Human Resource Management Strategies and Organizational Crisis Management: A Study of Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC)

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ABSTRACT: *This study is centered on the human resource management strategies and organizational crisis in Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC). Two objectives were designed for the study along with two research questions as well as two research hypotheses. Survey research design and simple random sampling techniques were used in the study. The population of the study comprised of 237 employees of AKTC and the same number was used for the sample through the Census size determination technique. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results from the analysis showed that collaboration has positive and significant relationship with organizational crisis in AKTC; and restructuring has positive and significant relationship with organizational crisis in AKTC. It was concluded that human resource management strategies have positive and significant correlation with organizational crisis in AKTC. It was recommended that management of the studied organization should ensure that collaborative work relations with other organizations are properly discussed and documented in order to reduce the chance of potential crisis between the organizations; and an organizational culture that promotes continuous innovativeness should be encouraged as such culture would help to keep the organization relevant and competitive overtime.*

KEYWORDS: human resource management, strategies, organizational crisis management, Akwa Ibom State Transport Company (AKTC)

INTRODUCTION

Individuals, corporate organizations as well as communities are continuously in competition for limited resources. Ideally, there are tendencies where the values, interests and needs of others are likely to collide. Usually, the aforementioned scenarios could easily lead to crisis, thus, projecting crisis as an inevitable part of corporate existence. Observing the effects and perspectives to crisis, most scholars keenly believe that crisis occurrence is a natural phenomenon; a natural course that improves the healthiness of a group, while others view it as being disruptive, thus, the need to manage and resolve its occurrence immediately using key human resource management strategies (HRM) (Tüz, 2001; Tutar, 2004).

The strategies for HRM are defined by the organization's plans to take action which will enable it to meet its corporate objectives. It ensures the linking of human resources with strategic goals and objectives in order to improve business performance and develop organizational culture that foster innovation and continuity. It further gives insight of a strategic partner in the formulation of the company's strategies as well as in the implementation of those strategies through human resource activities such as recruiting, selecting, training and rewarding personnel. The mention of HRM strategies within the context of crisis stems from the fact that human resources are affected from the ambience of uncertainty and chaos that occur during crisis situations. Additionally, human resources are the department which is diminishing, losing its function, or suffering from threats of liquidation at the moment of crisis (Aykaç, 2001). More importantly, in a knowledge-based economy, employees are increasingly being considered as a key component in attaining a competitive advantage (Werbel and Demaries, 2005). Thus, the relationship between human resources and crisis management is becoming more collaborative. Human resource functions are becoming more consultative and involved in day-to-day line management activities.

Collaboration and restructuring are key HRM strategies that could be employed during crisis situations (Wenzel, Stanske and Lieberman, 2020). Most business organizations may likely collaborate with other firms, as a response strategy, when crisis emerges. They may decide to persevere, which entails some sort of strategic arrangements that focuses on joint contribution of resources, shared risk, shared control and mutual dependence (Thompson, Strickland and, Gamble, 2007). Restructuring, meanwhile, is a process of making a major change in organization structure that often involves reducing management levels and possibly changing components of the organization (Farjoun, 2001).

As a concept that is increasingly seen as a semantic jungle, crisis management has been variously defined. It is said to involve shaping perceptions/experiences by interacting with stake-holders to prevent, resolve and learn from crises (Jankelová and Mišún, 2021; Kim and Lim, 2020). Regardless of these conceptual overviews, effective crisis management entails: (i) minimizing

disruption situations that could lead to crisis, and (ii) providing a solution that is both satisfactory and acceptable. In proper crisis management plans and programmes, careful attention is directed to the inter-actions between actors within an organization, interactions between organizations and external stakeholders, and how these interactions affect social perceptions and experiences. The purposeful interaction and integration of organizational members and their stakeholders can contribute to crisis prevention or management.

Akwa Ibom Transport Company (AKTC) was established in 1988, shortly after the creation of the state in 1987. The increase in the number of civil servants who lived outside the heart of the town or suburb of Uyo compelled the government to look for a way of conveying civil servants to and from work. This eventually led to the establishment of AKTC. Given the emergence of other transportation firms in Uyo metropolis and the need for effective and efficient operations, AKTC was leased out in order to retain market leadership. Since 2005 (when it was first leased out) till date, the effectiveness and efficiency that is clamored for has not really been achieved. There are still ongoing complaints among the firm stakeholders on issues bordering over service quality, exorbitant transportation fare, poor infrastructures, limited number of cars that operate in major cities of the country, insufficient drivers, lack of proper drivers' training due to their reckless driving, among others. Few experiences of crisis situations between AKTC staff and residents of Utu-EtimEkpo and Ukanafun. such as the aforementioned could easily derail the corporate image and plans of an organization if not properly managed by the HRM unit of the firm. Given such importance, study in this direction requires appropriate consideration.

Statement of the Problem
After two times leasing of AKTC (first time was for 16 years and second time is still ongoing and it is billed for 25 years), crisis management in the organization by the human resource unit has not generally improved. Observations by the researcher shows that there are still complaints from their customers on transports costs, service quality, limited number of buses, among others. Outside the firm, there are still ongoing crisis between the indigenes of Utu-EtimEkpo and Ukanafun, which has not been completely resolved. Equally, among concerned indigenes of Akwa Ibom State, major AKTC stakeholders and former commissioner of transport, there are unresolved contentions as to why AKTC should be leased to the same person for a second time covering twenty-five (25) years. Altogether, these concerns, contentions and crisis could easily impair and disrupt the internal and external workings of AKTC.

Prior studies have been conducted in this direction, both conceptual and empirical. Some of such studies include: Tierney (1997) who assessed crisis management situations during earthquakes and floods; and Piotrowski (2006) examined crisis management during periods of terrorism and hurricanes. None of these studies on crisis management were carried out in AKTC, both practically and empirically. It is on this background that this study attempts to assess HRM strategies and organizational crisis management in AKTC.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the relationship between HRM strategies and crisis management in AKTC. Specific objectives are to:

i. To examine the relationship between collaboration and organizational crisis management in AKTC; and

ii. To ascertain the relationship between restructuring and organizational crisis management in AKTC.

Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this study, the following research questions were raised:

i. What is the relationship between collaboration and organizational crisis management in AKTC?

ii. What is the relationship between restructuring and organizational crisis management in AKTC?

Hypotheses of the Study

The following null hypotheses were formulated for this study:

i. H_{01}: Collaboration has no significant relationship with organizational crisis management in AKTC; and

ii. H_{02}: Restructuring has no significant relationship with organizational crisis management in AKTC.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Human Resource Management Strategies

Human Resource Management strategies can be defined as the procedure and techniques that are useful in overseeing human ability to accomplish a company's goal (Haslinda, 2009). Byars and Rue (2004) posit that human resource management strategies refer to activities and systems that are designed to provide for and coordinate the human resources of an organization. Boxall and Purcell (2000) submit that human resource management strategies include anything and everything associated with the system and strategies that are used for the management of employment relationships in the firm. In addition, Omotayo and Anthonia (2012) defines human resource management strategies as a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques.

In sum, human resources management strategies is all about the philosophy, policies, procedures and practices related to the management of people within an organization. It is also seen as the totality of efforts of the organization to utilize the skills, talents and creativity of people to achieve corporate objectives. Human resource management strategies are the planned human resource activities that enable an organization to achieve its corporate goals. As opined by Wright (2009),

human resource management strategies focus on the alignment of a system of human resource practices to achieve the best performance from employees. In addition, human resource management strategies are used by organizations to link human resources management with organizational strategic plan (Muga, 2012).

Generally, certain employees are sometimes placed as head of human resource unit of an organization. These individuals could be the sales managers, supervisors, engineers, among others. For instance, smaller organizations do engage in some human resource management activities, however, the owner usually handles them. And in some other small businesses, clerical assistant is employed to handle the payroll systems, record keeping and other clerical work. Supervisors and Managers (irrespective of their departments) are involved in recruiting, selecting and training prospective employees, as a result these activities tend to shift their attention away from their primary assignments and reduce the time they spend on their core and other business areas. Nevertheless, the effectiveness and efficiency of the human resource management department hugely depends on how the unit is being organized and managed in organizations. Therefore, medium and large organizations create human resource management department and equip it with human resource specialists that can conveniently handle these activities. Collaboration and restructuring has been identified as key human resource management strategies. As such, these variables are explained as shown hereunder:

Collaboration: Collaboration is defined as durable relationship that brings previously separate organizations into a new structure with commitment to a commonly defined mission, structure, or planning effort (Perrault, McClelland, Austin and Sieppert, 2011). it is a process where an organization provides services to their customers by working collaboratively with another organization. Finch (2000) defines it as professional skills, knowledge and role which are adapted to fit with other professions. Hornby and Atkins (2000) defined it as the process of providing best services to service users and helping to achieve the optimal desired outcome and service users' satisfaction. Drinka and Clarke (2000) equally conceived it as working collaboratively to assess and solve service users' problems beyond scope and skill of a particular group of employees or organizations. Relatedly, it as a positive interaction of two or more organizations, who bring their unique skills and knowledge, to assist clients in making best decisions.

Accordingly, it is not in all cases that efforts for interorganizational collaboration yields the desired outcomes, especially in crisis situations. Championing the same assertion, Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek (2014) argued that, even well-formulated collaboration principles may not bring anticipated outcomes. Hence, possibilities and effects of collaboration may be constrained by, for instance, opportunism resulting from asymmetrical structure of dependencies among organizations, supervision systems diminishing capabilities for effective management of interpersonal relationships or by increased centralized coordination shrinking flexibility of relationships and their innovativeness (Young and Denize, 2008). Therefore, collaboration may not often be

advantageous (McGuire, 2006). This presupposes that forging appropriate relations within inter-organizational collaboration is a challenging process which requires continuous supervision and cultivation. This process is modelled by numerous elements and determinants, both at the phase when joint actions are orchestrated as well as when they are executed. Therefore, it is important to recognize the factors at the heart of efficiency of collaboration strategy and to systemize them, as well as to analyze their implications for crisis situations that are jointly resolved.

Restructuring: Restructuring strategy may entail any major reconfiguration of internal administrative structure that is associated with an intentional management change program (McKinley and Scherer, 2000). Restructuring is redesigning an organizational structure with the intent of emphasizing and enabling activities most critical to the firm's strategy to function at maximum effectiveness (Pearce and Robinson, 2009). Restructuring strategy has been defined as a strategy to enhance the firm's value. Restructuring is used by many organizations as a strategy to improve their efficiency. Restructuring can encompass a broad range of transactions, including selling lines of business or making significant acquisitions, changing capital structure through infusion of high levels of debt, going private, and even changing the internal organization of the firm. Different organizational structures exist in order to fit specific strategies. There are essentially five strategy-related approaches to organization: (I) functional specialization. (2) Geographical structures (3) multidivisional structures, (4) strategic business units, and (5) matrix structures. Each form relates structure to strategy in a unique way and. consequently, has its own set of strategy-related pros and cons.

The Concept of Crisis Management

Sahin, Ulubeyli and Kazaza (2015) sees crisis management as the process with related steps and procedures, which lead to early prediction of a potential crisis, identification (detection) of the nature of the crisis situation and successful resolution on time. Cater and Beal (2014) defined crisis management as a low-probability situation with significant consequences for the organization, a high degree of uncertainty and a sense of decision-making urgency. Coombs (2012) further sees crisis management as not only a form of strategic planning but also a process of thinking about a wide range of potential crises and how they can happen to any business. On the other hand, Glaesser (2006) conceived crisis management as the strategies, processes and measures that are planned and proficient enough to deal with crises and prevent them. Avraham and Ketter (2008) also opined that crisis management is a contemporary concept that deals effectively with crises and prevents its effects.

Regardless of the above overviews on crisis management, one fact that remains undeniable is that crisis is an inevitable part of human existence. It easily occurs due to differences observable in individual's interests, wishes, aspirations, values and targets. From organizational perspective, negative crisis often results to hate among employees or work groups due to missed deadlines, delayed decisions, depression, reduced teamwork, opting to work alone/solve problems alone

without the team, distrust, poor customer service, disruption while carrying out assigned task(s), diversion of employees' time and energy due to poorly designed jobs (Awan and Saeed, 2015). Thus, just like crisis that are community, region and nation-oriented, crisis in an organization could easily occur especially as individuals come from different background, which could easily trigger discord and disagreement among them (Awan and Seed, 2015). It could equally happen as their routine struggle for scare resource that are simultaneously needed by many functional units, competition for job security, organizational politics, intense competition for individual recognition, power and role difference (Olang, 2017).

Whenever it happens, it could either exert positive or negative impacts between or among the conflicting parties. When crisis is positively induced, it encourages healthy and peaceful co-existence among the parties. Individuals in a crisis recognizes the position, values and interests of one another, thus, necessitating the need to value those slight dynamisms that exist among themselves. However, when there are negative sides to crisis, it automatically turns dreams of peace, unity and development into a nightmare. It is also characterized by hostilities and confrontations among people in the same group, community or organization.

The idea of crisis management is that it is not always possible to avert the crisis, but organizations can manage it much more efficiently with minimal loss. All crisis management activities should be considered as a permanent continuous process beginning with prevention by the company and ending with organizational learning (Zuzák and Konigová 2009). Crisis management procedures and mechanisms should be integrated into the overall organization's strategy, which should be revitalized after every new crisis situation. An effective crisis management mechanism requires the incorporation of the employees` and stakeholders` interest. Equally, Khodarahmi (2009) argued that it is necessary to have clearly defined crisis goals, which are subsequently modified from the strategic goals. This fact must be properly justified, in particular, to preserve their trust and loyalty. Therefore, one of the key activities of crisis management is the clear definition of goals and objectives, especially with organizational stakeholders.

Collaboration and Organizational Crisis
Empirical evidence shows that collaborative form of human resource strategy affects both firm performance and effective crisis management (Smith, Bambra Joyce, Perkins, Hunter and Blenkinsopp, 2009). Collaboration between service organizations and other sectors is increasingly seen as a route to improving the financial health of an organization as cordial relationship where an organization is located (Siegel, Erickson, Milstein and Evans, 2018). On the contrary, collaboration strategy, when subject to closer inspection, appear less robust and ready to resolve crisis situations than their reputations might suggest (Sullivan and Skelcher, 2002). To Vangen and Huxham (2010), it leads to substantive outcomes, highly productive processes of collaboration as measure of organizational success, emergent milestones, collaboration recognition, and

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personal and organizational pride. These partnerships build on a long history of efforts to better manage crisis situation so as to provide improved outcomes.

Restructuring and Organizational Crisis

Change in any organization is unavoidable. Organizations worldwide are increasingly confronted with several challenges within a complex business environment. Consequently, these organizations are forced to review and adapt their organizational structure in order to address these challenges and to meet up with the needs of the communities they serve (Ogbonna and Harris, 2003). As the organizational environment becomes increasingly complex and more subjected to frequent changes, a need to change the organization's structure and adjust elements of the existing structure becomes imperative. Managers are thus challenged with the demand to introduce various changes during the transformation of their organization's structures (Robbin and Judge, 2009).

Restructuring is used by many organizations as a strategy to improve their efficiency. However, an organization should only restructure if there is a guarantee that it will lead to optimal performance. It is therefore crucial to ensure that employees realize the necessity of such a process before progressing. As a result, the importance to restructure an organization should be communicated. Interestingly, it has been emphasized that an important step towards creating successful restructuring is to empower the employees with enough information about the need for a change. Through that process, confusion and uncertainty is minimized (Elias, 2007). When employees failed to understand the reasons for organizational restructuring, or the strengths and weaknesses thereof, confusion and uncertainty amongst them will escalate. It is therefore, necessary to agree on primary factors for the new design that address the new structure.

Restructuring strategy could easily affect effective crisis management. For instance, it could be used to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of conflict management through significant changes in organizational structure, often accompanied by downsizing (Bowman and Singh, 1993). Restructuring provides the necessary objectivity and methodical support to bring a company back on the road to success. The hope is that through restructuring, a company can reduce factors that could trigger crisis and improve the business. Company management may restructure its business in order to sharpen focus on its core business and in order to raise capital or rid itself of a non performing operation by selling off a division. Organizational restructuring will normally change the levels of management in the company, affect the span of control or shift product boundaries. There is also a change in production procedures and compensation associated with this strategy.

METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was applied in the study on the basis that structured questionnaire was used in generating needed primary data for the study. The population of the study was 237 employees

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of the studied establishment. The Simple size of 237 respondents was determined using census/total sample size determination technique. After the administration of 237 copies of the questionnaire, 222 was returned in a usable form. The analysis in this study was done using the copies of the questionnaire that was returned. Pearson product moment correlation (PPMC) analysis was applied in analyzing the generated primary data for the study. The rationale for this choice of data analytical tool is to show the relationship between the studied variable.

ANALYSIS

Hypothesis 1
H_{01}: Collaboration has no significant relationship with organizational crisis in AKTC

Table 1:   RESULT OF HYPOTHESIS ONE

CORRELATED VARIABLES		Collaboration	Org. Crisis
Collaboration	Pearson Correlation	1	.654[**]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	222	222
Org. Crisis	Pearson Correlation	.654[**]	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	222	222

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

Source: SPSS Computed Result (2023).

Table 1 above analyze the relationship between collaboration and organizational crisis in Akwa Ibom State Transport Company. The table shows a correlation co-efficient (r) of 0.654 and a probability value (p-value) of 0.000. This shows that collaboration has a significant relationship with organizational crisis management in the studied organization. Based on the result, the null hypothesis which states that 'Collaboration has no significant relationship with organizational crisis in AKTC' was rejected in favour of an alternative hypothesis. This implies that 'there is a positive and significant relationship between collaboration and organizational crisis management in AKTC'.

Hypothesis TWO
H_{02}: Restructuring has no significant relationship with organizational crisis management in AKTC.

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Table 2:   RESULT OF HYPOTHESIS TWO

CORRELATED VARIABLES		Restructuring	Org. Crisis
Restructuring	Pearson Correlation	1	.652**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	222	222
Org. Crisis	Pearson Correlation	.652**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	222	222

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

Source: SPSS Computed Result (2022).

Table 2 shows the result of the statistical analysis of hypothesis two. From the Table, restructuring variables showed a correlation co-efficient (r) of 0.652 and a probability value (p-value) of 0.000. This shows that restructuring has a significant relationship with organizational crisis management in the studied organization. As a result, the null hypothesis which says collaboration has no significant relationship with organizational crisis management in AKTC was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Collaboration and Organizational Crisis
In service rendering organizations, such as the studied organization, there are certain corporate activities that organizations could collaboratively engage in. In such work relationships, firms may pull their unique source of competitive advantage so as to complete the task optimally. Thus, however the work relationship is formed in collaborative arrangement, the objective is usually to provide the best services to service users and helping to achieve the optimal desired outcome and service users' satisfaction (Hornby and Atkins, 2000). However, it is not in all cases that collaborative efforts between organizations yield the desired outcomes, leading to a crisis situation. Championing the same assertion, Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek (2014) argued that, even well-formulated collaboration principles may not bring anticipated outcomes. Therefore, collaboration may not often be advantageous (McGuire, 2006).

These assertions in previous studies support the finding of hypothesis one. The hypothesis on collaboration variable shows a positive and significant relationship with organizational crisis in AKTC (r = 0.654, p<0.000). This finding necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis, while the alternative hypothesis was rejected. The choice of this hypothesis corresponds with the finding of Sullivan and Skelcher (2002). They posit that collaboration strategy, when subject to closer inspection, appear less robust and ready to resolve crisis situations than their reputations might suggest. Equally, Smith, Bambra Joyce, Perkins, Hunter and Blenkinsopp (2009) revealed that

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collaboration form of human resource strategy affects both firm performance and effective crisis management.

Restructuring and Organizational Crisis
Regardless of how successful an organization may appear over the years, there are times when corporate operations may require major reconfiguration for a better competitive positioning. The need for such corporate action is more pronounced given the hyper-competitive nature of today's business landscape. The source of firm's competitive advantage does not last forever. Thus, there is a need for firms to consistently keep adapting and readjusting in order to remain in business in the long-term.it is at this point that the relevance of restructuring comes to mind. Thus, when firms effectively engage in restructuring, the intention is to carefully redesign organizational structure with the intent of emphasizing and enabling activities most critical to the firm's strategy to function at maximum effectiveness (Pearce and Robinson, 2009).

Globally, corporate organizations are increasingly confronted with several challenges in the 21st century business landscape. Consequently, these organizations are forced to review and adapt their organizational structure in order to address these challenges and to meet up with the needs of the communities they serve (Ogbonna and Harris, 2003). As the organizational environment becomes increasingly complex and more subjected to frequent changes, a need to change the organization's structure and adjust elements of the existing structure becomes imperative. Such restructuring may lead to crisis, depending on how it is communicated and managed within an organization.

The above assertion supports the finding of this study. Hypothesis result of restructuring variable shows it has positive and significant relationship with organizational crisis in AKTC (r = 0.652, p<0.000). This finding prompted the rejection of the null hypothesis, while the alternative hypothesis which states that 'restructuring has a positive and significant relationship with organizational crisis management' was accepted. This choice of hypothesis was supported by Bowman and Singh (1993). They submit that restructuring could be used to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of conflict management through significant changes in organizational structure, often accompanied by downsizing.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study revealed that collaboration has positive and significant relationship with organizational crisis management in AKTC; and restructuring has positive and significant relationship with organizational crisis management in AKTC. Based on these findings, it was concluded that human resource management strategies have positive and significant correlation with organizational crisis management in AKTC.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings in this study, the following recommendations are made:

i. Management of the studied company should ensure that collaborative work relations with other organizations are properly discussed and documented in order to reduce the chance of potential crisis between the organizations; and

ii. An organizational culture that promotes continuous innovativeness should be encouraged as such culture would help to keep the organization relevant and competitive overtime.

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