International Journal of Management, Economics and Social Sciences
2022, Vol. 11(1), pp. 29 – 47.
ISSN 2304 – 1366
http://www.ijmess.com

DOI:10.32327/IJMESS.11.1.2022.2

Strategy Execution and Firms' Performance: A Qualitative Investigation of Nigeria's Manufacturing Sector

***Nkemdilim Iheanachor[1]**

[1]Lagos Business School, Lagos, Nigeria

This study aimed to ascertain the role of strategy execution on the performance of the manufacturing sector in Nigeria using one of Africa's largest manufacturing conglomerates as a case study. A qualitative research design was deployed to actualize the above purpose by using a sample of eleven interviewees comprising five directors and other six members of the top management team from different departments of the firm whose headquarter is located in Lagos. The study revealed that all issues pertaining to strategy execution in the case study firm are the sole responsibility of the top management team led by its founder and president, which is consistent with theory. However, the interpretation of the interviewees' reactions implies that the firm did not have an explicitly understood strategy because it stems beyond merely setting objectives or targets. As such, the firm's overall performance cannot be linked to successful strategy execution. Nevertheless, there is a need for the case study firm and the industry to put measures in place to ensure improved communication at all levels, improved strategy development, reward system, performance monitoring, accountability and goal re-assessment where necessary. The measures mentioned above will aid the process of bridging the gaps in the overall performance of the case study firm in particular and the manufacturing industry in general.

Keywords: Strategy execution, firm performance, top management team, manufacturing conglomerate, qualitative research and Nigeria

JEL: M12, M14, M16

For several years, the concept of strategy execution has been primarily relegated to the background in contemporary strategy management literature (Levenson, 2018; Vuorinen *et al.*, 2018). A rough appraisal of the number of courses taught on strategy at virtually any modern-day university or business school solely concentrate on strategy formulation rather than strategy execution. This also gives credence to the general belief that present-day managers are trained to master the art of strategic planning and not that of strategy execution (Omsa *et al.*, 2017; Yang *et al.*, 2019). Regardless of whether this statement is accurate or not, empirical evidence seems to support it (Sibony *et al.*, 2017).

The strategy development process consists of selecting appropriate options and ensuring their effectiveness, while the execution process requires that these options are effectively implemented. Without effective execution, which is referred to as a process of putting plans and strategies into

Manuscript received July 25, 2021; revised November 26, 2021; accepted February 19, 2022.
*Corresponding author: niheanachor@lbs.edu.ng

action, it is not possible for a firm's performance to evolve positively (Dakare, 2019; Kathuria *et al.*, 2018; Shalender and Yadav, 2019). Based on the above assertions, the core research questions this study seeks to answer are what the perception of managers on the firm's performance is? How do the managers perceive the strategy execution process of the firm? Providing answers to these weighty questions will offer an insight into how top-level managers in the case study firm approach the issues surrounding strategy execution in their organization. Given that strategic management literature is awash with studies that examined the nexus between strategy execution and firms' performance, it is evident that a preponderance of these investigations concentrated on strategic management issues of firms from the Western economies (Parnell and Brady, 2019; Rajapathirana and Hui, 2018; Sohl *et al.*, 2020; Taouab and Issor, 2019; Yoshikuni and Albertin, 2020). Similarly, empirical evidence revealed that the studies considering strategic management issues among firms from emerging economies revolved around countries like Mexico, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Turkey (Hussain *et al.*, 2019; Parnell *et al.*, 2019; Ren *et al.*, 2019; Shalender and Yadav, 2019; Tsai and Ren, 2019; Beekun and De Carvalho, 2021). However, Batra *et al.* (2015) argued that the geographic gaze of several studies on the strategic management pattern of firms from the emerging economies is worryingly biased towards China and India, while other emerging economies are relegated to the background.

Although some extant studies (Alayemi and Akintoye, 2015; Michael, 2014; Monday, 2015; Agwu, 2018; Nwachukwu and Vu, 2020) have examined strategic management issues among corporate firms in Nigeria, nevertheless, most of the studies focused on the ideation and formulation phases of strategy without considering the specific importance of strategy execution in the conceptualization of their studies. As such, this study was motivated by the quest to ascertain the role of strategy execution on the performance of the manufacturing industry in Nigeria using one of Africa's largest business conglomerates as a case study. The choice of this company as the focal point of this investigation is that it is the largest manufacturing group in West Africa and one of the largest on the African continent. The group employs more than 30,000 workers, generating revenue above US$6.1 billion in 2020. It is evident that there is a paucity of studies on strategy execution and African firms' performance in the strategic management literature. To bridge this gap from the Nigerian context, this study was conceived to explore the rationality of Hambrick and Mason's (1984) upper echelons theory (UET) in explaining the strategy execution process of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. The upper echelon theory was founded on the premise that firm performance is directly influenced by the experiences, knowledge and expertise of those individuals occupying prominent managerial roles in the organization (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). The choice of the theory as the theoretical base for this study is justified on the assertion that it has received much attention and has offered strategic management research with essential empirical data on firms' strategic decisions. It also explains how the decisions made by top-level executives strongly influence the performance of a firm and how the firm, in Hambrick and Mason's view becomes a reflection of top management (Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Abatecola and Cristofaro, 2018; Altarawneh *et al.*, 2020). Given that existing studies in this research space flagrantly failed to consider the Nigerian context, present study, therefore, contributes to knowledge by qualitatively examining the strategy execution issues and the performance of manufacturing firms using one of the largest manufacturing conglomerates as a case study. Secondly, this study contributes to knowledge by using the upper echelons theory of management as the theoretical foundation for exploring and revealing the perception of the case study firm about strategy execution among manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Finally, this study also adds to knowledge by determining whether the Nigerian manufacturing industry has created peculiar characteristics that can meaningfully contribute to the ongoing debate about the strategy execution process of firms from developing economies.

The remaining sections of the article are organized as follows: section two focuses on the theoretical and empirical review of literature, section three deals with the research methodology. Section four outlines the presentation and discussion of results, while section five concludes the paper by presenting the empirical findings, policy implications, and future research direction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

The upper echelons theory (UET) was founded on the premise that firms' performance is directly influenced by the experiences, knowledge and expertise of those individuals occupying prominent managerial roles in the organization (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). These authors introduced a model in which situations occurring in the context of organizational life are addressed by managers whereby strategic choices are made as a function of the unique characteristics these individuals exhibit. As a result of the choices made by these individuals, organizational performance is argued to be directly impacted. To reconcile the impact these "upper echelons" have on organizational performance, Hambrick and Mason (1984) argued that focus should be directed towards those data, readily observable, reflecting individual characteristics concerning the educational, professional, and social backgrounds of prominent managers in organizational contexts. Thus, through the collection and analyses of these data, UET states that organizational outcomes can be predicted to some degree based upon the characteristics of executive managers. Since the cognitions, values, and perceptions of top management team (TMT) members are difficult to measure, UET focuses on examining demography to suggest that managerial characteristics are reasonable proxies for underlying differences in cognition, values, and perceptions (Certo *et al.*, 2006; Boone *et al.*, 2019). Thus, variables such as age, number of years and specific focus of work experience, and educational background can be applied to predict the actions of TMT members when faced with strategic decisions in organizations.

To apply UET effectively in the examination of manufacturing firms' performance in Nigeria, causality is an important consideration (Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Agwu, 2018; Nwachukwu and Vu, 2020). First, those managers with significant professional experience within the case study organizations act in accordance with these previous experiences more so than based on their attributes. Strategies employed in organizational life as a function of executive decision making are often a function of macro forces driving the pursuit of organizational goals. For example, an executive who is newly hired from an outside firm may bring a different perspective to the decision-making process than an individual promoted from within the organization to the manager's position. Thus, identifying the forces most directly driving the decision-making process is essential in UET research. Similarly, the industrial context in which the organization operates may directly impact the type of managers in positions of decision-making authority.

Empirical Review

-Top Management Team (TMT) and Firms' Performance

A multitude of studies in the strategic management literature has focused on the nexus between top management team (TMT) strategic decisions and firms' performance (e.g., Certo *et al.*, 2006; Boone *et al.*, 2019; Richard *et al.*, 2019). This research is mainly based on the upper echelon theory (Hambrick and Mason, 1984) and considers the dispositions of the most powerful stakeholders within an organization to understand why firms perform the way they do. Demographic features of top managers are used as a proxy of their cognitive frames by referring to bounded rationality. Values, experience, and personalities are reflected in executives' characteristics and affect their field of vision, selective perception, and interpretation (Hambrick, 2007; Abatecola and Cristofaro, 2018). Within the context of this research space, demographic diversity i.e., the level of dispersion among TMT players, has received a great deal of attention empirically and conceptually (Certo *et al.*, 2006; Boone *et al.*, 2019; Richard *et al.*, 2019). TMT strategic decisions should be positively related to firm performance through coordinated strategic planning processes and improved innovation outcomes (Liu, 2017; Dubey *et al.*, 2018; Richard *et al.*, 2019). TMTs face complex, uncertain situations and diversity may provide resources in several views that are outside homogeneous TMTs. Nevertheless, the empirical support of a direct link between a variety of TMT strategic decisions and firm performance remains equivocal at best, and recent literature asserts that it is impossible to assume a direct and straightforward relationship between TMT strategic decisions and firm performance without considering a series of factors that affect this relationship (Araujo-Cabrera *et al.*, 2017; Joshi and Roh, 2009; Cambrea *et al.*, 2017; Georgakakis *et al.*, 2017).

In recent years, the TMT literature has increasingly examined the role of moderators and mediators, which may influence the relationship between TMT's strategy execution decisions and firm performance. First, it has been revealed that the performance effects of strategy execution depend on specific moderators (Hambrick, 2007; Hambrick and Mason, 1984; Araujo-Cabrera *et al.*, 2017; Pisani *et al.*, 2018). For instance, managerial characteristics will only propel strategy and performance if means-ends ambiguity exists (Eisenhardt, 1989; Cambrea *et al.*, 2017; Richard *et al.*, 2019) i.e., managerial discretion must be high (Certo *et al.*, 2006; Boone *et al.*, 2019), if executives operate under pressure i.e., executive job demands must be high (Pisani *et al.*, 2018), if executives have considerable influence on firm performance (Parnell and Brady, 2019), or if behavioral integration is high (Shalender and Yadav, 2019; Tsai and Ren, 2019).

Second, empirical evidence shows that different aspects of strategic decisions may provoke different performance outcomes (Joshi and Roh, 2009; Araujo-Cabrera *et al.*, 2017; Cambrea *et al.*, 2017; Georgakakis *et al.*, 2017). Third, in many contexts, the performance effects of task-oriented aspects of strategy and relations-oriented aspects of strategy work in opposite directions. For example, while relations-oriented strategy seems to adversely affect performance due to stereotypic perceptions of dissimilar others, subgroup formation, and intergroup bias, task-oriented strategy rather seems to drive performance due to differences in information, knowledge, and perspectives (Rajapathirana and Hui, 2018; Sohl *et al.*, 2020).

Third, it is opined that the relationship between TMT's strategic decisions and firms' performance is indirect rather than direct, thereby relying on mediating processes. However, TMT research has not devoted much attention to examining such mediating processes (Hambrick, 2007). Those scholars who have done so (Daspit *et al.,* 2014; Araujo-Cabrera *et al.*, 2017; Hussain *et al.*, 2020; Pisani *et al.*, 2018) were mainly interested in how TMT diversity influences the TMT's social behavior i.e., communication, decision-making, consensus, or conflict. Hence, empirical backing lacks when it comes to how top managers' cognitive frames guide. However, Liu *et al.* (2018) demonstrated that TMT characteristics are indirectly related to firm performance through social integration and communication. These TMT processes directly increase the return on investment (ROI) of firms.

It is evident that the relationship between TMT demographic characteristics, heterogeneity, strategic decision-making, and firm performance is contradictory. Therefore, some scholars seek new research directions and ways to discuss the stable relationship between TMT and organizational output. As such, this study is designed to test the proposition stated below:

P_1: Top management team (TMT) strategy execution processes are likely to significantly influence the firm performance.

METHODOLOGY

This study followed Yin's (2003) research procedure which consists of defining research problem, stating objectives, drawing research questions, generating data, and creating an in-depth understanding of cases under investigation. The purpose of this inquiry was to unravel how the top management team's perception of strategy execution in their firm influenced overall performance in recent years. In generating the relevant information for the investigation, this study explored strategic management literature to establish a theoretical base for the study. A single-case procedure accompanied the theoretical underpinning to probe the burning research issues. In the investigation of the case, extant literature did not only aid to formulate the appropriate research design and facilitate data collection but also served as an essential instrument for summarizing and analyzing the data on the concerned case. This was a single case aimed at following replication logic to produce identical results consistent with literal and theoretical replications (Yin, 2003, Creswell *et al.*, 2007).

Sample

The sample for the study comprised of five (5) directors from the top management cadre and six (6) managers from the middle and lower management cadre from five (5) departments of Jupiter Group i.e., strategy, capital projects and portfolio development, logistics and distribution, commercial operations, stakeholders' relations and corporate communications and human resources of a top manufacturing conglomerate in West-African sub-region whose corporate headquarters is located in Lagos, Nigeria. The choice of this firm as the sample for this investigation is based on the fact that it is the largest manufacturing group in West Africa and one of the largest on the African continent. The group employs more than 30,000 workers, generated revenue above US$6.1 billion in 2020.

The average age of the participants was fifty-eight years, and they all had over ten years of working experience in their respective departments in a different capacity. Two participants represented each department during the interview session except the logistics and distribution department, which had one representative. The participants for this interview were guaranteed their anonymity and the confidentiality of the responses they provided.

Data Collection Procedure

The data on strategy execution and the performance of firms in the Nigerian manufacturing industry were collected qualitatively using semi-structured in-depth face-to-face interviews with different managers and directors from the case study firm Jupiter Group. The firm requested assurance of confidentiality before approving their participation in the interview. Therefore, the firm's real name and interviewees' identities were deliberately kept anonymous following Elliott (2018), as such, Jupiter Group is a pseudo name.

Prior to the face-to-face interview session, an email was sent to the public relations unit of the selected case study, which approved the interview request. The interview questions were prepared based on the insights obtained from extant literature with the core research problem, research questions, and objectives in mind. Since the investigators and the officials of the case study firm participating in the interview process were comfortable with the English language, the interviews were administered using the English language. The interviews lasted between 30 to 40 minutes, with an average of 35 minutes. The consent of the interviewees was sought before their voices could be recorded and they were conducted at the firm's corporate headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria, between March and June 2021.

Data Analysis

Ethical research standards and protocols were strictly followed while seeking formal participation approval for the interviews. An *a priori* list of codes guided the coding and analysis of interview transcripts. The hierarchical code structure from the *a priori* list of codes was replicated in the Nvivo (David-West *et al.*, 2018; Iheanachor and Ozegbe, 2021). Insights from multiple sources in strategic management literature were used as a guide while writing the research report (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Kiger and Varpio, 2020). The choice of intra-case analysis used in this study was justified because it provides a nuanced, empirically rich, and holistic account of a specific phenomenon under investigation.

RESULTS

Overview of the Case Study Firm

Jupiter group is used as the pseudo name of the firm under consideration for this investigation to guarantee the case study firm's anonymity. The group is a multinational manufacturing conglomerate of Nigerian origin founded by its incumbent president. It is adjudged the largest business conglomerate in the West-African sub-region and one of the largest in Africa. The group employed over 30,000 workers generating over $9.1 billion in revenue as of the last quarter of 2020.

The group was founded in the late 1970s when the president created an enterprise that traded majorly in sugar and other fast consuming goods through an initial capital of $3,000 obtained as a loan from an uncle. The group later expanded by starting trading in other commodities such as rice. In

1981, the group created two business ventures specializing in import business; this was an era where the Nigerian government made it strictly mandatory for firms to acquire import licenses before engaging in bulk importation of goods. The group then applied to acquire import licenses for various commodities such as aluminum products, steel, and baby foods. Later, cement importation and shipping were incorporated into the group's business portfolio. The group competed and still competes with another top multinational firm that produces and imports the bulk of cement used in the African continent.

Jupiter group currently owns and operates over 18 subsidiaries in 15 African countries. One of the subsidiaries that specialize in cement production is listed in the Nigerian Stock Exchange, with its market capitalization representing over 20 percent of the total capitalization of the Nigerian Stock Exchange. The group headquarter is located in Lagos, Nigeria.

The data in Table 1 (see Appendix-I) illustrate how the interviewee' from the top to the lower management levels expressed a relatively similar opinion on the perception of the group's overall performance. However, only the lower-level managers held the opinion that employees were dissatisfied with the measurement of performance. Financial performance was perceived as mostly poor by the top management team, despite the predominant perception of satisfied customers and employees. This seems odd as one could expect excellent financial performance given that employees and customers were both satisfied. The primary reason for this disparity was that the Covid-19 pandemic adversely impacted the group's performance during the long periods of national lockdown in 2020.

Table 2 (see Appendix-II) indicates that the interviewees were familiar and conversant with the concept of strategy execution in varying degrees. All interviewees agreed that all issues pertaining to strategy execution in Jupiter group are the sole responsibility of the top management team led by its founder and president.

After the participants' opinions on strategy execution were assured, they were further probed on the factors (drawn from literature review) which they perceived to have militated against strategy execution in their firm. The interviewees could add other factors to the ones on the list. The discussion of their selection of execution barriers, nonetheless, falls outside the jurisdiction of this investigation. The factors cited most often (ranging from one as most often cited to nine as the least often cited) as militating against strategy execution are reflected in Table 3 (see Appendix-III).

The interviewees' views on the factors militating against strategy execution differed. However, they concurred that the principal reason for the breakdown was ineffective communication. Interestingly, all interviewees agreed that the absence of approved strategy in the Group is a significant factor militating against strategy execution, as only middle management previously indicated that the Group did not have a strategy. The reasons stated for hindering strategy execution are congruent with the stages of strategy-shaping. Again, it appears as if these reactions were at variance with previous responses, particularly those of lower management cadre, who held a view that the Group was proficient in all facets of strategy building, and middle management cadre, whose opinion is that the bank was proficient in its strategy execution drive. Therefore, these responses were congruent with those of the top management cadre, whose viewpoint is that the bank was not proficient in any stage of strategy execution. From these responses, interviewees from all management cadres agreed that effective communication would improve strategy execution.

DISCUSSION

As observed from the results, the management team at all level expressed a relatively similar opinion on their perception of the group's overall performance. This viewpoint is consistent with the strategic management literature in relation to the importance of leadership in successful strategy shaping (Behara, 2017; Hayati *et al.*, 2018; Littoz-Monnet, 2017; Rezvani *et al.*, 2017). The consensus revelation of the interviewees from the Jupiter group and the empirical insights from the literature conforms to the postulation of upper echelons theory (UET) which posits that firms' performance outcomes are directly impacted by the expertise, knowledge and experiences of those individuals occupying prominent and top managerial roles in the organization (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). Nevertheless, this view is at variance with the findings of some empirical studies, which assert that successful strategy-shaping efforts require the participation of all levels of firms' management (Georgakakis *et al.*, 2017; Gupta *et al.*, 2018; Islami *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Tarakci *et al.*, 2018). The involvement varied in some aspects of their responses to several of the strategy contexts explored. These responses suggest that interviewees were not clear on whether or not Jupiter Group had a strategy at the time of the inquiry.

The interpretation of these reactions implies that Jupiter Group did not have an explicitly understood strategy as at the time of this particular investigation because strategy stems beyond merely setting objectives or targets (Hayati *et al.*, 2018; Littoz-Monnet, 2017; de Oliveira *et al.*, 2019; Vigfússon *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the contradicting opinion on the existence of a strategy is not surprising given the emergent pattern of strategy-shaping and the inconsistency in responses to questions about which stage of strategy-shaping was the more essential and the firm's proficiency in strategy-shaping. However, the key insight from these responses is the absence of attention to competitive advantage or any dimension alluding to competitive advantage, the hallmark of a successful strategy (Barney, 1991; Khan *et al.*, 2019; Wati and Triwiyono, 2018). In summary, the reactions to strategy as presented in

Table 2 alludes to the absence of clarity of strategy in Jupiter Group and indicates the complex nature of strategy as signified in the literature. Furthermore, the argument of Ansoff and McDonnell (1990) that strategy is an elusive concept seems to hold in this context. The participants' responses to the questions regarding strategy execution were deemed congruent with their reactions to the reasons for the strategy execution breakdown and steps that could be followed to bridge the performance gap. This is addressed in the subsequent paragraphs.

Although improvement in communication could raise the level of strategy execution, it is much more complicated and involved than communication, as was indicated in the theoretical framework (Behara, 2017; Hayati *et al.*, 2018; Crittenden and Crittenden, 2008; Kanter, 2017; Oketch *et al.*, 2021). The responses correspond with the factors reported in the literature, therefore, leadership is essential in drawing strategy (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000; Hassert, 2018; Mubarak *et al.*, 2019; Schaap, 2012); all stakeholders should participate in strategy formulation process (Joshi and Roh, 2009; Araujo-Cabrera *et al.*, 2017; Cambrea *et al.*, 2017; Georgakakis *et al.*, 2017); the starting-point of execution (Tait and Nienaber, 2010; Schaap, 2012; Hayati *et al.*, 2018; Littoz-Monnet, 2017; de Oliveira *et al.*, 2019; Vigfússon *et al.*, 2021); and execution is neglected from the beginning. These responses are consistent with reasons suggested for the execution gap as identified by previous studies (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000; Mankins and Steele, 2005; Tait and Nienaber, 2010), although the order differs. Congruent with previous studies (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000; Mankins and Steele, 2005; Joshi and Roh, 2009; Tait and Nienaber, 2010; Araujo-Cabrera *et al.*, 2017; Cambrea *et al.*, 2017; Georgakakis *et al.*, 2017), the responses of interviewees proved that the barriers to strategy execution could be minimized and possibly eradicated to bridge the performance gap in Jupiter Group. Moreover, the interviewees were not in agreement regarding their responses. The answers regarding corrective action failed to completely align with their reactions regarding the breakdown in strategy execution. However, the steps as graded by interviewees at all management cadre enhancing performance improved communication and better remuneration, then increased strategy development and ensured management buy-in, followed by performance monitoring and empowerment, after that accountability assignment. The next line of actions advocated by all was an improvement in talent management (recruit, train and retain the right staff), closely followed by management development and consequence control. A better transmission of the environment, proposed by middle and lower cadre managers, after that the re-evaluation of objectives proposed by all management levels and lastly selecting a different strategy as submitted by middle management. Again, the whole of these actions can be categorized into one or more of the strategy-shaping process. Furthermore, these responses confirm that the strategy-shaping procedure is indeed integrated and that if a particular step in a phase of the process is ignored, it will have a spillover effect on the phases that follow

(Alexander, 1985; Tait and Nienaber, 2010; Islami *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Tarakci *et al.*, 2018). However, these responses are explained to indicate that the interviewees were fully aware of their lack of expertise concerning strategy-shaping, which could be enhanced by a range of actions, especially management development. The measures advanced by the respondents that could be taken to strengthen strategy execution and improve the firm's overall performance include skill management and improved environmental scanning, consistent with some of the features of the strategy definition proposed by Nag *et al.* (2007). The top management team believed that these corrective measures would have a significant performance improvement, while middle cadre managers were mainly of the opinion that these actions would result in a moderate increase in performance. These responses correspond with findings from previous studies (Alexander, 1985; Beer and Eisenstat, 2000; Mankins and Steele, 2005; Tait and Nienaber, 2010; Hayati *et al.*, 2018; Littoz-Monnet, 2017; de Oliveira *et al.*, 2019). The findings reveal that interviewees in the study exhibited some level of understanding of the concept of strategy and its components, all stakeholders were not optimally involved in drawing strategy, the formulation phase was underestimated, and strategy execution starts from the formulation stage.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the perception of the top management team and other categories of managers in West Africa's top manufacturing conglomerate regarding the issues surrounding strategy and the firm's overall business performance. Strategy in itself is the instrument employed by management to achieve organizational goals by matching internal resources with the circumstances and conditions surrounding the organization's external environment with the primary motive of maximizing financial gains.

It is worthy of note that any breakdown in strategy execution leads to poor financial performance and other setbacks within the organization's ranks. The difference between a firm's planned performance and its actual performance has been studied by numerous scholars from various perspectives in the past. Despite their limitations, they have contributed immensely to the understanding and knowledge of the concept of organizational performance through the effective execution of strategy. Although there is no conclusive answer with regards to how best an organization should formulate and execute strategies. Therefore, the phenomenon of strategy execution in particular and strategy in general, is as complex as other concepts in social and behavioral sciences. This study strives to provide a deeper understanding of the issues about gaps in performance by examining the factors militating against strategy execution in the selected case study firm Jupiter Group.

The managers' indication at the different cadre of the Group's management hierarchy shows that opinions were similar in some areas while they differed in others. All interviewees exhibited some basic understanding of the concept of strategy as a whole and execution in particular. They stated some reasons behind the failure of strategy execution as follows; weak communication, weak monitoring, insufficient senior leadership, inadequate skill, insufficient details, no approved strategy, poor accountability, limited reward and consequences, leadership style as well as conflicting priorities. They suggested possible corrective measures (improvement in communication, improved strategy development, better rewards, monitoring of performance, accountability assignment, management buy-in, empowerment, advanced talent management, consequential management, management development, environmental consideration, re-assessment of goals and adopting different strategy) that can bridge the gaps in an organization's performance. The factors highlighted for both the breakdown and corrective measures can be classified according to the various stages of the strategic management procedures and are congruent with those in previous studies in connection with the performance gap. The factors militating against strategy execution and corrective measures outlined by interviewees can be classified by the stages of strategy-shaping or drawing process, which signifies the strategy formulation stage as essential. However, this stage is generally underrated and relegated to the background, which negates the ability to draw proper strategies that are needed to propel organizational success. It is consistently observed in the literature that successful strategy formulation often leads to success in strategy execution. While it is advisable to focus attention on an integrated approach to strategy issues, organizations must focus on ensuring that adequate measures are established to ensure the proper execution of strategies. A better understanding of the strategy execution stage of the strategy-shaping procedure will greatly benefit all manufacturing firms operating within Nigeria.

IMPLICATIONS

By implication, the consensus revelation of the interviewees from the case study firm Jupiter Group and the empirical insights from the literature conforms to the postulation of upper echelons theory (UET) which posits that firms' performance outcomes are directly impacted by the knowledge, experiences and expertise of those individuals occupying prominent and top managerial roles in the organization (Hambrick and Mason, 1984). Nevertheless, this view is at variance with the findings of some empirical studies, which assert that successful strategy-shaping efforts require the participation of all levels of firms' management (Georgakakis *et al.*, 2017; Gupta *et al.*, 2018; Islami *et al.*, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Tarakci *et al.*, 2018).

From a practical perspective, some reasons behind the failure of strategy execution include weak communication, inadequate monitoring, insufficient senior leadership, inadequate skill, insufficient details, no approved strategy, poor accountability, limited reward and consequences, leadership style, and conflicting priorities. Possible corrective measures that can bridge the gaps in an organization's performance are also suggested by the interviewees.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The solutions proffered in this article are based on the revelations of respondents during the interviews. Unfortunately, this study is based on a single-case inquiry. Although the respondents are generally experienced and knowledgeable in this field of management, it is difficult to generalize the finding of this study to other firms. Therefore, future studies can adopt the use of quantitative or mixed method approaches in investigating the issues surrounding strategy execution and firms' performance. In addition, further research may include more intensive qualitative analysis, which should incorporate more firms from the same industry and possibly other sectors because perception may differ across firms and industries. Therefore, a sample of more interviews from more firms and industries would help to confirm the findings.

REFERENCES

Abatecola, G., & Cristofaro, M. (2018). Hambrick and Mason's "Upper Echelons Theory": Evolution and open avenues. *Journal of Management History*. 26(1): 116-136. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMH-02-2018-0016

Agwu, M. E. (2018). Analysis of the impact of strategic management on the business performance of SMEs in Nigeria. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 17(1): 1-20.

Alayemi, S. A., & Akintoye, R. I. (2015). Strategic management of growth in manufacturing companies in Sub-Saharan Africa: A case study of Nigeria. *Journal of Economics, Management and Trade*, 6 (2): 151-160. https://doi.org/10.9734/BJEMT/2015/13796

Alexander, L. D. (1985). Successfully implementing strategic decisions. *Long range planning*, 18(3): 91-97. https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(85)90161-X

Altarawneh, M., Shafie, R., & Ishak, R. (2020). CEO characteristics: A literature review and future directions. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 19(1): 1-10.

Ansoff, I., & McDonnell, E. (1990). *Implanting strategic management*. New York: Prentice Hall.

Araujo-Cabrera, Y., Suarez-Acosta, M. A., & Aguiar-Quintana, T. (2017). Exploring the influence of CEO extraversion and openness to experience on firm performance: The mediating role of top management team behavioral integration. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 24(2): 201-215. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1548051816655991

Barney, J. (1991). Firm resources and sustained competitive advantage. *Journal of Management*, 17(1): 99-120.

Batra, S., Sharma, S., Dixit, M. R., & Vohra, N. (2015). Strategic orientations and innovation in resource-constrained SMEs of an emerging economy. *The Journal of Entrepreneurship*, 24(1): 17-36. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0971355714560052

Beekun, B., & De Carvalho, Z. (2021). Effect of strategic management strategies on performance of the manufacturing firms in Mexico. *Journal of Strategic Management*, 5(1): 30-39.

Beer, M., & Eisenstat, R. A. (2000). The silent killers of strategy implementation and learning. *IEEE Engineering Management Review*, 28(4): 35-45.

Behara, S. R. (2017). A Middle management perspective on strategy implementation. *ZENITH International Journal of Business Economics and Management Research*, 7(10): 78-88.

Boone, C., Lokshin, B., Guenter, H., & Belderbos, R. (2019). Top management team nationality diversity, corporate entrepreneurship, and innovation in multinational firms. *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(2): 277-302. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2976

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2): 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Cambrea, D. R., Lussana, G., Quarato, F., & Varacca Capello, P. (2017). Top management team diversity and firm performance: Empirical evidence from the fashion and luxury industry. *Corporate Ownership and Control*, 15(1-2): 325-340. https://doi.org/10.22495/cocv15i1c2p2

Certo, S. T., Lester, R. H., Dalton, C. M., & Dalton, D. R. (2006). Top management teams, strategy and financial performance: A meta-analytic examination. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(4): 813-839. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00612.x

Creswell, J. W., Hanson, W. E., Clark Plano, V. L., & Morales, A. (2007). Qualitative research designs: Selection and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 35(2): 236-264. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0011000006287390

Crittenden, V. L., & Crittenden, W. F. (2008). Building a capable organization: The eight levers of strategy implementation. *Business Horizons*, 51(4): 301-309.

Dakare, O. (2019). Developing competitive strategies among entrepreneurial managers in Nigeria using DEMATEL approach. *International Journal of Management, Economics and Social Sciences*, 8(2): 99-115. http://dx.doi.org/10.32327/IJMESS.8.2.2019.7

Daspit, J. J., Ramachandran, I., & D'Souza, D. E. (2014). TMT shared leadership and firm performance: Investigating the mediating role of absorptive capacity. *Journal of Managerial Issues*, 26(3): 219-239.

David-West, O., Iheanachor, N., & Kelikume, I. (2018). A resource-based view of digital financial services (DFS): An exploratory study of Nigerian providers. *Journal of Business Research*, 88 (1):513-526. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.01.034

de Oliveira, C. A., Carneiro, J., & Esteves, F. (2019). Conceptualizing and measuring the "strategy execution" construct. *Journal of Business Research*, 105 (12): 333-344.

Dubey, R., Gunasekaran, A., Childe, S. J., Papadopoulos, T., Hazen, B. T., & Roubaud, D. (2018). Examining top management commitment to TQM diffusion using institutional and upper echelon theories. *International Journal of Production Research*, 56(8): 2988-3006. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207543.2017.1394590

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(4): 532-550.

Elliott, V. (2018). Thinking about the coding process in qualitative data analysis. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(11): 2850-2861.

Georgakakis, D., Greve, P., & Ruigrok, W. (2017). Top management team faultlines and firm performance: Examining the CEO-TMT interface. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 28(6): 741-758. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.03.004

Gupta, A., Briscoe, F., & Hambrick, D. C. (2018). Evenhandedness in resource allocation: Its relationship with CEO ideology, organizational discretion, and firm performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 61(5): 1848-1868. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2016.1155

Hambrick, D. C. (2007). The field of management's devotion to theory: Too much of a good thing? *Academy of Management Journal*, 50(6): 1346-1352. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2007.28166119

Hambrick, D. C., & Mason, P. A. (1984). Upper echelons: The organization as a reflection of its top managers. *Academy of Management Review*, 9(2): 193-206. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMR.1984.4277628

Hassert, B. (2018). Bridging the strategy-execution gap: Strategic planning in times of change. *Journal of Airport Management*, 13(1): 17-30.

Hayati, B., Atefi, Y., & Ahearne, M. (2018). Sales force leadership during strategy implementation: A social network perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 46(4): 612-631. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-017-0557-2

Hussain, H. I., Ali, A., Thaker, H. M. T., & Ali, M. (2019). Firm performance and family related directors: Empirical evidence from an emerging market. *Contemporary Economics*, 13(2): 187-204.

Hussain, R. I., Rashid, H. A., Ali, A., Thair, M. S., & Noman, M. (2020). The mediating role of firm innovativeness between top management team diversity and sustainable firm performance of non-financial listed companies of Pakistan. *Paradigms*, 14(2): 64-70.

Iheanachor, N., & Ozegbe, A. E. (2021). The role of networks in the internationalization process of firms from emerging economies: The Nigerian perspective. *International Journal of Management, Economics and Social Sciences*, 10(1): 9-31. https://doi.org/10.32327/IJMESS/10.1.2021.2

Islami, X., Mustafa, N., & Latkovikj, M. T. (2020). Linking Porter's generic strategies to firm performance. *Future Business Journal*, 6(1): 1-15. http://dx.doi.org/10.1186/s43093-020-0009-1

Joshi, A., & Roh, H. (2009). The role of context in work team diversity research: A meta-analytic review. *Academy of Management Journal*, 52(3): 599-627. https://doi.org/10.5465/amj.2009.41331491

Kanter, R. M. (2017). Smart leaders focus on execution first and strategy second. *Harvard Business Review*, 6(1): 2-4. http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17244.39042

Kathuria, A., Mann, A., Khuntia, J., Saldanha, T. J., & Kauffman, R. J. (2018). A strategic value appropriation path for cloud computing. *Journal of Management Information Systems*, 35(3): 740-775. https://doi.org/10.1080/07421222.2018.1481635

Khan, S. Z., Yang, Q., & Waheed, A. (2019). Investment in intangible resources and capabilities spurs sustainable competitive advantage and firm performance. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management*, 26(2): 285-295. https://doi.org/10.1002/csr.1678

Kiger, M. E., & Varpio, L. (2020). Thematic analysis of qualitative data: AMEE Guide No. 131. *Medical Teacher*, 42(8): 846-854. https://doi.org/10.1080/0142159X.2020.1755030

Levenson, A. (2018). Using workforce analytics to improve strategy execution. *Human Resource Management*, 57(3): 685-700. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21850

Littoz-Monnet, A. (2017). Expert knowledge as a strategic resource: International bureaucrats and the shaping of bioethical standards. *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(3): 584-595. https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqx016

Liu, Y. (2017). A review of the relationship between TMT shared cognition and strategic decision making. *American Journal of Industrial and Business Management*, 7(10): 1101–1110 http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ajibm.2017.710078

Liu, D., Fisher, G., & Chen, G. (2018). CEO attributes and firm performance: A sequential mediation process model. *Academy of Management Annals*, 12(2): 789–816. https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2016.0031

Mankins, M. C., & Steele, R. (2005). Turning great strategy into great performance. *Harvard Business Review*, 83, 65–72.

Michael, O. B. (2014). Strategic management analysis of a Nigerian firm: Evidences from the First Bank of Nigeria (FBN) group. *Journal of Accounting, Finance and Management Strategy*, 9(1): 51–73.

Monday, J. U., Akinola, G. O., Ologbenla, P., & Aladeraji, O. K. (2015). Strategic management and firm performance: A study of selected manufacturing companies in Nigeria. *European Journal of Business and Management*, 7(2): 161–171.

Mubarak, M. F., & Yusoff, W. F. N. (2019). Impact of strategic leadership on strategy implementation. *British Journal of Management and Marketing Studies*, 2(1): 32–43.

Nag, R., Hambrick, D. C., & Chen, M. J. (2007). What is strategic management, really? Inductive derivation of a consensus definition of the field. *Strategic Management Journal*, 28(9): 935–955. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.615

Nwachukwu, C., & Vu, H. M. (2020). Strategic flexibility, strategic leadership and business sustainability nexus. *International Journal of Business Environment*, 11(2): 125–143. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBE.2020.107500

Oketch, J. O., Kilika, J. M., & Kinyua, G. M. (2021). The mediating role of strategy execution on the relationship between TMT characteristics and organizational performance in a regulatory setting in Kenya. *Journal of Business and Economic Development*, 6(1): 12–22. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.jbed.20210601.12

Omsa, S., Ridwan, M., & Jayadi, M. (2017). The effect of strategic management practices on SME performances in Makassar, Indonesia. *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Business*, 3(4): 71–80. https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ajtab.20170304.12

Parnell, J. A., Acikdilli, G., & Doyle, J. D. (2019). The competitive uncertainty, marketing and non-market roots of capability deployment and organizational performance in Turkey. *International Journal of Business and Emerging Markets*, 11(1): 27–51. https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBEM.2019.097475

Parnell, J., & Brady, M. (2019). Capabilities, strategies and firm performance in the United Kingdom. *Journal of Strategy and Management*. 12(3): 21–33 http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/JSMA-10-2018-0107

Pisani, N., Muller, A., & Bogă ţ an, P. (2018). Top management team internationalization and firm-level internationalization: The moderating effects of home-region institutional diversity and firm global focus. *Journal of International Management*, 24(3): 239–256. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2018.01.002

Rajapathirana, R. J., & Hui, Y. (2018). Relationship between innovation capability, innovation type, and firm performance. *Journal of Innovation and Knowledge*, 3(1): 44–55. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jik.2017.06.002

Ren, T., Xiao, Y., Yang, H., & Liu, S. (2019). Employee ownership heterogeneity and firm performance in China. *Human Resource Management*, 58(6): 621–639. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21995

Rezvani, A., Dong, L., & Khosravi, P. (2017). Promoting the continuing usage of strategic information systems: The role of supervisory leadership in the successful implementation of enterprise systems. *International Journal of Information Management*, 37(5): 417–430. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2017.04.008

Richard, O. C., Wu, J., Markoczy, L. A., & Chung, Y. (2019). Top management team demographic-faultline strength and strategic change: What role does environmental dynamism play? *Strategic Management Journal*, 40(6): 987–1009. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.3009

Schaap, J. I. (2012). Strategy implementations-can organizations attain outstanding performance. *Strategic Management Review*, 6(1): 98–121.

Shalender, K., & Yadav, R. K. (2019). Strategic flexibility, manager personality, and firm performance: The case of Indian Automobile Industry. *Global Journal of Flexible Systems Management*, 20(1): 77–90. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40171-018-0204-x

Sibony, O., Lovallo, D., & Powell, T. C. (2017). Behavioral strategy and the strategic decision architecture of the firm. *California Management Review*, 59(3): 5–21. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0008125617712256

Sohl, T., Vroom, G., & Fitza, M. A. (2020). How much does business model matter for firm performance? A variance decomposition analysis. *Academy of Management Discoveries*, 6(1): 61–80. https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2017.0136

Tait, A., & Nienaber, H. (2010). Exploring the strategy-to-performance gap: the case of four South African life insurers. *Journal of Contemporary Management*, 7(1): 271–289.

Taouab, O., & Issor, Z. (2019). Firm performance: Definition and measurement models. *European Scientific Journal*, 15(1): 93–106. https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2019.v15n1p93

Tarakci, M., Ateş , N. Y., Floyd, S. W., Ahn, Y., & Wooldridge, B. (2018). Performance feedback and middle managers' divergent strategic behavior: The roles of social comparisons and organizational identification. *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(4): 1139–1162. https://doi.org/10.1002/smj.2745

Tsai, H. T., & Ren, S. (2019). Antecedents of strategic ambidexterity in the context of internationalisation: a panel study of Taiwan Small and median-sized enterprises. *Technology Analysis and Strategic Management*, 31(8): 986–1001. https://doi.org/10.1080/09537325.2019.1582764

Vigfússon, K., Jóhannsdóttir, L., & Ólafsson, S. (2021). Obstacles to strategy implementation and success factors: a review of empirical literature. *Strategic Management*, 26(2): 12–30. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/jmo.2014.77

Vuorinen, T., Hakala, H., Kohtamäki, M., & Uusitalo, K. (2018). Mapping the landscape of strategy tools: A review on strategy tools published in leading journals within the past 25 years. *Long Range Planning*, 51(4): 586–605. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lrp.2017.06.005

Wati, L. N., & Triwiyono, G. (2018). The effect of using balanced scorecard on competitive advantage and its impact on firm performance. *Journal of Applied Accounting and Finance*, 2(1): 1–17.

Yang, X., Sun, S. L., & Zhao, X. (2019). Search and execution: examining the entrepreneurial cognitions behind the lean startup model. *Small Business Economics*, 52(3): 667–679. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11187-017-9978-z

Yin, R. K. (2003). Designing case studies. *Qualitative Research Methods*, 5 (1): 359–386.

Yoshikuni, A. C., & Albertin, A. L. (2020). Leveraging firm performance through information technology strategic alignment and knowledge management strategy: an empirical study of IT-Business Value. *International Journal of Research-GRANTHAALAYAH*, 8(10): 304–318. http://dx.doi.org/10.29121/granthaalayah.v8.i10.2020.2088

Appendix-I

Performance Measurement	Lower management Cadre	Middle management Cadre	Top management Cadre
Financial	Was not attained	Was not attained	Was not attained
Employees	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied
Customers	Satisfied	Satisfied	Satisfied

Source: Author's Presentation

Table 1. Interviewees' Perception on the Group's Overall Performance

Appendix–II

	Lower management Cadre (Directors)	Middle management Cadre	Top management Cadre
Conversant with strategy Execution.	Conversant with the term Strategy execution & its implications	Conversant with the term strategy execution & its implication	Conversant with the term strategy execution & its Implications
Does Jupiter Group have strategy?	The Group had a strategy because targets were set.	The Group didn't have a clear strategy, although goals were set.	The Group had strategy, although the (top management) were not wholly involved in the strategy formulation & execution.
Strategy execution process in the Group is?	Deliberate & emergent	Emergent	Emergent
Who executes strategy?	The CEO	The top management	Executive committee, middle & lower management cadre
Instruments for strategy	Vision & mission statement, strategic planning & outsourcing	Balanced scorecard, vision & mission statements, outsourcing & benchmarking	Balanced scorecard, vision & mission statements, strategic planning & outsourcing
Which stage of strategy shaping is more important?	Divided equally, all three & execution	Evaluation	Execution
Jupiter Group's proficiency in strategy shaping	Not effective in any of the stages.	Proficient in strategy formulation, but not effective in execution & evaluation.	Proficient in all stages

Source: Author's Presentation

Table 2. Interviewees' Perception about Strategy Execution in Jupiter Group

Appendix-III

Factors	**Lower management Cadre**	**Middle management Cadre**	**Top management Cadre (Directors)**
Communication	✓ 1	✓ 1	✓ 1
Inadequate monitoring	✓ 3	✓ 2	✓ 2
Insufficient senior leadership	✓ 3	✓ 2	Not cited
Inadequate skill	✓ 1	✓ 2	✓ 2
Insufficient details	✓ 3	✓ 2	Not cited
No approved strategy	✓ 3	✓ 3	✓ 2
Poor accountability	✓ 2	✓ 2	Not cited
Limited reward and consequences	Not cited	✓ 2	✓ 5
Leadership style	✓ 3	✓ 9	✓ 4
Conflicting priorities	✓ 3	Not cited	✓ 5

Source: Author's Presentation

Table 3. Factors Militating Against Strategy Execution in Jupiter Group