

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND MARKETING MANAGEMENT CAPABILITY: ACHIEVING GROWTH IN SMES, A CRITICAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

This is a critical assessment of the paper on "Digital Technology and Marketing Management Capability: Achieving Growth in SMEs." In this critical review, the author attempts to gain deeper understanding the elements contributing to the expansion of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) within the United Kingdom, an assessment will be conducted to examine the interconnections among digital innovation, physical and intangible resources, and marketing competencies. This body of literature has attracted significant attention, particularly within the realm of digital technology. Nonetheless, several limitations hinder its comprehensiveness: (1) There is a notable absence of a well-defined analytical framework that clearly delineates causality in marketing capabilities. (2) Despite its systemic nature, qualitative research in this area has not fully leveraged insights from the resource-advantage theory to attack the question of how the presence of digital technology shapes the effectiveness of marketing strategies, leading to ambiguity regarding the connections between the effects of digital technology, along with tangible and intangible assets, on marketing capabilities are significant., ultimately affecting company growth. (3) Defining the utilization of digital technology alongside effective marketing management capabilities plays crucial roles in facilitating the growth of SMEs remains a persistent challenge. (4) Many studies have been confined to single regions or clusters, lacking a comparative and multi-scalar perspective. (5) The literature often adopts a static framework, offering a snapshot of SMEs without systematically considering their longitudinal evolution. A succinct examination of the literature on the interpretation of interviews and various interview types is provided, addressing practical considerations researchers should contemplate before conducting interviews and offering insights into interview implementation. Limitations and implications of the research: Concentrating solely on UK SMEs might limit the applicability of the research findings. In this critique, the author attempts a systematic, objective review to highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of the paper and its applicability to practice, following the format of the criticized article.

Keywords: Digital Technology, SMEs, Marketing Management Capability.

INTRODUCTION

The strategists within organizations stated that core competency has remained a fundamental principle for quite some time. Originating defining it as the distinctive capabilities of a company and highlighting its role as a guiding principle (Nunhes, T. V. et. al, 2019). In their work from 2018, Grillitsch & Asheim explored core competence in greater depth, portraying it as the essential framework that supports and nourishes an organization. Concurrently, scholarly attention has increasingly focused on marketing capabilities, with studies by Manis and Madhavaram (2023), Morgan et al. (2018), and Herhausen et al. (2020). According to Soomro (2021) as pivotal role in enhancing organizational performance. Marketing capabilities are instrumental in fostering customer satisfaction, ultimately leading to improved sales, profitability, and competitiveness (Sánchez-Gutiérrez, J., et al., 2019). The objective of this paper is to enhance our comprehension of how digital technology affects the management capability of design innovation, thereby shaping the growth trajectory of a company.

Furthermore, this is a research explores the intricate interplay the connection among data accuracy, ease of service, and digital advancements is evident along with their antecedents, such as integrated promotion, product pricing, transactions, accessing information, fulfilling orders, and providing customer service are essential components. Adopting the resource-advantage theory, the study examines how these factors, along with physical and non-physical assets, marketing prowess, and fundamental strengths interact to shape organizational dynamics. By evaluating these relationships, the paper seeks to elucidate the factors underpinning primary expertise. Additionally, the research adds to the growing body of literature concerning digital technology and its impact on innovation by emphasizing its key role in enhancing management capability and fostering growth Within small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), Dewett (2003) emphasized that digital technologies empower employees through granting access to valuable information, thereby driving innovation and managerial effectiveness. The adoption of technology, as discussed in the literature on technology adoption, is crucial for Small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) strive for both expansion and innovation, emphasizing the significance of well-informed governmental policies to support this endeavor (Blackburn, 2016). Additionally, an SME's ability to acquire and utilize knowledge is essential for its growth path, especially concerning management skills and technological integration (Fruhling and Siau, 2007). Consequently, this paper emphasizes the significance of nurturing human capital and strategic resources to drive innovation and organizational growth.

The paper follows this structure: initially, it presents a theoretical framework covering the paper delves into the interconnections among information quality, service accessibility, digital innovation, tangible and intangible resources, marketing proficiency, and core expertise, providing a comprehensive understanding of their relationships. Subsequently, the research methodology is delineated, succeeded by the presentation of findings from the analysis. Finally, the paper concludes with a summary of research contributions, limitations, and suggestions for future research endeavors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the realm of digital technology, firms are increasingly adopting its use to not only meet customer needs but also enhance operations on the customer side (Khanom et al., 2023). This adoption serves to align business interests with consumer demands, driving sales and operational efficiencies by reducing costs. The transfer of high-quality information is facilitated through digital technology, a trend that organizations are keenly embracing to enhance customer experiences. Technological innovation, in general, entails the deployment of products with improved performance attributes to offer introducing fresh or improved services for customers (Gregory et al., 2019). The quality and also its manner of information dissemination significantly influence customer behavior and marketing outcomes. Information quality encompasses various aspects, including Coordinated advertising campaigns, which guarantee uniformity in brand representation across different touchpoints to assist clientele, integrated product and pricing details assure consistency in product representation and pricing across various retail platforms. Moreover, integrated transactional data collection involves retailers gathering online transaction data from customers to offer personalized services and information. Provision convenience, on the other hand, pertains to consumers' desire to save time and effort, with integrated processes such as Accessing information, fulfilling orders, and providing customer assistance are pivotal aspects playing pivotal roles in achieving this convenience (Roy, S. K., et al., 2018). Digital technologies have become indispensable in modern organizations, facilitating collaboration Within enterprises, the storage and analysis of information have advanced customer service performance significantly, revolutionizing service convenience. This has also bolstered marketing prowess necessitates leveraging digital technology to research customers, competitors, and the broader market environment. Processes involved in marketing capability, such as sustaining relationships with stakeholders and utilizing best practices, rely heavily on the tangible and intangible assets of a firm. Assets, in this context, are viewed as inputs into the production process, while capabilities represent the capacity of resources to perform specific tasks or activities. Marketing capability processes contribute to the reconfiguration of operational capabilities to meet evolving requirements (Wilden, R. et al., 2019).

METHOD

This research is gathering and analyzing qualitative data techniques to identify Trends, motifs, and classifications, enabling the assessment of what holds significance and meaning within the data, as advocated by Patton (1990). The research involved conducting twenty-one extensive interviews were conducted with senior executives from different SMEs in the UK, complemented by six focus groups involving a combined total of 35 individuals, including 21 men and 14 women. These data collection methods gaining a more profound comprehension of the research subject, revealing fresh evidence and perspectives on the issue, and offering vivid, precise descriptions rooted in personal experiences experiences.

Each interview was conducted in a conducive and comfortable environment, lasting an average of 1.5 hours, and was meticulously recorded and transcribed to ensure data reliability. The overarching of the study was to investigate how digital technology impacts marketing prowess, resulting in the cultivation of core expertise and subsequent expansion of SMEs.

Following the suggestions proposed by Foroudi et al. (2014, 2016), semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out using a qualitative framework with specific inquiries aimed at extracting key motivations, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions from the participants. These interviews were conducted in person between October 2015 and September 2016. Triangulation was employed at two stages to bolster the credibility and dependability of the research, adhering to Creswell and Miller's (2000) recommendations is imperative.

Initial coding was performed to address areas of concern, inquiry objectives, and fundamental concepts with subsequent use of the Data management and analysis software. This software facilitated the interpretation of text and the exploration of interrelationships between codes. Thematic ideas were scrutinized to ensure uniformity, a methodical approach was adopted during the data analysis stage. Interviews transcripts underwent thorough examination, with notable remarks pertinent to the research query highlighted. By isolating key terms, the outcomes derived from open-ended inquiries were methodically associated with the research question to construct a coherent theory.

DISCUSSION

The review of existing literature exposes a lack of clear definitions concerning fundamental expertise and its intricacies, prompting the development of a conceptual framework integrating key research constructs derived from both the body of literature and qualitative investigation. Developing a conceptual framework at the employee level guided by the resource-advantage theory reveals several findings:

- Connections exist between information quality, service accessibility, digital innovation, tangible/intangible resources, marketing expertise, and business expansion.
- The presence of relationships among other theoretically acknowledged factors is apparent.

Addressing Regarding Research Question 1 (RQ1) - "How does digital technology impact marketing capability, contributing to company growth?" - the study reveals that both tangible and intangible assets, along with digital technology, influence marketing capabilities, subsequently affecting the growth trajectory of SMEs and the formation of their core competencies. While individual entrepreneurs offer diverse viewpoints, the majority emphasize the growing importance of SMEs, attributing it to innovation and knowledge that encourage the adoption of new or improved products and procedures. Managers within SMEs emphasized the importance of possessing comprehensive knowledge across all business functions to navigate challenges successfully, highlighting the role of mastery in forthcoming advancements. This study aims to assess connections between variables to acquire deeper understandings of the factors associated with core competency in UK SMEs. It adds to the current pool of knowledge by empirically validating the assertion made by scholars (Mahoney and Pandian, 1992) regarding the comprehension of digital technology,

tangible/intangible assets, and their impact on marketing capability, consequently contributing valuable perspectives for future exploration in this domain.

Furthermore, this paper highlights the significance of information accuracy, coupled with its precursors, in combination with service accessibility and its precursors, to enrich comprehension of how digital technology affects tangible/intangible assets, marketing prowess, and competency. Utilizing data gathered from interviews conducted within UK SMEs, this research endeavors to investigate the correlation among information accuracy, service accessibility, tangible/intangible assets, digital technology, marketing capability, competency, and core competencies.

Interviewees outlined the business idea as a perception governing the management and execution of economic activities, encompassing presumptions and behavioral standards. Business concept innovation entails rethinking or questioning commonly embraced ideas and behaviors, altering the perception of how a business operates. The managers' narratives illustrate diverse paths to actualizing their business concepts, from initiating discussions with business owners to leveraging years of industry experience and personal passion to establish their ventures. Innovation fosters the development of new or significantly improved mental models, facilitating substantial changes in a firm's methods and knowledge base, enabling catering companies, for instance, to innovate and differentiate themselves, thereby enhancing competitiveness. Identifying competencies that confer competitive advantage, such as quality products and exceptional customer service, is crucial for managers aiming to innovate and seize market opportunities, ensuring sustained business growth and longevity.

In the absence of new technologies or scientific knowledge development, companies must seek innovation from alternative sources. Acknowledging the presence of non-technological knowledge becomes imperative in answering this question. Within SMEs, such knowledge is company-specific, accumulated through the learning process inherent in each business operation. Every firm, across all industries, acquires distinctive insights from its activities, encompassing market dynamics, organizational operations, production methodologies, and delivery processes. This innovative pursuit evolves alongside business and product ideation, delineating patterns dictating the utilization of knowledge or other firm resources.

For instance, a catering SME might diversify its offerings by introducing delivery services for local businesses and hosting special events like art days or cultural music nights, leveraging its limited marketing budget to attract new customers. Digital marketing via social media platforms offers SMEs an innovative means to engage with customers, presenting a cost-effective alternative with significant appeal.

In the competitive landscape, businesses contend within a market environment, often characterized by multiple sellers offering similar products to meet consumer demand. SMEs face direct and indirect competition, navigating various strategies to distinguish themselves. Indirect competitors like local supermarkets selling ready meals pose substitutes, prompting SMEs to emphasize unique product quality, convenience, and customer service to maintain competitiveness.

Growth and development objectives drive entrepreneurs can enlarge their market presence through diverse methods, such as expanding physical premises, executing marketing campaigns, and recruiting more staff members. Interviews with entrepreneurs underscored their growth trajectories, from initial investments and steady revenue growth to significant business value appreciation over time, often accompanied by inherent challenges in managing daily operations.

Effective management within SMEs encompasses understanding financial obligations, product customization to suit customer preferences, and recruiting skilled employees who align with business objectives. Regulatory compliance and tax obligations present significant challenges for SMEs, necessitating owners' adeptness in navigating legal frameworks.

Strategic planning forms the cornerstone of future growth and development, requiring consistent, measurable, and flexible approaches. Owners must commit fostering a conducive environment for the enterprise, valuing the workforce, advocating growth strategies, and possess comprehensive organizational skills to ensure sustained success. Strategies for future growth may include structural modeling, strategic objectives setting, and fostering a culture of collaboration and dedication among employees.

Ultimately, the growth and development of SMEs hinge on strategic decision-making, employee engagement, and a steadfast commitment to organizational objectives. While expansion remains a viable strategy for some, others prioritize maintaining current operations while focusing on familial succession or other non-expansionary approaches.

The majority of interviewees expressed contentment with their current business size, attributing their strategy to diligent efforts aimed at ensuring customer satisfaction and retention. Their focus remains steadfast on delivering products and services of the highest quality standards, leveraging their extensive industry experience to formulate effective strategies. Notably, three owners are contemplating relocating their businesses to larger premises nearby, reflecting aspirations for expansion.

In line with this study's findings, the quality of information and the convenience of services are closely intertwined with digital technology. Interview participants observed that digital technology affects information quality by coordinating promotion, product pricing, and transactional data. Likewise, service convenience benefits from digital technology, streamlining access, order completion, and customer service procedures. One SME accountancy firm director highlighted digital technology's pivotal role in enhancing client interaction and internal operations, citing examples of technology integration to foster a paperless working environment and leverage big data analytics for superior service delivery.

Definitions of SMEs in the UK vary based on employment, asset value, and sales criteria. However, Jasra et al.'s definition further specifies SMEs based on employee count and capability assessments. Regarding digital technology, this study uncovered positive associations between its usage and tangible/intangible assets. Moreover, frequent engagement with these assets correlated positively with customer relationship. Furthermore, the examination validated the hypotheses concerning corporate brand identity prowess. Moreover, the investigation unveiled robust connections between marketing capabilities and organizational core competency, as perceived by staff members, highlighting the importance of information accuracy, service accessibility, digital technology, and tangible/intangible resources in fostering this association. The study's outcomes elucidate the notion of employee-centered core competence, highlighting organizational practices that bring assets together to enhance deployment advantageously. Management's consistent monitoring of competence efficiency and appropriateness relative to organizational core competency is crucial across industries and competitive landscapes. Core competence, as conceptualized in this study, encompasses factors such as data precision, convenience of services, digital advancements, physical/intangible resources, marketing skills, and proficiency. These factors collectively contribute to organizational stability and competitiveness, with digital technology serving as a catalyst for design innovation and market segmentation, particularly within marketing departments.

Within the product design division, management capability predominantly centers on creating new products and market segments by closely monitoring market trends and identifying opportunities, as emphasized by Foroudi et al. (2016). Researchers such as Gupta and Wilemon (1990) and Foroudi et al. (2016) argue that efficient collaboration between design functions and marketing endeavors can stimulate product innovation, a factor particularly crucial for the growth of SMEs, as noted by Coad and Rao (2008). It is observed that SMEs engaging in product innovation tend to achieve higher growth rates compared to their counterparts that do not, indicating a direct correlation between internal management capability and innovation success.

This study also sheds light on the attributes of core competency are clarified by explaining its formation, assessment, and administration within firms. Techniques for cultivating core competency are investigated concerning both physical and intangible resources and marketing skills. Additionally, the employee-centric viewpoint on organizational core competency is analyzed by demonstrating how digital technology influences marketing capabilities and physical/intangible assets, aiming to strengthen organizational core competency.

This findings unveil both mediating there are observable links and immediate impacts between a company's physical and intangible resources and its marketing expertise. A proactive approach to market perception, corporate brand identity, customer relations, and social media/communication competencies indicates previous achievements, with input from an accounting firm emphasizing the crucial interplay between marketing capabilities and tangible/intangible assets in nurturing competence that drives core competency.

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Emphasizing of significance of marketing capabilities in today's digital landscape, one consultancy firm highlighted their adoption of various online methods, such as social media engagement and targeted apps, to promote thought leadership and innovations, showcasing the evolving role of technology in shaping marketing strategies.

Furthermore, customer relationship management (CRM) technology was highlighted as a crucial tool in gathering and disseminating data related to customer services and product offerings, demonstrating its profound impact on employee perceptions of core competence and dynamic marketing capabilities. According to Hunt and Morgan (1995), possessing a superior advantage in assets can result in a competitive edge in the market, ultimately leading to enhanced financial outcomes, underscoring the interconnectedness between firm assets, marketing capabilities, and overall competence. Effective management capabilities combined with design innovation serve as a catalyst for the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), highlighting the importance of continuous learning and optimization of managerial activities to drive innovation. Moreover, brand identity within the corporation, customer relationship prowess, and marketing competencies are identified as key drivers of superior performance, with corporate brand identity playing a pivotal role in differentiating one firm from another. Marketing capabilities are seen as instrumental in enhancing firm performance and competence, acting as a mediator between physical and intangible assets and company performance. The research concludes that information accuracy, service ease, and digital advancements collectively impact marketing capabilities, which in turn impact organizational competence. Digital technology's significant role in shaping marketing strategies and identifying areas for investment is evident, emphasizing the importance of leveraging technology to drive marketing innovation and enhance core competence.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to address gaps in academia by examining complex relationships among information precision, service ease, digital advancements, physical/intangible resources, marketing expertise, proficiency, and core competencies. The study seeks to unravel the intricate connections among these variables and explore their collective impact on the growth and innovation trajectories of UK firms.

The robust findings of this research illuminate a compelling narrative of interdependence and synergy between the examined variables. Notably, digital technology emerges as a transformative force, exerting a substantial impact on marketing capabilities within UK firms. This, consequently, acts as a stimulant for the advancement of core competencies, positioning organizations on a trajectory of sustainable growth and innovation. Such insights transcend mere theoretical abstraction, presenting a tangible roadmap for both scholars and managers to enhance their comprehension and strategic supervision of core competencies within the UK business landscape.

The implications of this study ripple through various dimensions of organizational dynamics. Innovation, heralded as a key driver of growth for SMEs, is underscored as a multidimensional construct influenced by information quality, service convenience, and digital technology. The study emphasizes the symbiotic relationship between these elements, offering a nuanced understanding of how SMEs can leverage digital technology to innovate, attract, and retain customers. The assertion that greater management capabilities and technological advancements unlock avenues for SMEs to achieve growth aligns with contemporary paradigms of strategic management and technological adoption.

Moreover, the research posits that innovation policies in developed countries, exemplified by the UK, play a pivotal role in fostering the adoption of technologies and best practices among SMEs. The proactive role of policymakers is emphasized as a catalyst for increasing innovation performance in SMEs through targeted training and improved access to higher education. These informed policies are framed as instrumental in empowering entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills essential for driving design innovation, thereby catalyzing the growth of SMEs and substantiating their significant role in the broader economic landscape.

However, it is imperative to subject these findings to critical scrutiny. While the study presents a comprehensive exploration of the relationships between the identified variables, potential limitations and contextual nuances should be acknowledged. The complexities of innovation and growth within SMEs may vary across industries, regions, and economic contexts, necessitating a nuanced understanding of the applicability of these findings. Future research endeavors should delve into these contextual intricacies to refine and expand upon the presented insights.

In conclusion, this research contributes substantively to the theoretical and managerial understanding of core competencies, innovation, and growth in the UK business landscape. By addressing critical gaps in existing literature and offering actionable insights, the study not only advances scholarly discourse but also provides a pragmatic guide for practitioners navigating the dynamic intersection of digital technology, marketing capabilities, and organizational competencies. The study's findings beckon further inquiry, encouraging researchers to unravel the subtleties of innovation policies, industry-specific dynamics, and the evolving role of SMEs in shaping the economic landscape.

Research implications

The implications of the current research extend beyond the immediate focus on core competence, delving into the intricate interplay between digital technology, marketing capabilities, and overall organizational competence. By forging a deeper engagement with competence issues, firms are positioned to maximize the effectiveness of digital technology by leveraging company assets to bolster their capacity to achieve and maintain core competence. The authors advocate for a comprehensive conceptual framework that positions digital technology and marketing proficiency play pivotal roles in the company's strategy, nurturing expertise and ultimately driving the progression of core competence.

A distinctive contribution of this research lies in its exploration of employees' perceptions. Examining the influence the impact of digital technology and marketing prowess on the financial proficiency of firms is the primary focus. Although past studies have recognized the correlation between the integration of digital technology, physical and intangible resources, and marketing competencies into core competency,

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the specific correlation among these dynamics had remained unexplored. The study fills this gap by presenting a validated framework that elucidates the relationships among these critical components of core competence. This corroborated model not only advances our theoretical understanding but also responds to the demands for research from the marketing perspective, as articulated by Foroudi et al. (2014).

The necessity to develop an innovative framework for core competence becomes apparent, necessitating the reassurance for (interdisciplinary) research to explore interactions that can yield tangible outcomes applicable in real-world this comprehensive approach, as outlined by Palmer and Bejou (2006), seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the intricate relationships among information precision, service ease, digital technology, physical and intangible resources, marketing expertise, proficiency, and core competence within the financial domain. Consequently, the findings of this investigation provide valuable insights aimed at tactical decision-makers endeavoring toward grasp of extensive correlations among core competence elements from the perspective of employees and their influence on organizational competence.

The research further contributes to managers and decision-makers' approaches, emphasizing the importance of the study recognizes the utilization of tangible/intangible assets in devising a comprehensive organizational strategy across the entire lifecycle in conjunction with digital technology and marketing capabilities, illustrating their role in enhancing organizational competence. Importantly, each component, including information quality and service convenience, emerges as a unique and noteworthy factor in shaping organizational core competency.

The findings present actionable guidance for managers, urging them to effectively cultivate their organizational competency, thereby enhancing competitive advantage and overall firm success. The recognition of the strategic significance for managers and decision-makers is highlighted by the varying importance of dynamic hypotheses impacting core competence. To secure a lasting viable edge, it is proposed that companies need to grasp fully the elements comprising core competence, with particular stress on the influence of digital technology, physical and intangible resources, and marketing competencies.

In conclusion, this study significantly contributes to the discourse on core competence by untangling the intricate web of relationships among its constituents. The implications extend beyond theoretical realms, providing practical insights for managers and decision-makers aiming to fortify their organizations' competitive positioning through a nuanced understanding of core competence dynamics. The proposed model and its implications are poised to guide strategic decisions, fostering organizational growth and resilience in an ever-evolving business landscape.

Constraints and avenues for future research

While this research substantially adds to our comprehension of competence dynamics and their impact on firms' success, it is imperative to acknowledge the inherent constraints linked to the selected sampling and analytical techniques, along with the measurement instruments utilized, were highlighted in Foroudi et al.'s (2014) study's confined scope within a specific background and location raises questions about the generalizability of the results. It is plausible that outcomes could vary in different locations or industry segments, emphasizing the need for future studies to validate and extend these findings across diverse sectors.

The qualitative nature of the research, primarily concentrated on managers and academics, introduces a potential limitation. Managers and academicians may grip distinct perspectives, and subsequent research endeavors might gain advantages from exploring the viewpoints of both these stakeholder groups to gain a more thorough comprehension of the dynamics of competency. Additionally, considering the qualitative investigation's concentration on employees' observations of the interconnections in the interplay among information accuracy, service ease, digital advancements, physical and intangible resources, marketing proficiency, proficiency, and fundamental expertise represent a significant aspect to more nuanced exploration involving mixed methods could yield richer insights.

Another limitation worth noting is the relatively smaller number and specific type of employees involved in the study. Expanding the sample size and incorporating a broader range of employee roles and responsibilities would enhance the reliability and generalizability of the study's results (Churchill, 1999). Future research endeavors should aim to replicate this investigation across various sectors and with a larger and more diverse employee population to provide a more robust foundation for drawing conclusions about the broader implications of competence in different organizational contexts.

To address the limitations and advance our understanding of competence, future studies should adopt a comparative approach across multiple sectors, industries, and geographical locations. This comparative analysis would shed light on the contextual variations in the relationships between competence components. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of both managers and employees through mixed-methods research designs would offer a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intricate dynamics engaged in the development and utilization of core competence.

In conclusion, while this study contributes valuable insights into competence and its impact on firms' success, the limitations inherent in its methodology and scope necessitate caution in generalizing the findings. Future research efforts should build upon these insights, addressing the identified limitations by adopting more expansive sampling strategies, diverse research methods, and a comparative approach. Improving the strength of the results will not only bolster the reliability of the findings but also add to a greater nuanced understanding of the complexities surrounding competence in various organizational settings.

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