

STRATEGIC DEPUTIZATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESILIENCE OF PRIVATE SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the relationship between strategic deputization and organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Rivers State. The cross-sectional explanatory survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 494 Government-approved private secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample of 221 schools was obtained using the Taro Yamene formula. Through the selection of 3 administrative heads (principal and two vice principals) across sampled schools, a total of 663 school administrators served as respondents to the questionnaire administered. Out of 663 copies of the questionnaire administered, a total 570 copies were retrieved. Mean and standard deviation were used for univariate analysis; Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used for bivariate analysis, while Partial Correlation was used for the multivariate analysis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between strategic deputization and organizational resilience of Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State. The study concluded that tacit knowledge harnessing strategies are instrumental to organizational resilience of Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State. It was therefore, recommended among other things that Management of private secondary schools should provide a policy environment that will support the choice of unbiased and charismatic deputies as part of succession planning as well upgrade the technological capacity of their school and staff.

Keywords: Strategic Deputization, Tacit Knowledge, Organisational Resilience, Adaptability

INTRODUCTION

The intentional development of future education leaders and the subsequent transference of leadership responsibilities is one of the major obstacles militating against the organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Nigeria generally and Rivers State in particular. Organizational instability of private secondary schools are observable in the underemployment and casualization of qualified staff, failure to grant incentives and motivation to hardworking staff eligible for promotions and recognitions. Where they occur, staff promotions or recognitions, and allocation of student leadership roles, are awarded mostly on preferment rather than merit basis. In the same way, suppression and proscription of student organizations that hold alternative perspective to those of school leadership, the unethical practice of hiring staff members who do not have the mandatory academic and professional qualifications and admitting students who do not meet approved entrance requirements are among the factors defying organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Rivers State. To a great extent, it is disturbing to recognize that leadership of private secondary schools often contradict, misinterpret and manipulate school plans and policies to the exploitation and detriment of staff and students. What's more, there is the wilful negligence of professional training and career development of staff, absence of on-the-job coaching and continuous staff performance improvement programmes, concealment of institutional knowledge and work experience. In a highly volatile and vulnerable circumstances, these evident setbacks are generally accepted as challenges that pose against and undermine the organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Rivers State (Nwaokwa & Okoli, 2012; David & Giambona, 2018; George-Amadi, 2019).

To state it specifically, specialized institutional knowledge and experiences of staff who have served over time and have become territorial of institutional expertise leave with them as they retire and senior students who have graduated discharge with these priceless institutional tacit resources. Private secondary schools in Rivers State lose some of these invaluable institutional knowledge and experiences as they go unutilized by new staff and students who would come into employment or instruction of these schools. Understandably, it appears that tacit knowledge management is either poorly applied or grossly inadequate across private secondary school systems in Rivers State. The management and leadership of these schools have not invested in a tacit knowledge management solution to pull information out of the brains of top performers, documented in the format that makes the most sense to them and captured into an accessible location for staff and students to learn from long after the sources of such information have retired or left for another role. As it happens, school proprietors, educational managers and administrators fail to create and sustain a robust and standard organizational learning culture that would secure long term continuity and longevity of the institutional experiences and knowledge of staff and students who have been in the system.

While these studies attest to the capabilities of various components of tacit knowledge harnessing strategies enhancing organizational resilience of schools in different states and parts of the world, none of them provided empirical explanation on how dimensions of tacit knowledge harnessing strategies such as strategic deputization, externalization and mentoring interact with organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Rivers State. This signifies that the association between tacit knowledge harnessing strategies such as strategic deputization and organizational resilience has not been given adequate research attention within the context of private secondary schools in Rivers State. Therefore, there was the need to bridge this knowledge gap with this research effort, and that lent credence to undertaking the empirical study.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated in line with the specific objectives and research questions stated above.

- Ho₁: Strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with situation awareness of private secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Ho₂: Strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with adaptability of private secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Ho₃: Strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with flexibility of private secondary schools in Rivers State.

Strategic Deputization

This construct illustrates the process that can provide seamless transition and succession of all management positions across an organization. Haile (2020) observes that teachers are either leaving the teaching profession or move from one school to another and join other occupations every year creating a huge gap in leadership development. It is a systematic effort (Odhiambo et al., 2014) and proactive practice (Rothwell, 2005); well organized process which comprises of the "identification and preparation" of would be successors to take over new roles (Garman & Glawe, 2018). In defining strategic deputization, Hackett (2017) noted that it has to do with identifying the key jobs in one organization and ensuring that if anything, planned or unplanned, were to remove the present job holder from his post, there would be someone ready to take the lost position and match it without much loss on the organization.

Wendy (2015) sees strategic deputization as that strategic approach whereby potential leaders are identified for important positions, and career moves, and development activities are activated for these would-be leaders. Filley (2019) regards deputization as a coordination of plans, controls, organizing and directing of an organization's staffing function to ensure uninterrupted continuity in

objectives during change of personnel. It is a deliberated and well thought out process of projecting leadership requirements, identify a pool of high potential candidates, develop leadership abilities in those candidates through intentional learning experiences and then select leaders from among the pool of successors. In their book, Jim and Jerry (2018) identified 18 establishments that have survived their organizations for over 50 to 100 years. They establish that one of the fundamental reasons such organizations enjoyed such strategic success is because of their fervent belief in deputization, leadership training and development.

Caudran (2016) argues that in times of sudden death or resignation of executives, strategic deputization serves as an important part of human resource strategy ensuring that suitable leaders are ready for appointment. Hazarika (2017) lending credence to the point opines that it is essential if organizations must survive, that they prepare for succession of outgoing leaders. Strategic deputization entails conscious placement of individuals to understudy the values, culture and experiences of experienced employees for the purpose of replicating such values in the organization. This direction of thought is even more pertinent when it has to do with educational management of private secondary schools. Deputization is perpetuating the organization by filling the channel with high performing employees to ensure that every leadership level has an abundance of these performers to draw from, both now and in the future. According to the above definition, deputization is viewed as a leadership medium that increases leadership effectiveness over time.

Strategic Deputization and Organizational Resilience

Strategic deputization denotes the process that provides seamless leadership transition across the organization. It is a well-organized process which comprises of the identification and preparation of would-be successors to take over new roles (Garman & Glawe, 2018). The competitive advantage of any organization is dependent on the leadership quality as well as the proficient resource harmonization in the organization. Filley (2019) suggests that resources that are rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable provide sources of sustainable competitive advantage for the organization through product innovation, satisfactory service delivery and outstanding brand image. Several researchers argue that deputization if strategically managed, a firm's tacit knowledge have the potential to meet these conditions and thus provide the firm with an advantage in terms of its human, social and intellectual capital (Wright & Snell, 1998).

At General Electric each manager was required to identify four backup candidates for their positions (Drucker in Filley, 2019). The author though disagrees with the concept of replacement planning because it does not adequately prepare incumbents for long-term leadership success. According to Drucker (2016), leaders should enter a corporation with the plan in place. This ensures organizational continuity and stability. In another study conducted by Rosenkopf and Atul, (2001), the role of deputization in organizations enhances corporate technology infrastructure. Since the sharing of ideas, experience, belief system is the mythological approach to the internalization of knowledge. It was observed that private secondary schools who strategically positioned their would-be successors are also at edge in the educational market. Therefore, strategic deputization could be a catalyst for resilience advantage in the educational market, and the private school sector in particular.

Furthermore, the authors state that deputization strategy includes "any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, and department or work group by making provision for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people over time through which organizations performed on high scale in the competitive market"(p. 221). Through such a program, strategic deputization helps an organization match present talent with needed future talent, meets strategic challenges, and insures the preservation of institutional memory. It is a proactive approach to developing talent from within the organization through planned training activities (Westerman et al., 2014). Accordingly, Sylvain (2020) asserts that

strategic deputization involves preparing the agency for a change in leadership, but it also includes assessing what has been valuable and how that can be preserved and transferred to the subsequent administration. If this planning does not occur, key positions would be filled with people who were not prepared or equipped to do the job. Primarily, Quinn (2016) denotes that strategic deputization provides for continuity of leadership, which is essential for companies to survive as CEOs and senior management positions become vacant due to retirement. Deputization allows organizations to strategically place the right people in the right leadership positions for the future (Robbins & Judge, 2008).

Person–Environment Fit Theory

Lewin and Edwards' Person–Environment Fit Theory was popularized in 1962 as cited in Jain (2011). Person–Environment Fit Theory of psychological stress describes the interaction between the person and environment (P×E) as the key to comprehending people's cognitive, emotional and behavioural reactions such as stress as well as operational productivity level. Two relevant assumptions of this theory are as follows:

- i. A mismatch between a person and their work environment will lead to tension and uneasiness capable of hampering their level of productivity;
- ii. Worker's capabilities (experience or value) will determine the level of work pressure and how environmental press affects their output (Lewin & Edward as cited in Odu, 2018). This aspect of the theory amplifies the fact that a match on the ability of an employee to their senior employee, the organization will maintain high level of productivity and compete favorably in the market through rebranding of its product coupled with high service delivery.

The adoption of person-environment fit theory as the major theoretical framework for this study is predicated on the fact that the theory is related to the predictor variable (tacit knowledge harnessing strategies conceptualized in terms of strategic deputization, externalization and mentoring) which the theory calls individual capabilities/skills. The theory is also appropriate to serve as the theoretical foundation of this study because it explains and predicts that employee capabilities/skills (in our case tacit knowledge harnessing strategies) will determine the organizations' resilience in the private secondary educational market. This determination theorizes in terms of situation awareness, adaptability and flexibility, as well as replicating the value of the experienced employees in the event of retirement, death, resignation etc.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the explanatory cross-sectional survey research design. The population of this study consisted of four hundred and ninety-four (494) approved private secondary schools duly recognized by Rivers State Ministry of Education. The sample of the study consisted of two hundred and twenty-one (221) private secondary schools in Rivers State. The sample was using The Taro Yamen formula as a sampling technique. A total of six hundred and sixty-three (663) copies of the questionnaire were administered and five hundred and seventy (570) copies retrieved through the assistance of three independent research assistants. Frequency table, mean and standard deviation were used for the univariate analysis. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient used for the bivariate analysis while Partial Correlation was used for the multivariate analysis. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation formula.

Results

Strategic Deputization and Organizational Resilience

Ho₁: Strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with situation awareness of private secondary schools in Rivers State.

- Ho₂: Strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with adaptability of private secondary schools in Rivers State.
- Ho₃: Strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with flexibility of private secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 1: Correlations between Strategic Deputization and Organizational Resilience

		Strategic Deputization	Situation Awareness	Adaptability	Flexibility	
Pearson	Strategic Deputization	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.755**	.234**	.214**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	570	570	570	570
	Situation Awareness	Correlation Coefficient	.234**	1.000	.640**	.710**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	570	570	570	570
	Adaptability	Correlation Coefficient	.578**	.578**	1.000	.214**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	570	570	570	570
	Flexibility	Correlation Coefficient	.214**	.214	.214	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000
		N	570	570	570	570

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

Source: SPSS Output

Column two of table 1 above shows r value of 0.755 at a significant level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to strategic deputization and situation awareness. Since the significant level is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₁) which states that strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with situation awareness of private secondary schools in Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a1}) was accepted. This implies that strategic deputization has a high positive correlation with situation awareness in Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State.

Column three of table 1 above shows r value of 0.578 at a significant level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to strategic deputization and adaptability. Since the significant level is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₂) which states that strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with adaptability of private secondary schools in Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a2}) was accepted. This implies that there is a moderate positive relationship between strategic deputization and organizational resilience in terms adaptability in Private secondary schools in Rivers State.

Column four of table 1 above shows r value of 0.688 at a significant level of 0.00 which is less than the chosen alpha level of 0.05 for the hypothesis relating to strategic deputization and flexibility. Since the significant level is less than the alpha level of 0.05, the null hypothesis (Ho₃) which states that strategic deputization does not have any significant relationship with flexibility of private secondary schools in Rivers State was rejected and the alternate hypothesis (H_{a3}) was

accepted. This implies that there is a high positive correlation between strategic deputization and organizational resilience in terms of flexibility in Private secondary schools in Rivers State.

The results above show that there is a significant positive relationship between strategic deputization and Organizational Resilience of Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State in terms of situation awareness, adaptability and flexibility respectively.

Discussion of Findings

Strategic Deputization and Organizational Resilience

The test of hypotheses one, two and three revealed a significant positive relationship between strategic deputization and organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Rivers State. This implies that strategic deputization provides seamless transition and succession of administrative heads which helps in sustaining the leadership strength of past administrators thereby helping the school to be resilient. This finding is in consonance with the findings of Godwin et al. (2013) succession planning and tacit knowledge management enhance the survival of Nigerian Manufacturing organizations. Schools can retain the leadership experiences of their staff by ensuring that administrative heads are understudied and replaced by deputies that fit into such leadership positions. The benefit of strategic deputization to school management and survival is that it saves the school organization from losing its strategic human resources. Having deputies that are charismatic and who appreciate the administrative philosophy of the school is a sure way of ensuring that the school system continues to have managers and administrators that can sustain the legacies and corporate culture of the institution which will keep the school resilient.

Strategic deputization denotes the process that provides seamless leadership transition across the organization. It is a well-organized process which comprises of the identification and preparation of would-be successors to take over new roles (Garman & Glawe, 2018). The competitive advantage of any organization is dependent on the leadership quality as well as the proficient resource harmonization in the organization. Filley (2019) suggests that resources that are rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable provide sources of sustainable competitive advantage for the organization through product innovation, satisfactory service delivery and outstanding brand image. Several researchers argue that deputization if strategically managed, a firm's tacit knowledge have the potential to meet these conditions and thus provide the firm with an advantage in terms of its human, social and intellectual capital (Wright & Snell, 1998).

At General Electric each manager was required to identify four backup candidates for their positions (Drucker in Filley, 2019). The author though disagrees with the concept of replacement planning because it does not adequately prepare incumbents for long-term leadership success. According to Drucker (2016), leaders should enter a corporation with the plan in place. This ensures organizational continuity and stability. In another study conducted by Rosenkopf and Atul (2001), the role of deputization in organizations enhances corporate technology infrastructure. Since the sharing of ideas, experience, belief system is the mythological approach to the internalization of knowledge. It was observed that private secondary schools who strategically positioned their would-be successors are also at edge in the educational market. Therefore, strategic deputization could be a catalyst for resilience advantage in the educational market, and the private school sector in particular. In the same vein, a study done by Asghar et al. (2015) found that charismatic deputization is positively correlated with organizational resilience of Iranian Public Organizations. Furthermore, the authors state that deputization strategy includes "any effort designed to ensure the continued effective performance of an organization, division, and department or work group by making provision for the development, replacement and strategic application of key people over time through which organizations performed on high scale in the competitive market. Through such a program, strategic deputization helps an organization match present talent with needed future talent, meets strategic challenges, and insures the preservation

of institutional memory. It is a proactive approach to developing talent from within the organization through planned training activities (Westerman et al., 2014). Accordingly, Sylvain (2020) asserts that strategic deputization involves preparing an organization for a change in leadership and it includes assessing what has been valuable and how that can be preserved and transferred to the subsequent administration by having deputies that have the propensity to carry on the culture of the school. If this planning does not occur, key positions would be filled with people who were not prepared or equipped to do the job and this can jeopardize the survival of the organization in the face of unforeseen future challenges.

Quinn (2016) opines that strategic deputization provides for continuity of leadership, which is essential for companies to survive as CEOs and senior management positions become vacant due to retirement. Deputization allows organizations to strategically place the right people in the right leadership positions for the future (Robbins & Judge, 2008). For example, qualified assistant identification as one of the key strategies for achieving strategic deputization, is an instrument that can be used to enhance organizational resilience especially in terms of situation awareness, adaptability and flexibility. Also, unbiased placement and charismatic subordinate choice have an impactful effect on organizational resilience. It is a deliberated and well thought out process of projecting leadership requirements, identify a pool of high potential candidates, develop leadership abilities in those candidates through intentional learning experiences and then select leaders from among the pool of successors. Similarly, the findings of Akinyele et al. (2015) points to the fact that succession planning (strategic deputization) enhances organizational survival in Covenant University.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that tacit knowledge harnessing strategies is a major determinant of organizational resilience of Private Secondary Schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study concluded that tacit knowledge harnessing strategies such as strategic deputization enhances organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Rivers State in terms of situation awareness, adaptability and flexibility. When private schools succeed in harnessing its tacit knowledge through strategic deputization, externalization and mentoring, the school becomes toughen to continue succeeding in spite of challenges like the Covid-19 pandemic. Strategic deputization enhances organizational resilience by ensuring that there exists situational awareness through steady flow of competent workforce.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following are recommended:

1. Management should proactively plan and incorporate a system of qualified assistants identification in other to prepare for succession ahead of time to fill strategic position in the organization, on the event of resignation or exit of the superior.
2. Management should formulate policies that will make it possible for unbiased placement in other to recruit suitable qualified personnel for appointment. This will go a long way to enhancing organizational resilience of private secondary schools in Rivers State.
3. School proprietors and management should endeavour to choose deputies who are charismatic, passionate and seasoned enough to build upon the legacies of the institution. Being able to raise and maintain a crop of subordinates that possess the strength of character and intelligence to pursue in the vision of the school is a sure way to organizational resilience.
4. Management should create a secured storage platform that is accessible to staff to enable them read and internalize corporate policies and plans of the school. This help staff have a better understanding of organizational policies and goals as well as what their role in building a resilient school.

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