

CORPORATE INTRANET: A DIGITAL CAPITAL FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN INSURANCE COMPANIES IN SOUTH-SOUTH REGION, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the how corporate intranet enhances employee performance of insurance companies in South-South region, Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational design. Sixteen (16) registered insurance companies in south-south region in Nigeria made up the total population. The instrument for data collection was questionnaire structured by the researcher The instrument was validated by experts in measurement and evaluation. Ascertaining the reliability coefficient of 0.85. Spearman ranked correlation was used to test the hypotheses. It was found that corporate intranet has significant relationship with measures of employee performance in the insurance companies. It concluded that corporate intranet is a workplace digital capital that enhances employee performance in insurance companies. Based on the findings of this study it was recommended that insurance companies should invest heavily in corporate intranet to drive an integrated and automated business process in order to create a faster information dissemination platform.

Keywords: Digital Capital, Employee performance, Corporate intranet, Creativity, Information dissemination



INTRODUCTION

Corporate intranet is a generic term for a private computer network within an organization. An intranet is a local network that uses network technology as a tool to facilitate communication between people or workgroups to improve the data sharing capability and overall knowledge base of an organization's employees. An intranet is used by a company's employees in the course of the workday.

Intranet is a term used to describe the use of internet technologies internally within an organization rather than externally to connect to the global Internet. Within the intranet computing environment, individual utilization can be a combination of purely volitional and mandatory. Mandatory utilization occurs when organizations enforce the usage of certain functionalities of the intranet such as functional business information systems. Intranet, in its full functionalities can be utilized as publishing application, discussion applications and interactive applications. Within the scope of publishing application, users have the freedom to publish any memos or notices. Within the domain of discussion applications, users have the liberty to interact with their colleagues and partners via the virtual forum, e-mail and chat room. Within the breadth of interactive application users have the opportunity to transact with any on-line services or to record their knowledge onto the intranet systems. With these functionalities being equipped in most Malaysian corporate workplace environment, questions regarding users' utilization behavior still remain unanswered. Not much is really known as to what extent do Malaysians exploits intranet technology for the purpose of enhancing their performance and productivity.

Corporate Intranet is a term used to describe the use of internet technologies internally within an organization rather than externally to connect to the global Internet (Omerzel, 2010). Within the intranet computing environment, individual utilization can be a combination of purely volitional and mandatory. Mandatory utilization occurs when organizations enforce the usage of certain functionalities of the intranet such as functional business information systems. Intranet, in its full functionalities can be utilized as publishing application, discussion applications and interactive applications. Within the scope of publishing application, users have the freedom to publish any memos or notices. Within the domain of discussion applications, users have the liberty to interact with their colleagues and partners via the virtual forum, e-mail and chat room (Rajalampi, 2011). Within the breadth of interactive application users have the opportunity to transact with any on-line services or to record their knowledge onto the intranet systems. With these functionalities being equipped in most Malaysian corporate workplace environment, questions regarding users' utilization behavior still remain unanswered. Not much is really known as to what extent do Malaysians exploits intranet technology for the purpose of enhancing their performance and productivity.

According to McConnell (2007), the corporate intranet should be the first place where employees look for company information. The author sees it as the hub for information, collaboration and everyday work. Nevertheless, according to the study *Intranet Strategies Today & Tomorrow*



conducted in 2006 (McConnell, 2007), few organisations have achieved this degree of relevance in their intranets. The results revealed that intranets are used to distribute information but, to a lesser degree, increase productivity and facilitate collaboration. Half of the respondents polled ‘absolutely’ to the statement "The intranet is perceived to be the primary means of delivering information to where it is needed within the organisation". Only twenty per cent said ‘absolutely’ to it being "a collaboration platform, creativity trigger and knowledge sharing tool”, while nineteen per cent called it "a productivity tool."

Development and usage of corporate intranet in the insurance industry is relevant as its foster flexible, time conscious and customer focused information dissemination (Fadun, 2013). corporate intranet creates environment that enable insurance companies focused on driving the effectiveness, efficiency and agility of the insurance business operations to enable a more cost-focused and robust business. Therefore, with the availability of corporate intranet, it is hoped that many insurance companies would be able to create a single source of customer data base using corporate intranet facilities such that a single, real-time view of customers’ total portfolio will be available to all insurance companies and their intermediaries.

Efficient application of corporate intranet would drive Insurance businesses to enable an integrated and automated business process management approach across all aspects of insurance business operations. This would automatically lead to a more agile offering to the consumer, but also creates efficiencies in the insurance business practice, which in turn aids the minimization of insurance business operational cost. Corporate intranet enables insurance companies to explore the benefits of technological advancements to take timely decision to improve the Nigeria insurance industry competitive advantage (Pankajakshi & Shailaja, 2012). Therefore, application of corporate intranet efficiently to the operations of insurance business would create and enable supportive solutions that help meet industry challenges and needs to satisfy their customers; that is, corporate intranet would give insurance business the enablement environment of efficiencies in the business practices, precisely around its fundamental operations that helps driven quality and performance at a minimized cost base; and handling the communications and operational process of premium renewals and reminders. Many schools and nonprofit groups have also deployed intranets also, but an intranet is still seen primarily as a corporate productivity tool. A simple intranet for a small business consists of an internal email system and perhaps a message board service. More sophisticated intranets include internal websites and databases containing company news, forms, and personal information.

Intranets are often adopted for specific objectives such as reducing printing costs (Denton 2003) and improving business effectiveness through better communication, collaboration and sharing of information. Managers often portray intranets as “business tools” and use financial arguments such as direct cost savings and increase in revenues to justify investment in these technologies. However, the conceptualization of intranets as business tools and the focus on tangible benefits is myopic and problematic. It is myopic because intranets have a broader impact on organizations



than just on business processes because they change perceptions and behavior. It is problematic because if employees perceive the intranet as “just work”, they tend to be less interested and engaged with the system (Curry et al. 2000).

The effects of intranets on organizations become more visible over time, especially the intangible effects on employee perception and behavior. For example, Denton (2003) argues that employees perceive themselves as part of the organization through what they read on the intranet. Employees also develop a greater sense of belonging, of organizational commitment and an increased awareness of what is happening. These intangible effects have been compared to the kind of benefits accrued from “air conditioning”, which improves the wellbeing of all employees but can only be indirectly related to increased sales or cost reductions.

In the intranets literature indirect benefits relate to, for example, how improved internal communication encourages more loyal and committed staff because employees feel that they are being kept informed of important developments. Results show that an effective intranet significantly enhances information dissemination (Murgolo- Poore et al. 2003). Duane and Finnegan (2003) study how Hewlett Packard’s (HP) new intranet increased employee perception of empowerment, improved satisfaction and productivity.

Literatures reviewed about intranets have shown that truly the provision of knowledge management systems such as intranet systems or facilities in organizations including insurance marketing firms have a significant relationship with the overall performance of such an organization. Also, as seen in the above discussed literatures, the presence and effective use of corporate intranet affects the job performance of employees which in turn affect the performance of the organization in their market share, profitability, brand reputation and other measures of employee performance.

As stated by Stenmark (2002), being an organisation-wide technology, an intranet should encourage people to actively use it not only as a place to look for information but as a collaboration tool, too. To support and facilitate everyday work and knowledge creation and sharing, an intranet ought to encompass more than just the information perspective. Hence, Stenmark (2002) has suggested a model – shown below in Figure 6 – where the intranet as a knowledge management environment is seen from three different perspectives: the information perspective, the awareness perspective, and the communication perspective.

Stenmark (2002) states that the information perspective is the most common view of the intranet. When intranet users say they cannot find the information they are looking for, the most obvious reason they give is the intranet’s poor structure. Nevertheless, another very simple reason is the fact that the information is not there in the first place. Even if the information is found, Stenmark (2002) argues, it does not necessarily lead to the desired result, e.g. sharing knowledge or exchanging ideas with colleagues.



Stenmark (2002), suggests that the communication perspective, finally, enables employees to collectively share the available information when they use various forms of channels for conversations and negotiations. Offering workflows and co-ordinating routines as well as support for more informal collaboration such as shared whiteboards, project areas, and chat rooms through the intranet, the company can provide its employees means for working together and engaging in dialogue, thus transforming their knowledge to organisational benefit. Szukala and O’Conor (2001) argue that the speed at which organisations acquire knowledge and put it to good effect has become one of the main competitive advantages. They urge companies to map their expertise using new technology – and letting that “map” be widely available. The process of knowledge sharing ensures employees to know where to go for task-critical information.

Accordingly, Stenmark (2002) points out that the organisational members must be understood as actors and not merely as passive receivers of corporate information. Contributions from all members are important when seen from the knowledge management perspective. Intranet applications must, therefore, be designed so that the technology actively affords user participation. This is a prerequisite for the intranet to function as a knowledge management environment. However, these activities must not increase the users’ workload or oblige them to do things in addition to what the tasks at hand require.

According to Stenmark (2002), today’s intranets are, in general, populated by a small number of information providers, who publish official corporate material and general information. However, much of the information available in intranets is not used by the organisation’s members, who instead need specific information. Leveraging the intranet means including the users and having them add content more closely related to the everyday activities they perform. Stenmark (2002) suggests that allowing not only a narrow group of information professionals but the entire employee base to publish has a positive effect on organisational knowledge creation. Youngjin et al. (2007) found the key challenge in knowledge sharing be how to effectively translate tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge through a diverse set of systems, structures, people and processes. They studied the way how two companies were merged becoming a company to act ‘as a single company’ in terms of knowledge sharing through their common intranet. Employees had to integrate knowledge resources from both companies, sales people were expected to offer complementary products and solutions that required a combination of these two companies, and employees in the research and development area were also expected to be aware of developments in other areas. A “knowledge Web” was created where all documents and other work-related information was uploaded.

Amurgis (2007) describes that by establishing new interactive features, American Electric Power (AEP) created a special area of their intranet devoted to employee collaboration. These features included:

- A weekly multiple-choice poll, enabling employees to quickly register their opinions on company or societal issues.



- A weekly discussion with a carefully-chosen topic of broad appeal, soliciting employee perspectives and ideas, in full text.
- An online thank-you card application, so employees can thank their colleagues (privately or publicly) for a job well done.
- An online marketplace where employees can sell cars, furniture, and other items to one another.

As noted by Amurgis (2007), the online marketplace, in particular, turned out to be very popular among AEP employees. It was not only valuable because of its selling function but also in terms of getting employees into the habit of sharing and exchanging. It was the company's intention to further promote discussion and encourage knowledge exchange, so this was one of the forerunner methods to pave the desired culture. At Globemec, an online global marketplace has been open approximately for one year. Unfortunately, it has not been actively used one reason probably being the fact that it is not too easy to sell, among other things, furniture or cars from one country to another. Obviously, this type of activity will be carried out through local intranets in the future. Knowledge sharing seems to be one of the most important tasks of the company intranet as evaluated by, among others, Scott (1998), Stenmark (2002), and Szukala and O'Connor (2001). Intranets ought to be developed in such a way that organisational knowledge would be easy to share among colleagues, thus transferring tacit knowledge to the benefit of the organisation as stated by Stenmark (2002).

From the foregoing, it could be observed that the number of empirical studies is relatively small, especially in relation to those on new technologies and employee performance. On this premise, it is evident that many studies have been carried out to provide information on the extent to which insurance companies are developing the strategies to adopt ICT into their business management processes and operations. It is obvious that as a result of increase in the integration of ICT into the operations of insurance companies in Nigeria, the industry has achieved to the baseline targets for ICT driven industry's profitability. However, many companies within insurance industry in Nigeria are yet to efficiently adopt ICT into their business operations and those that have adopted ICT into their business operations have not fully exploited the significant of ICT in all ramifications of their business operations. However, many studies have been conducted before in other areas of research related to capital investment such as human capital and employee performance (Awan & Sarfraz, 2013), intellectual capital and employee performance (Obeidat et al., 2016), working capital and organizational profitability (Lawal, 2013). Against this background, it is observable that there is a lacuna in literature as it pertains to digital capital-performance nexus. It is on this note that this study attempts to examine the influence of corporate intranet s a workplace digital capital on the employees' performance in insurance companies. Therefore, this study is unique as it tries to figure out the influence of digital capital on employee performance in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between corporate intranet and employee performance in insurance companies in South-South, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

1. determine the relationship between corporate intranet and creativity in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria
2. examine the relationship between corporate intranet and knowledge sharing in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria
3. examine the relationship between corporate intranet and information dissemination in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between corporate intranet and creativity in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between corporate intranet and knowledge sharing in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between corporate intranet and information dissemination in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

Methodology

The study is a correlational design to achieve the objectives of the study. The design is suitable for this study because it involved the gathering of required information on office information gadgets and service delivery of insurance companies in South-South, Nigeria, Nigeria.

The population of study in this research was all the operational staff of the sixteen (16) registered insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria These were the insurance companies registered in Nigeria by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) and the National Insurance Commission (NAICOM) as at 23rd January 2019, have been in operation in Rivers state, Bayelsa State or Akwa-Ibom State for more than one year. The target population of the study is 150 functional heads in the main branch of the insurance companies in Rivers state, Bayelsa State and Akwa-Ibom State. The population distribution in the individual insurance companies is presented in the table 1 overleaf:

The entire 16 Insurance Companies listed in the study was sampled. This was because the population is of manageable size. Since total population sampling involves **all** members within the population of interest, it is possible to get **deep insights** into the phenomenon you are interested in. With such wide coverage of the population of interest.

The study used questionnaires to collect primary data from the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into different sections where each section is aimed at measuring a particular variable in the insurance companies. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part one was designed to obtain general information on the person and organization profile. Part two

elicited information on the objectives of the study. The questionnaire contained closed-ended questions (to ensure uniformity) which was designed along the on a 4-point scale of Low Extent (LE), Moderate Extent (ME), High Extent (HE) and Very High Extent (VHE).

Table 1 Population Distribution of Insurance Companies

SN	NAME OF COMPANY	Managers	Marketers	Accounts	Customer service	Technical / maintenance	Total
1	Alliance & General Insurance Company Ltd	3	5	2	2	1	13
2	Anchor Insurance Company Ltd	1	3	2	2	1	9
3	Fin Insurance Company Limited	3	4	3	2	-	12
4	Mutual Benefits Assurance Plc	1	2	1	2	1	7
5	NEM Insurance Plc	1	2	1	2	-	6
6	Guinea Insurance Plc	1	3	2	2	-	8
7	Prestige Assurance Plc	2	4	1	2	1	10
8	Regency Alliance Insurance Plc	3	4	2	3	-	12
9	Saham Unitrust Insurance Nigeria Limited	1	2	2	2	-	7
10	Universal Insurance Plc	1	3	2	2	-	8
11	Allianz Nigeria Insurance Plc	2	4	2	2	1	11
12	Cornerstone Insurance Plc	1	3	2	2	1	9
13	Great Nigeria Insurance Plc	1	2	2	1	-	6
14	Industrial & General Insurance Company Plc	3	4	2	2	1	12
15	NICON Insurance Plc	2	5	2	3	1	13
16	Niger Insurance Plc	1	2	2	2	-	7
	TOTAL	27	52	30	33	8	150

Source: Field Survey, 2021



To validate the instrument, a detailed scrutiny of the constructs was carried out by test and evaluation experts who read through, checked for content and face validity and make necessary corrections that were noted and effected before the administration of the instrument to the respondents.

The research ensured the reliability of the questionnaire to determine its consistency in testing what it was intended to measure. Cronbach's Alpha method was used for measuring reliability. The result of the reliability coefficient was 0.854 and was accepted as "good" under the Cronbach's Internal Consistency test scale.

The research instrument was administered by the researcher to the respondents with the help of two research assistants. The research assistants were trained on how to administer the instrument. The questionnaire was administered through "drop and pick later" method.

The data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 23: The Spearman Rank correlation was used to test the hypotheses.

Results

H₀₁₄: There is no significant relationship between Corporate intranet and creativity in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

Table 2 Relationship between Corporate intranet and Creativity.

Variable	Mean	SD	Rho	N	P-value	Remark
Corporate intranet	2.9648	.64005	0.721**	135	0.000	Strong relationship
Creativity	3.2190	.60272				

Source: Field Survey, 2021(Based on results from SPSS, v.23 Output)

From the table above, it is shown that corporate website ($\bar{x} = 2.96$; $SD = 0.640$) is used to a moderate extent and the creativity ($\bar{x} = 3.21$; $SD = .602$) of the firms is to a Moderate extent. Furthermore, the table presents for relationship between corporate intranet and creativity. The calculated value of correlation coefficient (r) is 0.721; $p=0.000$ implied that there is a strong positive correlation between Corporate website and Creativity in the insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria The p -value of $0.001 < 0.05$ depicts a significant relationship, thus, the null hypothesis four is rejected for the alternative hypothesis which stated that There is a significant relationship between Corporate intranet and creativity in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria



H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between Corporate intranet and knowledge sharing in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

Table 3 Relationship between Corporate website and Knowledge sharing

Variable	Mean	SD	Rho	N	P-value	Remark
Corporate intranet	2.9648	.64005	0.647**	135	0.000	Strong relationship
Knowledge sharing	3.2038	.50678				

Source: Field Survey, 2021(Based on results from SPSS, v.23 Output)

From the table above, it is shown that corporate intranet ($\bar{x} = 2.96$; $SD = 0.640$) is used to a moderate extent and Knowledge sharing ($\bar{x} = 3.20$; $SD = .506$) of the firms is to a high extent. Furthermore, the table presents for relationship between corporate intranet and Knowledge sharing. The calculated value of correlation coefficient (r) is 0.647; $p=0.000$ implied that there is a weak positive correlation between Corporate website and knowledge sharing in the insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria The p -value of $0.000 < 0.05$ depicts a significant relationship, thus, the null hypothesis two is rejected for the alternative hypothesis which stated that there is a significant relationship between Corporate intranet and Knowledge sharing in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between Corporate website and information dissemination in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria

Table 4 Relationship between Corporate intranet and Information dissemination

Variable	Mean	SD	Rho	N	P-value	Remark
Corporate intranet	2.9648	.64005	0.809**	135	0.000	Very Strong relationship
Information dissemination	3.0629	.59492				

Source: Field Survey, 2021(Based on results from SPSS, v.23 Output)

From the table above, it is shown that corporate website ($\bar{x} = 3.01$; $SD = 0.507$) is used to a High extent and information dissemination ($\bar{x} = 3.06$; $SD = .595$) of the firms is to a high extent.



Furthermore, the table presents for relationship between corporate intranet and information dissemination. The calculated value of correlation coefficient (r) is 0.809; $p=0.000$ implied that there is a very strong positive correlation between Corporate intranet and information dissemination in the insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria. The p -value of $0.002 < 0.000$ depicts a significant relationship, thus, the null hypothesis three is rejected for the alternative hypothesis which stated that There is a significant relationship between Corporate intranet and information dissemination in insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The three research questions and hypotheses investigated the relationship between corporate intranet and creativity, knowledge sharing and information dissemination. Result of correlation analysis revealed that corporate intranet has a weak positive correlation with employee performance ($r=.721$, $p<0.05$). corporate intranet had a weak positive correlation with employee performance ($r=.647$, $p<0.05$). and corporate intranet also had weak positive relationship with employee performance ($r=.809$, $p<0.05$). these findings indicated that changes in employee performance is proportionate to the changes in corporate intranet.

The findings revealed that the adoption and use of corporate intranet significantly affects the creativity, growth and development and information dissemination of Insurance companies. This also implied that a decline in the use of corporate intranet would translate to a reduced creativity, growth and information dissemination. Hence, the study found that the use of corporate intranet in a panacea to an improved employee performance. This is in alliance with Fadum (2013) who opined that efficient use of corporate intranet would drive insurance business to enable an integrated and automated business process translating to an enhanced performance.

Fadum (2013) still in agreement with the finding of this present study opined that the development and usage of corporate intranet in the insurance industry is relevant as its foster flexible, time conscious and customer focused information dissemination. The finding of this present study is also in agreement with Pankajakshi and Shailaja (2012). application of corporate intranet efficiently to the operations of insurance business would create and enable supportive solutions that help meet industry challenges and needs to satisfy their customers. Also supporting this finding is the result from the study of Murgolo- Poore et al. (2003) which found that effective intranet significantly enhances information dissemination. Another study of HP's intranet (McGovern 2002) illustrates how intranets may be used to manage crisis and gather organizational support for initiatives such as fighting large scale staff redundancies.

Conclusion

This study concludes that there is a positive and significant relationship between study variable (corporate intranet and organizational performance) which also is strongly moderated by technological level of the insurance companies in South-South Region, Nigeria. Based on the result it is concluded the use of various aspects of workplace digital capital has a great effect on the

organizational performance of insurance companies. This implied that investment in workplace digital capital in the Nigerian insurance industry is an enabler of creativity, information dissemination and improved knowledge sharing with which they compete with their counterparts in the globe.

Recommendations

1. insurance companies should invest in corporate intranet to create a faster information dissemination platform.
2. Insurance companies should invest heavily in corporate intranet to drive an integrated and automated business process for knowledge haring among employees.
3. There is need to invest in digital infrastructure and improve on the employees' skills and usability of these infrastructures.

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