SELF-AWARENESS AND SALES REPS PERFORMANCE: INSIGHTS FROM INSURANCE SALESPEOPLE IN PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the influence of self-awareness on sales reps' performance. The survey research method was adopted for the study on a population comprising twenty five (25) insurance firms in Port Harcourt. The simple random sampling technique was adopted and executives (marketing manager, customer relationship manager and supervisors) and six (6) staff was drawn from each of three departments of these insurance companies to serve as test units. A total of 225 respondents thus participated in the study. However, data discerned from 200 copies of questionnaire were utilized in the final analyses. These 200 copies of questionnaire represents 98 per cent response rate. A 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire served as the research instrument. The study adopted descriptive statistics and simple regressions statistics to examine the influence of self-awareness on sales reps' performance. The results showed that self-awareness has a moderate, positive and statistically significant influence on customer expansion, but a strong, positive and statistically significant influence on customer service. The study concludes that self-awareness drives performance of sales reps of insurance firms in Port Harcourt, and recommends that managers of insurance firms in Port Harcourt that desire to spur improved performance of salespeople should orchestrate learning opportunities that enable them improve self-awareness.

Keywords: Customer expansion, insurance firms, sales representatives' performance, self-awareness

INTRODUCTION

Insurance companies play important roles in society, since they help to stimulate the economy. This is because the sector is a part of an economy's immune and repair system,

and its successful operation may provide energy for other industries and economic progress (Abate, 2012). Indeed, well-developed and evolved quoted insurance firms are vital to economic development; they generate long-term money for long-term investment while also strengthening the country's risk-taking ability. Insurance firms become more important to businesses and individuals when they compensate for losses, thereby protecting society's economic activities from collapse. Insurers serve society economically and socially not only by preventing losses, but also by reducing anxiety and fear, increasing employment, and generating accumulated premiums for long-term investment. As a result, insurance firms, like any other firms, are expected to keep improving their performance in order to maintain their role in society. In this context, sales reps' performance and accountability is critical to insurance firms' long-term success (Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2015). A sales rep is an employee whose job is to sell the firm's products. Zain and Jan (2014) state that sales reps' effectiveness is a recurrent discourse in business. They constitute the lifeblood of a business (Rahman *et al.*, 2015). The competitiveness of firms in high-tech industries largely depends on the performance flow of salespeople (Uddin *et al.*, 2013). Hence, salespeople need certain communication and interpersonal skills in order to build and improve customer relationships.

This study therefore, focuses on examining the influence of self-awareness on sales reps' performance. Self-awareness is treated unidimensionally, while sales reps' performance is decomposed into customer expansion and customer service. The study is guided by the following null hypotheses and conceptual framework.

     Ho_1: Self-awareness has no significant influence on customer expansion.

     Ho_2: Self-awareness has no significant influence on customer service.
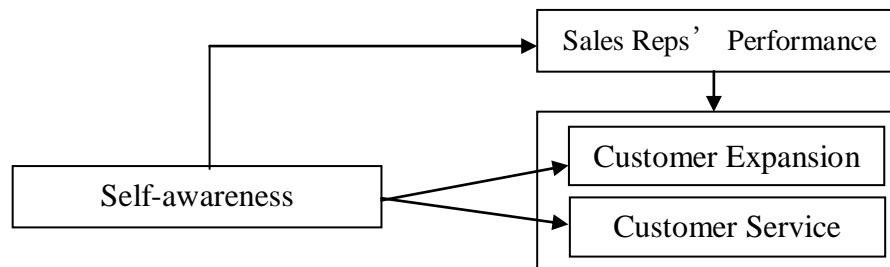

Figure 1:   Conceptual framework of self-awareness and sales reps' performance

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Intrapersonal and Interpersonal Intelligence Theory

The intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence theory serves as the baseline theory for this study. Emotional intelligence is a collection of skills that guide and control one's feelings towards work and work performance. These abilities are embodied in individuals' capacity to control and manage their moods and impulses while on the job. Knowing one's emotions and sentiments as they arise, as well as tuning one's self to changing situation, necessitates emotional competency, emotional maturity, and emotional sensitivity required on the job. Employee effectiveness is dependent on working with a group of people who have a variety of ideas, proposals, and perspectives (Ashforth *et al.*, 2015). Salespeople require great emotional intelligence since they represent the company to consumers, interact with the most people both inside and outside the company, and set the tone for employee morale.

Salespeople that have a high level of self-awareness are better equipped to comprehend the requirements of customers. Success in sales requires emotional intelligence and the ability to understand consumers and deliver service to customers (Bridget & Murray, 2008).

Howard Gardner, renowned for theories on intelligence, argued that people had intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence. Intrapersonal intelligence is the ability to access and understand ones' own feelings and emotions, as well as the ability to apply that knowledge to direct and explain behavior (Gardner, 2008). Interpersonal intelligence, on the other hand, is the ability to read and understand the moods, temperaments, and motives of others; and using that information to guide conversations and decisions (Hetherington & Parke, 2003).

CONCEPT OF SELF-AWARENESS

Self-awareness is concerned with one, knowing both the causes and effects of their moods and emotions, as well as how they evolve and change through time (George, 2000). Ateke and Amangala (2021) conceive self-awareness as individuals' conscious experience of their emotions; and their ability to recognize and make sense of theirs' and others' thoughts and emotions. Self-awareness is the most important skill related to workplace emotional intelligence; and involves individuals' insightfulness of their inner beliefs, emotions, strengths and weaknesses (Ateke & Amanagala, 2021). According to Yeung (2009), the first step to becoming emotionally intelligent is to become as self-aware as possible. Emotional intelligence is a relatively new concept that was introduced to the business world by Goleman (2008). Goleman (2008) is of the view that emotional intelligence may be more beneficial for managing corporate affairs than cognitive concepts. Many researchers have developed on the topic since Goleman's seminal works (Freedman & Everret, 2004).

Self-awareness is a set of emotional skills that enable individuals to be more productive at work and establish exceptional connections. Greaves and Bradberry (2009) conceive self-awareness as the ability to perceive one's own emotions and the consequences of those emotions. Studies suggest that those who are conscious of their emotions are more productive at work because they are aware of and comprehend their moods, feelings, and needs, as well as the impact of their actions on others (Goleman, 2008). People who have a high level of clarity about their feelings are better at managing their lives and can channel their good emotions into completing objectives.

Self-awareness emphasizes the significance of understanding one's own feelings and how they influence one's performance. The most important skill related to workplace emotional intelligence is self-awareness. Grayson (2013) described self-awareness as the ability to detect and distinguish one's feelings, to understand what one is feeling and why, and to understand what generated the sensations. If emotional intelligence were a voyage, self-awareness would be the talent for map reading (Yeung, 2009). The ability to critically evaluate one's own thinking and make behavioral changes can lead to a deeper understanding of oneself, which can lead to a greater understanding of others (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). George (2010) concludes that self-awareness is concerned with knowing both the causes and effects of moods and emotions, as well as how they evolve and change over time. People differ in their understanding of how different situations, events, other

people, and other inputs cause emotions due to disparities in their self-awareness (Goleman, 2008; George, 2000).

Goleman (2005) and Bar-On (2007) recognized self-awareness as the most crucial aspect of emotional intelligence. Lanser (2010) emphasizes the importance of self-awareness in guiding and perfecting job performance, including relationships with coworkers, as well as in developing good and productive leadership and collaborative abilities. Team members must be conscious of their emotions in order to avoid allowing uncontrolled emotions to affect team dynamics and culture. Effective team members, according to Cherniss (2008), are self-assured, which reflects their self-awareness and capacity to control their emotions.

SALES REPS' PERFORMANCE

Positive emotions often create positive energies that result in positive outcomes; and negative emotions produce negative energies and result in negative outcomes (Igwe & Ateke, 2021). Sales representative, in lieu of the boundary spanning role are expected to always understand that emotion and gauge or direct them appropriately towards desired ends. Sales representatives, in many ways, are a company's face and do everything from answering phones to keeping an eye on competitors, while maintaining good customer relations and chasing new prospects (Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2015). Salespeople constitute an important determinant of sales volume, satisfactory customer service and customer loyalty. They are also a source of unexpected expenses (Buciuniene & Skudiene, 2015). Sales reps' performance is also critical because they handle sensitive financial, product, and customer data (Miao & Evans, 2013). Salespeople interface with customers to determine what they want, develop solutions, and ensure sales. Sales reps use company directories, customer referrals, and other methods to find new sales leads.

Salespeople are therefore required granular data on potential customers in order to have a better understanding of their needs, identify important purchase influences, and guide them through the purchase process (Rodriguez, Peterson, & Krishnan, 2012). Salespeople also play a crucial role in shaping long-term customer relationships (Krishnan, Peterson, and Groza, 2015). By offering arrangements that save time and provide more convenience to customers, salespeople create societal benefits that go beyond the trade content of a single transaction. Hence, salespeople must be capable of handling a variety of projects and situations; they must act client's specialists in providing firm, finding workarounds, resolving obstacles, and facilitating trade between companies (Rodriguez *et al.*, 2012). A salesperson is deemed to have performed well when they carry out these functions creditably. Put differently, salespeople's performance is a measure of the extent to which they deliver customer satisfaction and cultivate relationships that translates to customer delight and loyalty by engaging in value-added activities (Schwepker & Schultz, 2015). In this study however, salespeople's performance is measured as customer expansion and customer service.

Customer Expansion

Customer expansion represent the process of gaining extra value from customers by encouraging current customers to increase product usage, buy higher versions of a product

or buy additional products outside of the product that endeared them to the firm initially (Ateke & Amangala, 2020; Bolton, Lemon, & Verhoef, 2008). It encompasses all the actions and processes of marketers that are aimed at broadening the volume of business they obtain from current customers by attracting more of the customers' footprint and share of wallet (Ateke & Amangala, 2020). Customer expansion essentially, means adding value to existing customers by encouraging them to buy more or use a product more frequently. Ateke and Amangala (2020) submit that customer expansion provides opportunities for firms or salespeople to move customers through cross-sell or upsell scenarios. Customer expansion reduces the amount of clients who leave. Existing consumers are more likely to buy and may be served at a cheaper cost than new customers (Magandini & Ngwenya, 2015). A firm's information arsenal, which includes cloud-based business analytics, is used to design customer expansion initiatives. Customer expansion plans evaluate and weigh the worth of your communication techniques in new markets and verticals, from in-person to mobile. Furthermore, consumer expansion techniques anticipate your security wants as your marketplace grows.

Customer Service

A commonplace maxim in marketing is "the customer is king" (Lancioni, 2005); suggesting that the customer deserve royal treatment. The term "customer service" encompasses a wide range of activities. It is difficult to define it in a way that is clear and plain. Many authors have attempted to perfect the concept, each defining it in their own way. La Londe and Zinser (2006) produced one of the most influential definitions:"... those activities that occur at the customer-company interface that promote or facilitate the sale and usage of the firm's products." It comprises everything a firm does for clients in order to get a product from the factory to the customer. "Customer service encompasses everything a firm does to ensure that its consumers are satisfied'. They assist in gaining a bigger profit from sold goods. According to Bovée and Thill (2012), quality and customer service provide a solid barrier against competition, ensure customer loyalty, assist in differentiating products, save on marketing expenditures, and enhance corporate profit.

Companies attempting to maintain market dominance are compelled to identify and evaluate specific needs of their market segment, then change their business strategy to meet those needs. Most businesses in various sectors of the economy are well aware that a differentiation strategy based on unique and "customized" services can be viewed as an essential chance to avoid price wars. As a result, in a wide range of economic fields, customer service has become an intrinsic aspect of the hunt for competitive advantages. Flattening demand in traditional production, more global competition, a short product life cycle, and a lot of money to be made in services are all possible reasons for this trend. Customer service is thus considered a competitive strategy option. In this context, strategy refers to all policies and important decisions that have a significant impact on a company's performance and, as a result, its competitive position (Buzzell & Gale, 2017).

METHODOLOGY

This study examined the influence of self-awareness and sales reps' performance. The study adopted the survey research design, and collected primary data from 225 sales reps drawn

from 25 insurance firms in Port Harcourt. A 5-point likert-scale questionnaire was administered to respondents, of which 200 copies of the questionnaire were returned, obtaining a 98 per cent response rate. The reliability of the research instrument was determined via the Cronbach's alpha test. Table 1 below presents a summary of the results of test of reliability. The simple regression statistic was used to establish the influence of the predictor variable on the criterion variable.

Table 1: Summary of Results of Test of Reliability (n=200).

S/N	Item	No of items	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Self-awareness	3	703
2	Customer Expansion	3	749
3	Customer Service	3	761

Source: SPSS output of data analyses on self-awareness and sales reps' performance (2021).

These above results illustrate that there is a very high level of internal consistency in the research questionnaire, hence the results produced thereof are considered reliable.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2: Summary of Regression Model for Self-awareness and Customer Expansion

Model R	R square	Adjusted Square	R std error of the Estimate
1 .911 [a]	.830	.829	1.643

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self Awareness
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Expansion

Source: SPSS output of data analyses on self-awareness and sales reps' performance (2021).

In Table 1, the sum of customer expansion was regressed with the sum of self-awareness to determine the influence of self-awareness on customer expansion. The value of R is 0.911. This represents the coefficient of influence of self-awareness on customer expansion. It suggests that self-awareness has a very strong influence on customer expansion. The R^2 (coefficient of determination) which indicates the explanatory power of the independent variable on the dependent variable is 0.830. This means that 83% of variation in customer expansion is explained by self-awareness of sales reps; or that self-awareness of sales reps contributes 83% of change in customer expansion rates.

Table 3: Summary of Regression Model for Self Awareness and Customer Service

Model R	R square	Adjusted Square	R std error of the Estimate
1 .956 [a]	.915	.914	.958

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self Awareness
b. Dependent Variable: Customer Service

Source: SPSS output of data analyses on self-awareness and sales reps' performance (2021).

In Table 2, the sum of customer expansion was regressed with the sum of self-awareness to determine the influence of self-awareness on customer expansion. The value of R is 0.956. This represents the coefficient of influence of self-awareness on customer service. It suggests that self-awareness has a very strong influence on customer service. The R^2 (coefficient of

determination) which indicates the explanatory power of the independent variable on the dependent variable is 0.915. This means that 91% of variation in customer service is explained by self-awareness of sales reps; or that self-awareness of sales reps contributes 91% of change in customer service levels.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This work investigated the influence of self-awareness on sales reps'. Given the knowledge of the importance that insurance companies attached to the various attributes of self-awareness, it becomes fairly possible for self-awareness to predict sales reps' performance. This is evident from the findings of the study that there is a strong positive influence of self-awareness on sales reps', as the results of the quantitative analysis demonstrates that there is sufficient evidence to show that self-awareness influences sales reps performance. Thus, the study concludes that self-awareness significantly influences sales reps' performance; and recommends that salespeople that seek to improve their performance in terms of expanding the volume of business they get from current customers and the level of customer service they provide, should actively seek understanding of their moods, emotions, and how these affects their interactions with customers and colleagues.

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