

INFLUENCE OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF TEA PROCESSING COMPANIES IN KENYA

Justus Segera Nyaribo.

Master of Business Administration (Strategic Option), Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya.

Dr. Paul Kariuki, PhD.

Lecturer, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Kenya.

©2022

International Academic Journal of Human Resource and Business Administration

(IAJHRBA) | ISSN 2518-2374

Received: 19th October 2022

Published: 25^h October 2022

Full Length Research

Available Online at: https://iajournals.org/articles/iajhrba_v4_i1_430_447.pdf

Citation: Nyaribo, J, S., Kariuki P. (2022). Influence of total quality management on competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. *International Academic Journal of Human Resource and Business Administration*, 4(1), 430-447.

ABSTRACT

Total Quality Management is an aspect that modern organizations use to enhance their production and management quality thus enhancing their performance and competitiveness. Competitiveness of the tea processing companies is critical in making the livelihoods of the tea growing farmers sustainable as well as contributing to the country's economy. This has however not been the case where most of the tea processing companies have gone for months without paying the farmers their dues while others subdue the payments due to losses. This study therefore sought to address the influence of total quality management on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. Specifically, the study sought to find out the influence leadership competency on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya; examine the influence of employee involvement on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya; evaluate the influence of customer focus on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya and to determine the influence of continuous improvement on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. The study employed various theories to explain the study variables which include; resource based theory, contingency theory, stakeholder theory, commitment-trust theory and porter's theory of competitive advantage. Descriptive research design was used while the target population comprised of the 54 tea processing companies registered under KTDA. Census was used where 4 heads of

department were surveyed from all the 54 companies. Structured questionnaire was used to collect the data which was analysed through descriptive and inferential statistics by use of SPSS. The findings were presented in form of tables, bar-graphs and pie-charts. The findings revealed that leadership competency had a significant ($\beta = 0.199$; $P < 0.05$) influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. Employee involvement was also found to have a significant ($\beta = 0.216$; $P < 0.05$) influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. The findings revealed that customer focus as an aspect of TQM had a significant ($\beta = 0.186$; $P < 0.05$) influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. The findings further revealed that continuous improvement had a significant ($\beta = 0.226$; $P < 0.05$) influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. The study concluded that Total quality management through leadership competency, employee involvement, customer focus and continuous improvement was essential in enhancing the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya. It is therefore recommended that the management of tea processing firms embraces TQM as a way of enhancing the competitiveness of the firms.

Keywords: Total Quality Management, Competitive Advantage, Leadership Competency, Employee Involvement, Customer Focus, Continuous Improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Total Quality Management is the management system consisting of values, methodologies and tools aimed at satisfying and exceeding the needs and expectations of the stakeholders with a reduced amount of resources (Nouri, 2013). It is the action plan to produce and deliver commodities or services which are consistent with customer needs or requirements by better, cheaper, faster, safer, easier processing than competitors with the participation of all employees under top management leadership. Total quality management (TQM) has been widely accepted as a holistic management philosophy that strives for continuous improvement in all functions of an organization (Oakland, 2014). Quality refers to the ability of a product or service to constantly meet or exceed customer expectations (Munisu, 2013). According to Chaudary, Zafar and Salman (2015) TQM is a set of instruments employed by the firm's management that aim to provide better value to customers by recognizing their observable and hidden needs (which are sensitive to the changing markets) and improve the efficiency of the procedure that generate the product or service.

Continuous commitment to TQM implementation has a significant positive effect on superior firm performance and ensuring the firm records increased competitive advantage (Lee & Lee, 2014; Wali & Boujelbene, 2010). Previous studies have reported that Organizations that effectively implement TQM generate many benefits such as higher quality products, more satisfied customers, reduced costs, improved financial, quality and innovation performance and in addition to these improved employee job satisfaction (Munisu, 2013). TQM has become an irreplaceable, globally pervasive strategic force in today's business environment (Asif, Brijin, Douglas & Fisscher, 2009). Organizations that have implemented TQM practices consistently outperform organizations that have not implemented TQM practices (Vanichchnchai & Igel, 2011; Akgün, Ince, Imamoglu, Kekskin & Kocoglu, 2014). Studies have shown that TQM is positively associated with performance outcome such as; Financial performance and profitability (Chaudary, Zafar & Salman, 2015; Talib, Rahman, & Quresh, 2013); customer satisfaction (Mehra & Ranganathan, 2008) and knowledge management (Ooi, Cheah, Lin & Teh, 2012; Aboyassi, Alnsour & Alkloub, 2011).

According to Zehir (2012), most of the South African firms embraced leadership management, employee management, customer focus, factual approach to decision making, supplier management, continual improvement, system approach to management and process management as the dimensions of TQM. However, in this study the aspects of TQM considered are: customer focus, continuous improvement, employee involvement and leadership competence. These practices are considered as key practices of TQM in both product and service industries (Sweis et al., 2013). In Nigeria, firm competitiveness has been exceedingly enhanced by total quality management. According to Ezugwu and Agu (2016), most of the public enterprises in Nigeria drew their performance and competitiveness from proper focusing on total quality management practices such as employee involvement and commitment from the top management.

Prajogo and Sohal (2013) described TQM as follows: working with and through teams, understanding the role of university managers, university leaders and university academic and support staff, creating a learning organization, being clear on purpose and on product/service definition, understanding customers and meeting or exceeding their needs, knowing quality is designed and built in, not inspected in at the end, building partnerships with customers and suppliers, focusing on understanding and improving processes, performing continuous improvement and benchmarking (Lazibat, Sutic & Jurcevic, 2009). According to Stutz and Warf (2009), competitive advantage seeks to address some of the criticisms of comparative advantage. Competitive advantage rests on the notion that cheap labor is ubiquitous and natural resources are not necessary for a good economy. Through TQM, comparative advantage can lead companies to specialize in exporting primary goods and raw materials that trap countries in low-wage economies due to terms of trade.

In Kenya, total quality management has not been adequately addressed as far as firm competitive advantage is concerned. Mungai and Kweni (2013) indicated that Total quality management played a significance effect in promoting firm performance and competitiveness through bringing both employee and the customers on board towards a common goal. In Kenya, the Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS) as the nation's representative in International Organization for Standardization, is the accredited certifying authority of ISO. However, there are other agents such as SGS Kenya Ltd., Bureau Veritas and Cotecna who also issue ISO 9001 certificates (KEBS, 2008). Most recently, ISO 9001 certification has become almost a mandatory requirement for exports to Europe, forcing many companies to be ISO 9001 certified. This has played a role to ensure most of the firms across the country embrace total quality management for them to remain competitive and relevant in the market.

KTDA manages 54 tea processing firms serving more than 500,000 small scale farmers in Kenya. KTDA members produce 60% of the tea in Kenya while large scale farmers produce the rest (KTDA, 2016). KTDA has grouped the processing firms into seven regions depending on geographical location. The regions are, Kisii Highlands, Kericho Highlands, Mt.Kenya and Nyambene Hills, Mt. Kenya, Aberdare Ranges, Nandi Hills and Western highlands (KTDA, 2016). Kenya Tea Development Agency (KTDA) was formed through legal notice No.42 of 1964 after independence and took over the liabilities and functions of the SCDA to promote and foster the growing of tea in smallholder farms, which were previously said to be unviable in view of the expertise and costs required, as witnessed in the plantation sector. Kenya Tea Development Agency Limited was incorporated on 15th June 2000 as a private (Kagira, Kimani, & Kagwathi , 2012) company under (CAP 486) of the laws of Kenya, becoming one of the largest private tea management agencies (Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd, 2015). The company manages 65 factories in 2015 (Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

Tea is the leading foreign exchange earner contributing about 28% of Kenya's total exports (KTDA Annual Report 2012). In tea growing areas, tea farms and processing companies contribute to more than 38% of the employment especially among the youths (GOK, 2017). This shows an immense contribution of the sector to the economic growth and development. Despite this contribution, the industry is characterized by many problems among them delay of green tea leaves from buying centers to the factory. The farmers' dissatisfaction and discontent on services offered by the factory is evident in the emergence of a parallel system where small-scale tea farmers in the area sell green tea leaves directly to brokers of multinational companies. This has seen increased competition and continued underperformance of many tea processing companies in Kenya. Fluctuations in the global market with increased supply where 4.2 billion Kgs are produced while the consumption stands at 4.1 billion Kgs (International Tea Committee, 2016) have left local tea producers in dire losses and unable to meet operating expenses. According to the Directorate of Tea report (2018), the revenues of tea dropped by 2.8% in the year 2017 as compared to 2016 which signifies a drop in the revenues of tea processing companies as well.

Empirical studies have revealed that total quality management has a significant influence on firm competitiveness (Calvo-Mora, Picon, Ruiz & Cauzo, 2014; Ismyrlis & Moschidis, 2015). TQM through leadership competency, customer focus, employee involvement and continuous improvement has seen many multinational enhance their operations thus gaining competitive advantage over their competitors. Locally, studies have focused on the influence of TQM on firm performance, growth and survival. However, it remains unclear on the role of TQM on competitiveness of tea processing companies in Kenya. This study therefore sought to fill the existing gaps by assessing the influence of Total Quality Management on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study was to assess the influence of Total Quality Management practices on the competitive advantage of Tea Processing Companies in Kenya.

Specifically, the study sought to underpin the following objectives;

- i. To find out the influence of leadership competency on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya
- ii. To examine the influence of employee involvement on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya
- iii. To evaluate the influence of customer focus on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya
- iv. To determine the influence of continuous improvement on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Resource Based Theory

The Resource-Based View (RBV) was developed by Penrose (1959) and advanced by Barney (1991) as a basis for the competitive advantage of organizations. The Resource-Based View stemmed from realization that competitive advantage depends on doing things differently, rather than matching some prescriptive best practice (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014). Resource-based view has become one of the most influential and cited theories in the history of management theorizing. It aspires to explain the internal sources of a firm's sustained competitive advantage (Kraaijenbrink, Spender, & Groen, 2010). It was Penrose who established the foundations of the resourced-based view as a theory (Dunkelberg, Moore, Scott & Stull, 2013). Penrose first provides a logical explanation to the growth rate of the firm by clarifying the causal relationships among firm resources, production capability and performance. Wernerfelt (1984) took on a resource perspective to analyze antecedents of products and ultimately organizational performance and believed that "resources and products are two sides of the same coin" and firms diversify based on available resources and continue to accumulate through acquisition behaviors. The RBT also states that a company's competitive advantage is derived from the company's ability to assemble and exploit an appropriate combination of resources. Such resources can be tangible or intangible, and represent the inputs into a firm's production process; such as capital, equipment, the skills of individual employees, patents, financing, and talented managers. As a company's effectiveness and capabilities increase, the set of available resources tends to become larger. Through continued use, these "capabilities", defined as the capacity for a set of resources to interactively perform a stretch task or an activity, become stronger and more difficult for competitors to understand and imitate.

Contingency Theory

The contingency theory of leadership was proposed by Fielder (1964). The basic proposition of Fielder's contingency theory is that leadership effectiveness depends on the extent to which a leader works with subordinates to identify needed change, creating a vision to guide the change through inspiration, and executing the change in tandem with committed employees with a view to attain effective Organizational performance (Fielder, 1964; Kreitner & Kinicki, 1992). With regard to this proposition, Fiedler (1964) identified three dimensions of leader-employee interaction: leader-follower relations, task structure, and position power. Leader-follower relations reflect the condition where the leaders have the support, loyalty, and trust of the work group. Fiedler (1964) suggested this was as the most important dimension that should be considered by organizational executives. Employees who find such a favorable relation are encouraged to perform high quality services to attain the leader's goals and organizational objectives. Task structure refers to the amount of structure that describes and guides the tasks accomplished through organizational work.

When managers work within highly structured tasks (for instance, with clear objectives, procedures, volumes, schedules, and instructions), they have more access to controlling the group, and effectively influencing Organizational performance. The third most important dimension is position power, which implies that the leader has the formal power to exercise reward motivation or punishment. In this manner, the managers in certain management systems get compliance from employees. Otherwise, the managers cannot lead and control the employees effectively (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2012). To support the theory, Fielder (1964) developed the least preferred co-worker (LPC) scale to determine what kind of situation was faced by leaders, and identify which management or leadership style was appropriate for the specified situation. Although this scale was acknowledged to have somewhat insufficient validity, Fiedler's contingency theory has had strong support from succeeding research (Grant, 2008; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2012). This suggests that management effectiveness can be obtained through a transformative yet participative leadership style that matches existing situations. In the present study, the theory will be used to understand how youth entrepreneurs focus and apply appropriate leadership styles with a view to make decisions that will work in the interest of the business success as a critical pillar in the growth of their firms. The contingency theory is important in guiding the business management in such a case.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was the original thought of Freeman (1984). Stakeholder theory holds that maximizing the value of one's stakeholders will also maximize social responsibility and performance of individuals. Stakeholder theory is one of most relevant models in the field of management. The theory focuses on enhancing involvement of key organizational stakeholders in the matters of the organization for an integrated performance (Gill, 2011). The stakeholder theory enhances the management's vision of its roles and responsibilities beyond the profit maximization function (Mansuri & Rao, 2004) and stakeholders identified in input-output models of the firm, to also include interests and claims of non-stockholding groups. Patton (2008) elaborated that the stakeholder model entails that all persons or groups with legitimate interests participating in an enterprise do so to obtain benefits and that there is no pre-set priority of one set of interests and benefits over another (Karl, 2007).

Associated corporations, prospective employees, prospective customers, and the public at large, needs to be taken into consideration. The stakeholder theory enables managers to understand stakeholders and strategically manage them (Patton, 2008). The managerial importance of stakeholder management has been accentuated in various studies (Ramabodu & Verster, 2010) that demonstrate that just treatment of stakeholders is related to the long term survival of the organization (McManus, 2004). While having its origins in strategic management, stakeholder theory has been applied to a number of fields and presented and used in a number of ways that are quite distinct and involve very different methodologies, concepts, types of evidence and criteria of evaluation. As the interest in the concept of stakeholders has grown, so has the

proliferation of perspectives on the subject (Oakley, 2011). The theory emphasizes the significance of the relationship between the top management staff with the stakeholders.

Commitment-Trust Theory

The Commitment-trust theory was first put forward by Day (1989) in a bid to explain the need for involving the customers and focusing on them to enhance firm performance and competitiveness. The theory posits that two important factors, trust and commitment must prevail for the firm to establish a good relationship with its customers (Cook & Whitmeyer, 1992). Day (1989) postulates a good relationship between the customer and the firm builds strong bonds between the customers through satisfying their needs and honouring their commitments. Unlike concentrating on short-term profits businesses is more concerned about retaining their customers by providing quality services that meet their needs. Trust is confidence between two parties in a relationship. Firms develop trust by building a level of confidence with their customers. This is based on a number of factors such as reliability, consistence and satisfaction. Stone, Woodcock and Machtynger (2007) explained that a customer is confident about a firm from the various interactions and relationships that they have had in the past. This assists the firm to attract more customers, increase sales and enhance organizational performance.

Commitment is a long-term need to maintain a good relationship. This need is essential in motivating the firm to develop and maintain its relationship with the customers. This is consistent to Hunt (2009) who argued that better relationships are defined through continuous provision of services to the consumers. Kumar, Batista and Maull (2011) posited that customers should be treated in a manner that makes them feel valued; this helps in retaining existing customers and attracting new ones. This can be achieved by being responsive to the needs of the customers when designing products and services. Morgan, Robert & Shelby (2005) posit that affective commitment is a kind of commitment that is more personal, it involves social interactions among individuals. The attitudinal aspect of affective commitment is important in developing trust, mutuality, integrity and solidarity which is essential in sustaining long-term relationships between two parties. This contributes positively to improved performance. Social interaction minimizes uncertainty between individuals; this improves the quality of the relationship between the firm and the customers hence contribute to improved customer satisfaction and performance (Stone et al., 2007).

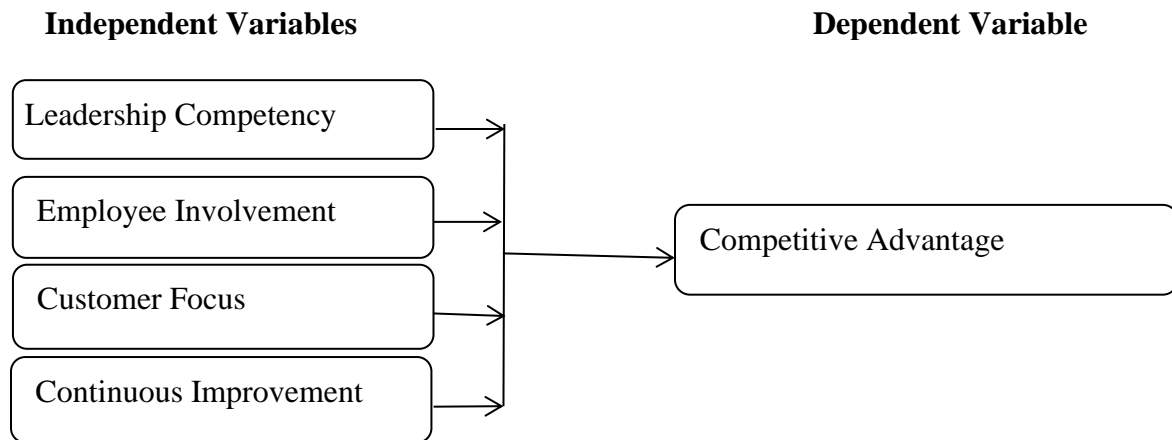
Porter's Theory of Competitive Advantage

Porter's theory of competitive advantage is a well renowned theory that is significant in most organizations' strategy formulation incepted by Porter (1980). Michael Porter considers the competitiveness of a country as a function of four major determinants: factor conditions; demand conditions; related and supporting industries; and, firm strategy, structure, and rivalry. Even though these determinants influence the existence of competitive advantage of an entire nation,

their nature suggests that they are more specific of a particular industry rather than typical of a country. The reason for this is that in Porter’s theory the basic unit of analysis for understanding competition is the industry. “The industry is the arena in which the competitive advantage is won or lost.” So, seeking to isolate the competitive advantage of a nation means to explain the role played by national attributes such as a nation’s economic environment, institutions, and policies for promoting firms’ ability to compete in a particular industry.

The theory of competitive advantage allows an organization to compete with the other industries. This is noting that the organization has acquired a set of unique attributes that allows it to gain advantage over and above other organization that offer the same services or product in the market. An organization technological advancement can make it gain a competitive advantage, which enhances its attractiveness in the market. Noting that there is a number of competitive market sources that would block an organization to compete. The industry structure determines the market and where the organization can compete. The competitive forces model, that is five forces, entry barriers, bargaining power of suppliers, threat of substitution, bargaining power of buyers and enmity among industry players this define the profitability of an industry.

Conceptual Framework



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive survey research design. This is a study design that systematically describes the characteristics of the study objects in all aspects. The target population for this study was the tea processing companies in Kenya. There are a total of 54 tea processing companies in Kenya that are accredited and registered by KTDA (KTDA, 2020). Most of these firms according to KTDA have four major departments which include marketing, human resource, operations and administration. The heads of these departments formed the units of observation in the study. The sampling frame that was used in the study was the 54 tea processing companies registered under the Kenya Tea Development Agency. A census was used

where all the 54 tea processing firms were surveyed in the study as the units of analysis. Purposive sampling was used to pick heads of marketing, human resource, operations and administration departments thus giving a sample size of 216 respondents as the units of observation. According to Young (2013), a census is necessary when the target population is below 400 respondents for an academic work.

A self-administered Questionnaire was used in this study. The questionnaire contained both closed and open-headed questions. This was in order so as to enhance better responses that best fits the research questions. Questionnaire was considered appropriate based on the ability for it to collect the more data and with less time as well as avoiding biasness. Pilot study was conducted whereby 10% of the sample size (22 respondents) was given the questionnaire to fill and the responses were compared to the motive of the questions asked and in case of any misinterpretation they were corrected. The questions in the questionnaire were tested for reliability by use of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The variables were specifically tested and the variables that at least add up to 0.7 value were considered reliable. The questionnaire was tested against content validity. Content validity was estimated by approaching individuals of subject matter experts and the supervisor to review the questionnaire items. They were requested to review whether each item is appropriately matched to the content area indicated.

Questionnaires was dropped at the respondent's working places and picked on an agreed date. Based on the changes in technology and emergence of Covid-19, some respondents were not available physically at their designated working stations, thus they were sent the questionnaire electronically through emails and asked to send it back once they filled. Afterward, all the questionnaires were collected and brought together for sorting and analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used in analysing the data. All the quantitative questions in the questionnaire were assigned codes. These were used to generate tables, charts, and graphs which are easily interpretable and thus making the findings profound. Qualitative data were sorted and organized as per the research questions and presented on the findings part. They were compared to the literature reviewed earlier in the study and any correlation determined. ANOVA was used to find out the correlation between the variables in the study.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Leadership Competency

The descriptive results of the study revealed that most of the respondents agreed that they frequently sought training on entrepreneurship and how to manage the business and take it to the next level and that the leaders had a good experience in running the business effectively. It was further revealed that most of the leaders in the tea processing companies had adequate education

to run the companies successfully and that there were engagements with customers through the leaders to ensure a unified way of operation towards effectiveness. It was further established that the leadership skills and competencies possessed by the leaders and decision makers in the tea processing firms were essential in influencing the success of the firms. The inferential results revealed that leadership competency had a significant and positive effect on the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya.

Employee Involvement

The results from the study revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that the views of the employees in their respective companies were sought before making key decisions and that there were guidelines that showed how employees should be involved in the organizational matters. Employee engagement forums where the management and the employees interacted were however not upheld, despite these being critical in bringing the organizational management closer to the employees. The employees however had the freedom to raise their concerns to the management and that working in teams was encouraged as a way of ensuring continued collaboration among the employees. There was however inadequate involvement of the employees in problem solving to come up with preferable solutions.

Customer Focus

The descriptive analysis of the study findings revealed that most of the companies did not effectively offer after-sale services to their customers despite this being an essential way of strengthening the relationship between the organization and the customers. The customers in most of the tea processing companies had not shown any level of satisfaction in regard to the services and products offered. The views of the customers in most of the organizations were not sought even when making decisions that affect them. Some of the companies had active platforms for keeping customer contacts, but the customers were not frequently contacted to seek their experience with the company's services and products. The inferential results revealed that customer focus had a significant and positive influence on the competitive advantage of the tea processing firms in Kenya.

Continuous Improvement

The findings revealed that product selection based on the specifications of the customers was not effectively upheld in most of the organizations while demand driven production selection was not appropriately upheld among the companies. The respondents agreed that their respective companies had well positioned products for ease access by the customers and that the packaging of the products was done in a unique way so as to attract customers. It was further established that most of the companies surveyed did not effectively maximize on inventing in research and

development. The findings revealed that most of companies had no structured framework for continuous improvement. The respondents indicated that their respective companies did not effectively benefit from continuous improvement since this was not appropriately upheld. The inferential results from the regression model revealed that continuous improvement had a significant and positive influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya.

Table 1: Summary of Inferential Analyses Results

Model	R	Adjusted Square	R Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.749 ^a	.561	.42902

a. Predictors: (Constant), Continuous Improvement, Leadership Competency, Customer Focus, Employee Involvement

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	35.088	4	8.772	47.659	.000 ^b
	Residual	27.425	149	.184		
	Total	62.513	153			

a. Dependent Variable: Firm Competitiveness

b. Predictors: (Constant), Continuous Improvement, Leadership Competency, Customer Focus, Employee Involvement

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.119		.656	.513
Leadership Competency	.199	.263	4.219	.000
Employee Involvement	.216	.271	4.303	.000
Customer Focus	.186	.220	3.514	.001
Continuous Improvement	.226	.264	4.165	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Firm competitive advantage

From the model summary continuous improvement, leadership competency, customer focus, employee involvement had a strong effect on the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya. This is evidenced by the R² value of 0.561 which indicates that continuous improvement, leadership competency, customer focus, employee involvement explained up to 59.1% of the variation in competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya. The ANOVA results depicted that when combined, continuous improvement, leadership competency, customer focus, employee involvement had a significant influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya. This is evidenced by the P-value of 0.000 < 0.05 and the F-calculated of 47.659.

The regression analysis results revealed that continuous improvement, leadership competency, customer focus, employee involvement had a significant and positive influence on competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya. The model now becomes:

$$Y = 0.119 + 0.199X_1 + 0.216X_2 + 0.186X_3 + 0.226X_4 + \varepsilon$$

The model output reveals that a unit change in leadership competency would influence the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya by 19.9%. A unit change in employee involvement would influence the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya by 21.6%. A unit change in customer focus would influence the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya by 18.6% while a unit change in continuous improvement would influence the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya by 22.6%. The findings further revealed that all the variables had P-values less than the standard P-value of 0.05 an indication that they significantly influenced the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concluded that leadership competency had a significant influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. The social and self-awareness of the leader, the cognitive intelligence possessed by the leaders as well as results oriented leadership is integral in enhancing the ability of a company to be different from the competitors thus gaining competitive advantage.

On the influence of employee involvement on competitive advantage of tea processing companies, the study concluded that employee involvement had a significant influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing firms in Kenya. The engagement of the employees as a way of bringing them closer to the management and strengthening the working relationship is significant in promoting the competitive edge of the organization. The seminars that act as get-togethers for the employees and the teamwork which promotes the ability of the employees to work together are essential employee involvement aspects that significantly contribute to organizational competitiveness.

On the customer focus as an aspect of TQM, it was concluded that focusing on customers was significant in promoting the competitive advantage of the tea processing companies in Kenya. After-sale services, customer engagements, and customer contacts and communication as essential drivers of customer satisfaction, which in turn enhance firm competitiveness.

The study concluded that continuous improvement had a significant and positive influence on the competitive advantage of tea processing companies in Kenya. Through product selection, research and development and product differentiation, the companies gain more customers and operate differently thus enhancing firms competitiveness. The continuous improvement aspect of TQM enables a company to be more innovative and creative in meeting customer needs, thus gaining competitive advantage.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the management, the study recommends the need for embrace of results-oriented leadership that is focused on motivating the team to be more productive, thus enhancing their performance. The management ought to have adequate self and social awareness in order to successfully lead the organization to be more competitive.

The management of the tea processing firms have a duty of having a fully committed and involved team, through continuous involvement of the employees. Employees are integral in running the organization successfully, hence their role and contribution can be enhanced by consulting and involving them, thus enabling them to be productive and committed.

The tea processing companies through their management should focus on involving their customers and bringing them closer to the organization. This will be a major move to help in understanding the customers' needs and how to best meet such needs. Offering the customers after-sale services, engaging them through frequent contacts and communication is essential in strengthening their relationship with the organization, thus gaining competitive edge.

Continuous improvement is based on the ability of an organization to continuously innovate and be creative to meet the needs of the customers. The study recommends the need for the managers of the tea processing firms to be at the forefront of being creative and improving their products and services, so as to enhance customer satisfaction.

To the government and policy makers, there is need for these essential stakeholders to set a level ground for the tea processing companies so as to promote their effectiveness and competitiveness. The competitiveness of the local tea processing companies implies that the companies also gain competitiveness in the international market, thus earning the country the much needed foreign currency. The government through the relevant ministries of trade and agriculture should be at the forefront of setting key policies that encourage the tea processing companies to embrace TQM through leadership competency, employee involvement, customer focus and continuous improvement in order to enhance their competitiveness in local and international markets.

REFERENCES

- Aboyassi N. A., Alnsour, M. & Alkloub, M. (2011). Achieving total quality management using knowledge management practices. *International Journal of Commerce and Management*, 21(4), 394-409.
- Almansour, Y.M. (2012). The impact of total quality management components on small and medium enterprises, financial performance in Jordan. *Journal of Arts, science and commerce*, 3(1), 87-91.

- Calvo-Mora, A., Picon, A., Ruiz, C. & Cauzo, L. (2014). The relationships between soft-hard TQM factors and key business results. *International Journal of Operations and Production Management*, 34(1), 5-143.
- Chaudary, S., Zafar, S. & Salman, M. (2015). Does Total Quality Management still shine? Re examining the total quality management effect on financial performance. *Total Quality Management and Business Excellence*, 26(7- 8), 811-824.
- Ezugwu, B.C & Agu O.A (2016). The Effect of Total Quality Management On Performance In Public Enterprise, *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*, ISSN: 2278-6236
- Goetsch, D. L. & Davis, S. B. (2013), *Quality Management for Organizational Excellence: Introduction to Total Quality*. [7th Ed.], NJ: Pearson
- Ismyrlis, V. & Moschidis, O. (2015). The use of quality management systems, tools and techniques in ISO 9001: 2008 certified companies with multidimensional statistics: The Greek case. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 26(5-6), 497-514.
- Kagira , E., Kimani , S., & Kagwathi , S. (2012). Sustainable methods of addressing challenges facing smallholder tea sector in Kenya: A supply Chain Management approach. *Journal of Management and Sustainability*, 2(2).
- Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd. (2015, June 10). Factories. Retrieved from Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd: <http://www.ktdateas.com/index.php/the-factories>
- Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd. (2015, June 10). Our Background. Retrieved from Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd: <http://www.ktdateas.com/index.php/the-company/about-us/our-background>
- Kenya Tea Growers Association. (2015, July 2). What we do. Retrieved from Kenya Tea Growers Association: <http://www.ktga.or.ke/the-ktga/what-we-do.html>
- KTDA (2016). *Chai News Bulletin*. (5th ed). Nairobi: Kenya Tea Development Agency Ltd
- Lee, H. & Lee, C. (2014). The effect of total quality management and organization learning on Business performance: evidence from Taiwanese insurance industries. *Total Quality Management and Business Excellence*, 25(9- 10), 1072-1087. doi:10.1080/197615597.2010.96686683
- Lee, V., Ooi, K., Tan, B. & Chong, A. Y. (2010). A structural analysis of the relationship between TQM practices and product innovation. *Asian Journal of Technology Innovation*, 18(1), 73-96. doi:10.1080/197615597.2010.96686683
- Mosadeghrad, A. M. (2015). Developing and validating a total quality management model. *The TQM Journal*, 27(5), 544 - 564.

- Muhammad , E. & Supinit, V. (2016). Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction Relationship: A Research in the Ambassador Bangkok. *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities Research*, 4(1), 459-472.
- Mungai, J. & Kweni, P. (2013). Developing alternative perspectives for total quality management in higher education, *International Journal of Education Management*, 17(3), 126-36.
- Munisu, M. (2013). The Impact of Total Quality Management Practices towards Competitive advantage and Organization Performance. *Pakistan Journal of Commerce and Social Sciences*, 7(1), 184-197.
- Ngambi, M. T. & Nkemkiafu , A. G. (2015). The Impact of Total Quality Management on Firm's Organizational Performance. *American Journal of Management*, 15(4), 69-85.
- Nouri, M. (2013). A Comprehensive Total Quality Management Strategy and Organization. *International Journal of Engineering Research and Development*, 7(2278-800), 94-99.
- Oakland, J. S. (2014). *Total Quality Management and Operational Excellence*. Third Avenue, New York: Routledge.
- Ogolla, T. (2016). The impact of soft & hard TQM elements on quality management results, *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, Vol 26, no 2, pp 150-163.
- Ooi , K.-B., Cheah, W.-C., Lin, B. & Teh, P.-L. (2012). TQM practices and knowledge sharing: An empirical study of Malaysia's manufacturing organizations. *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 29(1), 59-78.
- Ozdemir, E. D. & Mecikoglu, S. (2016). A Case Study on Performance Implications of Hybrid Strategy in Automotive Supplier Industry. *International Business Research*, 9(6), 31-43. doi::10.5539/ibr.v9n6p31
- Parasuraman, A. (2010). Service productivity, quality and innovation. *International journal of quality and service sciences*, 2(3), 277-286.
- Prajogo, D. I. and Sohal, A. S. (2013). The relationship between organization strategy, total quality management (TQM), and organization performance-the mediating role of TQM. *European Journal of Operational Research*, 168, 35-50.
- Sousa, R. & Voss, C.A. (2002). —Quality management re-visited: A reflective agenda for future research” *Journal of Operations Management*, 20, pp. 91-109.
- Talib, F., Rahman, Z. & Quresh, M. N. (2013). An empirical investigation of relationship between total quality management practices and quality performance in Indian service companies. *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, 30(3), 280-318.

- Tornow, W. W. & Wiley, J. W. (2011). —Service quality and management practices: A look at employee attitudes, customer satisfaction, and bottom-line consequences” *Human Resource Planning journal*, 14, 105-115
- Wali, S. & Boujelbene, Y. (2010). The effect of TQM implementation on firm’s performance in the Tunisian Context. *International Journal of productivity and Quality Management* , 5(1), 60-74.
- Wang, C. H., Chen, K. Y. & Chen, S. C. (2012). Total Quality Management, Market Orientation and Hotel Performance: The Moderating effects of external environmental factors. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 1(31), 9-129.
- Weckenmann, A., Akkasoglu, G. & Werner, T. (2015). Quality management history and trends. *Tehe TQM Journal*, 27(3), 281-293.
- Yunis , M., Joo , J. & Chen, S. (2013). TQM, strategy, and performance:a firm-level analysis. *International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management*, 30(6), 690 - 714.
- Yusr, M. M., Mokhtar., S. S. & Othman, A. R. (2014). The effect of TQM practice on Technological innovation capabilities: applying on Malaysian Manufacturing sector. *International Journal for quality Research*, 8(2), 197-216.
- Yusr, M. M., Othman, A. R. & Mokhtar, S. S. (2012). Assessing the moderating role of marketing capabilities in the relationship between TQM practices and Innovation performance capabilities approach. *International Journal of Business and Social science*, 3(23), 165-176.
- Zubairu, K. I., Ibrahim, Y. M.,& Ibrahim, M.A. (2017). Evaluating the Impact of employee involvement on Financial Performance of Selected Nigerian Construction Firms, *Journal of Construction in Developing Countries*, 16(2), 91-114