector gave rise to an increase in active subscriptions, which grew from 400,000 lines in 2001 to 145.3 million lines in May 2017, resulting in a teledensity of 0.4% and 103.82% in both years respectively (NCC, 2019). Tele-density measures the percentage number of active telephone connections for every one hundred persons living within an area.

The role of leaders in ensuring organizational survival cannot be over-emphasized. Adequate motivation, a suitable work environment, compensation, and efficient communication between managers and subordinates play an important role in promoting this goal. Planning and organization of work are also very crucial. It has been argued by some researchers that the most common problems affecting organizational performance in business and other institutions are poor attitudes to work among the workforce, inefficiency as well as the ineffectiveness of leaders in most places, though others share a contrary view (Haque, Faizan, & Cockrill, 2017).

The survival and growth of firms are highly desirable and many efforts are usually to foster this goal. Suffice it to say that when faced with adversity a firm's ability to continue to thrive is highly threatened. This is more so if the firm's coping strategies are maladapted as the coping strategies adopted by the firms at such times will lead to the survival of the fittest and the elimination of the unfit. Recently, there has been a massive layoff of workers across key sections of the economy such as Oil and Gas, Banking, and Telecommunications to mention a few, and strategies such as slashing of pay and allowances, partial shutdowns, as well as other seemingly desperate strategies, were adopted to ensure organizational survival. Claessens and Kose (2009) have noted that although there is no official definition of recession, there is a general recognition that the term refers to a period of decline in economic activity. It is pertinent for organizational management to apply intellectual stimulation in a bid to ensure organizational survival.



Despite the popularity of intellectual stimulation throughout numerous organizations, limited research exists in identifying potential issues in the implementation of this transformational leadership dimension within government entities in Kenya (Ndwiga & Ngaithe., 2016). Mafini (2015) suggested that more studies should be carried out on the influence of innovation within organizations in various geographical regions. Organizational survival is arguably one very crucial objective many firms strive to achieve especially in the long run. More so, the telecom operators in Nigeria are not exempted from this quest, given the nature of competition and the business environment they operate. In recent years, stakeholders in the telecom industry have been worried about various government regulatory policies, economic downturn, telecom infrastructure vandalization, increased competition by internet service providers, rapid changes in active subscribers' lifestyles, etc. Again, the industry has witnessed a sharp decline in GSM mobile subscribers as the market grapples with shifts in product options. Subscribers are moving away from traditional cellular services Aitel, 9mobile, etc to data bundle packs, which allows them (subscribers) to use Over The Top (OTT) services. According to NCC, the fourth quarter of 2016 witnessed an increase in total GSM active subscribers of 0.84% to 154 million. However, subscribers' patronage went low in the first quarter of 2017 by 1.38% to 152million.

Given these challenges before GSM operators and based on leadership theories, including scholarly evidence; it could be argued that for operators to achieve sustainable survival, there is a need to build the organization around visionary leaders that has what it takes to inspire subordinates through intellectual stimulation, employee empowerment, and flexibility to proactively respond to environmental changes. This research wants to examine the possibility of achieving adaptability and innovativeness through intellectual stimulation as it relates to telecom firms in Nigeria.

Aims / Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to empirically examine the nature of the relationship between intellectual stimulation and the organizational survival of telecom firms in Rivers State. Specifically, the following objectives are:

- i. Evaluate the relationship between intellectual stimulation and the adaptability of telecom firms in Rivers State.
- ii. Determine the extent to which intellectual stimulation relates to the innovativeness of telecom firms in Rivers State.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Intellectual Stimulation

The intellectually stimulating leader encourages followers to try new approaches. Intellectual stimulation represents an important component of transformational leadership. Through intellectual stimulation, transformational leaders encourage followers to question their own beliefs, assumptions, and values, and, when appropriate, those of the leader, which may be outdated or inappropriate for solving current problems (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Elkins & Keller, 2013; Anjali & Anand, 2015). Anjali & Anand (2015) assert that intellectual stimulation leads to the development of employee commitment to the organization. This, in turn, has implications for the ability of organization to achieve goals based on the dedication and hard work of employees.

By constantly searching for new knowledge, and intellectual stimulation transformational leaders constantly teach, illustrate, and also promote and get new and creative ideas for solving problems from all organizational members (Bass & Avolio, 2004; Bass, 2006). Similarly, Bycio, Hackett, and Allen (1995) found that the intellectual stimulation dimension of the transformational leadership scale had very strong positive relationships with the extra effort put in by subordinates. Avolio and Bass (2004) described an intellectually stimulating leader as one who "can discern, comprehend, conceptualize, and articulate to their associates the opportunities and threats facing their organization and its strengths, weaknesses, and comparative advantages." Furthermore, they opined that in allowing followers to seek intellectual ways to solve problems, analyze situations, and critically question long-held beliefs/assumptions/values, transformational leaders were developing their followers to seek innovative and creative ways to solve traditional problems.

Through intellectual stimulation leadership effectiveness, employees show their commitment to work and performance by using innovative techniques to achieve desired tasks and thus bring the desired change in institutions (Gilley et al., 2008). Still, certain factors are responsible for bringing variation in the relationship between intellectual stimulation and employee behavior among which a fair reward system (contingent rewards) is the most suggested phenomenon. Intellectual stimulation is the affective attribute of leadership wherein leaders motivate the workforce to realize the assigned tasks thereby following the institutional norms and values, which in turn, helps in developing employees' positive behavior (Ismail et al., 2010). Through intellectual stimulation, leaders persistently inspire employees to think and act in innovative and supportive



manners to achieve the desired tasks in a challenging environment (Aryee et al., 2012). The leader tries to enhance the employees' interests, responsiveness, and abilities to problem-solving in an effective manner. The leader over intellectually stimulating behavior encourages innovation, creativity, information exchanges, and critical thinking in institutions (Gong et al., 2013). Resultantly, employees' innovative behavior helps in generating, promoting, and realizing novel ideas and practices toward the attainment of institutional objectives (Strauss & Parker, 2014).

2.2 Organizational Survival

Organizational survival is arguably one of the most important objectives and interesting subjects for many organizations over the years (Simpson et al., (2007). Maheshwari (1980) argued that organizational survival as a concept, is multiple-dimensional with no common definition, making it elusive that there is no single way of defining organizational survival. This fact, according to the author may be a result of the many criteria used in operationalizing the concept. According to Perren (2000), organizational survival refers to the ability of a firm to realize and actualize its goals in line with its mission despite the prevailing environmental conditions. The author argued that organizational survival is defined through financial and non-financial elements such as market share, profitability, product/service quality, customers, and employees (Simpson et al., 2007).

Delacroix & Carroll (2000) organizational survival can be defined as an organizational ability or state of continuing to live or exist, often despite the difficulty, challenges, or dangers. Organizational survival has many connotations-both subjective and objective. The most objective way to measure survival in organizations is to observe their continuing existence. This is problematic given the nature of mergers and acquisitions. An organization is seen as having survived as long as it "acquires inputs from suppliers and provides output to a given public (customers, clients, etc). The organization is seen as a failed one when coalitions of its resource providers cannot be induced to supply resources and the firm cannot repay resource providers for past support (Sheppard, 1989). Generally, a firm is considered to have failed once it has entered bankruptcy proceedings. In order words, the firm has failed to return investors' and creditors' capital in the agreed manner to provide workers with Job security, to provide states with tax revenues, etc. So, for this study survival is simply nonfailure that is, non-bankruptcy, of an existing organization. Therefore, survival can be seen or viewed as non-failure (Moulton, 1988).

In addition, organizational survival is concerned with the effort of management to guide towards achieving organizational goals which have so many potential benefits, including the following: economies of scale, increased profitability, sales increment, and adaptability, hiring the best employees, increased prestige and employee satisfaction, etc (De-Smet & Schaninger, 2006). Man et al. (2002) defined survival as the organization's ability to achieve sustainable growth and realization of its goals which leads to eventual superior performance. According to Paige & Littrell (2002), organizational survival can be seen as the company's capacity to withstand adverse business conditions such as recession, and depression, and remain profitable to meet its financial and other organizational objectives.

2.2.1 Adaptability

The world is flat and full of complexities and is non-linear in nature. Such sort of complexities, uncertainties, and multi-stability domains apply limits to predictability yet still do not make system features or the dynamics associated with them unmanageable (Levin, 2003). What is important is how much humans and systems adapt. Given the importance of the interconnected global environmental changes, adaptability has become an evenly more important ingredient to pay attention of business organizations (Steffen, Crutzen & McNeill, 2007). Environmental uncertainty represents a constant threat to organizations and it tests the shoulders of management to adapt to these conditions in ways that put the organization ahead of competitors (Smit & Pilifosova, 2001). Adaptability has also been known to be considered an important response option to environmental uncertainties and worthy of research and assessment.

A plethora of scholars has put forward varying definitions of organizational adaptability. Kalling & Kogut (2000) defined the concept as a firm's capability to respond speedily to opportunities and risks and to convert the same into its competitive advantages. Adaptability is defined as the modification and alterations in the organization's structure or its components to adjust to changes in the environment (Bukowitz & Williams, 2000). According to Buch (2009), organizational adaptability is defined as an organization's capacity to accommodate change or be changed to fit an altered environment. While organizational adaptability should not be viewed as a one-stop process of organizational change; Drejer (2002) argued that it is a continuous process during an organization's entire life cycle. The author stressed that adaptation is a process of organizational change that should be practiced in the context of a continuous process of human and organizational



improvement over time (Drejer, 2002). This enables an organization and its people to effectively adapt to environmental change (Chung & Lee, 2006).

According to Dalziell & McManus (2004) adaptability is “the ability of the system to respond to changes in its external environment and to recover from damage to internal structures within the system that affects its ability to achieve its purpose”. An organization’s capacity to adjust relies on its ability to show survival characteristics (Mcmanus, 2007). According to Amah & Baridam (2012), the essence of adaptation is to create advantages over competitors who fail to adapt. This simply means that one can easily link adaptability to competitiveness. Hence, adaptability is the extent to which any organization can change behavior, structures, and systems to continue in the event of any change (Denison, 1990)

From the perspective of organizational learning, resilience, and experimentation; adaptability involves organizational learning, flexibility to experiment, an aspect of resilience that reflects and adopts novel solutions. These capabilities help the organization to develop generalized responses to broad classes of challenges (Loermans, 2002). In this regard, Menguc & Auh (2006) define adaptability as a form of engagement and involvement of organizational employees in ways that make them (employees) responsible, accountable, and occupied with developing the organization’s resilience through their hard work because they understand the links between the organization’s resilience and its long-term success. The entire organizational system can respond to the alterations in its external environmental conditions and recover from damages in the internal structures to achieve its purpose (McManus, et al; 2008). An organization’s ability to adapt is at the heart of its ability to display resilient characteristics (Kalling & Kogut, 2000).

2.2.2 Innovativeness

Organizational innovativeness is increasingly considered important for firms because it is a characteristic that is inherent to the organization and one that can become a valuable and difficult-to-imitate resource. Hurley & Hult (1998) and Hult et al. (2004) agree that innovativeness means that a firm is willing to innovate, implement new ideas, and abandon outdated attitudes that no longer achieve the expected results for the organization. As illustrated by the above, it has been shown that learning orientation and organizational innovativeness are factors that can be critical to the success of organizations in environments in which competition is constantly increasing. It is therefore believed that these characteristics can help firms to create differentiating factors that will allow them to get ahead of the competition.

McFadzean, O’Loughon & Shaw (2005) defined innovation as a process that provides added value and novelty to the business, its suppliers, and customers through the development of new procedures, solutions, products, and services as well as new methods of commercialization. The concept of innovation was first introduced by Schumpeter (1949). Innovation was emphasized in the entrepreneurial process by describing the growth of economies as driven by changes made to the existing market structure through the introduction of new goods and services. Similarly, the entrepreneurial orientation literature describes innovativeness as efforts focused on the discovery of new opportunities and solutions (Dess & Lumpkin 2005). Thus, innovation is described in terms of individuals' creative ability who strongly believe in what they do and promote it through organization stages to arouse support for the business concept among key stakeholders, create internal acceptance of the new idea, and represent the venture to resource allocators to ensure sufficient resources are released for development (Howell & Boies, 2004; Howell, et al., 2005; Markham, 1998). The process the individual take to achieve the project could be aligned with an inner drive to meet the individual creative instincts.

According to Chesbrough (2003) innovativeness has been previously tested to enable organizations to have significant advantages over rivals. This implies that innovativeness makes an organization better off in several ways, which include, effectively disseminating information, lowering transaction costs, improving perceived value, building up the possibility for the division of labor between enterprises, and fostering collective action. Nevertheless, Oke & Olughor (2014) mentioned that innovativeness could be likened to systemic and therefore it settles that organizations maintain a continuous system that upgrades knowledge from time to time. This is because it is usually difficult for one organization to possess all the knowledge and capabilities required to effect innovativeness (Howel & Boies, 2004). This implies that there will always be certain inputs into the innovation process, especially knowledge and capabilities, which the organization does not possess in-house and had to be sought outside the confines of the organization. Therefore, as integral to the innovation process, firms need to engage in a search for complementary knowledge and capabilities beyond their boundaries (Chukwudifu & Olori (2020).



2.5 Intellectual Stimulation and Organizational Survival

Yasin et al. (2014) examined the relationship between intellectual stimulation, innovations, and organizational success in Pakistan. The outcome of their study was that intellectual stimulation is a veritable management tool for the development of innovations and higher organizational success. The research further revealed a strong and positive relationship between employee creativity and organizational success. Also, Jung, Chow, & Wu (2003), who used 32 Taiwanese electronic/telecommunication firms to explore how visionary leadership affects innovativeness in these firms; found that intellectual stimulation leadership has significant and positive relationships with both empowerment and innovation supported by organizational climate. In another study of 46 Korean telecommunication firms, using a sample of employees and their supervisors; Shin and Zhou (2003) found that intellectual stimulation leadership was positively related to followers' level of creativity.

Elgelal & Noermijati (2015) conducted a study aimed at investigating the effect of direct intellectual stimulation on employee motivation, job satisfaction, and employee performance with a focus on all employees at FEB UMM. Data was collected using questionnaires with a Likert scale and the analysis was carried out using Partial Least Square (PLS). The results of the analysis conclude that employee motivation has no significant positive effect on the employees' performance. Intellectual stimulation was however found to be the main indicator determining transformational leadership and thus managers who encourage employees should be able to solve problems carefully, and then encourage employees to act creatively. This study used PLS Orabi (2016) in his study looked at the impact of intellectual stimulation on organizational performance in Jordan. A survey was sent to a randomly selected sample of 249. The respondents were sent a questionnaire. Regression analysis was used to get the results. The results of this study proved that intellectual stimulation plays a most significant role in shaping employees' performance hence the outcomes for the organization's performance. The investigation of the current research considers the role of transformational leadership and its four components idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration, and their influence on organizational performance in three banks operating in Jordan. This study was on banks operating in Jordan and not on SMEs.

Kirui, Iravo & Kanali (2015) investigated the influence of intellectual stimulation and individual consideration on effective organizational performance. The study was conducted in all 22 branches of Post Bank and National Banks within the Rift Valley, Kenya. The study used primary means of collecting data by employing quantitative approaches with a target population of 137 employees. A questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistics. A regression analysis was carried out and the r^2 value of 0.6374 implied that 63.7% of the variations in the effective organizational performance in state-owned banks can be explained by the variations in independent variables. Further, by quick standard error tests, the individual coefficients of the regression function were found to be significant in influencing effective organizational performance. This study was in Kenya but in the banking sector only.

Also, Kirui, Iravo, & Kanali (2015) investigated the influence of intellectual stimulation on individual consideration and innovativeness in effective organizational performance. The study was carried out in all 22 branches of Post Bank and National Banks within the Rift Valley Metropolis of Kenya. Accordingly, a regression analysis was undertaken and the r^2 value of 0.6374 implied that 63.7% of the variations in the effective organizational performance in state-owned banks can be explained by the variations in independent variables. Further, by quick standard error tests, intellectual stimulation coefficients of the regression function were found to be significant in influencing employee innovativeness and organizational performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted realist ontology and objectivist (scientific) epistemology. However, this study is quasi-experimental, and we adopted the cross-sectional survey research design. Quasi-experimental research determines the extent to which the independent variable can be used to explain or predict the variation in the dependent variable. In essence, scientific tests and quantitative methods are amenable to the use of questionnaires or surveys. The population consists of GSM service providers in Rivers State. This study was limited to the four major GSM operators who have known and functional operational offices in the City of Port Harcourt, which include; Aitel, Globacom, MTN, and 9mobile respectively. These top positions fall within the top and middle (or functional) management and were observed based on their various organograms. These four (4) top positions in both the main and subsidiary offices of these four companies constitute the research target population. Therefore, ten (10) positions (5 for regional and 5 for subsidiary offices) for each of the four (4) companies, making a total of forty (40) senior staff were involved in this research, and this population size of 40



was adopted as our sample size. The research adopted Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient and Regression Analysis, and all analyses were aided with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Questionnaire distribution and retrieval reveal that out of 40 questionnaires, only 36 were properly filled and found useful for the study.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Intellectual stimulation and the adaptability of telecom firms in Rivers State.

Table 4.1: Correlation Analysis on Intellectual Stimulation and Adaptability.

			Intellectual Stimulation	Adaptability
Spearman's rho	Intellectual Stimulation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.899**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	36	36
Adaptability	Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.899**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	36	36

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

Decision: Since the P value (0.000) is less than the alpha value (0.01%) which is the level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Coefficient of Determination

$$r^2 = (0.899)^2$$

$$r^2 = 0.8082 \times 100$$

$$r^2 = 80.8\%$$

The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 80.8%, meaning that, there is a positive and strong significant relationship between intellectual stimulation and adaptability of GSM firms in Port Harcourt. In light of this finding, earlier, research on intellectual stimulation leadership has proven a significant relationship between intellectual stimulation leadership and employee creativity and performance. Masi & Cooke, 2000) found that the intellectual stimulation leadership style practiced in a typical organization led to employees being more committed and innovative.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between Intellectual Stimulation and innovativeness of telecom firms in Rivers State.

Table 4.2: Correlation Analysis on Intellectual Stimulation and Innovativeness.

			Intellectual Stimulation	Innovativeness
Spearman's rho	Intellectual Stimulation	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.901**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	36	36
Innovativeness	Innovativeness	Correlation Coefficient	.901**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	36	36

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

Decision: Since the P value (0.000) is less than the alpha value (0.01%) which is the level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected while the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Coefficient of Determination

$$r^2 = (0.901)^2$$

$$r^2 = 0.811801 \times 100$$

$$r^2 = 81.2\%$$

The coefficient of determination (r^2) is 81.2%, meaning that, there is a positive and strong significant relationship between intellectual stimulation and innovativeness of GSM firms in Port Harcourt. This result however corroborates with the findings of Bycio, Hackett & Allen (1995) when the authors found that the intellectual stimulation dimension of visionary leadership had very strong and positive relationships with the innovative effort put in by employees.



5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study thus concludes that through intellectual stimulation, visionary leaders encourage subordinates to re-examine personally established beliefs, assumptions, and values; including those of the leader, which may be outdated or inappropriate for solving current problems. In addition, the research revealed that intellectual stimulation is a vital attribute of a visionary leader, which involves the motivation of subordinates to realize the assigned tasks to follow the institutional norms and values of the organization, and in turn, helps in developing employees' positive behavior. We further recommend that the management of GSM firms should encourage subordinates to re-examine personally established beliefs, assumptions, and values; including those of the leader, which may be outdated or inappropriate for solving current problems. They should allow employees to solve work-related issues by making use of their intellectual skills.

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