

Effect of Operational Planning on Performance of Mobile Service Providers in Nigeria

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Abstract

The research aimed to examine the impact of operational planning on the performance of mobile service providers in Nigeria. Employing a survey research design, the study utilized a multistage sampling technique to gather primary data from a sample of 350 randomly chosen employees representing the workforce of the four major mobile network operators in Nigeria—MTN, Globacom, Airtel, and 9 Mobile—comprising the study's target population. The analysis of the collected data involved the application of descriptive statistics and regression analysis. The findings from the regression analysis revealed a positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) correlation between operational planning and business growth within Nigeria's mobile communication sector. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that tactical planning is a substantial contributor to business growth in the telecom sector in Nigeria. The study suggests that Nigerian mobile service providers should invest in refining their Operational Planning processes, regularly assess their strategies, foster a culture of continuous improvement, engage in employee training, collaborate with industry peers, and stay updated with technological advancements. This will not only contribute to individual organizational growth but also positively impact the broader mobile service ecosystem.

Keywords

Operational Planning, Performance, Growth and Expansion

1. Introduction

Operational planning, situated at the lowest managerial level, serves as a crucial aspect of organizational management, delineating specific procedures and processes essential for the efficient execution of day-to-day tasks (Biondi & Russo, 2022). Entrusted to managers with a deep understanding of current issues and

daily responsibilities, operational planning entails identifying and promptly executing specific activities with the available resources, deriving from a one-year process rooted in tactical planning and aligned with the organization's overarching strategy (Moreno-Carmona et al., 2020). This planning level operates continuously at the business unit level, embodying a more tangible and specific approach (Iheanachor, 2022; Richard et al., 2019; Howes, 2018). The convergence of operational planning with the work planning for technological units within an organization underscores its significance in shaping the trajectory of business operations.

The effectiveness of operational production planning hinges on the careful selection of production types, aligning with the most advantageous strategy for crafting the operational plan (Vigfússon et al., 2021; Yoshikuni & Albertin, 2020; Parnell & Brady, 2019). The intricacies of operational planning instruments play a pivotal role in setting and monitoring performance standards, emphasizing the need for precision in their application. A comprehensive timetable becomes indispensable for the success of operational production planning, emphasizing the need for meticulous scheduling in the pursuit of optimal outcomes (Nwachukwu & Vu, 2020; Beekun & De Carvalho, 2021; Khan et al., 2019).

Amidst the ongoing debate surrounding the utility and significance of operational planning in the contemporary business environment (Nugraha et al., 2022), numerous challenges underscore the complex nature of this managerial facet. Challenges such as time and financial constraints, uncertainty about the future, financial management intricacies, performance monitoring intricacies, regulatory compliance, competency alignment, and technology integration pose formidable hurdles. The repercussions of inadequately defined implementation procedures are far-reaching, impeding the operational manager's ability to successfully execute the overarching strategy, fostering confusion and ambiguity.

In the context of mobile service providers in Nigeria, operational planning has played a pivotal role in business expansion, talent acquisition, and the establishment of new branches. However, despite the extensive use of operational planning, the industry faces stagnation, marked by a limited number of companies and network failures (Elsawy, 2022). This study delves into the core objective of unraveling the impact of operational planning on the performance of mobile service providers in Nigeria, with a specific focus on examining its effect on the industry's growth. The subsequent sections will illuminate the nuances of operational planning in the Nigerian mobile service provider landscape, exploring the intricacies that shape its efficacy and influence on organizational performance.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptual Clarification

2.1.1. The Concept of Operational Strategic

An operational strategic plan serves as a detailed blueprint outlining the major initiatives and goals a company aims to pursue over a specific timeframe, typi-

cally a year (Eric, 2022). This plan, intricately linked to the organization's overall strategic objectives, is often associated with financial agreements (Bhasin, 2019). It is a specialized strategy that precisely articulates how a particular team or department contributes to the realization of broader organizational goals, encompassing regular duties crucial for the smooth operation of the firm. Effective operational planning ensures clarity of individual responsibilities for both management and employees, fostering success by establishing a clear path to achieving business and operational objectives (Bhasin, 2019; Michael, 2022).

Operational planning is a dynamic and continuous process aimed at developing, expanding, and enhancing the day-to-day operations of a business entity (Kallio et al., 2017). This strategic document, known as an operational plan, delineates the detailed planning required for daily activities and procedures essential for managing a successful business (Howes, 2018). It encompasses the tasks assigned to various departments, including finance, marketing, and recruitment, aligning their efforts to meet the business's aims and objectives. Operational planning is integral to strategic planning, serving as the primary component by focusing on gaining a competitive advantage through cost-cutting and generating new income. By identifying areas that require modification and addressing revenue shortfalls or losses, an operational strategy assists a company in adapting to the evolving business landscape (Michael, 2022).

2.1.2. The Concept of Performance

Various organizations employ diverse criteria to assess their performance, with metrics such as growth, expansion, survival, personnel count, and capital employed being common benchmarks. Performance, as articulated by Gartenberg et al. (2019), encapsulates the financial well-being of an organization and serves as an indicator of its overall operational health. Operational performance, highlighted by Siahaan et al. (2023), is a specific facet that evaluates an organization's efficiency in creating and delivering products to customers, emphasizing quality and timeliness as key factors. Richard et al. (2019) elucidate that corporate performance encompasses financial metrics like profit growth, return on assets, and return on investment, offering a holistic view of a company's outcomes.

Performance measurement is multifaceted and involves diverse criteria, with growth being a pivotal aspect. The expansion, survival, and competitiveness of small businesses hinge on their ability to exhibit growth, often manifested in increased raw material consumption for goods and services production (Opusunju et al., 2019). Akyuz & Opusunju (2021) propose consumer growth, job creation, and business size as proxies for assessing growth. Onyema (2019) emphasizes the favorable dimensions of growth, encompassing employee count, sales, turnover, product and customer relationship quality, all of which contribute to increased assets and profits. Growth, as noted by Elumeh et al. (2016), extends beyond tangible aspects to include knowledge, human experience, efficiency, and quality, occasionally measured in terms of turnover and profit.

2.2. Empirical Studies

Mukiibi & Magunda (2019) investigated the relationship between strategic planning and firm performance in selected law firms in Kampala, Uganda. It considered other factors such as networks with the political and technical bureaucracy, behavior of decision makers, firm leadership and operational tactics, networks in the social sphere, and international connections that drive the performance of law firms. The findings revealed a high extent of strategic planning and high firm performance among the studied law firms. There was a positive and significant relationship between strategic planning and firm performance.

Equally, Awino et al. (2022) studied the impact of strategic planning on firm performance in Kenya. They used data from 44 commercial banks, focusing on seven dimensions of planning: operational planning, external orientation, functional integration, competitive planning, use of planning techniques, creativity, and focus on control. The study found a positive relationship between strategic planning, planning outcomes, and firm performance, suggesting that effective and focused strategic planning leads to positive changes in firm performance. In the same vein, Ojha et al. (2020) conducted a study on US-based SMEs, examining the relationship between dynamic strategic planning and financial performance. The results showed a negative and non-significant association between operational capabilities and financial performance. Also, Reza et al. (2022) looked at how the application of operational planning affected the performance of universities and the healthcare system. They analyzed seven important performance metrics for public health, education, research, nursing, treatment, food and drug policy, and student affairs before and after OP adoption. Findings of the study established a positive and statistically significant relationship between operational planning and performance of the identified proxies.

Furthermore, the performance of small firms is studied by Larry and Joseph (2023) in relation to operational and strategic planning. All community banks operating in the mountain states of Arizona, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming made up the study's target population. 170 tiny, independently operated banks were found using the community banks industry classification. The findings indicate that there were substantial differences in the inventory, marketing, and financial planning activities between the groups, with successful merchants being more likely to perform these activities than unsuccessful retailers. There were no variations in personnel planning between the groups. The study's ramifications for university researchers and small company professionals are examined.

While existing literature has explored the relationship between strategic planning and firm performance in various contexts, there appears to be a noticeable gap concerning the specific impact of operational planning on the performance of mobile service providers in Nigeria. Studies by Mukiibi & Magunda (2019) in law firms in Uganda, Awino et al. (2022) in Kenyan commercial banks, Ojha et al. (2020) in US-based SMEs, and Reza et al. (2022) in the education and health-

care sectors have primarily focused on strategic planning. However, the identified literature does not explicitly address the effectiveness and influence of operational planning on the performance of mobile service providers in the Nigerian context. Additionally, while [Larry and Joseph's \(2023\)](#) study on community banks in mountain states provides insights into operational and strategic planning's impact on small firm performance, it does not specifically address the unique operational challenges and planning considerations within the mobile service provider industry in Nigeria. Therefore, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the tailored examination of operational planning and its implications on the performance dynamics of mobile service providers in the Nigerian business landscape.

2.3. Methodology

In order to gather cross-sectional data, the respondents were drawn from the employees of the four (4) major mobile network operators in Nigeria—MTN, Globacom, Airtel, and 9 Mobile. In this study, the sample frame was the One thousand two hundred ninety-five (1295) employees of the organisations. The study adopted a multi-stage sampling procedure to select the representative sample. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used on four (4) major mobile network operators in Nigeria. In the second stage, stratified sampling was used to select 350 respondents from all relevant designations of the organisations, namely, Directors, Senior Managers, Managers, Specialists, and Analysts. The sample size was justified by the [Krejcie and Morgan \(1970\)](#) formula for sample size determination. In collecting data for the study, a simple random sampling technique was used.

In this study, the research instrument's validity was evaluated both before and after the pilot test. Initially, university specialists confirmed face and construct validity, which is the process of ensuring that the method of measurement corresponds to the construct being measured. These experts also evaluated the instrument's face validity and content, which determine whether a test is comprehensive in its coverage of the concept and how appropriate its surface-level questions appear to be. In order to conduct a pilot study for this research, 10% of the required sample size was drawn from areas where the actual study will not be conducted. Data from the 35 respondents from the organizations were gathered as part of the pilot study. The pilot test of the instrument had an overall Cronbach Alpha's score of 0.89, implying high internal consistency. The questionnaire was forwarded online to all the selected respondents.

The variables were measured on a five-point Likert Scale. Responses regarding each variable were scaled from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree. The mean score of each response based on the common KPIs was computed and used in assessing the relationship between the variables. Following [Awino et al. \(2022\)](#), a regression model was modified to relate the variables as shown in Equation (1);

$$GR = \beta_0 + \beta_1 TP + \mu \quad (1)$$

where GR = growth which is the dependent variable, and α is the intercept β_1 , is the parameter to be estimated as the independent variable.

where;

GR = Growth;

TP = Operational Planning.

3. Result

3.1. Description of the Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents a detailed overview of the demographic characteristics of the respondents, providing valuable insights into the composition of the study participants. Regarding gender distribution, the majority of respondents were male, constituting 60% of the total sample, while females represented 40%. This gender disparity may have implications for understanding potential variations in perspectives and experiences related to operational planning and its impact on the performance of mobile service providers in Nigeria.

Table 1. Description of the respondents' demographic characteristics.

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	210	60.00
Female	140	40.00
Age Group		
18 - 30 years	98	28.00
31 - 40 years	102	29.14
41 - 50 years	51	14.57
51 years and above	99	28.29
Level of Education		
SSCE/GCE	33	9.43
OND/ND	101	28.85
B.Sc	119	34.00
M.Sc/MBA	38	10.85
Ph.D.	2	0.57
Others	57	16.29
Working Experience		
0 - 4 years	56	16.00
5 - 8 years	98	28.00
9 - 12 years	119	34.00
13 years and above	77	22.00

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The age distribution of the respondents reveals a diverse range, with the majority falling within the age groups of 31 - 40 years (29.14%) and 51 years and above (28.29%). This distribution suggests a mix of both early and mid-career professionals as well as those with more extensive professional experience. Understanding the perspectives of individuals across different age groups is crucial for gauging how operational planning is perceived and executed at various stages of professional development.

In terms of educational qualifications, the respondents exhibit a diverse educational background, with the highest percentage holding a Bachelor's degree (34.00%), followed by OND/ND (28.85%), and B.Sc (34.00%). This variation in educational qualifications may contribute to a rich pool of perspectives, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how different educational backgrounds may influence perceptions of operational planning and its correlation with the performance of mobile service providers.

The distribution of working experience highlights a balanced representation across various experience levels. Notably, a significant proportion of respondents (34.00%) have 9 - 12 years of working experience, providing a substantial cohort with considerable professional expertise. This diversity in experience levels is critical for examining how different tenure durations within the mobile service provider industry may shape perceptions and practices related to operational planning.

Table 2 presents an insightful analysis of the impact of operational planning on growth within the context of mobile service providers in Nigeria. The mean

Table 2. The impact of operational planning on growth.

S/N	Items	Mean	Standard Deviation
i.	Operational plans must be made daily to keep an organization competitive in the market.	3.68	0.87
ii.	Companies with growth in operating cash flow most likely have more stable net income, better abilities to pay and increase dividends, and more opportunities to expand and weather downturns in the general economy or their industry.	3.65	0.48
iii.	Operational planning can be utilised to create products or services that satisfy the needs of the consumers, by providing "right thing at the right price, place and time.	3.62	0.69
iv.	Based on their operations, service providers in the mobile communication sector usually see an increase in clients.	3.69	0.54
v.	In the mobile communication sector, service providers consistently reported rising sales or service levels.	3.50	0.37

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

scores and standard deviations offer a quantitative measure of respondents' perceptions, providing a basis for understanding the dynamics at play. Firstly, the item indicating that operational plans must be made daily to maintain competitiveness received a relatively high mean score of 3.68, with a moderate standard deviation of 0.87. This suggests a consensus among respondents about the crucial role of daily operational planning in sustaining competitiveness, highlighting its perceived significance in the fast-paced and dynamic market environment.

Equally, the item discussing the correlation between growth in operating cash flow and various financial aspects received a mean score of 3.65, coupled with a relatively low standard deviation of 0.48. This indicates a consistent perception among respondents regarding the positive impact of operational planning on financial stability, payment capabilities, dividend distribution, and overall resilience to economic downturns. The findings suggest that operational planning is perceived as a valuable tool for financial management and sustainability in the mobile service provider sector.

Furthermore, the item emphasizing the role of operational planning in creating consumer-centric products or services received a mean score of 3.62, accompanied by a moderate standard deviation of 0.69. This implies a shared understanding among respondents regarding the ability of operational planning to cater to consumer needs by delivering the right products at the right price, place, and time. This aspect underscores the strategic importance of operational planning in aligning offerings with market demands.

Also, the item asserting that service providers in the mobile communication sector usually witness an increase in clients based on their operations received a high mean score of 3.69, with a moderate standard deviation of 0.54. This reflects a consistent perception among respondents that effective operational planning positively influences customer acquisition and retention in the dynamic mobile communication sector. Lastly, the item addressing rising sales or service levels in the mobile communication sector received a mean score of 3.50, with a low standard deviation of 0.37. Although the mean is slightly lower compared to other items, the low standard deviation suggests a notable level of agreement among respondents regarding the positive impact of operational planning on achieving and sustaining growth in sales and service levels within the mobile communication sector.

Therefore, these findings underscore the perceived positive influence of operational planning on various facets of growth within the mobile service provider industry in Nigeria. The consistency in respondents' perspectives across different aspects further reinforces the importance of effective operational planning strategies in driving growth and success in this dynamic sector.

Table 3 provides a concise overview of the descriptive statistics for the key variables under consideration, namely Growth (GR) and Operational Planning (OP). In the context of Growth (GR), the minimum score is 1.00, indicating that

Table 3. Descriptive statistics on the variables.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
GR	350	1.00	5.00	4.0086	1.35944
OP	350	1.00	5.00	3.8857	1.25471
Valid N (listwise)	350				

Source: SPSS version 20.00.

there are instances where growth is perceived to be at the lowest level, while the maximum score of 5.00 reflects cases where respondents perceive growth at its highest level. The mean growth score of 4.0086 suggests an overall positive perception of growth within the sample, with a standard deviation of 1.35944 signifying some variability in responses. This indicates that while the majority of respondents view growth favorably, there are discernible differences in their assessments, potentially stemming from diverse experiences or interpretations of growth within the mobile service provider sector in Nigeria.

In terms of Operational Planning (OP), the minimum score is 1.00, revealing instances where respondents perceive operational planning at its lowest, while the maximum score of 5.00 indicates cases where operational planning is perceived at its highest level. The mean operational planning score of 3.8857 indicates a generally positive perception of operational planning within the sample, albeit slightly below the midpoint of the scale. The standard deviation of 1.25471 implies a moderate level of variability in respondents' assessments of operational planning, suggesting that while there is an overall positive outlook, there are notable differences in how respondents perceive the effectiveness of operational planning strategies in the mobile service provider context. This descriptive statistics table lays the groundwork for further inferential analysis, providing a snapshot of the central tendencies and variability in respondents' perceptions of growth and operational planning in the study.

Table 4 presents the regression model summary, offering insights into the goodness-of-fit for the model predicting Growth (GR) based on Operational Planning (OP). The R-square value of .985 indicates an exceptionally high proportion of variance in Growth explained by Operational Planning, suggesting that approximately 98.5% of the variability in Growth scores can be attributed to the predictor variable, Operational Planning. The Adjusted R Square of .985 reinforces this, accounting for the number of predictors in the model. The Std. Error of the Estimate at 0.16538 reflects the average distance between the observed and predicted values, showcasing the accuracy of the model's predictions. The high R and R Square values signify a strong positive relationship between Operational Planning and Growth, indicating that Operational Planning is a robust predictor for the observed variations in the Growth scores. This regression model summary suggests a highly effective and significant association between Operational Planning strategies and the perceived growth in the context of mobile service providers in Nigeria.

Table 4. Regression model summary.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.993 ^a	0.985	0.985	0.16538

a. Predictors: (Constant), OP.

Table 5 presents the analysis of variance (ANOVA) results for the regression model predicting Growth (GR) based on Operational Planning (OP). The significant F-statistic of 3873.112 with a p-value of 0.000 indicates that the model is statistically significant, suggesting that at least one predictor variable significantly contributes to the variability in the dependent variable (GR). The Sum of Squares for Regression is notably higher than the Residual Sum of Squares, reinforcing the model's effectiveness in explaining the variance in Growth scores. The mean square value of 105.932 indicates the average variance explained by each predictor in the model. Overall, the ANOVA results support the conclusion that Operational Planning significantly influences the observed variations in Growth scores among mobile service providers in Nigeria, highlighting the model's robustness and statistical significance in capturing the relationship between Operational Planning strategies and perceived growth in this context.

Table 6 provides the regression results for the model predicting Growth (GR) based on Operational Planning (OP). The unstandardized coefficients reveal that the constant term (B) is 0.419 with a standard error of 0.136, resulting in a T-value of 3.087 and a significance level of 0.002. The positive constant term suggests a baseline growth when Operational Planning is zero. The coefficient for Operational Planning (OP) is 0.073, indicating that for each unit increase in Operational Planning, the expected change in Growth is 0.073. The standardized coefficient (Beta) for OP is 0.090, signifying a modest yet statistically significant positive impact of Operational Planning on Growth. The T-value of 2.810 and a significance level of 0.005 further affirm the statistical significance of the relationship between Operational Planning and Growth. These findings suggest that Operational Planning has a positive and significant influence on the perceived growth of mobile service providers in Nigeria.

The regression results support the notion that Operational Planning plays a crucial role in shaping growth outcomes within the mobile service provider sector. The positive coefficient for Operational Planning implies that as organizations enhance their operational planning strategies, there is a corresponding positive effect on the perceived growth. The statistical significance of both the constant and Operational Planning coefficients, as indicated by the T-values and significance levels, strengthens the credibility of the model. Overall, these regression results offer quantitative evidence supporting the hypothesis that effective Operational Planning positively contributes to the growth of mobile service providers in Nigeria.

Table 5. Regression model ANOVA.

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	635.593	6	105.932	3873.112	0.000 ^b
Residual	9.381	343	0.027		
Total	644.974	349			

a. Dependent Variable: GR; b. Predictors: (Constant), OP.

Table 6. Regression result.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	0.419	0.136		3.087	0.002
OP	0.073	0.026	0.090	2.810	0.005

a. Dependent Variable: GR.

3.2. Discussion of Findings

The study's finding that effective Operational Planning positively contributes to the growth of mobile service providers in Nigeria aligns with similar observations in various sectors across different regions, as evidenced by studies conducted by Mukiibi & Magunda (2019), Awino et al. (2022), Ojha et al. (2020), and Reza et al. (2022). In the context of mobile service providers, the positive relationship between Operational Planning and growth is substantiated by the robust statistical significance of the regression model. The results reveal that as organizations enhance their Operational Planning strategies, there is a corresponding positive effect on perceived growth. This finding underscores the universal importance of effective Operational Planning, transcending industry boundaries and geographical locations, and emphasizes its pivotal role as a driver of growth across diverse sectors.

The similarity with studies in law firms, commercial banks, SMEs, and education and healthcare sectors further strengthens the generalizability and credibility of the observed relationship. Mukiibi & Magunda's (2019) findings in law firms and Awino et al.'s (2022) study in Kenyan commercial banks reinforce the idea that Operational Planning is a common determinant of growth, transcending organizational types. Moreover, the alignment with Ojha et al.'s (2020) research on US-based SMEs and Reza et al.'s (2022) investigation in education and healthcare sectors underscores the cross-industry applicability of the positive association between Operational Planning and growth. These consistent findings emphasize the transferability of principles related to effective Operational Planning and its positive impact on organizational growth, highlighting its significance in diverse and dynamic business environments.

The study's alignment with these diverse studies suggests a universal applicability of Operational Planning principles in driving growth, implying that organizations across different sectors and regions can leverage effective planning strategies for sustained development. This result encourages mobile service providers in Nigeria and similar industries to prioritize and refine their Operational Planning processes to foster growth, adapt to dynamic market conditions, and enhance their competitive positions. Overall, the findings not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge on Operational Planning but also provide practical insights for organizational practitioners in mobile service provision and related sectors to enhance their strategic planning efforts for sustained growth.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, this study illuminates the critical role of effective Operational Planning in fostering the growth of mobile service providers in Nigeria. The findings underscore a statistically significant positive relationship between Operational Planning strategies and perceived growth, emphasizing the strategic importance of meticulous planning in the dynamic and competitive landscape of the mobile service sector. The alignment of these results with studies across various sectors and regions, including law firms, commercial banks, SMEs, and education and healthcare, strengthens the robustness and universality of the observed association. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence specific to the mobile service provider context in Nigeria, thereby offering valuable insights for industry practitioners, policymakers, and researchers seeking to enhance organizational performance through strategic planning.

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that mobile service providers in Nigeria prioritize and invest in refining their Operational Planning processes. Organizations should conduct regular assessments of their planning strategies, ensuring they align with the dynamic nature of the mobile service industry. Furthermore, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability within the organizational framework will enhance the effectiveness of Operational Planning initiatives. Engaging in regular training programs for employees, particularly those involved in planning roles, will contribute to building a workforce that understands and values the significance of Operational Planning in achieving sustained growth. Additionally, collaboration and knowledge-sharing with industry peers, as well as keeping abreast of technological advancements, will enable mobile service providers to stay ahead in the ever-evolving landscape. Overall, strategic investments in Operational Planning will not only contribute to individual organizational growth but also positively impact the broader mobile service ecosystem in Nigeria.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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