

STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF AKWA IBOM STATE TRANSPORT COMPANY, UYO.

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ABSTRACT

This study, Strategy Implementation and Organizational Competitiveness in Nigeria: A study of Akwa Ibom State Transport Company, Uyo, was designed to underscore the relationship between strategy implementation and organizational competitiveness. Specifically, the study examined the extent to which operationalization and institutionalization strategies influence organizational competitiveness. Survey research design was adopted in this study. The study population was the entire managerial staff of AKTC totaling 20. Because of the small population, sampling was not necessary. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analyzing the data for the study. Findings from the results of the analysis indicate that both aspects of strategy implementation such as strategy institutionalization and operationalization have a significant positive relationship with organizational competitiveness in AKTC, Uyo. Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that strategy implementation affects organizational competitiveness in AKTC transportation industry. Consequently, it was recommended among other things that, firms should endeavor to embrace the principles of strategic management by analyzing their environment, formulating value creating strategies, and most importantly, ensuring that formulated strategies are properly implemented.

keywords: Strategy Implementation, organizational competitiveness, institutionalization strategy, and operationalization strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Business organizations in contemporary economies operate in a very competitive environment, and for them to sustain competitive advantage, they need to practice strategic management. Strategic management consists of the analysis, decisions, and actions an organization undertakes in order to create and sustain competitive advantage (Amstrong & Barron, 2005). According to Davenport (2007), creating a brilliant strategy is nothing compared to executing it successfully and this is so because, without a carefully and well planned approach to strategy implementation or execution, strategic goals cannot be attained.

Strategy implementation is an important aspect of strategic management, it is the process of transforming strategic intentions into actions or acceptable results. While many people believe that formulating a strategy is critical and by itself, sufficient to lead a firm to success in today's business world, it is also pertinent that such strategy should be innovative and unique to ensure organizational competitiveness. Organizational competitiveness simply refers to current events which organizations are dealing with to remain economically competitive in the global market to create an enabling environment that inspires, encourages and spawns highly innovative ideas from employees (Harrison & Pelletier, 2000). Organizational competitiveness is achieved when a firm successfully formulates and implements a value creating strategy of which other companies or firms are unable to duplicate the benefits or imitate, such a firm is said to have a sustained competitive advantage. A firm is assured of its competitiveness only after other efforts to duplicate its strategy have seized or failed (Akpan & Ayandele, 2012). Therefore, in striving to achieve intended results of competitiveness and earn above average return, good strategies should be properly implemented by organizations, including the transport firms.

Organizations including those in the transport industry compete for the same resources, competencies, and customers. Hence, the cruel realities of strategic management is about affecting the overall activities of an organization in ways to make the organization a winner or survive in fierce competitions.

Transportation is an essential part of the economy. It is one of the indices for measuring the development of a country (Thomson & Strickland, 2003). As the society and economic organizations become complex, the relevance of transport grows. Also the demand for transportation is a derived one, because it depends on the demand for the commodities carried or the benefits of persons travelling; and each travel made, is unique in time and space. Hence, the demand for transport services increase with the extension of the input-output relationships of an economy. Transport system is classified into four basic categories, namely; (1)- road, (2)- rail, (3)- air and (4)- water transport.

The Akwa Ibom State transport company belongs to category (1)-Road. Economic transformation, and indeed, the development of any country is nearly impossible without an efficient transport system (Salim, 2010) and (Lingartiene, 2006). According to Mbaka and Mungambi (2014)," transportation is an essential part of human activity and in many ways forms the basis of all socio-economic interactions". Indeed, no two locations will interact effectively without a viable means of movement.

World demand for transport services is growing rapidly. For example, global demand for passengers transport services is predicted to grow from 26 trillion passenger kilometers in 1990 to 103 trillion passenger kilometers in 2050 on average (Schafer and Victor, 1997).

In recent years, the Nigeria transportation industry has recorded an influx of firms and the quest for greater market share had shifted these firms from the fence of complacency to the state of competitiveness(Salim, 2010). Although the industry has experienced robust strategy formulation

process in addition to numerous opportunities and prospect, many firms still find it uneasy to achieve competitiveness advantage for sustainable growth and profitability. The inability of this firms to achieve strategic competitiveness is attributed to faulty or non-implementation of formulated strategies.

Strategic management is important for organizational competitiveness. For strategic management to result to organizational competitiveness, all the steps in the process need to be effectively managed. A brilliant strategy may put a company on the competitive map and increase its performance. Unfortunately, most companies struggle with strategy formation and then fail in implementation (Blahová & Knápková, 2010).

However, This study therefore sought to ascertain the relationship between strategy implementation and organizational competitiveness in the Nigerian transportation industry, with focus on Akwa Ibom State Transport Company.

Statement of the Problem

In today's competitive business world, organizations find themselves in an ever- changing environment and need to react positively. Organizations, in the recent turbulent economic times, operate under a new hyper competitive landscape due to technological revolution and increasing globalization which cause many organizations in the world to change in an increasing pace.

However, despite having a robust strategy formulation policies coupled with environmental opportunities, many organizations including the transport sector still find themselves in dead ends and even below average in their returns due to wrong formulation and implementation of strategies that would result in sustained growth and profitability, innovation, skill workforce, quality service delivery as well as efficient and ethical management to ensure competitive advantage.

Furthermore, the traditional managerial mindset such as : economy of scale, huge advertising and budgets are ineffective in the new competitive landscape and to lead most firms to strategic competitiveness in the new business era (Akpan & Ayandele, 2012). This development calls for strategic options for firms to adopt new mindsets such as institutionalize and operationalize strategies which are unique input alleged to add values such as flexibility, speed, innovation, and integration that can propel economic transformation leading to firms competitive advantage.

Moreover, there is no empirical research evidence recorded in Akwa Ibom State to ascertain the relationship between strategy implementation and organizational competitiveness in the transport sector. So, these and other contending issues prompt the researchers curiosity to investigate the relation between strategy implementation and organizational competitiveness in Nigeria using Akwa Ibom State transport sector as a case study.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study was to ascertain the relationship between strategy implementation and organizational competitiveness in Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC), Uyo. The specific objectives were to:

- i. examine the extent to which strategy institutionalization influences organizational competitiveness in Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC), Uyo.

- ii. ascertain the extent to which strategy operationalization influences organizational competitiveness in Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC), Uyo

Hypotheses of the Study

The study is guided by the following (null) hypotheses.

- i. There is no significant positive relationship between strategy institutionalization and organizational competitiveness in Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC), Uyo.
- ii: There is no significant positive relationship between strategy operationalization and organizational competitiveness in Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC), Uyo.

Study Area

The study area is Akwa Ibom State. Akwa IBom State is one of the 36 states in the Nigerian Federation. It has an estimated current population of 3.92 million (NPC,2006). Created on 23rd September, 1987, it is the tenth largest state in the country with 31 Local Government Areas. The state covers a total area of 7,246.499square kilometers. It is located in the coastal South-south part of Nigeria and lies approximately between latitudes 432' N and 533'N and longitudes 725' E and 825' E. The state is bounded on the East by Cross Rivers State, on the West by Rivers State and Abia State and on the South by Atlantic Ocean.

Akwa Ibom State is a civil service state. However, Agriculture constitutes the main stay of the economy given that about 90 percent of the population of the state live in the rural area. Also, the industrial base of the state is not only small but also weak and undeveloped. At creation, the state inherited the following companies from Cross River State: Sunshine Batteries, Peacock Pain, Quality Ceramic, Qua Steel Product Limited Asbestonit Industries, Plasto-Crown industries , International Biscuit Limited, Champion Breweries, Palm industries, Seashore Seafood Limited etc (Daniel &Ibok, 2013).

Regrettably, most of these industries are ailing apart from Champion Breweries that survive through public-private partnership. The Akwa Ibom State transport company limited (AKTC) is a recent industry created by Akwa Ibom State in 2002. But suffice to say that the transport sector is not well developed in the state coupled with other weak industries constitute to unemployment and weak economic base of the state. Hence the need for proper strategy formulation and implementation in Akwa Ibom State transport sector as a means for achieving organizational competitiveness

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Organizations are operating in a turbulent and hyper competitive environment, and it is their desire to continue to operate successfully by creating and delivering products and services that have superior value to their customers while also learning how to adapt to a continuous and dynamic business environment (Thompson & Strickland, 2007). Strategic management is therefore a sine qua

non since it involves developing and formulating strategies to meet competition for long term survival and growth thereby ensuring that competitive advantage is created so that the company will not only outperform competitors but also guide its programs successfully irrespective of the changes in the environment.

Strategy can therefore be viewed as a means by which a particular goal of an individual or organization is attained (Aremu, 2000). This implies that for any organization to achieve its goals there is the need to devise appropriate strategies to facilitate such. Thompson and Strickland (2007) argued that strategy is a management's action plan to strengthen the market position and boost performance in running the business and conducting operations in order to achieve the targeted levels of organizational performance.

Institute of Strategic Management, Nigeria (2010) cited in Olanipekun, Abioro, Akanni, Arulogun and Rabi (2015) defines strategic management as an integrative process of management in which all managers of an organization engage in continuous rethinking and auditing of themselves, the organization and the environment, and in developing, implementing and controlling the organizations' direction, strategies and programmes, aimed at effecting positive changes, and achieving all time successful performance. Strategic management does not only enhance organizational performance but also go a long way to give a firm competitive advantage which makes it outperform competitors in the industry. (Olanipekun et al, 2015).

Muogbo (2013) examined the impact of strategic management on organizational growth and development in Anambra, Nigeria and concludes that strategic management is not yet a common business practice among manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Nonetheless, strategic management has been identified as a veritable tool for improving the competitiveness, performance levels, and structural development of manufacturing firms in Anambra State in particular and Nigeria in general.

The Benefits of Strategic Management

Strategic management can be beneficial when an organization applies an approach to strategic management which matches the situation they are into. According to Akingbade (2007), the benefits of strategic management in organizations include: clearer definition of objectives, providing better guidance to the entire organization on the crucial point of "what it is we are trying to do" that is, the vision and helping in overcoming risks and uncertainties and therefore contributing to organization's success.

Problems of Strategic Management

However, Aluko, Odugbesan, Gbadamosi, and Osuagwu (2004), Akingbade (2007) also identified the following disadvantages of strategic management: involving a great deal of time and effort that could be too much for available staff, it requires a considerable investment in money and people, Some firms seem to remain at the planning stage almost perpetually, i.e. implementation and control are sometimes ignored.

Failure of Strategic Management

Dauda, Akingbade, and Akinlabi (2010) outlined the following reasons as responsible for failure of strategic plans: Failure to understand the customer – why do they buy, inadequate or incorrect marketing research, inability to predict environment reactions, what will competitors do – price wars, over-estimation of resource competence, equipment and processes to handle the new strategy

The Strategic Management Process

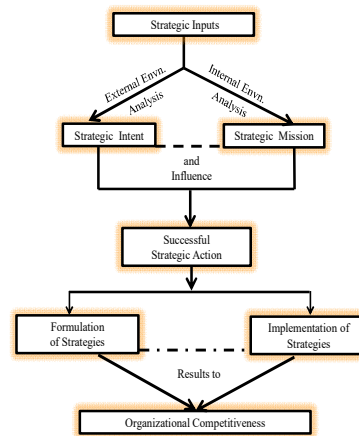
The strategic management process is a full set's of commitments, decisions, and actions, required for a firm to achieve strategic competitiveness and earn above average return (Akpan & Ayandele 2012).

As shown in figure 1, relevant strategic inputs from the analysis of the internal and external environments are necessary for effective strategy formulation and strategy implementation action. In turn, effective strategic actions are a prerequisite to achieving the desired outcome of strategic competitiveness and above average return.

Strategic Action

Strategic action refers to the transformation process of the mission or intent of a competent leader to steer the company through huddles and help it to grow by formulating and implementing good strategies (Moulton & Standford, 2017). Strategy formulation is one of the managerial competencies which is seen as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes that managers need to function effectively. A successful strategic action refers to the ability of the manager to transform the vision of the organization into actions that can lead to the realization of the expected goal (Moulton & Standford, 2017). In other words, it is only business managers with (successful) strategic action or competencies that can steer their companies to growth amidst weaknesses and threats through good strategy formulation.

Figure 2.1: The Strategic Management Process and Organizational Competitiveness Model



Source: Researcher's own concept

Figure 1: The Strategic Management Process and Organizational Competitiveness Model

Strategy Formulation

Strategy formulation is the process of developing a vision and a mission, determining internal strength and weakness, identifying external opportunities and threats, establishing long-term

objectives, generating alternative strategies, and choosing a particular strategy to pursue (Akpan & Ayandele 2012).

Boyne (2003) cited in Akintunde, Fred, Edem, Akwawa, and Edem (2016), stated that in many business corporations, there are two key processes through which Strategy is crafted. The conscious and analytical process is the first, this involves assessing the structure of the market, competitive strengths and weaknesses, the nature of customer requirements, and the drivers of market growth. while the second Strategy-making process is identified as emergent Strategy. It is seen as the cumulative impact of daily prioritization of decisions made by middle level executives, engineers, salespeople and financial personnel (Ihunda,2007).

Strategy Implementation

Akpan and Ayandele (2012), define strategy implementation as the sum total of activities and choices required for the execution of strategic plans by which strategies and policies are put into action through the development of programmes, budgets and procedures. It includes developing strategy supportive marketing efforts, preparing budget, developing and utilizing information system and linking employees compensation to organization performance.

Practitioners emphatically agree that it is a whole lot easier to develop a sound strategic plan than it is to “make it happen.” Putting strategy into effect and getting the organization moving in the chosen direction calls for a different set of managerial skills such as organizing, motivating, culture-building and creating strong fits between strategy and how the organization does things (Njagi & Kombo, 2014).

The process of strategy implementation involves two major steps namely operationalization of strategy or tactical issues and institutionalization or administration of strategy. Operationalization of strategy involves breaking long-term corporate objectives to operational short-term objectives and developing specific functional unit or departmental strategies and drawing action plans to achieve the objectives (Burgelman, Grove & Meza, 2006). While institutionalization of strategy requires developing organizational capability to a point where it is fully supportive of the new strategy, the reality of strategy resides in its strategic actions rather than its strategic statements (Burgelman et al, 2006). This involves action-oriented activities such as communicating, matching strategy with organizational structure, culture, selecting effective leadership and designing effective reward systems. These two phases of strategy implementation are geared towards improving organizational performance which is seen as the actual output or results of an organization as measured against its intended outputs (or goals and objectives).

Njagi and Kombo (2014) in their study, "effect of strategy implementation on performance of commercial banks in Kenya" concluded that for strategic management to improve organizational performance, all the required actions in each step should be carefully carried out, tailored to the organization and made part of an overall implementation plan. In conclusion, they advice that, institutions that want to thrive and compete effectively must implement their strategies effectively.

Importance of Strategy Implementation

Strategy implementation involves the managerial exercise of supervising the ongoing pursuit of strategy, making it work, improving the competence with which it is executed, and showing measurable progress in achieving the targeted results (Thomson & Strickland, 2003).

For example, Harrison and Pelletier (2000) indicate that the value of strategic decisions will be realized only after effective implementation of a decision. Moreover, below are the importance of strategic implementation according to (Dauda et al, 2010).

Function: Without strategic implementation, a project would not be able to get off the ground, since strategic implementation functions as a project's blueprint.

A work breakdown : Work breakdown structures identify all the steps that need to be taken to get from one implementation phase to the next, and break a project down into smaller, and more manageable, components.

Cost Allocation: Strategic implementation is important because it evaluates project costs and determines cost allocation to fund the project from start to finish, thereby eliminating unnecessary costs.

Evaluation Methodology: Evaluations consist of measuring a project's progress, and comparing that against what the targeted goal is. This will tell the project team whether or not they are on track with the projected time frames and projected funding.

Factors Influencing Strategy Implementation

Madegwa (2013) determines the barriers to strategy implementation in mid-sized companies in Kenya. The barriers were found to be from external and internal environment of the organization. The major barriers identified from the internal operating environment were behavioural resistance to change, inappropriate systems (specifically the structure), culture, leadership, systems used in the organization that did not have a strategic fit with the strategy. Others are poor communication on the organization strategy, lack of proper training and instruction given to the lower employees. The external barriers were found to be business macro factors in the operating environment and they include factors such as stiff competition compounded by new entrance competitors into the industry, un-anticipated new substitute or competing products, stakeholders in the operating environment such as customers, creditors, government and the politico-legal status of the organization in the operating environment.



Source: Researchers own concept

Diagrammatical Representation of Strategy Implementation and Organizational Competitiveness

Figure 2.

According to the framework in figure 2, strategy implementation constitutes the independent variable while organizational competitiveness is the dependent variable. Strategy implementation will be assessed through the specific activities of operationalization and institutionalization of strategy. Strategy implementation is expected to result in organizational competitiveness. This will be assessed in terms of Efficient and ethical management; Innovation; Improve technology; Skilled, healthy, competitive and efficient workforce; Profit; Market share; Social responsibility; Customer satisfaction; 'Value' of the product/service etc.

Theoretical Framework

Resource Based Theory or View (RBV)

This theory was developed by Birge Wenefeldt in 1984. It is a method of analyzing and identifying a firm's strategic advantages based on examining its distinct combination of assets, skills, capabilities and intangibles as an organization. The RBV's underlying premise is that a firm differs in fundamental ways because each firm possesses a "unique" bundle of resources-tangible and intangible assets and organizational capabilities to make use of those assets. In the context of this theory, it is evident that the resources that a firm has will play a big role in the strategic

implementation process. This is because no matter how good the strategies are, without the necessary resources to enable the implementation, they remain in the planning phase.

The resource-based approach sees firms with superior systems and structures being profitable not because they engage in strategic investments that may deter entry and raise prices above long run costs, but because they have markedly lower costs, or offer markedly higher quality or product performance. This approach focuses on the rents accruing to the owners of scarce firm-specific resources rather than the economic profits from product market positioning.

This theory is suitable for this study because in Nigeria and by extension Akwa Ibom State, the rate at which State own industries get moribund is obvious and pathetic thereby causing majority of the young School leavers to remain unemployed. This development has gross effect on the socio-economic development of the state and Nigeria at large. To address the issues of firm's collapse or malfunctioning, management needs to identify the best strategic options during formulation stage, and also see to it proper implementation so as to achieve firm's competitive advantage.

Materials and Methods

The work adopted survey method as the design of the study. This method was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to elicit responses from respondents through the use of questionnaire instrument to assess the data collected.

Population of the Study

The population for this study was 20 being the entire managerial staffs of Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC) Uyo. The choice of this group of staff was judgmental because these managers are in a good position to provide the required information on the strategic position of the organization. Owing to the small sample size, sampling was not considered. Hence, the total population formed the total sample size for the study.

Data Analysis

The data for this study was analyzed using descriptive statistics, hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. This analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22.

Demographic information about the respondents. The analysis relied on this information of the respondents so as to categorize the different results according to their responses.

Table 1. Highest Levels of Education

	Frequency	Percent
Diploma/Certificate	2	10.0
University Degree	14	70.0
Master's/PhD	4	20.0
Total	20	100.0

SOURCE: Field Work 2017.

The respondent were requested to indicate their highest level of academic qualification they held. Table1. shows the findings of the result, majority 70% of the respondents had acquired

university degree as their highest academic qualification, and 20% had master as their highest level of education while 10% had diploma/certificate.

Table 2. Number of Years Spent in the Organization

	Frequency	Percent
Valid 0 - 5 Years	10	50.0
6 - 10 Years	7	35.0
11 - 15 Years	3	15.0
Total	20	100.0

SOURCE: Field Work 2017.

The respondents were requested to indicate the number of years they have been working with the organization. As shown in table 2. 50% of the respondents represent those who had worked between 0 – 5 years, 35% falls between 6 – 10 years, whereas 15% are those between 11 to 15 years. This also affirms that these respondents have spent a good number of years to have known the strategic and competitiveness position of the firm.

Test of Hypotheses 1.

To achieve the general objective of this study, two null hypotheses were formulated and tested, the results are presented below.

H₀₁: There is no significant positive relationship between strategy institutionalization and organizational competitiveness in AKTC.

Table 3. Correlations Matrix on Strategy Institutionalization and Organizational competitiveness

		Strategy_Institutionalization	Organizational Competitiveness
Strategy_Institutionalization	Pearson Correlation	1	.596**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.006
	N	20	20
Organizational Competitiveness	Pearson Correlation	.596**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	
	N	20	20

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

SOURCE: Field Work 2017.

Table 3 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.596. This value is significant (2 tailed p = .006). Therefore, the alternate hypothesis (H₀) is rejected. This implies that strategy institutionalization has a significant effect on organizational competitiveness in AKTC, Uyo.

Test of Hypotheses 2.

H_{0i}: There is no significant positive relationship between strategy operationalization and organizational competitiveness in AKTC.

Correlations Matrix of Strategy Operationalization and Organizational competitiveness

		Strategy_Operationalization	Organizational_Compitiveness
Strategy_Operationalization	Pearson Correlation	1	.613**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	20	20
Organizational_Compitiveness	Pearson Correlation	.613**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	20	20

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

SOURCE: Field Work 2017.

Table 4 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of 0.613. This value is significant (2 tailed p = .004). Therefore, the null hypothesis (H₀) is rejected. This implies that strategy operationalization has a significant effect on organizational competitiveness in AKTC, Uyo.

The results from the demographic characteristics of the respondent reveals that most of the managerial staff of AKTC are literate and have spent a good number of years in the organization. Hence, have a better understanding of the subject under discuss, this also indicates that they are aware of the strategic and competitiveness position of the firm.

On strategy institutionalization and operationalization, it was discovered that both strategy institutionalization and operationalization are significantly correlated with organizational competitiveness Akwa Ibom State Transport Company. This findings corroborate the conclusion of Njagi and Kombo (2014) that, there is a strong relationship between strategy implementation and organizational performance of commercial banks in Kenya, and that the two aspects of strategy implementation (operationalization and institutionalization) are complementary and either is ineffective in the total absence of the other. Findings also revealed that institutionalization had a correlation coefficient of .596, whereas operationalization was significantly correlated at a coefficient of .613. This implies that both strategy institutionalization and operationalization has significant positive influence organizational competitiveness in AKTC.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Organizations are said to be operating in a turbulent and hyper competitive environment, and it is their desire to continue to operate successfully by creating and delivering services that add value to

their customers while also learning how to adapt to a continuous and dynamic business environment. Strategic management is therefore a sine qua non since it involves developing and formulating strategies to meet competition and ensure long term survival and growth of the firms. This study has established that indeed strategic management does not only gives a firm competitive advantage but also go a long way in enhancing organizational performance.

Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore recommended that the strategic management practices needs continuous and sustained supervision, organizations should have a well conceived strategic vision that must be communicated to all employees. It is also imperative to emphasize that all employees should be carried along in formulation and implantation of strategic management process that will prepare the company for the future, establish long-term direction and indicate the company's intent to position itself as a market leader in the industry.

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