

## **Micro-Managing: Between Management Philosophy and Environmental Realities (A Study of Some Table Water Producing and Packaging Companies in South West, Nigeria)**

---

Livinus Okpara Onu, Ikechukwu Humphrey Ezema & Peace Chinwendu Nwankwo

### **Abstract**

This study evaluated Micro-Managing (MM) as an environment reality in managing some table water producing and packaging companies in South West, Nigeria. The research methods adopted were survey questionnaire and oral interview. Forty two companies, out of 56, judgmentally selected through cluster sampling, completed and returned usable copies of the questionnaire. Fifteen decision makers were interviewed, comprising five executive members of the Association of Table Water Producing and Packaging (ATWAP) companies, five owner/managers and five owner non-managers of their businesses. The data generated with the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The hypotheses were tested with Chi-Square test statistic, using SPSS, version 21. It was found that MM, as a management philosophy, is not inherently bad, and is appropriate in managing small business, in a predisposing environment characterized by high level of corruption, dysfunctional legal system, economic hardship, counterproductive work behavior, and paranoid managers, as is the case in Nigeria. It was further found that the rate of small business failure may assume exponential dimension if not micro-managed. It is concluded that business operating environment defines appropriate management style. It is recommended that managers and policy makers should craft policies and institutions that are environment-fit. This study has lent a principled voice and balance to micro-management discourse. Further research is necessary for different cultures and bigger organizations.

**Key words: Micro-managing, Management philosophy, Environment, Psychopathic Personality, Transference Theory.**

### **Introduction**

Historically, different management principles and philosophies have been propounded by diverse writers. Management students are undoubtedly familiar with Taylor's scientific management (1909); Fayol's administrative theory (1916); Weber's bureaucratic organization (1905); Mayo's human relations school (1933); Maslow (1943) and McGregor's (1960) behavioral (human resources) philosophy; Bertalanffy's systems approach (1968); Fiedler's contingency management (1958); Drucker's knowledge organization (1969), among others. Distinctly, each of these writers was addressing extant contemporary management problems during their time. Each, too, was influenced by the operating environment, personal background, education and experience. This situation has not changed. Since each theory was meant to address existing management problem, at some given time, it would therefore be presumptuous if their universal applicability is presumed, without commensurate modification for possible adaptability to changing operating environment. Even Fayol (1916) rejected the notion of management principles as unquestioned and rigid way of doing things. Rather he noted that principles are flexible and capable of adaptation to every need; it is a matter of knowing how (and when) to make use of them (Wren and Bedeian, 2009, p.217). Hofstede (1984) also argued that comparison in social sciences is most appropriate in contiguous and homogeneous cultures, while he severely criticized attempts at generalization.

### **A Discourse on Micro-Management**

Characteristically, main stream management writers, especially those in the human relations and human resource mould, have roundly condemned micro-management (MM) with derogatory connotations. Martinez-Lewi (2008)

likened it to narcissism (the pursuit of power, excesses, and the abuse of others in the pursuit of these ends). Ransky (1998) and Meier (2009) accused micro-managers of having psychopathic personality. Also, they are said to have fiefdom syndrome, i.e: control freaks, paranoid, incompetent, nitpicking, exhibit lice infestation spirit, wont to adopt Machiavellian manipulation tricks, engage in bureaucratic ritualism, create executive burnout, benevolent dictators and that their activities are toxic to organizational effectiveness.

In these writers' assessment, the modus operandi of MM manifests through: refusal to delegate duties; micro-managers immerse themselves in overseeing the project of others; reverse delegation (i.e. taking back delegated work before it is finished if a mistake is found in it); start by correcting tiny details instead of looking at the big picture and discourage others from making decisions without consulting them.

Further attention is drawn to dysfunctional consequences attendant to MM practices in organizations: MM promotes a dysfunctional and a hostile work environment in which one or more managers, or even management generally, are labeled control freak. Employees' self esteem, as well as their mental and physical health, suffer, especially where there is suppression of constructive criticisms which would lead to internal reform. Finally, it could force out skilled employees who are valuable to competitors, and encourages employees complain in social settings and to friends. Traumatized and unduly criticized subordinates face vicious cycle of fear, resulting in damage to company's reputation, which may create increased insecurity among management, prompting further MM among managers who use it to cope with such insecurity. Such a feedback effect creates and perpetuates a vicious cycle (Chambers, 2004; Bielaszka-Duvernay, 2008). Fred Chittenden, quoted in Formichelli (1997), asserted that a business (and an employee) is a lot like a garden. Individual plants cannot grow to their full potential if they are shaded from the sun by the ever-present shadow of the gardener. Furthermore, a study in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, by DeCaro, et al (2011), showed that employees, who felt they were being watched, consistently performed at a lower level.

On the other hand, few theoretical and empirical works have agreed that certain organizational circumstances predispose it to MM application. King (2006) said, "It's ok to micromanage sometimes." Riordan (2010) asserted that MM is sometimes good and necessary. Specifically he mentioned situations of new strategy, disappointing result, lingering projects and serious customer complaints. Sidhu (2012) described micromanagement as a redeeming Project Management Tool (PMT) in crisis. Goldsmith and Goldsmith (2013) concluded that MM is not a dirty word –if you do it right. In their opinion, to become an effective manager, it helps to rethink what you thought you knew-for example, that micro-managing is a sin... Onu (2017) found that a typical manager, of a small business, would adopt a given management style based on previous experience with a particular worker. In reality, micro-management can be one of the most effective ways to increase performance. In addition, there are some environments where micro-management through systems and structure, are necessary to ensure specific outcomes and safety. Micro-management is not always a choice, but industrial standard, for example, during audits, for investigations, trouble shooting, editing a document and policy audit, so the question is not whether or not you micromanage; it is how to do it correctly. Leadership in toxic waste or medical waste-management facilities, for instance, must follow strict procedures to ensure the safety of their staffers, customers, and the general public.

Summarily, three internal organizational imperatives; the nature of the task, organizational structure/culture and manager's personality, are often considered as internal causative factors. For example, MM may be justified, if the task is new, complicated, value laden, requires great care and quality control. Hence, greater supervision is needed. Should there be time constraint to meet customers' orders or statutory requirement, MM may become a way out. As a supervisor, if you are stuck with an under-performing staff, you have no option but micro-manage. The alternative would be to sack such staff, perhaps, with graver consequences. The reporting system in a hierarchical and/ or matrix organizational structure may necessitate MM. A manager's personality that is detail-oriented, emotionally insecure and has doubt about employees' competence is likely to be predisposed to MM.

This is in line with a model based on Transference Theory, to draw analogies between micro-managers' relationships and dysfunctional parent-child relationships. For example, that both often feature the frequent imposition of double binds and/or a tendency by the authority figure to exhibit hyper criticality.

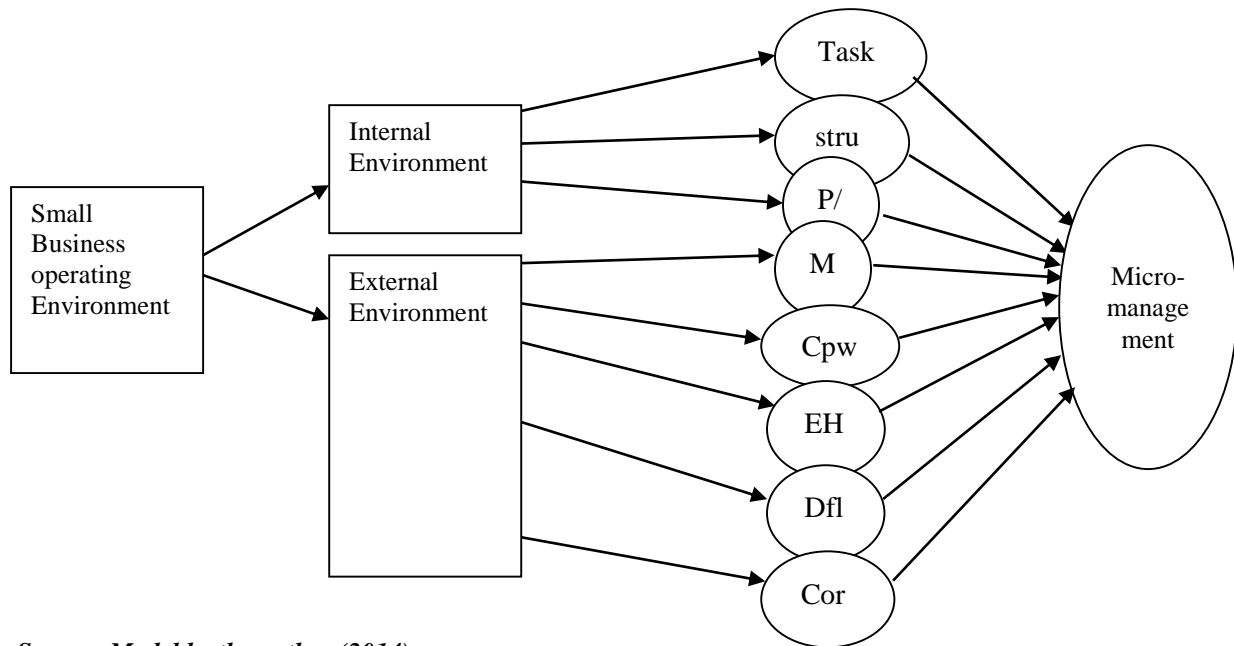
Yet, not willing to concede any exception to their generalized world view, the critics of MM ascribed what was discussed above as internal to the organization, and were learned set of negative behaviors that can be unlearned. Realistically, micro-managing is a study in organizational behavior. Morgan (1989, p. 26) reminded us that the reality of organizational life usually comprises numerous realities. Mullins (2010, p. 5) noted that the behavior of people at work cannot be studied in isolation. It is necessary to understand interrelationships with other variables that together comprise the total organization. Therefore, being more circumspect, contemporary studies in psychology, sociology, anthropology and economics are careful to delineate differences in personality, society and embedded culture, as possible causative factors in evaluation of organizational behavior. Why then is the perception and interpretation of micro-managing (MM) as a management philosophy rigidly cast? Are these theoretical vituperations empirically supported in different cultures? The reasoned answer may be no. This is the gap this study hopes to fill. Though, MM may not be a 'saint', without blemish, as has been noted, the point being made is the need for perspective mapping, and contextual consideration of the construct's total environment, while philosophizing and theorizing. MM is best perceived as a child of circumstance, whose future behavior is environment determined.

Fortunately, few left wing writers and empirical studies have advocated contingency approach in dealing with MM. However, emphasis appeared to be on organizations' internal environmental variables, wherein a yawning gap is left on external environmental dominant influence. In a developing country like Nigeria, the internal factors are mere tips of the proverbial iceberg, which are visible and do not destroy ships (Hellriegel, Slocum and Woodman, 1998:5). The major challenge resides in the domain of the external environment, which contains the underneath iceberg that often destroys ships, if the captain fails to avoid it, or is incapable of eliminating it. Such weighty issues like corruption, dysfunctional legal system, economic hardship, counterproductive work behavior and paranoid managers, the lot of Nigeria's business environment, are rather hydra-headed and pervasive and if not 'strategically managed' are capable of sinking the 'ship' of any organization. In the developed countries, these cancerous variables seemed to have been substantially eliminated or tamed and their negative effects on organizational performance curtailed. To that extent, extant management literature has tended to ignore, at best, downplay the need to factor in these environmental issues, instead of across- the- board condemnation of MM. That approach would appear to demonstrate a gross oversight, lacking inclusiveness, and bordering on contextual myopia.

### **Model Specification**

Below, we attempt to operationalize the independent variables through a thematic micro-management model in figure 1.

**Figure 1: Model of Business Environmental Predictors of Micro-management in Nigeria**



*Source: Model by the author (2014)*

Our above proposed model assumes five main constituent relationships: the operating environment of a small business, as in big ones, is made up of internal and external environments. In the internal environment, the micro-management predictor factors are the nature of the task (task), the organizational structure (stru) and the personality of the supervisor/manager (P/M). On the other hand, the variables within the external environment that necessitate micro-managing include; corruption (cor), dysfunctional legal system (dfl), economic hardship (EH), counterproductive work behaviors (cpw) and paranoid managers (P/M). It should be noted that there is iteration in the manager’s boxes in the two environments. Whereas, the micro manager in the internal environment is essentially influenced by task, structure and their personality; they are additionally influenced by the other external environmental factors which aggravated their position to a state of paranoia.

Consequently, the main objective of the study was to evaluate the realities of business operating environments in deciding the appropriate choice of management philosophy to adopt.

Some germane basic research questions would therefore emerge:

- a) Is micro-managing, as a management philosophy, environment determined?
- b) What is responsible for micromanaging small businesses in Nigeria?

More direct and specific questions from a decomposed a) and b) above would be:

- a) Can high level of corruption in a system accentuate the practice of MM?
- b) Does a dysfunctional legal system encourage MM?
- c) Can lack of trust on employees by management engender MM?
- d) Does the presence of economic hardship provide a motivation to MM?
- e) Can the nature of the task to be performed influence MM?
- f) Is a detailed-oriented and paranoid manager/supervisor more predisposed to MM?

The following alternative research hypotheses were stated:

- a) High level of corruption in a system accentuates the practice of MM

- b) A dysfunctional legal system encourages MM
- c) Lack of trust on employees by management engenders MM
- d) The presence of economic hardship provides a motivation to MM
- e) The nature of the task to be performed influences MM
- f) A detailed-oriented and paranoid manager/supervisor would be more predisposed to MM.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted survey research through the use of questionnaire and structured interview. The sampling technique adopted was cluster method which was considered the most appropriate when the researcher recognized that some population were distributed in clusters or pockets of settlements and therefore, desired equitable representation (Asika, 2000, p. 44). The choice of cluster sampling was to reflect the peculiarities inherent in the locations of different companies, especially in their general cost of operation. With a population of 185 companies, our sample size was 56 (30.27 percent) which we considered adequate and hence proportionately and judgmentally selected. Since the phenomena under study are homogeneous, a small sample is sufficient (Osuala, 1987, p. 110). Forty two (42) usable copies of the questionnaire were collected and analyzed. The actual companies sampled were systematically selected in an area where the required proportion was smaller than the number of companies. Due consideration was given to companies' age and 'visibility' (scale of operation) in its location.

For structured interview; five executives of ATWAP, five owner/managers and five owner non-managers were interviewed to share from their experiences on the working of the sub-sector, concerning business successes, failures and other challenges. It was also intended to corroborate the result of the questionnaire.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The questionnaire administered to 56 companies was hand delivered and completed by either the managing owner or the operating officer (manager). Each company was given one questionnaire to complete. Forty two usable questionnaires were collected. Data collated were duly analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistical tools. Further analysis was made of the respondents' bio-data with respect to sex, age, educational qualifications, position and length of service in the company, etc.

Section B questions related to the hypotheses, and using Likert scale, the expected answers were ranked in five scales starting from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree to Strongly Disagree. The research instrument was validated through experts in management science; reliability was achieved through test-retest method. A pilot test was conducted on those sampled and not sampled. Five respondents were selected in the pilot study, and the questionnaire administered at an interval of three weeks. Using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Co-efficient, the result was  $r=0.72$ , which showed a high degree of correlation, indicating consistency.

Responses to the questions were categorized and summarized using frequencies and percentages. Six independent variables viz: nature of the task; manager's personality; perceived fraudulent staff; economic hardship; dysfunctional legal system; and corruption, were tested against the dependent variable-micro-managing at 95% level of confidence. Chi-Square test statistic was applied using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences), Version 21, which has the capacity to show the degree of relationship that existed between variables of study.

Ninety five percent (95%) of the respondents strongly agreed that MM is inevitable in a highly corrupt society. The result of the chi-square SPSS analysis below showed that the P-value-119.328 was far greater than the critical (table) value of 9.488 (i.e.  $X^2=0.05$  at  $DF=4$ ), therefore we accepted the alternate hypothesis that high level of corruption in a system accentuates the practice of MM.

**Table 2: High level of corruption in a system and the practice of MM**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
2.00	16	75.6	-59.6
3.00	43	75.6	-32.6
4.00	121	75.6	45.4
5.00	74	75.6	-1.6
6.00	124	75.6	48.4
Total	378		

**Table 3: Test Statistics**

	High level of corruption in a system and the practice of MM
Chi-Square	119.328 <sup>a</sup>
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000

- a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5
- b. . The minimum expected cell frequency is 75.6.

Ninety eight percent (98%) of the respondents generally agreed that a dysfunctional legal system encourages MM. The result of the chi-square, SPSS analysis showed that the P-value of 107.847 was far greater than the critical (table) value of 9.488 (i.e.  $X^2=0.05$  at  $DF=4$ ). Therefore, at 5% alpha, we accepted the alternate hypothesis that a dysfunctional legal system encourages MM.

**Table 4: A dysfunctional legal system and MM**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
2.00	13	49.6	-36.6
3.00	22	49.6	-27.6
4.00	68	49.6	18.4
5.00	42	49.6	-7.6
6.00	103	49.6	53.4
Total	248		

**Table 5: Test statistics**

	A dysfunctional legal system and MM
Chi-Square	107.847 <sup>a</sup>
Df	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000

- a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 49.6.

Eighty three percent (83%) of the respondents strongly agreed that the routine nature of the task carried out by small businesses in Nigeria, at their present stage of development, may not survive without MM.

Ninety six percent (96%) of the respondents generally agreed that the personality of the manager/supervisor will significantly determine the extent of applicability of MM in any organization, eighty seven percent (87%) believed that economic hardship, as is the case in Nigeria, compels business owner/managers to micro-manage for their businesses to remain sustainable.

### **Summary of Structured Interview**

All those orally interviewed corroborated the responses obtained through the questionnaire that: micro managing is a child of circumstance of Nigeria's business environment. The Executive Directors/ Chief Operating Officers (COO) hinted that business failure is inevitable without micro-managing. Some of the business owners interviewed lamented they were at the verge of paranoia; hinting that the business was their 'life,' and since all their eggs were in one basket, they must be awake to watch them grow, though inconveniently. Some lamented previous business failure experiences resulting from abuse of trust and lack of commitment and conscientiousness in managing the business by others. ATWAP officials blamed the adoption of MM as a response to embedded culture of corruption in the Nigerian system.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The results of the findings indicate an overwhelming support for the alternate hypotheses: MM is inevitable in a highly corrupt and legal dysfunctional environment; 95% and 98% respectively support this view. As at present, small businesses in Nigeria cannot survive and grow without the application of MM (83%). The personality of the manager/supervisor (96%) and the nature of the businesses (87%) equally were strong MM predictors. It is noted that corruption, dysfunctional legal system, paranoid managers, economic hardship and counterproductive work behaviors collectively accentuate the application of micro-management. These findings agree with the radical views of few dissenting authors who counseled circumstantial application of micro-management (King, 2006; Goldsmith and Goldsmith, 2013). The empirical findings rebutted the views of main stream writers who generally condemned micro-managing as 'evil' without due consideration of differences in behaviors arising from diversity in socio-cultural and economic environments and task dimension (Martinez-Lewi, 2008 and Meier, 2009). In a case study, Sidhu (2012) justified the use of micromanagement thus: While in a perfect world and on the perfect project (a very rare occurrence), the Project Manager would just plan the work, delegate, and report success. In reality, when risks are occurring (including those that are planned for and those that are surprises), schedule and cost are generally the first to slip. If not managed properly and mitigated, scope is the next to suffer. By recognizing the need to micromanage and using this tool as a last resort and in a timely fashion, the focus and intensity of the team can be raised and deliverables possibly salvaged.

### **Conclusion/Recommendation**

It has been proven that social science does not lend itself to universal equivocation. The realities of contextual factors of socio-cultural and political imperatives determine environmental appropriateness of any management philosophy. Small businesses in Nigeria, at their present stage of development, may not survive without MM. Whereas MM may not be very necessary in a society with manageable level of corruption, efficient and effective legal system, and significantly reduced level of poverty; an otherwise situation calls for a different approach. Except the socio-cultural and business operating environment changes in Nigeria, micro-managing in small businesses, as in other personal properties, may have come to stay.

It is recommended that managers and policy makers should craft policies and institutions that are environment-fit to deliver best practices, which are capable of engendering sustainable economic development.

There may be need for a future research on micro-managing in other contemporary cultures like Nigeria, and on a wider scale.

## References

- Asika, N. (2000). *Research Methodology in the Behavioural Sciences*. Lagos: Longman Plc.
- Bassett, D. (2011). Mary Parker Follett: A Public Scholar “Far Ahead of Her Time.” [www.wikipedia](http://www.wikipedia), Retrived 28/10/2014.
- Bielaszka-Duvernay, C. (2008). “Micromanage at your Peril.” Harvard Business Review Publishing Corporation. Retrieved from Wikipedia on 31/01/2013.
- Bouchard, J. (2009). Remedies to Micromanaging. [www.corrections.com/news/article/20961](http://www.corrections.com/news/article/20961). Cited on 30/01/2013
- Chambers, H. (2004). *My Way or the Highway: The Micromanagement Survival Guide*. Barrett Koehler Publishers. San Francisco
- Cheng, T., Sculli, D. and Chan, F. S. (2001). Relationship Dominance-Rethinking Management Theories from the Perspective of Methodological Relationalism. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, Vol.16 (2).pp.97-105.
- De-Caro, Marci S.; Thomas, Robin D.; Albert, Neil B.; Beilock, Sian L. (2011). Choking under pressure: Multiple routes to skill failure. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, Vol. 140(3), 390-406. doi: 10.1037/a0023466
- Dodgson, M (1993). Trust. *Organization Science*, Vol.10, No, 4. pp. 443
- Enock, K. (2006). *Management & Change: Basic Management Models and Theories associated with Motivation and Leadership*. [www.healthknowledge.org.uk](http://www.healthknowledge.org.uk). Cited 22/10/2014.
- Fred Chittenden, quoted in Linda Formichelli (1997), Letting go of the details: Drawbacks of micromanagement, *Nation’s Business* 85, p. 50.
- Goldsmith, D. and Goldsmith, L. (2013). Why, “Micromanaging” is not a Dirty Word-if you do it Right. [www.fastcompany.com](http://www.fastcompany.com) Cited on 27/10/2014
- Hellriegel, D., J. Slocum & R. Woodman (1998), *Organizational Behavior*, 8th ed., Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western College Publishing.
- Hisrich, R. D., Peters, M. P. & Shepherd, D. A. (2008:42). *Entrepreneurship* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture’s Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Beverly Hills CA: SAGE Publications
- Kaminski, A. Z. and Kaminski, B. (2001), *Governance and Corruption in Transition: The Challenge of Subverting Corruption*. A/ Paper prepared for the Spring Seminar of the UN Economic Commission Europe, Geneva
- Kapelovitz, L.H. (1987). *To Love and to Work. A Demonstration and Discussion of Psychotherapy*. P.66
- King, S. (2006). It is OK to Micromanage Sometimes. <http://www.2-speed.com/2006/12/its-ok-to-micromanage-sometimes/> Cited 28/10/2014
- Martinez-Lewi, L. (2008). *Freeing Yourself from the Narcissist in Your Life*. New York, New York, U.S.A.: Jeremy P Tarcher Penguin.
- Meier, P. (2009). You May Be a Narcissist If...How to Identify Narcissism in Ourselves and Others, Harper-Collins Books in [www.energeticsinstitute.com.au/page/narcissism.html](http://www.energeticsinstitute.com.au/page/narcissism.html) .Cited on 26/10/2014
- Merriam-webster online dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/micromanagement> (2005, November 2 27). Retrieved from <http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2005-11-27/the-man-who-invented-management>
- Morgan (1989:26) in Mullins, L. J. (2010). *Management & Organizational Behaviour* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.), Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Mullins, L. J. (2010:5). *Management & Organizational Behaviour* (9<sup>th</sup> ed.), Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Onu, L. O (2017). *Entrepreneurial Orientation and Firm Performance (A Study of some Selected Table Water Producing Companies in South East Nigeria)*, A PhD Thesis, Entrepreneurship Studies, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
- Osuala, E. C. (1987). *Introduction to Research Methodology*. Onitsha: African-Fep Publishers Limited
- Ransky O. (1998). *Healing with the Devil: Psychopathic leaders and Self Development Cults*, Visage Publications



- in <http://www.energeticsinstitute.com.au/page/narcissism.html> .Cited on 26/10/2014.
- Riordan, C. M (2010). Sometimes Micromanaging is Good...and Necessary. Dean, Daniel College of Business. University of Denver. USA
- Sidhu, A. S. (2012). MICROMANAGEMENT: A Project Management Tool in Crisis. International Journal of Economics and Management Sciences Vol. 1, No. 12, 2012, pp. 71-77
- Slocum and Woodman, (1998:5). Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies; 5(1), pp.4-17
- Stolorow, R. (2000). Psychoanalytic Treatment: An Intersubjective Approach. P. 36
- Tosi, H. L (Jr) and Slocum, J. W.(Jr). (1984). Contingency Theory: Some suggested Directions, Journal of Management (10)
- White, R.D. (2010). The Micromanagement Disease, Symptoms, Diagnosis and Cure. Public Personnel Management. Vol.39 (1), pp.71-77
- Wren, D. A. and Bedeian, A. G.(2009). The Evolution of Management Thought. John Wiley & Sons Inc. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. P.217 [www.ascholarship.org/tags/economic-hardship-definition.html](http://www.ascholarship.org/tags/economic-hardship-definition.html), cited on 20/12/2014

---

Livinus Okpara Onu, Department of Business Administration, Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State  
[livinusonu@gmail.com](mailto:livinusonu@gmail.com); [livinus.onu@rnu.edu.ng](mailto:livinus.onu@rnu.edu.ng), 08033158105

Ikechukwu Humphrey Ezema, Department of Business Administration, Renaissance University, Ugbawka, Enugu State  
[zemaik2005@gmail.com](mailto:zemaik2005@gmail.com)

Peace Chinwendu Nwankwo, Department of Cooperative Economics and Management, Federal Polytechnic, Nekede, Imo State.  
[nwankwopeace8@gmail.com](mailto:nwankwopeace8@gmail.com)