

INFLUENCE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP ON THE PERFORMANCE OF NESTLE FOODS NIGERIA

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Abstract

The digital age has posed challenges to organisations in the 21st century. Strategic leadership is one of the most critical issues facing organisations today. The study looked at how strategic leadership affected the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc. The study focused on the impact of strategic direction setting, strategic core competencies, and strategic alignment on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc. A survey research design was utilised, and data were obtained from 32 management staff of the company using an online questionnaire. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23) was used to analyse the data collected from participants using mean, standard deviation, and regression. The results indicated that strategic leadership practices (strategic direction setting, strategic core competencies, and strategic alignment) have a positive and significant effect on firm performance. The study concluded that strategic leadership had a significant impact on the company's performance. The study recommends, among others, that the company's vision statement should be reviewed frequently to address emerging dynamics in the environment. This would ensure that the vision reflects where the company wants to be in the future.

Keywords: Leadership, strategic leadership, strategic direction setting, strategic core competencies, and strategic alignment.

a. Introduction

Organisations now operate in a turbulent business environment, with factors such as competition, globalisation, and technology reshaping the environment in which modern businesses thrive. To address these challenges, organisations require leaders with adequate capabilities. The ability to quickly and successfully implement new strategies can mean the difference between an organisation's success and failure in difficult circumstances. Leaders must adapt to and manage changing conditions, as well as creativity, for their businesses to thrive.

Strategic leadership practice is an important strategy for leading 21st-century organisations because of the unpredictable environments in which most organisations operate (Mwasiri & Muchiri, 2022). Strategic leadership entails the leader's ability to anticipate, envision, remain flexible, think strategically, and collaborate with followers to initiate changes that create a viable future for the organisation (Serfontein, 2015; Jooste & Fourie, 2016).

Strategic leadership requires establishing the strategic direction, manipulating and keeping core competencies, creating human capital, developing social capital, maintaining an influential business culture, emphasising ethical methods, and developing balance in business objectives (Ramos, Koesmono, Ellitan, & Otok, 2023). Strategic leaders are responsible not only for meeting expanding and Ellitan customer needs but also for navigating and aligning the entire organisation to outperform market competitors (Musafiri, Mulyungi, & Rukia, 2018).

According to existing literature, strategic leadership practices include strategic direction setting, strategic core competencies, and strategic alignment (Mwasiri & Muchiri, 2022; Abdullah & Anwar, 2021). Strategic direction setting is the set of activities and decisions firms make to achieve goals and objectives (Banda, 2022). Strategic core competencies are the resources and capabilities required by firms to perform better in an industry. Strategic alignment entails developing and implementing practices to ensure that an organisation's strategies support its overall goals (Ali & Anwar, 2021).

Strategic leadership enables organisations to act and respond quickly to changes that improve performance (Chen, Birasnav, & Zhang, 2022). Performance is the results achieved by firms on a given action during a period. Firm performance is identified through output, streamlined internal processes, profits, and customer satisfaction, among others (Mwangi, 2017). Strategic leadership is one of the most important determinants of an organisation's

performance because it guides strategic decision-making, determines organisational structure, and manages the organisational process.

Nestle Nigeria Plc is a food manufacturing and marketing company in Nigeria and a subsidiary of the largest food and beverage company in the world. The company manufactures, markets, and distributes food products (Bakare & Rahim, 2023). The company is involved in strategic leadership initiatives to maintain market leadership and ensure sustained growth and performance. This study therefore explores the effect of strategic leadership on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc.

Statement of the Problem

The role of leadership is of great value to the realisation of the goals of any firm, and strategic leadership is critical to firms that have to face competition. The shifts in dynamics in organisational practices mean that organisations need experienced and strategic people with well-developed strategies and passion to compete and grow faster. Strategic leaders and top management teams deal with the challenge of meeting stakeholders' expectations and demands for organisations to meet multidimensional performance targets daily. Many companies today record poor performance and continue to stagnate in market share. However, there is a lack of literature on addressing the challenges that organisations face today in terms of strategic leadership. The current study is conducted to determine how strategic leadership practices affect Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc's performance to fill a vacuum in the literature.

Objectives of the strategic leadership.

Examining how strategic leadership affects Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc's performance is the study's main objective. The specific objectives of the study are:

- i.To determine the influence of strategic direction setting on the performance of Ne Foods Nigeria Plc.
- ii.Determine the impact of strategic core competencies on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc.
- iii.To establish the influence of strategic alignment on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc.

b. Literature Review Strategic Leadership

According to Anwar (2017), leadership is the capacity to direct, enable, and inspire people to make positive contributions to the growth and productivity of the organisations they are a part of. Leadership assists organisations in achieving stated goals by linking job success to valuable incentives and ensuring that employees have the resources they need to do their jobs. According to Witts (2016), strategic leadership is the capacity of a leader to

foresee, uphold, and empower others to effect strategic change when called for. Strategic leadership is the capability of corporations to anticipate, envision, and maintain flexibility and empower others to make a strategic probability and a viable way forward for the organisation (Ali & Anwar, 2021).

In addition to requiring proficiency in managing internal and external business environments, strategic leadership involves sophisticated information processing (Banda, 2022). Strategic leadership is thus the ability of companies to anticipate and envision the future, maintain flexibility, think strategically, and initiate changes that will create a competitive advantage in the future. Aspects of strategic leadership have been identified by earlier research as strategic direction setting, strategic core competencies, and strategic alignment (Wakhisi, 2021; Mwasiri & Muchiri, 2022).

Strategic Direction Setting

Strategic direction setting entails developing a long-term vision and strategic goals by a firm (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Establishing an organisation's mission and vision, creating its strategic goals and objectives, and implementing a strategic plan are all necessary steps in deciding on a strategic direction, according to Mutia (2015). This view is supported by Ireland and Hitt (2015), who discovered that the task of determining the direction of the firm rests squarely on the strategic leader. The successful realisation of an organisation's vision is highly dependent on a firm's leadership direction and leadership mismanagement (Serfonten, 2021). According to Ahmad, Kadzrina, and Yen (2016), creating an organisational vision and having the ability to manage the change that visions bring about are key organisational competencies that give an organisation a competitive edge.

Strategic Core Competencies

Strategic core competencies are the resources and capabilities that offer an organisation a competitive advantage over its rivals (Santoso, Budiman, & Lena, 2019). A competitively important activity that an organisation performs better than any other internally important activity and that is essential to its strategy and competitiveness may be considered a core competency. According to Kitonga (2017), effective leadership embodies a variety of competencies linked to the facilitation of day-to-day work in organisations. These competencies include goal-setting and plan-making, growth monitoring, system-building, problem-solving, and problem-solving.

Strategic Alignment

Planning and executing procedures to guarantee that an organisation's strategies support its overarching goals is known as strategic alignment (Kitonga, 2017). A strategically aligned business comprises operations, methods, and prescribed

practices that work in unison to achieve long-term company goals (Mui, Basit, & Hassan, 2018). Strategic alignment is a process that ensures an organisation's structure, use of resources, and culture support its strategy (Anwar, 2017). According to Ramos, Koesmono, Ellitan, and Otok (2023), maintaining strategic alignment between organisational priorities and resources improves the organisation's ability to respond to external pressures and propels it towards a higher performance level by integrating the core ideas of its goals and objectives.

Organisational Performance

The utilisation of resources by an organisation to accomplish predetermined goals is referred to as organisational performance (Serfontein, 2015). The performance of an organisation is measured by comparison between the actual results and these objectives or goals (Costa, 2020). A firm's performance also refers to the transformation of inputs into outputs for achieving certain outcomes. Performance provides information about the relationships between realised output and efficiency, between minimal and effective cost and economy, and between output and effectiveness (Mui, Basit & Hassan, 2018). Several studies on organisational performance have emphasised the need for strategic leadership, which can tap into the unique capabilities that firms develop to become successful (Banda, 2022; Jooste & Fourie, 2016). Sales revenue and market growth are frequently used as performance measures (Abdullah & Anwar, 2021); hence, these measures are adopted for the study.

Sales Revenue

Sales revenue is the income received by a company from its sales of goods or the provision of services (Abdullah & Anwar, 2021). The number of goods or services sold multiplied by the unit price yields the sales revenue. This indicator measures the sales that an individual or company receives from its business activities, usually the sale of goods or services (Birasnav & Bienstock, 2019).

Market Growth

Market growth is the gradual expansion of a market's size (Costa, 2020). It is the predicted percentage growth for your industry over a defined period (Shao, 2019). Market growth can provide insights into business performance and guide enterprises when considering whether to enter new markets (Mwangi, 2017). According to this study, market growth refers to the gradual expansion of the market for a company's goods or services.

Theoretical Framework

The study's foundation is the upper-echelon theory, which was created in 1984 by Hambrick and Mason. The theory states that leaders' characteristics are reflected in the decisions they make in organizations. This theory was founded on the premise that organisational outcomes were directly influenced by the knowledge, experience, and expertise of the strategic leaders. Knowledge, experience, and skills are important predictors of strategic leadership and organisational performance. The theory argues that organisations are a reflection of their strategic leaders. The theory is relevant to the current study because it shows that strategic leaders play an instrumental role in realising organisational performance.

Empirical Studies

Ramos, Koesmono, Ellitan, and Otok (2023) investigated the impact of strategic leadership, organisational learning, and organisational culture on organisational performance in Australia through organisational citizenship behaviour. The study adopted a quantitative survey design and collected data from a sample of 310 management staff of companies. The Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) method was used, and the findings revealed that organisational performance is significantly related to strategic leadership, organisational learning, organisational culture, and organisational citizenship behaviour.

Chen, Birasnav, and Zhang (2022) examined the effect of strategic leadership on the performance of manufacturing firms in China. The study adopted the descriptive research design. The target population consisted of 330 managers and employees of manufacturing firms. The data collected using the questionnaire were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. According to the study, strategic leadership improves firm performance.

Mwasiri and Muchiri (2022) investigated how strategic leadership practices affected the performance of Kenyan telecommunications firms. The study employed a descriptive research design, and the population was comprised of 70 staff drawn from Telkom Kenya, Mombasa branch. The study used a simple random sampling technique, and data were collected via a semi-structured questionnaire and analysed using regression and correlation techniques. It found that strategic leadership practices (strategic direction setting, strategic articulation, intelligence leadership, and strategic alignment) were significant and positively related to performance.

Ali and Anwar (2021) investigated the influence of strategic leadership effectiveness on organisational effectiveness in Iraq. The study used a survey research design, with data collected through a self-administered questionnaire. The total population included 175 small and medium-sized businesses, and a

sample of 152 participants was used. Using regression for data analysis, the study found a significant effect of strategic leadership effectiveness on management expertise.

Birasnav and Bienstock (2019) conducted a study on the impact of strategic leadership on the performance of manufacturing companies in India. The target population included all fifty manufacturing companies in India, and a semi-structured set of questions was utilised to collect primary data. According to the regression analysis, strategic leadership improves firm performance.

Santoso, Budiman, and Lena (2019) examined the effect of strategic leadership on corporate performance in Indonesia. The study used a survey design to gather primary data from 100 AIA Financial leaders in East Indonesia. The data collected were analysed using Partial Least Square. The study found that strategic leadership practices had no significant effect on organisational performance.

Musafiri, Mulyungi, and Rukia (2018) examined the effect of strategic leadership on performance with a focus on MTN Rwanda. A descriptive survey design was used. The target population consisted of 21 managers working at MTN Rwanda's headquarters. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data and analysed using Pearson Coefficient Correlation. The study found a significant positive relationship between strategic leadership practices and organisational performance.

Mwangi (2017) examined the influence of strategic leadership on organisational performance in selected banks within Nakuru Sub County, Kenya. The study used primary data obtained from 43 respondents. The study employed a descriptive survey design and structured questionnaire to collect data where both closed and open-ended questions were used to get the opinions of the respondents. The Pearson and chi-square tests were used to analyse the gathered data. The findings showed significant effects of strategic leadership on the performance of banks in Kenya.

Research Hypotheses

The study is guided by the following null hypotheses:

H0₁: Strategic direction setting has no significant effect on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc.

H0₂: There is no significant effect of strategic core competencies on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc.

H0₃: Strategic alignment has no significant effect on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc.

c. Research Method

The study employed a survey research design. This approach helped in the collection of different opinions of the participants to achieve the objectives of the study. 32 Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc management employees make up the population. The target population includes only those directly involved in executing leadership roles in the company. The entire population was sampled using a census technique. Primary data were collected through an online questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha in this study. The results for all the constructs were above 0.70 as follows: strategic direction setting ($\alpha=0.829$), strategic core competencies ($\alpha=0.825$), strategic alignment ($\alpha=0.794$), and organisational performance ($\alpha=0.848$). The data distributed were retrieved, collated, and analysed using mean, standard deviation, correlation, and regression with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23).

d. Results and Findings

To explain respondents' agreement with the responses, mean and standard deviation were used in the data presentation using descriptive statistics. Likert scale data was collected, rating the extent of agreement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 is the strongly disagree whereas 5 is the strongly agree indicator. **Table 1: Strategic Direction Setting**

Statement	Mean	Std Deviation
The company regularly reviews the vision statement.	4.65	.519
The moral purpose of the company is spread across the company.	4.51	.536
The management has set organisational goals that are feasible.	4.86	.881
The company has a written mission statement that shows who we are and who we serve.	4.69	.703
Overall Mean	4.68	.659

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The results in Table 1 showed that respondents agreed with the statement that the company regularly reviews the vision statement and that the moral purpose of the company is spread across the company, as indicated by a mean of 4.65 and a mean of 4.51, respectively. The respondents (mean of 4.86) also agreed that management has established attainable organisational goals and that the company has a written mission statement outlining who we are and what we do. An overall mean of 4.68 implied that respondents strongly agreed that strategic direction setting was applied in the organisation.

Table 2: Strategic Core Competencies Statement Mean Std Deviation

The company can sustain a competitive advantage	4.01	.882
The company can manage complexity in the environment.	4.36	.887
The company can make timely decisions.	4.11	.883
There is an availability of adaptable organisational design.	4.72	.881
Overall Mean	4.30	.883

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

The results in Table 2 showed that respondents agreed with the statement that the company can sustain a competitive advantage and the ability to manage complexity in the environment, as indicated by a mean of 4.01 and a mean of 4.36, respectively. With a mean score of 4.86 and a mean score of 4.72, respondents also agreed that the company can make decisions quickly and that flexible organisational designs are available. An overall mean of 4.30 implied that respondents strongly agreed that core competencies were applied in the organisation.

Table 3: Strategic Alignment

Statement	MeanStd	Deviation
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The company constantly engages employees to ensure behaviour change.	2.57	.753
		.748
The company induces a new culture, which enables goal achievement.	4.66	
The company motivates staff to adhere to the company's procedures to stimulate productivity.	4.41	.741
The goals of the company and employee needs are well aligned.	4.04	.756
Overall Mean	3.92	.749

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

According to Table 3's results, respondents disagreed with the assertion that they continuously engage staff members to guarantee behaviour change (mean = 2.57). Respondents, however, agreed that they try to induce a new culture that enables goal achievement, as indicated by a mean of 4.66. Respondents agreed that they motivate the staff to adhere to the company procedures to stimulate productivity and that the goals of the company and employee needs are well aligned (mean = 4.04). An overall mean of 4.68 implied that respondents agreed that strategic alignment was applied in the organisation.

Table 4: Multiple Regression Result and Hypotheses Testing

Obs	32
R ²	0.737
R ² adjusted	0.724
Sig	0.000

Variable	β	t-value	Sig
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Strategic Direction Setting	.469	5.184	.000
Strategic Core Competencies	.322	3.206	.021
Strategic Alignment	.336	3.825	.008

Table 4 explains the extent to which strategic leadership practices affect firms. The result revealed that the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.739$) implies that strategic leadership accounts for 73.7% of the variation in firm performance, while 26.3% is accounted for by factors outside the study. With a coefficient value of 0.469 for strategic direction setting, the company is expected to experience a 46.9% increase in performance for every unit increase in strategic direction setting. Also, for strategic core competencies, a coefficient value of 0.322 implies that if strategic core competencies are improved by one unit, firm performance will increase by 32.2%. Similarly, a unit change in strategic alignment will result in 33.6% improvement in firm performance. The result therefore implies that strategic direction setting has the greatest effect on firm performance.

The result of hypothesis one indicates that there is a significant effect of strategic direction setting on firm performance ($\beta = .469$; $t=5.184$; $p=.000$); hence the null hypotheses, which state that strategic direction setting has no significant effect on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc, are rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

The second hypothesis maintained that Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc's performance is not significantly impacted by its strategic core competencies. The result showed that ($\beta = .322$; $t=3.206$; $p=.021$), hence the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that strategic core competencies have a significant positive effect on firm performance.

Hypothesis three stated that strategic alignment has no significant effect on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc, and the outcome indicates that ($\beta = .336$; $t=3.825$; $p=.008$), hence the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis found that strategic direction setting had a positive and significant influence on Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc's performance. The outcome

concur with Chen, Birasnav, and Zhang's (2022) findings that strategic direction setting has a major impact on organisational performance. The result is also supported by Mwasiri and Muchiri (2022), who affirmed that strategic direction setting and organisational performance are significantly and positively related. The implication of the finding to the management of organisations is that leaders of the company set clear and realistic goals and plans on how to achieve such goals on time, thereby improving their performance to remain competitive.

The study also found that strategic core competencies have a positive and significant effect on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc. The outcome is consistent with research by Hitt, Haynes, and Serpa (2019) and Mwasiri and Muchiri (2022), which found a strong correlation between core competencies and the accomplishment of organisational objectives. In support of the result, Ali and Anwar (2021) averred that core competencies are important for every organisation and they are positively related to organisational performance. This is corroborated by the result of a previous study conducted by Mwangi (2017). The result implies that strategic core competencies enable leaders of organisations to undertake business activities that are most relevant in achieving organisational mission. In addition to encouraging and pressuring staff to meet organisational goals, the company also cultivates a positive performance culture. These actions match its core competencies with organisational objectives.

The research also reported that there is a positive and significant effect of strategic alignment on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc. Mwasiri and Muchiri (2022) discovered a positive correlation between firm performance and strategic alignment, which is in line with the findings. The result is corroborated by Mwangi (2017), who affirmed a significant effect of strategic alignment on the performance of organizations. The finding implies that the core challenge for organisations is to provide sufficient clear structure to ensure that all people in the organisation are familiar with and willing to endorse good strategic leadership practices.

e. **Conclusion**

The study was conducted to ascertain the effect of strategic leadership on the performance of Nestle Foods Nigeria Plc. The results of the study demonstrate the significance of strategic leadership practices in raising organisational performance. The research concluded that the company has set organisational goals that are achievable and realistic. The study also concluded that the company aligns its core competencies with organisational objectives and nurtures a culture that fosters positive performance. The study further concluded that the management of the company strives to align employee needs to the attainment of set goals. Organisational performance is influenced

both jointly and independently by strategic alignment, strategic direction setting, and strategic core competencies.

f. **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made in line with the findings and conclusion:

As environmental dynamics change, the company's vision statement should be reviewed regularly. This would ensure that the vision reflects where the company wants to be in the future. The management should also put in place a team to spearhead strategic direction setting within the organisations.

The management of the company should put in place a team that identifies and develops activities that the firms outsmart the competition to ensure maximum exploitation of the firm's resource portfolio. Every head of section should impress upon staff under them to enhance their skills through training for better exploitation of their potential.

The management of the company should design effective incentives capable of inculcating cultural values in employees necessary for the achievement of the goals. To increase productivity, the company's staff should be inspired to follow its policies. This could be realised through employee needs and organisational goal alignment.

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