
KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND ENTREPRENEURIAL ORIENTATION OF SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (SMEs) IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study explored the nexus between knowledge sharing and entrepreneurial orientation of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa State. The study applied a quantitative design and selected a sample of 312 managers of SMEs through simple random and stratified sampling methods. A structured questionnaire designed in a 5-point Likert form was utilized in collecting data through the distribution of the questionnaire to respondents. The content approach was adopted to ascertain the validity of the measuring instrument while Cronbach alpha was applied to determine the reliability of the measurement instrument. The data collected were analyzed with multivariate regression and found that knowledge sharing had a positive but no significant effect on risk-taking; knowledge sharing had a positive significant effect on innovativeness of small and medium enterprises; knowledge sharing had a positive but no significant effect on proactiveness of small and medium enterprises; knowledge sharing had a positive significant effect on the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises; and knowledge sharing had a positive but no significant effect on autonomy of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa state. The study concluded that knowledge sharing contributed to the entrepreneurial orientation of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa State. In tandem with the findings, we recommended that managers and owner managers of SMEs should build knowledge management systems that facilitate exchange of intellectual capital to enhance entrepreneurial orientations to attain sustainable competitive edge.

Keywords: Knowledge sharing, Risk-taking, Autonomy, Competitiveness, Proactiveness, Entrepreneurship and SMEs

Introduction

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have gained global recognitions as critical entities that determine economic growth, employment creation and income generation (Onyeje, Court & Agbaeze, 2022), and accordingly, economic frameworks, policies and activities of supranational and regional agencies and governments revolve around SMEs in the current decade (Scupola, 2006; Tambunan, 2008). However, the need for SMEs to interface with all forms of institutions, agencies and governments cannot be overemphasized as the world is now a global village that is powered by technology (Fayyaz et al., 2009). The knowledge of available technology and exploring them to an advantage has greatly increased the chances of business success. Knowledge is of more consequential value when created and shared amongst stakeholders. Therefore, the application of knowledge management principles undoubtedly enables SMEs and other firms to achieve competitive advantage by establishing knowledge sharing links among stakeholders (Rastega & Ruhanen, 2021). In recent times, the acquisition of knowledge depends on the ability of an organization to utilize different technologies, technological instruments and associated resources (Uzoma & China, 2021). Knowledge sharing of both implicit and codified knowledge begins with knowledge creation and storage. According to Kirsch et al. (2015), knowledge creation involves developing new knowledge through social interactions that result in idea and information exchange via diverse media.

Globalization has dramatically changed the perspectives of the business world, resulting in a healthy competition and improved business processes (Shah & Ahmad, 2019). Organizations are highly innovative and futuristic, having required information that are being transformed into useful knowledge at their disposal. To maximize knowledge in organizations, it must be shared through platforms that are easily accessible. With the use of data sharing platforms, organizations can exchange their ideas and information electronically and knowledge becomes accessible to individuals within and outside an organization (Mohammed & Alzeidiz, 2022; Naeem, 2019). For both internal and external stakeholders to share and utilize knowledge, trust becomes an indispensable inherent factor of knowledge sharing. Casimir et al. (2012) posit that there is a positive relationship between trust and knowledge sharing.

An entrepreneur is a person with innovative ideas that bring about financial gain (Runyan et al., 2008). Through the lens of entrepreneurship-focused management style, entrepreneurial orientation is conceptualized as dynamic characteristics of SMEs in responding to prevailing business ecosystem circumstances, affecting market offerings and industries (Wales, Parida, & Patel, 2013). Pittino et al (2018) posit that, firms need to retain the right level of entrepreneurial orientation (EO) in order to thrive and maintain their ability to produce value over time. Employees within an organization can encourage knowledge sharing because of the associated altruistic spirit and organizational identification, which increases people's willingness to share information, promote others' learning, assist one another in solving problems, and support and promote organizational values and beliefs (Han, Chiang & Chang, 2010). Martinez, Galvan, and Palacios (2016) in their study explained that, knowledge transfer has a positive and significant effect on entrepreneurial orientation, which in turn influences business performance. The remainder of the paper is in this structural form. The first part of the paper is to review literature for hypothesis development, followed by the explanation of the methodology, the third aspect is for the analysis of data and results while the fourth part discusses the results and implications for the study. Furthermore, the last aspect provides limitations and direction for future studies.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Knowledge sharing and Innovativeness of SMEs

According to Liu and Philips (2011), for SMEs to navigate the complexities and competitive business scenarios, they adopt flexible and new approaches to creating knowledge-based capabilities, tools and solutions. In recent years, the business climate has undergone significant change and the fluidity of the business climate is largely resulting from scientific breakthroughs in technology. Nguyen (2020) in his research work, developed a model that shows the interaction between five different cross-functional coordination and multifaceted means of competition in the business environment, The model fosters cross-functional organizational knowledge sharing for the greater good of enhancing innovativeness in organisations. Also, Kmiecik (2021), explained that both trust among colleagues and trust with superiors in the organization positively related to knowledge donating and knowledge collecting. This shows that no single person has all required knowledge for business excellence. Hence, there is need for interdependence. Knowledge usage can be said to be in a cycle involving the point of collection and the point of donation (Kmiecik 2021).

Different aspects of entrepreneurial orientation are key to maximizing chances of competitive advantage. Interorganizational partnership diversity, effective knowledge sharing via ICTs, and organizational innovativeness are essential aspects. EO allows organizations to be diverse in search for knowledge and supports active engagement in different communication channels and learning opportunities that open possibilities for nascent innovations, and mobilize prior knowledge for synergistic innovative effects (Yu et al., 2013). Organizations in recent time foster working relationships with other organizations for innovation (Sampson, 2007). The role of ICTs cannot be underestimated in facilitating knowledge sharing across organizational boundaries (Barley, 2015). Organisation-wide approach for innovativeness would be rated to be greater indices for success than a single innovation; guaranteeing a long-term effect as the innovation involves shared knowledge (Damanpour et al., 2018).

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant relationship between knowledge sharing and innovativeness of SMEs in Yenagoa in Bayelsa State.

Knowledge Sharing and Proactiveness of SMEs

Entrepreneurial proactiveness involves the ability to identify both latent and emerging opportunities so as to take necessary advantage that is timely by going ahead of competitors to produce goods of high value not yet in the market (Jiménez-Jiménez et al., 2020). Organizations look beyond the present to make good plans that would be profitable in the nearest future. Being proactive necessitates entrepreneurs use current facts to identify gaps, opportunities, and solutions. Opportunities that are yet to be fully created would require visionary thinking to bring it to reality (Short et al., 2009). Higher degrees of proactive initiative would increase a small business's capacity to recognize and seize first-mover advantages (Hughes and Morgan, 2007). Du et al. (2007) posits that information sharing interacts with innovation, proactivity, and collectivism to impact business performance. Since proactive businesses employ explicit knowledge to spot and seize new market possibilities, they tend to be more technologically focused. According to Bature et al. (2018), proactive activities enable firms to keep abreast of changes in technology and regularly strive to create and integrate resources to match technology advancement. Firms develop new technologies and change the original resource structure to create new environmental opportunities (Farooq & Vij, 2020). Being proactive in creating knowledge sharing capabilities can help a firm

improve its competitiveness by exploiting productive knowledge. This suggests a positive association between proactiveness and knowledge sharing.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant relationship between knowledge sharing and proactiveness of SMEs in Yenagoa in Bayelsa State.

Knowledge Sharing and Risk-Taking of SMEs

Learning can take place in an organization due to the interactions among team members, groups and colleagues within a firm (Susanty et al., 2022). These learning outcomes generate new ideas or information that would add value to the organization. However, the new information needs application for it to be utilized. Putting new information into practice is hard work and takes time, especially with varying degrees of complexity (Pradana et al., 2020). Enforcing change in an organization is not as easy as identifying information that can help to bring about change. This poses a risk to the organization as wrong implementation of good ideas can also produce a negative outcome.

Putnins and Sauka (2020) explained that entrepreneurial orientation (EO), reflects inclinations of key players within a firm to take calculated risks. Organizations determined to make progress must make moves that are risky, but must ensure they are examined from different perspectives before application. Putnins and Sauka, (2020), therefore put forward in their study that risk taking has a significant positive relationship with performance of an organization. Knowledge sharing among project members is very important to avoid mistakes of the past, ensure proper and efficient management of resources, and reduce possible risks of failures (Ni et al 2018). Organizations strive to ensure that risks associated with operations are minimal, using adequate knowledge to improve expertise. According to Ali and Gurd (2020), there is correlation between knowledge sharing and operational risks, such that as knowledge sharing increases, a reduction in the adverse performance effect of operational risks would be recorded and vice versa.

Hypothesis 3: There is a significant relationship between knowledge sharing and risk taking of SMEs in Yenagoa in Bayelsa State

Knowledge Sharing and Competitive Aggressiveness of SMEs

The ability to create new knowledge enables not only innovation, but can also stimulate aggressive competition which affects an organization's market share and industry structure. This is evident in the aggressive attitude of an organization towards competitors' behavior characterized by an intense attitude to confront and outdo rival organizations. There is a relationship between knowledge sharing and business performance through an organization's competitive aggressiveness. Almulhim (2017) mentioned that organizational creativity is very important for improving productivity. Entrepreneurs are innovators or discoverers of specific skills that are associated with financial gain (Runyan et al., 2008). The socialization process allows individuals to learn and adapt to work groups in which they compete with others rather than with others to achieve collective goals (Collier et al., 2010). An important dynamic function that companies must have in order to gain a competitive advantage is to encourage knowledge sharing among employees, especially in terms of teamwork (Teece et al., 1997). However, knowledge sharing cannot be done simply. Group members may have reasons or motivations to accumulate their own knowledge and thus see knowledge as an important personal asset. Thus, motivating team members to share knowledge is an important but complex issue (Staples & Webster, 2008). Second, effective knowledge sharing requires synergistic cooperation among team members working toward a common goal (Boland and

Tenkas, 1995). For the reasons given above, knowledge sharing involves a certain degree of motivation (Gagne, 2009). Competition within a team has the potential to motivate or prevent team members from sharing knowledge (Hansen et al., 2005; Tjosvold et al., 2003), indicating a team environment that promotes knowledge sharing within the team (Zarraga and Bonache, 2003).

Hypothesis 4: There is a significant relationship between knowledge sharing and competitive Aggressiveness of SMEs in Yenagoa in Bayelsa State

Knowledge Sharing and Autonomy of SMEs

A work environment where employees cooperate, promotes knowledge sharing among the staff. A cooperative climate better predicts knowledge sharing when workers have low intrinsic motivation and high job autonomy. A cooperative climate and intrinsic motivation substitute each other in impacting knowledge sharing, while cooperative climate and job autonomy complement each other (Llopis & Foss 2016). Alhady et al. (2011) noted that organizations supporting employees' knowledge contributions within and across groups create new and improved ideas, sparking business opportunities and fueling innovation. Entrepreneurial autonomy becomes feasible when employees and managers of SMEs have some freedom to express their inner thoughts, opinions and room for initiative. Knowledge sharing allows employees to pass knowledge to others, helping them gain valuable insights (Kuo et al. 2014).

Sharing knowledge generates a healthy environment fostering new ideas, idea promotion, and idea realization within the organization. Kuo et al. (2014) state that collegiality among coworkers indirectly impacts knowledge sharing by decreasing greed and boosting self-efficacy. However, the results of Akhavan et al. (2015) study on knowledge collection and donation in knowledge sharing suggest some interesting facts. Compared to knowledge donation, knowledge collection better contributes to employees' innovative work behavior. In other words, workers demonstrate more innovative behavior when they able to collect rather than donate knowledge.

Hypothesis 5: There is a significant relationship between knowledge sharing and autonomy of SMEs in Yenagoa in Bayelsa State

Methodology

The study employed a quantitative methodology by way cross-sectional survey. The population consisted of SMEs in Bayelsa State as its population. A sample of 159 SMEs were selected for the study through simple and stratified random sampling procedures by ensuring the SMEs from ten sectors were adequately represented for the study.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed on a 5-point Likert scale. In designing the instrument, knowledge sharing was developed based on the scientific literature with a view to ascertaining the frequency of knowledge sharing of SMEs with 8 items and response options of Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often and Always while entrepreneurial orientation had 16-items with five dimensions which were adapted from the works of Hughes and Morgans (2007) that measures entrepreneurial orientation. The response options for entrepreneurial orientation consists of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The questionnaire was validated through content validity approach from the academia and SME-owner managers while reliability was tested applying Cronbach alpha. The reliability of the measurement instrument had coefficients for knowledge sharing stood at 0.74 while that

of entrepreneurial orientation yielded a value of 0.78. The coefficient values are above the acceptable threshold of 0.70 which means that the instruments for measurement attained internal consistency (Hair, Anderson, Babins & Black, 2010). The data were collected by distributing questionnaires to managers and owner-managers of SMEs in Bayelsa State through research assistants and were analyzed by applying multivariate regression analysis using STATA software of version 12.

Data Analysis and Results

The section focuses on the analysis of the data collected through question using multivariate regression. The results are presented on the table below.

Table 1: Multivariate Regression Analysis Between Knowledge Sharing and Entrepreneurial Orientation of SMEs in Bayelsa State.

Variables	Obs	Parms	RMSE	“R-sq”	F	P
Risk-taking	150	2	0.4227	0.0020	0.2996	0.5849
Innovativeness	150	2	0.3931	0.0318	4.8635	0.0290
Proactiveness	150	2	0.4365	0.0031	0.4586	0.4993
Competitiveness	150	2	0.5205	0.0601	9.4666	0.0025
Autonomy	150	2	0.4418	0.0067	0.9962	0.3199
	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P>/t/	[95% Conf.	Interval]
Risk-taking	0.0512	.09362	0.55	0.585	-.13376	.2362
constant	3.9279	.35256	11.14	0.000	3.2312	4.6246
Innovativeness	.19200	.08706	2.21	0.029	.01995	.36406
constant	3.3871	.32785	10.33	0.000	2.7392	4.36738
Proactiveness	.06547	.09667	0.68	0.499	-.12557	.25652
constant	3.6479	.364055	10.02	0.000	2.92855	4.36738
Competitiveness	.35471	.11528	3.08	0.002	.12689	.58254
constant	2.6240	.434122	6.04	0.000	1.7661	3.4819
Autonomy	.09765	.09784	1.00	0.320	-.095695	.29101
constant	3.69402	.36844	10.03	0.000	2.9659	4.42211

Source: The Data Analysis Output from authors computation, 2023

In table 1, the results from the data analysis demonstrated that knowledge sharing has positive but no significant effect on risk-taking ($\beta = 0.05$, $t = 0.55$, $p > 0.05$); knowledge sharing has a positive significant effect on innovativeness of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa state ($\beta = 0.19$, $t = 2.21$, $p < 0.05$); knowledge sharing has a positive but no significant effect on proactiveness of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa state ($\beta = 0.06$, $t = 0.68$, $p > 0.05$); knowledge sharing has a positive significant effect on the competitiveness of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa state ($\beta = 0.35$, $t = 3.08$, $p < 0.05$); and knowledge sharing has a positive but no significant effect on autonomy of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa state ($\beta = 0.09$, $t = 1.00$, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion of Results and Implications

The study aimed at examining the links between knowledge sharing and entrepreneurial orientation (EO) of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa State. The finding of the study showed that knowledge sharing had a positive but no significant relationship with risk-taking of small and medium enterprises in Bayelsa State. Risk-taking is an indispensable and inherent characteristic of entrepreneurial firms. Small and medium enterprises are under compulsion to commit funds into entrepreneurial opportunities and investment proposals with risk elements due to uncertainty associated with the outcome of making profit or incurring loss. However, having relevant and critical information through knowledge sharing makes it possible for SMEs to reduce the extent of uncertainty and becomes much more confident of investment outcomes in new products and entities (Hock-Doepgen, Clauss, Kraus, & Cheng, 2021). Although, there was a positive relationship between knowledge sharing and risk-taking but it was not statistically significant and this implies that managers and employees of SMEs in Bayelsa State do not adequately harness the potentialities of knowledge sharing to facilitate the risk-taking propensities while committing funds into investment and entrepreneurial opportunities. The result of the current study is supported by Hock-Doepgen, Clauss, Kraus and Cheng (2021) in their study which demonstrated that external and internal knowledge management capabilities influence an entire risk-taking tolerance of SMEs.

In the view of Tassabehji, Mishra, and Dominguez-Péry (2019), SMEs with entrepreneurial orientation gravitate firm activities into innovation of products and processes to stimulate customer patronage and attain a competitive advantage. Knowledge is a key resource and knowledge sharing is a foundation for new product development and organizational processes and such products become diffused in the market place. Empirical evidence of the current study that knowledge sharing had a positive effect on the innovativeness of SMEs in Nigeria is underpinned by Arsawan et al (2022) who examined the relationship between knowledge sharing, innovation culture and sustainable competitive advantage of SME and found that knowledge sharing influenced innovative culture of SMEs.

Further, the study demonstrated that there was a positive but no significant relationship between knowledge sharing and proactiveness of SMEs in Bayelsa State. This implies that knowledge sharing plays a key role for SMEs to identify, evaluate and exploit entrepreneurial opportunities in the business landscape. The finding of a prior study indicated that proactiveness and risk-taking as dimensions of entrepreneurial orientation positively affected the knowledge management of SMEs (Nasution et al, 2021). Although, the direction of the study differs from the current study but it also implies that knowledge sharing as a part of knowledge management could as well positively influence proactiveness as a component of entrepreneurial orientation of SMEs. In view of the finding, managers of SMEs should engage in knowledge sharing to take advantage of latent business opportunities and attain strategic objectives over and above corporate agencies competing in the business space.

In the light of competitiveness of SMEs, the study finding showed that knowledge sharing had a positive link with competitiveness of SMEs. This implies that SMEs attain competitive advantage by sharing knowledge within and outside the confines of their firms. The study of Arsawan et al. (2022) demonstrated that knowledge sharing had a positive and significant effect on the competitive advantage of firms and accordingly, this study underpinned the finding of the current study that knowledge sharing served as a source of competitiveness in the entrepreneurial orientation of SMEs in Nigeria.

Another momentous finding of the current study was that knowledge sharing had a positive but no significant effect on entrepreneurial autonomy of SMEs. Entrepreneurs and managers

of SMEs need some level of autonomy to take initiatives on behalf of their firms. However, Kabiauwu, et al. (2016) contend that the decision-making process of managers and owner-managers of SMEs is confronted with *Satisficing* and *bounded rationality*. Accordingly, this scenario restricts the extent of managerial autonomy and leeway to engage in entrepreneurial activities of SMEs but would be consulting with other agencies under the circumstance of lacking relevant and useful intellectual capital and knowledge. Thus, knowledge sharing overcomes this challenge and enhances the autonomy of SMEs through the provision of a distinct sense of direction. In the light of the current finding, SMEs need to facilitate knowledge sharing to boast their entrepreneurial autonomy.

Implications, Limitations and Directions for future study

The study makes significant contributions and salient managerial implications in the extant and current research stream of entrepreneurship and knowledge management. The findings imply that knowledge serves as an intangible asset and intellectual capital that to a large extent facilitate entrepreneurial risk-taking, proactiveness, innovativeness, competitiveness and autonomy of SMEs in Nigeria. Accordingly, the findings suggest that knowledge sharing should be promoted within managers, staff members and among SMEs. Thus, SMEs with entrepreneurial orientation should build knowledge management capabilities in their firms. The study has some limitations as it employed cross-sectional design and circumscribed in Bayelsa State only which affects the generalizability of the findings outside the context of the study. Further studies should consider a longitudinal design and a wider scope by investigating other states in Nigeria.

Declaration of Potential conflicts

The authors declare that there is no potential conflict to the publication of this paper.

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