

Original Article

Knowledge Management and Employee Performance in Selected Small and Medium Enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract: The performance of employees is a critical factor in the success and sustainability of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), which are vital contributors to economic development in Lagos State, Nigeria. However, employee performance is often constrained by inadequate knowledge management practices, which are essential for enhancing organizational capabilities. This study examined the effect of knowledge management on employee performance in selected SMEs in Lagos State. A survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 80,072 registered SMEs. A sample size of 498 respondents was determined using a research advisor's sample size table, with data collected through an adapted and validated questionnaire. Reliability coefficients ranged from 0.739 to 0.846, and a response rate of 92.2% was achieved. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, including multiple regression analysis via SPSS version 27 at a 5% significance level. The findings revealed that knowledge management had a positive and significant effect on employee performance ($\text{Adj. } R^2 = 0.328$, $F(3,460) = 74.314$, $p < 0.05$) in selected SMEs in Lagos State. The study concluded that effective knowledge management significantly enhances employee performance in SMEs in Lagos State. It is recommended that SME management prioritize the development and implementation of comprehensive knowledge management strategies to improve employee productivity and organizational performance.

Keywords: Employee performance, Knowledge acquisition, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge retention, Knowledge management, Small and Medium Enterprises.

I. INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is critical to the success of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs), as it directly impacts productivity, organisational growth, and economic contributions. Efforts to enhance employee performance, such as mentoring, coaching, and employee orientation programs, have been implemented to improve skills and engagement. However, these initiatives have often fallen short, as seen in the persistent decline in employee performance, marked by low productivity and commitment. This decline is partly attributed to poor knowledge management (KM) practices, which fail to effectively acquire, share, retain and apply knowledge within organizations. Hence, the need to examine the effect of knowledge management on employee performance, as effective KM systems can enhance access to information, foster a supportive work environment, and boost job satisfaction, yet many SMEs in Lagos struggle with inadequate KM strategies, underscoring the urgency to investigate and address these gaps to improve the performance outcomes of employees.

Globally, the decline in employee performance among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) poses a significant challenge to organisational productivity and economic stability. A 2024 global study reported that only 21% of SME employees are actively engaged, resulting in a \$438 billion loss in global productivity due to disengaged workforces, particularly in SMEs, where managerial disengagement further impacts team performance (Gallup, 2025). In the United States, ineffective performance management systems exacerbate the issue, with only 2% of Chief Human Resource Officers believing their systems are effective, leading to diminished job satisfaction and productivity (Wigert & Barrett, 2024). The global and regional data underscore the critical need for enhanced employee performance to reverse the decline in employee performance in SMEs, as the misalignment of employee and organisational goals continues to hinder progress (Kannan & Gambetta, 2025).

The decline in employee performance among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in both the United Kingdom and Germany has become a pressing concern, driven by factors such as work stress, skills shortages, and shifting workforce dynamics. In the UK, recent data reveal that only 20% of SMEs increased their workforce in Q1 2025, down from 24% in Q4 2024, while 17% reduced staff, signaling not only hiring challenges but also a broader stagnation in employee productivity and engagement (Personnel Today, 2025). The UK's productivity gap persists, with traditionally high-performing regions, such as London, experiencing a 2.5% decline in small business productivity, highlighting a nationwide struggle to maintain performance levels (Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales [ICAEW], 2024).



Similarly, a Gallup study in Germany found that only 16% of employees feel engaged at work, resulting in an estimated annual loss of €100 billion in productivity, which highlights the direct link between low morale and declining performance (CE Interim, 2025). The shortage of skilled workers, exacerbated by demographic changes and educational mismatches, further hampers German SMEs, slowing growth and innovation (Neosphere, 2024). Compounding these issues, work stress and deteriorating mental health among SME employees have been shown to significantly lower job performance, as employees face increased anxiety and burnout in the wake of recent economic and social disruptions (PMC, 2022). These trends collectively illustrate a multifaceted decline in employee performance, with significant implications for the competitiveness and resilience of SMEs in both countries.

In Asia, the decline in employee performance among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Bangladesh and Pakistan is a multifaceted issue, influenced by factors such as lack of skills, insufficient training, and challenging work environments. In Bangladesh, approximately 30% of the workforce is engaged in SMEs, but the sector faces significant hurdles in adapting to new technologies and digitalization, leading to stagnant productivity and performance (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Bangladesh, 2023). Research indicates that determinants such as entrepreneurial competency, financial resources, and investment capacity are critical for SME performance, with deficits in these areas directly hampering employee output and organizational growth (Alam & Shaikh, 2023). Furthermore, employee engagement, favorable working conditions, and job autonomy are identified as pivotal contributors to employee performance, yet many SMEs in Bangladesh struggle to provide these, resulting in reduced efficiency and motivation (Rahaman et al., 2021).

The issue is similarly acute in Pakistan, as a 2022 assessment revealed that SMEs lack the requisite skills and training, with only 17% of women-led enterprises receiving micro-enterprise lending—a decline from 19% in 2018, reflecting broader challenges in workforce development and inclusion (Competition Commission of Pakistan, 2022). Additionally, a recent study found that transformational leadership significantly improves job satisfaction, motivation, and innovative work behavior among SME employees, suggesting that leadership quality is a key lever for reversing performance decline (Ali et al., 2025). Together, these findings underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions in skills development, leadership, and workplace conditions to address the persistent decline in employee performance across SMEs in both countries.

The decline in employee performance among Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Africa is a critical issue, particularly in Ghana and Nigeria, where SMEs are vital to economic growth but face significant challenges. In Ghana, SMEs contribute approximately 70% of the GDP and employ 85% of the manufacturing workforce. However, recent productivity statistics reveal stagnation, with a notable decline in overall labour productivity growth affecting SME sectors (Ghana Statistical Service, 2025; Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations, 2022). This decline is linked to inadequate employee motivation, poor working conditions, and limited access to training and technology (RSIS International, 2024).

In Nigeria, studies have shown that employee salary and job security significantly influence job satisfaction and performance in SMEs; however, many enterprises struggle to provide competitive pay and stable employment, leading to reduced motivation and output (Adekunle & Gbadebo, 2024). The average job satisfaction score among Nigerian SME employees is moderate, reflecting ongoing challenges in workforce engagement (Adekunle & Gbadebo, 2024). These issues are compounded by broader economic constraints, such as limited budget performance in trade and industry sectors, which restrict investment in human capital development (Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ghana, 2023).

Furthermore, in Nigeria, research indicates that 70% of SMEs struggle with inadequate employee motivation, directly linked to reduced performance and organizational outcomes (Afolabi & Ojo, 2020). Additionally, Nigerian SMEs with fewer than 500 employees experienced a 25% productivity decline due to weak performance management systems, often worsened by poor knowledge management practices (Tesfaye & Kitaw, 2023). Together, these factors contribute to a persistent decline in employee performance in SMEs across these countries, threatening their sustainability and growth potential.

Knowledge Management (KM) plays a crucial role in enhancing employee performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) by facilitating the creation, storage, sharing, and application of knowledge, which directly improves efficiency, productivity, and innovation (Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025). Despite its importance, KM in SMEs has not received adequate research attention, particularly in integrating strategic leadership, continuous training, and technology to foster a knowledge-sharing culture that boosts employee outcomes (Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025; Kazmi & Abbas, 2021). Studies show that knowledge application has the strongest positive impact on employee performance, followed by knowledge sharing and creation, underscoring the need for comprehensive KM strategies tailored to SMEs' unique contexts (Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025). Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the significance of digital capabilities as mediators in the KM-performance relationship, yet many SMEs still underutilize digital tools for effective knowledge management (Putra et al., 2023). This gap in research and practice limits SMEs' ability to fully leverage KM for sustained competitive advantage and workforce development, calling for more focused empirical studies and practical frameworks to address these challenges (Putra et al., 2023).

Several studies have examined the impact of knowledge management on employee performance across various sectors and industries, yielding mixed results (Adekunle & Gbadebo, 2024; Kazmi & Abbas, 2021; Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025; Rahman et al., 2024). However, in the context of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) operating in Nigeria, little has been done to establish the effect of knowledge management on employee performance, which has created a knowledge gap; hence, this study. It has been observed that poor employee performance in Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) significantly undermines their growth and sustainability, as it directly affects productivity, innovation, and competitive advantage. Factors such as role conflict, role ambiguity, role overload, and poor interpersonal relationships have been identified as major contributors to diminished employee performance in SMEs, with studies showing that these stressors explain over 59% of the variance in performance (Yuen et al., 2022). Additionally, inadequate employee retention practices exacerbate turnover issues, which further impair SME performance by causing loss of skilled labor and increased recruitment costs (Ogunyemi & Adeyemi, 2022). The lack of sufficient training and career development opportunities also limits employees' ability to perform effectively, reducing overall organizational efficiency (Ogunyemi & Adeyemi, 2022). Moreover, infrastructural challenges such as poor electricity supply and limited access to finance indirectly affect employee motivation and performance by constraining operational capacity (PwC Nigeria, 2024). These issues are often compounded by inadequate knowledge management practices within SMEs, which hinder effective knowledge sharing, learning, and innovation, thereby limiting employees' ability to improve performance and adapt to changing business environments (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy [BEIS], 2022; Yuen et al., 2022). Addressing knowledge management gaps is therefore essential for enhancing employee performance and ensuring the long-term viability of SMEs.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review discussed the concepts of the study, explaining the views of different scholars as they relate to the variables under investigation.

A) Employee Performance

Employee performance is commonly defined as the extent to which an employee fulfils their job responsibilities and contributes to achieving organizational goals through productivity, quality, and engagement (Darmadi et al., 2023; Garad et al., 2023). Another definition frames employee performance as the measurable output of an employee's efforts in meeting role expectations and organizational objectives, often influenced by motivation, leadership, and work environment (Yuen Yee Yen et al., 2022; Faradillah et al., 2023). For SMEs, high employee performance is crucial as it drives innovation, enhances competitiveness, and improves customer satisfaction, which are vital for survival in resource-constrained and competitive markets (Nasir et al., 2022; Darmadi et al., 2023). Moreover, improved employee performance reduces turnover and operational costs, fostering sustainable growth and resilience in SMEs (Garad et al., 2023; Yuen Yee Yen et al., 2022). Thus, understanding and enhancing employee performance through effective leadership and motivation is crucial for the success of SMEs.

B) Knowledge Management

Knowledge Management (KM) is defined as the systematic process of creating, sharing, using, and managing organizational knowledge to improve performance and innovation (Durst et al., 2023). Another perspective describes KM as the strategic approach to capturing and leveraging both tacit and explicit knowledge within an organization to enhance decision-making and competitive advantage (Putra et al., 2023; Rahman et al., 2024). For SMEs, effective KM facilitates faster problem-solving, improved employee learning, and innovation, which are critical for adapting to dynamic markets and limited resources (Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025). Additionally, KM enhances collaboration and knowledge sharing among employees, boosting overall organizational performance and employee engagement (Kazmi & Abbas, 2021; De-Bem et al., 2022). Consequently, investing in KM practices enables SMEs to build intellectual capital and sustain long-term growth despite resource constraints.

C) Knowledge Acquisition

Knowledge acquisition is defined as the process through which organizations identify, obtain, and internalize knowledge necessary for improving their operations and capabilities (Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025). Another definition describes knowledge acquisition as the systematic effort by SMEs to source relevant knowledge from both internal and external environments, thereby enhancing innovation and competitive advantage (Putra et al., 2023). For SMEs, effective knowledge acquisition offers several advantages, including accelerated capability development, improved decision-making, and enhanced adaptability to market changes, which are crucial for survival in dynamic business environments (Yepes, 2024). Moreover, knowledge acquisition fosters continuous learning and innovation by enabling SMEs to tap into external networks and experiential learning, facilitating faster internationalization and growth (Kazmi & Abbas, 2021). Consequently, investing in robust knowledge acquisition strategies enables SMEs to build intellectual capital, enhance employee performance, and maintain long-term competitiveness despite resource constraints (Kuang et al., 2021).

D) Knowledge Sharing

Knowledge sharing is defined as the process of disseminating and exchanging knowledge, experiences, and skills among individuals or groups within an organization to enhance collective understanding and performance (Enakrire & Smuts, 2023). Another definition views knowledge sharing as a sustained, interactive communication process that facilitates the transfer of organizational knowledge through formal and informal channels, fostering learning and innovation (Shanmugam & Sakthi, 2023). For SMEs, effective knowledge sharing offers numerous advantages, including improved innovation capacity, faster problem-solving, and enhanced employee collaboration, which are critical for adapting to competitive and dynamic markets (Yepes, 2024). Moreover, knowledge sharing helps SMEs overcome resource constraints by leveraging collective expertise, thus boosting organizational performance and sustaining competitive advantage (IGI Global, 2023). The growing adoption of digital tools and collaborative networks further amplifies these benefits by facilitating seamless knowledge flows across geographical and cultural boundaries, enabling SMEs to innovate and grow sustainably (Shabeer & Mahmood, 2025).

E) Knowledge Retention

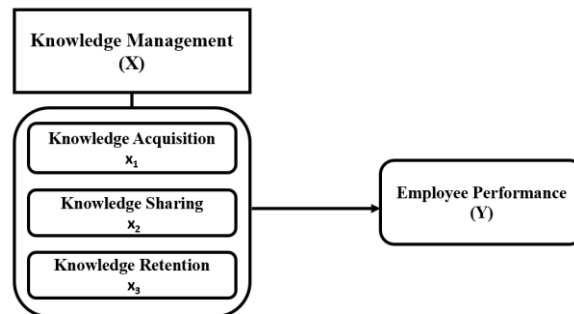
Knowledge retention is defined as the ability of an organization to preserve and recall critical knowledge and expertise over time to maintain operational efficiency and competitive advantage (Okoro et al., 2022). Another definition describes knowledge retention as the systematic process through which organizations capture, store, and transfer knowledge to prevent loss due to employee turnover or organizational changes, ensuring continuity and sustained performance (Abubakar & Bala, 2025). For SMEs, effective knowledge retention offers significant advantages such as minimizing the impact of employee attrition, enhancing decision-making, and fostering innovation by maintaining access to valuable tacit and explicit knowledge (Alsarayreh, 2021). Additionally, knowledge retention supports faster onboarding and skill development, which is crucial for SMEs with limited resources to sustain competitive advantage and improve financial performance (Focuskeeper, 2024). Therefore, investing in knowledge retention strategies, such as mentoring, documentation, and digital knowledge repositories, is essential for SMEs to build resilience and promote long-term growth (Sumbal et al., 2023).

F) Theoretical Framework

The underpinning theory for this study is the Social Construction of Knowledge Theory (SCKT), which asserts that knowledge is not an objective entity but is created and shaped through social interactions and cultural contexts. According to social constructionism, knowledge and reality are products of collective human processes, where meanings and truths are negotiated and sustained within communities over time (Burr, 2015). This theory challenges the notion of fixed, universal knowledge by emphasizing that what is accepted as knowledge is historically and culturally contingent, constructed through language, social practices, and shared understandings (Kretchmar, 2021). In organizational settings, particularly SMEs, SCKT highlights the dynamic and interactive nature of knowledge creation, where employees collaboratively construct and internalize knowledge, making it a socially embedded process.

The relevance of SCKT to knowledge management and employee performance in SMEs lies in its focus on social processes as the foundation for knowledge creation and sharing. SMEs often rely on close-knit social networks and informal interactions, which foster trust and facilitate the exchange of tacit knowledge critical for innovation and adaptability (Daud & Yusoff, 2022). By applying SCKT, knowledge management in SMEs can be understood as a continuous, socially mediated process that enhances employee learning and performance by encouraging participation, dialogue, and collective problem-solving (Mafabi et al., 2023). This social embedding of knowledge enables SMEs to leverage their human capital effectively, improving responsiveness to market changes and sustaining competitive advantage through enhanced employee capabilities and organizational learning (Bedeian, 2023). Thus, SCKT provides a robust theoretical framework for exploring how knowledge management practices influence employee performance in the SME context.

G) Conceptual Model



Source: Researcher's Conceptualization (2025)

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the survey research design. The population of this study comprised 80,072 registered Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria. A sample size of 498 was determined using the research advisor's sample size table. An adapted and validated questionnaire was used for data collection. Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficients for the constructs ranged from 0.739 to 0.846. A response rate of 92.2% was achieved through the fieldwork. The data were analysed using descriptive and inferential tools with the aid of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.

Operationalization of Variables

The variables of this study are operationalized as shown below:

X = Knowledge Management (KM)

Y = Employee Performance (EP)

$Y = f(X)$

$X = (x_1, x_2, x_3)$

x_1 = Knowledge Acquisition (KA)

x_2 = Knowledge Sharing (KS)

x_3 = Knowledge Retention (KR)

Y = Employee Performance (EP)

Model Specification

$Y = f(x_1, x_2, x_3)$

$EP = \alpha + \beta_1KA + \beta_2KS + \beta_3KR + \epsilon_i$ Eq (1)

Where: Beta (β) = the degree of change in the outcome variable for every 1-unit of change in the predictor variable. ϵ_i = error term.

Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

The researcher distributed 498 copies of the questionnaire to participants, with 462 completed and returned correctly, yielding an approximate response rate of 92.7%. This rate is deemed excellent.

The inferential statistics showed the results of the research hypothesis. The data collected were presented, analysed, and the findings were interpreted using SPSS software version 27 based on the formulated objective to enable the researcher to reach rational conclusions and deductions.

A) Restatement of Research Objective and Research Hypothesis

Research Objective: To determine the effect of knowledge management on employee performance of selected small and medium enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria

Research Hypothesis: Ho: Knowledge management has no significant effect on employee performance of selected small and medium enterprises in Lagos State, Nigeria

Table 1 Multiple Regression Analysis on the Effect of Knowledge Management on Employee Performance of Selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria

N	Model	B	Sig.	T	ANOVA (Sig.)	R	Adjust ed R ²	F (3,460)
	(Constant)	3.759	0.003	3.013	0.000 ^b	0.573 ^a	0.328	74.314
	Knowledge Acquisition	0.423	0.000	7.415				
	Knowledge Sharing	0.247	0.000	4.294				
	Knowledge Retention	0.509	0.007	2.711				
	Predictors: (Constant), Knowledge Acquisition, Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Retention							
	Dependent Variable: Employee Performance							

Source: Researcher's Findings, 2025

B) Interpretation

Table 1 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis examining the impact of knowledge management components on employee performance in selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The results revealed that knowledge acquisition ($\beta = 0.423$, $t = 7.415$, $p < 0.05$), knowledge sharing ($\beta = 0.247$, $t = 4.294$, $p < 0.05$), and knowledge retention ($\beta = 0.509$, $t = 2.711$, $p < 0.05$) all had positive and significant effects on employee performance. This implies that the processes of acquiring, sharing, and retaining knowledge are important drivers of employee performance in the selected SMEs.

The R value of 0.573 indicates a moderate positive relationship between knowledge management practices and employee performance in the selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. The coefficient of multiple determination, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.328$, indicates that approximately 32.8% of the variation in employee performance can be explained by the combined effect of knowledge acquisition, sharing, and retention. The remaining 67.2% of the variation is attributed to other factors not accounted for in the model. The predictive and prescriptive multiple regression model can therefore be expressed thus:

$$EP = 3.759 + 0.423KA + 0.247KS + 0.509KR + \epsilon_i \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq (1) (Predictive Model)}$$

$$EP = 3.759 + 0.423KA + 0.247KS + 0.509KR + \epsilon_i \dots\dots\dots \text{Eq (1) (Prescriptive Model)}$$

Where:

EP = Employee Performance

KA = Knowledge Acquisition

KS = Knowledge Sharing

KR = Knowledge Retention

The regression model shows that, holding knowledge management components at a constant value of zero, employee performance would be 3.759, which is positive and statistically significant ($p = 0.003$). The predictive model indicates that all sub-variables of knowledge management, including knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge retention, have a positive and significant effect on employee performance. This implies that management of the selected SMEs should pay close attention to these components as they are key determinants of employee performance.

The results of the multiple regression analysis reveal that when knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge retention improve by one unit, employee performance increases by 0.423, 0.247, and 0.509 units, respectively, and vice versa. This means that enhancing knowledge acquisition, sharing, and retention will lead to improved employee performance in the selected SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Furthermore, the F-statistic ($df = 3, 460$) = 74.314, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$), indicates that the overall regression model is significant in predicting the effect of knowledge management components on employee performance. This suggests that knowledge management practices are important predictors of employee performance in these SMEs. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that knowledge management has no significant effect on employee performance, is rejected. The findings recommend that SMEs should invest in developing effective knowledge management strategies to boost employee performance.

C) Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study align with previous empirical research that has established a significant and positive relationship between knowledge management and employee performance in SMEs. Putra et al. (2023) found that knowledge management had a positive influence on SMEs' performance during the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the importance of effectively managing knowledge assets to sustain business operations and improve outcomes. This supports the current study's conclusion that knowledge management components significantly enhance employee performance in Lagos State SMEs. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2024) demonstrated that knowledge-sharing technologies significantly improve employee performance in SMEs, emphasising the role of communication and collaboration in knowledge dissemination. This corroborates the present study's finding that knowledge sharing has a positive impact on employee performance, reinforcing the notion that facilitating knowledge flow among employees contributes to improved work outcomes.

Furthermore, regarding knowledge acquisition, IGI Global (2015) emphasized its critical role in SMEs by identifying and acquiring relevant knowledge as a foundation for organizational learning and competitive advantage. This resonates with the current study's result showing that knowledge acquisition significantly boosts employee performance, suggesting that SMEs benefit when employees continuously acquire new knowledge to enhance their skills and productivity. The significance of knowledge retention found in this study aligns with the findings of Abubakar and Bala (2025), who reported that knowledge retention has a positive impact on the financial performance of Nigerian SMEs. Likewise, Musa et al. (2025) highlighted knowledge retention strategies as vital for organizational sustainability in SMEs. These studies support the current evidence that retaining critical knowledge within the organization enhances employee performance by preserving valuable expertise and reducing knowledge loss.

Shabeer and Mahmood (2025) also found that knowledge management practices, including acquisition, sharing, and retention, have a positive effect on employee performance in Pakistan's service industry. Their findings align with the current study, reinforcing the universal applicability of knowledge management as a driver of employee effectiveness across different sectors and geographical contexts. The empirical evidence from previous studies consistently supports the present study's conclusion that knowledge management, including its sub-components of knowledge acquisition, knowledge sharing, and knowledge retention, has significant and positive effects on employee performance in SMEs. This body of research collectively

underscores the imperative for SMEs to develop robust knowledge management practices to enhance employee capabilities and overall organizational performance.

D) Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of this study demonstrate that knowledge management practices, specifically knowledge acquisition, sharing, and retention, have improved employee performance in SMEs in Lagos State, Nigeria. Owners/managers should therefore prioritize creating an organizational culture that encourages continuous learning and effective knowledge exchange among employees. By investing in systems and processes that facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge and ensure the retention of valuable information within the organisation, they can enhance employee skills, motivation, and productivity, ultimately driving better business outcomes.

Additionally, to improve employee performance, owners/managers should implement structured knowledge management initiatives such as training programs, collaborative platforms, and mentorship schemes that promote knowledge sharing. Additionally, they should establish mechanisms to document and preserve critical organizational knowledge to prevent loss when employees leave. These strategies will not only improve individual employee performance but also strengthen the overall organizational capability, making the SMEs more competitive and adaptable in a dynamic business environment.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors, Lawal, L. O., Akpa, V. O., and Esator, G. O., declare that they have no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, or publication of this article. They confirm that they have no financial, personal, or professional relationships or affiliations that could be perceived to influence the objectivity or integrity of the work presented. This includes, but is not limited to, any involvement with organizations, entities, or individuals that could benefit from or impact the outcomes of the study. The research was conducted with impartiality, and the findings are presented based solely on the scientific merit of the work.

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