

WORKFORCE PLANNING AND ORGANISATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS IN NIGERIAN FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between workforce planning with specific focus on resource planning and competitive positioning and organizational competitiveness in the Nigerian food and beverage industry, measured through innovativeness and experienced workers. The objectives were to: (1) determine the relationship between resource planning and innovativeness, (2) examine the relationship between resource planning and experienced workers, (3) determine the relationship between competitive positioning and innovativeness, and (4) examine the relationship between competitive positioning and experienced workers. A qualitative research design was employed. The findings revealed that resource planning significantly enhances both innovativeness and retention of experienced workers, as efficient allocation of financial, human, and technological resources fosters creativity and reduces employee turnover. Similarly, competitive positioning positively influences innovativeness by encouraging differentiation strategies, brand uniqueness, and proactive market adaptation. Furthermore, competitive positioning was found to have a positive but varying degree of influence on the retention of experienced workers, as organizations with strong market positions tend to offer better incentives, work conditions, and career growth opportunities. The study concludes that workforce planning is a vital driver of competitive advantage in the Nigerian food and beverage industry.

Introduction

Background of the Study

The Nigerian F&B industry is one of the largest segments of manufacturing, consistently contributing a notable share to GDP and jobs. Recent macro-sector briefs show that "Food, Beverages and Tobacco" remained a leading manufacturing sub-sector in 2022 and 2023, even amid shocks from inflation, currency volatility, and supply-chain disruptions (KPMG, 2023; NBS, 2024). Central Bank macro updates through late-2024 further indicate continued (if uneven) real growth across non-oil sectors, underscoring the sector's resilience and the necessity for deliberate strategic choices to navigate input-cost spikes, FX scarcity, and demand pressures (CBN, 2025). At the same time, industry reports describe intense rivalry among major beverage brands and rising informal competition, which heighten the premium on clear market positioning and operational discipline (Research and Markets, 2024; BusinessWire, 2024).

Within this setting, workforce planning functions as a coordinating mechanism that aligns long-term direction with day-to-day decisions. Contemporary evidence synthesised across SMEs and developing-economy contexts shows that structured workforce planning especially when digitally enabled improves operational efficiency, decision quality, and market responsiveness, thereby enhancing performance (Adeola et al., 2024; Rana & Shukla, 2025). Two dimensions are salient for Nigerian F&B firms. First, resources planning the systematic prioritisation and allocation of financial, human, technological, and supply-chain resources helps firms absorb shocks and redeploy scarce inputs where they yield the highest competitive returns. Recent work on resource-allocation styles finds that disciplined (as opposed to ad-hoc) allocation supports innovation and scale efficiency (Zajac et al., 2025). These insights are consistent with renewed Resource-Based View (RBV) arguments that VRIN/O assets and the routines that marshal them underpin advantage in turbulent environments (Ketchen et al., 2023).

Second, competitive positioning choosing and defending a clear basis for competition (e.g., cost efficiency, differentiation, focus, or ambidextrous blends) is tightly linked to performance under high rivalry and cost volatility. New empirical studies across African markets show that positioning choices shape competitiveness directly and also through organisational innovation (Dube & Moyo, 2024). In the Nigerian F&B context, current market commentary highlights high rivalry, changing consumer preferences, and price sensitivity, all of which amplify the returns to distinctive positioning anchored in product quality, packaging/format innovation, distribution reach, and reliable service levels (Research and Markets, 2024; BusinessWire, 2024).

Turning to organisational competitiveness, innovativeness is a central channel connecting planning to outcomes. Multi-country and Africa-specific studies show that digital infrastructure and firm-level capabilities catalyse product and process innovation, but their payoffs depend on complementary human capital and managerial routines precisely the elements orchestrated by workforce planning (Abubakar et al., 2024). In Nigeria's manufacturing base, recent evidence documents positive links between product innovation and competitiveness among F&B firms, reinforcing the case for resource-backed innovation roadmaps (Menekpugi, Adiele, & Hart, 2024). Systematic reviews also tie dynamic capabilities the ability to sense, seize, and reconfigure to innovation performance, suggesting that planning processes must remain adaptive rather than static (Abed, Hussin, & Ali, 2020).

The second lever of competitiveness is the experienced workforce. Nigerian and broader SSA studies indicate that human-capital depth (experience, skills, and continuous development) strengthens innovation outputs and firm performance (Ogundele et al., 2024; Nchake & Ngepah, 2021). For F&B, where quality assurance, process efficiency, and compliance matter, experienced operators, technologists, and sales/distribution personnel enable faster problem-solving, tech adoption, and consistent product standards. Importantly, Nigeria's skills and retention challenges exacerbated by macro headwinds and talent mobility raise the strategic value of workforce planning, upskilling, and knowledge retention as part of the resources-planning agenda (CBN, 2025; NBS, 2024).

In sum, the study's focus is well-grounded in current sector realities. Resources planning equips firms to marshal scarce inputs toward innovation priorities and operational resilience; competitive positioning ensures those choices translate into defensible market advantage. Together, they influence innovativeness and harness the contributions of an experienced workforce two pillars of organisational competitiveness within Nigeria's dynamic F&B landscape. It is in the light of the above that this study seeks to provide theoretical insight on the relationship between Workforce planning and organisational competitiveness in Nigerian food and beverage industry.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian food and beverage (F&B) industry operates in a turbulent environment marked by rising production costs, foreign exchange volatility, infrastructural constraints, and intense market competition (KPMG, 2023; NBS, 2024). While the sector remains a significant contributor to manufacturing GDP, these challenges threaten firms' ability to maintain competitiveness and sustain growth. Recent industry reports reveal that many Nigerian F&B firms are struggling to optimise resources, differentiate their offerings, and respond swiftly to changing consumer preferences (Research and Markets, 2024). Workforce planning, particularly in the areas of resource planning and competitive positioning, is widely recognised as a critical driver of organisational survival and success in volatile markets (Adeola et al., 2024; Dube & Moyo, 2024). However, empirical evidence suggests that many Nigerian F&B firms still rely on short-term, reactive approaches rather than structured, forward-looking plans for resource allocation and market positioning (Menekpugi, Adiele, & Hart, 2024). This reactive orientation often results in misaligned resource deployment, weak brand positioning, and limited capacity to capitalise on market opportunities.

Furthermore, organisational competitiveness in the F&B industry hinges significantly on innovativeness the ability to introduce new products, processes, and marketing approaches—and

on leveraging the skills of an experienced workforce to sustain quality and efficiency (Abubakar, Asongu, & Boateng, 2024; Ogundele et al., 2024). Yet, many firms face innovation inertia due to inadequate investment in research and development, weak knowledge management practices, and high employee turnover. This undermines their ability to respond to market dynamics and consumer demands, thereby eroding their competitive edge. Given the persistent gap between the theoretical benefits of workforce planning and the practical realities of its adoption in Nigeria's F&B sector, there is a pressing need to investigate how resource planning and competitive positioning influence innovativeness and the utilisation of an experienced workforce as levers for organisational competitiveness. Without such insights, firms risk continued market share erosion, declining profitability, and eventual business failure in the face of intensifying competition and macroeconomic instability.

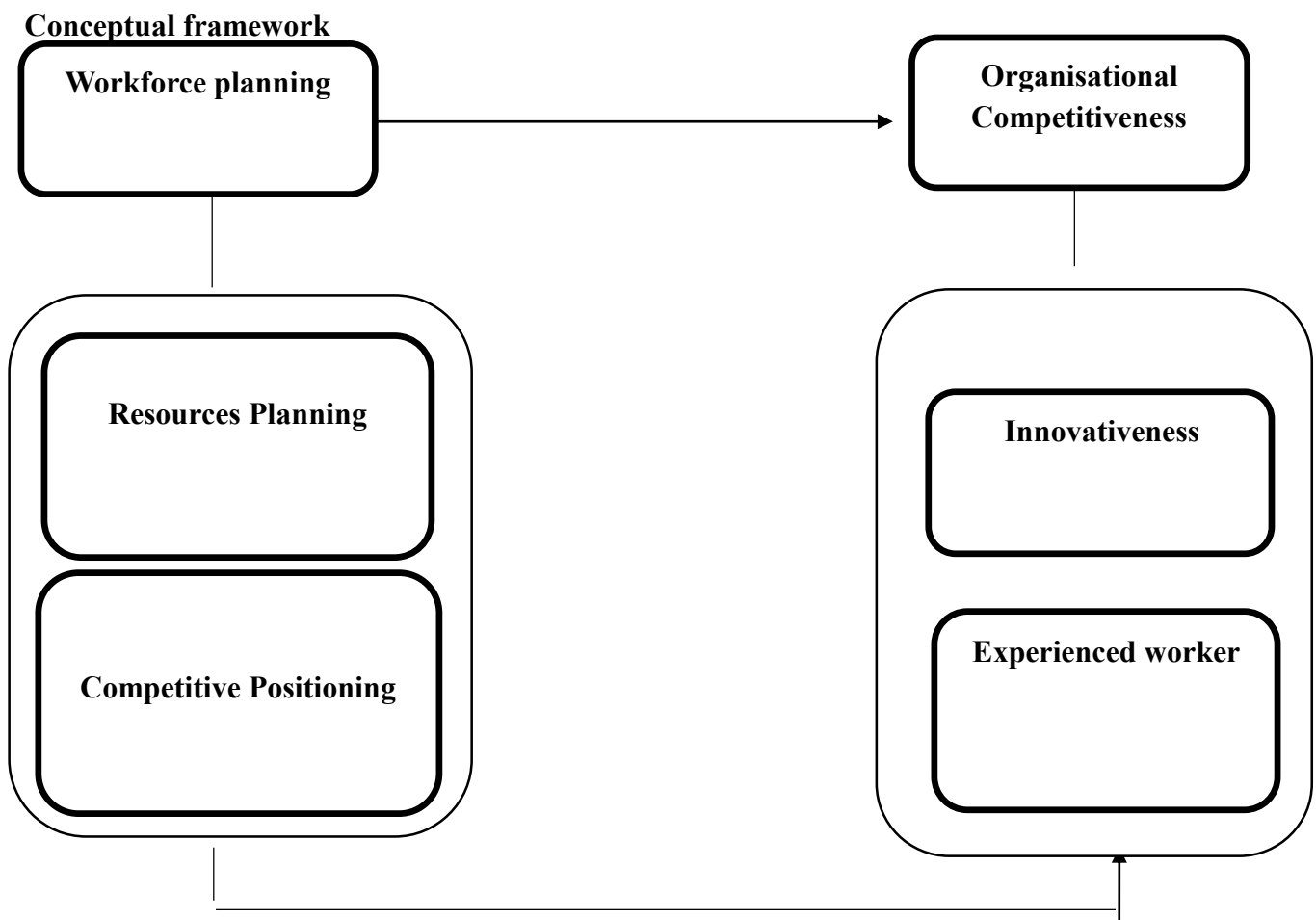


Figure 1: showing conceptual framework on Workforce planning and organisational competitiveness in Nigerian food and beverage industry

Source: Dimensions of Workforce planning were adapted from David & David (2020) & Porter, (1985) while measures of organisational competitiveness were adapted from Onunwor, A.A (2024).

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between Workforce planning and organisational competitiveness in Nigerian food and beverage industry. The specific objectives are to:

- 1) determine the relationship between Resources Planning and Innovativeness in Nigerian food and beverage industry;
- 2) examine the relationship between Resources Planning and Experienced worker in Nigerian food and beverage industry.
- 3) determine the relationship between Competitive Positioning and Innovativeness in Nigerian food and beverage industry and
- 4) examine the relationship between Competitive Positioning and Experienced worker in Nigerian food and beverage industry.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it addresses a critical gap in understanding how workforce planning dimensions specifically resource planning and competitive positioning influence organisational competitiveness within Nigeria's food and beverage (F&B) sector. The sector is one of the largest contributors to Nigeria's manufacturing GDP, yet it faces challenges of high production costs, unstable macroeconomic conditions, and intense market rivalry (KPMG, 2023; NBS, 2024). By exploring these strategic dimensions, the study will provide actionable insights into how firms can better allocate scarce resources and establish sustainable market positions to improve performance. For managers and decision-makers in the F&B industry, the study will offer practical guidance on developing and implementing resource planning systems that optimise human, financial, and technological assets. It will also highlight strategies for competitive positioning whether through differentiation, cost leadership, or market focus that align with prevailing market dynamics and consumer preferences (Adeola et al., 2024; Dube & Moyo, 2024). Such evidence-based strategies are essential for maintaining relevance and profitability in a fast-changing business environment.

For policy makers and industry regulators, the study will contribute to industrial development discourse by revealing how workforce planning practices can boost productivity, innovation, and job creation. This is particularly relevant to Nigeria's drive for economic diversification and manufacturing sector growth (CBN, 2025; NBS, 2024). Policies that incentivise innovation investment, workforce upskilling, and infrastructure improvement can be informed by this research. For academics and researchers, the study will enrich the strategic management literature by integrating resource planning and competitive positioning with organisational competitiveness indicators innovativeness and the role of an experienced workforce in an emerging market context. While prior studies have examined these constructs individually, empirical evidence linking them within Nigeria's F&B sector remains limited (Menekpugi, Adiele, & Hart, 2024). The findings will thus provide a foundation for future comparative and longitudinal studies in similar developing economies. Ultimately, for society at large, improving the competitiveness of the F&B industry has wider implications for economic stability, employment generation, and consumer welfare. Efficiently managed and innovative firms are better equipped to deliver affordable, high-quality products, contribute to national food security, and withstand economic shocks.

Review of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

Workforce planning

Workforce planning is a structured, systematic process by which organisations define their long-term goals, determine the resources required to achieve them, and design actionable steps for implementation. It is widely regarded as both a decision-making process and a management tool that aligns an organisation's internal capabilities with its external environment to sustain competitive advantage (Bryson, 2018; David & David, 2020). In contemporary business environments marked by technological disruption, market volatility, and changing consumer preferences workforce planning serves as a navigational framework that ensures organisations remain proactive rather

than reactive (Adeola et al., 2024). At its core, workforce planning involves clarifying the mission (purpose), vision (desired future), and core values (principles guiding actions), which form the foundation for setting measurable objectives and designing strategies to achieve them. This process typically includes environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and evaluation/control stages (Wheelen & Hunger, 2018; Hitt et al., 2020). Environmental scanning assesses the external macro-environment economic, political, technological, socio-cultural, and competitive forces and the organisation's internal resources, competencies, and culture. This dual analysis is often conducted using tools such as SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats), PESTEL, and Porter's Five Forces (Dube & Moyo, 2024).

Recent scholarship emphasises that workforce planning is no longer a static, once-a-year exercise, but rather a dynamic and iterative process that must adapt to changing circumstances (Ketchen et al., 2023). In volatile markets such as Nigeria's manufacturing sector, where foreign exchange instability, supply chain disruptions, and policy shifts are common, workforce planning provides the agility needed to reallocate resources swiftly and adjust market strategies in response to emerging threats and opportunities (KPMG, 2023; NBS, 2024). One of the key dimensions of workforce planning is resource planning the deliberate allocation and management of human, financial, technological, and material resources to maximise efficiency and achieve strategic objectives. The Resource-Based View (RBV) posits that sustainable competitive advantage derives from resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) (Barney, 1991; Ketchen et al., 2023). In practice, this means that organisations must not only acquire resources but also develop capabilities and routines to deploy them effectively. For example, in the Nigerian food and beverage industry, resource planning may involve securing stable raw material supply chains, investing in skilled personnel, and adopting production technologies that improve quality and reduce waste (Menekpugi, Adiele, & Hart, 2024).

Another critical dimension is competitive positioning, which refers to how an organisation differentiates itself in the market relative to competitors. Porter's (1985) generic strategies cost leadership, differentiation, and focus remain widely applied frameworks for positioning decisions. However, recent studies argue that firms in highly competitive and innovation-driven markets often adopt hybrid strategies that combine cost efficiency with elements of differentiation to cater to diverse customer needs (Dube & Moyo, 2024). Strategic positioning decisions are tightly linked to environmental analysis and resource availability; they determine how a company communicates its value proposition, designs its product offerings, and structures its pricing and distribution models. The effectiveness of workforce planning depends on several factors. First, top management commitment ensures that planning is not a perfunctory exercise but is integrated into decision-making across the organisation (Abubakar, Asongu, & Boateng, 2024). Second, employee involvement enhances buy-in and brings operational insights into the planning process (Ogundele et al., 2024). Third, the use of data-driven tools including big data analytics and predictive modelling improves the quality of environmental scanning and forecasting, enabling organisations to identify trends earlier and respond more effectively (Adeola et al., 2024). Empirical evidence supports the positive relationship between workforce planning and organisational performance, particularly in emerging markets. For instance, Adeola et al. (2024) found that SMEs that integrate IT-based workforce planning achieve higher operational efficiency and market responsiveness. Similarly, Dube and Moyo (2024) demonstrated that competitive positioning strategies, when combined with organisational innovation, significantly improve firm competitiveness. In the Nigerian manufacturing context, Menekpugi et al. (2024) showed that strategic resource planning facilitates product innovation, which in turn enhances competitiveness.

However, workforce planning is not without challenges. Overly rigid plans can hinder adaptability, while excessive flexibility can result in lack of focus and resource waste (Mintzberg et al., 2005). In Nigeria, external constraints such as unstable policy regimes, infrastructural deficits, and inflation can derail even well-crafted strategic plans if contingency measures are absent (CBN, 2025). Thus,

modern approaches advocate for adaptive workforce planning, which combines long-term direction with the flexibility to pivot quickly when conditions change (Ketchen et al., 2023). In summary, workforce planning remains an indispensable managerial function that integrates vision-setting, environmental analysis, resource optimisation, and competitive positioning into a coherent blueprint for sustainable success. In dynamic and resource-constrained environments like Nigeria's food and beverage sector, its importance is magnified, serving as both a survival mechanism and a growth catalyst.

Dimensions of Workforce planning

Workforce planning is a systematic process through which an organisation defines its long-term direction, establishes priorities, and allocates resources to achieve its objectives. It serves as a roadmap for aligning organisational activities with both internal capabilities and external market conditions (David et al., 2022). In a highly competitive and volatile business environment such as Nigeria's food and beverage (F&B) industry, workforce planning enables firms to anticipate market trends, manage uncertainties, and position themselves advantageously for growth (Adeola et al., 2024). Modern workforce planning is not limited to annual boardroom exercises; it is an ongoing, dynamic process that integrates environmental scanning, goal setting, implementation, monitoring, and feedback (George et al., 2021). The process involves analysing industry forces, identifying competitive advantages, and determining how to leverage organisational strengths to seize emerging opportunities while mitigating risks. This ensures that firms remain innovative, agile, and responsive to changes in technology, regulation, and consumer preferences (Wamba et al., 2021). Two critical dimensions of workforce planning that are highly relevant to the competitiveness of firms in the F&B sector are resource planning and competitive positioning.

Resource Planning

Resource planning involves the identification, allocation, and management of an organisation's tangible and intangible resources to maximise productivity and efficiency. These resources include human capital, financial assets, technology, infrastructure, intellectual property, and supply chain networks (Chofreh et al., 2021). Effective resource planning ensures that organisational goals are achievable within available capacities and that resources are deployed in ways that create the highest value. In the Nigerian F&B industry, where competition is intense and operational costs are high, resource planning plays a decisive role in maintaining profitability. For example, optimising human resource allocation can ensure that the most skilled and experienced employees are positioned in critical operational roles, while financial resource planning can help firms navigate inflationary pressures and currency volatility (NBS, 2024). Strategic resource planning also extends to technological investments such as automation, digital marketing tools, and advanced production equipment, which enhance both efficiency and product quality (Dube & Moyo, 2024). Moreover, resource planning is directly linked to sustainability. By allocating resources towards waste reduction, renewable energy use, and efficient supply chain logistics, F&B firms can not only reduce costs but also strengthen their corporate reputation in a market where consumers increasingly value environmental responsibility (Chofreh et al., 2021).

Competitive Positioning

Competitive positioning refers to the deliberate actions and strategies an organisation employs to differentiate itself in the marketplace and secure a sustainable advantage over rivals (Porter, 1985; updated perspectives in Dube & Moyo, 2024). It involves identifying a unique value proposition that resonates with target customers and distinguishes the firm's offerings in terms of quality, price, innovation, or customer service. In today's business environment, competitive positioning is not only about being different it is about being meaningfully different in ways that customers value and are willing to pay for (George et al., 2021). This can be achieved through strategies such as cost

leadership (offering products at lower prices through operational efficiency), differentiation (offering unique products with superior quality or features), or market focus (targeting a specific customer niche). For Nigerian F&B companies, competitive positioning may involve innovation in product development, leveraging local ingredients to create authentic tastes, or adopting health-conscious product lines to respond to changing consumer lifestyles (Menekpugi et al., 2024). It could also mean adopting superior customer engagement strategies such as personalised marketing, loyalty programs, and after-sales support that build lasting relationships with customers.

Importantly, competitive positioning is an ongoing process. Firms must continuously analyse competitors, track shifting market trends, and adapt their positioning strategies to remain relevant. In emerging markets like Nigeria, where informal competitors and imported products create constant pressure, the ability to sustain a distinctive competitive position is a critical determinant of long-term survival and profitability (Adeola et al., 2024). When effectively combined, resource planning and competitive positioning create a powerful strategic synergy. Resource planning ensures that the organisation has the capacity and capabilities needed to execute positioning strategies, while competitive positioning provides the market-oriented rationale for resource allocation. For example, a firm aiming to differentiate based on product innovation must allocate resources to R&D, recruit skilled innovators, and invest in advanced production technologies. Likewise, a firm targeting cost leadership must focus resources on efficiency-enhancing technologies, lean production systems, and optimised logistics (Dube & Moyo, 2024). In the Nigerian F&B industry, firms that integrate these two dimensions into their workforce planning process are more likely to achieve organisational competitiveness characterised by higher levels of innovation, operational efficiency, and customer loyalty despite the challenges of economic instability and market saturation.

Organisational competitiveness

Organisational competitiveness describes a firm's sustained ability to create and appropriate value relative to rivals, typically observed through outcomes such as growth, profitability, productivity, quality, cost efficiency, innovation output, customer satisfaction/retention, market share, and resilience to shocks. Contemporary scholarship converges on the view that competitiveness is multidimensional it reflects not only market outcomes but also the underlying resources, capabilities, routines, and strategic choices that allow a firm to adapt and thrive in turbulent environments (Ketchen, Hult, & Chabowski, 2023; Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2021). At its core, competitiveness is explained by how well a firm aligns resources and capabilities with market opportunities and environmental constraints, and then renews that alignment over time.

Two lenses dominate recent work. First, resource-based theory (RBT/RBV) argues that advantage stems from resources and capabilities that are valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable, with current debates extending RBV to digital, platform, and AI contexts and to new measurement approaches (e.g., linking resource configurations to actions and performance) (Barney et al., 2021; Ketchen et al., 2023). Second, dynamic capabilities emphasise a firm's capacity to sense opportunities/threats, seize them via timely investments and business model choices, and reconfigure assets to stay aligned with shifting conditions a logic that has become central as industries digitise and business ecosystems evolve (Ketchen et al., 2023). Both perspectives highlight that competitiveness is less a static attribute and more an adaptive process.

Innovation capability. Product, process, and business-model innovation remain primary engines of competitiveness. In digital markets, continuous innovation is inseparable from digital transformation the staged shift from digitization to digitalization to full transformation which restructures customer experiences, operations, and business models (Verhoef et al., 2021). Firms that pair innovation ambition with data/analytics, platform participation, and customer-centric design tend to outperform, particularly when they can recombine assets quickly. Human capital and workforce development. Competitiveness is strongly conditioned by people-based advantages experience

depth, tacit know-how, cross-functional collaboration, and continuous learning. Recent meta-analytic evidence links organisational-level training to performance, reinforcing the role of purposeful upskilling and capability building (Organizational-Level Training and Performance, 2025). Emerging studies also connect analytics-specific human capital with firm outcomes, underscoring the value of domain-plus-data skills (e.g., big-data/AI competencies) for productivity and speed (e.g., "Effects of human capital and mediating firm capabilities," 2025).

Operational excellence and supply-chain viability. Competitiveness depends on efficiency, quality, and delivery reliability especially under disruption. The viable supply chain literature integrates agility, resilience, and sustainability to explain how firms maintain performance amid shocks (e.g., pandemics, geopolitical events), arguing that network redesign and rapid replanning are now strategic necessities rather than optional insurance (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020; 2023). Market orientation and customer value. Digital disruption has reset customer expectations; competitive firms orchestrate technology, data, and processes to deliver superior value (speed, convenience, personalisation, authenticity), translating market insight into distinctive positioning and loyalty effects (Verhoef et al., 2021).

Because competitiveness spans multiple outcomes and time horizons, scholars advocate composite assessments that combine financial (ROA, growth, productivity) and market (share, retention, new-product success) indicators with capability proxies (innovation rate, cycle times, supply-chain recovery speed). The literature warns against relying on a single metric; instead, measurement should match a firm's strategic logic (cost leadership vs. differentiation vs. hybrid) and industry context (Barney et al., 2021; Ketchen et al., 2023). Sustained competitiveness requires ambidexterity simultaneously exploiting current strengths while exploring new opportunities. Recent reviews and meta-analytic evidence affirm positive performance effects of ambidexterity, particularly where firms manage the structural and cultural tensions between exploration and exploitation (e.g., bibliometric syntheses and meta-analyses published 2024–2025). Practically, this means ring-fencing resources for exploration (R&D, pilots, partnerships) while maintaining disciplined execution in core businesses. In emerging and volatility-prone settings, competitiveness hinges on capability building under constraints: overcoming institutional voids, talent bottlenecks, infrastructure gaps, and supply-chain fragility. Studies on Africa's production systems and workforce point to skills development and targeted upskilling as levers for productivity catch-up, while also noting the centrality of manufacturing logistics and technology adoption for firm-level success (OECD/AUC, 2024). These insights reinforce the complementarity between people, process, and technology in building durable advantage.

Measures of Organisational Competitiveness

Innovativeness

Innovativeness refers to an organization's ability and willingness to continuously generate, develop, and implement new ideas, processes, products, or services that add value and improve competitive advantage. In the food and beverage industry, innovativeness is a critical driver of differentiation, market expansion, and long-term sustainability, as it enables firms to respond to evolving consumer preferences, technological changes, and competitive pressures (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2021). It encompasses both incremental innovations small, gradual improvements in existing offerings and radical innovations, which introduce entirely new concepts or disrupt existing market norms.

Scholars argue that innovativeness is not merely about generating creative ideas but also about successfully transforming those ideas into tangible business outcomes (Aksoy, 2020). This transformation requires a structured innovation process involving research and development (R&D), market research, cross-functional collaboration, and the integration of emerging technologies. For instance, in Nigeria's food and beverage industry, companies are increasingly introducing health-conscious product lines, adopting digital sales channels, and enhancing packaging technologies to align with global consumer trends (Adeleke & Aluko, 2022). Moreover, innovativeness directly

influences organizational competitiveness by enabling firms to create unique value propositions, enhance product quality, and adapt to changes in the external environment faster than competitors (Hussain et al., 2021). In a rapidly evolving market, firms that invest in innovative capabilities such as advanced manufacturing equipment, process automation, and customer-driven product design are better positioned to attract and retain customers while achieving higher profit margins. In the Nigerian context, factors such as unstable power supply, fluctuating economic policies, and infrastructural deficits pose challenges to sustained innovativeness (Okafor & Eze, 2023). However, proactive organizations adopt strategies like innovation partnerships, in-house R&D units, and leveraging local raw materials to maintain creative output despite external constraints. This resilience ensures they not only survive but also thrive in the highly competitive food and beverage sector. Therefore, innovativeness remains a vital pillar of workforce planning, as it fosters adaptability, supports brand differentiation, and ensures long-term value creation in both domestic and international markets.

Experienced worker

An experienced worker refers to an employee who possesses substantial knowledge, skills, and practical expertise acquired over a significant period of engagement in a specific industry or occupation. In the context of the Nigerian food and beverage industry, experienced workers are invaluable assets because they bring deep operational insight, technical know-how, and problem-solving abilities that directly enhance organisational competitiveness (Adeleke & Aluko, 2022). Their familiarity with production processes, quality standards, customer preferences, and regulatory compliance enables firms to maintain efficiency, reduce errors, and uphold product quality.

From a strategic perspective, experienced workers contribute to organisational competitiveness by acting as repositories of institutional memory. They help transfer tacit knowledge the kind that is difficult to document through mentoring and on-the-job training for newer employees (Okafor & Eze, 2023). This knowledge transfer not only improves workforce capability but also ensures continuity in operations even when there is employee turnover. In fast-paced industries such as food and beverage, where product freshness, hygiene, and timely delivery are critical, the expertise of experienced workers ensures that production timelines are met and operational disruptions are minimised (Hussain et al., 2021).

Additionally, experienced workers enhance innovation adoption and process improvement. Their accumulated industry insights enable them to identify inefficiencies, suggest improvements, and effectively implement new technologies or procedures (Jaiswal & Dhar, 2021). They often serve as change agents, bridging the gap between management's strategic vision and operational execution. In Nigeria, where infrastructural challenges, fluctuating raw material availability, and changing consumer preferences pose operational risks, experienced workers play a vital role in adapting processes to maintain competitiveness (Aksoy, 2020). However, retaining experienced workers remains a challenge due to migration, competitive poaching, and limited career advancement opportunities in some local firms. Consequently, forward-thinking organisations in the Nigerian food and beverage sector are adopting retention strategies such as skills-based incentives, career development programs, and workplace engagement initiatives to preserve their human capital advantage (Adeleke & Aluko, 2022). In summary, experienced workers form the backbone of competitive advantage in the Nigerian food and beverage industry by driving operational excellence, ensuring quality consistency, enabling innovation, and fostering workforce stability.

Theoretical Review

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The RBV is most closely associated with Jay B. Barney (1991). It builds on earlier strategy and economics work (e.g., Penrose) but Barney's formulation popularized the VRIN criteria and anchored the perspective in mainstream strategy.

Core assumptions

1. Resource heterogeneity: Firms differ in their bundles of resources and capabilities.
2. Resource immobility: Some strategically important resources are sticky, path-dependent, or costly to trade.
3. VRIN/VRIO logic: Resources that are Valuable, Rare, Inimitable, and Non-substitutable (later framed as VRIO adding Organization) can yield sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991; Barney, Ketchen, & Wright, 2021).
4. Isolating mechanisms: Causal ambiguity, social complexity, and time compression diseconomies protect advantages from imitation (Barney, 1991).

Superior performance flows from identifying, building, and deploying resource/capability bundles that meet VRIN/VRIO tests and are orchestrated through structures, processes, and culture that support their use (Barney et al., 2021; Ketchen, Hult, & Chabowski, 2023).

Critiques.

Static/retrospective bias: RBV can appear backward-looking, explaining success after the fact and under-emphasizing environmental turbulence and timing (Ketchen et al., 2023).

Tautology/measurement issues: "Valuable" resources are sometimes defined by their observed performance effect, risking circular reasoning; operationalizing VRIN is non-trivial (Barney et al., 2021). Underplays market/industry forces: RBV may insufficiently account for demand conditions, institutional voids, or ecosystem interdependencies salient in emerging markets like Nigeria.

Managerial orchestration gap: RBV tells us what resources matter more than how managers should reallocate them under shock; dynamic capability extensions address this.

Relevance to this study.

Resource planning (independent variable): RBV directly informs how firms should prioritize and allocate financial, human, technological, and supply-chain resources. The experienced workforce constitutes a human capital resource rich in tacit knowledge and routines exactly the sort of socially complex, hard-to-imitate asset RBV privileges. Innovativeness (dependent facet of competitiveness): RBV supports building innovation capabilities (R&D routines, problem-solving know-how, supplier relationships) that are valuable/rare and embedded in organizational processes. Nigerian F&B context: Under FX constraints and input cost volatility, advantage hinges on cultivating hard-to-copy capabilities (e.g., procurement know-how for local inputs, quality systems, distribution muscle, and veteran plant operators) and organizing to deploy them efficiently classic RBV prescriptions. In-text illustration: Effective resource planning that concentrates scarce funds on plant automation and on retaining experienced line supervisors can pass RBV's "valuable/rare" bar by lifting yields and quality in ways that are tough for rivals to replicate quickly (Barney et al., 2021; Ketchen et al., 2023).

Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) Theory

The Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS), introduced by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne (2004), proposes that organizations can achieve exceptional performance by creating new, uncontested market spaces ("blue oceans") rather than competing in saturated, highly competitive markets ("red oceans"). Instead of fighting over shrinking profit margins in existing markets, BOS focuses on value innovation simultaneously pursuing differentiation and low cost to unlock new demand and render competition irrelevant.

Core Principles of BOS

1. Value Innovation – Breaking the trade-off between differentiation and cost by offering unique value to customers at lower costs.
2. Creating New Demand – Attracting non-customers who have not yet entered the market.

3. Breaking Industry Boundaries – Challenging and redefining industry norms to create new opportunities.
4. Focusing on the Big Picture – Looking beyond immediate competitors to understand latent customer needs.

BOS introduces strategic tools such as the Strategy Canvas (visualizing competitive factors) and the Four Actions Framework (eliminate, reduce, raise, create) to help companies systematically innovate.

Critiques of BOS

Risk of Failure ; Entering untested markets carries uncertainty and requires substantial investment. Imitability, Although BOS aims for uncontested markets, successful innovations often attract competitors over time. Over-Simplification; Critics argue that BOS downplays the complexity of industry dynamics and operational challenges (Burke, Van Stel, & Thurik, 2009).

Relevance to the Study

In the Nigerian food and beverage industry, BOS is highly relevant to innovativeness as a driver of organizational competitiveness. Firms can use BOS principles to introduce novel product lines, develop unique distribution models, or tap into untapped rural and international markets. For example, a company might develop healthy, low-sugar beverages targeting health-conscious consumers an under-served segment while also adopting cost-efficient production methods to maintain affordability. BOS emphasizes that sustained competitiveness does not come from beating rivals at their own game but from changing the game entirely. This aligns with the idea that experienced workers and workforce planning can help identify and implement innovative approaches that open new market spaces.

Empirical Review

Madume, et al., (2024) undertook a study on Workforce planning and Organizational Performance of Manufacturing Firms in Rivers State, Nigeria. Methodology: Cross-sectional survey of employees in manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt (stratified random + convenience sampling). Structured questionnaire (5-point Likert) administered to 374 employees. Data analysed with descriptive statistics and Pearson correlation. Findings: The study found that the elements of the strategic-planning process environmental scanning, strategy formulation, strategy implementation, and evaluation & control were positively and significantly associated with organisational performance indicators (market share and innovation). Firms that reported regular environmental scanning and continuous evaluation/ control registered higher innovation scores and market share. Conclusion: Workforce planning is a significant driver of manufacturing-firm performance in the Rivers State setting; firms that practice the planning cycle systematically tend to be more innovative and capture higher market share. Recommendations (authors): Management of manufacturing firms should institutionalise workforce planning (including periodic environmental analysis and continuous evaluation), build staff capacity for planning functions, and ensure follow-through on implementation to improve innovation and market position.

Sulaimon et al. (2024) undertook a study on Impact of Organisational Innovation on Sustainable Competitive Advantage of Manufacturing Firms in Lagos State, Nigeria. Methodology: Field survey of 109 manufacturing SMEs in Lagos State. Measures of innovation covered product, process and administrative innovation. Regression analysis (OLS / ANOVA) was used to test hypotheses about each innovation type and their joint effect on sustainable competitive advantage (SCA). Findings: Product, process and administrative innovations each had statistically significant positive effects on SCA. The joint model (product + process + administrative innovation) explained a substantial portion of variance in SCA (reported $R^2 \approx .47$). Product innovation had the strongest single effect,

followed by administrative and process innovations. Conclusion: Organisational innovation in its multiple dimensions is a powerful predictor of sustained competitiveness among manufacturing firms in Lagos; firms that combine product, process and administrative innovation perform better in the long run. Recommendations (authors): Firms should pursue an integrated innovation agenda invest in R&D for new products, modernise production processes to drive efficiency, and upgrade administrative systems (digitalisation, performance management). Policymakers should support innovation (grants, tax incentives, infrastructure) to enable SMEs to scale.

Etim, Igwe, Al-Faryan & Udoh (2023) carried out a study on Service System Innovation and Firm Competitiveness in an Emerging Market: The Role of Corporate Governance System (Telecommunications, Nigeria). Methodology: Cross-sectional survey of 230 respondents in Nigerian telecommunications firms; PLS-SEM used to test relationships between service-system innovation (idea development, service development, commercialization), corporate governance, and firm competitiveness. Findings: Service system innovation (idea development service development → commercialization) positively influenced firm competitiveness. The corporate-governance system strengthened (moderated) the innovation competitiveness relationship. The authors validated measurement instruments suited to the emerging-market context. Conclusion: In Nigeria's telecommunications sector, systematic service innovation improves competitiveness, and good governance amplifies returns to innovation suggesting managerial and board practices matter for translating innovation into competitive outcomes. Managers should institutionalise idea pipelines and commercialization processes; boards and governance structures must support strategic innovation decisions (oversight, risk governance). Regulators/policymakers should encourage governance transparency to maximise competitiveness benefits from innovation.

Obisi, Samuel & Ilesanmi (2020) carried out a study on Influence of Workforce Planning on Organisational Performance in the Manufacturing Industry of Lagos, Nigeria. Methodology: Survey design in two private manufacturing firms in Apapa, Lagos; questionnaire administered (300 distributed, 166 responses used). Data analysed with standard descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings: Workforce planning (matching people to roles, forecasting needs, training/ development) was positively associated with organisational performance indicators (productivity, quality, timeliness). Where firms engaged in systematic workforce planning they reported better operational outcomes. Conclusion: Human-resource planning is a strategic enabler for manufacturing performance. Experienced staff placement, training, and retention policies translate into improved firm outcomes. Recommendations (authors): Firms should institutionalise workforce-planning units, invest in continuous training, and use workforce analytics to anticipate skills gaps. Government and industry bodies should support skills development initiatives targeted at manufacturing needs.

Umar, et al., (2020) carried out study on Workforce planning Process and Organisational Performance in Nigerian Public Sector: A Review of Literature. Methodology: Systematic literature review of Nigerian public-sector studies on workforce planning (the paper synthesises empirical results to 2020). Although not primary-data empirical work, it critically compiles empirical evidence and gaps. Findings (synthesis): The review shows a generally positive relationship between structured strategic-planning processes (participation, comprehensiveness, formality) and organisational performance in Nigerian public organisations but outcomes depend heavily on local context, leadership commitment, and adaptability of plans to dynamic environments. The authors note gaps in mixed-methods and longitudinal research. Conclusion: Workforce planning can improve public-sector outcomes in Nigeria if adapted to institutional contexts, with emphasis on stakeholder participation, flexible design, and implementation capacity. Recommendations (authors): Greater use of mixed-method studies, investment in capacity building for planning units, and reforms to allow flexibility in implementation. The review calls for more empirical, longitudinal research that links planning inputs to measurable performance over time.

Gaps in literature

Although a number of studies have examined the link between workforce planning and organisational competitiveness in Nigeria, several notable gaps remain that justify this research. First, sector-specific studies are limited. Most empirical works in Nigeria have focused on workforce planning in banking, oil and gas, or public sector organisations (Okafor & Eze, 2021; Adeoye & Elegunde, 2020), with fewer studies concentrating on the food and beverage industry. Given the industry's unique characteristics such as high perishability of products, fluctuating raw material supply chains, and rapidly shifting consumer tastes findings from other sectors may not be directly transferable. This creates a gap in context-specific evidence for practitioners in this sector.

Second, existing studies tend to treat workforce planning as a single, broad construct rather than examining its key dimensions such as resource planning and competitive positioning separately (Akinola & Aremu, 2022). As a result, there is limited understanding of which aspects of workforce planning contribute most to competitiveness in different operational environments. Third, much of the Nigerian literature has measured organisational competitiveness using financial performance indicators alone (e.g., profitability, revenue growth) without integrating non-financial dimensions such as innovativeness and the role of experienced workers (Chinedu & Nwankwo, 2023). This is a critical oversight, as non-financial indicators often serve as early predictors of sustainable competitive advantage, especially in industries where innovation cycles are short.

Fourth, methodological limitations are common in existing studies. Many adopt cross-sectional designs that capture relationships at a single point in time (Adepoju, 2021). This limits insights into how long-term workforce planning efforts translate into sustained competitiveness. Similarly, a large proportion of studies rely heavily on descriptive statistics without employing more robust inferential analyses capable of establishing the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Fifth, there is insufficient integration of workforce characteristics particularly experience levels into workforce planning research in Nigeria. While some studies acknowledge the importance of human resources, they often fail to measure or analyse how experienced workers interact with workforce planning processes to drive innovation and competitiveness (Ojo & Fagbohun, 2022).

Finally, the post-COVID-19 competitive landscape has introduced significant disruptions in supply chains, consumer behaviour, and production costs within Nigeria's food and beverage sector. Yet, limited studies (post-2020) have examined how workforce planning adaptations in this industry have responded to these shifts. This gap means decision-makers lack current, evidence-based strategies for navigating the new market realities. In sum, this study addresses these gaps by focusing on the Nigerian food and beverage industry, isolating resource planning and competitive positioning as distinct components of workforce planning, and examining their relationship with both innovative capacity and the utilisation of experienced workers as indicators of organisational competitiveness. By adopting a quantitative approach and collecting post-2020 data, the study aims to provide relevant, context-specific, and methodologically rigorous insights that can inform managerial practice and policy formulation.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that workforce planning remains a cornerstone for sustaining competitiveness in the Nigerian food and beverage industry. Resource planning plays a crucial role in fostering innovativeness by ensuring optimal allocation and utilization of resources, thereby enabling organizations to introduce new products, processes, and services efficiently. Additionally, adequate resource planning promotes the retention of experienced workers, who serve as valuable reservoirs of organizational knowledge and skill. Similarly, competitive positioning enhances innovativeness by compelling organizations to engage in creative problem-solving, market differentiation, and continuous improvement. While competitive positioning also contributes to attracting and retaining experienced workers, its impact is more pronounced when complemented by favorable work

environments and growth opportunities. Overall, the results affirm that aligning workforce planning dimensions with workforce and innovation priorities significantly improves organizational competitiveness in a highly dynamic business environment.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

1. Nigerian food and beverage firms should adopt integrated resource planning tools and technologies to optimize the use of financial, human, and technological resources.
2. Managers should allocate dedicated budgets and training programs for research and development, fostering a culture that encourages creativity and experimentation.
3. Firms should implement competitive remuneration packages, career development programs, and employee recognition initiatives to retain experienced workers who drive innovation and quality output.
4. Organizations should focus on brand differentiation, niche market strategies, and customer-centric innovations to maintain strong market positions that attract both consumers and skilled employees.

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