

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE OF PAINT PRODUCING COMPANIES IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between continuous improvement and performance of paint producing companies in Rivers State. The study was carried out in twenty (21) Paint producing companies in Rivers State that constituted the population. The sample techniques used was census sampling. Structured questionnaire was adopted as primary source of data. The reliability of the instrument was ascertain through the Cronbach Alpha coefficient with threshold level of 0.7. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was adopted to test the direction and strength of the relationship with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was use to analyse the data. The study found that there is a significant relationship between continuous improvement and organization performance. Base on the findings, paint producing companies should endeavor to improve quality and ensure customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Continuous improvement, organizational performance, efficiency, effectiveness, customer satisfaction and quality

INTRODUCTION

The paint producing companies in Rivers State, operate in highly competitive environment, necessitating the adoption of continuous improvement strategies to enhance organizational performance. Continuous improvement involves ongoing effort to improve products, service or process, ultimately leading to increased efficiency, productivity and customer satisfaction. Continuous improvement, a concept popularized by Masaaki Imai's book "Kaizen: The key to Japan's competitive success" (1986) involves incremental changes aimed at reducing waste, optimizing processes and improving quality (Imai, 1986).

The approach values sustainability, consistency and long-term result, enabling organization to respond quickly to market changes and anticipate future needs (Deming 1986). Continuous improvement ensures companies find ways and techniques in producing better quality product, production, be more competitive as well as exceed customer expectation. In the context of paint

producing companies in Rivers State, continuous improvement can be a vital tool for achieving sustainable growth and competitiveness.

Studies have shown that enterprise-first behavior, which encompasses a proactive and customer-centric approach, significantly influences organizational performance in paint producing companies in Rivers State (Nwiyii & Amanada, 2003). Additionally, training and development programs have been found to positively impact the performance of paint producing companies highlighting the importance of investing in employee skills and knowledge (Emeti, 2015). Effective inventory management with just-in-time inventory have shown a positive relationship with sales performance (Horsfall & Ali, 2025). Knowledge lifecycle also plays a crucial role in organizational decision-making. However, the study of continuous improvement and organizational performance is grounded in total quality management approach which emphasis on continuous improvement and customer satisfaction (Deming, 1986).

Organizational performance on the other hand encompasses multiple dimensions, including financial performance, customer satisfaction and operational efficiency (Kaplan & Norton, 1992). Performance in an organization is measured by how well a company meets the individual objectives of its business plan thus signifying its achievements rate. Performance involves evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of process, decision and actions. It refers to the achievement of desired outcome and goals. (Krajeroski et al 2023). Given the significance of continuous improvement in enhancing organizational performance, this this study aims to investigate the relationship between continuous improvement and performance of paint producing companies in Rivers State. By exploring the impact of continuous improvement on performance outcomes, this research seeks to provide insights into the effective implementation of continuous improvement initiative in paint producing companies in Rivers State.

The purpose of this study was to critically examine the relationship between continuous improvement and performance of paint producing companies in Rivers State. The study was aimed at achieving the following objectives:

- i. Examine the relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in Paint producing companies in Rivers State.
- ii. Examine the relationship between continuous improvement effectiveness in paint producing companies in Rivers State.

Conceptual Framework

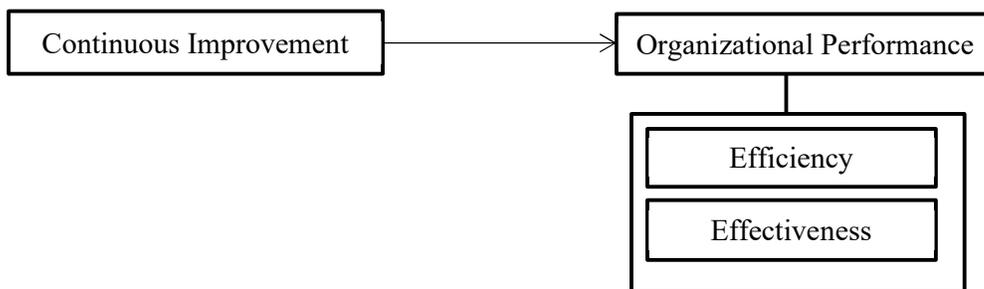


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Continuous Improvement and Performance.

Source: Desk Research – (TQM: Juran, 1988; and Performance: Kaplan & Norton ,1992)

Research Questions

Base on the objectives of the study, the following research question was formulated:

- i. What is the relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in paint producing companies in Rivers State.
- ii. What is the relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in paint producing companies in Rivers State.

Statement of Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated;

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in paint producing companies in Rivers State.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in Paint producing companies in Rivers State.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Review

This study drawn inspiration from Deming Theory, Joseph – Juran Theory and Six Sigma Theory.

Deming Theory

This theory was propounded by William Edward Deming in (1986). Deming as an administrator is of the view that each firm involves an arrangement of correlated procedures made up of individuals. To him the quest for quality in any organization require a fundamental change in philosophy and in organizational value. Deming believed that the manager’s job is to seek out and correct the causes of failure, rather than merely identify failure after they occur. The goal of Deming theory lies in altering the behavior of managers and employee so that companies can become low-cost, high-quality, and highly productive suppliers of goods and services and place of work that honour and support the contribution of all organizational members.

According to Deming; the excursion from the major administration style to quality requires the comprehension of frameworks inside the organization. Quality is the rationalization of the execution of the sections in respect to the object or point of framework. Organizations are comprised of the office which forms systems. Throughout the years Deming dense his rationality into 14 focuses which progressed toward becoming activity things for top administration embrace.as indicated by Dale (2003), Deming kept up that his 14 points can be connected anyplace, to little organizations and substantial ones, to benefit industry and also to manufacturing.

Joseph – Juran Theory

This theory was propounded by Joseph-Juran in (1951). Juran believes that the change to total quality can happen much like other shifts within an organization – that is, using the current framework for organizational decisions and actions. Joseph-Juran described “Quality Trilogy” of quality planning (identifying customers and their needs so that they can be satisfied); quality control (developing processes to produce goods and services that can meet those needs); and quality improvement (constantly trying to improve processes). According to Juran, these

should be pursued just like other managerial activities such as financial planning, financial control, and profit improvement (Scudder, 2013). Juran (1951) built on the 10 quality change steps which are condensed as: Build attention to the need and open door for development, set objectives for development, well organize their operation to achieve the firm objectives, carry out activities to tackle issues; Report in advance, give acknowledgement, keep score, maintain energy by influencing yearly change to some portions of the standard frameworks and procedures of the organization which were meant to enhance quality in the organization (Mokamba, Gakure, & Keraro, 2013).

Six Sigma Theory

Six sigma is a data-driven approach to qualify management that aims to reduce defects and variations in business process, products and services. At its core, sigma is a methodology that uses statistical tools and techniques to identify and eliminate defects, resulting in improved quality, efficiency and customer satisfaction. The sigma methodology consists of five phases: Define, measure, analyze, improve and control. In the define phase, the problem or opportunity for improvement is defined, and the project goal and objective are establish. The measuring phase involves collecting and analyzing data to understand the current process and identify opportunity for improvement. The improved phase develops and implements solutions to address the problem and opportunities identified. Finally, the control phase implement controls to ensure the improvement is sustained overtime.

Six sigma uses a belt-based certification system with different levels of expertise recognized through white belt, yellow belt, green belt, black belt and master black belt certifications. Each belt requires a different level of knowledge, skills and experience with black belt and master black belt leading complex improvement projects and others monitoring. By applying this approach, organization can achieve significant improvement in quality, efficiency, and customer satisfaction leading to increased competitiveness and profitability. This theory was developed by Bill Smith at Motorola in the 1980.

Conceptual Review

Continuous Improvement

Bessant et al, (2001) define continuous improvement as a particular bundle of routines which can help an organization improve what it currently does. Continuous improvement is an initiative that implies bundles of practices, such as prescribed sequences of steps for carrying out projects, and sets of tools and techniques commonly used to execute these projects (Handel & Gittleman, 2004); Pil & MacDuffie, 1996 quoted by Anand, 2009). Kantor (1998) define continuous improvement as an array of powerful techniques that has produced substantial improvements in numerous companies and organizations. Continuous improvement can also be defined as a planned, organized and systemic process of ongoing improvement (Deming, 1986). It involves a cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation and refinement with the goal of achieving continuous improvement (Juran, 1988).

Organizational Performance

Performance is a multidimensional construct that evaluates the position of an organization pertained to internal or external standards. Continue existing of any establishment depends on its performance. According to Zep-obipi (2015) organizational performance refers to the record of achievements made by an organization at, or over a given time measurable through several indices. It means that individual performance is the record of achievement made by an individual over a period of time measurable through several indices. The analysis in this research focuses on two main outcomes, operation efficiency and satisfied customer.

Performance is a concept used to evaluate the level at which an organization has succeeded in its line of business. It varies from one organization to the other depending on the nature of activity.

Empirical Review

Afunwa, Agbaeze, Ike and Isiehei (2020) investigated continuous improvement as a facet of lean adoption and performance of telecommunication firms in Nigeria. The study used a survey design. A sample of 299 was chosen from 6 state offices of selected telecommunication firms. Data were analysed using partial Least Square SEM with the aid of smart PLS 3.0. Findings of the study indicated that continuous improvement has a significant effect on performance of telecommunication firms. Continuous improvement ($t = 2.164$, $P < 0.004$), Customer's involvement ($t = 1.981$, $P < 0.003$), and employee's involvement ($t = 3.896$, $p < 0.000$). The study therefore, recommends that lean adoption should be enhanced to achieve superior performance.

Nazar, Ram, Anjum and Shahzad (2018) assessed performance; the role of customer focus, and continuous improvement in banking sector of Pakistan. The study involved a survey whereby the hypotheses were tested using Least Square Structural modelling equation (PLS – SEM). It was found that customer focus and continuous improvement were positively and significantly associated with operational performance ($\beta = 0.169$; $t = 1.987$; $p < 0.05$), ($\beta = 0.290$; $t = 2.433$; $p < 0.05$) and overall performance ($\beta = 0.187$; $t = 2.145$; $p < 0.05$). Their results revealed with Lean adoption is significant predictor of operational performance.

“The impact of continuous improvement on Employee safety: a study of the moderating role of organizational culture” by Wang, Y & Liy (2020). This study examines the impact of continuous improvement on employee safety with the moderating role of organizational culture. It was found that continuous improvement has a positive impact on employee safety, but this effect is stronger on organization with a culture that values safety.

METHODOLOGY

In line with the purpose and objective of this study, the study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The design allowed for collection of primary data through structured questionnaire. The population of this study was twenty-one (21) registered companies operating in Rivers State was listed on Paint Manufacturing Association Nigerian (PMAN). The study used census sampling techniques which were sixty-three (63) managers' make-up the study elements. The study adopted content and construct validity, while the reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach's alpha test and the output confirmed all the items tested were okay since they all have good internal consistency. The average of the possible split-half reliable coefficients and threshold level, 0.7 which is generally accepted by rule of thumb (Nunnally, 1978). The data was analyzed using inferential statistics. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation Coefficient was adopted to test the direction and strength of the relationship with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyse the data.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of the distribution and test for the hypotheses for this research is presented in this section of the paper. From the 63 questionnaire copies distributed, only 53 copies were considered suitable, while other copies were not retrieved.

Table 1: Distributions and Retrieved Copies of Questionnaire

S/N	Detailed Rate	Response	Distributed copies	Retrieved copies	Not Retrieved Copies	Used Copies
	Total		63(100%)	53 (%)	10 (%)	53(%)

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Bivariate Analysis (Inferential Statistics)

The relationship between continuous improvement and organizational performance. The Spearman Rank Order Correlation coefficient was utilized in assessing the between each of the dimensions and the measures of the study variables. The study adopts a criterion and significance value of 0.05, based on its level of confidence (95%). Decision rule: The decision rule which applies for all bivariate test outcomes is stated as follows: where $P < 0.05$, reject hypothesis on the basis or evidence significant relationship; and where $P > 0.05$, accept hypothesis on the basis of insignificant relationship between the variables. The extent of influence is on this basis assessed using the r interpretations provided by Bryman and Bell (2003) as shown in table 4.2:

Table 2: Description on Range of correlation (rho) values and the corresponding level of association

Range of r with positive and negative sign values	Strength of Association
$\pm 0.80 - 0.99$	very strong
$\pm 0.60 - 0.79$	Strong
$\pm 0.40 - 0.59$	Moderate
$\pm 0.20 - 0.39$	Weak
$\pm 0.00 - 0.19$	Very weak

Source: Adopted from Ahaiauzu & Asawo, 2016, *Advance Social Research Methods*

The positive (+) sign in the values of (r) indicates a positive relationship, while the negative (-) sign in the value of (r) indicates an indirect/negative or inverse relationship. Thus, the sign of the ρ explains the direction of association between the two variables.

Scatter Plot of the Relationship between study variables

The first step in determining whether there is a relationship between the variables is to examine the graph of the observed data (Mac'Odo, 2006). A scatter plot was fitted to describe the relationship between workplace family culture and employee prosocial behaviour. The results of the scatter plot in the Figure 4.1 indicate that there is a positive linear relationship between total quality management and performance which implies that continuous improvement positively contributes to performance in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State.

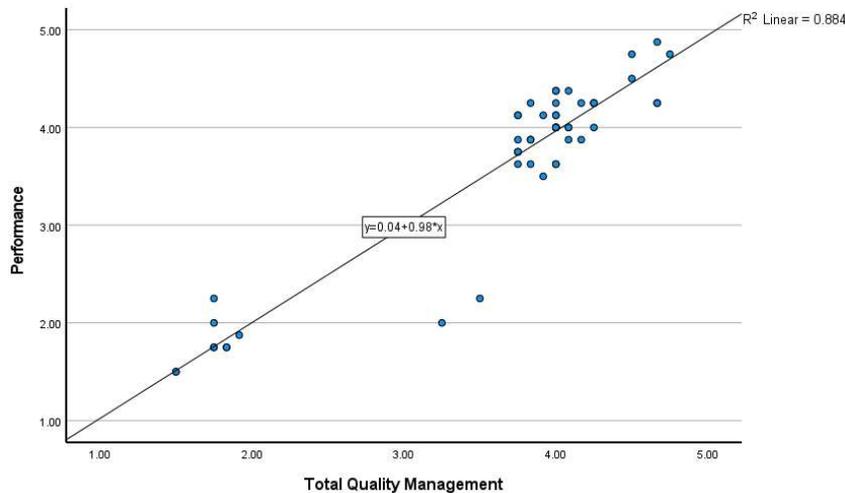


Figure 2: Scatter graph for the relationship between continuous improvement and performance

Figure 2 shows a scatterplot illustrating the relationship between continuous improvement practices and performance in paint producing companies within Rivers State. The graph reveals a strong positive linear relationship, as evidenced by the coefficient of determination (R^2) value of 0.884, indicating that approximately 88.4% of the variation in organizational performance can be explained by the adoption and implementation of continuous improvement practices. The clustering of data points around the regression line implies a consistently strong association between the two variables, with higher levels of continuous improvement practices resulting in corresponding improvements in organizational performance outcomes, particularly in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

Continuous Improvement and Organisational Performance

Table 3 shows the result of correlation for continuous improvement and organisational performance in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State. Also displayed in the table is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes us able to answer our research question and generalize our findings to the study population.

Table 3: Correlations for Continuous Improvement and Organisational Performance

		Continuous Improvement			
			Efficiency	Effectiveness	
Spearman's rho	Continuous Improvement	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.734**	.519**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	53	53	53
	Efficiency	Correlation Coefficient	.734**	1.000	.632**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	53	53	53
	Effectiveness	Correlation Coefficient	.519**	.632**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	53	53	53

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

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State?

Table 3 showed the correlation analysis examining the relationship between continuous improvement and organizational efficiency in paint producing companies in Rivers State using the Spearman Rank Order Correlation technique produced a correlation coefficient (ρ) of 0.734, indicating a strong positive relationship between continuous improvement and organizational efficiency in paint producing companies in Rivers State. This suggests that as these organizations intensify their commitment to continuous improvement initiatives such as regularly reviewing processes, prioritizing operational enhancements, monitoring the effectiveness of improvement projects and equipping employees with relevant training, there is a significant corresponding increase in organizational efficiency. The positive direction of this association means that consistent and structured improvement efforts lead to streamlined operations, optimized resource utilization and enhanced responsiveness to market dynamics. The coefficient of determination (R^2), computed as $(0.734)^2 = 0.539$, reveals that approximately 53.9% of the variation in organizational efficiency within these paint producing firms can be statistically attributed to their continuous improvement practices, highlighting the substantial impact of an enduring culture of operational refinement on overall organizational performance. Therefore, there is a strong and positive relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State.

Similarly displayed in the table 3 is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtain, the tests of significance show that the relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between continuous improvement and efficiency in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State?

Table 3 showed the correlation analysis investigating the relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in paint producing companies in Rivers State, applying the Spearman Rank Order Correlation technique, produced a correlation coefficient (ρ) of 0.519, signifying a moderate positive relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State. This indicates that as these firms deepen their focus on continuous improvement activities such as implementing regular process evaluations, prioritizing enhancement initiatives, monitoring improvement outcomes and investing in employee development there tends to be a corresponding improvement in effectiveness. The coefficient of determination (R^2), calculated as $(0.519)^2 = 0.269$, suggests that approximately 26.9% of the variance in effectiveness within these firms can be statistically explained by their continuous improvement practices, pointing to its meaningful, though partial, influence on overall organizational success. Therefore, there is a strong and positive relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State.

Similarly displayed in the table 3 is the statistical test of significance (p - value), which makes possible the generalization of our findings to the study population. From the result obtain, the tests of significance show that the relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State is significant ($p=0.000<0.05$). Therefore, based on observed findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between continuous improvement and effectiveness in Paint Producing companies in Rivers State.

Discussion of the Findings

The study examined the relationship between continuous improvement and organizational performance in paint producing companies in Rivers State. The findings revealed that continuous improvement had a significant impact on organizational performance. This suggests that paint producing companies in Rivers State that adopt a culture of ongoing improvement and learning are more likely to achieve enhanced organizational performance. The results indicate that continuous improvement enables organizations to identify areas for improvement, implement changes, and monitor progress, leading to increased efficiency, productivity, and effectiveness.

The relationship between continuous improvement and organizational performance is noteworthy, as it highlights the importance of fostering a culture of ongoing learning and improvement in today's fast-paced business environment. Organizations that prioritize continuous improvement are better positioned to stay ahead of competitors, respond to changing market conditions, and achieve long-term success. This can be achieved through strategies such as encouraging employee suggestions, conducting regular process audits, and implementing quality management systems. Ultimately, the study's results underscore the significance of continuous improvement in driving organizational performance.

The findings align with the work of Afunwa, Agbaeze, Ike and Isichei (2002) investigated continuous improvement as a facet of lean adoption and performance of telecommunication firms in Nigeria. The study used a survey design. A sample of 299 was chosen from 6 state offices. Data were analyzed using partial least square SEM. The study found that continuous improvement (lean adoption) enhances achievement of superior performance.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Base on the outcome of the study, the findings revealed that there exist a substantial relationship between continuous improvement and organizational performance with regards to efficiency and effectiveness. The implication of this study shows that for continuous improvement to be effectively implemented there must be proper statistical process control of continuous improvement which means that planning, quality control for minimizing or cost effectiveness will impact positively on overall performance of the organizational goals and objectives.

Evidence from the study shows the following recommendations:

1. Organization should foster the culture of quality within the organization, emphasizing on the importance of continuous improvement and customers' satisfaction.
2. Organization should provide regular training and development opportunities for employees to enhance their skills and knowledge
3. Organization should establish process controls to ensure consistency and quality in paint production.
4. Organization should set clear quality objectives and key performance indicators (KPI) to measure progress.

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