

Strategic Innovation Leadership Framework for Sustainable Management of Electricity Distribution Company in Nigeria - Post Privatization

By Habeeb A. Quadri

Introduction

The imperious relationship between economic growth and electricity management has been globally established and acclaimed. Wittily, in spite of being blessed with the largest potentials for electricity in Africa, Nigeria enduringly remains a developing nation because electricity capabilities are underexplored. Within the last century, electricity management in Nigeria has evolved from fully state owned monopoly to private owned enterprise where formerly state monopolized electricity generation, transmission and distribution got segregated and unbundled. Electricity distribution unbundled into 11 private owned distribution companies with 60% stake while the Federal Government of Nigeria has a 40% interest. Electricity generation unbundled into 6 while electricity transmission outsourced to Manitoba Hydro, a Canadian company.

The transformation aimed at strategic repositioning of the power sector to meet the ever-growing electricity demand in response to the growing economic activities required for GDP growth. However, a leadership appraisal of the electricity distribution company's post-privatization revealed that significant improvements have not been recorded in operations, customer satisfaction and the privatization mandate. Meanwhile with zero investment by the FG of Nigeria throughout the 1990s, the new democratic party in 1999 spent well over \$10b unproductively on the power sector between 1999-2015. This pre-privatization lack of impactful investment by the Federal Government of Nigeria for almost a quarter of a century, gives the picture of the monster inheritance the new private investors are up against.

This is why Africa has about 13% of the world population but over 600m Africans (about 47% of the world population without electricity) have no access to electricity with implications on economic activities and the GDP. Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (NNBS) confirmed 200m Nigerian population require about 200,000MW of electricity to optimize. But less than 45% (about 80m) Nigerians have real access to the grid electricity although below the global standard per capita. The World Bank declared that countries with less than 80% level of electricity access struggle with sustainable economic growth.

To augment, over 70% of Nigerians run generating plants costing about \$13b every year and about 86% of corporations, industries and small & medium enterprises in Nigeria run operations with self-generated electricity, these not only destroy the ecology but also constitute over 40% of the production cost with multiplier effects on the consumers and the GDP. You further get the picture right? These pictures confirm the

World Bank assertion that any country with less than 80% level of electricity access struggle with economic growth. This is why Nigeria/Africa struggles with economic growth. There is a clear correlation between electricity and economic growth.

These backdrops led to The World Bank forecast of electricity demand increase in Nigeria. Hence, the Nigerian power sector development remains one of the major strategic priorities of the US government under the Power Africa program. The World Bank (2018) approved the injection of \$486m fresh credit facility and the proposed additional \$2.6b 5-year intervention fund to reduce deficit, restore viability, improve transparency via sustainable cost reflective electricity pricing, ensure better service delivery to satisfy customers, reduce losses and reposition the Nigerian Electricity Supply Industry (NESI) for growth. These developments confirm the conclusion of the MD/CEO of Abuja Electricity Distribution Company, Engr. E. Mupwaya (2017) that: “A major problem that we are facing in the sector is characterized by liquidity challenge”.

These industry pictures reinforced the fact that Nigeria electricity industry remains a deficit market and a posterity venture. Therefore, electricity distribution companies in Nigeria need to employ unconventional leadership tools to remain sustainably competitive. Boal & Hooijberg (2001) noted that the global economy is experiencing a turbulent and dynamic phase that has created a society craving for speed, action, innovation and excellence. Corporate leaders face a tremendous pressure to deliver immediate results with fewer resources, which unfortunately, resonates unrealistically well with the electricity distribution companies.

Haggin et al, (2003) argues that corporate leaders must take a more innovative look into the future with strategic innovation leadership to overcome the turbulent business environment. Olajide (2016) concluded that the problem of the electricity distribution company in Nigeria stems from a lack of innovation leadership capable of correcting and improving the (wasteful) legacy of the traditional leadership systems of the Nigerian Electricity Power Authority/Power Holding Company of Nigeria (NEPA/PHCN). Pre-privatization of electricity distribution in Nigeria had leadership issues, unsatisfied bitter customers, poor network, uncoordinated teamwork, institutionalized corruption, low generation and inefficient portfolio management.

Awkwardly, the post-privatization electricity distribution companies equally face same challenges including new challenges such as over-regulation by the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), spot-trading mentality, obvious human capital skill-gap, inadequate metering, lack of funding and market indebtedness. These have imposed difficulties on how effective the new disco leadership manage the paradox of “change and stability” amidst growing customer base, profitability quest, intensified business risks, diversity and technological advancement.

These spaghetti of inefficiencies call for strategic innovation leadership approach bedrocked on disco leadership positive self-regulating capabilities to create a workplace environment that supports vigilance, tolerance, positive organizational scholarship and integrated systems and processes that create ongoing improvements for operational excellence and sustainable performance. This paper proposes a strategic innovation

leadership framework for sustainable management of electricity distribution company in Nigeria, post-privatization.

Pre-Privatization Electricity Distribution in Nigeria – Historical Perspective

Prior to 1972, the Nigerian power sector witnessed several transformations. In 1972, the Niger-Delta Authority (NDA) was merged with the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria (ECN) to form the Nigeria Electric Power Authority (NEPA). NEPA enjoyed monopoly of generation, transmission and distribution of electricity in Nigeria and some neighboring countries with the power to fix tariff which metamorphosed into a free-for-all pricing as NEPA officials usually had their own unofficial but prevailed pricing driven by mood or connection! Nigerian customers were usually at the mercy of the NEPA officials and not the operating system for all the wrong reasons. Some customers got used to it till today.

Whereas, NEPA/PHCN never met the electricity demand in Nigeria and, was plagued with years of under investment by the Nigerian government, dilapidated infrastructure, poor network, poor power generation, poor customer satisfaction, monumental corruption and traditional leadership style. These resulted in a total loss of customer confidence in NEPA/PHCN, a battered goodwill the discos inherited, regrettably.

In 1999 the new democratic government revealed among others, that:

- Out of 79 generation units existing in the country, only 19 were operational
- Average daily generation was at 1,750MW
- No new infrastructure was built in the sector between 1991-1999
- About 100m Nigerians (140m population then) with no access to electricity.

These unacceptable inefficiencies with untold hardship on Nigeria (GDP) and the welfare of Nigerians (GNH) prompted the establishment of the Electric Power Reform Implementation Committee (EPIC) by National Council on Privatization that resulted in the National Electric Power Policy (NEPP) in September 2001. NEPP recommended:

- The establishment of an institution charged with regulating the power sector
- NEPA should be unbundled and privatized.
- A framework should be designed for market trading, new rules, codes and processes.

The Electric Power Sector Reform Act (EPSRA) was passed in March 2005 to facilitate the framework for the reformation process and serves as a guide for any future reformation in the power sector. The Act advanced the following reformation:

- Unbundling of NEPA into private owned generation, transmission and distribution
- NEPA assets and liabilities transferred to the Power Holding Company of Nigeria
- Establish Independent regulator, Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC)

The power sector privatization exercise in 2005 resulted in 18 new successor companies; six generating companies (Gencos), one transmission company and eleven distribution companies (Discos). They were issued with the relevant codes (grid, distribution, metering, performance, etc.) and certificate of ownership awarded on September the 30th 2013. The discos were charged to distribute electricity efficiently in their respective franchise market territories throughout Nigeria. The eleven electricity distribution companies are:

1. Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (AEDC),
2. Benin Electricity Distribution Company (BEDC),
3. Eko Electricity Distribution Company (EKEDC),
4. Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (ENEDC),
5. Ibadan Electricity Distribution Company (IBEDC),
6. Ikeja Electricity Distribution Company (IKEDC),
7. Jos Electricity Distribution Company (JEDC),
8. Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company (KDEDC),
9. Kano Electricity Distribution Company (KEDCO),
10. Port-Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDC),
11. Yola Electricity Distribution Company (YEDC).

Strategic Appraisal of Disco Leadership in Nigeria – Post Privatization

Disco leadership is assumed to consist of the executive senior management team, the regional managers and the heads of departments and of course, the board. Disco leadership in Nigeria subscribed to the fact that not so much success has been achieved since takeover as private investors in 2013 due largely to the underestimation of the power sector pre-privatization issues, despite the thorough due diligence. Some caveats were just not apparent or disclosed or overwhelmingly ignored by the investors given the euphoria. The Managing Directors of Kano Electricity Distribution Company and Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (Engineer Ernest Mupwaya and Dr. Jamil Gwamna respectively) stated at different times that all the discos currently run at a loss.

An internal appraisal of the discos revealed that most of the operating realities that led to the privatization of the sector are still prevalent, such as the leadership style (legacy traditional leadership), illiquidity, poor infrastructure investment and infrastructure decay, inadequate metering, low supply, poor maintenance culture, accumulated debt after the takeover, billing system challenges, uncooperative communities, entitlement mentality, endemic corruption among the workforce, poor customers service orientation and most especially, the NERC regulatory environment which sometimes complicate the operating realities of the discos as attested to by an expert in the industry, Emmanuel Katepa (2016) when he said that “I tend to think we lost two years in the sector for development because of the standoff between the operators and the NERC. By the beginning of this year, things started looking better but for the two years past, we could not move on many critical issues”.

Other major challenges include the gray area between the middle management and top management, poor cash collection, lack of public trust, nepotized recruitment process,

poor teamwork, uncoordinated workforce, lack of streamlined structure to facilitate business process, and lastly, the inherent culture that hinders real change post privatization. The ability of the disco leadership to manage these confluences requires technical competencies in strategic innovation leadership and not just a grounding in electrical engineering.

However, in spite of these challenges and threats facing the discos in Nigeria, the increasing (albeit at a decreasing rate) rate of economic growth in Nigeria and West Africa portends an increase in economic activities with rising electricity demand which makes the sector remain a viable investment option considering the great opportunities yet untapped. Adopting strategic innovation leadership as a disruptive strategy to radically transform the discos will fill the vacuum between these challenges and the conspicuous opportunities.

Nonetheless, the compelling force that will inevitably trigger a new leadership paradigm for discos will be the customer with increasing choices of electricity sources than ever before. This trend will force the disco leadership to re-focus solely on customer science. Current disco leadership is yet to fully tap into the fusion of technology-push and customer-pull at a time when the global electricity market is flooded with new players, technologists, strategists and new power sources.

The paradigm is gradually fast shifting away from the dominating grid source Nigeria struggles with alongside the perennial mentality of electrical engineers constituting the disco leadership. Electricity distribution company is a corporate entity with a vision and corporate objectives that require the technical brilliance and pragmatic competence of organizational management including systemic knowledge and application of strategic innovation leadership to achieve the corporate goals.

The legacy traditional leadership is characterized by fear-inducing smokescreen persona, over-bloated hierarchy, over celebrated titles, annoying bureaucracy and lackadaisical laid-back executives with penchant for positional power decision-making style. This leadership style stifles innovation. The legacy traditional leadership suddenly woke up to the post-privatization realities; the injection of new senior executives who came from within and outside Nigeria, self-starters and up-starters into the system. Unfortunately, some of the newly injected senior executives do not come from a private sector orientation which quickly re-established their marriage of convenience with the legacy traditional leadership for political organizational survival, more like old wine in a new bottle or new wine in an old bottle. It's caustic!

This cosmetic picture exacerbated the workforce relationship and integration to the detriment of the privatization mandate and of course, the new employees who were already the minority group. Hence, typically, the vision/mission driven newly injected employees usually leave within an average of 2-4 years for lack of a streamlined and transparent environment to thrive. Literature on innovation management confirms that most strategic innovative ideas are pioneered by new employees who brought fresh outside-in perspectives. Rather than shy away from the disruptive realities of the privatization, the legacy traditional leadership typified by most NEPA/PHCN inherited

employees, should tolerate and embrace the emerging opportunities in human capital synergy and development to stimulate positive organizational scholarship, collegiality and the privatization mandate.

This dichotomy in leadership focus and the regulatory environment, most especially post-privatization has been echoed and re-echoed by an expert in the industry, Yusuf Hamisu Abubakar (2017) when he emphasized that “with the power assets now in the hands of the private investors, it is imperative to recognize that values and systems that drive public sector services cannot work under private initiatives. Private sector is driven by value creation and profit motive. Regulatory inconsistency and policy changes when done without consultation and certainty are inimical to business. Business thrives in an atmosphere of confidence, credibility and predictability”.

The post-privatization disco leadership must shift away from the legacy traditional leadership that devastated NEPA/PHCN, to a more unorthodox strategic innovation leadership approach dictated solely by customer science. Strategic innovation leadership embraced the new definition of profitability as a combination of service leadership and excellent customer relationship management (CRM) away from the linear and traditional profitability model, which focuses mainly on sales management i.e. $TR = P \times Q$. The question is: what happens in a perfectly competitive market where sellers have access to same products and pricing? A seller who sees customers as Kings using CRM methodology coupled with excellent service leadership will undoubtedly profit better on the long-run than one who merely manages and/or maneuver products quantity and price. The latter is a trader and the former is an investor!

Disco leadership in Nigeria should innovatively reexamine the flexibility-driven advanced demand-side management where source(s) of energy and usage pattern by their maximum demand customers (disco's current cash cow) now constitute their corporate culture, the brand and the marketing. An example here is, Apple contracted First Solar in 2015 to power its operations in California as a way to communicate to their customers Apple's strategic alignment with low-carbon energy and, to impress their business environment of their corporate social citizenship. This is the thinking disco leadership must port into!

However, for non-maximum demand disco customers (the projected real cash cow on the long-run), households are beginning to embrace sophistication and green-ness given the increasingly available electricity supply choices (i.e. solar, inverter, etc.) away from the high carbon and heavy pollution generators. Here, the thinking is, fast emerging so-called smart cities typified by mega upscale estates currently springing up in major commercial cities in Nigeria, now combine environmental friendliness in terms of renewable energy sources, efficient waste management, “internet of things”, etc., as their brand and advertising to entice their customers. Disco leadership must innovate around these paradigms shift.

Being the main driver of the value chain, the overarching reality is if the disco leadership fail to strategically plan the strategic change management plan to radically

transform the management systems given the changing landscape, most especially with the emerging electricity storage technology coupled with the relaxed entry barriers (thanks to NERC), electricity consumers will gradually become micro-producers (termed prosumers) of electricity and may end up selling power to the electricity distribution companies which will regress the transformation process and, the legacy traditional leadership re-established.

Considering the growing demand and the increasing sophistication of today's electricity customers, the manifold thrusts for disco leadership going forward, will be to reevaluate the customer science in behavioral economics term, customer engagement and customer intimacy. Disco leadership should also re-assess their position on innovation with regard to the business models, business process and service offering. No one in the industry understood this better than the MD/CEO of Kano Electricity Distribution Company, Dr. Jamil Gwamna when he forcefully declared that "we consider customer intimacy and responsiveness an integral part of our daily operations, therefore attending and addressing our customers' plights on time has always been and will always be a top priority of our company".

Strategic Innovation Framework for Disco Leadership in Nigeria

Discos operate in a new competitive and dynamic electricity market where its almost oligarchy positioning is constantly being threatened by even smaller but technology-driven competitors whose innovative speed may markedly reduce discos' market dominance. Strategic innovation leadership framework affords the disco leadership to keep one eye on value creation and the other eye on environmental changes that may not only threaten its market positioning but also, as a window to recognize new opportunities to create additional value.

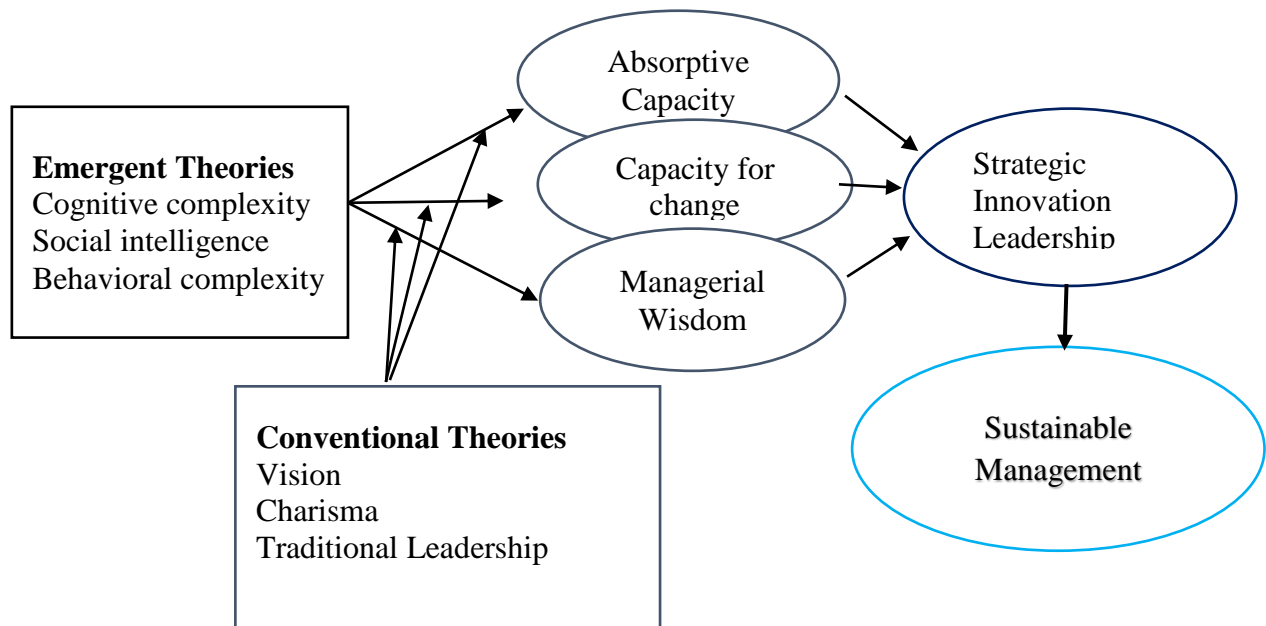
Boal & Hooijberg (2001) argued that strategic innovative leadership entails the ability to understand the environment within which an organization operates and use it to create innovative changes to put the organization in a better competitive edge for long term sustainability. Guillot (2003) and Rome (2001), see strategic innovative leadership as the ability to make consequential decision by formulating and implementing plans in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous environment to increase the competitive advantage.

Hunt (1999), identified certain characteristics with strategic innovative leadership such as make strategic decisions, create and communicate vision, develop key competencies and capabilities, develop structures, processes, and controls, manage multiple constituencies, select and develop the next generation of leaders, sustain an effective organizational culture, and infuse ethical and innovative value systems into the culture.

Strategic innovation leadership is rooted on these basic characteristics such as clear vision, charisma and transformational leadership mindset to facilitate cognitive complexity, social intelligence and behavioral complexity that nurtures absorptive

capacity, change capacity and managerial wisdom, to mold a strategic innovation leaders Rome (2001). The framework for strategic innovation leadership that facilitates sustainable management of the Nigerian discos is presented in figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Framework for Strategic Innovation Leadership and Sustainability



Source: Author Schematization

From figure 1 above, emergent theories identified cognitive complexity (ability to broadly conceptualize different but complex systems), social intelligence (street level smartness version of emotional intelligence which is the ability to psychologically understand yourself, others and the environment) and behavioral complexity (positive eccentric and self-regulating behavioral ability to adapt to different paradoxes). Conventional theories identified clear vision, charisma, and traditional leadership as foundation feeders upon which strategic innovation leaders build absorptive capacity (ability to identify, understand and apply outside-in perspectives to transform an organization), capacity for change (multidimensional technical competencies and resilience for organizational transformation) and managerial wisdom (basic intuitive brilliance of organizational management and leadership), to achieve excellence.

Flagrantly speaking, as the world gets more flat due to globalization, innovation will be the yardstick for sustainable performance. Nigerian disco leadership must reach further out of the box for renewed innovative ideas to transform, satisfy customers and achieve the privatization mandate. Thus, managing given deliverable such as metering, customer enumeration, ATC&C, HSE, technical network, etc., are fast becoming the basics. Inexorably, disco leadership must entrench a new and measurable corporate

culture (values) to resonate with innovation to redevelop human capital in line with strategic innovation leadership framework. Disco leadership must also include the topic of strategic innovation in their tactical meetings and be perceived, seen and accountable as a model of strategic innovation leadership in all ramifications, to permeate company-wide.

Acknowledging that human capital is the core of the organization, disco leadership must forge a sense of belongingness for both the legacy staff and the new staff in a synergistic manner that brings out the best in them. While new employees come with fresh ideas, it should be noted that the legacy staff also come prepared with enterprise information. Without sentimental recourse to insecurity or observational selection bias, disco leadership must exploit these human capital opportunities by promoting healthy competition and transparent appraisal to protectively pipeline potential future leaders in the executive succession plan. Disco leadership must periodically and deliberately indulge in a leadership pep-talk on the benefits of cross-fertilizing ideas from both the legacy staff and new staff, systemically abridged the fusion into strategic innovations to achieve operational effectiveness, employee development and vision accomplishment.

Disco leadership must simulate customer science by employing data analytics to gain valuable insights into the (clusters of) customer behavioral pattern. This is more important as customers gravitate towards having a 100% decision stake on when and how electricity is needed. Disco leadership must realize that Nigeria and Nigerians never really enjoyed light in its history. World Bank estimated current electricity demand in Nigeria around 40MW while Nigeria produces 7,000MW but only evacuates about 5,000MW. ECN (2015) revealed that 90% of Nigerians are rural-dwellers have no real access to electricity. The disco leadership must leverage strategic innovation thinking to turn these data into customer service projects.

World Bank (2018) confirmed the growing increase in electricity consumption in Nigeria since 2013 (coincided with privatization) in spite of the electricity management lapses. Given the current quantum of energy from the grid, disco leadership should probe; are customers increasingly utilizing alternative electricity sources? Why and what are the alternative electricity sources accountable for the increase in electricity consumption? Even though this translates to confirm an increase in electricity consumption, but may not necessarily be dependent on electricity supplied and distributed from the grid. Making a strategic innovative sense out of these conclusions should refocus the disco leadership on customer science.

The trend of electricity consumption is clearly illustrated in figure 2 below.

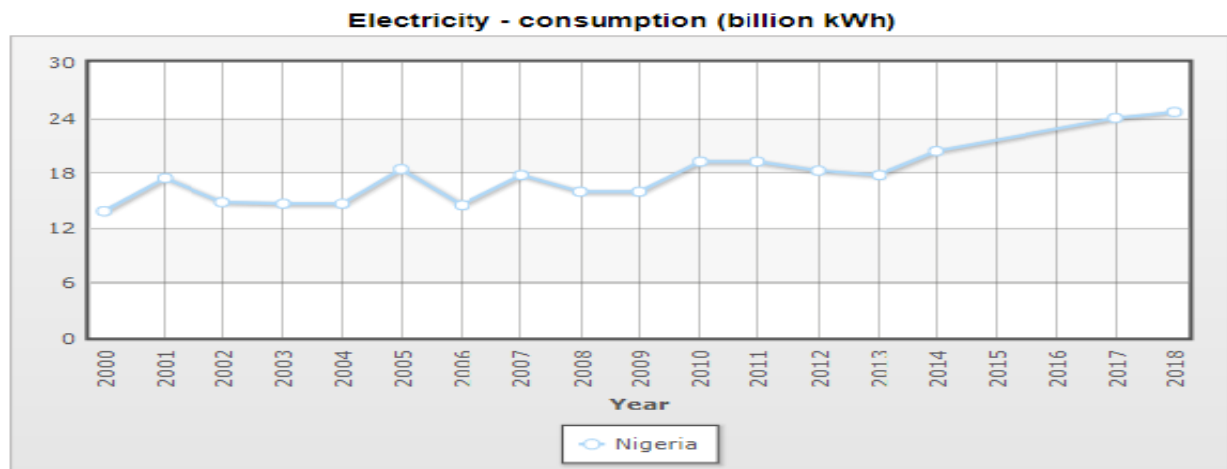


Figure 2: Electricity Consumption in Nigeria

Source: World Bank (2018)

The crux of the foregoing is that disco leadership should take a back step to reexamine the electricity industry and the market with a view to paying more strategic attention so as to see what others are not seeing and cannot see. This personalized and intuitive macroscopic view allow disco leadership to see customers (some are friends, family members, employees and stakeholders), as economic agents with needs and priorities, who also feel the pains of an underdeveloped economy. Seeing customers this way, is way beyond seeing them from the lens of cash collection regardless of whether or not they are metered or electricity is supplied. This intuitive imagination of customer nuances almost with empathy using Monte Carlo what if analysis will elicit innovation on how to empower the customers to be the best they could possibly be as economic agents and as strategic business partners, given the circumstances.

Armed with the assumption that every employee has the innate deposit for innovation if well harnessed, disco leadership should strategize on how to re-socialize the workplace environment given the fact that innovation flows spontaneously in relaxed environments where employees freely and innocently ask questions, challenge assumptions, share ideas without fear to stimulate incubatable ideas and perspectives. This techie-like workplace environment drives innovation than highly rigid robot-like environments where orders are given and obeyed dogmatically as typified by the legacy traditional leadership system.

This abductive reasoning strategy of observing customers instinctively allows disco leadership to sympathize and impulsively connect with customers at a higher level of abstractions for unrestricted innovation. Most often, innovation does not necessarily mean bringing heaven down to earth. Thus disco leadership needs to start asking themselves some questions on their current position on innovation, what need to be done to foster an environment that encourages innovation, what are the obstacles

obstructing innovation, etc., the results will be the discovery of what is potentially new, how to innovatively transform what is new to bring out the next big deal – This is innovation!

Conclusions and Recommendations

This paper has taken a critical evaluation of the impact of strategic innovation leadership on sustainable management of electricity distribution company in Nigeria. It is clear that the sector has undergone series of restructuring and seems not to have accomplished any significant feat pre and post privatization. The strategic internal leadership appraisal revealed that post privatization discos are still performing below average especially in operations, customer service and the mandate of the Federal Government of Nigeria.

The research proposes to the disco leadership the application of strategic innovation leadership in actualizing operational efficiency and sustainable performance. Based on the internal appraisal, considerable policy and strategic options have already been advanced in the paper for implementation by disco leadership. Ellis (2005) noted that it takes a strategic innovation leadership to focus on strengthening the institutions that innovate and change faster than the changing business environment. Drunker (1997) concluded that organisations that refuse to change and adapt to the changing environment through constant innovation, will die a gradual death faster than expected. Disco leadership should deploy strategic innovation leadership to radically transform in order to stay ahead of the competition in advanced demand-side management to remain competitive for the long haul since electricity remains a posterity venture.

Recommendations

- ❖ Engage strategic innovation leaders to facilitate sustainable management
- ❖ Befriend customers as strategic business partners
- ❖ Strategically re-engage Nigeria Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC)
- ❖ Radical change management approach – innovative cultural reawakening
- ❖ Establish and empower the Research, Development & Innovation Department
- ❖ Aggressive recapitalization of discos – disco is an investment and not a trade
- ❖ Total re-electrification of discos market territories using customer data analytics
- ❖ 70% of disco leadership should be tested/re-trained private sector professionals
- ❖ Re-socialize workplace environment to elicit positive organizational scholarship
- ❖ Champion the re-streamlining of the Nigerian power sector value chain
- ❖ Create Project Management Office (PMO) and deploy unconventional “value engineering decisioneering” as a risk management tool for value creation.

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