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The Impact of Supplier Performance on Corporate Success, a Study of Accra Brewery Limited, Ghana

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Abstract
The study examined the impact of supplier performance on corporate success with the searchlight on the operations of Accra Brewery Limited, one of the leading breweries in Ghana. The study had the objective of understanding, the general knowledge of supplier selection, evaluation, assessment and monitoring criteria as well as techniques at ABL, evaluating the benefits resulting from effective supplier performance management programs whiles identifying the challenges encountered in managing suppliers at ABL. In conducting the study, the researcher employed the purposive sampling technique to solicit views from key officials within the supply chain management unit of the company as well as some suppliers using questionnaire technique as research instrument. Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used in analyzing both qualitative and quantitative data obtained from the field. The study uncovered the facts that supplier selection techniques employed by ABL includes selecting suppliers on the basis of Quality, Delivery, Reliability, Product performance, knowledge and previous successful supplier records. It also came to light from the study that one core challenge facing ABL in managing supplier performance lies with honouring the social sustainability concept. Recommendations made called upon the authorities of ABL to advance a cohesive supplier development program by exposing local suppliers with inadequate experience to some kind of capacity building to shore up their ability to help achieve corporate goals and objectives. The study also concluded that in order to harness efficiency and effectiveness in its supply source management programs, the company pays closer attention to the origin of its materials by examining and monitoring how supplier's products and services are designed.

I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary business administration is such that organizations that can take advantage of the external business environment are those that are likely to meet their targets and therefore will be able to achieve their corporate objectives Fawcett and Fawcett (1995). Taking advantage of the business environment presupposes that organizations pursue programs that result in long term sustainability and maximization of competitiveness. One of such programs is the reorganization of the Supply chain function to eliminate waste, increase customer responsiveness, improve quality thereby resulting in overall corporate profitability, sustainable competitive advantage in the long term so as to facilitate growth and development Tracey and Tan (2001). According to Wells (2009), supply chain is defined here as a part of a network that supplies a specific product from raw material to final customer – it is a whole commercial chain embedded in the network with a common objective of efficiency and effectiveness. Efficiency, in the view of Hertz (2001), is an internal standard of performance while effectiveness is an external standard of fit to various groups' demands. Ross (2001) also notes that, efficiency is a cost-related advantage and effectiveness is an advantage of customer responsiveness within supply chain management research. This assumes that efficiency improvements, according to Ayers (2002), are achieved through Just-in-Time production and logistic supplier nets while effectiveness is achieved through customer orientation. Tracey and Tan (2001) submit that, supplier efficiency is seen as a direct influence on value while supplier effectiveness and network effects are seen as an indirect influence on value in relationships. According to Mintzberg and Waters (1998), supply chain is producing or using activity system embedded in a networking activity system in characterization of exchange systems. This implies that the production facilities are the resources that are activated throughout an organization. Pfeffer and Salancik (2003) also explain that, activities in a supply-chain are sequentially interdependent but have also pooled reciprocal interdependencies. These co-authors indicate further that, the serial interdependent activities are managed through integration of processes and adaptation of activities. The pooled interdependencies are managed through a standardization and specialization and the reciprocal interdependencies are managed through responsiveness and the capability to innovate. Decades and decades after the 2nd world war, Carter (1996) indicates that, supply chain has seen a vigorous transformation in business operations. With the passage of times, Cooper and Ellram (1993) pointed out that, it became apparent that organizations must have an efficient and effective supply function if they were to contend successfully in the global souk. Hewitt (1994) also argues that, the early 21st century has brought new challenges in the areas of sustainability, supply chain security, risk management, quality, customer responsiveness and corporate goodwill, hence, the need for effective management, evaluation and assessment of our sources of materials and inputs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to contextualize the study, researcher deemed it appropriate to review contemporary articles and publications on supply performance management and the enhancement of corporate success. According to Monczka et al (2000), the purchasing function is becoming widely recognized as an important contributor to strategic success, helping firms meet the challenges of an increasingly competitive and dynamic environment. Chen et al (2004) also submit that, strategic purchasing allows the function to play a greater role in corporate planning, reduces a firm's exposure to opportunistic behaviours leading to more successful collaborative relationships with stakeholders. According to Monczka et al (2008), managing suppliers is one of the core functions of the purchasing department this presupposes that purchasing personnel must play a strategic role in providing quality inputs to buying organizations' to meet requirements thereby satisfying customers better. The review of literature in supply performance management will essentially examine Supplier Analysis, Best Value from Suppliers, Supplier Selection, Supplier Performance, Supplier Evaluation and Inventory Management in the Brewery Industry, Supplier Development and Communication in Supply Management and ICT in Supply Chain Management.

A. Supplier Analysis

Prior to selecting a supplier, Hertz (2001) suggests that, there is the need to undertake supplier research to identify the specific capabilities and financial health of key suppliers that are in the supply base or that may not currently be in the supply industry. Monczka et al (2008) identified some of the key elements that should be documented during this research and included in a comprehensive supplier analysis study sheet fall within cost structure, financial status, customer satisfaction levels and records, support capabilities, relative strengths and weakness, core capabilities, company's strategy or future direction and of course culture. Identifying major suppliers in a market is an important first step of any organisation towards getting best value for monies expend, especially when you are talking about global market share Monczka et al (2008). It is therefore a critical step towards effective management of who qualifies to partner and become the buying firms' strategic sources of inputs.

B. Best Value from Suppliers

The ability of any organisation to outwit competition remains solely by being responsive to the need of its customers. Responsiveness is simply, the ability of firms to react quickly to changing trends in the environment within which it operates. Trent (2005) points to the fact that, severe customer and competitor pressures are a reality in today's supply chains, forcing firms to be more responsive. No company will be able to achieve this without building an enabling environment through value creation and effective relationship management. According to Chopra and Meindl (2010), the consumer goods sector is characterized by improved revenue, less inventory and higher retail level fill rates due to collaborative planning, forecasting and replenishment, which represent the open flow of promotional plans and forecast information between manufacturers and vendors. Flynn et al. (1995) acknowledge the fact that, a good supplier relationship fosters and increases the likelihood of the timely delivery of quality materials, which facilitates reduced inventory and eliminates waste and non-value-added activities. In the views of Easton and Jarrell (1998), Just-in-time (JIT) and supplier collaborative efforts relate directly with improved financial performance through reductions in supply chain inventory levels, enables the firm to reduce waste, eliminate safety stock, and create lean operations thereby improving market performance through higher quality and service levels. Krajewski and Ritzman (2001) argue that, supplier relationships have become more collaborative in order for firms to compete in a relentless environment that demands continuous quality improvements in an increasing changing consumer market. Trent (2005) notes that, deriving the best value from suppliers makes buying organizations' to remain focus, serving their customers' enough thereby nurturing markets for sustainable competitive advantage. Managing the type of relationships that exist between customer firms and supplying firms must address the critical issues identified in terms of total cost, continuous quality, efficient delivery, better service and overall reduction in downtime.

C. Supplier Selection

Selecting sources of supply does not just happen, it requires putting in place and adopting systems that effectively select and assess the performance of supplier's for continuous quality assurance. Robbins and DeCenzo (2005) are of the conviction that constant improvement in the quality and reliability of an organization's products and services will result in a competitive advantage that others cannot steal. This means, getting the best suppliers who are willing to add value through the delivery of high standard performance towards enterprise requirement is decisive. Christensen et al (2005) indicate that, new developments in modern business practices have forced organizations to hub on their core competencies leaving them with no choice than to outsource their remaining activities to outside vendors. Suppliers in most cases have even been responsible for new products designs, sub-assemblies and component parts.

These trends have made buying organizations to rely more on their suppliers for continuous improvement of their performance. As organizations have to seek performance improvement, they are recognizing their supplier base and managing it as an extension of the firm's manufacturing system resulting in more collaborative relationships. Supplier selection has therefore become crucial to optimal purchasing performance and must be done aptly. The decision to source, make or buy is determined by top management taking into cognizance the needs of the organization. Once a decision is reached, selection must be based on merits and the criteria decided. In industrial buying research, Bhutta and Huq (2002) point out that, explicit criteria such as quality, service, delivery and price have been found to dominate the supplier selection process. Tracey and Tan (2001) also found out that evaluating and selecting suppliers on the basis of quality, delivery, reliability and product performance enhances the four dimensions of customer satisfaction that is price, quality, variety and delivery whilst reflecting an improvement in firms' performance. However, Pearson and Ellram (1995) put up an argument that quality, cost, current technology and design capabilities are the most important selection criteria and the focus on these criteria improves strategic flexibility for the firm and its competitiveness.

Kotabe and Murray (2001) established the fact that supplier's competency, service quality control, transaction cost-drivers, supplier's brand image and supplier's country characteristics are more important than others. The supplier selection process should not only consider price but also a wide range of factors such as quality, organization and relationship with a view to decision making by considering the whole supplier capability in a long term and strategic approach. Source selection decision is highly complex and purchaser's most difficult responsibility. Since the supplier selection process encompasses different functions within the company, it is essentially a multi-objective problem in nature, entailing many tangible and intangible criteria and factors in a hierarchical manner, Weber et al (2000) also explain that, the relative importance of evaluative criteria varies largely in accordance with the nature of the selection situation and is complicated further by the fact that some criteria are quantitative (price, quality, etc.), while others are qualitative (service, flexibility, etc.). Talluri and Sarkis (2002) also indicate that, establishment of proper weights for each evaluation criterion increases the level of uncertainty inherent in the selection process and decision making becomes difficult when the available information is incomplete and/or inaccurate. Bhutta and Huq (2002) are of the conviction that, another complication facing buying firms' surrounding the supplier selection decision arises from internal policy constraints and externally imposed system constraints placed on the buying process.

Hagel and Brown (2005) note that, the criteria included in the supplier selection process may frequently contradict each other thus, lowest price against poor quality. Therefore, it requires substantial judgment to assess the wide range of trade-offs present, to recognize all the alternatives available and to make a decision, which balances both the short and the long-term needs of an organization. Furthermore, as organizational requirements and market conditions change, the importance of the analysis of tradeoffs among the selection criteria may be increased. The set of relevant supplier selection criteria, according to Trent (2005), is believed to change over time, reflecting business and competitive environments, new development and individual organizational needs. That notwithstanding, the researcher considers among other criterion consideration should be given to quality, total cost, reliability, vendor capacity, structure, internal policy, cultural values, competency, flexibility in source selection.

D. Supplier Performance

Kontis and Vrysagotis (2011) are of the opinion that, procurement and supply chain has gained an increasingly important recognition within most firms. Improving supply chain performance is part of the transformation that has occurred within the purchasing function of mere order placement to having well-structured systems to track suppliers performance for a better decision making. Contemporary trends show that, severe financial and operational consequences can result from the failure to strategically optimize the procurement and supply chain function Monczka et al (2008). Expressly, appropriate supplier performance management is one of the fundamental strategies for enhancing the quality of output desired by customers to any organization and has a direct influence on the company's competitiveness and reputation. According to Monczka et al (2008), remaining competitive means, supply management must contribute to profitability by focusing on not only cost savings, but also contributes to top-line growth and innovation. World-class supply management requires that leaders align with business unit stakeholders, understand their direct and indirect requirements for success, develop a deep insight into the global supply market's ability to meet these requirements and negotiate contracts whilst managing supplier relationships and performance that create a competitive advantage. This however is a dynamic and difficult task, given the complexity and challenges that exist under current market conditions and increasing customer requirements.

Supplier performance, according to Beamon (1998), refers to the ability of suppliers to deliver raw materials to the firm on time and in good condition. While few committed suppliers will guarantee that supplies are on time, some might not be totally involved. An involved supplier will work assiduously to enable firms' reduce their total costs in a collaborative manner meeting customer needs and increased better performance. Managing the source of inputs has therefore become very critical in meeting the 21st century manufacturing needs. Ross (2011) reiterated that the acquisition of raw materials, components and finished goods necessary to service channel network and end-customer demand resides at the very core of supply chain management (SCM).The most efficient way to maximize productivity is to decisively control sources of inputs to reduce if not to eliminate the cost of quality. It is therefore vital the timely acquisition of inventory and supplier performance maximization remains fundamental to gaining competitive advantage.

Wells (2009) is of the view another dimension to performance management is that, companies have begun to look to their supplier and customer channels as sources of cost reduction and process improvement. Companies are investing in computerized techniques and management methods, such as enterprise resource planning (ERP), business process management (BPM), Six-Sigma and Lean process management and have extended these to the management of the supply chain in an effort to optimize and activate highly supple, accessible manufacturing and distribution functions across a network of supply and delivery partners. The goal, according to Li (2006), is to obstinately eradicate all forms of waste where supply chain entities touch while enabling the creation of a linked, customer-centric and virtual supply channels capable of unbeatable quality and service. Coupled with the above, Robbins and DeCenzo (2005) explain that, businesses have continued to divest themselves of functions that were either not profitable or for which they had weak competencies where they have found that by closely collaborating with their suppliers, new avenues for competitive advantage can be unearthed. Achieving these advantages can only occur when entire supply chains work seamlessly to leverage complementary competencies. Chopra and Meindl (2010) submit that, collaboration can take the form of outsourcing noncore operations to channel specialists or leveraging complimentary partner capabilities to facilitate the creation of new products or speed delivery to the marketplace. The synergy created will result in development of competencies towards competitiveness. Improved supplier performance is required to make these a reality. According to Weber et al (2004), constant and continuous review and monitoring of performance will enable partners' greater value and customer responsiveness. The pursuit of competitive advantage, improved quality, customer centric organization and long term sustainability makes optimal supplier performance a new thinking. More recently, Li et al. (2006) advanced five dimensions of Supply Change Management (SCM) practices thus, strategic supplier partnership, customer relationship, level of information sharing, quality of information sharing and postponement and tested the relationships between SCM practices, competitive advantage and organisational performance. The analysis of the data collected from 196 organizations indicated that higher levels of SCM practice can lead to enhanced competitive advantage and improved organisational performance.

III. CONCLUSIONS

- **Supplier Selection Techniques being employed by ABL:** The study can conclude that ABL's supplier selection techniques is based on quality, smart delivery, reliability, product performance and previous track records of suppliers. Moreover selection technique is also strategized to bring about customer satisfaction through control, competency, capacity and creativity. Supplier selection techniques should therefore take cognizance of variety and delivery records thereby enhancing overall firm's performance.

- **Challenges faced by ABL in managing suppliers performance:** The study is in the position to conclude that key challenges facing ABL in managing supplier performance include the difficulty in managing the social sustainability concept which makes it obligatory for the company to hand down supply jobs to local SMEs most of which do not exert the capacity and capability to discharge such business contracts judiciously. ABL faces further supplier performance management challenges in that the company does not have any structured supplier development program in place. The unstable nature of the local currency, the Ghanaian cedi, poses a big challenge to efforts at managing the suppliers' performance at ABL. Based on the above, ABL must therefore develop structures that focus on supplier development in other to gain sustainable competitive advantage. The need to nature and maintain partnership will offer ABL great returns in the long term.

- **Measures at harnessing efficiency and effectiveness in supply management programs at ABL:** It is worth concluding from the study that in order to harness efficiency and effectiveness in source management program at ABL, the company pays closer attention to the origin of materials by critically examining how supplier's products and services are designed. ABL should further build into its structures how to maximize the production of goods as well as evaluating the means of transportation to increase supply chain efficiency in order to ensure competence and value of source management program. ABL must continuously demonstrate caution of how their products and services are created and distributed to customers. Again, the company must take advantage of customer responsiveness initiatives by paying particular attention to what its direct customers and the end-product consumers really want. This will provides great potential for market share increase and sustainability of position.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the problems and challenges uncovered in the study the following recommendations are mandatory.

- **Building the Capacity of Local Suppliers to enhance their Performance:** The study noted that although the social sustainability concept dictates that ABL engages local SMEs suppliers in their supply chain activities a good number of them lack the capacity and competence to effectively execute their obligations to meet desires of the company. It is hereby recommended that conscious effort is made by the management of ABL to expose these SMEs to some kind of capacity building workshops so as to soar up their ability to properly help achieve corporate goals of the company. Suppliers who benefits should also help contribute towards the upkeep of such training and skills development sessions.

- **Difficulty in Developing Suppliers for long term mutual benefits:** The study discovered that one other problem facing ABL in effectively managing the performance of suppliers has to do with the fact that it is getting increasingly difficult to develop suppliers for a long-term partnership relation. It is therefore recommended that in short listing suppliers for contracts, serious efforts are made to ensure that selected suppliers are willing to enter into long term relationship and have the capacity to sustain development programs. Additionally, management of ABL should quickly put in place structures that support collaboration such us Strategic Supplier Development Programs. This will result in long-term competitive advantage since local suppliers enrolled on the program will further improve their performance to offer corporate benefits through diligent and dedicated services to the company.

- **Unstable Value of the Local Currency on Corporate Success:** The study noted that with most of ABL's raw materials imported, the unstable value of the local currency, the cedi often increases operation cost thereby adversely affecting the fortunes of the organization. This problems, like high inflation, high interest rates, are all macro-economic constraints which are way beyond the control of the brewery. Consequently, the only way forward is for management to reduce operation cost especially by implementation of automation and more lean and agile operation procedures to reduce the quantum of operational cost to compensate for the erosion in profit as result of such external shocks as depreciation of the local currency etc.

- **Streamlining facilities to enhance import business:** The study also made bare the fact that import business facilities such as import licensing, clearing procedure at the port of Entry, import duty etc. are not the best and contribute in no small measure towards discounting the suppliers performance towards enhancing the corporate success of ABL. It is hereby recommended that government of Ghana takes a second look not only at import licensing procedure but also goods clearing procedure at the Ports and Harbours by reducing the clearing time as well as waive some of the taxes paid by manufacturing importers. High import duty often translates into increasing cost of production and by extension high prices of ABL products. Compared with imported finished products especially from the Far East, ABL products are not competitive and therefore adversely affect the revenue base of the company.

- **Recommendation for Further Studies:** It is also recommended that, other researchers should continue by assessing the financial impact of supplier's performance to organizations' success. The desire of the researcher was to ascertain the financial impact of suppliers' performance on companies' success. This however could not be done due to time constraints.

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