

Strategic Leadership: A Vehicle for Evolutionary Dynamism

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Abstract

The paper reviewed strategic leadership as a tool for evolutionary dynamism admits the readiness of the leader to prepare for a challenging future. Three objectives on strategic leadership, external environment and organisational change effects on performance. A sample size of 150 was used. Multiple Regression analysis and tables were used for results. Findings revealed a no significant difference between strategic leadership and organizational performance as its applicable to the external environment and organisational change, strategic leaders focus on ensuring that the strategy of the organisation is effectively and simplistically communicated to the workforce to ensure that they 'buy-in' to the process and, also, to ensure that the workforce understands and internalises the strategy and remove all barriers that could affect the strategy formulation.

Keywords: Strategy, leadership, Evolution and Dynamism.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The core purpose of strategic leadership theory and research is to understand how much influence top executives have over performance (Singh et al. 2016). Empirical and conceptual studies have shown that strategic leadership actions significantly influence performance (Quigley & Graffin, 2017; Ireland & Hitt, 1999). Unfortunately, other studies conclude that their actions are impeded by situational constraints, inertia or random effects, such that they don't have much leeway over performance (Fitza, 2017; Haveman, 1992). These divergent findings indicate either a lack of evidence in establishing a

direct association between strategic leadership and performance or of the many confounding variables that make it difficult to demonstrate a clear cause and effect (Knies et al., 2016). Hambrick & Quigley (2014) point out that scholars are yet to agree on the conceptualization and operationalization of contextual conditions strategic leaders face. Various scholars have argued that methodological and statistical limitations, unavailability of relevant control variables and contexts have systematically undermined the effect of strategic leadership on performance (Fitza, 2017; Hambrick & Quigley, 2014; Blettner et al., 2012; Thomas, 1998). Boal & Hooijberg (2001) observed that

studies on strategic leadership are limited since many have used demographic variables as substitutes for moderating or mediating variables.

Crossan et al., (2008) argue that many studies have excluded critical organizational and environmental variables that might moderate or mediate such a relationship. Additionally, the empirical literature has solely examined the impact of strategic leadership at the micro-levels without integrating both the micro and macro perspectives of leadership (Bornardi et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2014). To date, very little research has analyzed the direct and indirect relationships between strategic leadership, external environment, organizational change and performance variables. Morales et al., (2008) admit by pointing out that few studies on strategic leadership have systematically traced the causal path of its effect on performance by examining the intermediate influence of different strategic variables. This paper seeks to fill these research gaps by reviewing conceptual and empirical literature on how the external environment and organizational change as moderators and mediators respectively could influence the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

How well an organization implements its policies and programs and achieves its strategic intent in terms of its mission and vision is of principal concern of strategic management. Strategic management gives much attention to owners/managers in achieving their goals easy way. A strategy is a mechanism to emphasize the efforts of a business. The importance of strategy implementation as a component of the strategic management process has been theoretically presented. Also, it has been noted that there is a high failure rate of

strategy implementation efforts. Strategy implementation failures are the result of many barriers in the internal and external environments of organisations. There is evidence of a lack of leadership – specifically strategic leadership – in the management structures of organisations. Strategic leadership can be either a barrier to or a driver of, effective strategy implementation and several identifiable actions characterise strategic leadership that positively contributes to the effective implementation of the strategy. The high failure rate of strategy implementation efforts in an environment characterised by the rapid change should be an area of major concern for the strategic leaders of contemporary organisations. Since the role of strategic leadership in strategy implementation has been overlooked, the following research question should now be addressed: What is the perceived role of strategic leadership as a vehicle for evolutionary dynamics?

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

1. To find out whether strategic leadership could be positively related to organizational performance.
2. To find out if the external environment could moderate the relationship between strategic leadership and performance.
3. To examine the extent at which organizational change could mediate the relationship between strategic Leadership and performance.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between strategic leadership and organizational performance

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the external

environment and organizational performance

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between organizational change and organizational performance

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As was the case for twentieth-century business, businesses operating in the twenty-first century are continuing to be faced with extraordinary demands. These come mainly from areas such as increased globalization, new technologies, rapid information exchange and diverse modes of communication. As a result, organizational leaders continue to face challenges and hardships (Dess and Picken 2000). Most companies, and the environments in which they operate, have changed significantly in recent times. Also, the life-cycle of products and services has become shorter in the last few decades (Hitt and Ireland 2002). Typical solutions are for companies to become smaller, stronger and faster; for them to undertake processes of change through reengineering and restructure (Hamel and Prahalad 1994). However, as Hamel and Prahalad (1994) state, this is not enough, a company must be capable of identifying and focussing on core strategic capabilities. This paper proposes that strategic leadership is key to this path of development. The requirements and qualifications of leaders are becoming more critical and demanding. Leadership is a critical component to the success of companies operating today (Hitt and Ireland 2002; Davies and Davies 2004). Hitt and Ireland (2002) argue that an important issue in strategic management is the need to find out why some companies perform better than others. One possible answer to this question is to detect the extent that strategic leadership can influence business success. According to

Sorcher and Brant (2002), strategic leadership is multiple competencies that have many refinements and small differences that make it difficult to define. Christensen (1997) defines strategic leadership as "a person's ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and work with others to initiate changes that will create a viable future for the organization". Hitt and Ireland (2002) agree and add that strategic leadership can be practised at all levels within an organization. Adding to this argument, Boal and Hooijberg (2000) state that strategic leadership combines the past, the present and the future and should reassure core values and identity to ensure continuity. According to these authors, strategic leadership "makes sense of and gives meaning to environmental turbulence and ambiguity, and provides a vision and road map that allows an organization to evolve and innovate. Strategic leaders should play an active role in developing ideas and defining a vision, while traditional management roles focus more on implementing structures and processes. In this competitive environment of the twenty-first century, strategic leaders need to focus on utilising strategic vision to motivate, inspire and empower the workforce at all levels (Dess and Picken 2000). These authors argue that sharing internal knowledge and the collection and integration of external information are key priorities of organizational leaders.

This paper proposes that strategic leadership is the ability of the leader to be prepared for every possible future challenge. Furthermore, strategic leaders need to be able to focus on critical resources which are most likely to make a difference in the assurance of sustained future success. This view is supported by Hitt and Ireland (2002) who recommend that strategic leadership is about gaining access to key resources such as alliances

with partner firms (social capital) and the ability to build “great teams” (human capital) as the most important firm resources.

Strategic leaders have the capability and the power to manage the organizations' critical resources to achieve sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) in the marketplace. Successful strategic leaders can be strategically oriented (Davies and Davies 2004). This skill includes both an understanding of the organization's present situation as well as an ability of the leader to see the big picture in a long term perspective. Leavy (1996) adds that the potential to connect history with the present context and experiences in different fields is of utmost importance.

Leadership versus Management

Yukl (2006) stated that there is continuing controversy on the differences between management and leadership and that the degree of overlap of these two concepts is a point of disagreement. According to Yukl (2006), some authors (Bennis and Nanus, 1985; Zaleznik, 1997) think that leadership and management are qualitatively different and that they are mutually exclusive. Other scholars (Bass, 1990; Hickman, 1990; Kotter, 1998; Mintzberg, 1973; Rost, 1991) view leadership and management as different types of processes, but do not assume that leaders and managers must necessarily be different types of people.

Kotter (2001), for example, argued that: “...management is about coping with complexity”. Good managers facilitate order and consistency by formulating plans, designing organisational structures to support these plans, and controlling or monitoring results against these plans. Managers tend to be more analytical, structured and controlled, and view their work as a quantitative science. In contrast, “...leadership is about coping with change”

(Kotter, 2001). Leaders establish the strategic direction of the organisation by developing a vision of the perfect future of the organisation as well as a mission statement that serves as a means to accomplish this vision. Leaders then communicate this vision and mission in clear and concise terms and motivate and inspire employees on all levels of the organisation to achieve this vision. Leaders tend to be more experimental, visionary, flexible and creative, and they value the intuitive aspect of their work. However, Mintzberg (2004) insisted that the dysfunctional separation of leadership and management should be stopped and that, instead of isolating leadership, it should be diffused throughout the organisation.

Leadership defined

According to Yukl (2006), leadership has been defined in terms of traits, behaviours, influence, interaction patterns, role relationships, and occupation of administrative positions. Below are some of the definitions of leadership formulated during the past years: Hemphill and Coons (1957) Leadership is “...the behaviour of an individual...directing the activities of a group toward a shared goal”. Katz and Kahn (1978) Leadership is “...the influential increment over and above mechanical compliance with the routine directives of the organisation”. Burns (1978) “Leadership is exercised when persons ... mobilize ... institutional, political, psychological, and other resources to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers.”

Levels of leadership

Leadership can exist on all levels of an organisation. According to Dent (2005), the following levels of leadership can be distinguished:

- Team leaders: leaders who operate at the team level and whose prime responsibility is the people who

work with them and the achievement of the goals for which they are jointly responsible.

- Operational leaders: leaders in the organisation who are responsible for a functional area of the organisation, all the human capital in that functional area, and for contributing to decisions in their specialist area.
- Strategic leaders: leaders at the top level of the organisation who are responsible for a range of organisational functions and for contributing to major decisions.

The Importance of Strategic Leaders and Their Effect on Organisational Performance

Yukl (2006) stated that the importance of strategic leaders and their effect on the performance of large organisations is a controversial issue. According to Yukl (2006), some authors argue that leadership has a major influence on organisational performance (Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1996; Katz and Khan, 1978; Peters and Waterman, 1982), whereas others contend that leaders have very little impact on organisational performance (Hannan and Freeman, 1984; Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985; Pfeffer, 1977).

Strategic Leadership as a Vehicle for Evolutionary Dynamism

Strategy and leadership represent two sides of the same coin. Leadership in general, and specifically strategic leadership, are critical to ensuring that the strategies of organisations are effectively implemented (Maritz, 2003). Strategic leadership can be defined as the "...ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility and to empower others to create strategic change as necessary" (Hitt et al, 2007).

Organisations need competent leaders who can translate strategy into actions and then results. Hsieh and Yik (2005) wrote: "The

best-planned strategies are worthless if it can't be translated from concept to reality" and "...even the best strategy can fail if a corporation doesn't have a cadre of leaders with the right capabilities at the right levels of the organisation". These authors think that one of the major reasons for the failure of strategy implementation efforts is that many organisations do not recognise the leadership capacity that new strategies will require, let alone treat leadership as the departure point of strategy.

Theoretical Framework Evolution of Leadership Theory

Leadership Theories Various leadership theories like Great Man theory, Trait theory, Behavioral theory, Participative leadership theory, Situational leadership theory, Contingency theory, Transactional theory, Transformational theory etc. have been studied and explored over the years and currently organizations are looking at Servant, Strategic and Positive Leadership. Great-Man Theory looks at the effort put toward explorations for common traits of leadership which has been lasted over centuries as most societies need a leader or heroes to define their successes and to justify their failures. Carlyle (1874) & Khan, et, al (2016) opined "Great-Man Theory" that leaders are born and men who are endowed with heroic potentials can become the leaders. The credibility of the great-man theory was challenged by the subsequent events that leadership was morally flawed concerning Napoleon, Hitler, and like, as these great men becoming irrelevant and hence the growth of the organizations restrained (MacGregor, 2003). The earliest leadership researchers believed in the leader's traits and theory talks about how leaders are distinct from their followers because of their physical features, confidence, personality attributes and social characteristics. Trait theory ignored the fact of whether leadership traits are

genetic or acquired? Jenkins identified traits as emergent traits (dependent upon heredities- such as height, intelligence, attractiveness, and self-confidence) and effectiveness traits (based on experience or learning), as the fundamental component of leadership (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991 & Khan, et, al 2016). Kamisan and King, (2013); Malik et, al., (2016) Individuals born with certain traits such as confidence, intelligence, idealism, a determination inclines becoming a leader but there an only significant difference which distinguished between leaders and followers during the study.

Trait theory failed since it was difficult to detect the common traits of every effective leader and in the 1940s, the researcher exposed the importance of certain traits developing at certain times while studying the traits of leaders from armed forces and civilian (Khan, et, al 2016). So it failed to produce consistency in the finding and sometimes degenerated into illogical speculation. Behavioural theory based on behaviour pattern differentiates between leaders and followers. It includes Michigan, Ohio and Managerial grid. Michigan research centre has contributed a lot to leadership behaviour (job centred and employee-centred).

Empirical Review

A review of the empirical literature presents mixed findings on the impact or how much of the variance in performance could be causally linked to strategic leadership. This has been attributed to various reasons such as the different methodologies used, the conceptualization of the variables under the study and more importantly, contextual factors. Additionally, performance differentials in the empirical literature could be as a result of the influence of the external environment on the causal relationship between strategic leadership and performance. Thus the external

environment could have a moderating influence on the envisaged relationship. Empirical findings on the effect of strategic leadership and organizational change on performance are equivocal. This lack of consistency could be due to differences in the definitions of the constructs, the role played by strategic leadership and the mediating influence of organizational change on performance. Besides, since performance is a multidimensional construct, how it's conceptualized and measured makes it difficult for scholars to agree on the causal link between strategic leadership and performance. Accordingly, various studies reviewed have not explicitly tested the joint relationship between strategic leadership, external environment and organizational change on organizational performance. In a bid to address the knowledge gap, this paper argues that the influence of strategic leadership on performance could be limited due to the moderating influence of the external environment and the mediating role of organizational change. Table 1 presents a summary of different studies and the gaps which inform the emerging propositions. The knowledge gaps need to be addressed by way of empirical research.

Fitza, (2017) An empirical test of Quigley &Graffin's (2017) framework on how much of the variance in performance can be attributed to CEOs The analysis and results show that the influence of CEOs on performance is not significant since they are mainly constrained by chance or random events. This contradicts Quigley &Graffin's (2017) results that CEOs have a significant effect on performance The study did not investigate the effect of strategic leadership on performance by explicitly incorporating the external environment and organizational change as moderating and mediating variables respectively.

Quigley & Graffin, (2017). A replication of Fitza's (2014) study using multilevel modelling, which is a more appropriate statistical technique than the ANOVA model Fitza used. Their findings contrast with Fitza's (2014) where they were able to demonstrate the positive impact of CEOs on performance. The study did not address the indirect influence of strategic leadership on performance and explicitly incorporate constraining factors of the external environment as a moderating variable and organizational change as a mediating variable. It did not also use a multiple regression model to analyze and measure the joint effect of the variables

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is focused on the perceived role of strategic leadership as a vehicle for evolutionary dynamics? A literature study was undertaken to acquire the theoretical background on the perceived role of strategic leadership as a vehicle for evolutionary dynamics. An empirical investigation was undertaken following the literature study. This empirical investigation served as the basis from which to investigate the perceived role of strategic leadership as a vehicle for the evolutionary dynamic.

The sample size for the study was determined using Yamane's (1968) sample size determination formula.

$$n = \frac{n}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;

n = the required sample size to be captured;

N = the total number of members in the population;

e = the tolerable error margin for the selection of appropriate representative unit of the population.

$$n = \frac{240}{1 + 240(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = 240$$

$$1.6 = 150$$

A total number of 150 respondents were selected.

RESULTS

Variables Entered/Removed

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ^b		. Enter

a. Dependent Variable: ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.509 ^a	.259	.244	.402

a. Predictors: (Constant), ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT, STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	8.256	3	2.752	16.998	.000 ^b

Residual	23.63	14	.162		
1	7	6			
Total	31.89	14			
		3	9		

- a. Dependent Variable:
ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE
- b. Predictors: (Constant),
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE,
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT,
STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-.391	.365		-1.073	.285
STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP	.014	.027	.042	.515	.607
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT	.310	.076	.302	4.073	.000
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE	.133	.035	.323	3.840	.000

- a. Dependent Variable:
ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between strategic leadership and organizational performance
Since the P-value calculated is lesser than the critical level of significance

(.607>0.05), the null hypothesis was accepted while the alternate hypothesis was rejected this implies that there is no significant difference between strategic leadership and organizational performance

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the external environment and organizational performance
Since the P-value calculated is greater than the critical level of significance (.000<0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted this implies that there is no significant difference between the external environment and organizational performance.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between the external environment and organizational performance
Since the P-value calculated is greater than the critical level of significance (.000<0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was accepted this implies that there is no significant difference between organizational change and organizational performance

Discussion of Major findings

Several propositions have emerged from the reviewed literature. Many scholars who subscribe to the leadership school argue that the influence of strategic leadership on performance is substantial (Hambrick & Quigley, 2014). However, others who endorse the constraint school argue that such an influence is limited by contextual factors (Knies et al., 2016). Thus, the question of whether strategic leadership influences performance is yet to be resolved given the findings as evidenced by the recent scholarly debate

(Quigley &Graffin, 2017; Fitza, 2014; 2017). However, most contemporary studies using improved methodologies have generally found a positive relationship between strategic leadership and performance.

Thus, Strategic Leadership could be positively related to organizational performance Strategic leadership plays a major role in determining performance by enabling their organizations to cope with their external environment (Jansen et al., 2009). Unfortunately, other studies have found out that such an influence is paradoxical since the complex nature of the external environment may likely constraint or limit the CEO effect (Fitza, 2017). Conger (1999) further points out that there is a scarcity of empirical studies focusing on the moderating role of the external environment in the relationship between strategic leadership and performance. Generally, empirical studies have demonstrated that the external environment is a critical moderating variable that determines the relationship between strategic leadership and performance (Jansen et al, 2009; Goll et al., 2007).

Moreso, the external environment could moderate the relationship between strategic leadership and performance. Studies have shown that strategic leadership influences organization change and ultimately performance gave that they need to articulate a clear vision of the future organization (Goll et al., 2007). However, other scholars argue that when change is hastily implemented, performance can be negatively affected or the relationship is not consistent (Kim & McIntosh, 2011; Battilana et al., 2010). Generally, studies show that strategic leadership leads to organizational change and which in turn influences performance (Gilley et al., 2009; Goll et al., 2007).

Besides, it was shown that organizational change could mediate the relationship between strategic Leadership and performance. The influence of strategic leadership on performance has generally been agreed upon by most scholars while others point to its limited influence due to contextual constraints (Quigley &Graffin, 2017; Fitza, 2017). These inconsistent findings suggest either a lack of evidence in establishing a direct association between strategic leadership and performance or of the many confounding variables that make it difficult to demonstrate clear cause and effect (Knies et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

This paper has revealed various knowledge gaps revolving around the relationship between strategic leadership, the external environment, organizational change and performance. Studies have been inconclusive when examining the effect and extent of strategic leadership on performance. Although evidence shows that the strategic leadership actions substantially influence performance, the processes through which they exert this influence is still limited and largely speculative. Thus, the presence of strategic leadership, however, does not merely lead to high performance since other antecedents may be at play. Few empirical studies have systematically traced the causal path of the effects of strategic leadership on performance by examining the moderating and mediating influence of the external environment and organizational change respectively. This paper seeks to address this research gap by arguing that the external environment and organizational change could influence the relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance. Thus, the external environment in which an organization is anchored in could have a significant moderating influence on the relationship between strategic leadership and performance. In equal measure,

organizations facing the realities of the external environment could improve their chances of success by engaging in organizational change. Thus, the relationship between strategic leadership and performance could be influenced by the mediating role of organizational change. This paper, therefore, concludes that strategic leadership indirectly influences performance since the external environment and organizational change could moderate and mediate respectively the relationship between strategic leadership and performance. Also, the paper proposes that indeed, strategic leadership is a vehicle for evolutionary dynamics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The implementation of the strategy is perceived to play an important role in organisational success and the ability to implement the strategy is perceived to be more important than the ability to formulate a strategy. Notwithstanding this, most leadership development focuses on aspects of formulating strategy and not on implementing strategy.
2. It is recommended that organisations include aspects of implementing strategy in leadership development. This should be done in an attempt to equip leaders on all levels of organisations with the knowledge, skills and values to effectively implement the strategy. Hrebiniak (2005) supported this recommendation and stated that one of the major reasons why strategy implementation efforts fail is because management and leadership training and development tends to focus more on formulating strategy than on implementing it. The emphasis is, therefore, on conceptual work, primarily 'planning', and not 'doing'.
3. One of the reasons for the difficulty and failure of strategy implementation efforts is the existence of many barriers or obstacles to these efforts. The implementation of the strategy involves the effective utilisation of more people than those required to formulate the strategy. This poses a challenge to implement effective communication in an organisation. Ineffective communication of the strategy and the fact that the workforce does not understand the strategy of the organisation are perceived to be the most important barriers to the effective implementation of the strategy
4. As a result of this conclusion, it is recommended that strategic leaders focus on ensuring that the strategy of the organisation is effectively and simplistically communicated to the workforce to ensure that they 'buy-in' to the process and, also, to ensure that the workforce understands and internalises the strategy. Organisations need to improve internal communications to help employees on all levels of the organisation to understand how their actions contribute to the implementation of the strategy. This can be done using training and development initiatives, frequent debates and discussions and assessing the consistent interpretation of the strategy.

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