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ENHANCING BUSINESS PROCESS THROUGH RESEARCH

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Abstract. Business process refers to series of activities including methods, tools, actors etc. that is involved in business operation with the goal of achieving the business objectives. It covers the daily operations of a business. These sequences of activities are meant to produce result meant to add values to customers as well as stakeholders. Effective business organization requires a continuous renewal of each step to ensure that the business meets the constant changes that is associated in the business world. Today's business arena, especially in the emerging economy, is in constant struggle with inadequate power supply and other resources needed for business development. More so, the influence of internet and social networking is presently changing the way people are doing business. Therefore, given the competitive nature in the business world, improving the efficiency of each step in the business process is essential for sustainability. Efficiency in business process could be enhanced using several measures. This study basically examined the extent to which business process can be enhanced through research. The study adopted a descriptive survey design and studied four multinational as well as four emerging business enterprises. The sample size of the study was forty (40) respondents selected across the top management staff of the chosen companies who possessed the required knowledge regarding the variables studied in this research. Questionnaire was used for data collection and data analysis was carried out using frequency count, percentages and chi-square. Findings from this study indicated that research is one area that is often neglected by most emerging business organizations. While multinational companies rely greatly on the outcome of research to make their business decisions; most emerging businesses, even though believe that research is essential, still considered research as a waste of resources given that they barely have enough fund to meet their business routine demand. The findings from this study also revealed that outcomes or results from research have the potential of enhancing operational efficiency in business. It also enhances the flexibility of business processes, as well as ensures innovation in business process. The study also revealed that research provides the tools needed in business to tackle societal challenges that affect business processes.

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INTRODUCTION

Business process refers to series of activities including methods, tools, and actors etc. that are involved in business operation with the goal of achieving the business objectives. It covers the daily operations of a business. These sequences of activities are meant to produce result meant to add values to customers as well as stakeholders. Therefore, it is essential for every business organization to continually improve their business process as a way of providing quality services or products to gain competitive advantage. Effective business organization requires a continuous renewal of each step to ensure that the business meets the constant changes that are associated with the changing business world. But initiating business idea, growing such a business, and sustaining such business until it becomes conglomerate or multinational requires great deal of knowledge - knowledge about the totality of the business process as well as the customers. Rai, Ruppel and Lewis (2005) have stated that the difference between a winner and a loser in the business world is the ability to accurately predict consumer demand coupled with the capability to rapidly react and readjust to

environmental changes and supply and demand fluctuations. This indicates that knowledge is paramount in business success and sustainability. But such knowledge does not just come by without some degree of investigation. In other words, such knowledge can be made available through research. Just as companies need to understand their customers, so also do customers stay eager to know more about their dealings with companies. Thus, while business organizations want to know who their customers are, their needs, tastes, desires, the level of acceptability of their products and services in the market, etc., customers are in need of a coherent view of all their activities with respect to their purchase, delivery, schedules, alerts, benefits, promo, etc. This scenario makes research indispensable in the business world.

In Nigeria, while most multinational companies are constantly engaging in business research before taking any business decision, only a handful of emerging business enterprises embark on business research. Multinational Corporation is that corporation which has its facilities and other assets in at least one coun-

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try which is different from its home country while emerging business refers to new businesses growing out as a result of change in technology, customers' needs, or new socio-economic conditions to replace the older ones.

Most emerging businesses considered research as a waste of resources. Could this be the reason why most businesses in Nigeria remain stagnant; or even crumble before they see the light of the day? Without doubt, most emerging businesses in Nigeria carry out their business processes and make business decisions blindly without getting full information to guide them. Some make use of secondary sources of information. Research involves a process of identifying and analyzing such problems for the purpose of knowledge enhancement. It is a systematic way of finding solutions to problem.

Research in a business context involves systematic assembling and analysis of data with the sole aim of proffering solution to matters concerning business. This makes business research imperative for the effectiveness of business process. The understanding of a business process is paramount for its improvement. As pointed out by Koontz, O'Donnell and Weihrich (1982), "business processes are increasingly subject to management methods such as planning, monitoring and controlling". No wonder, Davenport (1993) and Hammer and Champy (1993) pointed out that business processes have the primary goal of meeting the business objectives of an organization. According to Hevner, March, Park and Ram (2004) business process quality is "a goal-bound artificial construct".

Given the constant competition and changes in the business world in light of the mandatory changes seen in the markets, changes in customers' demands, technological changes, and the overall changes in world view, there is no doubt that research is essential in improving the business processes to meet the overall trend in the business world. But business process improvement is complex and challenging given the dynamic nature of business.

Worse still is the problem of knowing exactly what changes need to be carried out in order to improve the business process. This also calls for research. Perhaps, through research, the interdependencies that exist between activities and stakeholders in terms of the elements, tributes and application will be revealed. Again, business research will not only help in identifying problems associated with improving business process but will also procure solution to the identified problems. Hence the present study on enhancing business processes through research has been conducted.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion of business process improvement can be built upon the theory of constraints (TOC). TOC attempts an explana-

tion on the various obstacles that prevent business organizations from achieving their goals. Its proponents, Goldratt and Cox (1984) maintained that the theory is meant to assist organizations achieve their goals. Thus, the theory gives managers insights regarding what needs to be changed such as policies, people, equipment, etc. for business process to improve. Thus, business firms and organizations, acting in light of this theory believe that there is always a minute obstacle to change and understanding the business structure is a key to avert such obstacle in order to improve their business processes geared towards surviving in a global competition.

In this light, imita, Gunay and Vayvay (2014) considered TOC as an "important problem structuring and solving methodology which changes the way of thinking of managers". This theory is therefore essential in explaining business process improvement. Rather than distributing the already limited time, resources, or materials across the whole system, this theory maintains that the management should focus solely on the areas that actually need attention to yield immediate system improvement (Marton & Paulov, 2010).

As pointed out by Lodhi, Koppen and Saake (2013), the competitive business environment makes business process management and improvement essential to enterprises. Supporting this view, Gershon (2010) also stated that an organization becomes more efficient by improving the quality of its processes as well as "maintaining acceptable levels of performance quality". But business process improvement is complex and identifying the first step towards business processes improvement is by no means an easy task. Davenport (1993) was of the view that process improvement focuses more on hard fact and value since it is business-oriented. For this reason, Lodhi, et al. (2013) pointed out that prior to any improvement in the existing business operation system it is essential for organizations to be acquainted with how processes are executed within an organization.

Perhaps, such knowing is a clue that research is inevitable in improving business processes. Until this study, several methodologies have been suggested by several researchers on how to improve business processes. Among these are: Six Sigma (Hayler & Nichols, 2007), Lean Management, Lean Six Sigma (Pyzdek, 2003), Agile Management, Re-engineering, Total Quality Management, Just-In-Time, Kaizen, Hoshin Planning, Poka-Yoka, Design of Experiments, and Process Excellence (Gershon, 2010), among others. But none of these studies has been able to consider research as essential in improving business process a gap which the present study bridged.

According to Czarl and Belovecz (2007), research is essential for achieving long term growth. "It is a systematic and objective analysis and recording of controlled observations that

may lead to the development of generalizations, principles, or theories, resulting in prediction and possible control of events” (Ahmed-Refat, 2013). Research performs diverse role in business organization.

Kato (1993) identified industrial innovation, invention, paradigm shift and bubble as essential roles of research to company. In business, research involves establishing objectives and assembling information that are meant to solve business-related problems. It provides answers to questions such as what the target markets of a company's product are, as well as enables business managers to ascertain whether or not a firm is making progress or otherwise.

Hypothesis One

H0: Business research does not significantly improve business processes in multinational and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria.

H1: Business research significantly improves business processes in multinational and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria.

Hypothesis Two

H02: There is no significant difference between multinational corporations and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria in terms of their level of engagement in business research.

H1: There is a significant difference between multinational corporations and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria in terms of their level of engagement in business research.

METHODOLOGY

Flexibility in research gives researchers impetus to adopt any research method and methodologies in carrying out their studies, inasmuch as such methodology is appropriate in the study. For this reason, the present study adopted a quantitative study. Quantitative research refers to study whose phenomena are measurable. This made it appropriate to the present study. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design.

Descriptive survey is suitable for the present study because it enables the researcher to sample out a wide range of opinions across the chosen respondents for the study. Both multinational and emerging business enterprises were adopted in the study. The sampling was done in multi-stages. The first stage was in selecting the companies which was done using a purposive sampling technique. The criterion for the selection of the company is based on the sustainability.

Thus, only multinationals and emerging business enterprises which have operated in Nigeria for at least five years were selected. Purposive sampling technique enables the researcher to choose the sample based on some personal factor. In this case, the researcher chose both multinational as well as emerging business enterprises to ascertain which of these groups of companies practice business research and to what extent such research results in improving the business processes of the companies.

Again, a purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting two companies from each arm of companies. From each of the selected companies, the researcher selected ten top management staff using purposive sampling.

The choice of purposive sampling technique at this stage was motivated on the fact that the management staff has the knowledge of the subject matter being investigated. Other rationale that informed the choice of the sample apart from the respondents' knowledge and experiences, includes accessibility and willingness to participate in the study. Thus, the study adopted a total sample size of forty (40) respondents.

Questionnaire was adopted as the sole instrument for data collection. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents through different medium depending on the respondents' preference; among which was respondents' emails, courier delivery as well as one-on-one contact with the respondents. Frequency tables, percentage, and means were used for data analysis, while the hypotheses were tested using Chi-square at 0.05 level of significance.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Hypothesis One

H0: Business research does not significantly improve business processes in multinational and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria.

H1: Business research significantly improves business processes in multinational and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria.

The table below indicates a chi-square value of 89.695 with 3 degrees of freedom and p-value of 0.000 which is considered less than 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected at 5% level of significance that means the business research will improve business processes in Nigerian emerging businesses significantly.

TABLE 1

Frequencies Results

Business research does not significantly improve business processes in Multinational and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
strongly agree	2	10.0	-8.0
Agree	5	10.0	-5.0
not sure	5	10.0	-5.0
Disagree	18	10.0	8.0
strongly disagree	10	10.0	0.0
Total	40		

TABLE 2

Test Statistics

Business research does not significantly improve business processes in Multinational and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria	
Chi-Square	89.695a
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 58.3.

Hypothesis Two

H0: There is no significant difference between multinational corporations and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria in terms of their level of engagement in business research.

H1: There is a significant difference between multinational corporations and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria in terms of their level of engagement in business research.

TABLE 3

Multinational

Statement	SA %	A %	NS %	D %	SD %
My company usually embarks on business research before making any business decision	76	13	8	2	1
My company places so much importance on business research	62	31	6	0	1
My company invests so much on business operation	27	68	2	1	2

The table above shows the responses elicited from the respondents regarding the level to which multinational companies engaged in business research. The result above indicated that 89% of the respondents are of the view that my company usually embarks on business research before making any business decision; 8% are not sure, where as 2% and 1% of the respondents disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively. The same table

indicated that 93% strongly agreed and agreed to the statement: my company places so much importance on business research where 6% are not sure while only 1% strongly disagreed. The same reviewed that 95% of the respondents believed that multinational companies invest so much on business operation. 2% are not sure whereas 1% and 2% respectively disagreed and strongly disagreed.

TABLE 4

Emerging Business Enterprises

Statement	SA %	A %	NS %	D %	SD %
My company usually embarks on business research before making any business decision	10	13	17	52	6
My company lacks the resources to embark on business research as a result of limited resources	17	40	26	4	17
My company is of the view that business research enhances business processes	27	68	2	1	2

The table above shows the responses elicited from the respondents regarding the level to which emerging businesses engage in business research. The table above indicated that 58% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed to the statement: My company usually embarks on business research before making any business decision while 23% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed to the statement; whereas 17% of the respondents are not sure. The same table indicated that 57% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed to the statement: my company lacks the resources to embark on business research as a result of limited resources; 26% percent are not sure whereas 17% of the respondents strongly agreed and disagreed respectively. The table also indicated that 95% of the respondents are of the view that business research enhances business processes; 2% are not sure, 3% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

One of the factors that drive business growth is innovation. Innovation brings about improvement in business processes. It gives a business firm the competitive advantage needed to outsmart its competitors. Thus, any firm that is not innovative in both its products and services attracting new customers let alone maintaining their existing ones (Kehinde & Ogunnaiké, 2013). But innovation which can lead to the improvement of business processes can also be very risky. However, the risk can be reduced if the management is acquainted about the possibilities of such risk. Such knowledge can be made available through research. The present study has been able to make reasonable attempts in unveiling the extent to which business processes could be enhanced through research.

Thus the first hypothesis formulated in this study was meant to predict whether or not business research improves business processes in both multinationals and emerging enterprises in Nigeria. Whereas multinational companies refer to companies that have subsidiaries in other countries different from its home country, emerging enterprises refers to new enterprises that are coming up as a result of the changes in the business world as well as life style. The result from testing the hypothesis using Chi-Square at 0.05 levels of significance yielded a p-value of 0.000 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance and thus indicated that business research significantly improves business processes in both multinationals and emerging business. This finding proves that business research is indispensable for business process improvement.

This finding confirms the respective findings from the study carried out by Udeani (2010); Czrl and Belovecz (2007), Ahmed-Refat, (2013), and Kato (1993) who respectively indicated that research is essential for business process improvement. For one

thing, these researchers revealed that business research is the magic bullet for achieving long term growth, innovation, and invention, flexibility in business processes as well as operational efficiency in business.

Similarly, the present study confirmed the study carried out by Hite and Hester (2001) who saw research and development as key department that embodied all the knowledge needed to improve business ideas and processes. Likewise, a study by Booz, Allen and Hamilton as cited by Green and Tull (2008) revealed that in developing new product ideas (innovation) about 60% of the contribution comes from Research and Development department. Against this evidence, the present study concluded that business research is inevitable in solving business problems which will lead to growth and improvement in the overall business process improvement. This conclusion justifies the claim made by Rai et al. (2005) who maintained that the primary difference between a winner and a loser in the business world is the ability to accurately predict consumer demand coupled with the capability to rapidly react and readjust to environmental changes and supply and demand fluctuations. Such predictions can only be made after a great deal of study - research.

The second hypothesis was formulated to predict whether or not there is a significant difference between multinational corporations and emerging business enterprises in Nigeria in terms of their level of engagement in business research. The evidence presented above in light of the first hypothesis has indicated without doubt that both multinational firms and emerging businesses in Nigeria are in agreement that business research is a prerequisite for business process improvement. However, the second hypothesis rather sought to determine the extent to which multinational and emerging business enterprises engage in research. According to the outcome from the analysis of the data collected in the course of this study using frequency count and percentage, the study revealed that multinational companies engaged in business research more frequently (89%) when compared to emerging enterprise which rarely engaged in business research (23%). According to the report from this study, all business decisions made by multinational companies are based on the outcome from business research (93%) which is contrary to that of emerging businesses (17%). The same study showed that multinational companies invest more in research compared to emerging enterprises. Thus, despite the fact that both multinational companies and emerging companies attest to the fact that business research is essential to business process improvement, their level of engagement in to research differs significantly.

This difference in the level of engagement necessitated several assumptions. For one thing, the researcher assumes that inadequacy of finance may be a major factor. This assumption

was borne on the fact that the general challenge confronting businesses in Nigeria is inadequate finance. Most of these emerging enterprises in Nigeria are mostly owned, managed, and financed by owners and relations, in extension, by friends or club members. Consequently, hardly do they have enough capital for the day to day running of the business. Emerging business enterprises are already faced with the insurmountable cost on other factors of production such as lack of tarred roads, electricity, phone lines and others, making it difficult for such businesses to include the cost of research among the already high cost of running a business. Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that emerging businesses considered business research as a major driver for business process improvement, they still do not engage meaningfully in research. What most of the entrepreneurs of these emerging businesses do as a substitute for research is to rely on secondary sources of information such as internet information, some read textbooks, others join MBA schools to gather knowledge used in running their businesses. Some just rely on trial and error and solve their problems blindly. Whatever the case is, the fact remains that research is essential for the overall growth and sustainability of business and thus should not be overlooked.

CONCLUSIONS

Business process refers to series of activities including methods, tools, and actors etc. that are involved in business operation with the goal of achieving the business objectives. It covers the daily operations of a business. The present study investigated

the extent to which research can enhance business process in emerging businesses in Nigeria. The findings of the present study indicated that multinationals value business research and adopt it regularly before making business decision. Thus, multinational firms invest heavily in business research.

On the other hand, emerging businesses also consider research as a prerequisite for business process improvement; however, their level of engagement into research is relatively low given that these emerging businesses are usually confronted by some financial challenges. Given the central role of research to the overall business process improvement, the present study therefore recommends that businesses, be it multinational, emerging, medium, or small, should first of all carry out business research before making any business decisions. This will go a long way to reduce risks and upturn innovation and overall sustainability of the business. Given the fact that money invested on business research is by no means a waste because of the many benefits associated with research, the study recommends that emerging businesses should learn from multinational companies and also allocate some portion of their finance on business research. Research will also enable the business firms to be in tune with what and who their customers are; what they want and thus know exactly what to do to meet their needs. Research will also help to know their competitors, to be acquainted with the level of acceptability of their products in the market, and thus, enables the firm to compete favorably.

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Appendix
YABA COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY LAGOS, NIGERIA
QUESTIONNAIRE ON ENHANCING BUSINESS PROCESS THROUGH RESEARCH

Dear Sir/Madam,

REQUEST FOR COMPLETION OF QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a lecturer of the above institution carrying a study on a topic: "ENHANCING BUSINESS PROCESS THROUGH RESEARCH". Your assistance in answering this questionnaire is highly appreciated. This questionnaire is only for academic purpose, it will not be used for any other purpose not stated. Kindly select the response which applies to you. All information will be kept confidential.

SECTION A
SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Business research improves business processes in emerging businesses significantly		
S/N	QUESTIONS	RESPONSE(S)
1	What is your gender?	<input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Male
2	What is your highest educational qualification?	<input type="checkbox"/> Primary/secondary school <input type="checkbox"/> OND/Technical/NCE <input type="checkbox"/> B.Sc/ B.A./HND or Equivalent <input type="checkbox"/> Masters Degree <input type="checkbox"/> Doctorate
3	What is your position in this organization?	<input type="checkbox"/> Management staff/Supervisor <input type="checkbox"/> Senior staff
4	Which option describes the size of your company	<input type="checkbox"/> Multinational <input type="checkbox"/> Emerging enterprise <input type="checkbox"/> Medium size enterprise <input type="checkbox"/> Small scale enterprise

SECTION B
INTRODUCTION

Please tick ✓ against your chosen option and express your view where necessary. The Likert 5-Point scale is used in the construction of the questionnaire to elicit your responses and opinions on each statement. The adopted options and scales are as follow: Strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Not Sure (NS), Disagree (D) and Strongly disagree (SD).

Business research improves business processes in emerging businesses significantly						
S/N	Statement	SA%	A%	NS%	D%	SD%
1	My company usually embarks on business research before making any business decision.					
2	My company places so much importance on business research					
3	My company invests so much on business operation.					
4	Business research enhances operational efficiency in business					
5	Business research enhances the flexibility of business processes					
6	Business research ensures innovation in business processes.					
7	Business research provides the tools needed by businesses to tackle societal challenges that affect business processes.					