FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT AND RESPONSIVENESS OF QUICK SERVICE RESTAURANTS

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Abstract:

The aim of this study was to determine the nexus between frontline employee competence development and responsiveness of QSRs, using training, coaching and mentoring as dimensions of competence development. Responsiveness was treated unidimensionally. The study adopted an explanatory research design and used a questionnaire to collect primary data; while the Spearman's rank order correlation served as the test statistic, relying on SPSS version 20.0. The study observed that frontline employee competence development associates strongly with responsiveness of QSRs as all the dimensions of competence development posted strong, positive and statistically significant relationship with responsiveness. The study concludes that frontline employee competence development informs responsiveness of QSRs, or that responsiveness of QSRs depends on mentoring, training and coaching of frontline employees. The study recommends that QSRs that seek to be responsive to changes in their operating environments must continually update the competencies of their frontline employees through mentoring, training and coaching.

Keywords: competence development, coaching, frontline employees, mentoring, training, responsiveness

1. Introduction

The ability to respond to market opportunities and the vagaries of the business-scape has been identified as a critical success factor for firms. Increased global competition, shifting customer preferences and rapid advances in technology have created an environment wherein sustained competitive advantage is difficult to achieve, and even more difficult to maintain (Bhatt, Emdad, Roberts, & Grover, 2010). However, the resource-based view of competitive advantage suggests that sustained competitiveness could be achieved through the acquisition, development and deployment of "*valuable,*

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rare, and inimitable resources" (Bhatt et al, 2010; Makadok, 2001; Grant, 1991). This implies that business organisation that possess, and engage in studied deployment of inimitable and non-substitutable resources could enjoy sustained competitiveness (Makadok, 2001). Resource-picking and capability building are identified as two distinct strategic mechanisms that build and sustains competitive advantage (Bhatt et al, 2010). Resource-picking involves creating economic rents by applying superior knowledge while capability building involves building unique capabilities from the resources (Bhatt et al, 2010).

Competent employees constitute "*valuable, rare, and inimitable resources*" for firms (Grant, 1991). It is thus an imperative for business firms to possess competent employees that are skilled in the performance of their tasks; and deploy same to perform such tasks in which they are proficient, if they must remain successful in today's highly competitive business-scape. This is even more essential in service settings because services rely more on human competency. Firms that are very sensitive to changes in the business-scape have a strategic organizational capability that enables them to adapt easily. These firms continue to "*maintain acceptable results without incurring high reorganization costs*" (Asree, Zai, & Razalli, 2010). They possess core competencies that enable them operate efficiently within the business environment and respond to challenges (Chen, Katila, McDonald, & Eisenhardt, 2010) seamlessly.

Companies differ in terms of their resource-picking and capability building abilities; and this yield differences in corporate performance. Companies that are able to select, build, deploy and protect core competencies are most likely to post better performances (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990). Responsiveness is central to business success. A firm's performance is often determined by its ability to respond quickly to changes in the business environment. Responsiveness enables companies to "*detect market changes quickly, reconfigure their processes to meet new market requirements, share information across organizational units, take maximum advantage of information processing systems, and adopt new product and process technologies ahead of competitors*" (Hoyt et al, 2007). The level of uncertainty in the operating environment of firms supports the assertion that responsiveness is a key determinant of competitiveness. It is an essential condition that allows firms to develop competitive advantage. It is therefore pertinent to understand the factors within organisations that enhance their ability to respond to environmental change quickly and effectively.

Various studies have been conducted to determine the key enablers of responsiveness. Hoyt et al (2007) and Van de Ven, 1986 conducted a multivariate study that looked at how environmental scanning, strategic planning, flexible manufacturing infrastructures, supply chain governance mechanisms and multi-skilled workers inform responsiveness. However, being multivariate in nature, these studies did not identify the variable that is most significant in enabling organisational responsiveness. Zaim, Yaşar, & Ünal (2013) on their part studied the effects of individual competencies on organisational performance; while Tallon and Pinsonneault (2011); Lu and Ramamurthy (2011) and Sambamurthy, Bharadwaj, and Grover (2003) investigated the

link between information technology and organizational agility. Furthermore, Kuye and Sulaimon (2011) studied how employee involvement in decision making affects performance while Inthiyaz (2017) examined the impact of employee skill development on organizational performance. Save for Inthiyaz (2017) and Zaim et al (2013), studies that link employee competence development and organisational responsiveness are in short supply. The purpose of the current study therefore, is to join in the discourse of identifying the enablers of organisational responsiveness by examining the nexus between employee competence development and responsiveness of quick service restaurants (QSRs).

2. Conceptual Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Frontline Employee Competence Development
Customers make contact with business organisations through frontline employees. Frontline employees are the personnel with whom customers make their first contact in their interaction with the firm. Various scholars give these employees different appellations, even though their job remains the same. Bowen and Hallowell (2002) identify them as customer-contact employees; Czepiel (1990) described them as boundary spanning employees while Crosby, Evans, and Cowles (1990) view them as front-line personnel. These employees link the firm and its customers. They also manage and sustain relationships with customers (Payne & Webber, 2006). Frontline employees offer the first and often the only impression of the firm and therefore are the image makers of the firm, representing the organization to the customers (Bowen & Hallowell, 2002).

The need for frontline employees to be up-to-date on latest opportunities and challenges, as well as changing value requirements of customers and business owners in the fast-paced, high-pressure business-scape (Ateke & Kalu, 2016) is paramount. Firms therefore need to regularly update the knowledge and skills of these employees via continual competence development programmes. Competencies represent the cluster of related knowledge, skills, and attitudes that affects one's job and correlates with job performance, which can be measured against established standards, and that can be improved through competence development (Zaim, Yaşar, & Ünal, 2013). Employee competence development (ECD) includes activities aimed at enlarging employees' knowledge and skills in order to prepare them to assume newer or greater responsibilities and challenges and facilitate the achievement of nominated organizational objectives (Asiegbu, Awa, Akpotu, & Ogbonna, 2011). Through ECD, employees broaden their horizons and acquire newer technologies to enable them become more efficient and increase their creativity in problem-solving (Harcourt & Ateke, 2018).

Knowledge, skills, attitudes and other behaviours that inform improved performance of employees in particular and firms in general are cultivated through programmes designed by the management of firms; hence, it is suggested that the

development of employee competence depends on management (Asiegbu et al, 2011; Pfeffer, 1994). Competence development empowers employees and creates a setting for employees to contribute to the competitiveness of the firm (Inthiyaz, 2017). The resource-based view of competitive advantage emphasizes the place of internal resources, such as competent employees, in the development and maintenance of firms' competitive capabilities (Grant, 1991; Barney, 1991). Also, studies note that competent employees are the ultimate source of sustained competitive advantage, given that globalization and other environmental changes have weakened the conventional sources of competitive advantage (Asiegbu et al, 2011) such as markets, financial capital and scale economies. Thus, businesses that aspire to be successful in the globalized business environment acquire and build employees who possess better skills and capabilities than their competitors, and also invest in them (Pfeffer, 1994). Managers effect ECD through training, coaching and mentoring. These activities are therefore adopted as adequate dimensions of ECD.

2.1.1 Training

Training is the process of instilling competencies, skills, knowledge and attitudes in individuals that translates to improved productivity and company wellness (Asiegbu et al, 2011). It is the process of acquiring specific skills to perform a job better or to become qualified and proficient in doing a job. Training focuses on using appropriate techniques to transfer expert knowledge and skills which are intended to positively change individuals' current behaviour (Asiegbu et al, 2011). Training involves teaching, informing or educating people so that they become better equipped to do their job and better qualified to perform in positions of greater challenges or responsibilities (Ateke & Kalu, 2016; Asiegbu et al, 2011). It is one of the most potent tools managers use to create efficient employees (Gillis & Beauchemin, 2000). Through training, employees acquire new behaviours, skills and knowledge that assist in the performance of their job and help the organization to achieve its objectives (Rathore, 2017). The overriding importance of training is captured in the statement of J. W. Marriott who states that "*If you take care of your employees and train them systematically, they will treat your customers well and business will run itself*"

Frontline employees communicate the firm's value proposition to customers, cultivate relationships, educate and provide solutions to customers' problems (Ateke & Kalu, 2016). Hence, organizations usually undertake the training of these employees with the belief that the modified behaviour that comes through training can facilitate the attainment of nominated organizational objectives. The goal of training is to increase the efficiency of employees through improved education and skills acquisition. Organizations need employees who are not only skilled in the performance of their tasks, but who are also up-to-date with changes in the environment. It is thus cogent that firms continually update the knowledge and skills of employees. The most important assets of firms are their employees; they determine the prosperity and survival of the organisation. Training is one of the conditions that enable greater

productivity. It informs stable management, and is a vital and indispensable condition for continuity (Hamid & Behrad, 2014).

2.1.2 Coaching

People management in the fast-paced business-scape is gradually but consistently shifting from "*command and control*" to "*develop and empower*" (Ateke & Kalu, 2016). Increasingly, managers are taking more responsibility for ensuring that employees always have the knowledge and skills necessary to perform at a high level. Coaching is the new tool managers are using to improve employees (Noe, 2002). Coaching is a wisdom-transfer process, from a wise and trusted teacher to an acolyte; and is done in real time, performed on the job as the coach uses real tasks and problems to help the learner increase performance (Harcourt & Ateke, 2018). It is a tool managers adopt to develop employees' when new competencies are needed due to changes in work situations, or when poor performance indicates that remedial instructions are required. "*Over time, coaching also prepares employees for advancement and additional responsibility*" (Minter & Thomas, 2000). The international coach federation defines coaching as "*a strategic partnership in which the coach empowers the client to clarify goals, create action plans, move past obstacles and achieve what the client chooses*" The development of a coaching culture in organisations and the adoption of coaching style of management is thus premised on the need to enhance effectiveness.

Coaching seek to enhance performance rather than rectify performance issues. However, coaching has been shown to be highly effective as an intervention in cases of performance rectification (Minter & Thomas, 2000). Business, sports, psychology as well as general management provides theoretical underpinnings of performance coaching. Skills coaching have some commonalities with one-to-one training. Skills coaches combine a holistic approach to personal development with the ability to focus on the core skills employees needs to perform in their roles. Traditional training programmes are often too inflexible or generic to deal with the fast pace of the contemporary business environment. Managers thus adopt coaching to equip employees to keep up with changing job roles at an increasing rate. "*In these instances one-to-one skills coaching allows a flexible, adaptive 'just-in-time' approach to skills development*" (Salters, 1997). It is also possible to apply skills coaching in "live" environments rather than taking people away from the job into a "classroom" where it is less easy to simulate the job environment. Noe (2002) emphasize that:

> "*Managers coach in order to build employees' knowledge and skills. Unless managers are handed a staff that possesses all of the knowledge and skills they will ever need to do their jobs, some learning must take place during the employment relationship. Coaching is simply a way that managers supplement any formal training and on-the-job learning that their employees get, and a way to give remedial instruction when performance deficiencies necessitate it. Coaching can also be part of a long-term effort to promote employee development; since one of the criteria that leaders are evaluated on is how well they develop others.*"

Employees can be instructed using varying levels of specificity. Often, managers coach by guiding employees on how to figure things out for themselves. Managers may rely more on monitoring employees' professional development, helping them see opportunities for self-improvement, and encouraging them to continue to progress in their development.

2.1.3 Mentoring

Mentoring represents a caring and supportive relationship between a proficient individual and another who is less so. It is a relationship in the workplace or educational settings in which a respected, experienced person partners with a less experienced person to support and nurture personal and professional growth through a series of time-limited, confidential, one-on-one conversations and other learning activities (Asiegbu et al, 2011; Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006). Mentoring is intended to improve individual productivity through building on existing skills and knowledge of the less experienced person. Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal. They are individual focused, and may employ a variety of different roles. Mentoring occurs over multiple, planned and sequential interactions through various contact modalities such as personal contact or contact via telephone or other interactive media (Kram & Isabella, 1985). The positive effects of mentoring are generally thought to be derived from the support and role modelling these relationships offer (Rhodes et al, 2006). Mentoring relationships enhance the development of individuals in both early and middle career stages (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Phillips-Jones, 1982). Scholars posit that mentoring is instrumental in supporting both career advancement and personal growth (Phillips-Jones, 1982).

Mentoring is an effective strategy in various professional calling, including education, business, sport, nursing and theatre arts. It is used to develop expertise and leadership within professions. Traditionally, mentoring involves a voluntary alliance between an experienced senior professional and a less advanced one, for the dual purposes of career development and the enhancement of the profession (Byrne & Keefe, 2002). Studies on mentoring delineate specific developmental functions provided by mentor-protégé relationships (Kram, 1985; Kram & Isabella, 1985). "*Mentors provide protégés with career-enhancing opportunities, such as sponsorship, coaching, facilitating exposure and visibility, and offering challenging work or protection, all of which help the younger person to establish a role in the organization, learn the ropes, and prepare for advancement*" (Kram & Isabella, 1985). Mentors offer role modelling, counselling, confirmation, and friendship, which help protégés develop a sense of professional identity and competency. "*In providing these functions, an experienced mentor gains technical and psychological support, finds internal satisfaction in enabling a younger colleague to learn how to navigate in the organizational world, and gains respect from colleagues for successfully developing younger talents for the organization*" (Phillips-Jones, 1982).

The literature on mentoring identifies three distinct types of mentoring: Youth mentoring, academic mentoring, and workplace mentoring. Youth mentoring

represents a relationship between a caring, supportive and experienced adult and an adolescent, based on the assumption that such supportive relationships with adults are important for the emotional, cognitive and psychological growth of the adolescent (Rhodes, 2002; Ainsworth, 1989). Academic mentoring on the other hand represents the apprentice model of education wherein, a senior colleague imparts knowledge, provides support, and offers guidance to a junior on academic, as well as non-academic issues (Jacobi, 1991). This type of mentoring facilitates psychological adjustment and fosters a sense of professional identity (Austin, 2002). Finally, workplace mentoring occurs in organizational settings and the purpose is the personal and professional growth of the protégé (Kram, 1985). Mentoring is vital and significant in organisational settings because both the mentor and the protégé benefit from the relationship (Kram & Isabella, 1985).

2.2 Responsiveness

Responsiveness is the ability of a firm to respond to customers' needs in terms of quality, speed and flexibility (Asree et al, 2010). It describes the competitive capability of the operations management function in a firm. Organisational responsiveness in service settings is characterised by combined goals such as time, quality and flexibility (Asree et al, 2010). Responsiveness has been viewed from two separate functional perspectives: Service marketing and operations management (Palmer, 2001). From service-marketing perspective, responsiveness is related to the willingness to help customers and speed of service delivery; while from operations management perspective, it is more related to the speed and variety of products offered. This study however, views responsiveness from both perspectives, and conceives it as the ability of a firm to provide a variety of services speedily as well as the willingness to help customers in service delivery processes (Asree et al, 2010). Responsiveness as used in this study therefore represents the cumulative capabilities of the firm in terms of multiple performance measures such as quality, speed and flexibility. Hoyt et al (2007) and Holweg, (2005) also demonstrates the multidimensionality of responsiveness

Organisational responsiveness is itself a dimension of the market orientation construct where it represents the organisation's swift and seamless response to market intelligence about current and future customer needs; as well as threats and opportunities in the business environment. It entails the capacity of the firm to speedily summon individual and collective competencies to address issues relating to the firm itself, customers or competitors. The ability and capacity to respond to challenges posed by the environment is often a strategic challenge for most firms. However, investment in employees in terms of competence development is a viable strategic move that enable firms to surmount this challenge. The design school of strategy formation (Andrews, 1987; Chandler, 1962) suggests that responsiveness consists in a strategy formation as entrepreneurial response to match internal abilities and opportunities in the environment (Hoyt et al, 2007).

Through their environmental scanning activities, firms gather intelligence. However, what makes the difference is how firms respond to such intelligence. Firms

that are able to react quickly and effectively so, are better able to survive and prosper. Continuous adaptation to changing business conditions is thus an essential strategic manoeuvre (Chen et al, 2010). Firms adapt to vagaries in the business-scape by being responsive through fast decisions while simultaneously considering several possible alternatives (Ateke & Nadube, 2017; Judge & Miller, 1991). Responsive firms undertake prompt and seamless transformations in their configuration, programmes and activities (Brannen & Doz, 2012; Dyer & Ericksen, 2005), including leadership, strategy, innovation, knowledge sharing, organization etc. (Brueller, Carmeli, & Drori, 2014; Morgan & Page, 2008). "*Responsiveness is thus a concept related to strategy and marketing that permeates the variables involved in management action, which leads the company to innovate, seize business opportunities, adapt and act proactively*" (Hult, Ketchen & Slater, 2005).

2.3 Frontline Employee Competence Development and Responsiveness

Learning organisations identify knowledge as a necessary strategic weapon that can be used against competitors. Such organisations therefore view employees' competence development as a necessary investment. Today's knowledge-based economies require firms to equip their employees to enable them cope with emerging challenges of the business-scape. Highly developed employees represent the collective knowledge stock of an organisation. They constitute the organisation's human capital. Human capital is important because it is a source of innovation and strategic renewal (Bontis, 1999). The competencies of employees encompass explicit and tacit knowledge that enable them to exhibit proficiency in the performance of their job. Knowledge that can be taught, read, and explained are categorised as explicit knowledge while tacit knowledge involves non-transmittable knowledge gained through personal experience (Collins & Hitt, 2006).

Employees confer competitiveness through their competencies. Competencies in terms of skills, education, attitude and other behavioural component of employees' enable firms to respond effectively to environmental challenges. Employees are thus considered the most important corporate asset in a learning organisation (Grant, 1991). Intellectual assets as embodied in employees have therefore become more important than any other because knowledge is a catalyst for differentiating a firm's work from its competitors (Stewart, 2001). Human knowledge manifests in skills or expertise and usually combines explicit and tacit knowledge (Hedlund, 1994) in Ateke and Didia (2017). Firms leverage this knowledge to better respond to the business environment. The concept of knowledge leverage denotes a conscious organisational effort to manage the competencies of its staff. This notion is also traceable to the concept of intellectual capital which Grant (1991) identify as one of firms' most important intangible resources. Employees' competence development; as well as the utilisation of these competencies is essential to organisational adaptability and responsiveness (Ateke & Didia, 2017).

The continuous shifts in consumer preferences and shorter product life cycle require firms to develop competencies that could enhance their ability to readily

respond to the dynamics of the marketplace (Dyer & Ericksen 2005). Such competencies are often embedded in employees through competence development. Such employees then become the rare and inimitable resources that enable the organisation respond swiftly to changing business conditions. Organizational responsiveness reflects the ability of the firm to sense changing environmental conditions and react readily and swiftly (Tallon & Pinsonneault, 2011). A paradigm that is often used to explain the formation of sustainable competitive advantage is the dynamic capabilities perspective (Winter, 2003) which postulates that resources, dynamic capabilities and operational capabilities are important condiments in the formation of competitive advantage (Barki & Pinsonneault, 2005).

Dynamic capabilities impact operational capabilities via organizational resources (Teece, 2007). Operational capabilities represent firms' ability to accomplish tasks based on effective operational activities relating to marketing and operational adjustments (Lu & Ramamurthy, 2011). They reflect procedures that can be used to respond to market changes, such as product improvement, rapid response to customers' queries etc. (Barki & Pinsonneault, 2005). Responsiveness in this context is considered an important facet of operational capability required for superior performance (Sambamurthy et al, 2003); and is seen as "*firm-wide capability to cope with market changes through speedy product improvement and developing flexible business processes*" (Lu & Ramamurthy 2011). It involves collecting information and monitoring value offerings, as well as routine manoeuvres in response to changes. Dynamic capabilities refer to the firm's ability to integrate, build, and reconfigure internal resources and competencies (Cepeda & Vera 2007). They represent higher level routines aimed at developing new strategies to adapt operational routines and capabilities.

Business organizations must be swift in their actions in order to secure desirable financial and market positions in today's highly competitive environment (Agha, Alrubaiee, & Jamhour, 2012). To achieve this, they must depend more on their core competencies to provide superior customer value, strong differentiation and extendibility (Mansour, 1998). The potential of core competencies to better the lot of firms was supported by Agha et al (2012) who observe that core competences have strong and positive impact on competitive advantage and organizational performance. The need for strategic posturing to move product-based competition to core competence-based competition is therefore paramount. The competencies of employees distinguish a firm and provide competitive advantage (Leonard-Barton, 1992). Competencies viewed as unique problem definition and problem solving knowledge form the basis of firms' competitive advantage that can be leveraged in different markets and products (Srivastava, 2005).

Competent employees utilize various job related skills to perform tasks. They are often self-motivated and capable of enacting process changes that promote organisational agility (Goldman & Nagel, 1993). These skilled employees are obtained either through selective hiring, competence development programmes provided by the firm or through lateral rotation of employees within the firm. Calantone, Cavusgil and

Zhao (2002) found that competencies have positive effect on organizational innovativeness, which in turn affects performance. Also, Bani-Hani and Al-Hawary (2009) indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between competencies and competitive advantage. In view of the foregoing, this study proposes that:

H_1: Training of frontline employees is significantly associated with organisational responsiveness.

H_2: Coaching of frontline employees is significantly associated with organisational responsiveness.

H_3: Mentoring of frontline employees is significantly associated with organisational responsiveness.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study was to determine the link between frontline employee competence development and responsiveness of QSRs. The study adopted an explanatory research design. It aligns with the realist ontology and positivist epistemology; and subscribed to the deterministic nature of human interactions, thus relied on a nomothetic methodology. The study was conducted in a natural setting without any form of manipulation; and employed questionnaire as instrument of primary data collection. Twenty-one (21) QSRs operating in Port Harcourt that are duly registered with the Port Harcourt Chamber of Commerce and Industry served as the population of the study. Sixty-three (63) frontline employees, on a sample frame of three (3) employees per QSR, who are arrived at using the accidental sampling technique served as the test units (respondents). However, only data collected from fifty eight (58) respondents was used in the final analysis.

The validity of the instrument of the study was confirmed through the opinion of academic experts and practitioners with adequate knowledge of the subject of the study; while the internal consistency of the measurement items was confirmed through the Cronbach's Alpha test of reliability with a threshold of 0.70 set by Nunally (1978). Table 1 presents the summary of the test of reliability. The P(r) served as the test statistic. All the analyses were conducted with the aid of SPSS version 20. 0. Besides assessing whether relationships exist between variables, it is also important to evaluate the nature of the relationship between the variables. The Pearson correlation is a technique commonly used to measure this phenomenon (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The coefficient of correlation can range from -1.00 to 1.00, with -1.00 representing a perfect negative relationship and 1.00, a perfect positive relationship between two variables; while 0 denotes no relationship. A higher correlation coefficient indicates stronger relationship between variables.

This study adopts the threshold of correlation coefficients suggested by Shiu, Hair, Bush, and Ortinau (2009) to assess the nature of the relationship between the variables under investigation. Shiu et al (2009) states that:

1. No relationship exists between two variables if the coefficient of determination is ∓ .00.
2. The relationship between two variables is very weak if the coefficient of determination is ∓ .01-.19.
3. The relationship between two variables is weak if the coefficient of determination is ∓ .20-.39.
4. The relationship between two variables is moderate if the coefficient of determination is ∓.40-.59.
5. The relationship between two variables is strong if the coefficient of determination is ∓ .60-.79.
6. The relationship between two variables is very strong if the coefficient of determination is ∓ .80-1.0.

   The interpretation process was subject to 0.01 (two tail) level of significance.

Table 1: Summary of Result of Reliability Analysis on Study Variables

S/N	Variable Measure	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
1.	Training	0.881	6
2.	Coaching	0.713	5
3.	Mentoring	0.814	6
4.	Responsiveness	0.701	7

Source: Simulation from SPSS Output on Data Analysis on Frontline Employee Competence Development and Responsiveness of QSRs (2017).

4. Analyses and Results

Correlations of dimensions of competence development and responsiveness were tested using the P(r). The summary of the result is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Summary of Correlation Analysis on Competence Development and Responsiveness

Statistics	Variables		Responsiveness	Training	Coaching	Mentoring
Pearson Correlation	Responsiveness	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.733**	.713**	.797**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	-	.000	.000	.000
		N	58	58	58	58
	Training	Correlation Coefficient	.633**	1.000	-	-
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	-	.000	.000
		N	58	58	58	58
	Coaching	Correlation Coefficient	.713**	-	1.000	-
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	-	.000
		N	58	58	58	58
	Mentoring	Correlation Coefficient	797**	-	-	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	-
		N	58	58	58	58

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

Source: Simulation from SPSS Output on Data Analysis on Frontline Employee Competence Development and Responsiveness of QSRs (2017).

Table 2 above displays the summary of result of test of association between dimensions of frontline employee competence development and responsiveness of QSRs. The Table indicate that the P(r) of the connection between training and responsiveness is .733**, with a probability value of .000 which is less than 0.01. This indicates that a strong relationship exists between the variables, and that the relationship is statistically significant. The result implies that increase in training of frontline employees will result to increased responsiveness of QSRs.

On the relationship between coaching and responsiveness of QSRs, Table 2 indicates a P(r) of .713** with a probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.01. This suggests that a strong positive link exists between coaching and responsiveness, and that the link between the variables is statistically significant. Meaning that increase in frontline employee coaching will result to greater responsiveness of QSRs.

Finally, the result of test of relationship between mentoring and responsiveness as shown on Table 2 indicates that a significant association exists between the variables. The result show that the link between mentoring and responsiveness carries P(r) of .797** with a probability value of 0.000 which is less than 0.01. The result implies that the relationship between the variables is statistically significant; and that increased frontline employee mentoring will lead to increased responsiveness of QSRs.

5. Discussion of Findings

This study aimed to determine the association between frontline employee competence development and resilience of QSRs. Based on the tests conducted; it was observed that all the dimensions of employee competence development have positive and statistically significant relationship with responsiveness of QSRs; with mentoring and responsiveness indicating the strongest relationship. These findings support that of Agha et al (2012) that core competencies have strong and positive impact on competitive advantage and organizational performance. Having the right set of employees and developing them to deliver quality service and promptly attend to customers' issues is a way of standing the firm for competitiveness (Ghorbani & Ahmadi, 2012). Also, the findings of the current study support the submission of Ateke and Didia (2017) that employees' competence development; as well as the utilisation of these competencies is essential to organisational adaptability and responsiveness.

Additionally, the findings of the study cohere with Calantone et al (2002) who found that core competencies have positive effect on organizational innovativeness, which in turn affects performance. Bani-Hani and Al-Hawary's (2009) finding that there is a significant positive relationship between competences and competitive advantage is also corroborated by the findings of the current study.

Furthermore, the findings of the study lend credence to the statement of Mansour (1998) that employee competencies provide superior customer value, strong

differentiation and extendibility; all of which enhances the firm's responsive capacities. The findings of the study also cohere with the submission that employee competence development facilitates organisational flexibility, improved product quality and productivity through the incorporation of ideas and information from employees (Inthiyaz, 2017); and that employee competence development and empowerment increases the likelihood of effective goal implementation and increased adaptive capacity of the organisation (Kuye & Sulaimon, 2011).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Responsiveness is the ability of firms to adapt and respond to environmental fluctuations. It makes firms more responsive to change. Responsiveness is a paradigm that firms desiring competitive advantage must embrace. A competent workforce is a strategic asset that facilitates the attainment of company goals. Managers therefore need to invest in the competency development of employees. Competencies drive optimum performance, and ensure responsiveness of firms. Employee competence development results to improved organizational performance through flexible and responsive processes; and is critical to organizational innovativeness.

On the strength of the empirical analysis and the discussion of findings in the preceding sections, the study concludes that a significant association exists between frontline employee competence development and responsiveness of QSRs; and that responsiveness of QSRs depends on mentoring, training and coaching of frontline employees. The study therefore recommends that QSRs that seek to respond swiftly and seamlessly to environmental changes should continually update the competencies of their frontline employees, through mentoring, training and coaching.

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