



**OPERATIONS SENSITIVITY AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCE SUCCESS IN NIGERIAN MANUFACTURING COMPANIES  
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**Ejekwu, K.,<sup>1</sup> Zeb-Obipi, I.,<sup>2</sup> & Uhuru, G. P.<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1,3</sup> Department of Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Rivers State University [RSU], Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, PMB 5080, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Prof., Ph.D, Department of Management, Faculty of Management Sciences, Rivers State University [RSU], Nkpolu-Oroworukwo, PMB 5080, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between operations sensitivity and strategic alliance success in manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The research design adopted in this study was the cross-sectional survey design. The data used were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source involved the distribution of questionnaire to a selected number of employees. Thus, the population of workers in these firms amounted to 127. Secondary sources used included journals, project materials, books, internet materials, etc. considering the enormity of the task and the large population size of the study, the researcher adopted the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table, thus, a total 97 randomly selected workers. The researcher further used the proportionate sampling method (22.30%) of each firm's population of workers to arrive at an appropriate sample size for each of the firm. A total of 97 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents. The reliability of the instrument gave a correlation coefficient index of 0.80 which was considered very reliable using the Cronbach's Alpha. Simple tables, means and grand means were used to analyze the research questions. The research questions were based on a five-point likert scale. The hypotheses were tested at a significance level of 0.05 using the rho analytical tool with the aid of SPSS. The findings of the study revealed that: There is a positive and strong relationship between dimension of operations sensitivity and the measures of strategic alliance success such as partner computability and partner complementarity. Therefore, based on the findings of the study, the practice of operations sensitivity should be demonstrated and every worker made to imbibe it since it has the ability to enable workers to have system-wide knowledge to detect and prevent error. Organization should ensure that strategic alliance is necessary to uphold the necessary practices that are beneficial to the complimentary partners of the organizations.*

**Keywords:** *Operations Sensitivity, Strategic Alliance Success, Partners Compatibility, Partners Complementarity, Partners Commitment*

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## INTRODUCTION

No one company anywhere in the world is big or strong enough to do everything on its own Drucker (1996). The world is changing; the business operational environment is now characterized by high volatilities and uncertainties than it ever had. Globalization has become the order of the day and a reality to all players both in the domestic and international scene. Those firms that are oblivious of the global economy are heading to the archives of business history. Corporate strategists are kept busy constructing and coining new strategies to cope with the changing environment. The business operating environment has become increasingly uncertain and highly competitive (Naicker & Saungweme, 2009). Kirzner (1997) and Machovec (1995) pointed out that firms have to seek new knowledge in order to survive and prosper. Ahmad (2014) argued that firms are expected to innovate constantly to differentiate their products and services in order to contain the pressure of foreign competition.

Consequently, organizations are expected to exploit their strategic abilities, adapt and seek improvements in every area of the business, building on awareness and understanding of current strategies to survive and prosper. They must be able to swiftly act in response to opportunities and threats (Papulova & Papulova, 2006). This turbulence has made several firms come to rely on alliances as strategic necessities for sustaining competitive advantage and creating customer value (Dyer, 2002). Strategic alliances are inter-organizational cooperative structures formed to accomplish strategic objectives of the partnering firms. A number of business literatures and management practitioners have acknowledged the positive outcomes for companies engaged in it, such as higher returns on equity, better returns on investment and higher success rates compared with integration through merger and acquisition (Booz-Allen & Hamilton, 2009).

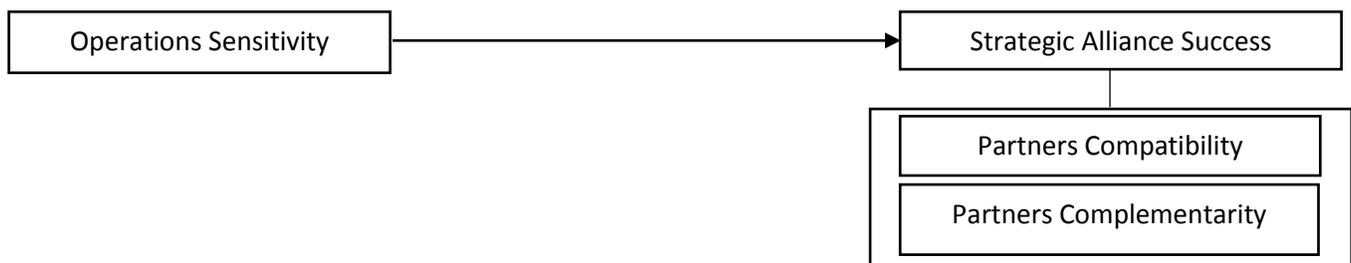
Breuer & Gebauer (2011) argued that it is a practice that shifts the attention of managers to the ambiguous and complex world of the here and now to the concrete actions to be able to detect discriminatory details and make sense of them. The principle is based on the fact that collective perception of the present is distracted by future plans that were made in the past. And it is why practices around this principle foster observation of the here and now, trying to get a broad picture of the present in order to construct a rich picture of the future. This practice does not allow organizations to take the past as an infallible guide to the future being aware that system failures can take a variety of yet to be encountered forms, they continually look out for sneak paths or novel ways in which active failures and latent conditions can combine to defeat or by-pass the defenses, barriers and safeguards. In short, operations sensitivity preoccupies organizations with the possibility of failure. Ray and colleagues (2011) argued that organizational mindfulness is evident when leaders create cultures that encourage rich thinking and a capacity for action.

However, Ray & Colleagues (2011) sees operations sensitivity as a measure of organizational mindfulness which administrators enact practices and structures that work to ensure more mindful ways of acting, thinking, and organizing. They defined organizational mindfulness as a state of alertness and active awareness characterized by the creation and refinement of categories, openness to new information and awareness of multiple perspectives. Despite the many benefits of strategic alliance to partnering companies, there has been many reported cases of failure as according to Saungweme (cited in Naicker, 2009) managers reported the failure of alliance to the inability of the various partners to be transparent, accountable, fair and honest in their dealings. Its success therefore requires a thoughtful decision making, purposeful planning and sincere collaboration (Richard, 2014).

Extant literature revealed that strategic alliances literatures and practices in the past thirty years are mostly by foreign authors and practitioners like Neilson (2002) who studied “the underlying conditions favoring alliance formation, Kont (1986), and Doz (1996) studied “The impact of strategic alliance on partnering firms”. Gulati (1998) studied “the dynamics of strategic alliance”. All these centered on the operational issues of strategic alliances. Very little has been done on the managerial practices and actions in the successful initiation and management of strategic alliance of manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt. This is evident in the paucity of existent literature on the topic. This research work as a point of departure from previous studies, examines the effect of organizational mindfulness on strategic alliance success in the manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt. This study

therefore sought to address these challenges as it departs from previous studies through its empirical investigation of the relationship between operational sensitivity and strategic alliance. The study in the assessment of the variables provided an operational framework through which the operational relationship between the variables was assessed within the context of selected manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. The purpose of this study was therefore to investigate the relationship between operational sensitivity and strategic alliance while the following questions will be examined

- To what extent does operations sensitivity correlate with partner’s compatibility in the Nigerian manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt?
- To what extent does operations sensitivity correlate with partner’s complementarity in the Nigerian manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt?



**Figure 1:** Operationalized Framework for the hypothesized relationship between operations sensitivity and strategic alliance success.

**Source:** Author’s Desk Research, 2019

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Theoretical Foundation

The underpinning theory for this study is the social learning theory which states that That most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling; from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for actions. According to Bandura (1977) learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur through observation or indirect

reinforcement. He went further to say that people learn through observing others behavior, attitudes and outcomes of those observed behaviors. Ahiauzu (2010) sees social learning as an internal mental activity. That the basic understanding is that the human being possesses an insight for building up of schema, thental maps which allows him to act on the basis of imperfect knowledge and expectation which is against the trial and error approach of humans.

### Concept of Operations Sensitivity

The principle is based on the fact that collective perception of the present is distracted by future plans that were made in the past. And it is why practices around this principle foster observation of the here and now, trying to get a broad picture of the present in order to construct a rich picture of the future. This practice does not allow organizations to take the past as an infallible guide to the future being aware that system failures can take a variety of yet to - be - encountered forms, they continually look out for sneak paths or novel ways in which active failures and latent conditions can combine to defeat or by-pass the defenses, barriers and safeguards. In short, operations sensitivity preoccupies organizations with the possibility of failure. Breuer & Gebauer (2011) opined that it is a practice that shifts the attention of managers to the ambiguous and complex world of the here and now to the concrete actions to be able to detect discriminatory details and make sense of them.

### **Concept of Strategic Alliance**

Strategic alliances are inter- organizational cooperative structures and are considered as an essential source of resources sharing, learning and thereby gaining competitive advantage in the competitive business world (Uddin & Akhter, 2011). Strategic alliances are processes in which two or more partners share the commitment of reaching a common objective, combining their resources and capabilities in coordinated activities, which may or not involve stock sharing Teece (1992). As also argued by Naicker & Saungweme (2009), it is indisputable that no one organization can boast of having all resources and services it requires in achieving its strategic goals and for this reason, the past two decades has witnessed a phenomenal growth in strategic alliances. A strategic alliance is “an agreement between firms to do business together in ways that goes beyond normal company-to-company dealings, but fall short of a merger or a full partnership” (Wheelen & Hunger, 2011).

### **Partner Compatibility**

This is seen as the fit among alliance partners, organizational culture, the similarity of strategic goals and working styles that smoothen coordination of strategic alliance activities and implementation of the strategies of alliances (Abuzaid, 2014). The extent to compatibility between partner firms has been found to be a significant indicator of the success or failure of strategic alliances (Shandasani & Sheith, 1995).

A clear goal is indispensable to successful strategic alliances in order to avoid vague and different goals achievement levels. Original goals also must be regularly reviewed (Wang & Hwang, 2007). Kanter (1994) has also stated that the concept of compatibility includes a wide issue such as strategic ground, hopes for the future, values and principles, organizational and cultural matters. Liu (1996) has added a voice that the compatibility of operational policies between organizations must be stressed in order to have compatible strategic alliance goals.

### **Partners Complementarity**

According to Abuzaid (2014), Partners complementarity is the degree to which partners share non-overlapping resources to the alliance; that one partner provides those values – chain resources or capabilities the other needs. He went further to say that the highest complementarity among partners will lead to the highest success possibility of alliances according to the firm resource – based perspective. Wang and Hwang (2007) echoed the imperativeness of complementarity by saying that it includes partners’ financial resources, alliance network, technology resources, marketing channels and the partners’ previsions experiences.

Abuzaid (2014) posits that knowledge and skill are the main basis of an organization’s capabilities that are usually developed in specific functional areas like research and development, marketing and advertising and manufacturing. So, it is an important trait in strategic alliances because it shows a partner’s

operational capability in the form of resources and core-competencies (Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson, 1997).

### Relationship between Operations Sensitivity and Strategic Alliance Success

Operations sensitivity principle is based on the fact that collective perception of the present is distracted by future plans that were made in the past. This is why practices around this principle foster the observation of the here and now, trying to get a broad picture of the present in order to construct a rich picture of the present future (Breuer & Gebauer, 2011). Mellor *et al.* (2015) had also said that operation sensitivity has to do with attention to frontline, workloads, deviations and routines. Here, management is visible on site. Having an integrated big picture of ongoing operation is key to counter the threat of the objective engineering culture. He went further to say having a continuous conversation to counter risks that strategic alliances did not anticipate will bring about it success. We therefore hypothesize that:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between operations sensitivity and partner compatibility of manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between operations sensitivity and partner complementarity of manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt.

### METHODOLOGY

The research design for this study was cross-sectional survey. This is because, the study was a relational study and such the study elements were not under the influence of the researcher. The accessible population for this study comprised of 127 employees of the selected manufacturing firms. The sample size for this study was 97 of employees from the 15 selected manufacturing with the aid of Krejcie and Morgan Table. The primary source of data collection was adopted using structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using tables, means and standard deviations. The Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (rho) with the aid of SPSS version 22 statistical software to analyze the null hypotheses. Also a five (5) point likert scales was used to measure the respondents choices and opinions, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree and three (3) items were extracted from each of the variables.

### DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

**Table 1: Correlation matrix for operations sensitivity and measures of strategic alliance success**

|                |                        |                         | Operations sensitivity | Partners compatibility | Partners compliment | Partners commitment |
|----------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Operations sensitivity | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000                  | .736 **                | .821 **             | .402 **             |
|                |                        | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .                      | .000                   | .000                | .000                |
|                |                        | N                       | 84                     | 84                     | 84                  | 84                  |
|                | Partners compatibil    | Correlation Coefficient | .736 **                | 1.000                  | .855 **             | .822 **             |
|                |                        | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .000                   | .                      | .000                | .000                |
|                |                        | N                       | 84                     | 84                     | 84                  | 84                  |
|                | Partners compliment    | Correlation Coefficient | .821 **                | .855 **                | 1.000               | .959 **             |
|                |                        | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .000                   | .000                   | .                   | .000                |
|                |                        | N                       | 84                     | 84                     | 84                  | 84                  |

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

Source: Research Data 2020, (SPSS output version 21.0)

***Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between operations sensitivity and partners' compatibility in manufacturing firms***

From the result in the table above, the correlation coefficient shows that there is a positive relationship between operations sensitivity and partners' compatibility. The *correlation coefficient* 0.736 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at  $p < 0.000 < 0.05$ . The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation between the variables. Therefore, based on the result, the null hypothesis earlier stated (i.e.  $H_{01}$ ) is hereby rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between operations sensitivity and partner's compatibility in manufacturing firms.

***Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant relationship between operations sensitivity and partners' complementarity in manufacturing firms***

From the result in the table above, the correlation coefficient shows that there is a positive relationship between sensitivity to operations and partners' complementarity. The *correlation coefficient* 0.760 confirms the magnitude and strength of this relationship and it is statistically significant at  $p < 0.000 < 0.05$ . The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation between the variables. Based on the result, the null hypothesis earlier stated (i.e.  $H_{02}$ ) is hereby rejected. Thus, there is a significant relationship between operations sensitivity and partners' complementarity in manufacturing firms.

**Discussion of Findings, Conclusion and recommendation**

The result of the hypothesis one (as indicated by the  $\rho = +0.736$ ), revealed that there is a positive relationship between operations sensitivity and partners compatibility among Nigerian manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. This result was further corroborated by the findings of Shreiner, (2018) who maintained that a strong sensitivity among workers can be the key to the ultimate success of an

organization, the results are advantageous. It is known that if a strong relationship is in place employees will be more productive, more efficient, create less conflict and will be more loyal. As stated by Knight (2004), individual and collective comprehension of organizational operations in the current moment, will facilitate error detection and prevention in strategic alliances. He further argued that sensitivity to operations encourage all employees to be aware of the alliance operations which is manifest in the importance they assign to system-wide knowledge for all employees regardless of hierarchical position. Hunter(2013) also stated that been operations sensitivity enables managers to leads with much more openness to entire situation as opposed to having a fixed view of the way things need to be. That been more opens to others ideas and more willing to critique their own actions and honestly assess their impact on others. Extant literature has shown that when employees are harmed with the requisite information needed for smooth operations, their horizon is broadened and their confidence level also increases bringing about higher performance and success situations.

In response to research question 2, the result shows that the majority generally agreed to a high extent that operations sensitivity correlate with partners' Complementarity in the Nigerian manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt (as indicated by grand means of 3.74 and 3.98 respectively). The final grand mean (4.04) also affirms there is a close relationship between the two variables. Also, from the result as revealed in the test of hypothesis 2, it was shown by the spearman rank order correlation coefficient  $\rho (+0.760)$  that there is a very strong, positive relationship between operations sensitivity and complementarity in Nigerian manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt. This result was also further corroborated by the findings of Cohen and Ledford (2014), who claimed that improvement of the quality of operations of activities

in the organization is based on the partners complementarity with other organizations.

Conclusively, the paper concludes that proper information sharing among strategic alliance partners in the manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt will bring about smoother coordination and implementation of their activities, system wide knowledge of the operational processes by employees of manufacturing companies in Port Harcourt has the ability to increase the sharing of non-overlapping resources to alliance and managements demonstration of confidence in the ability employees of manufacturing firms in Port Harcourt.

The study expressed concretely its findings and drawn conclusion and based on this, the following recommendations were made:

- The practice of operations sensitivity should be demonstrated and every worker made to imbibe it since it has the ability to enable workers to have system-wide knowledge to detect and prevent error.
- Organization should ensure that strategic alliance is necessary to uphold the necessary practices that are beneficial to the complimentary partners of the organizations

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