



CEOs' CORPORATE PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA: THE GENERALIST AND SPECIALIST PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS:

*Corporate, Generalist,
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The evaluation of the corporate performance delivered by the chief executive officer from the background of a generalist or specialist is the focus of this paper. They both have their respective responsibilities and pattern of operations in performing in the organisation. The inputs of both generalist and specialist are critical to the smooth and successful running of the organisation because the organisation itself exists as a system that has various facets and requires inputs from different sources. The system theory here explains the importance of the contributions of the each of the sub-units and sides to contribute to the success of the whole organisation. The skills and competencies required from the generalist and specialist therefore become inevitable in managing a successful organisation. These expected competencies and capabilities are viewed as the invaluable characteristics of the generalist and specialist in the management team. The generalist's characteristics of understanding and in-depth knowledge of the system approach, ability of the group dynamic management, broad based knowledge of the fundamentals of all the system and subunits, global view orientation in management and other vital characteristics are considered very essential and are ascribed to the generalist. The specialist's characteristics of expertise on the other hand, being the master of the task, be focused, in-depth knowledge and experience of specific areas, vital contribution to overall organisation's results and consulting skills of the specialized area are also evaluated and established to very essential also. Effectiveness of performance of the generalist and specialist is also examined considering the work rotation and work team approach which is widely adopted by global organisations in modern business environment. In concluding, though both the generalist and specialist are considered very vital but to operate competitively and succeed in the current business world, corporate performance results have clear backings that the generalist taking up the responsibilities of the CEO is considered the way to go for a modern world class organisation.

INTRODUCTION

Human resources management requires the skill sets of executives who can drive the organisation to success. There are executives with the competencies of very technical and specialized field and there are also executives with just basic and general knowledge of various fields but with capabilities of coordinating, leading and controlling, and ensuring smooth interaction and interdependence of various units to ensure that the overall organizational objectives are achieved. Anderson (2012) indicates that organizations rely on the skills

of innovative individuals at the top to drive the strategic goals of organisation and create value and further points out that executives in these fields can be divided into two categories which are; specialists, who have a deep knowledge of a single area, and generalists, who have knowledge in a wide variety of areas. This can be likened to having people with broad based capabilities and having others with specific and focused expertise; they are commonly known as the generalists and specialists respectively. Roy (1964) defines a generalist as someone that has knowledge of the technique of the process

involved in an organisation and carry out the technical undertakings in administration but he is not an expert. A specialist on the other hand is a person whose special training makes him an authority in a particular field. The complexity and integration of the modern organisations, is indicative of the fact that it is hard to be successful at top leadership levels without a broad perspective that allows one to think and lead beyond his or her own functional or geographical limit. These two distinct people – the generalist and specialist, are what modern organisations require to operate, compete and succeed. This article briefly examines these two types of management personalities from the system point of view and highlighting their fundamental characteristics. There are also examples of people who have headed organisations with their background training reflecting their generalist or specialist positions, thus reflecting who among them is more at the top as chief executive officer (CEO).

THE SYSTEMS APPROACH

In organisation the system is a reflection of the activities of the functions performed by the people. Both generalists and specialists operate in the system; with tendency of the specialists being favourably more disposed to the system approach in working in the organisation. The reason for this is simply each part has its focus which is what the specialist will always want. The system is made up of different parts that when put together form the organisation. This is driven by the system theory. The system theory is focused on viewing the organisation as a whole entity and as interrelationship of its parts (Lussier, 2009). The earlier theorists of the system approach started by considering an organisation as system that transforms resources (otherwise known as inputs) into products and services (also known as the output). For this transformation of through production to happen, it is the managers who drive all the activities that lead to the transformation of inputs into outputs. Lussier (2009) further explains that system theory stresses the need for managers to be equipped with conceptual skills so as to easily understand how the subsystems in an organisation interrelate and individually contribute to the overall goals of the organisation. All organisations' functional specialists or experts and management generalists are concerned with their works / tasks and their larger environment respectively.

Functional specialists and management generalists are different types of professionals in business, and both types can serve a purpose in an organization. The styles are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and functional specialists may be asked to serve in a generalist managerial capacity or vice versa. In a busy small business, staff may be asked to switch interchangeably between both approaches, depending on what is needed for the organization.

In organisations, the *generalist managers* tend to focus on developing other managers' skills in technical or specialist areas, such as finance, accounting, production *management*, *supply chain management*, *marketing*, and *customer management*. They would rather tend not to develop skills in the area they are managing. The generalists acquire the basic skill sets expected for all the specialist areas. This is to enable the generalist to identify management issues, problems or challenges that may arise from any of the specialist area. The generalists operate as the system manager, understanding every bit of the system that forms the whole organisation. The role of the generalist in the organisational decision making

process is that of introducing extra-disciplinary values (Deepak, 1964). The generalist in most cases carry out the work of a leader and manager in the organisation, though the responsibility and the required ability too execute both responsibility differ. (Park, 2005).

There are distinct characteristics these different groups of people display in the course of dispensing their duties and responsibilities in the organisation. The generalist understands the system theory and system interrelationship. That is the interrelationship among the different units in a system, especially in large organisation which require some special skills to manage. The relationship in some cases could be complex such that if not properly handle could disrupt smooth flow of operations of the corporate entity. Due to a broader interrelationship with people in different units of the organisation, the generalist gets to have thorough grab of the interrelationship and interplay of these people and units or departments. Also, the generalist manages group dynamics. This implies that as organisations are run by people and they are at times in groups or segments, working together to achieve the overall success of the organisation, there are bound to be changes and movement of the people, structures, process or materials of the various segments or departments. The continuous agility of organisation is dependent on the smooth interaction of the groups. The group process is usually guided by the law of interdependency and the doctrine of the whole (Sapru, 2013). The group dynamics could result into conflict if the group process is faulty in interactions. Usually the interest of the whole emerge from the process of interdependency and synthesis of ideas, actions and feelings of the members that make up the group. The generalist requires the full understanding of how the group process flow from the point of formation to achieving and delivering overall results. The management of group dynamics therefore is a critical ability and knowledge required of a generalist.

There is issue of adapting to change. The management generalists are more skillful at adapting to changes and because the ability to drive change throughout the business increases organizational flexibility and allow the company to react to internal and external threats and opportunities. Although management generalists do not typically have deep level of knowledge in any one area like the specialists, the generalists' basic knowledge of a wide variety of subjects allow generalists to seek out information more easily because they know what to look for and who to source the data from (Benjamin, 2015). The management generalists won't take on the responsibility of self-development of specialized knowledge rather they just need the ability to identify the person with the knowledge needed. Besides, the generalist has a global view of managerial approach. The generalists consider at situations in the organisation as with total environment approach and focuses on activities out there around all the facets that make up the whole organizational environment (Nickols, 2004). The generalists focal point is on the context of the environment out there in the organisation; both internal and external. The generalists manage the surrounding condition using the strategy of dealing with all the available resources by majorly deploying the resources to the appropriate areas where they can achieve maximum results. This approach is broad based and interest is across board. In carrying out the organisation's activities there is clearly a centralized operating authority which revolves around the generalist. An organisation's overall authority is the power bestowed upon the generalists' positions and

responsibilities. The authority is activated with order addressed to another person to act (Sapru, 2003). The generalists in their characteristic manner will always want to manage and control the authority at a central point where they are in charge since this is what give them power to operate. They feel that to decentralize the authority will mean diluting the power they have to manage the organisations. They rather keep their authority within their central positions.

Another key characteristic and responsibility of the generalist is managing Team to Success. Generalists may perform better in mixed-specialty teams because they have a greater understanding of the issues different team members are facing, meaning that they can communicate more easily with the other group members. For this reason, a team made up of generalists might actually perform better on a group task than a team consisting of functional experts, even though the level of technical expertise is not as good. A management generalist heading a team must guard against the team listening disproportionately to his opinions, and inadvertently ignoring the expert information provided by functional specialists. Leadership quality or virtue is essential ingredient in a generalist skills and competencies. In most organisations across different industry, the ultimate leadership positions require a generalist approach to management. It may be difficult for a functional specialist to make a transition in career building as technical expertise focused on a professional specialty to transit into overall management team leader.

The generalist has a macro-orientation and breadth disposition of operations in an organisation. The generalist possesses a macro orientation which is characterized with broad based and wide breadth of knowledge of the operations in the organisation. The generalist tends to aspire strongly to climb to the top echelon of the organisation (Ceasare&Thornton, 1993). The generalist is more focused on the total success of the organisation as a whole. To achieve this overall success of the organisation, the generalist ensures all segment of the system are up and running at the same speed that would create sustainable synergy for optimum performance and results. There is also the organisation commitment and loyalty in the generalists. The generalist exhibits total commitment and loyalty to the organisation. Top on his or her mind is that "this house must not fall" thinking keeps him or her obsessed about the organisation. The generalist is optimistic and assertive about achieving success for the overall organisation. This characteristic is a reflection of the loyalty in the organisation as generalist does not believe in the independency of a particular unit for success, rather all the units or departments are priority for the generalist at all times. It is also noticed in organisations that individuals who are classified as generalist follow on the similar type of career trajectory in that these individuals and their organisations are usually engaged in adding substantial elements of education, training and development to their early career level qualifications (Kelly et al, 2011).

On the flip side of the personality, skills and competencies of the generalist is that of the specialist with distinct features or characteristics. The specialist in the true sense, is a technical expert and master in specific field. If a situation calls for technical expertise with a significant depth of knowledge, a functional specialist is the best choice to handle and solve the situation. This is observed in fields such as medicine where an uncommon ailment on a patient will

require a technical or specialized type of surgery which can only be performed by specialists. The technical expertise in such a case is obtained from higher or further training which is usually encouraged by the generalists. There are certain specialist industries such as information technology and science, and in such fields, an individual's entire career progression is often dependent on his or her expert knowledge as a functional specialist; this is what make the individual to grow in an organisation. It is obvious that total organisation results is dependent on units' achievement / results. Specialists in the various departments and units are the ones that the organisation is truly dependent upon. The specialists ensure that their various part do not bring any hitch to the overall operations. The specialist has the organisation consulting skills. Generalists are able to work on a broader set of problems, and thus their scope is larger than that of specialists. There is therefore a tradeoff between the depth of skill gained through specialization and the scope gained through generalization (Anderson, 2012).

Businesses will often require and retain functional specialists for detailed consulting expertise in particular areas. For small and medium size entrepreneurial businesses, using a consultant is a good alternative because it will not be economically wise to hire someone on a permanent or full-time basis if the businesses are not on proper footings. For example, while a larger company might have a tax professional on staff, a smaller company might contract with an expert only during tax season. Large and small companies typically need a management generalist on staff, but generalists also can be used in a consultant capacity, often to diagnose general management and leadership problems such as productivity issues. Also, on the backing of the specialist, there is the principle of Specialization and division of labour. The idea of division of labour is majorly to ensure works are carried out more easily and hitch-free. There is also the advantage of increasing production better than when all the jobs are lumped up together in the organisation. Young (1966) indicates that specialist is an instructional leadership person with specific defined responsibilities. Each specialist focuses on his or her task where he has the best competence and skills. The rate of production is increased over time because the specialist must have gotten used to the operational process and therefore carry out the work with less effort but more output.

It is obvious that the specialist has the depth of skill and expertise in the organisation. The specialist has a deeper understanding and knowledge of the specific field. Specialist is defined as a professional who is trained in a singular discipline, concerned with the increasing and perfection of the skills and value recognition from his or her specialist peers. With the depth of knowledge, the specialist shows more interest in the skills and the professional bodies in his or her field. Loyalty therefore is less to the organisation and more to the professional group which is where he or she feels that is where the or she belongs. There is also the inclination on division of labour in the case of a specialist. The desire to achieve better performance through higher output of product and services has made companies to insist on division of labour in their operations. Of course, this is the modern way of business management. Division of labour brings about increase in the rate of production with specialization being emphasized in the factories. Workers are made to specialize in what they have the best skills to deliver. This gives the workers focus on their jobs and concentration in developing

their skills and competencies to becoming better and improved specialist every day. They know and have the depth knowledge of their jobs which make them to strive for continuous improvement. They feel, with division of labour, one should be on top of his or her job at any time and should ensure there is no failure or slack in the specialized segment.

Corporate Performance

Effective performance of managers has its roots in a variety of factors which include education, experience, enabling environment, knowledge and skill of the task at hand, human relation ability and structure of organisation, managerial skills of planning, organizing, coordinating and control, and the zeal to succeed. It is obvious that formal education is standard for the top tier of the modern business world. However, there are few exceptions such as Bill Gate and Michael Dell who are world renowned top Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) but have no university degree. This shows that though education is important but it remains just one among the many key factors that propels someone to climb to the top in business.

On the job, the CEO's performance and determination whether it is different or not is established defining of the task and objectives of the job and its corresponding responsibilities followed with a mid-year review and an end of year assessment of performance and delivery of results. In modern global best practice also suggest that an effective CEO performance evaluation process is integrated with the company's calendar of business planning and compensation review. In any case at the top leadership position with the understanding that the CEO is a generalist, understanding all facet of the business. The performance is usually evaluated from the point of what is the contribution to the bottom line, what is operational impact and what is the leadership style.

The corporate performance of an organisation which would always be attributed to the capability of the CEO could also be viewed from the accounting-based dimension and the market-based dimension (Al-Matari, Al-Swidi & BtFadzil, 2014). The company's performance is viewed from the financial statement reported by the company and this covers both the accounting and market dimensions. When the performance looks great, a good

performing CEO would push and reinforce management for quality disclosure. The measure of corporate performance is its growth and long-term survival which could be interpreted to be continuous improvement of organizational performance to meet its corporate goal of existence (Jenatabadi, 2015). Corporate performance generally has in common the effectiveness or ability of realization of the objective of organization. Further considerations show that Cherrington (1989) explains organizational performance as a concept of success or effectiveness of an organization, and as an indication of the organizational manner that it is performing effectively to achieve its objectives successfully. Whatever dimension the corporate measures is placed, the CEO's target is to attain the best possible results in all ramifications to satisfy the shareholders and stakeholders of the organisation.

EDUCATIONAL RELEVANCE TO CEOS ACHIEVEMENT

In the upper echelons theory, it is indicated that the demographic characteristics and background of top management team members influence strategic decisions, which can directly impact organizational performance and firm value creation. Obviously, education helps define the proper demographics and background of the top executive (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). In highlighting the top echelon position of few organisations in Nigeria, it is obvious that more of the generalists head their organisations but they in one way or the other obtain business education from one college or business school. Datta and Datta (2014) indicate education is valuable and relevant to the top leadership positions because firms use relevance of education as a signal of managerial ability for the positions of leadership in organisations. In the human capital theory, it is simply explained that the unique managerial capabilities that top executives bring to the organization influence the organisation's output and also their compensation (Andrews, 1971). The table below shows the educational background and basic specialization of CEOs from the Nigerian business environment, it shows that top leaders and CEOs are far from being specialist in the field of management or business administration, but they have grown their organisations to enviable levels.

Table 1: Summary of Top Nigerian CEOs and Their Educational Background

| | Name of CEO | Position & Organisation | Area of Business | Course Studied /specialization | Remarks |
|----|------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Adesola K. Adetutan | Group MD/CEO First Bank Nig. Plc | Finance & Banking | Doctor of Veterinary Medicine | Generalist |
| 2 | Leo-Stan Ekeh | CEO, Zinox | ICT | Economics | Generalist |
| 3 | Aliko Dangote | Group CEO, Dangote Group | FMCG, Oil & Gas, Construction | Business Administration | Specialist |
| 4 | Mike Adenuga | CEO Globacom | Telecoms | Business Administration | Generalist |
| 5 | Florence Seriki | CEO, Omatek Plc | ICT | Chemical Engineering | Generalist |
| 6 | Mosunmola Abudu | CEO, EbonyLife TV | TV Broadcasting | Management | Generalist |
| 7 | Michael Arumeni-Ikhide | CEO, Arik Airlines | Air Transport | Chemical Engineering | Generalist |
| 8 | Chidi Okoro | CEO, UAC Foods | Foods & Confectioneries | | Generalist |
| 9 | Michael Ikpoki | CEO, MTN | Telecoms | Law | Generalist |
| 10 | Udeme Ufort | CEO, SO & U Advertising | Advertising | Industrial Art & Design | Specialist |
| 11 | Funke Okpeke | CEO, MainOne | ICT | Electrical Engineering | Generalist |
| 12 | Felix O Nwabuko | CEO, Presco Plc | Agriculture & Manufacturing | Accounting | Generalist |
| 13 | Nnamdi Okafor | CEO, May & Baker | Pharmaceuticals | Pharmacy | Specialist |
| 14 | Stella Okoli | CEO, Emzor | Pharmaceuticals | Pharmacy | Specialist |
| 15 | Oba Otudeko | CEO, HoneyWell Group | Flour & Confectioneries | Accounting | Generalist |
| 16 | Tony Elumelu | Chairman, Heirs Holdings | Investments, Oil & Gas | Economics | Specialist |
| 17 | Peter Amangbo | CEO, Zenith Bank | Banking | Engineering | Generalist |
| 18 | Uzome Dozie | CEO, Diamond Bank | Banking | Chemistry | Generalist |
| 19 | Yinka Sanni | CEO, Stanbic IBTC | Investment & Banking | Agric Economics | Generalist |
| 20 | Paul Gbededo | CEO, Flour Mills Plc | Flour & Pasta Manufacturing | Plastic & Rubber | Generalist |

Source: Ochelle, F. O (2015). *Most Nigeria Influential CEO in 2015*. Retrieved from: <http://venturesafrica.com/ethiopia-is-africas-fastest-growing-economy-as-the-imf-dismiss-impact-of-us-china-trade-war-on-africa/> Retrieved on 16th April, 2018.

Similarly, top leadership jobs in key organisations in the United States are more occupied by generalists who also later acquire some education in management to support their job in

driving the strategic goals of these organisations to success. The table below shows the educational background and basic specialization of CEOs in some key company in the USA.

Table 2: Summary of Top American CEOs and Their Educational Background

| | Name of CEO | Position & Organisation | Area of Business | Course Studied /specialization | Remarks |
|----|-------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------|
| 1 | Larry Page | CEO, Alphabet (Parent Google) | ICT | Engineering | Generalist |
| 2 | Sundar Pichai | CEO, Google | ICT | Metallurgical Engineering | Generalist |
| 3 | Mark Peter | CEO, Nike | Sport | Political Science | Generalist |
| 4 | Warren Buffet | CEO, Berkshire Hathaway | Investments & Finance | Business Administration | Generalist |
| 5 | Tim Cook | CEO, Apple | ICT | Industrial Engineering | Generalist |
| 6 | John S. Watson | CEO, Chevron Corporation | Oil and Gas | Agric Economics | Generalist |
| 7 | Bob Iger | CEO, The Walt Disney Company | Entertainment | Radio & TV | Specialist |
| 8 | Howard Schultz | CEO, Starbucks | Eatery & Confectionaries | Communication | Generalist |
| 9 | Doug McMillion | CEO, Wat-Mart Stores | FMCG & Retailing | Business Administration | Specialist |
| 10 | Meg Whitman | CEO, Hewlett Packard | ICT | Economics | Generalist |
| 11 | Satya Nadelia | CEO, Microsoft | ICT | Electrical Engineering | Generalist |
| 12 | Jeff Bezos | CEO, Amazon | Books & Online Marketing | Computer Engineering | Generalist |
| 13 | Mary T. Barra | CEO, General Motors | Automobiles | Computer Engineering | Generalist |
| 14 | Jeremy Stoppleman | CEO, Paypal | Online Payment | Computer Engineering | Generalist |

Source: Williams, T. (2017). America's Top CEOs and their College Degrees. Retrieved from: <http://www.investopedia.com/articles/articles/professionals/1022015/americas-top-ceos-and-their-college-degrees.asp> Retrieved on 16th April, 2018.

THE CONCEPT OF WORK ROTATION AND WORK TEAM

Working in modern global oriented organisations provides the managers the opportunities of moving from one job to another especially, jobs with responsibilities that are interrelated and similar in approach. In some organisations, mostly multinationals such as Unilever, Nestle, Cadbury and Heineken International (Nigerian Breweries Plc), the newly recruited managers are assigned to work around all the department for a minimum of six months in each department. As a manger grows upward in the career ladder, there is the tendency of rotating job; that is to move from one department to another. However, this idea of rotation on the job and growth to the top leadership is hinged on the capability and policies of the human resource department in the process of recruitment, training retention and reward. Potential leaders and movers of the organisation are identified at their entry point or early day days in the organisation. The organisation also creates work team in the different departments across the organisation. The potential or spotted future leaders are made to be part of the team and at the same time they are made to move from department to department. The essence of such movement is to groom the future leaders in preparation to moving to the top echelon and taking up the leadership task of the Chief Executive Officer or Executive Directors in the organisation.

Team work is key to organisational success but the coordination and management of the team requires some fundamental skills and knowledge of the task so that the leaders or CEO can easily understand what is going on in each of the units at all times and also empathize with the personnel carrying out the jobs.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Generalists believe their familiarities with the ability to pain, coordinate, control and control management process helps foster collaboration among the various sub-system and earn overall results. Specialist, on the other hand, believe they have the industry-specific expertise needed to address a project's nuances for prompt efficient delivery. Generalists believe their familiarity with project management processes helps foster coloration among stakeholders and earn results. As business become more integrated and work become more cross functional, there is increasing need for people who can lead beyond their silos and be broad based in their approach and thinking.

It is known that management is broader in scope that expertise in organisation. The manager has to be a generalist in knowledge and in action while expert is a specialist in knowledge and in action (Roy, 1964). Generalist have the skills sets expected of management person which include the capabilities and competencies of planning, organisation, leading controlling. On the other hand, the specialists have the capabilities and competencies required of an expert in specific fields of focus. Specialist is very essential in an organisation because of the valuable contribution and holding on strongly on the organisational intendency and interrelationship chain. Since the generalists have some fundamental knowledge of all facets of operation in the organisation, they can manage the business but will definitely run at a very slow speed with low production quality quantity. This situation cannot survive an organisation in the modern business environment; then will get out of business. With the specialist, the business can run smoothly and fast competing

favourable in the business environment, even with some leading edge enhanced by the inputs of these specialists. The absence of specialists in the organisation means the system interdependency is weak for good results to be achieved. Both generalist and specialists are essential to operate competitively. The generalist operates with wide breadth of knowledge and skills required for effective operations. While trying to do everything through the basic knowledge and experience of all the subsystems, specialist is just focused on the specialized skill which is where he or she belongs, at times not minding what happen to other part of the organisation. Following the preceding positions to operate as part or incomplete system flow by specialist is a reflection of mediocrity for the leadership and management team, this therefore explains the importance and leading edge of the generalist as the CEO, above the single skill and silo-type competency of the specialist in an organisation. This is actually the path to tread for an organisation to remain successfully in modern business environment. Successful leaders are those who have a wide breadth of knowledge and capabilities, and depth of understanding of the core business of their organisation and they are generalists.

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