



**ASSESSING THE EFFECT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT SOFT SKILLS ON
PERFORMANCE OF PROJECTS. THE CASE OF PROJECTS UNDER INYANGE
INDUSTRIES LTD KIGALI- RWANDA**

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ABSTRACT

The term soft skills are traditionally used to describe interpersonal and subjective skills such as leadership, communication, and emotional intelligence. This research explains the importance of soft skills towards project performance, their relation to project management, project management education, and the highlighted differences between a transactional leader and a transformational leader (Hannah Adams, 2016). Rwanda like any other developing country has various projects and organizations that are either being created or continue to look for ways to sustain their existence by improving their performance. Some of these projects and organization fail while others succeed but the truth remains that many of them have discovered that the better way to stand the dynamic global challenges is to operate under project management scheme (Hannah Adams, 2016). The purpose of conducting this research was thus to study the effect of project management soft skills on project performance. The researcher used a correlational design which was complemented by the case study. The sample size was 87 respondents who were selected by purposive and convenience sampling techniques. However, 71 respondents were able to provide the data. These included 8 project managers and 63 project staff. The structured questionnaire formulated on a five-point likert scale was used for data collection while methods of analysis include descriptive statistics, correlation and regression. The first hypothesis (H_{01}) states that communication skills have no effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. However, findings show that communication skills have statistically significant effect on project performance ($\beta=.333, p<.05$). Therefore, this research fails to accept the first hypothesis. The second hypothesis (H_{02}) states that Leadership skills have no effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. However, findings show that leadership skills have a statistically significant effect ($\beta=.399, p<.05$) on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. The research therefore fails to accept the second hypothesis. The third hypothesis (H_{03}) states that team building skills have no significant effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. This is supported by the regression coefficients and the probability value ($\beta=.019, p>.05$) which showed that team building skills have no statistically significant effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. The research therefore fails to reject the third hypothesis.

1.INTRODUCTION

A project is a temporary endeavor designed to produce a unique product, service or result with a defined beginning and end. Global perception of Project management is that, it is discipline of planning, organizing, leading, and controlling resources to achieve specific goals. Every project is undertaken to meet unique goals and objectives, typically to bring about monetary or nonmonetary beneficial change. The primary challenge of project management is to achieve all of the project goals and objectives while honoring the constraints on scope, time, and cost. In recent years, project management has become an important part of any organization; as a result of the changing nature of managing organizations due to technological advancement, and a complex competitive global marketplace. Regional wise, projects are the basic building blocks of development. Without successful project identification, preparation and implementation, development plans are no more than wishes and developing nations would remain stagnant or regress.

The significance of project management cannot be overlooked mostly in Africa where most nations if not all are still under development. In order to optimize use of resources, budget, and time in view to achieve development, many organizations have discovered that the better way is the use of project management approach. The understanding of project management has 2 tremendously developed in the last century, initially projects were considered unique tasks (PMI, 2010). Project development was stirred up by two major approaches, firstly, projects were to be considered as temporally organizations (Lundin & Soderlund, 1995) and secondary, projects were to be regarded as strategic building blocks (Cleland,1994). As a result of this project evolution, projects are nowadays defined as a one-time, complex, unique sequence of activities carried out with time and budget constraints in view to achieve definite results (Görög, 2013). In Rwanda, project development was geared-up by the national strategy vision 2020 which articulated how Rwandans envisaged their future. This vision finally permitted the transformation needed to emerge from the impoverished social and economic situation. In Rwanda, project management has been embraced as a way to control spending and improve project results. According to Petter & Randolph (2009), project managers should encourage all possibilities to increase chances of success in their projects, they need to focus on improving technical skills while sticking to the importance of soft skills which are likely overlooked a lot. The perception is that in Rwanda, projects have had their humps

at one time or the other not only because of inadequate project management hard skills such as Gantt charts, critical path method or project evaluation and review technique but also because of managers' inability to practice the appropriate soft skills such as understanding business objectives, team motivation, effective communication, work within organization culture and stakeholder management

Inyange Industries Ltd is located in Kigali- Rwanda and is a complex food processing industry that has different projects existing underneath. Performance of Inyange Industries Ltd is determined by the two parameters namely; the technical and non- technical skills and the latter is sometimes referred to as soft skills. Soft skills are these skills that are inter personal related that help to attain the goals and objectives of the project, these skills include but not limited to communication, leadership, team building and decision making. Projects running under Inyange Industries Ltd must be exercising these skills if they are to succeed, so this research intends to determine the effect of these soft skills on performance of these projects. The ultimate goal is to highlight that every project must emphasize on the importance of soft skills during its birth, maturity and death. When projects achieve their goals it represents key ingredients to the nation as whole. Due to this important role, projects must continuously emphasize on increasing their performance (Gorog, 2013).

2. Statement of the Problem

Project Managers need management soft skills in their organizations in order to be able to perform the basic functions of management, i.e. Planning, organizing, leading and controlling. Management soft skills include but not limited to Communication, leadership, team building and decision making. Communication allows managers to acquire all the essential information pertaining the project after then managers must disseminate this information to their subordinates who perform the line tasks required for the project to deliver (Shi & Chen, 2006). Effective communication must be two-way communication i.e. bottom-up and top down communication. At Inyange Industries Ltd Communication is encouraged but as mentioned earlier an effective communication is a two-way communication but this is not the case at Inyange Industries Ltd because the bottom- up way of communication is mainly the active one while the top-down way of communication is crippled.

Leadership is also another soft skill that managers must have in order to balance the demands of owners, employees, customers, community and the needs of the employees. According to the numerous research like Sampson (2007) it has been verified that most of the failures in the organization have come from an incorrect direction that the leaders pursued to achieve the objectives. The leader plays a key role in the orientation and direction of the organization which is the one that sets the vision and mission of the organization and others follow it. Leadership wagon must take on board all members of the organization which is otherwise in Inyange industries Ltd.

Project performance cannot be achieved without fostering team building amongst team members. Team building at the workplace is the process of creating a team that is cohesively working together towards a common goal. Managers must emphasize on team building to create a strong team through forming bonds and connections. At Inyange Industries Ltd, teams are well established and well organized in their departments but seemingly team members work mainly as individuals other than working as a team. This finally deters the significance of synergy towards project performance as team members feel excluded.

3. Objectives of the Study

- i. To assess the effect of project communication skills on performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd.
- ii. To determine the effect of project leadership skills on performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd.
- iii. To determine the effect of team building skills on performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd.

4. Research Hypothesis

- i. **H₀₁**: Communication skills have no effect on performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd.
- ii. **H₀₂**: Leadership skills have no effect on performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd.
- iii. **H₀₃**: Team building skills have no effect on performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Theoretical Review

Administrative theory of project management Project management is a discipline that has been developed based on various theories. One of the theories of project management is known as administrative theory of project management, this theory is composed of Henry Fayol's 14 principles (Fayol, 2013). The theory looks at the organization from the top down and sets out steps for managers to get best from employees and run projects effectively. The 14 principles mainly advocate for productivity that is based on wellbeing of employees who perform the tasks necessary for the project to deliver. This theory emphasizes on the importance of administrative or soft skills over technical skills in a project (Fayol, 2013). It is worth noting that project management soft skills required to run a successful project are embedded in Henry Fayol's 14 principles of administrative theory, this means that soft skills are theoretically required if the project is to succeed in its operations.

5.1.1 Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a theory that stipulates the model for supporting your team members towards self-actualization. This theory believes that, when your team members know that you are treating them right, they will feel motivated to give their best in return (Maslow, 1954). Conversely, if you ignore your team members' needs, they will likely feel demotivated or disengaged. They may even end up leaving. Basically, the theory contends that as we humans strive to meet our basic needs, we also seek to satisfy a higher set of needs, until we grow to become "self-actualized". Maslow believed that the higher-level needs of self-esteem and fulfillment can only be addressed once the lower-level needs have been at least partially satisfied. In respect to this theory, it purely advocates for the importance of soft skills in Project management because it's through these soft skills that managers ensure that their team members attain these levels of needs gradually (Maslow, 1954). When soft skills like communication, leadership, team building, motivation and others are practiced in a project, team members feel inclusive in the

project and consequently success easily comes along. Basically, all the above theories coincide on the fact that soft skills are imperative when it comes to the success of the project.

5.2 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework shows the relationship between independent variables (Soft skills) and dependent variable (Project Performance). The researcher seeks to find out if there is any significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables and this will have confirmed the role of project management soft skills on successful project outcomes. Prior to establishing the relationship between these two variables, let's look into the independent variables in detail.

Communication Skills: Communication as a soft skill doesn't focus much on correct grammar, syllables or speeches, it rather gives the importance to the tone and style in which the communicator speaks to their audience. Good communicators are those who know what to say, when to say it and most importantly how to say it to both upper and lower levels of the leadership hierarchy as well as clients (Schulz, 2008). Communication itself is defined as the process of acquiring relevant information, interpreting this information and effectively disseminating it to persons who need the information to be able to accomplish their tasks in an organization, this is because poor communication during the project affects the schedule, cost, quality and safety of workers.

Leadership Skills: Leadership is the ability to organize, control and manage a group of people with a view to achieve a common goal. It is an important pillar of soft skill which reflects how we are directly managing individuals under our authority (March, J. G, 1994). Leadership achieves its importance when some other skills like positive attitude and outlook, the ability to communicate effectively and an aptitude for both self-motivating as well as motivating others are taken into consideration. Leadership plays a prominent role in project management which includes promoting objectives, empowering and inspiring project personnel and raising morale of project team among others.

Project Team Building: There is a common saying in English that "a united minority will always crush a divided majority". This statement emphasizes the importance of working as a team not as an individual. Teamwork allows the integration of individual potentials to perform specific tasks

and consequently synergy is achieved. Employers look for those candidates who not only have the capability to work efficiently with others, but also understand that every team member gets an opportunity to contribute which instills a sense of inclusiveness.

There are two types of groups namely traditional groups and cooperative groups, managers need to understand the two in detail and how they contribute towards success of a project. Also in this conceptual framework, we consider project success as a dependent variable. Project success is the overall achievement, but it entails satisfaction of end user, employees, and the stakeholders along with meeting the budget and time (Jays, 2017). However, in this concept, we recognize the intervention of other factors like availability of funds, social and political factors.

Below is the conceptual Review schematic diagram

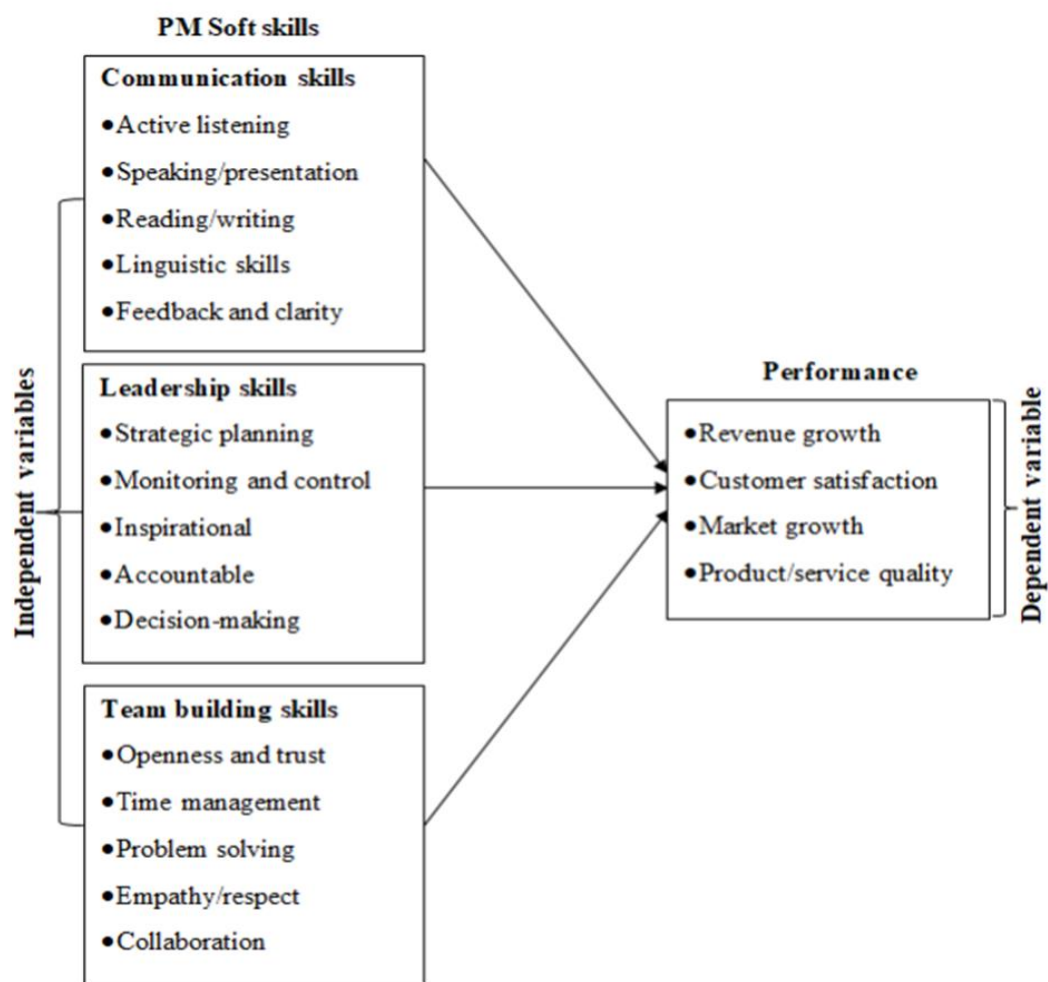


Figure 2.2: Conceptual framework

6. METHODOLOGY

6.1 Research Design

Research design refers to the overall strategy utilized to carry out research. It defines the logical plan to address the established research question through the collection, interpretation, analysis, and discussion of data (Creswell, 2014). This research used a correlational case study design. This research design was preferred because according to Creswell (2014), a correlational design is the most appropriate design when the researcher intends to establish the effect or influence of the independent variables on the dependent.

6.2 Target Population

The target population of the study as shown in Table 6.1 was 150 people who work in different production projects implemented under different product lines within Inyange Industries 20 Limited. These included milk production project (45), water production project (30), juice production project (55) and butter production project (20). The targeted staff categories included 9 project managers and 141 production staff.

Table 6.2: Target Population

Projects	Project Managers	Project/production staff	Total
Milk production project	03	42	45
Water production project	02	28	30
Juice production project	03	52	55
Butter production project	01	19	20
Total	09	141	150

Source: Inyange Industries Ltd, Administrative Records, 2022

6.3 Sample size

As Table 6.3 shows, the researcher selected 87 (58%) to act as respondents. These included 9 project managers and 78 project production staff. However, data was collected from 71¹ respondents.

Table 6.3: Sample Size

Population category	Sample Size	Sampling technique
Project managers	09	Purposive/convenience
Project/production staff	78	Purposive/convenience
Total	87	

6.4 Data Collection Instruments

The researcher used the survey questionnaire with close-ended response items for data collection. According to Amin (2005), a *questionnaire* is a series of questions asked to individuals to obtain quantitative and statistically useful information about a given topic. The response items in the questionnaire were formulated on a five point likert scale where, 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree.

The researcher preferred to use the questionnaire because it is easy to administer and enables the researcher to collect large volumes of information in a short and predetermined time since respondents fill the survey instrument by themselves. Close-ended questions were preferred because they are easy to score and to not take too much of the respondents' time.

6.5 Data Collection Procedures

The researcher requested appointments to the project authorities to seek permission and took short time to explain the contents of the questionnaire and purpose of the research to the respondents. After explaining the key terms of the survey questions, the researcher requested respondents to tick the appropriate answer of their choice on the five point likert scale. Participation was purely voluntary. To make high response rate, the researcher delivered the questionnaires to concerned individuals and adopted drop and pick strategy. Data collection was conducted across different days of the week in varying time periods.

¹ The questionnaire was administered to all selected 87 respondents, but only 71 were able to return the filled questionnaire. The remaining 16 who did not respond were either absent at the day of collecting the questionnaires they returned them blank citing lack of time to fill them.

6.5.1 Validity Testing

Validity refers to the truthfulness of the data collection tool or the degree to which the research instrument captures and measures what it is intended to measure (Amin, 2005). Validity can be determined based on the contents of the research in terms of constructs, methodology to be used, the population and unit of analysis to be studied, etc. For the purpose of this research, the researcher used content validity to determine the truthfulness of the questionnaire. Subject matter experts, were requested to judge the contents of the questionnaire and determine if they were valid. Based on their approval after the defense of the proposal, the researcher became confident that the instrument was valid.

6.5.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of a measure. A test is considered reliable if the same result is got repeatedly (Cooper and Schindler, 2003). According to Sekeran (2003) a pilot test is necessary for testing the reliability of data collection instruments. Pilot study is thus conducted to test weaknesses in design and instrumentation to provide proxy data for selection of a sample. The pilot study was done by selecting a sizeable group of 4 respondents (students at University of Kigali) and issuing them with the questionnaire. The data obtained was evaluated to ensure that questions are properly answered, and the responses were consistent.

6.6 Data analysis

The researcher used the computer software called the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze data from the questionnaire survey. The analysis was done based on both descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (multiple linear regression analysis).

6.6.1 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics was used to describe the basic features of the data in a study, and they provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures/response items. In other words, descriptive statistics was preferred because they present lots of quantitative measures/descriptions in a manageable form. For example, the researcher used means and standard deviations to describe the nature of responses on each of the response items under the study variables.

6.6.2 Inferential Statistics

Using SPSS, the researcher also conduct a multiple linear regression analysis in order to determine the statistical significance of the association that exists between project performance and project management soft skills. The multiple linear regression model used for analysis and hypothesis testing for this study is indicated below:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$$

Where:

Y = Project Performance

β_0 = Constant

$\beta_1 \dots \beta_3$ = Regression coefficients for independent variables

X_1 = project communication skills

X_2 = Project leadership skills

X_3 = Project team building skills

ε = Error term

6. FINDINGS

6.1 Data Analysis

6.1 Pearson correlations matrix

Variables	N	X ₁	X ₂	X ₃	Y
Communication skills (X ₁)	71	1.000			
Project leadership skills (X ₂)	71	.522**	1.000		
Project team building skills (X ₃)	71	.450**	.911**	1.000	
Project performance (Y)	71	.511**	.653**	.593**	1.000

** . Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed); p<.01

As Table 6.1 shows, it is observed that project communication skills (X₁) was positively correlated with performance (Y) with a coefficient of ($r=.511$), and the association was statistically significant ($p<.01$). This shows that as project communication skills change, performance also changes and vice versa. Similarly, it is observed that the performance (Y) of Inyange Industries Ltd is also positively related to project leadership skills (X₂) with a correlation coefficient ($r=.653$). This association is also statistically significant ($p<.01$). This shows that as organization changes

its project leadership skills, performance (Y) also changes and vice versa. In the same vein, a positive relationship was also observed between performance (Y) and project team building skills (X₃) with a correlation coefficient of ($r=.593$), and the relationship was statistically significant ($p<.01$). This demonstrates that a change in project team building capacity/skills is followed by a corresponding change in performance outcomes of the organization and vice versa.

6.2 Regression Analysis

Multiple linear or ordinary least squares regression was used to determine the contribution of each of the predictor variables: communication skills, leadership skills and team building skills towards organizational performance. The regression model presents the model summary, analysis of variance and regression coefficients.

Table 6.2: Regression model summary ^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	SE of the Estimate	Sig. F Change
1	.816 ^a	.762	.698	.121	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Project team building skills, project communication skills, project leadership skills

As shown in Table 6.2, R=.816 represents the combined correlation coefficient for the three predictor variables which show that there is a correlation between project management soft skills: project communication skills, project leadership skills and project team building skills on one hand and organizational performance. The adjusted R square of .698 shows that 69.8% of the variation in organizational performance outcomes can be attributed to project communication skills, project leadership skills and project team building skills.

Table 6.3: Analysis of variance (ANOVA^a)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.219	3	2.739	19.532	.000 ^b
	Residual	9.397	67	.140		
	Total	17.616	70			

a. Dependent Variable: Performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Project team building skills, project communication skills, project leadership skills

The ANOVA table is used to determine whether the regression model is suitable and significant enough to correctly determine the statistical outcomes. According to Table 6.3, it can be observed that the regression model used fits the data very well and can significantly ($p < .05$) and correctly predict the regression outcomes.

Table 6.4: Regression coefficients^a

Model	UC		SC	t	Sig.
	B	SE	Beta		
(Constant)	1.148	.596	-	1.925	.058
1 Communication skills (X ₁)	.333	.149	.235	2.238	.028
Leadership skills (X ₂)	.399	.177	.510	2.247	.028
Team building skills (X ₃)	.019	.190	.022	.102	.919

^a Dependent variable: Performance (Y)

Table 6.4 shows the regression coefficients for project communication skills (X₁), project leadership skills (X₂) and project team building skills (X₃). The coefficient ($\beta = .333$, $p < .05$) shows that holding other factors constant, a unit change in project communication skills results into 33.3% change in organizational performance of Inyange Industries Ltd. Similarly, $\beta = .399$, $p < .05$ for project leadership skills shows that holding other factors constant, a unit change in project leadership skills contributes up to 39.9% variation in organizational performance of Inyange Industries Ltd. Lastly, $\beta = .019$, $p > .05$ for project team building skills shows that holding other factors constant, a unit change in project team building skills contributes up to 1.9% of the change in organizational performance of Inyange Industries Ltd during the period covered by the study. However, this change is not statistically significant.

6.5 Hypothesis Testing

The first hypothesis (H₀₁) states that project communication skills have no effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. However, findings show that project communication skills

statistically affect the way projects in Inyange Industries Ltd perform ($\beta=.333, p<.05$). Therefore, this research fails to **accept** the first hypothesis.

The second hypothesis (H_02) states that the skills of project leadership have no effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. However, findings show that project leadership skills have a statistically significant effect ($\beta=.399, p<.05$) on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. The research therefore fails to **accept** the second hypothesis.

The third hypothesis (H_03) states that project team building skills have no significant effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. This is supported by the regression coefficients and the probability value ($\beta=.019, p>.05$) which showed that project team building skills have not statistically significant effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd. The research therefore fails to **reject** the third hypothesis.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

The study examined the effect of project management soft skills on the performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd between 2019 and 2022.

It was intended to establish how communication, leadership and team building skills influenced project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd between 2019 and 2022.

The study observes that communication skills are practiced and effective in facilitating information flow between different project stakeholders.

Furthermore, the leadership skills are applicable in the management of Inyange Industries Ltd and they have helped to inspire staff towards greater productivity.

Regarding team building, it is observed that this skills set was effective in ensuring that staff work productive, harmonious and competent teams.

The research argues that communication skills had a positive and significant effect on the performance of project in Inyange Industries Ltd between 2019 and 2022.

It is also important to note that leadership skills had a positive and statistically significant effect on project performance in Inyange Industries Ltd between 2019 and 2022.

However, team building skills had no statistically significant effect on the performance of projects in Inyange Industries Ltd between 2019 and 2022.

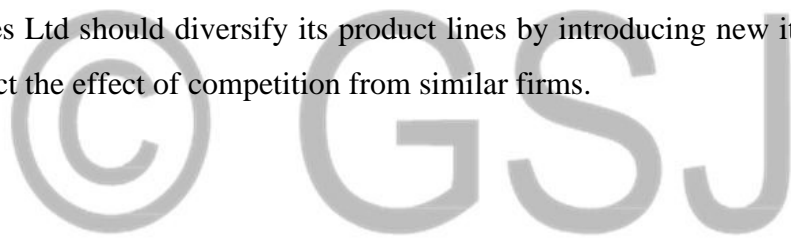
Nevertheless, staff lack adequate information and communication skills to apply in high tech communication, and the firm is affected by competition from other producers of similar goods.

7.2 Recommendation

Inyange industries should invest more in training its staff on how to use IT tools and platforms for communication among staffs.

Inyange Industries Ltd needs to negotiate with suppliers to sign supply agreements where prices of inputs remain stable.

Inyange Industries Ltd should diversify its product lines by introducing new items on the list in order to counteract the effect of competition from similar firms.



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