

Cross Functional Integration and Corporate Sustainability of Hospitality Firms in Rivers State

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between cross functional integration and corporate sustainability of hospitality firms in Rivers State. The problem of this study was to determine if cross functional integration can predict corporate sustainability of four star hotels in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to ascertain the extent to which the un-dimensioned predictor variable cross functional integration relate with corporate sustainability of four star hotels in Rivers State. The population of the study consists of eight four star hotels firms in Rivers State. All the firms were studied and respondents provided primary data that were used to ascertain the relationship between the variables. The primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire that was designed in a five point Likert scale ranging from a very high extent to a very low extent. Two research hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Sciences to establish the relationships between the variables. Results of the test showed that cross functional integration have significant and positive relationships with collaboration and continuous improvement– the measures of corporate sustainability. Therefore, the study concluded that cross functional integration positively relates with corporate sustainability of hospitality firms in Rivers State. Therefore, the study recommended that hospitality firms should engage in cross functional integration to enhance their corporate sustainability.

Introduction

The profitability, sustainability, and success of the hospitality and tourist business depend upon the corporate sustainability of the sector. For companies, this include maintaining and increasing economic development, shareholder value, prestige, corporate reputation, customer connections, and the quality of goods and services. Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) analyzed business sustainability by breaking it down into three dimensions: economic, ecological, and social. Belz

and Peattie (2009) established six key attributes of sustainable marketing: customer happiness, dual emphasis, life cycle orientation, major enhancements, and continual progress. The economic component of sustainability encompasses the fundamental characteristics of an organization that must be maintained alongside environmental and social considerations, in order to ensure long-term viability in the market. The economic component of business sustainability encompasses several factors, including innovation and technology, cooperation, knowledge management, procedures, procurement, and sustainability reporting. The ecological component encompasses the environmental consequences resulting from business activity.

A comprehensive comprehension of the hospitality and tourist industry, in which the majority of enterprises operates or wants to operate, is crucial. These firms are rapidly expanding sources of income and provide attractive opportunities for employment (Backman, Klaesson, & Öner, 2017). Furthermore, anecdotal research indicates that sustainability activities may simply be seen as a necessary expense in doing company due to imitation (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2021). Similarly, anecdotal evidence indicates that business researchers have not yet reached a clear understanding of what corporate sustainability entails (Montiel & Delgado-Ceballos, 2014). This is required due to the high level of competition and the importance of company sustainability, which cannot be overstated. Furthermore, it is essential for these companies to maintain sustainability. Sustainability refers to the capacity to create, analyze, and maintain adaptive capabilities (Silvestre, Antunes, & Filho, 2018). Sustainability in the corporate environment should include three characteristics that together foster economic and social progress while avoiding damage to the environment (Elkington, 1999).

Hence, the hospitality and tourist industry diligently observes the evolving business landscape and the factors that drive these changes in order to establish connections with clients and attain long-term corporate viability. Corporate sustainability refers to the capacity of a business to fulfill the requirements of its present stakeholders, both directly and indirectly, while also ensuring that it can satisfy the demands of future stakeholders without any negative impact (Dyllick & Hockerts, 2002). Corporate sustainability refers to the capacity of a corporation to promote sustainable development by considering the environmental, social, economic, and ecological impacts of the hospitality industry. The operational activities of the hotel and tourist industry are closely connected to the implementation of sustainable practices by companies. Corporate sustainability plays a crucial role in redefining perspectives on social equality, environmental justice, and business ethics, considering the current state of society and its future prospects of deteriorating social and environmental conditions (Elkington, 1999). Bansal and Desjardine (2014) define corporate sustainability as the safeguarding of the company's future requirements, including the demands of shareholders, who are the future marketing managers.

Corporate sustainability refers to the obligation of companies to not only produce income, but also to actively promote beneficial outcomes in the social and environmental aspects of their operations (Costa, Curi, Bandeira, Ferreira, Tomé, Joaquim, Santos, Góis, Meira, Azevedo, et al., 2022). Corporate sustainability refers to the establishment and preservation of enduring ties with consumers, the social environment, and the natural environment, which is also known as

sustainability marketing (Belz 2006). Conversely, there is a contention that achieving sustainability in marketing will pose challenges if we persist in regarding customers and their desires as the exclusive impetus for marketing, while considering socio-environmental issues as mere limitations that marketers must adapt to (Peattie & Ken, 2010). Therefore, it is essential to develop, attain, sustain, and execute a product that is focused on delivering value and satisfying the demands and desires of the intended market. Four star hotels encounter intense competition within the sector. Therefore, it is crucial for them to differentiate themselves from their rivals by consistently enhancing and innovating their products (Backman, Klaesson, & Öner, 2017). Corporate sustainability has evolved from a mere response to stakeholder demands to a prominent market differentiation. Corporate sustainability provides a significant strategic benefit. Strategic advantage refers to the ability of stakeholders to influence the perception of others towards the company.

Hospitality businesses must determine the cost implications of product design. Implementing cross-functional integration necessitates significant financial investment. It may be necessary to assess cross functional integration to some extent. Very few marketing managers can afford to undertake a costly marketing effort without convincingly demonstrating its financial performance (Landwehr, & Herrmann, 2015). Hence, business sustainability is assessed based on the factors of cooperation, product excellence, and ongoing enhancement. Collaboration is the act of partnering with individuals or organizations to create something. Continuous improvement is a lean methodology that aims to optimize operations.

The field of literature has several researches that seek to establish connections between cross-functional integration and business sustainability. Eccles, Ioannou, and Serafeim (2014) examined how corporate sustainability impacts organizational processes and performance. Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) conducted a study on business sustainability strategies, specifically focusing on sustainability profiles and maturity levels. In their study, Silvestre, Antunes, and Filho (2018) investigate the typology of corporate sustainability, specifically analyzing the factors that drive sustainability and promote its implementation in firms. Ioannou and Serafeim (2021) investigated the concept of business sustainability as a strategic approach. Lozano, Barreiro-Gen, and Zafar (2021) conducted a study on cooperation for organizational sustainability, specifically focusing on the limitations to development. They developed a framework that identifies the characteristics, advantages, and problems associated with this collaboration. Nevertheless, none of these studies made an effort to establish a connection between product design and company sustainability. The objective of the present research is to establish the correlation between Cross Functional Integration and the long-term viability of hospitality companies in Rivers State. Collaboration and continuous improvement will be used as indicators of corporate sustainability. The investigation is directed by the subsequent null hypotheses and conceptual framework.

H₀₁: cross functional integration does not significantly relate with collaboration of corporate sustainability of hospitality firms in Rivers State.

H₀₂: cross functional integration does not significantly relate with continuous improvement of corporate sustainability of hospitality firms in Rivers State.

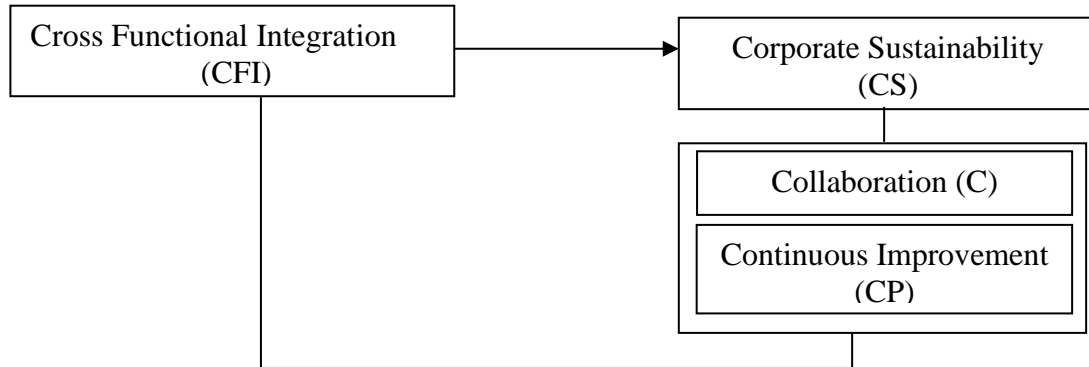


Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework of the relationship between cross functional integration and corporate sustainability of hospitality firms in Rivers State

Source: Baumgartner and Rauter (2010).

Theoretical Foundation of the Study/Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The diffusion of innovation theory posits that all novel approaches are beneficial and efficient, and hence should be embraced and implemented. The idea aims to comprehend the mechanism by which knowledge is transmitted to individuals or entities over a period of time, ultimately resulting in the adoption of an invention (Bass, 1969; Rogers, 1983). The most proficient managers do not passively wait for innovations to come to them; instead, they actively pursue innovations and other novel ideas that might assist them in resolving their issues or enhancing their performance. Diffusion refers to the transmission of an invention via communication channels over a period of time to individuals within a social system. Communication entails individuals exchanging and producing knowledge that leads to mutual understanding of the invention. Communication about innovations often entails interactive communication between individuals, rather than unilateral communication from a sender to a recipient (Rogers & Kincaid, 1981).

2.3 Concept of Cross-functional Integration

Cross-functional integration refers to the harmonization of many personnel and departments to facilitate the growth process in tackling organizational challenges. Cross-functional integration involves the collaboration of individuals from many disciplines and roles who possess relevant expertise (Robben, 2019). The need for cross-functional integration arose from the requirement to enhance cooperation across different departments within a business, which is crucial for achieving success in the marketplace. Cross-functional integration enhances the creation of innovative and efficient solutions for technical challenges (Gebert, Boerner, & Kearney, 2006). Over the years, organizations have discovered the benefits of organizing activities, individuals, and resources into processes, transforming isolated functional units into interconnected relationships. Through

collaborative efforts, these cross-functional relationships are capable of fulfilling market demands (Galpin, Hilpirt & Evans, 2007).

Ellegaard and Koch (2014) found that cross-functional integration enhances horizontal communication, mitigates interregional disputes, boosts product originality, and facilitates the transmission and transformation of implicit learning and knowledge across functional domains within the organization. According to Hayati, Naufal, and Khusaini (2017), cross-functional integration enhances creativity, enhances the quality of development activities, reduces product and process development times by promoting lean production methods and just-in-time inventory strategies, and decreases overall inefficiency and costs. Pimenta, Silva, and Tate (2015) identified five distinct elements that are involved in the process of cross-functional integration. The following criteria are included: places of contact, integration factors, formality/informality, integration degree, and integration affects. The term "points of contact" refers to the act of reaching out to a department or someone to seek information or support with a particular assignment.

The process of cross functional integration tends to be more time-consuming and less efficient compared to centralized and bureaucratic procedures. This is due to the informal communication patterns, participatory decision making, and consensual conflict resolution involved (Olson, Walker & Ruekert, 1995). Workers with diverse work ethic and orientations might be demanding, which can enhance efficiency but also potentially decrease system effectiveness. This may lead to a situation where some workers rely on others to complete the task. Collaborating with colleagues who possess diverse experiences and viewpoints towards work and objectives may lead to disputes over resources, technical matters, compensation, and personnel allocations (Olson, Walker, & Ruekert, 1995). On the other hand, cross-functional integration is often seen as a beneficial element in the successful creation of new products. Cross-functional integration is a prerequisite for achieving both cross-functional integration and corporate sustainability.

2.4 Concept of Corporate Sustainability

Corporate sustainability refers to the pursuit of growth that satisfies current need while safeguarding the capacity of future generations to fulfill their own demands (Sharma and Henriques, 2005). Corporate sustainability refers to the practice of functioning in a business in a modus that is socially accountable, environmentally friendly and economically practicable in the long term. Corporate sustainability is a firm's capacity to foster; facilitate long-term development by successfully fulfilling the needs; wants and demands of many stakeholders (Neubaum & Zahra, 2006). Corporate sustainability enable companies adopt sustainable practices in order to capitalize on a valuable industry position that has not been fully used or has been underutilized. This may be achieved by meeting the requirements of stakeholders in a better or distinctive way (Ioannou & Serafeim, 2021). The organization's integration of sustainable development is known as corporate sustainability, including the interplay of economic, ecological, and social components, similar to the concept of sustainable development (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Corporate sustainability

involves considering the impact of the business actions on the environment, society and economy and taking measures to reduce the negative effects while increasing the positive attributes of the business.

Business sustainability may be conceptualized as a three-dimensional framework including economic success, social equality, and environmental integrity (Bansal, 2005). An organization is considered sustainable when it does not use natural resources at a quicker pace than they can be replenished, recycled, or regenerated, as seen from a systems viewpoint (Marshall & Brown, 2003). The long-term viability of a corporation depends on its capacity to engage in perpetual and timeless trading. However, if strategic management fails to include the element of time, the company's sustainability will be at risk due to short-term thinking. Time was seen as a critical factor in differentiating sustainability from other ideas like corporate social responsibility. The primary driving force behind the emergence of corporate sustainability has likely been the major motivation (Seiw, 2015). As a result, stakeholders are now placing more emphasis on the need for increased transparency, not just in terms of a company's financial performance, but also its environmental and social policies (Waddock, 2003).

According to Baumgartner and Ebner (2010), business sustainability also has beneficial impacts on society over an extended period of time. A sustainable organization is a conscientious and financially viable entity that implements suitable frameworks and strategies to effectively accomplish its goals at the economic, environmental, and social levels. It ensures its growth by allocating resources in a rational manner (Lozano, Barreiro-Gen, & Zafar, 2021). Lo and Sheu (2007) define corporate sustainability as a company strategy that enhances the value of a product by effectively managing risks in the economic, environmental, and social aspects. Corporate sustainability is a marketing strategy that aims to increase the value of a product and manage risks associated with economic, environmental, and social factors.

2.5 Measures of Corporate Sustainability

This study will consider the economic dimensions and social dimension of Baumgartner and Ebner (2010) and Belz and Peattie (2009) specifically, 'collaboration', and continuous improvement respectively.

2.5.1 Collaboration

Collaboration refers to the process of individuals, groups, or companies working together in a partnership to produce, manage, and share information, ideas, and expertise with the goal of delivering a product or service. Collaboration refers to a deliberate and cooperative relationship where all parties involved work together towards a common outcome or objective (Gülbahar & Madran, 2009). Collaboration may provide benefits such as the use of diverse viewpoints, including disparities in knowledge, views, and problem-solving techniques (Lozano, 2007). Cooperation's actively collaborating with a range of business partners, including as suppliers, research and development institutes, universities, and hospitality businesses (Baumgartner and

Ebner, 2010). Collaboration enhances the process of working together in shared programs and networks to develop new and inventive goods and technology (Baumgartner and Ebner, 2010). Collaboration has a crucial role in facilitating the development of sustainable companies. It is vital in fostering the growth of corporate entities that prioritize sustainability (Lozano, Barreiro-Gen, & Zafar, 2021).

Collaboration offers additional benefits to hospitality companies compared to operating as separate entities. Collaboration is the inclination to distribute opportunities and dangers. According to Lozano (2007), cooperation may assist in obtaining the most favorable position for companies. In this context, each firm's choice aims to maximize its own benefits, but is limited by the need to consider the decisions of other firms, who are also striving for the best possible outcomes. This interdependence among decisions is a key factor. Collaborative enterprises are not limited by the decisions of individual organizations. Instead, they take use of the extensive expertise, information, and resources of other firms.

2.5.3 Continuous Improvement (CI)

Continuous improvement (CI) is a cultural approach that focuses on making ongoing enhancements to eliminate inefficiencies in all systems and processes within a company. Continuous improvement involves the active participation of all individuals within the business (Jagdeep & Harwinder, 2013). In order to meet the standards of sustainability, goods and services must undergo ongoing enhancements in terms of their consumer, social, and environmental performances (Belz & Peattie, 2009). Since the advent of intense global rivalry in the industrial sector, the concept of continuous improvement has been a focal point of discourse (Jagdeep & Harwinder, 2013). Continuous improvement is the process of attaining perfection in quality and reaching a higher level in the highly competitive market. However, there are still various opinions on the methods used to achieve this (Jagdeep & Harwinder, 2013).

Continuous Improvement is of utmost importance and has a crucial and strategic position for four star hotels. Customer-driven improvement is a fundamental aspect of continuous improvement (CI), since it involves all endeavors aimed at enhancing the performance of the product. The industry aims to achieve continuous improvement by reducing the failure ratio in installations and undergoing a future process transformation (Cardenas, Monticolo, Muller & Lhoste, 2021). In order to thrive in this dynamic and ever-evolving landscape, four star hotels must actively pursue innovative strategies that enable them to maintain a competitive edge while also being adaptable. This will empower their organizations to swiftly address emerging needs and requirements (Black, 1991). Sustainable goods and services are not fixed standards, but rather rely on the current level of knowledge, advanced technology, and social goals, which evolve with time (Peattie & Ken, 2010).

The necessity of continuous improvement has arisen for four-star hotels in order to maintain competitiveness, retain market share in the global economy, and meet the demands of both external and internal customers. This is analogous to the need for continuous improvement in

manufacturing system processes. The continuous enhancement of performance within a company is of paramount importance. Continuous Improvement is a well-established method aimed at improving performance in organizations and their processes (Gonzalez Aleu & Van Aken, 2016). The key elements of continuous improvement include the focus on achieving economic efficiency and profitability, preventing maintenance issues, enhancing maintainability, implementing improvement programs, and ensuring the active involvement of all workers (Jagdeep & Harwinder, 2013).

2.7 Empirical Review of Related Studies

Ahmed, Rafiq, and Philbin (2021) conducted a study on the relationship between cross-functional integration, organizational structure, and the new product development process. The research specifically intends to examine how cross-functional integration mediates the relationship between organizational structure and the NPD process. The research used a survey instrument to gather cross-sectional data from 247 individuals working in the telecoms business of Pakistan. The study used correlation and regression analysis to examine the interrelationships between the variables and evaluate the research hypotheses. The research found that the organic structure of an organization has a favorable influence on the NPD (New Product Development) process during the execution phase. Cross-functional integration has a role in improving the performance of organizations by mediating the links between different functions. Furthermore, the integration of different functions has a role in connecting the mechanical framework and the NPD process, although only to a certain extent. Genç and Benedetto (2014) also investigated the incorporation of several functions in the process of developing sustainable new products: Environmental specialist firms in the twenty-first century face a multitude of challenges to address environmental concerns, which in turn impact several elements of their company operations, including procurement and marketing. The research conducted an empirical examination of the theoretical model by analyzing a sample of 219 enterprises across various business-to-business sectors. There is evidence to suggest that including an environmental expert into a new product team has a beneficial impact on the success of SNPD projects, surpassing the achievements of the team's conventional members.

In their study, Eccles, Ioannou, and Serafeim (2014) examined how corporate sustainability affects the functioning and outcomes of organizations. We used a sample of 180 US corporations that were matched. The study found that corporations that willingly implemented sustainability policies by 1993, referred to as high sustainability companies, displayed distinct organizational processes by 2009 compared to a group of firms that implemented very few of these policies, referred to as low sustainability companies. In addition, the boards of directors of these organizations are more inclined to have a formal responsibility for sustainability, and the incentives for senior executives' remuneration are more likely to be determined by sustainability indicators. In addition, organizations with high sustainability are more inclined to have well-established procedures for engaging with stakeholders, have a long-term perspective, and have more measurement and disclosure of nonfinancial information.

Ioannou and Serafeim (2021) investigated the concept of business sustainability as a strategic approach. The focus is on the circumstances in which companies may keep their competitive advantage by differentiating themselves via sustainability, while facing pressure from competitors who want to imitate them. The study observed an increasing trend of industries adopting sustainability measures over time, with almost all industries in our sample showing this convergence. The study also found that the variation in the rates of convergence among industries is linked to the significance of environmental and social issues compared to control issues, as well as the feedback received from stakeholders in terms of both tone and volume. The research found that acts with minimal regulatory ambiguity are more prone to imitation, whereas actions with great novelty are less likely to be mimicked. The study also examined the role of sustainability as a long-term strategy in the presence of significant imitative influences, adding to both the literature on sustainability and the literature on imitation. Lozano, Barreiro-Gen, and Zafar (2021) conducted a study on the limitations of growth for organizational sustainability and developed a framework that identifies the causes, advantages, and problems of cooperation. More precisely, a survey was created to examine the cooperation required for the long-term viability of an organization, including its components, advantages, and difficulties. A total of 253 replies were collected for the research. The data generated from these responses were analyzed using statistical methods such as the Friedman tests, correlations, and multivariate analysis. The multivariate statistical analysis indicated that firms enhance their cooperation in two distinct areas - business-oriented and society-oriented variables. The research unveiled a framework for organizational sustainability cooperation that is contingent upon many elements, advantages, and problems derived from collaboration. This framework may assist companies in comprehending and enhancing collaboration, hence maximizing benefits and mitigating issues.

Methodology

Research design refers to the systematic strategy or structure that directs the process of gathering and analyzing data in a research (Baridam, 2001). This document outlines the techniques and protocols for gathering the required data for problem-solving. It also includes a well-designed plan, structure, and strategy for doing research to gain answers to research questions and to manage variability. This research used a correlational analysis to examine the relationship between cross functional integration and corporate sustainability in hospitality enterprises in Rivers State. Therefore, it is considered that an explanatory study design can determine if there is a relationship between cross-functional integration and corporate sustainability in hospitality enterprises in Rivers State. The objective is to extrapolate the results to the whole research population. Nevertheless, a total of five surveys will be sent to each of these establishments. Consequently, The survey participants consisted of 40 staff members from each hotel, including General Managers, Administrative Managers, Marketing Managers, Food and Beverage Managers, and Supervisors. Reliability refers to the extent to which the results gained from an investigation remain consistent over a period of time. Coefficient Alpha is a commonly used metric for assessing the dependability of internal consistency in the field of social sciences. According to

Nunnally (1978), the general guideline for the application of Cronbach's alpha coefficient test is that alpha values should be more than 0.7.

Table 3.0 Reliability Test - Cronbach's Alpha Analysis

S/N	Variables	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients
1	Cross Functional Integration	4	0.964
2	Collaboration	4	0.899
6	Continuous Improvement	4	0.829

Source: SPSS Output form field data

The Cronbach's alpha analysis in Table 3.0 revealed that all the variables in the study produced high Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. This is an evidence to show that, there is inter-item consistency among the variables in the study. This means that, if this study is conducted again in a similar condition the results will be similar to the results of this study.

Table 4.1: Model Summary of the influence cross functional integration on Collaboration

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.925 ^a	.856	.841	1.598

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cross Functional Integration

Source: SPSS output from field survey, 2023

Results of the analysis as shown in Table 4.1 showed that the regression coefficient is 0.925 which means that cross functional integration has a very strong and positive combined effect on collaboration. Again, the R Square is 0.856, indicating that approximately 86% of variations in collaboration were caused by the influence of cross functional integration, while the remaining 14% were attributable to the influence of external variables not included in the model.

Table 4.2: Model Summary of the cross functional integration on Continuous Improvement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.825 ^a	.755	.740	1.568

a. Predictors: (Constant), Cross Functional Integration

Results of the analysis as shown in Table 4.2 showed that the regression coefficient is 0.825 which means that cross functional integration has a very strong and positive effect on continuous improvement. Again, the R Square is 0.755, indicating that approximately 76% of variations in continuous improvement were caused by the influence of cross functional integration, while the remaining 24% were attributable to the influence of external variables not included in the model.

Discussion of Findings

The study results, shown in Table 4.1, indicate that the regression coefficient is 0.925. This suggests that cross functional integration has a very robust and beneficial impact on cooperation. The R Square value of 0.856 suggests that about 86% of the fluctuations in cooperation may be attributed to the impact of cross functional integration. The remaining 14% can be attributed to external factors that were not included in the model. The study results, shown in Table 4.2, indicate that the regression coefficient is 0.825. This implies that cross functional integration has a significant and beneficial impact on continuous improvement. The R Square value of 0.755 suggests that about 76% of the fluctuations in continuous improvement may be attributed to the impact of cross functional integration. The remaining 24% can be attributed to external factors that were not included in the model.

This finding aligns with the study conducted by Ahmed, Rafiq, and Philbin (2021) that investigated the relationship between cross-functional integration, organizational structure, and the new product development process. The research found that the organic structure of an organization has a beneficial influence on the NPD (New Product Development) process during the execution phase. Cross-functional integration acts as a mediator in the interactions, enhancing the performance of organizations. Genç and Benedetto (2014) also investigated the incorporation of several functional areas in the process of developing sustainable new products. There is evidence to suggest that including an environmental expert into a new product team has a beneficial impact on the success of SNPD projects, surpassing the achievements of the team's conventional members. Eccles, Ioannou, and Serafeim (2014) conducted a study to examine how business sustainability affects organizational processes and performance. Ioannou and Serafeim (2021) investigated the concept of business sustainability as a strategic approach. The research found that acts with minimal regulatory ambiguity are more prone to imitation, whereas actions with great novelty are less likely to be mimicked. Lozano, Barreiro-Gen, and Zafar (2021) conducted a study on the boundaries of development for organizational sustainability, focusing on cooperation. They developed a framework that identifies the causes, rewards, and problems associated with this collaboration. The research unveiled a framework for organizational sustainability cooperation that is contingent upon various elements, rewards, and problems derived from collaborative efforts. This framework aids companies in comprehending and enhancing collaboration, hence maximizing benefits and mitigating obstacles.

Conclusion

In view of the findings of this study, the study concluded that cross functional integration relates with corporate sustainability of hospitality firms in Rivers State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. managers of hospitality firms should cross integrates their functions to enhance their corporate sustainability
- ii. Hospitality firms should always work with other firms to sustain their corporate sustainability

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