

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE PERFORMANCE OF SMALL AND MEDIUM SCALE ENTERPRISES (SMES) IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence holds significant sway over the operational dynamics and effectiveness of any organization. It serves as a cornerstone for fostering harmonious interpersonal relationships, facilitating effective communication, and enhancing overall teamwork within an organizational. The broad objective of the study was to examine the effect of emotional intelligence on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study consists of 159,704 registered small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in North Central, Nigeria that is registered with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) as at 2020. The study employed Simple random sampling and Taro Yamen sampling technique was used to determine the sample size of 400 SMEs. Multiple Regression Analysis was used as the data analysis technique, and SPSS version 22 was used to assist. With a t-statistics value of 6.861 and a p-value of (.000), the study found that empathy has a positive and significant impact on the performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. Similarly, self-control was found to have a positive and significant impact with a t-statistics value of (21.120) and a p-value of (.000). The study recommended firms should ensure that in formulating policies, employee empathy should be put into consideration so as to create a sense of belonging for the employee. Employee must ensure a high level of self-control and decorum so as to comply with the firms rules and regulations.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Self-Control, Empathy, SMEs and Performance.

INTRODUCTION

Effectively navigating the complex terrain of business goes beyond conventional measures of success. In the realm of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), Emotional Intelligence (EI) emerges as a powerful influencer, not only shaping individual performance but also the collective achievements of organizations. EI stands as one of the most extensively researched subjects in organizational studies, consistently revealing its significance as a predictor of desirable organizational outcomes such as employee performance, job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and commitment (Luke, 2019). Central to EI is the skill of managing emotions to ensure they are expressed appropriately, fostering a conducive and transparent environment for collaborative goal pursuit. When leadership prioritizes emotional intelligence, it cascades throughout the organization, influencing employees to reflect similar traits such as optimism, confidence, creativity, flexibility, tolerance, respect, and compassion (Gunu & Oladepo, 2014).

Organizations comprise individuals with emotions, beliefs, cultures, and needs. Effectively relating to them and averting workplace conflicts necessitates emotional intelligence (Osisioma et al., 2016). Managers must grasp their subordinates' emotions, reasoning, and thought processes, foreseeing their actions and reactions in various scenarios, requiring emotional intelligence. Questions often arise regarding why academically brilliant individuals or top graduates struggle to advance in both life and the workplace, with the consistent answer being their deficiency in emotional intelligence (EI) (Osisioma et al., 2016). This notion is reinforced by Mayer and Caruso (2018), who underscore the pivotal role of emotional intelligence (EI) in people's personal, professional, and domestic life because emotional cues control interactions. Emotional intelligence (EI) is the ability to identify and control one's own and other people's emotions and to use this knowledge to guide one's own thoughts and actions (Giardini & Frese, 2016; Mayer et al., 2018). It involves self-awareness and understanding others to prevent negative impacts on them. In certain commercial banks, prospective employees undergo a battery of tests and interviews before recruitment, all centered on their Intelligence Quotient, with no consideration given to their emotional intelligence levels (Osisioma et al., 2016).

In comprehending the multifaceted processes leading to the inception of a new venture, it becomes crucial to pinpoint the factors motivating individuals to embark on this journey and commit the necessary time and resources (Cross & Travaglione, 2019). Hence, there's been a recent resurgence in entrepreneurial analysis focusing on the human element, encompassing traits and capabilities. This shift holds significance in the current landscape, where there's an increasing imperative to foster and bolster entrepreneurship and the creation of new ventures.

The scarcity of empathetic leadership poses a significant hurdle. In a culture where hierarchical structures often prevail, cultivating empathy among leaders can be a formidable task. Without empathetic understanding of employees' needs and concerns, leaders may struggle to foster a supportive and inclusive work environment, hindering employee morale and productivity (Barsade, 2018). Moreover, self-control presents a poignant challenge. In a business ecosystem marked by volatility and uncertainty, the ability to regulate emotions and maintain composure in high-pressure situations is paramount. However, the fast-paced nature of SME operations in Nigeria, coupled with external factors such as economic instability, can strain individuals' self-control capacities, leading to impulsive decision-making and interpersonal conflicts that impede organizational progress (Adebisi, 2020).

While different scholars have argued for and against the effect of emotional intelligence on small- and medium-sized business performance. According to research by Amos (2013), Goleman (2011), Hasanzadeh and Bastian (2015) opined that SMEs' performance is negatively impacted by emotional intelligence. Research by Coplan and Goldie (2011) and Dirette (2014) revealed a positive correlation between SMEs' performance and emotional intelligence. This study aimed to give more detailed information on the relationship between SMEs' performance and emotional intelligence in the setting of North-Central, Nigeria, in opposition to divergence.

In realizing the objectives of this study, the following questions were formulated and answered by this study.

- i. Does empathy have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria?
- ii. Does self-control have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria?

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. The Specific objectives include:

- i. To establish whether empathy have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria.
- ii. To examine whether self-control have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria.

To address the research question designed for this study, the following hypotheses was formulated and tested in null form;

H₀₁: Empathy do not have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Self-control do not have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI)

Jonas (2013) provided a definition of EI as the ability to identify and control our own feelings effectively, while also influencing the emotions of others. This underscores the importance of understanding that emotions drive behaviors and can impact individuals positively or negatively, necessitating strategies for emotional management within ourselves and among others. Emotional Intelligence (EI) lacks a singular definition among scholars. Mayer et al. (2018) suggested that Emotional intelligence (EI) functions mostly on social, perceptual, practical, personal, and emotional information, whereas intelligence functions on cognitive information. According to Zeidner et al. (2014), exploratory intelligence (EI) is the study of human cognitive capacities that go beyond traditional academic intelligence. According to Mandell and Phewanti (2015), emotional intelligence (EI) is a set of skills combining sensing and abstract thinking based on emotional data.

Mayer and Salovey (2018) described EI as the ability to accurately perceive, evaluate, and express emotions; to utilize emotions in thinking processes; to comprehend emotion and emotional knowledge; and to regulate emotions to foster emotional and intellectual development. Ciarrochi et al. (2019) and Simunek et al. (2018) associated EI with effective mood management in the workplace, while Barsade (2018) concluded that EI significantly influences mood and behavior dynamics within team and group settings.

Empathy

Empathy stands as a crucial element of employees' emotional intelligence (EI), profoundly influencing their job behaviors. Stein and Book (2011) define empathy as the ability to perceive the world through another person's viewpoint, tuning into their thoughts and emotions regarding a situation, even if it contrasts with one's own perception. To foster a culture of learning and facilitate mindset growth, employees must cultivate an atmosphere of inquiry, openness, patience, and encouragement, all integral facets of empathy (Kouzes & Posner, 2013). It involves striving to understand others' perspectives and interpreting their actions from alternative viewpoints (Stein & Book, 2011; Goleman, 2011). Additionally, empathy encompasses the dynamics of interpersonal interaction and often aligns with sentiments such as compassion (Coplan & Goldie, 2011).

Self-Control

As outlined by McPheat (2013), several questions arise regarding one's ability to exercise self-control: Can you pause and deliberate before taking action? Do you generate multiple solutions before making decisions? Are you adept at analyzing the best courses of action and prioritizing tasks based on urgency, thereby avoiding impulsive reactions? If so, it indicates a strong sense of self-control; otherwise, it suggests a deficiency in self-control. McPheat (2013) further emphasizes the importance of continuously examining our fears and desires, which often drive our intense reactions. Understanding these desires such as aspirations for advancement, affection, wealth, security, health, and familial connections and fears, like salary reductions and job insecurity, enhances our awareness of our emotional responses. This heightened awareness enables us to analyze situations more effectively and devise more suitable solutions. Additionally, techniques such as reframing negative self-talk and rehearsing ideas before implementation contribute to the enhancement of self-control.

SMEs Performance

Various researchers have highlighted the association between Emotional Intelligence (EI) and performance. Ganji (2011), Hasanzadeh (2019) asserted that EI fosters innovative creativity in individuals, thereby contributing to the enhancement of performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Moreover, facilitating communication within organizations, a function of emotional intelligence, is deemed crucial for SME performance (Ganji, 2011). Recent research by Schmidt and Hunter (2014) suggests that EI is a strong predictor of employee performance across a wide range of jobs, not limited solely to those demanding high intellectual prowess. They argue that EI serves as a key determinant in assessing SME performance. Rosete and Ciarrochi (2015) demonstrated that managers who possess a deep understanding of their own emotions and those of their subordinates are more likely to achieve positive business outcomes. Additionally, accumulating evidence indicates that EI is linked with significant outcomes such as high-quality social relationships (Lopes et al., 2014).

Performance of Small and Medium Enterprise (SMEs)

Both financial and non-financial metrics can be used to evaluate and quantify the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), while theoretical frameworks and practical applications tend to

favor financial measures. While non-financial measures include things like delivery speed, product and service quality, and inventory turnover, financial performance indicators typically include metrics like return on assets (ROA), return on investment (ROI), share price, market shares, and sales growth (Fullerton & Wempe, 2019).

A balanced scorecard strategy, which emphasizes striking a balance between financial and non-financial performance measurements, is helpful in coordinating strategic goals with financial performance evaluation, according to Hudson et al. (2016). To fully assess company performance in the context of SMEs, a combination of financial and non-financial metrics must be used.

Theoretical Review

Contingency Theory of Management

Fred E. Fiedler introduced the Contingency Theory of Management in 1960, suggesting that there isn't a singular best method of management. Instead, the appropriate management style varies depending on the specifics of each situation. These specifics encompass factors such as the environmental context and the characteristics of the employees involved, including their intellect, emotions, knowledge, skills, and abilities. The Contingency Theory asserts that the effectiveness of management hinges on how well management behaviors align with particular situations. Managers are tasked with discerning which approach will most effectively advance organizational objectives within a given circumstance, at a specific time.

Resource Based View (RBV) Theory

Barney (1991) introduced the Resource-Based View theory, which conceptualizes a firm as a distinct amalgamation of tangible and intangible assets, encompassing resources such as assets, capabilities, competencies, organizational processes, attributes, information, and knowledge. These resources, under the firm's control, empower it to execute strategies aimed at enhancing its operational effectiveness. Central to the Resource-Based View is the notion that valuable firm resources are typically scarce, difficult to replicate, and lack direct substitutes. For a resource to be considered advantageous, it must possess four key attributes: value, rarity relative to competitors, imperfect imitability, and irreplaceability by strategically equivalent alternatives. Accordingly, the theory advocates that a firm's strategy should be contingent upon its unique set of resources; if a firm excels in a particular area, it should leverage those strengths. According to the Resource-Based View, a firm's performance is influenced by its specific resources and capabilities.

Adoption of Theory

The Resource-Based View theory was used in this study for its objectives. This idea was accepted because it is expected of companies to be aware of their strengths and limitations in order to establish plans for being competitive and performing well in the market by effectively utilizing their capabilities and resource bundle. According to the notion, valuable business resources are typically hard to come by, difficult to imitate, and devoid of direct alternatives.

Empirical Review

The study conducted by Lopes et al. (2021) evaluated the connection between sales personnel performance in Southern Nigerian petroleum businesses and self-management and emotional intelligence. Using questionnaires, they gathered information from 44 sales employees, which they then used Pearson's moment correlation to examine. Their study used primary data from 150 local businesses and used a cross-sectional survey design. Inferential statistics were used in the analysis to investigate the connections between sales performance and independent factors. Descriptive statistics were employed to understand the distribution, central tendency, and dispersion of the data, thereby ensuring conformity to the requirements of linear regression. The results showed that employee empathy had a favorable and considerable impact on the businesses' sales performance. Thus, the investigation concluded that sales performance in the examined area is impacted by sales force self-management. Based on these conclusions, the study suggested that businesses adopt plans to improve infrastructure and procurement procedures in order to possibly improve performance.

Schneider et al. (2020) examined how sales force self-awareness affected Australian transportation industry sales performance. By using a survey research design, the study collected primary data from each of the 32 management employees of the organizations that were the subject of the investigation. Regression analysis was used to examine the gathered data. According to the research, self-awareness and emotional intelligence together promote altruistic conduct, positive work attitudes, and successful work performance outcomes in the workplace. The study also emphasized the important role that emotional intelligence plays in the success of the sales force, stressing how it helps to foster positive work attitudes, behaviors, and results, which in turn improves performance at work.

Shahhosseini et al. (2020) carried out an empirical analysis, concentrating on the Nigerian banking industry, to determine the effects of emotional intelligence and self-awareness in corporate organizations. The study used a survey design and gave questionnaires to forty (40) bank managers who were chosen at random. The study's analytical tool was regression analysis. Based on their diverse behaviors, the findings showed a strong relationship between Nigerian sales force self-awareness and sales performance. Additionally, the results indicated that employee emotional intelligence plays a role in improving the organization's financial position. According to the study, salespeople who have greater empathy, self-esteem, reality testing, and problem-solving abilities are more likely to boost the profitability of the businesses they work for.

Uzma and Tajammal (2019) carried out a study with 300 salespeople from different telecom companies to find the relationship between sales effectiveness and emotional intelligence for self-management. The firms were chosen using a straightforward random process, and information was acquired using surveys. Both correlation analysis and simple regression analysis were used in the analysis. Their findings suggested that emotional intelligence for self-management by itself does not ensure worker success. However, it was shown that there is a considerable correlation between individuals' productivity and the organization's sales performance and emotional intelligence. This suggests that emotional intelligence is more significant in the workplace than intelligence quotient (IQ).

Moon and Hur (2017) examined how the self-motivation of salespeople affected medium-sized businesses in Southeast Ghana's sales results. The study was carried out in Ghana and used a survey methodology to collect data in a qualitative manner. Distributed to a sample of respondents, questionnaires were used to collect primary data. Twenty transport companies, with a maximum of fifty employees apiece, were chosen to comprise the study sample. The results imply that exercising and putting self-control into practice can improve these companies' sales performance and promote their expansion. Furthermore, the study offered proof in favor of the theory that self-control techniques enhance sales performance in global transportation enterprises of all sizes. Furthermore, the study revealed that owner-managers view quality management as a critical component that supports a company's profitability, sales growth, and expansion.

METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was survey-based. The approach uses quantitative data from surveys to examine how emotional intelligence affects the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in North Central Nigeria. The researcher's ability to relate to facts as they actually exist in real life is what justifies the use of this methodology.

The study's population consists of 159,704 owners and operators of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) that are registered. These businesses are located in Kogi State (22,715), Kwara State (16,935), Nasarawa State (38,536), Niger State (2,749), Plateau State (16,870), and the Federal Capital Territory (61,899). The data used in this study was sourced from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN, 2020). These SMEs are dispersed throughout Nigeria's North-Central State. The list of registered SMEs in the CAC 2020 report, which is annexed to this study, did not include Benue State.

Sampling techniques are employed to select samples from populations in a manner that ensures a satisfactory level of representation and impartiality. In this study, a multi-staged sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling, was utilized. The sample size was determined using the Taro Yamen sampling technique, which is applicable when the population under study is already known. Through the Taro Yamen method, a sample size of four hundred (400) was determined. The study made use of 5 point Likert- scale questionnaire for responses which was assigned a value of 1 to strongly agree, 2 to agree, 3 to undecided, 4 to disagree, 5 to strongly disagree. SPSS version 24.0 was utilized for data analysis, employing multiple regression to estimate the model and evaluate the study's null hypotheses. Data corresponding to the study's objectives were coded into SPSS version 24.0. Descriptive analysis was initially conducted on the responses, followed by inferential regression analysis to assess the hypotheses' validity. Each respondent's answers to questionnaire inquiries, especially those pertinent to the study's objectives, were represented by these codes.

Model Specification

The dependent variable is Performance of SMEs (PRFS), while the independent variables are Empathy (EMPT) and Self-Control (SFC). To achieve all the hypotheses, multiple regression was used to estimate the model. The model is presented thus:

$$PRFS = f(EMPT \text{ and } SFC)$$

$$PRFS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EMPT_i + \beta_2 SFC_i + \mu_i \text{-----} (1)$$

Where: PRFS = an indicator representing Performance of SMEs (Dependent Variable);

β_0 = a constant and β_{1-5} = coefficients of independent variables;

EMPT = a predictor representing Independent Variable (Empathy);

SFC= a predictor representing Independent Variable (Self-Control);

μ = Stochastic error term;

i = Cross sectional; and

f = Functional relationship.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

A total of Four Hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were administered to owners of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. But only three hundred and sixty-eight (368) copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned back. The analysis for the study was based on the three hundred and sixty-eight (368) copies of the questionnaire that were properly completed and returned back.

Cronbach’s Alpha Reliability Test

The Cronbach’s Alpha test showed a satisfactory result on each of the study variables as presented below.

Emotional Intelligence	Cronbach’s Alpha value
Empathy (EMPT)	.814
Self-Control (SFC)	.796
Performance of SMEs (PRFS)	.852

Source: Researcher Computation, (2024).

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.951 ^a	.904	.903	.37616

a. Predictors: (Constant), EMPT, SFC

The R-square value of .904 in the table showed that the constructs of independent variable (Empathy and Self-Control) have a combined effect of 90.4% on the dependent variable (Performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria) while the adjusted R-square value of .903 indicates the accurate influence of the combined effect of Empathy and Self-Control of 90.3% on Performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. The remaining 9.7% was not captured by the variables in this present model.

ANOVA Output

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	464.263	3	154.754	1093.717	.000 ^b
	Residual	49.523	350	.141		
	Total	513.785	353			

a. Dependent Variable: PRFS

b. Predictors: (Constant), EMPT, SFC

The preceding table's F-Statistics value of 1093.717 and sig. level of .000 indicate that the model is well-fitting and significant at the 5% level. This indicates that the outcome is valid and appropriate for use in making decisions.

Test of Hypotheses

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.488	.055		8.864	.000
	EMPT	.336	.049	.294	6.861	.000
	SFC	.961	.046	.984	21.120	.000

a. Dependent Variable: PRFS

The coefficients was used to explain the hypotheses for this study.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: Empathy do not have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria.

The coefficient table above demonstrated that empathy has a positive and substantial impact on the performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria, with a t-statistic value of (6.861) and a corresponding sig. level of (.000), which is significant at the 5% level of significance. This led to the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which states that empathy significantly affects the performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria, and the rejection of the null hypothesis, which claims that empathy has no influence at all on the performance of SMEs in the same region.

H₀₂: Self-control do not have significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria.

The coefficient table above demonstrated that self-control has a positive and substantial impact on the performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria, with a t-statistic value of (21.120) and a corresponding sig. level of (.000), which is significant at the 5% level of significance. This led to the rejection of the second null hypothesis, which claimed that self-control had no discernible impact on the performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria, and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which claimed that self-control had a discernible impact on SMEs' performance in North Central, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

Firstly, the study found that empathy has positive and significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. This implies that a unit increase in empathy would lead to increase in performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. When small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) prioritize the consideration of employee well-being before making decisions, they wield empathy as a finely tuned tool of emotional intelligence. By acknowledging and understanding the conditions in which their employees work, these SMEs offer a level of recognition that goes beyond mere acknowledgment. This recognition serves as a catalyst for enhancing employee performance. It fosters an environment where employees feel valued, understood, and supported, leading to increased motivation, productivity, and loyalty. This finding consistent with the findings of Lopes et al. (2021).

Lastly, the study found that self-control has positive and significant effect on performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. This implies that a unit increase in self-control would lead to increase in performance of SMEs in North Central, Nigeria. As shown by the findings, it's incumbent upon employees to exercise self-control in their day-to-day activities. This responsibility stems from the need to uphold the firm's rules and regulations with strict adherence. By exercising self-control, employees demonstrate their commitment to maintaining a harmonious and productive work environment. This involves exercising discipline in managing time, resources, and interactions with colleagues and clients. Self-control also encompasses adherence to ethical standards and professional conduct, even in challenging situations. When employees consistently demonstrate self-control, they contribute to the establishment of a culture of accountability and integrity within the organization. Moreover, they help ensure that the firm operates

efficiently and effectively, minimizing risks and fostering trust among stakeholders. This finding consistent with the findings of Moon and Hur (2017).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

People in every corporate organization have varying personalities, strengths, and emotions, which can have a big impact on how they perform. The ability to feel, use, communicate, recognize, remember, describe, identify, learn from, manage, comprehend, and explain emotions is the focus of emotional intelligence. Thus, this study came to the conclusion that SMEs' performance is highly impacted by emotional intelligence.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the study recommends that;

- i. Firms should ensure that in formulating policies, employee empathy should be put into consideration so as to create a sense of belonging for the employee.
- ii. Employee must ensure a high level of self-control and decorum so as to comply with the firm's rules and regulations.

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