



Innovation and Sustainable Development: A Compelling need for Strategic Leadership in a Global World

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Abstract: The goal of sustainable development in organizations, societies and nations are to enhance the quality and standard of living of the citizenry. However, in the absence of strategic and adaptive leadership, achieving innovation and sustainable development may be difficult if not impossible. This study examined how strategic and adaptive leadership help to foster business innovation and sustainable development in corporate Nigeria ambience, in the information age of the 21st century. To achieve these objectives, articles from indexed journals with high impact factors related to strategic and adaptive leadership, business innovation and sustainable development were reviewed. Findings from the literature reviewed and that of focus discussion group of senior executives of corporate organizations confirmed the importance of strategic/adaptive leadership in fostering business innovations and sustainable development of corporate organizations. Dearth of strategic/adaptive leadership skills in managing change and innovation are also reported as major challenges militating against innovation and sustainable development in corporate Nigeria. This paper, therefore, recommend that captains of industries in Nigeria should adopt a more pragmatic strategic leadership practices in mainstreaming innovation: continually finding important corporate problems, solving those problems and implementing the solutions; and a determination to building global leadership competencies and budgeting of more fund for research and development, that we lead to the development of new products and service that will improve the standard of living of the citizenry.

Keywords: Innovation, Sustainable development, Strategic leadership, Adaptive leadership

Introduction

In a fast –paced and highly integrated world of the 21ST century characterized by rapid change, complexity and critical uncertainty the need to innovate and have a strong and effective leadership that can develop and sustain constant supply of goods and services needed by consumers without jeopardizing long term sustenance of natural resources, in the face of dwindling resources and explosion in global population cannot be over- emphasized. No matter the amount of physical and natural resources at the disposal of an organization, and no matter how sophisticated an organisation’s strategies and technologies are, the leadership factor is inevitably the key to success and long term sustainable development. The quality of thinking of leadership in any organisation, determines the quality of human and organization future.

One of the most significant issues confronting the world today is that of future sustainability. Sustainability and carbon footprint occupies an increasingly important position on the corporate agenda around the world. Growing number of companies are realizing the importance of environmental initiatives in business development. The practices of environmental sustainability ensure that the need of today’s population is met without jeopardising the ability of future generation needs to meet theirs.

With the fluctuating political and economic situation, global market turbulences, weather and climatic uncertainties and global health pandemics, the need for strategic leadership cannot be over- emphasised.

Strategic leadership is often seen as the ability to influence others to voluntarily take decisions for long term organisational stability. Hitt, Ireland and Rowe (2005) define strategic leadership as leader’s ability to anticipate, envision, and maintain flexibility and to empower others to create strategic change as necessary. It is multifunctional in approach and involves managing through others. It helps organisations cope with change that seems to be increasing exponentially in today’s globalised environment. Strategic leaders transform critical situations into meaningful opportunities.

Several studies (cited under the empirical review) have been conducted to improve the understanding of strategic and adaptive leadership, business innovation and sustainable development. A synthesis of studies of the key concepts of - innovation, sustainable development and leadership-under review revealed that they are carried out independent of one and another, therefore, a systematic literature review that integrates the three distinct concepts is required. This paper, therefore, conducts an all in one literature review with the objective of organising previous researches on strategic leadership, business innovation and corporate sustainability.

The broad objective of this paper is to investigate the role of strategic and adaptive leadership on innovation and sustainable development in a rapidly changing global economy of the 21st century. The specific objectives are to:

- i. explore the extent to which innovation is driven by strategic leadership.
- ii. investigate the influence of strategic

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leadership on sustainable development.

Based on literature reviewed, two research hypotheses were raised to explore the link between innovation, sustainable development and strategic leadership:

- i. There is a significant link between strategic leadership and innovation..
- ii. 2. There is a significant link between strategic leadership and sustainable development

Conceptual and Theoretical Reviews:

Business innovation:

According to the Oslo manual (2018), business innovation is a new or improved product or business process (or a combination thereof) that differs significantly from the firm's previous products or business processes which has been introduced to the market or brought into use by the firm". Behnam, Raffaella & Mercedes (2018) argue that innovations targeting sustainable development are crucial for enhancing sustainability in companies. Cillo (2009) sees sustainable innovation as the development of products, processes, services and technologies that contribute to the development and well-being of human needs and institutions while respecting natural resources and regeneration capacities.

Concepts of Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development has been defined in many ways, but the most frequently used definition is from our common future, also known as the Brundtland report (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development, 1987). The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) sees sustainable development as development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. According to Taylor (2016) the issues of sustainable development is hinged on three main pillars- economic growth, environmental protection and social equality. Economic sustainability implies a system of production that satisfy present consumption levels without compromising future needs (Lobo, Pietriga, & Appert, 2015). Du & Kang (2016) observe that the growing level of the economic system has overstretched the natural resource base, necessitating the need for a rethink of the traditional economic systems. Allen and Clouth (2012) posit that human life on earth is supported and maintained by utilising the limited natural resources found on the earth. Against the above background, economic sustainability, therefore, call for strategic decisions that are equitable and fiscally sound, whilst at the same time paying due attention to other aspects of sustainability (Zhai & Chang, 2019).

Social Sustainability:

Social sustainability encompasses notions of equity, empowerment, accessibility, participation, cultural identity and institutional stability.

Farazmand (2016) sees social sustainability as the nexus between social conditions, such as poverty and environmental destruction, which is witnessed daily, for example, in the Niger delta area of Nigeria through gas flaring and water pollution by the major oil exploration companies - Shell Petroleum Development Company, Exxon Mobil Producing Unlimited, TotalFinaElf etc. Towards this

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end, the theory of social sustainability points out that the alleviation of poverty should neither involve wanton environmental destruction and degradation nor economic instability. Scopelliti et al. (2018) posits that poverty alleviation should take place within the existing environmental and economic resource base of the society. Guo (2017) opines that social sustainability also encompasses many issues, such as, human rights, gender equity and equality, public participation and rule of law, all of which promote peace and social stability for sustainable development.

Environmental sustainability:

The concept of environmental sustainability is about the natural environment and how it remains productive and resilient to support human life. Environmental sustainability relates to ecosystem integrity and carrying capacity of natural environment. The quest for unbridled growth is imposing ever greater demand on the earth system and placing ever greater strain on these limits because technological advancement may fail to support exponential growth. Evidence to support concerns about the sustainability of the environment is increasing.

Campagnolo, Carraro, Eboli, Farnia, Parrado, & Pierfederici (2018) opine that for the sake of sustainability, all societies must adjust to the emerging realities with respect to managing ecosystems and natural limits to growth. Diaz- Garcia (2015) submits that innovation that accommodates only the environmental dimension of sustainability is sometimes referred to as green innovation, eco innovation or environmental innovation.

Concept of Leadership:

The term leadership, like many other concepts in social sciences has many meanings and connotations. Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organisation in a way that makes it more organised and logical. Waite (2014) defines leadership as a group-based process that involves encouragement to achieve certain goal(s). According to Yukl (2013) leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done, and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives. Hiefertz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) see adaptive leadership as a practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. It is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive.

Theories of Innovation, Sustainability and Leadership

The Chocolate Model

Dormant (2011) Chocolate Model for innovation adoption and change focuses on innovation adoption and change related to an organization. It is structured around four elements: change, adopters, the change agent(s), and the organization – CACAO when made into an acronym for ease of recollection and use for planning can be applied when planning for organizational change and innovation adoption. The processes are as follows: first, analyse the change whether it is a new system or innovation. The second step is to analyse the adopters of the change. Third, identify the change agents. At this point, a plan is developed. The fourth step is the analysis of the organization where the change process is expected to occur as well as analysing the

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larger context of the organizational change – how it impacts other aspects of the whole organization. Before implementation, the plan may be revised based on the outcomes of the organisational analysis. Two elements emphasised in the Chocolate Model are the adaptability of the innovation to the specific needs of the adopters and the social impact of the change, which is; what the change will mean for the social structure and climate of the organization (Dormant, 2011).

Corporate Social Responsibility Theory

As a specific theory of the way corporation interact with the surrounding community and larger world, corporate social responsibility is composed of four obligations: (1) the economic responsibility to make money and /or profit, (2) legal responsibility to adhere to rules and regulations (3) ethical responsibility to do what is right even when not required by the letter and spirit of the law and; (4) lastly the philanthropic responsibility to contribute to society's projects even when they are independent of their particular business.

Adaptive Leadership theory:

In times of constant change adaptive leadership is critical. Hiefeitz, Grashow and Linsky (2009) see adaptive leadership as a practical leadership framework that helps individuals and organizations adapt and thrive in challenging environments. It is the practice of mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive. Adaptive leadership is based on a specific set of four characteristics seen as necessary for leaders facing adaptive problems:

character, organisational justice, development and character. Leadership, when seen from this perspective, requires a learning strategy. According to Heifeitz and Laurie (2011), the adaptive demands of our time require leaders who take responsibility without waiting for revelation or request. Diermeier (2020) developed a theory called “Trust Radar” which can be used to tackle challenges during period of rapid changes and crisis situation, like that of COVID-19 pandemic. Deirmeier (2020) points out that strategic and adaptive leader must continue to build trust both internally and externally. Even though the desirability of trust is widely acknowledged, most leaders often struggle with building and maintaining it, especially during high-stake crisis. He listed four key competencies required during crisis and period of rapid change: empathy, transparency, expertise and commitment. Showing empathy is not the same thing as apologizing. Empathy in times of rapid change and crisis means when you communicate with people, you communicate clearly their pains and suffering, and express a sense of feeling with their situation.

Transparency is reached when in the mind of the subordinate's all relevant questions thrown up by the challenges on ground have been fully addressed by the leader. The key criteria here are for leaders to be fully understood, in their sincerity, openness and honest, while communicating with their teams. A perceived lack of expertise in leaders can undermine trust quickly. Where such expertise is lacking in leadership commitment, particularly where the situation is highly dynamic, fluid and easy solutions are not available. Commitment involves leaders in defining and instituting a process, communicating promptly with the people and making the communication personal. Video is better than email and personal address is

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better than video clips. In coping with organisational change, which is novel, fluid and where there is no easy solution in sight, leadership must demonstrate openness and transparency about learning. While leaders must set their eyes on the big pictures, focus must be placed on company specifics.

Innovation, Sustainable Growth and Strategic Leadership:

Strategic leadership is inextricably linked to innovation and sustainability. To be successful, in the information age of the 21st century with its attendant challenges and opportunities, the 21st century leader must provide the discipline to decide which industry, global changes and customers' needs to respond to, while avoiding organisational distractions and maintaining the company's distinctiveness, as a key to the company's competitive advantage. Strategic leadership provides the essential difference between the most successful businesses and those struggling just to survive. Every organization aims at striving for excellence and growth in the long run. To attain long-term growth and sustainability, organizations need to have a vision and competence which can only come from strong and adaptive leadership. Leadership springs from innovation, commitment and positive change. Sustainable development, for business enterprise means adopting business strategies and activities that meet the needs of the enterprise, and its stakeholders today, while protecting, sustaining and enhancing the human and natural resources that will be needed in the future. Innovation and corporate sustainability requires strategic leadership in order for corporate leaders

to think strategically and use strategic intent, anticipate events in order to be proactive, have flexibility to work correctly with divergent situations and interact with internal and external environments, and initiate and implement changes

Empirical Study:

A number of empirical studies have been carried out aimed at understanding the role of strategic leadership in fostering business innovation and sustainable development in corporate organizations. The research shows that a manager's strategic and adaptive or interactive leadership style substantially contributes to the development of sustainable innovation processes.

Yongan, Umair, Seoyen & Madiiha (2019) examine the influence of management innovation and technological innovation on organization performance with the mediating role of sustainability. Based on the empirical evidence collected from 304 Pakistan CEO's and top managers, it was found out that leadership innovation contributed positively to business innovation, corporate sustainability and organization performance.

Cillo (2019) carried out a literature review with the objective of organizing previous research regarding sustainable innovation. A systematic approach was adopted to identify sixty nine relevant articles. These articles were organized according to three key perspectives: internal managerial, external relational, and performance evaluation. The results demonstrate that the first perspective, incorporating diverse managerial aspects is the most considered, whereas the second and third perspectives remain underdeveloped.

Suriyankiekaew (2019) investigated leadership and management practices that

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literature suggests influence organisations performance and corporate sustainability in entrepreneurial firms. Survey data were gathered from 357 small business leaders in Thailand. Regression analysis results indicated that innovation, high quality and stakeholders' consideration were three significant drivers for enhanced long-term financial performance, thereby contributing to corporate sustainability

A 2015 study by PWC, a chartered accountant and management consulting firm revealed that of 6,000 senior executives studied only 8 percent of the executives turned out to be strategic leaders. McKinsey, another firm of management consultant, reported in their survey of 600 global executives, managers and professionals that respondents pointed to strategic and adaptive leadership as the best predictor of innovation performance and sustainable development.

Waite (2014) reviewed published articles within the human resource journal (HRD) and related fields to identify relationships between disparate streams of research on leadership and innovation and sustainability. Findings revealed the parallel research streams are rather isolated from one another and highlighted strategic leadership as a connection between business innovation and sustainability.

Researches in Nigeria have also shown that societies which subscribe to proper ethical behavior and transformation leadership that focus on innovative ideas are more likely to experience sustainable development in the area of adequate

provision of infrastructure for the improvement in the citizens' standard of living (Imhonopi & Urim, 2014; Okebukola, 2014).

The Compelling need for Strategic Leadership in the 21st century Change and Crisis

The word change and crisis are short and simple six- letter words that are pervasive in the world today. Both words are simple to spell and yet difficult to define. The Chinese language written representation of the word "crisis" is a synthesis of the symbols for danger and opportunity. For instance, in the face of grave dangers in the world today – wars, terrorism, natural disasters- why is it that some organisations, nations manage change successfully and others don't. Why is it one may ask that most African countries- Nigeria, Ghana, Algeria, Cameroon, Zimbabwe etc in spite of their huge human and natural resources are still wallowing in poverty and less endowed nations like Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea, India have transform from being a developing economies to developed economy? The answer to these questions may well be in the way the creative and innovative potentials of these nations workforce have been handled by strategic and adaptive leadership.

Canton (2015) predicts that game –changing trends are coming in business, technology, workforce, economy, security and environment. Climate change, energy demand, and population growth will redefine global risk and power. Exponential new technologies will emerge in digital money, mobile commerce, and big data. To thrive in this future calls for strategic leadership that is predictive, adaptive and agile. Leadership is required to identify the most fruitful challenges or problem definitions from the

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key facts. Basadur (2001) posits that effective individuals, groups and strategic leaders are adaptable. They anticipate problems and opportunities and develop timely solutions. They search for changing circumstances that they can turn to advantages rather than wait for change, they make change.

Methodology:

The main objective of this article is to explore the links between strategic and adaptive leadership, business innovation and corporate sustainable development by reviewing existing literature on the aforementioned concepts. Secondary data were obtained by keying these key terms – strategic and adaptive leadership, business innovation and corporate sustainability into the on-line databases. The terms were searched in the titles, abstracts and the bodies of the articles. Preference was given to articles from indexed journals with high impact factors. Additional information was also gathered from on line magazines, websites and government reports and white papers. These sources was also supported with the opinions of focused group discussion of senior executives from three integrated software solutions companies in Lagos, Nigeria

Results and Discussion:

Many studies support the complex relationships between strategic leadership and innovation and strategic leadership and corporate sustainable development. The findings from this article support the hypotheses which states that there is significant link between strategic leadership and innovation/ sustainable development. This finding is corroborated by the report of McKinsey

survey of 600 global executives, managers and professionals, where the respondents pointed to strategic leadership as the best predictor of innovation performance and sustainable development. Yongan, Umair Seoyen & Madiiha S. (2019) based on empirical evidence collected from 304 Pakistan CEO's and top manager, found out that strategic leadership positively contributed to sustainability and organization performance. One possible reason for this finding may be ascribed to the fact that today's business environment is more volatile than ever before. There are more new technologies, smart customers with enormous access to product's information, changing regulations that affect business one way or the other.

Strategic leadership plays a key role in the development and prosperity of individuals, organisations and national economy. Strategic leadership lies behind the history of the emergence of the Asian Tiger nations (China, Japan, India, South Korea, Indonesia and Malaysia) as members of the industrialised economy of the world. By developing the thinking abilities of their creative workforce, the Asian Tigers have joined the league of the industrialised nations of the world. Adekunle (2012) gave a vivid example of the above when he compared the economic development of Malaysia and Nigeria. Both nations gained independence from Britain in 1960 but while Nigeria can boast of vast resources –crude oil, palm kernel, rubber, cocoa, groundnut, Malaysia could boast of little or no resources at independence. Today, Malaysia which took palm kernel seedlings from NIFOR, Benin, Nigeria is now a net exporter of vegetable oil while Nigeria is a net importer of same. What went wrong? The difference in the fortune of these two nations may well be in the ways the creative potentials

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and innovation processes of their people were nurtured and harnessed. While Malaysia, through the strategic leadership of her leaders invested in nurturing the creative potentials of her people and hence achieved technological and sustainable development; Nigeria was contented with the importation of the output of the innovative effort of others and hence got poorer and poorer.

The necessity of strategic leadership in fostering innovation and sustainable development in corporate Nigeria environment is very profound. In the late 80's through the 90's a large number of multinational companies, like Nigeria Brewery Plc, Guinness Plc, Lever Brothers, now Unilever, Dunlop, Nestle, PZ, Cadbury ceded the mantle of leadership to budding Nigerian management staff. It was observed that the fortune of these companies, in most cases, took a downward trend shortly after the departure of the expatriates from the management of the companies. All these companies, as at today, have all replaced their Nigerian captains of industries with their expatriates counterpart. Again, what went wrong? Is it lack of thinking? The quality of thinking determines the quality of human and organisation future. It then follows that the level of economic growth any company/ nation can attain is directly linked to the creative ability of her workforce and most importantly how strategic and adaptive the leadership of corporate enterprises are.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is revealed that strategic leadership is inextricably linked to innovation and

sustainable development. In the new economy of the 21st century driven by network information technology, knowledge management; strategic leadership and innovation rather than natural resources is the raw material of business and competitive advantage. Strategic leadership, innovation and sustainable development play a key role in the development and prosperity of individual, organisation and national economy. To thrive in the ever changing business world of the 21st century calls for strategic leadership that is predictive, adaptive and agile. Leadership is required to identify the most fruitful challenges or problem definitions from the key facts. Growing number of companies are realizing the importance of environmental initiatives in business development.

Recommendations:

- Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were made:
- 1) That captains of industries in Nigeria should adopt a more pragmatic strategic leadership practices in mainstreaming creativity and innovation among SME's, that is, continually finding important corporate problems, solving those problems and implementing the solutions.
 - 2) That strategic and adaptive leadership thinking courses should be incorporated into the curriculum of all tertiary institutions in Nigeria.
 - 3) That government at various levels should budget more fund for research and development that we lead to the development of innovative new

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- 4) products and services that will improve the standard of living of the citizenry.

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