



Community Of Innovation And Organizational Ambidexterity In Rivers State-Owned Public Institutions- A Strategy For The Post-Oil Economy Of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study's primary purpose is to investigate the relationship between the community of innovation (COI) and organizational ambidexterity (OA) in Rivers state-owned public institutions of Nigeria. The study adopted a survey research design. It generated data using well-structured copies of the questionnaire from directors and senior staff from the different ministries, departments and agencies (MDA) in Rivers state-owned public institutions. The methodology focuses on the quantitative method of analysis. Data obtained was tested on the relationship between the two variables using Pearson's correlation coefficient. The findings revealed that a positive and significant relationship exists between COI, exploitation, exploration and OA. Based on these, the study recommends the use of COI, the need for OA and the complementary nature of exploitation and exploration as it relates to Rivers state-owned public institutions.

Keywords: Community of innovation, Organizational ambidexterity, exploitation and exploration.

INTRODUCTION

Today's organizations face unique opportunities and challenges. With the increase in knowledge, shorter product life, organizations are beginning to think strategically about the future. Gone are the days when organizations are all about exploitation. That is trying to increase efficiency and effectiveness in all their processes. While that is on-going, organizations that aim to remain relevant are moving toward exploration, which is looking for new ways to do things. The ability to do both exploitation and exploration is what is referred to as been ambidextrous. Recent research shows a positive relationship between organizational ambidextrous (OA) and performance (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; He & Wong, 2004; Lubatkin, Simsek, Ling, & Veiga, 2006).

In the last decade, regional, state and federal governments are beginning to move toward ambidextrous, as nationalization is gaining momentum since the election of President Trump. Nations, who found themselves at the wrong end of globalization, such as developing countries are beginning to take advantages of the situation, more so with the coronavirus that has limited free movement as we know it. The drop in the price of crude oil, innovation on greener energy, and the clamour for greener energy adds to the need of developing countries. There is enough evidence for Nigeria, and Rivers State to become ambidextrous, that is, to start investing in radical innovation (exploration) even as they try to increase efficiency and effectiveness (exploitation). Based on this backdrop that the paper aims to look at ways in which the Rivers State public service can be ambidextrous. Pouwels and Koster (2017) established that

collaboration contributes to innovation. That is, organizations worldwide can be more innovative if they increase collaborations among their employees.

In today's knowledge economy, the roles and responsibilities of employees are increasing exponentially. The views of knowledge-based-view theory (KBT) of a firm hold that knowledge is the most critical factor of an enterprise; there is the need for organizations to harness this vital resource to the advantages of the firm. One such way is through the establishment of a community of innovation (COI) in the workplace. COI is a form of a community of practice (COP), dedicated to increasing innovation in the workplace (Coakes & Smith, 2007). By creating a community of innovation, organizations are tapping into the most significant resource they possess, which is the tacit knowledge that each employee brings to the workplace daily.

The total reliant on fossil fuel and its derivatives is driving mediocrity in modern Nigeria. With the advancement of information, communication and technology (ICT) and the glamour for greener energy, climate change regulations on the horizon, there is a need to plan. The need to strategize in Rivers state, producers of crude oil, cannot be overemphasis. The need to reposition for a post-oil economy.

The lack of innovation in public workplaces in Rivers state is glaring for everyone to see. Just a visit to their massive complex tell it all. The place is devoid of any kind of useful work even when the state needs their different service. The lack of activity is more glaring as the usual work done by the public service is now given out to contractors, even with qualify personnel, essential machinery/equipment and available expertise to get the job done. The increasing non-use of their employee to address even the most basic of problems is obvious. Apart from the teaching profession, all other sectors of the public service are getting obsolete. The situation is significantly worse, hence the need to do something radical to change the system.

Based on this, the following research questions have been put forth:

To what extent does COI affect OA in Rivers state-owned public institutions?

To effectively answer this question, the researchers formulate the following hypotheses.

HO₁: There is no significant relationship between COI and organizational exploitation in Rivers state-owned public institutions.

HO₂: There is no significant relationship between COI and organizational exploration in Rivers state-owned public institutions.

HO₃: There is no significant relationship between COI and organizational ambidexterity in Rivers state-owned public institutions.

Literature Review

Organizational Ambidexterity (OA)

Ambidexterity, according to the oxford dictionary, is the 'ability to use the right and left hands equally well; the quality of being ambidextrous.' In management, OA refers to the ability of an organization to simultaneously pursue exploitation (incremental innovation) and exploration (radical innovation), thereby remaining competitive for a long time (March 1991). Exploitation refers to the ability to effectively manage existing competencies like refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation and execution (March 1991). While exploration is futuristic and includes search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, and innovation (March 1991). Whether this is complementary or opposite end of the continuum has been an issue of debate by scholars. March (1991), a pioneer of OA, saw it as the opposite end, seeing it makes use of different organizational structure, resources and capabilities. However, other scholars, notably Popadić, M., Černe, M., & Milohnić, I., (2015), disagree with the notion, especially for diversified firms.

Other arguments in OA are on whether ambidextrous firms perform better than those firms that rely on one activity over the other (Junni et al., 2013; Raisch and Birkinshaw, 2008; Popadić et al., 2015). Empirical evidence of OA and performance are still mixed (Junni et al., 2013; Popadić et al., 2015). One group of scholars found positive relationships (Gibson & Birkinshaw, 2004; He & Wong, 2004; Lubatkin,

Simsek, Ling, & Veiga, 2006). Another negative relationship (Atuahene-Gima, 2005; Atuahene-Gima & Murray, 2007), or no relationship at all (Venkatraman, Lee, & Iyer, 2007). However, Popadić et al., (2015) noted that the mixed results were associated with the methodology used, and used data from community innovation survey 2006, involving 12 countries to show the complementary relationship OA has on performance.

Hernández-Espallardo et al. (2011) showed that both exploitation and exploration have a positive effect on organizational performance. Firms that engage in both exploration and exploitation are expected to achieve reliability and be innovative while enabling organizational renewal and enhanced performance (Stettner & Lavie, 2013; Popadić et al., 2015). Some scholars see the relationships between exploitation and exploration as mutually exclusive, hence a negative relationship between exploitation and exploration. But Gupta et al. (2006) argued against it, asserting that the relationship between exploitation and exploration may be positive. This research embraces this suggestion and thinks that the relationship is complimentary.

In measuring OA, the study uses variables of exploitation and exploration, with their mean value as measurement of an ambidextrous organization, and thus will interpret a positive result as evidence of organization performance in line with the post-oil economy.

A Community of Innovation (COI)

Creative ideas come from employees (Durmaz, 2013). In today's knowledge and competitive environments where innovation is seen as the most basic of all outputs (Akman & Yilmaz, 2008), there is need for organizations to harness the full potential of its employees. The creation of a COI is one sure way of achieving that. According to Durmaz (2013), COI creates productive discussion between management and employees. A COI is a place within the workplace where ideas are freely exchanged. Durmaz (2013) quoted the wall street journal by saying COI has the potential to give new shape and purpose to the workforce. COI is particularly crucial in Rivers State public service, where the organizational structure is weak, and culture of mediocrity exists. Establishing a COI will galvanize public service employees to their responsibilities and increase motivation and teamwork, significant values in an organization (Durmaz, 2013). As the KBT holds, organizations are failing to harness the most important available resources at their disposal, their employees. No wonder they are falling behind in terms of productivity and efficiency. According to Durmaz (2013), some of the benefits of COI includes: Reduce risk, inspire trust, create open communication, and promote learning. COI also encourages the free exchange of information about new techniques and plant designs among different divisions and parastatals.

The concept of COI was developed from community of practice (COP). Lave and Wenger (1991) were the first ones to coin the term, COP. They describe COP as groups where learning occurs through a process of Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP), stating that learning must be associated with the practice. LPP expresses how novices convert to knowledgeable members and finally, old-timers in a community of practice through social interaction. It starts with new members doing a simple peripheral task with low risk, learning terminology and organizing philosophies of the firm and then steadily moving on to the more critical and crucial job and eventually becoming experts (Okwu, 2019). COP existed since ancient times. They are considered the first knowledge-based social structure that existed, dating back to when people lived in caves (Wenger 2000). As a social learning theory, COP involves groups associating together to share knowledge and build relationships with professionals of similar interest and practice (Okwu, 2019).

COI is a group of people (employees) that share a concern, set of problems or a desire for a topic and who develop their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting in a continuous basis. COI possess the same characteristics as COP, which are, a body of knowledge, a combined initiative as understood by its affiliates. It reflects a mutual doing that reflect the know-how of that specific community. COI possess a shared identity, the competences it produces are the collective repertoire of shared resources (habits,

susceptibilities, artefacts, terminology, and panaches).The affiliates advance over time, and it can only be cultivated, not managed or controlled (Wenger, 2000, Wenger and Snyder, 2000). COI is a community where employees and management come together to brainstorm on ways in which the organization can increase innovation, either through incremental or radical innovation. According to Wenger (2000), a community of practice is the fundamental way that humans accomplish work. There are three main dimensions to it, which are mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire. All of which apply to COI.

Unlike COP, COI consist of people from different professional field. The various professional areas are because innovation is heterogeneous and so requires professional from multiple fields to be successful. Therefore, diversified organizations have better chances at harnessing the potential value inherent in COI, giving the different skills and expertise on their workforce.

In measuring COI, the study used dimensions from COP, that apply to COI. The dimensions are mutual engagement, joint enterprise and shared repertoire. A high mean value will indicate the use of COI in Rivers State public service, even if the term COI is not used to in conjunction with these dimensions.

A Community of Innovation and Organizational Ambidexterity

In the previous section, the study established the relationship OA has with organizational performance, meaning that ambidexterity can lead to better performance. That for organizations to be considered ambidextrous, they must be willing to invest not just on incremental innovation, but also on radical innovation, that may in the short term be disruptive to their system, but in the long run necessary for their survival. Also, the strategy of OA enables organizational learning, a vital resource that ensures the survival of the firm.

For COI, the paper establishes that collaboration increases performance; thus, when management and employees meet regularly to brainstorm. There will be an increase in performance as well as risk reductions, creation of trust, open communication and promote learning, vital benefits, especially in Rivers, state public service where there is a lack of confidence, maximizing communication and learning. Studies in the western world, though few, seem to suggest that a relationship exists between COI and performance, COI and Organization learning, OA and performance etc. This paper though not the first to suggest a relationship exist between COI and OA, adds to the gap in the study by providing empirical data to show that a positive relationship exists between COI and OA. Rivers state public service can get solutions from its problem if it embarks on a strategy that promotes COI.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this paper is based on the social learning theory and the knowledge-based-view theory of a firm. The relevance of the theoretical framework is, among other things, to validate the study's position and to determine the specific field of inquiry of the course, which is, information management.

Albert Bandura (1977) propounded the Social learning theory (SLT). The theory is based on observational learning. Bandura illustrated this theory during the famous bobo doll experiments of 1961, where children watched an adult's behaviour and behaved according to what actions they saw. The theory examines social interaction variables from three key areas; the person, the environment, and the modelled behaviour. (Ahiazu & Asawo; 2016; Bandura, 1977). Social network theory emphasizes that access to these observational learning and resources depends on the existing firm's network (Brass et al., 2004; Cammarano et al., 2016). Thus, an organization that uses its employee networks gets access to more resources. The Rivers state public service has a considerable number of human resources that it can leverage on to get resources that are beyond the limit of the organization, especially in today's knowledge economy.

Knowledge-based-view theory (KBT) was derived from the resource-based-view theory of the firm (RBT) (Curado, 2006; De Carolis, 2002; Huizing & Bouman, 2002; Balogun & Jenkins, 2003),

propounded by Penrose (1959). The formulation of KBT from RBT is considered appropriate by scholars given the present economic context (Drucker, 1993; Sirois, 1999; Stewart, 1997; Garud & Kumaraswamy, 2002; Grant, 2002; Guthrie, 2001; Mathews, 2003), characterized by the economic change from material-based production to information-based production. The RBT was used to explain the difference in a firm's ability to innovate, add value, and make a profit despite having similar raw materials, physical and human resources with other competing firms. RBT is concerned with the internal working of the firm, and outline that the differences in efficiency, that is, systematic variations in profits and performance between firms, within the same industry, are due to difficulties in imitating the resources each firm possesses (Curado, 2006; Seth & Thomas, 1994). KBT considers knowledge as the most important strategic resource of a firm. (Curado, 2006; De Carolis, 2002). Like RBT, KBT believes that organizations are heterogeneous entities loaded with knowledge (Hoskisson et al., 1999). Unlike RBT, KBT holds that organizations exist to create, transfer, and transform knowledge into a competitive advantage (Curado, 2006; Kogut & Zander, 1992). Today, intangible resources such as problem-solving capabilities, recognizing the importance and assimilating information, and applying commercial purposes are critical to the organizations (Grant, 1996). The resources contributing to a more sustainable competitive advantage are resources like knowledge, learning capacity, culture, teamwork, and human capital (Hitt et al., 2001; Barney, 2001).

This study's assumptions are based on the KBT. It sees knowledge (tacit) as intangible resources that are difficult to imitate, as the most strategic resource for organizations, responsible for the competitive advantages they seek (Okwu & Bestman, 2019). Because of the value attached to knowledge, collaborations within the organization become crucial and necessary. Based on these assumptions, organizations must increase value, efficiency, and profit via knowledge sharing and collaborations.

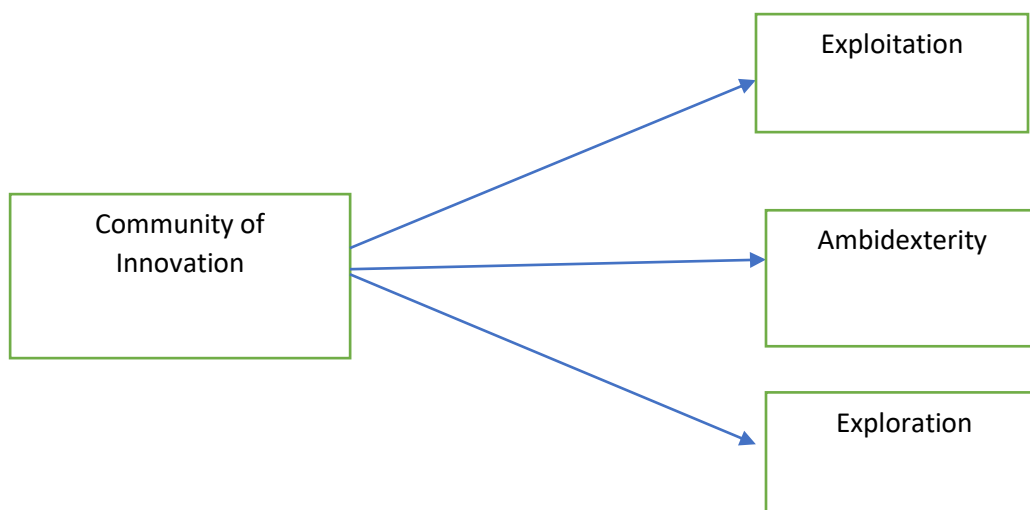


Fig. 1.1: Conceptual framework of COI and OA.
Source: Author conceptualization, (2020).

METHODOLOGY

The research is a positivist epistemology sociological debate. The type of research is causal (explanatory). In terms of dimension of research design, the survey design was deployed. For its research approach, the nomothetic approach involving the use of questionnaires was deployed.

The population consists of sixty-six (66) Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in Rivers State secretariat complex, with a total population of twenty-four thousand, three hundred and fifty-seven (24,357) are within level 8 and above (Rivers State SEEFOR/SIFMIS project, 2019; Bestman & Okwu, 2019; researchers' desk, 2020). From this population, the researcher used Taro Yamane (1976) formula, at 0.05 margin of error, to get a sample size of three hundred and ninety-three (393), stratified random sampling was used to choose the representative sample from 26 selected MDAs based on size and relevant. A total of 393 copies of a questionnaire was administered out of which 228 were found usable, amounting to 69.4%.

In carrying out this study, the researchers collected data using a primary source. The questionnaire was structured according to the four-point Likert scale of with '4' for 'Greater extent' and '1' for 'low extent'. A pilot test was undertaken to ensure that wordings, ambiguity, imprecision, or assumption were avoided, and all necessary precautions are taken. The outcome of the pilot test was reviewed, corrections taken, and suggestions considered before proceeding. The decision of distribution is taken before distributing and how 'no responses' would be treated. Finally, the conditions of confidentiality and anonymity were also adhered to strictly. Data collected using the questionnaire were analyzed using statistical tools (SPSS). Validity (content and construct) and reliability test using the Cronbach alpha reliability test was done to ensure the instrument's suitability, consistency, and clarity.

Pearson correlation coefficient for bivariate hypotheses was used to show the linear relationship that exists between COI, exploitation, exploration and organizational ambidexterity (OA) at 0.05 significant level. Where p-values at 0.05 level of significance are less than the statistical value, suggests a significant relationship between the variables and the rejection of the null hypothesis. A p-value greater than the statistical value at the 0.05 level significantly indicates an insignificant relationship between the variables of interest, hence accepting the null hypothesis.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Model Estimation and Interpretation

Pearson correlation analysis was carried out to establish the relationship among the variables' interest. Also, the results of regression analyses are presented accordingly.

Correlation Analysis

Table 1: Pearson correlation coefficient

		COI _{total}	Exploitation _{total}
COI _{total}	Pearson Correlation	1	.961**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	228	228
Exploitation _{total}	Pearson Correlation	.961**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	228	228

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

Table 1 above shows a Pearson correlation value of 0.961, p-value < 0.005 level of significant, illustrating a positive and significant relationship between COI and exploitation. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between COI and exploitation in Rivers State-owned institutions.

Table 2: Pearson correlation coefficient

		COItotal	Explorationtotal
COItotal	Pearson Correlation	1	.943**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	228	228
Explorationtotal	Pearson Correlation	.943**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	228	228

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

Table 2 above shows a Pearson correlation value of 0.943, p-value < 0.005 level of significant, illustrating a positive and significant relationship between COI and exploration. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between COI and exploration in Rivers State-owned institutions.

Table 3: Pearson correlation coefficient

		COItotal	OrgAmbidexterity
COItotal	Pearson Correlation	1	.964**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	228	228
OrgAmbidexterity	Pearson Correlation	.964**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	228	228

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

Table 3 above shows a Pearson correlation value of 0.964, p-value < 0.005 level of significant, illustrating a positive and significant relationship between COI and OA. We, therefore, reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant relationship between COI and exploration in Rivers State-owned institutions.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study found that a positive relationship exists between COI and organizational exploitation. The connection is in line with Durmaz (2013), who maintained that a community of innovation would improve learning in the organization, which in turn will increase efficiency and effectiveness, critical measures of organizational exploitation.

The study also found a positive and significant relationship between COI and organizational exploration. The positive association is in line with Pouwels and Koster (2017), who found a connection between collaborations and innovation. Since COI is social learning theory and exploration is related to radical innovation. It is also worth noting that from the descriptive statistics, exploration is rarely the focus of the Rivers state-owned public institution.

The study revealed that a positively significant relationship exists between COI and OA. This relationship is in line with the social learning theory (SLT) and knowledge-based-view theory (KBT) of the firm. SLT holds that observational learning and resources depend on the existing firm's network (Brass et al., 2004; Cammarano et al., 2016). And KBT which see knowledge as the most valuable resource capable of contributing to a more sustainable competitive advantage (Hitt et al., 2001; Barney, 2001).

The study also shows that the relationship between a firm's exploitation and exploration can be complementary as opposed to some view that they are mutually exclusive, validating the assumption and position of the study Gupta et al., (2006).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results reveal the following conclusions

- That a positive and significant relationship exists between a community of innovation and organizational exploitation in Rivers state-owned public institutions.
- That a positive and significant relationship exists between a community of innovation and organizational exploration in Rivers state-owned public institutions.
- That a positive and significant relationship exists between a community of innovation and organizational exploitation in Rivers state-owned public institutions.
- That Rivers state-owned public institutions are ambidextrous

Based on the conclusion, the researchers made the following recommendations:

- Rivers State public institutions should embrace the idea of a community of innovation, seeing that it has the potential to transform the workplace, motivate its workforce and utilize the enormous potential in its human resource.
- That exploration activity should be encouraged to reposition the public service for the future.
- That Organizational ambidexterity should be encouraged in public service as it has a positive relationship with both exploitation and exploration.

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