CORPORATE STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT AND THEACHIEVEMENT OF OBJECTIVES IN A POST PANDEMIC ERA

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A B S T R A C T	K E Y W O R D S
This paper addressed the alignment of organizational strategy in the achievement of objectives in post pandemic era. The research advances a position on the imperatives of strategic alignment as a basis for effectively coping with related crisis and change events necessitated by the pandemic; while pursuing the objectives of the organization. Drawing on the literature review, the research identified three key areas that require focus in the alignment of organizational strategy, these include the organization's learning, human resource development and restructuring. The paper also advanced content which highlighted the nature of corporate strategy and its related steps, including related considerations involved in the setting of objectives and the formulation of strategies. As a research paper, the investigation adopted a quantitative methodology, and a descriptive survey design. A population of 6 (4-star) hotels was also adopted in the research with referents comprising 30 management staff (5 from each hotel). In conclusion, this research affirms that corporate strategy alignment harnesses and streamlines the organizations' resources and competencies in a way that effectively enhances its responsiveness to the changes and contextual attributes that characterize its environment in a post pandemic era.	Corporate strategy alignment, objectives, pandemic, human resource development, restructuring, organizational learning

1.   Introduction

The organization exists as a collective of interests, coordinated in such a way as to ensure the harmonic and cohesive achievement of related objectives. However, as a social system, related change events such as that of the recent COVID-19, impact and in most cases derail the organization from its objectives (Olawoyin, 2020). Rumelt (2012) described the objectives of the organization as clearly identifiable projections offered in line with its goals or expectations. Organizational objectives differ substantially from the goal or vision of the organization. Mankins and Steele (2005) classified goals

as a more comprehensive and wholistic position on the expectations of the organization, whereas objectives are the detailed and more specific features of the goals or vision of the organization. However, in advancing both goals and objectives, organizations rely substantially on strategic behaviour or actions intended to bridge existing functional gaps with preferred outcomes.

According to Rugman and Verbeke (2017) organizational strategy describes the detailed actions of the organization – designed primarily for linking its current state to its futuristic state. Research points to the relative nature of organizational strategy and the imperative of its contextuality for effectiveness. In their research Homkes, Sull and Sull (2015) noted that strategies clarify on the organizations plan of action, hence, it must be such that connects and aligns with the context or environment of the organization. This agrees with Freedman (2015) position that strategies must never be imposed but should be adapted in view of the gaps or unique attributes of the environment of the organization. Hence, one could argue therefore that effective organizational strategies are such that emerge and are anchored within the context (time, geographical region, market, industry etc.) of the organization; and in that way is cognizant of its particular challenges, opportunities and circumstances. Grant (2016) specified three major ways in which strategies can be aligned, these include organizational learning, human resource development, and restructuring.

This research builds on the views of scholars (Grant, 2016; Durmaz & Ilhan, 2015; Lev, 2017; Hambrick, 2016), in its assessment of the imperatives for corporate strategy alignment in the achievement of organizational objectives. The research is justified on the basis that it offers a perspective which anchors on the current dilemma of most organizations, given their current challenges in terms of functionality during the post COVID-19 pandemic – thus departing from the perspectives advanced by previous research. Furthermore, effort is made in this research to clarify and expand on the implications of organizational strategic alignment building on the theoretical premise of the social cognitive theory. On this basis, this research advances a unique perspective and position on the issue of strategic alignment.

1.1 Purpose of Study
The purpose of this research is to examine corporate strategy alignment in the achievement of objectives in the post-pandemic era. The related objectives for this research are stated as to:
i. Determine the relationship between learning and the achievement of organizational objectives
ii. Ascertain the relationship between human resource development and the achievement of organizational objectives
iii. Examine the relationship between restructuring and the achievement of organizational objectives

1.2 Research Questions
In line with the stated purpose and objectives of this research, the following research questions are posed to guide the research:
i. What is the relationship between learning and the achievement of organizational objectives?
ii. What is the relationship between human resource development and the achievement of organizational objectives?
iii. What is the relationship between restructuring and the achievement of organizational objectives?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

The following hypothetical statements are stated in line with the research objectives:

HO_1: There is no significant relationship between learning and the achievement of organizational objectives

HO_2: There is no significant relationship between human resource development and the achievement of organizational objectives

HO_3: There is no significant relationship between restructuring and the achievement of organizational objectives

2.   Review of Literature

In this section of the study, related literature on the conceptualization of the variables and the possible relationship that may exist between them are discussed.

2.1 Corporate Strategy

Corporate strategy describes the framework established in line with advancing the organization toward its futuristic state or condition (Afonina, 2015; Babafemi, 2015). Corporate details a wholistic approach and structured position focused on advancing the interest and goals of the organization. Carter and Greer (2013) identified corporate strategy as anchored on several factors, one of which is learning. According to Antonakis and Day (2017), learning is a vital aspect of strategy development and implementation. This is because the process and action of learning provides the organization with the required information and knowledge about the prevailing conditions or factors that influence or impact on the environment of the organization.

Afonina (2015) stated that the strategy of the organization is its overall structure or format for adjusting or adapting the organization to meet the change and demands of its market. It is as David (2011) noted, that an effective corporate strategy is harmonic and supports the development of organizational features that are aligned and substantially synchronized with the features or characteristics of the environment. While a variety of models and approaches have over the years advanced processes or steps related or necessary for effecting strategic actions, this research draws on a modified 4-step approach comprising of (a) strategic objectives and analysis (b) strategic formulation (c) strategic implementation (e) strategic evaluation and control (Grant, 2016; Menon, 2015; Purce, 2014).

2.2   Strategic objectives and analysis

In this stage of advancing the corporate strategy, emphasis is placed on projected end or goal of the organization and assessment of the environment. Purce (2014) As such this stage of strategic structuring assesses the organizations goals in line with its availing capacity and the favourability of the environment. Hence at this stage, organizations learn through the scanning of their environment (SWOT analysis, PESTLE analysis) and in the same vein determine how well to adapt their existing features to match and address possible gaps in their functionality or operations (Grant, 2016).

i. **Strategic formulation**: This stage of the strategic action builds on the choice or stipulation of a particular strategic approach and thus is focused on developing the required capacities and gathering the necessary resources for actualizing the organizations strategic goals. Strategic formulation describes the step applied in ensuring that the strategy of the organization is not burdensome or

overbearing on the organization (Grant, 2016). Grant (2016) posited that organizations that are able to effectively synchronize their internal activities with the dynamics of their environment have a better chance of transforming their ideas or plans into reality.

ii. **Strategic implementation**: The implementation of strategy builds on the organizations ability to apply its plans or projected actions in ways that are considered viable or suitable in driving the organization toward its goals. Strategic implementation according to Northouse (2018) establishes the organization within its context, reinforcing functions that are designed to enhance its competitiveness and effectiveness. It is as such the extent to which the organization's structure, systems, technologies and process are configured to ensure its success in the achievement of its goals and objectives.

iii. **Strategy evaluation and control**: This stage of the corporate strategy process details the assessment of the effectiveness of strategies, their suitability and appropriateness as well as the adoption corrective measures where necessary in ensuring that related deviations or gaps in the strategic action or process is corrected (Rumelt, 2012). Pitelis and Wagner (2018) stated that strategic evaluation and control process is one which anchors on the organizations assessment of operational alignment, the use of feedback for assessing the viability of structures and functions, and the adoption of contingent strategies in addressing possible loopholes and deficiencies in the organization's behaviour and choices.

For this research, three dimensions of corporate strategy are adopted in line with its conceptualization in this research (Grant, 2016), namely – learning, human resource development and restructuring.

2.3 Dimensions of corporate strategy alignment

Learning: Organizational learning describes the related organizational actions concerned with the creation and acquisition of knowledge (Grant, 2016). It is concerned with the development of structures, frameworks and relationships that aid the organization in the enrichment of its knowledge base. In the alignment of strategy, learning can be considered as playing a crucial and essential role as it acquaints the organization with the emerging issues, factors or features that are currently shaping and impacting on its environment; at the same time, it also informs the organization of the required skills, functions and strategic stance through which it could effectively address the gaps and demands of its environment or context. Learning determines the criterion for success as it advances insight and at the same time equips the organization for effective alignment (Grant, 2016).

Human resource development: Human resource development as a basis for strategy alignment describes the actions of organizations geared toward advancing the skills set and capabilities of their workforce in line with the direction of change. This follows Menon (2015) assertion that organizational change begins with its human resource. According to Menon (2015), the development of the organizations human resource could be channelled toward specific objectives with functions such as training and job design adopted as effective tools in defining the competencies and qualities of the workforce. This agrees with Phipps (2012) observation that organizations are only as responsive and effective as their human resources allow for or enable them to be. The human resource in this manner can be considered as significant in ensuring that the organization remains effective and relevant, despite the changes within its context.

Restructuring: Restructuring describes reorganizing or redesigning of the organizations features, such that ensure its survival and effectiveness in the face of change. Restructuring according to Grant (2016) should be proactive and advance functional forms that enable the organization compete more favourably. However, Lee (2017) argued, restructuring can also be reactive and focus on addressing the negative impact of factors such as that of the pandemic on the organization's wellbeing. This way, it could also be considered a strategic tool for enhancing the resilience of the organization as it aligns and further facilitates a reviving of the organization through changes to investments, debt payments, expenditure and even operational features.

2.4 Issues to be considered in setting corporate objectives

Delery and Roumpi (2017) described the corporate objectives as varied but interrelated actions that provide the premise for the actualization of the organization's goals. Objectives emerge from the goal of the organization and not the other way round. This is because objectives outline the various actions linked to the organizations goal. Organizational objectives are as such the measurable and operational qualities of the organization's goals (Bertozzi et al, 2017). Hence objectives allow for measurability of success or progress in the pursuit of the organization's goals. Related issues to be considered in the setting or establishment of the organization's objectives are as follows

Workforce characteristics: In establishing or setting up objectives, it is imperative that organizations are considerate of the capacities, qualities and other related features that characterize their workforce. This is important as it determines the extent to which the organization can be viewed as expressing the required capacity and competence for the actualization of specific objectives (Johnson et al, 2008).

Finance: The financial position of the organization and that required of the stated objective is also a factor for consideration in the development or setting of objectives. The financial structure and base of the organization is also an aspect of its capacity – one which determines the extent of its investments and its ability to pursue high-cost objectives or goals (Grant, 2016; Kumar & Pansari, 2016).

Competition: Competition is one major factor that determines the objectives of the organization. This is because organizations through their learning or scanning process often assess the activities of rivals or competitors in their environment (Rugman & Verbeke, 2017). This behaviour is necessary for identifying the unique ways they can standout or be distinctive in their products and services. Competition is one this basis a criterion for determining the organizations objectives (Thompson et al, 2005).

2.5 Considerations for strategy formulation

Strategy formulation as earlier stated, describes the stage wherein the organization focuses on harnessing the qualities, resources and capacities required for its intended objectives or goals – by this, the organization is able to specify its intended actions toward the achievement of its objectives. In formulating strategies (Thompson et al, 2005; Antonakis, 2017), it is imperative for organizations to draw on the existing gaps between their capacities and what is required in the actualization of related objectives. Hence considerations of strategy formulation are often reflected in (a) the suitability or appropriateness of the strategy in advancing the organization's interest (b) the role of stakeholders,

and (c) the values of the organization. In relation to the suitability or appropriateness of the strategy, it is important to note that strategic effectiveness is relative and as such as be considered as being linked to a variety of factors – the timing of the strategy, the environment of the organization, the industry etc. All these factors play critical roles in the choice of strategies (Augier & Marshall, 2017). Similarly, considerations of the role of stakeholders in the formulation of strategies is also important. David (2011) stated that stakeholders are vital and play crucial roles in the organization's wellbeing and in the achievement of its objectives. This is because the organization's relationship with its stakeholders either reinforces its progress or on the other hand can be frustrating to it. This follows Pitelis and Wagnar (2018) observation that the organizations stakeholders can be considered as the "soil" upon which the organization plants or establishes itself. Third, is the consideration of the organization's values (Grant, 2016).

2.6 Strategy and objectives

Objectives are distinct from strategies (Menon, 2015). Organizational objectives specify the direction and expectations of the organization, whereas strategies reflect the designs and actions which enable to coordination of related features and resources in the achievement of the organization's objectives. Grant (2016) stated that it is imperative for objectives to be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound (SMART) in nature and that way realizable; however, at the same time, it is imperative that strategies are structured in ways that are cognizant of existing challenges, deficiencies, threats and other related factors that may hinder the achievement of the organization's objectives. According to Babafemi (2015) strategies are the vehicles through which the organization reaches its destination, therefore they are expected to be responsive in nature and flexible; however, the objectives of the organization are more consistent and coherent with the goals of the organization.

2.7 Strategy and Structure in Achieving Corporate Objectives in Post COVID-19 Pandemic Era

Organizations depend on their strategies for success in their various contexts or markets. A good or effective strategy is one which is systematic and also responsive (Northouse, 2018) in that it draws on existing relationships within its networks and at the same time recognizes the need for change especially such that mirrors the changes in the environment. In recent months, the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic on businesses and organizations has demonstrated the implications or change and crisis on the organization's behaviour and the achievement of objectives (Olawoyin, 2020).

Purce (2014) stated that effective strategies are responsive, suggesting that alternative approaches or contingent strategies are considered in the overall strategic process. This idea or position builds on a recognition and understanding of the volatility and highly unpredictable nature of the environment. Northouse (2018) stated that while certain aspects (especially the internal features and relationships) can be considered controllable to a certain degree, the external environment is beyond the control of the organization. This is because a wider and much more complex level of relationships and interactions manifest and are expressed within the environment (Northouse, 2018).

3.   Research Methodology

The methodology of this research is anchored within an epistemological positivism social paradigm. Scott (2005) described positivism as emphatic on an objective perspective of social reality – one which identifies the social world as separate and distinct from its social actors. According to Scott (2005)

such a perspective imposes on the behaviour of social actors, and is considered deterministic; thus, supposing the capacity for understanding and prediction based on the estimates of causes and effects between two or more variables. The choice of the quantitative methodology for this research is therefore such that premised on the need for knowledge and prediction of the role of corporate strategy in the actualization of organizational objectives (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Hence, this research adopts in its positivism stance, adopts the quantitative methodology in its investigation of the corporate strategy in the achievement of organizational objectives during the COVID-19 pandemic era.

3.1 Research Design: The design adopted for this research is the descriptive survey design. This choice follows the focus of the research which is to identify the role of corporate strategy in the achievement of organizational objectives. The choice and adoption of the descriptive survey also follows the concern of data generation from a range of units at a specified time and the nature of the concepts of interest. Collis and Hussey (2014) stated that the descriptive survey supports the generation and assessment of data which primarily describes actions, behaviour, events and activities in ways that provide a clear basis for understanding and explaining related phenomena. Collis and Hussey (2014) further stated that the descriptive survey advances knowledge and understanding on "why" events are the way they are and also on the areas or features that can be addressed for improved outcomes.

3.2 Population of the Study: The population in research describes the total number of units, events, groups or individuals who share a particular context, experience or feature in which the researcher is interesting in investigating. However, a population can be universal (implying all members of a stated or identified concern) or accessible (implying only a quantifiable segment of the universal population) (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The accessible population for this research is six hotels which are categorized within the 4-star bracket, with at least 15 years of operational existence and located within the context of Port Harcourt. These comprise of (a) Novotel (b) Golden Tulip Hotel (c) Juanita (d) Swiss Spirit (e) Polo Court Hotel, and (f) De Edge Hotel. A total of 5 management staff are to be captured as units of measurement in the research based on their leadership and decision-making roles in the hotels, hence they will serve as referents for this research (population listing sourced from: www.tripadvisor.com).

3.3. Sample size: The sample size describes the portion of the population adopted in line with providing representation to the entire population grouping, especially when the population is considered as too large and difficult to investigate within a particular point in time (Kumar, 2008). However, the population for this research is six (6) hotels categorized as 4-star and with a total of 30 units of measurement of referents; hence this research will adopt a census in its investigation. By this, all identified units of the population frame for this research will be included in the investigation and data generated from all units. Kumar (2008) described the census as a more representative approach as it involves and captures all units in the research. According to Kumar (2008), this is only recommended when the research population is small ($N \leq 30$). This also agrees with Bryman and Bell (2015) observation that the census advances a wider and more accommodating approach in its investigation of social phenomena. Thus, the entire 6 hotels 4-star hotels and 30 management staff will be investigated in this research.

3.4   Sampling Techniques: The sampling technique for this research is the purposive technique. This implies that participants are not just selected randomly but based on their perceived usefulness to the research in terms of their capacity to offer useful or relevant information (Bryman & Bell, 2015). This choice follows the identification of management staff as key to the research especially given the nature of the variables which primarily identify with management related actions and decision-making within the organization. The purposive technique which is non-probability in nature anchors on referents that are knowledgeable within the sphere of interest in this investigation (Bryman & Bell, 2015).

3.5 **Sources of Data Collection:** The data source for this research is the primary source and the instrument is the structured questionnaire. As such data for this research will be generated primarily from the identified referents and units within the specified hotels in Port Harcourt. The questionnaire instrument is adopted based on its effective application in generating quantitative based data which allows for ease in numerical analysis and summaries (Kumar, 2008). The structured questionnaire also facilitates increased control over responses using predefined questions and scales that ensure response consistency.

4.   Data Results
In this section, the data is analyzed, presented and discussed accordingly. The section comprised the univariate and bivariate analysis.

4.1 Univariate Analysis
This section of the analysis addressed the distribution for the properties of the variables. The summaries for the distributions are presented on figure 1.
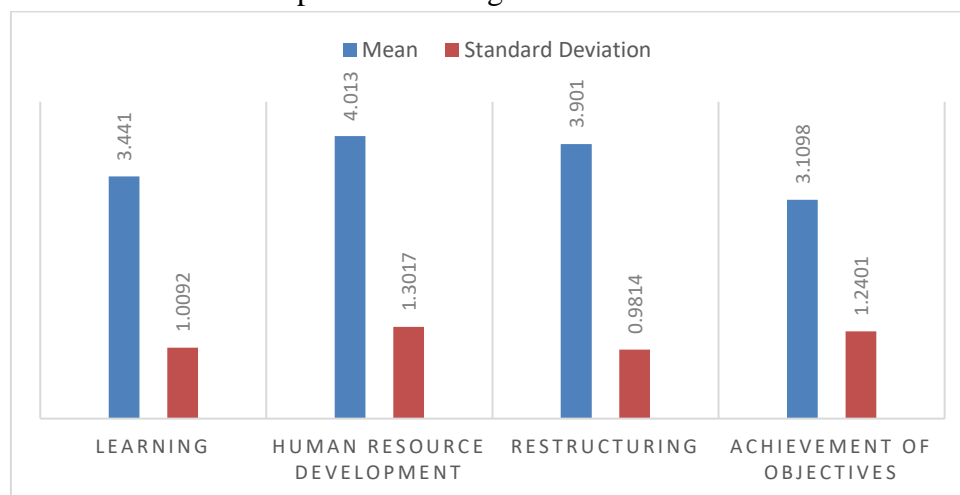

Figure 1: Univariate Summaries for the Variables

Source: Survey Data, 2022

Presented on the figure 1 are the univariate summaries for the variables – learning (X = 3.441; SD = 1.0092); human resource development (X = 4.013; SD = 1.3017); restructuring (X = 3.901; SD = 0.9814) and the achievement of objectives (X = 3.1098; SD = 1.2401). The distributions demonstrate substantiality (where x > 2.5). However, where the distributions for learning and goal achievement can

best be described as moderate (2 < x < 4), the distributions for human resource development and restructuring appear to be high (where x > 3).

4.2 Bivariate Analysis

In the bivariate analysis, the test for the hypotheses is carried out with the result presented on the table 1

Table 1: Test for Hypotheses

		Achievement of Objectives	Learning	HR Development	Restructuring
Achievement of Objectives	Pearson Correlation	1	.524**	.471**	.457**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	140	140	140	140
Learning	Pearson Correlation	.524**	1	.652**	.538**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	140	140	140	140
HR Development	Pearson Correlation	.471**	.652**	1	.403**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	140	140	140	140
Restructuring	Pearson Correlation	.457**	.538**	.403**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	140	140	140	140

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Survey Data, 2022

The result for the test for the hypotheses shows that all three dimensions of strategic alignment (learning, HR development and restructuring) significantly contribute toward the achievement of organizational objectives. The results show that out of all three, learning appears to have a stronger and more significant impact on the achievement of objectives (where R = 0.524 and P = 0.000) compared to the effects of HR development (where R = 0.471 and P = 0.000) and restructuring (where R = 0.457 and P = 0.000) on the achievement of objectives. Based on the result of the analysis, all previous null hypotheses are rejected.

4.3 Discussion of the Findings

The relationship between corporate strategy alignment and the achievement of objectives demonstrates the significance of dimensions such as learning, HR development and restructuring to the organization's effective engagement and embeddedness of the organization. The study through its findings, point to the need for organizational actions that build on increasing its knowledge of the environment and context in developing internal capacities in addressing the change or realities of its environment (Purce, 2014). The findings of this study corroborate existing theories on the imperatives of strategy alignment in building capabilities that match the change features of the environment (Northouse, 2018; Purce, 2014).

The findings of this research also suggest that given the implications of knowledge, such as demonstrated in the significance of the relationship between learning and the achievement of objectives, it is imperative that organizations focus on building stronger and more collaborative

systems that support information transfer and improved levels of stakeholder's relationship (Northouse, 2018). Moreso, such emphasis on learning is imperative as it informs and equips the organization with the knowledge on what aspects or attributes to modify, training and development content or the structuring of roles and responsibilities (Augier & Marshall, 2017).

5. Conclusion

The objectives of the organization are critical to its success and progress; however, the achievement of such borders on the extent to which the organization is able to align and effective match its strategies with the context of the organization. This research advanced strategic alignment in the form of learning, human resource development and restructuring as critical and imperative to the achievement of the organization's objectives. As reveled, the organizations capacity to shape its human resource in line with the competencies required for addressing the gaps in its environment, its capacity to acquire and assimilate knowledge and the restructuring of its core features and policies, enable the strengthening and enablement of strategic frameworks that are well suited to its objectives and goals. Thus, it is the position of this research that strategic alignment harnesses and streamlines the organizations resources and competencies in a way that effectively enhances its responsiveness to the changes and contextual attributes that characterize its environment.

6. Limitations of Study

The limitations of this research anchor on three factors – (a) the methodology (b) the population, and (c) the data source.

In terms of methodology, this research focused on the quantitative methodology. This follows the aggregation of data and the report of evidence based on summaries. This suggests an emphasis on generalized outcomes with little to no assessment of related individual experiences and subject interpretations of the variables from the units. Such provides evidence on only an aspect of the nature of the relationship between the variables and in that manner, does not explain or provide any qualitative justification for such.

The choice of the population also limits the research in the sense that it conditions the generalizability of its outcome. Hence, its findings or the evidence generated can only be inferred to organizations that share similar characteristics or attributes like those addressed in this research (e.g., industry, type of organization, services).

The data source for this research focused on primary data generated from the target units of the investigation. Such a focus however is considered a limitation as it offers little to no secondary information or historical information on the variables. Thus, limiting the research to only the estimates and summaries provided by the primary data.

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