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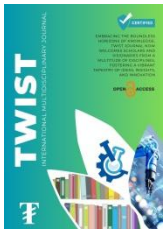

The Effect of Network Competence Among Managers in Small and Medium Enterprise

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Abstract
This study conceptually examined the relationship between Leadership skills and organization performance. It was carried out on 245 samples to include owners/managers of medium sized manufacturing enterprises; structured questionnaire were administered. The findings show that network competence could serve to encourage trust within interdependent firms**.** Thus, the act of developing a leader's skills through coaching and mentoring can be adopted in SMEs, including network competence practices to ensure enterprise performance. We recommend that owners of medium sized SMEs should invest in human capital development such as leadership skills and network competence practices, the outcome can promote innovation of products that enhance organizational performance overtime. Thus, the higher the network competence practice of relationship building in the SMEs, the greater the level of performance experienced by the SMEs.

Keywords
Human resource development, Leadership skills, Network competence, Organizational performance, Small and medium enterprises

INTRODUCTION

Performance concerns demand that organizations continually integrate leaders with quality skills or employees who would be leaders, including those who are likely to assume the role of leadership be developed through coaching and mentoring with skills necessary and specific to areas of engagement. Organizations engage in developing individuals through human resource development (HRD), because they believe that developing their own is crucial for improved performance. Thus, developing leaders to acquire quality leadership skills is sine qua non to organizational outcomes. Mohamad & Hassan (2009), has it that their experiences over the past thirty years in professional development make them conclude that leadership skills are the key to getting results. Hence, it is basic that considerations are accorded leadership skills development, whether at group level, community level, organizational level or even at national level for improved

performance (Yusuf et al., 2024). Leadership skill consist of the skills embedded in the leader's ability to influence extra-ordinary performance in ordinary persons to become motivated to work towards the attainment of a common goal (Dobbins and Pettman, 1997).

However, leadership skills, such as communication, teamwork, problem solving, relational ability, conflict resolution, project management, public relation, professionalism, visionary and strategic thinking, interpersonal ability, leadership, training, coaching and developing subordinates, technical and specialized skills, change management and research skills are germane for organizational performance as pointed out by (Mohamad &Hassan2009). Furthermore, previous investigations about skills, have also shown that organization with effective and quality leadership skills from the start-up always maintain a competitive edge than those organizations without such capabilities (Chell, 2013; Siepel, Cowling, & Coad, 2017). More so, ineffective leadership with obsolete skills is believed to be the reasons for most enterprise failures (Siepel et al., 2017). In fact, 43% SMEs business failures were as a result of low leadership skills (Gbandi & Amissah, 2014; Subairu, 2016; Mohammed & Hilma 2014). Gbandi and Amissah (2014) opines that in the year 1998, nearly 90% of SMEs in Nigeria reported a deficit owing to lack of skills of leadership by management. This lack contributed negatively to the Nigerian national productivity gap with countries like Malaysia, China and Japan (Eze & Okpala, 2015). In other words, incompetence or bad leadership arising from company directors cause high level of corporate failures and these corporate failures are as operational risk which have negative effect on operational risk (Ozuomba, Ibeaja & Nosiri, 2023). Moreover, this is not a conventional challenge, for the reason that certain SMEs do develop leaders with excellent skills for improved performance. This means that organizations with effective leadership development plan can significantly improve levels of employee engagement towards performance stand points and organizational resolve, indicating that improving leadership skills should be paramount in organisations for long-term success.

If left unattended, the knowledge gap could pose a significant obstacle to SMEs' performance. Consequently, the goal of the study is to investigate the potential effects of leadership abilities, such as interpersonal, cognitive, strategic, and business acumen, as well as the mediating role of network competence, on the performance of SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. As a guide for future researchers in this field, the findings of this empirical analysis will contribute to the body of knowledge already available on leadership abilities. Additionally, given the significant influence SMEs have on the development of developing nations, this analysis will advance the body of research on the relationship between SMEs' performance, network competency, and leadership abilities.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Small and Medium Enterprises

SMEs are small and medium-sized companies having fewer than a specific number of workers. According to Holmes and Farrill (2004), SMEs are companies with less than 200 workers. According to Asah et al. (2015), SMEs' traits include their capacity to react quickly to shifting market conditions, which creates a wealth of opportunities for competition. According to Saravanan, Gupta, and Ghatak (2008), SMEs in Africa now account for more than 90% of business operations and more than 50% of employment and GDP in the continent. This highlights SME's primary risk. Since SMEs in Nigeria account for over 90% of employment opportunities and up to 70% of all employment created annually, especially in the manufacturing sector (Agwu & Emeti, 2014; Eniola & Ektebang, 2014), their contribution to the country's economic development cannot be overstated (Ozuomba, Ogujiofor, & Nwadialor, 2016). Furthermore, despite SMEs' role as engines of socioeconomic activity, including innovation, economic expansion, and job creation, many of their owners seem content with the status of their businesses and pay little attention to skill-development concerns. Since this behavior is detrimental to SMEs' ability to survive, HRD must be incorporated to guarantee better performance through the development and training of SMEs' owners and leaders (Asah et al., 2015; Siepel et al., 2017).

Table 1 Dual criteria classification of SMEs in Nigeria

Size	No. of employees	Capital minus land & building
Micro	1 to 9	< 5 million
Small	10 to 49	5 to 50 million
Medium	50-199	51 to 500 million
Large	> 200	≥ 501 million

Source: (SMEDAN, 2013)

Organizational Performance

The practices that best describe organizational performance are being prioritized in the fields of human resource development (Alagaraja, 2012; Katou, 2009; Sung and Choi, 2014). The causes of non-performance, which is frequently linked to failure in developing countries, are also significant (Mahmud and Hilmi, 2014; McCormick & Pedersen, 1996; Ogunyomi and Bruning, 2015). Accordingly, organizational performance can be defined as the degree to which a company successfully accomplishes its planned goal with the limited resources available to it. This is anticipated to lead to the satisfaction of stakeholders' needs and wealth as well as high-quality product innovation (Ozuomba, Anichebe, & Okoye, 2016).

Leadership Skill

According to Chell's (2013) research on entrepreneurial talents, leadership skill is the capacity to influence others, which is likely to bring about change in a given situation. Persuasiveness, self-efficacy, self-awareness, and self-confidence are believed to be related to leadership abilities. According to Chell's explanation of the function of leadership skills, social skills are linked to leadership skills because they allow a leader to persuade and strongly believe in his followers about the significance of an opportunity. The earlier paradigm of leadership talent, which deals with layered strata and plex (i.e. segmented), meaning strataplex, served as the foundation for the investigations of Day et al. (2014) and Mumford et al. (2007). For their case study, the authors selected a sample of roughly 1000 workers, including junior, middle, and senior executives working in their respective fields inside a company. The results indicated that all four of the leadership skill categories cognitive, interpersonal, business, and strategic skills were favourable. According to the authors, these prerequisites are necessary for a leader to perform well at various levels of the company. Second, they noted that higher-level positions inside the company require more of these retirement benefits for leadership skills. This indicates that different leadership skills are required at different levels of the company. For instance, while cognitive skills are important at all levels of the company, strategic acumen is more important and contributes more at the higher levels of management, which need strategic applications to solve performance issues both now and in the future. The aforementioned results make it clear that effective leadership is essential to organizational performance at all levels and in all business categories.

Network Competence

Ritter (1999) conceptualizes network competence as the "degree of network administration duty implementation and the amount of network organisation prerequisite possessed by the individuals handling the enterprise network competence, relations". Walter et al. (2006), alongside the above definition, operationalized network competence as "abilities to initiate, maintain and utilize relationships with various external partners". Using network competence approach in businesses can bridge both knowledge and marketing gaps. Studies have shown that organisations with network competence were able to manage and grow their businesses unlike the organisations without network competences (Chaudhuri & Boer, 2016; Chen, 2015; Ritter, 1999: Torkkeli *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, organizational competencies like network competence and the owners' leadership talents are valuable, distinct, and challenging to replicate, according to resource-based theory (Barney, 1991). According to resource-based theory, incorporating such specialized knowledge and abilities can give businesses a long-term competitive edge (Wernerfelt, 1984; Barney, 1991). Therefore, owner competences, like network competence and leadership skills, can be viewed as sustainable and valuable assets that the company owns to obtain a competitive edge and enhance organizational performance.

Leadership Skill and Network Competence

The competencies of leaders at all business levels were examined by Dai et al. (2011): A test of the pipeline model revealed that the requirements for successful job performance alter as employees advance through different organizational levels. Therefore, in order to be successful and efficient in their new roles, managers need to acquire new skills. According to this, companies who use executive coaches to help managers grow as leaders are better equipped to meet future responsibilities. As previously mentioned, Mumford et al.'s 2007 study on the strataplex of leadership skills: Requirements for leadership abilities at all organizational levels. The results demonstrate that positions at higher organizational levels demand higher levels of leadership abilities, supporting the "strata" part of the model. This is because distinct categories of leadership skill requirements appear at different organizational levels. According to Sousa (2017), the most effective leaders are those who can facilitate learning and knowledge development, coach, be a change agent, and communicate effectively with their workforce. The research's findings include the identification of leadership competencies for raising employee engagement, which may be viewed as components of a leadership skills development model that businesses may use to improve their leaders' abilities.

H1: There is a positive relationship between leadership skill and network competence in the manufacturing medium-sized enterprises.

Leadership Skill and Organizational Performance of SMEs

Over the past three decades, there has been an increase in interest in merging the two distinct notions of organizational performance and leadership abilities, which were formerly two distinct research topics. According to this premise, workers are therefore more likely to be impacted by the leadership style of the company's owners (Purcell & Hutchinson, 2007). Additionally, enhancing leadership abilities through HRD and aligning them with the company's purpose, vision, and goal statement may have a significant effect on the overall performance of the business (Swanson & Hilton, 2010). For example, Aziz, Abdullah, Tajudin, and Mahmood (2013) investigated how leadership styles affected Malaysian SMEs' business performance. The results showed that transactional leadership and corporate performance were significantly positively correlated. The results also show a negative correlation between corporate performance and passive-avoidant leadership. In a similar vein, Jing and Avery (2008) investigated the missing pieces in comprehending the connection between organizational performance and leadership. They discovered that significant knowledge gaps still exist in spite of more study on the connection between performance and leadership. However, Jaoua and Radouche (2014) conducted an empirical study to investigate the moderating effect of leader qualities on the relationship between strategic

management and global performance. The findings indicate that only strategic management directly affects global performance, meaning that regardless of a leader's ability level, only the strategies established by strategic management result in high performance. Karriker, Madden, and Katell (2017) focused on performance, distributed leadership, and team composition. Beyond the effects of team size and female diversity, the results showed a favorable correlation between performance and shared leadership. In light of this, we suggest researching the connection between SMEs' organizational performance and leadership abilities in the industrial sector. Thus, the following theory is proposed: **H2:** There is a positive relationship between leadership skill and organizational performance of SMEs in the manufacturing medium-sized SMEs.

Mediating Effect of Network Competence on Organizational Performance

The literature has hardly examined the mediating function of network competency. Network competence has been employed as a mediator in several research, and some literature has even suggested that network competence be used as a mediator. For instance, Tehseen, et al. (2019) investigated the mediating function of network competence in the relationship between entrepreneurial competences and the expansion of SMEs. The results demonstrate that when network competence was employed as a mediator in the link between the entrepreneurs' strategic and ethical abilities, growth was impacted. In light of this, the study suggests that network competency acts as a mediator between medium-sized SMEs' organizational performance. Thus, the following hypothesis is put forth: **H3:** There is a positive relationship between network competence and organizational performance of the medium sized manufacturing enterprises.

Network Competence Mediates the Relationship Between Leadership Skill and Organizational Performance

According to resource-based theory (Barney, 1991), organizational assets like the owner's leadership talents and network competency are valuable, distinct, and challenging to replicate. Businesses may gain a long-term competitive edge as a result (Barney, 1991). Internal enterprises' strengths, such as inadequate decision-making procedures and inadequate resource management within the organization, can be leveraged to overcome internal weaknesses. Businesses can retain and keep their competitive advantage, profitability, and business growth thanks to their internal resources (Wernerfelt, 1984). The key internal resources that are essential to maintaining a firm's competitive advantage are management expertise, organizational procedures and practices, knowledge, and information controls (Barney, 1991). Owner competences like network proficiency and leadership abilities can be regarded as important assets for the operation of medium-sized businesses. One of the contextual elements that these studies overlook in the context of medium-sized manufacturing is leadership ability. Stated differently, the link between organizational performance and management talent is consistently overlooked. The way that resources, knowledge, and teamwork that facilitate opportunities in medium-sized manufacturing businesses might result in organizational performance can be explained by network competence. The contributions of skills, knowledge, abilities, and opportunities in their organizational setting are explained by network competence (Human & Naude, 2009). Thus, this study's hypothesis is founded on this justification: **H4:** Network competence mediates the relationship between leadership skill and organizational performance in medium sized manufacturing enterprises in Lagos state Nigeria.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study's participants were restricted to managers of medium-sized industrial businesses in Lagos State, Nigeria. This study used probability sampling techniques, where each member of the population was given an equal chance of being chosen. As a result, the Yamane formula was used to sample all 619 proprietors of medium-sized manufacturing businesses. 258 of the 267 questionnaire samples that were sent out were returned. Additionally, 245 responses, or 91.8 percent, had complete valid cases or right answers during the exploratory data analysis (EDA), and this was employed for the study. This is a strong success rate for the minimal that Zainudin (2015) recommends.

Network Competence Questionnaire (NCQ)

According to Ritter, Wilkinson, and Johnston (2002), Torkkeli et al. (2016), and Torkkeli, Puumalainen, Saarenketo, and Kuivalainen (2012), the Network Competence Question was completed using the questionnaire of earlier studies. According to the current study, a five-point Likert scale was used to measure the network competency items.

Leadership Assessment Survey Tool (LAST) 2016

Leadership Assessment Survey Tool (LAST) 2016 version: 01202017 was developed by Troy V, Mumford. This instrument is a five Likert scale with 30 items total, but only 27 items were factored into nine dimensions of three items on each dimension. Those three items which were not among the already existing dimension were struck out to maintain coherency and consistency (Tatherdoost, 2016; Wieland et al., 2017).

Results/ Measurement Model Validation

Construct validity, or the degree to which a set of measured items represents the theoretical latent constructs that they are intended to measure, was investigated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Hair et al, 2006). In addition to observing the model's convergent and composite dependability, CFA provides metrics for overall degree of fit and model specification (Bagozzi, Yi, & Phillips, 1991). To evaluate the measurement of factor loading for items, first and second

order CFA were performed. Items were eliminated if their factor loading was less than 0.5. The construct validity of each construct was tested using second order CFA, which looked at both convergent and discriminant validity. In the meantime, Hair (2010) specifies the following criteria for fit indices to test for a model fit: CAMIN/DF = X2/DF; chi-square (CMIN x2 = (100-200); TLI = >.90; RMSEA = <.08; GFI = >.90; CFI = >.90; IFI=>.90). Based on the model fitness = x2(141) =100.49; P>=0.05; =.000 x2/DF=2.880; GFI=.910; CFI=.965; IFI=.966; TLI=.953; RMSEA =.088; the CFA validated our proposed three-factor structure for the study variables. This suggests that the three constructs are empirically supported by the findings of our CFA. All of the constructs had strong internal consistency and fell within the acceptable range, according to our estimates of composite reliability and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). In accordance with the suggested value (Bagozzi Yi, 2012; Hair et al., 2010), Table 2 displays the summary results of the Construct Validity (CR) above.7 and the AVE value of.5 and above.

Table 2 Final CFA Fitted Measurement Model of the Study with Construct Validity (AVE and CR) and Items Factor Loading

Variables	C.R	AVE
Leadership Skill	0.926	0.757
Organizational Performance	0.924	0.674
Network Competence	0.859	0.754

***Note*:** CFA is for confirmatory factor analysis; AVE stands for average variance extracted; and CR stands for construct/composite reliability

Additionally, each construct's AVE is compared to the squared correlations (shared variance) between it and every other construct in the model to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2006; Farrell, 2010). According to Table 3 below, if a pair of constructs' AVE is higher than their squared correlation coefficient, discriminant validity is considered to be valid (Farrell, 2010). Because the constructs are different from one another, the discriminant validity assumption is not broken.

Discriminant Validity

Table 3 AVE, correlations, and squared correlation are constructed in the study

Variables	OP	LSD	NC
Organizational Performance	**0.821**		
Leadership skill	0.741***	**0.870**	
Network competence	0.747***	0.697***	**0.868**

AVE stands for Average Variance Squared. Correlations between variables are represented by the highlighted values (*** significant level), whilst extracted values are bolded. NC stands for network competency, LDS for leadership skill, and Op for organizational performance

Structural Model Estimation

A structural model is an expressive representation of a structural relationship between constructs. The structural model as one of the two-step approaches was employed for analysis of data and was also used to determine the predictive capability of the independent predictor variable of this study paired with the dependent variable. Thus, the model is set to determine whether the independent variable such as leadership skill has the capacity to predict the dependent variable, organizational performance.

The predicted link between the independent, dependent, and mediator variables is shown in Figure 1. In the meantime, using the model fitness criteria, the total model fitness of the proposed structural model was accessed. Tabachnik and Fidel (1989) suggest that the Chi-Square = CMIN (X2) value should be between 100 and 200. Accordingly, the proposed structural model's chi-square is 141.100 (49). .000 is the P value (>=0.05). According to Bentler (1990) and Mash and Hocevar (1985), the relative Chi-square DF for the relative chi-square (CMIN/DF) must be less than 5.0. As a result, the study's relative chi-square of 2.880 is within the advised range. According to Segars and Grover (1993) and Chau (1997), the GFI ought to be more than 0.8. As a result, the GFI in this study is 0.910, which is higher than 0.8. Additionally, in order for the three fit indices to be greater than >.09 in the range of CFI >.965; IFI >.966; and TLI >.953 correspondingly, CFI, IFI, and TLI must all be greater than 0.90. However, Byrne (2013) states that in order to achieve the model fitness criterion, the RMSEA should be less than or equal to.08. The RMSEA for this investigation is 0.088, which is likewise within the advised range. When considered together and in light of the fit index results, the proposed structural model for this investigation is considered to satisfy the model fitness requirements.

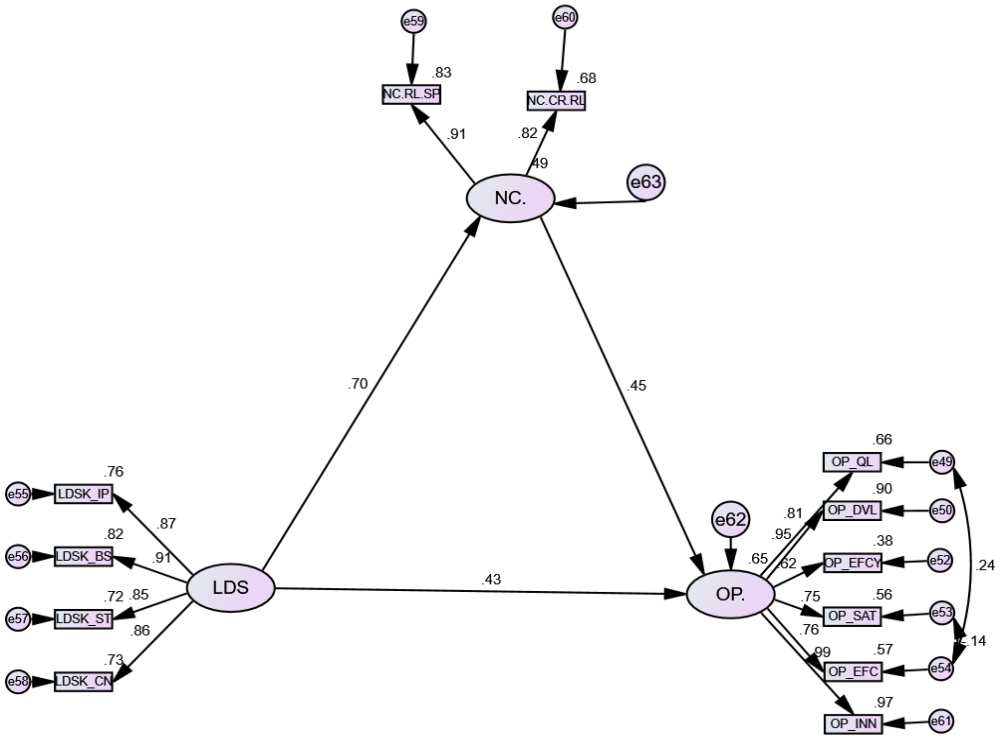

Fig. 1 the hypothesized structural model

The association between the independent variables of leadership skill and network competence, which act as mediators, and the dependent variable, organizational performance, has been tested. In Table 4, the regression coefficient summary is displayed.

Table 4 The regression path coefficient between the constructs and its significance

Construct		Construct	Estimate	S.E	C.R.	P.value	Results
NC.	←---	LDS	0.839	0.075	11.257	***	Significant
OP	←----	LDS	0.359	0.057	6.251	***	Significant
OP	←----	NC.	0.313	0.050	6.219	***	Significant

***Note*:** NC=Network Competence, Op= Organizational Performance; LDS = Leadership skill, S.E=Standardized Estimate, C.R= Critical Ratio

The path (arrow) and its coefficients, which show the extent to which each external construct influences its corresponding endogenous construct, are shown in Table 4. For instance, there is a 0.839 path correlation between network competency and leadership skill. According to this figure, there would be a 0.839-unit rise in network competence for every unit gain in leadership skill. According to the contributions made, network competence was significantly improved by leadership skill (b=.0.839, ρ = 0.000). Additionally, organizational performance was significantly impacted directly by leadership skill (b=.0.359, ρ =.000). Thus, H1 and H2 are generally supported by the results. Additionally, with regard to H3, the relationship between network competency and organizational performance was similarly supported at (b = 0.313, ρ =.000).

Mediation Analysis

First, as illustrated in figure 2, we model the straightforward relationship between the independent variable of leadership skill and the dependent variable of organizational performance in order to test for the mediation effect.

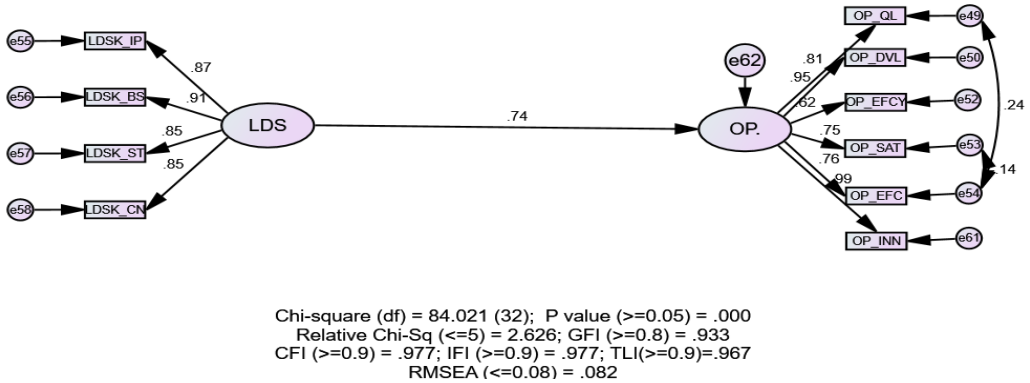

Fig. 2 Direct mediation model between Leadership skill and organisational performance

Following the test, the result is 0.74 with a significant effect p-value of less than 0.000. Second, as illustrated in figure 3, we incorporate the mediator network competency into the model. Using AMOS graphics, the direct effect's coefficient value decreased from 0.74 to 0.43, although it was still significant at 0.000. It is referred to as partial mediation in this instance. Thus, the results of the total, indirect, and direct effect test for mediation estimation were ascertained as indicated in Table 5 below in order to test for the significant indirect effect of network competence on the relationships between leadership skill and organizational performance on individual paths.

Table 5 Distinguishing the standardized total, direct and indirect effect of model and their P-Values

		Total effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Type of mediation
LDS→OP	βeta	0.745	0.430	0.315	partial mediation
	P value	0.001	0.001	0.002	

The proposed H4 hypotheses test was developed based on these relationships in order to estimate the significant indirect effect of network competence in the relationship between leadership skill and organizational performance. According to the above result, the standardized regression weight of the direct effect of leadership skill on SMEs' organizational performance was significant (β =.430, ρ = 0.001), and the standardized indirect effect of leadership skill on network competence through SMEs' organizational performance was found to be significant (β =.315, ρ = 0.002). The indirect test revealed that network competence partially mediates the relationship between leadership skill and the organizational performance of medium-sized manufacturing enterprises The study confirms that network competence is a mediator in the relationship between leadership skill and organizational performance of SMEs. Consequently, the relationship between leadership skill and organizational performance was further enhanced due to the application of network competence. Partial mediation occurs when the direct effect of independent variable on dependent variable is significant, and the direct effect is reduced when mediation enters the model because some of the effects have shifted through the mediator.

Bootstrapping

According to Zainudin (2015), bootstrapping is essentially a resampling technique used to confirm the mediation test's outcome. The 500 bootstrap sample was re-sampled for this investigation, and the mediation test was confirmed by computing the bias correction at a 95% confidence interval. Therefore, network competence somewhat mediates the relationship between leadership skill and organizational performance of the manufacturing SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria, according to the results of standardized direct and indirect effects. Thus, H4 is confirmed by the mediation analysis, which suggests that network competence, rather than direct organizational performance, is impacted by leadership abilities. As seen in table 6, we examined the mediation and bootstrapping results using the traditional method as described by Zainudin (2015).

Table 6 Bootstrapping result

	Indirect effect	**Direct effect**
Bootstrapping results	0.315	0.430
Bootstrapping p-value	0.002	0.001
Results	Significant	Significant
Type of mediation	Partial mediation since indirect is also significant	

leadership skill -network competence-organizational performance = 0.745 p<0.001 is significant based on Standardized total effect

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results of this study go beyond what has been previously known regarding the relationship between leadership abilities and organizational success, which has only shown a direct linear relationship. Specifically, through network competence, this study was able to connect the indirect impact of leadership abilities on organizational performance. This has significantly advanced the theory regarding how network competency improves organizational performance. In the first place, it confirms that SMEs with network competency function better organizationally than their rivals. Second, by valuing individuals and contributions and using appropriate techniques to influence members toward desired goals while allocating resources to accomplish the task with maximum efficiency—including strategic viewpoints and plans that create, set, and accomplish goals in product and quality—as well as by cultivating supportive relationships with pertinent stakeholders and associates, the findings show that leadership skills embodied in a firm practice outcome, such as interpersonal, cognitive, strategic, and business acumen, can holistically promote positive attitude and productive culture. The outcomes may result in improved performance for the organization.

The study's conclusions offer HRD experts, legislators, and business owners some useful takeaways regarding the relationship between network competency and leadership abilities and how they relate to organizational success in the study area. First off, the development of high-performing teams has fostered a spirit of cooperation and unity among team members, which has helped the organization achieve its goals and objectives. This is due to the practice of leadership skills, which use interpersonal and cognitive abilities, including strategic and business acumen, at various levels of the organization. According to the research, in order to obtain the proper leadership skills and deliver a beneficial return on investment in terms of employee development, which in turn affects organizational performance, leaders should be trained through training and development activities like coaching and mentoring. Fundamentally, this study clarifies the

method via which leadership abilities influence organizational performance. The study also emphasizes how crucial network competency may be for enhancing organizational success. This implies that medium-sized business owners can foster innovation and creativity in the production of high-quality goods that enhance organizational performance over time by investing in human capital development activities like network competency and leadership abilities. Therefore, SMEs experience higher levels of performance the more network competency they practice in developing relationships.

CONCLUSION

Enhancing knowledge of a potential mechanism by which network competency influences organizational performance in medium-sized SMEs is the goal of this study. The study's findings indicate that network competence and leadership skills are positively correlated in medium-sized manufacturing businesses. Using AMOS, it was discovered that the leadership abilities significantly improved network competency at (b=.839, ρ = 0.000). Additionally, the outcome demonstrates that organizational performance was significantly impacted directly by leadership abilities at (b=.359, ρ =.000). For medium-sized manufacturing businesses in the study area, the network competence to organizational performance path was similarly supported (b =.313, ρ =.000). Additionally, it was determined that the association between organizational performance and leadership skills is partially mediated by network competence at (β =.430, ρ = 0.001). Nonetheless, the organizational performance of SMEs revealed a significant standardized indirect influence of leadership abilities on network competence (β =.315, ρ = 0.002). Lastly, the results presented here, which show how a network of competence mediates the relationship between leadership abilities and organizational success, could inspire others who want to conduct additional HRD research in Nigeria both inside and outside of the subregion.

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There was no specific funding received for this study.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

There is no conflict of interest to be disclosed by the authors.

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