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The Direct And Mediated Effects Of Strategic Management Practices On Operational Performance

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Abstract

This study explores the direct and mediated effects of strategic management practices on operational performance within AlZamil Steel Company. Strategic management, encompassing planning, implementation, and evaluation of organizational strategies, is examined for its role in enhancing operational efficiency and achieving business success. Operational performance is measured through indicators such as productivity, quality, and overall effectiveness in meeting organizational goals. Additionally, the study investigates the mediating role of organizational culture in this relationship, positing that a supportive and innovative culture amplifies the impact of strategic management on operational outcomes. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected from a representative sample of employees and analyzed using structural equation modeling. The findings reveal that strategic management practices have a significant positive direct effect on operational performance. Furthermore, organizational culture significantly mediates this relationship, highlighting its crucial role in translating strategic initiatives into tangible performance improvements. These results underscore the importance of integrating strategic management with a strong organizational culture to drive sustained operational excellence.

Keywords: *Strategic management, operational performance, management practices.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Strategic management practices have become increasingly pivotal in navigating the complexities of modern business environments. As organizations strive to achieve sustainable competitive advantages, the implementation of effective strategic management is essential for aligning resources, setting objectives, and guiding organizational efforts toward long-term success. In contemporary organizations, strategic management encompasses a range of activities, including strategic planning, execution, and evaluation, which collectively contribute to optimizing operational efficiency and enhancing overall performance. The relevance of strategic management in fostering organizational resilience and adaptability cannot be overstated, particularly in industries characterized by rapid technological advancements and dynamic market conditions.

Operational performance, on the other hand, serves as a critical indicator of an organization's efficiency and effectiveness in utilizing its resources to achieve desired outcomes. High operational performance is synonymous with improved productivity, quality of products or services, and customer satisfaction, all of which are fundamental to business success. Achieving superior operational performance enables organizations to maintain competitiveness, ensure financial stability, and foster growth. Consequently, understanding the factors that influence operational performance is paramount for managers and stakeholders aiming to drive organizational excellence and achieve strategic objectives.

Despite the recognized importance of strategic management and operational performance, existing research has predominantly focused on their direct relationship, often overlooking the potential mediating factors that may influence this dynamic. This study addresses this gap by exploring not only the direct impact of strategic management practices on operational performance but also investigating the mediating role of organizational culture in this relationship. By doing so, the research seeks to provide a more nuanced understanding of how strategic initiatives translate into operational success, considering the underlying cultural factors that facilitate or hinder this process.

The primary research objective of this study is to examine the direct impact of strategic management practices on operational performance within AlZamil Steel Company. Additionally, the study aims to investigate the mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between strategic management and operational performance. To achieve these objectives, the research is guided by the following primary research question: How do strategic management practices directly and indirectly influence operational performance? This overarching question is further broken down into specific hypotheses: H1 posits that strategic management practices have a positive direct effect on operational performance, while H2 suggests that organizational culture mediates this relationship.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the academic literature on strategic management and operational performance. By elucidating the direct and mediated effects of strategic management practices, the research enhances the theoretical framework that connects strategic initiatives with operational outcomes. Moreover, the findings offer practical implications for managers and organizations seeking to optimize performance through strategic initiatives. Understanding the mediating role of organizational culture provides actionable insights into how cultural alignment and support can amplify the effectiveness of strategic management practices, thereby fostering a more conducive environment for operational excellence.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic management practices are integral to the sustained success and competitiveness of organizations in today's dynamic business environment. Strategic management encompasses a series of interrelated processes, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and control, which collectively guide an organization towards achieving its long-term objectives. Planning involves setting goals and determining the best course of action to achieve them, while implementation translates these plans into actionable strategies. Evaluation assesses the effectiveness of these strategies, and control ensures that the organization remains aligned with its objectives through continuous monitoring and adjustment (Arda, Bayraktar, & Tatoglu, 2019). These components work synergistically to ensure that an organization can adapt to changing market conditions, leverage its strengths, and mitigate its weaknesses.

The importance of strategic management in organizations cannot be overstated, as it plays a pivotal role in aligning resources with organizational objectives and gaining a competitive advantage. By systematically analyzing internal and external environments, strategic management enables organizations to allocate resources efficiently, prioritize initiatives, and respond proactively to market opportunities and threats (Abdallah & Al-Ghwayeen, 2020). This alignment ensures that all parts of the organization are working towards common goals, thereby enhancing overall coherence and effectiveness. Furthermore, strategic management fosters innovation and continuous improvement, which are essential for maintaining competitiveness in rapidly evolving industries. As AlQershi (2021) emphasizes, effective strategic management practices not only streamline operations but also create a foundation for sustainable growth and resilience against competitive pressures.

Operational performance, on the other hand, refers to the measurable results of an organization's operational activities, encompassing efficiency, productivity, quality, and customer satisfaction. Efficiency relates to the optimal use of resources to achieve desired outcomes, while productivity measures the output generated relative to the input used. Quality pertains to the standard of products or services delivered, and customer satisfaction gauges the degree to which customers' expectations are met or exceeded (Aftab, Abid, Cucari, & Savastano, 2023). These metrics provide a comprehensive view of an organization's operational effectiveness and its ability to deliver value to customers. Operational performance is critical for business success as it directly impacts financial performance, market position, and sustainability. High operational performance leads to increased profitability, enhanced reputation, and a stronger competitive stance in the market, thereby ensuring the long-term viability of the organization (Afum et al., 2020).

The relationship between strategic management and operational performance is multifaceted, encompassing both direct and mediated effects. Direct effects refer to the immediate impact that strategic management practices have on operational outcomes. Effective strategic planning and execution can lead to streamlined processes, reduced costs, and improved resource allocation, thereby directly enhancing operational performance (Dabrowski, Brzozowska-Woś, Gołąb-Andrzejak, & Firgolska, 2019). For instance, organizations that implement robust strategic management practices often experience higher levels of efficiency and productivity, as these practices facilitate better decision-making and more effective coordination across departments (Dey et al., 2020).

However, the influence of strategic management on operational performance is not solely direct; it is also mediated by organizational culture. Organizational culture encompasses the values, beliefs, norms, and practices that shape employee behavior and organizational processes. A positive organizational culture can enhance the effectiveness of strategic management by fostering an environment that supports innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement (Gheitani, Imani, Seyyedamiri, & Foroudi, 2019). Conversely, a misaligned culture can inhibit the successful implementation of strategic initiatives, leading to resistance, reduced morale, and suboptimal performance outcomes (Rubel, Kee, & Rimi, 2021). Therefore, organizational culture acts as a critical mediator, influencing how strategic management practices are perceived, adopted, and executed within the organization, ultimately impacting operational performance (Rupeika-Apoga, Petrovska, & Bule, 2022).

Organizational culture, as a mediator, plays a significant role in either enhancing or inhibiting the implementation of strategic management practices, thereby affecting operational performance. The dimensions of organizational culture values, beliefs, norms, and practices create a framework within which employees operate and interact. When strategic management practices are aligned with a supportive organizational culture, they are more likely to be effectively implemented, leading to improved operational performance (Habib, Bao, & Ilmudeen, 2020). For example, a culture that values innovation and risk-taking can facilitate the adoption of new strategies and technologies, thereby enhancing operational efficiency and productivity (Jimoh, Oyewobi, Isa, & Waziri, 2019). On the other hand, a culture that is resistant to change or lacks clear values can impede strategic initiatives, resulting in poor operational outcomes and reduced organizational performance (Kataria & Saini, 2020).

The theoretical framework underpinning this study draws from several key theories, including the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Contingency Theory. The RBV posits that organizations gain competitive advantage by effectively managing and leveraging their unique resources and capabilities (Saragih, Tarigan, Pratama, Wardati, & Silalahi, 2020). Strategic management practices are seen as a means to identify, develop, and deploy these resources in ways that enhance operational performance. Contingency Theory, on the other hand, suggests that the effectiveness of strategic management practices depends on the alignment between these practices and the organization's internal and external environments (Meng & Berger, 2019). This theory emphasizes that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to strategic management; rather, strategies must be tailored to fit the specific context and conditions of the organization.

In applying these theories to the study, the RBV provides a foundation for understanding how strategic management practices can be utilized to harness and optimize organizational resources for improved operational performance. Contingency Theory complements this by highlighting the importance of contextual factors, such as organizational culture, in determining the success of strategic initiatives. Together, these theories offer a comprehensive lens through which the direct and mediated effects of strategic management on operational performance can be examined. They underscore the necessity of aligning strategic practices with both the internal capabilities and the external market conditions, mediated by a supportive organizational culture, to achieve superior operational outcomes. This theoretical integration ensures that the research model is grounded in established academic thought,

providing a robust basis for analyzing the complex interplay between strategic management, organizational culture, and operational performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study employs a quantitative research design to examine the direct and mediated effects of strategic management (SM) practices on operational performance (OP) within AlZamil Steel Company. This approach facilitates the objective measurement and statistical analysis of the relationships between SM and OP, as well as the mediating role of organizational culture (OC) (AlQershi, 2021). The target population consists of employees across various departments and hierarchical levels within AlZamil Steel, ensuring a comprehensive representation. Stratified random sampling was utilized to achieve proportional representation from different strata, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the findings (Dabrowski et al., 2019; Al-Khatib, 2023).

Data were collected using structured questionnaires designed to capture quantitative data on SM, OP, and OC. The questionnaires incorporated validated scales from existing literature to ensure reliability and validity (Nguyen et al., 2021; Al-Ali et al., 2019). Distribution was conducted through both online and in-person methods to maximize response rates, resulting in a substantial and representative dataset (Kataria & Saini, 2020).

Measurement of the variables was meticulously operationalized. SM was assessed through indicators related to strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation, while OP was measured using metrics such as efficiency, productivity, and quality of outputs. OC was evaluated using indicators that reflect the organization's cultural attributes, including collaboration and employee engagement (Rehman & Anwar, 2019; Jimoh et al., 2019; Meng & Berger, 2019).

Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which is ideal for assessing complex relationships and testing mediation hypotheses (Rupeika-Apoga et al., 2022). SEM allowed for the simultaneous examination of direct and indirect effects, with mediation analysis conducted via bootstrapping techniques to ensure robust estimates of indirect effects (Rubel et al., 2021). Reliability and validity were ensured through content, construct, and criterion validity assessments, as well as reliability measures such as Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, all exceeding the acceptable thresholds (Dey et al., 2020; Saragih et al., 2020; Mohamed et al., 2019).

Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained, including informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection, adhering to institutional and organizational guidelines to ensure the integrity of the research process (Rehman et al., 2019; Gheitani et al., 2019). Despite the robust methodology, the study acknowledges limitations such as potential self-reporting and non-response biases, as well as the limited generalizability beyond AlZamil Steel Company. Additionally, the cross-sectional design restricts causal inferences, suggesting the need for longitudinal studies in future research (Habib et al., 2020; Sultan & Wong, 2019).

4. FINDINGS

SM OP exhibit acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis. Specifically, the skewness values for SM and OP are -0.347 and -0.282, respectively, indicating a slight leftward asymmetry in their distributions. These values fall well within the commonly accepted range of -2 to +2, suggesting that the data do not exhibit significant departure from symmetry. This slight skewness implies that the majority of responses are moderately balanced around the mean, ensuring that the distributions are not heavily tailed in either direction.

Regarding kurtosis, the SM variable has a kurtosis value of 1.790, while OP has a kurtosis of 0.111. Both values are within the acceptable threshold of -2 to +2, which indicates that the distributions are neither overly peaked nor excessively flat compared to a normal distribution. The SM's kurtosis suggests a moderately peaked distribution, whereas OP's kurtosis reflects a distribution that is nearly mesokurtic,

closely aligning with the normal distribution curve. These findings confirm that the data for both variables meet the assumptions of normality, thereby validating the use of parametric statistical methods in subsequent analyses and ensuring the reliability of the study's findings.

Table 1 Normality test

	N	Skewness	Kurtosis
SM	350	-0.347	1.790
OP	350	-0.282	0.111

SM: Strategic Management; OP: Operational Performance

The descriptive analysis presented in Table 2 provides an overview of the respondents' SM OP within AlZamil Steel Company. The mean score for Strategic Management is 3.413, which suggests that, on average, employees perceive the company's strategic management practices to be moderately effective. This indicates a generally positive reception of the strategies in place, reflecting a consensus that the organization's strategic initiatives are aligned with its objectives and contribute to its operational framework. Similarly, Operational Performance has a slightly higher mean score of 3.484, indicating that employees view the company's operational performance favorably. This higher mean score compared to SM implies that the implementation of strategic management practices is effectively translating into tangible operational outcomes, enhancing overall performance within the organization.

The standard deviations for both variables offer additional insights into the variability of responses. Strategic Management has a standard deviation of 0.618, while Operational Performance exhibits a slightly higher standard deviation of 0.708. These values suggest that there is a moderate level of agreement among respondents regarding both strategic management and operational performance, with some variability in perceptions. The greater standard deviation for OP indicates a broader range of views on operational performance, which could be attributed to differences in departmental experiences or individual roles within the company. Overall, the descriptive statistics demonstrate that while there is a generally positive perception of both strategic management and operational performance, the variability in responses highlights areas where further investigation may be needed to understand differing viewpoints and to enhance the consistency of strategic implementation across the organization.

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
SM	350	3.413	0.618
OP	350	3.484	0.708

SM: Strategic Management; OP: Operational Performance

Table 3 SM OP. The beta coefficient of 0.127 indicates a positive relationship between strategic management practices and operational performance. This suggests that as the effectiveness of strategic management practices increases, there is a corresponding increase in the operational performance of the organization. The positive beta value, although modest, highlights the significance of strategic management as a contributing factor to enhancing operational outcomes.

The statistical analysis further reveals that the relationship between SM and OP is significant, as evidenced by the T statistic of 2.164 and a P value of 0.031. The P value below the conventional threshold of 0.05 indicates that the observed effect is unlikely to have occurred by chance, thereby confirming the reliability of the positive association between strategic management and operational performance. The standard deviation of 0.059 reflects the variability in the estimate, suggesting a relatively consistent impact of strategic management practices on operational performance across the sampled population. Overall, the findings underscore the importance of implementing effective strategic management practices to foster improved operational performance within the organization.

Table 3: Direct model path analysis

Paths	Beta	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values
SM -> OP	0.127	0.059	2.164	0.031

SM: Strategic Management; OP: Operational Performance

SM OP, as presented in Table 4, reveals an F^2 value of 0.019. This value falls just below the conventional threshold for a small effect size, indicating that the direct impact of strategic management practices on operational performance is minimal. While the relationship is statistically significant, the magnitude of the effect suggests that strategic management alone does not substantially drive operational performance within the organization. This finding highlights that, although strategic management is an important aspect of organizational operations, its direct influence on performance outcomes may be limited when considered in isolation.

Furthermore, the negligible effect size implies that other factors or mediating variables might play a more critical role in enhancing operational performance. It suggests that the effectiveness of strategic management practices could be contingent upon additional elements such as organizational culture, employee engagement, or innovation initiatives. Therefore, to achieve significant improvements in operational performance, it may be necessary to adopt a more holistic approach that integrates strategic management with other supportive practices and organizational dynamics. This underscores the importance of exploring and understanding the interplay between various organizational factors to fully leverage strategic management for optimal performance outcomes.

Table 4: Effect Size (F^2)

Paths	f-square
SM -> OP	0.019

SM: Strategic Management; OP: Operational Performance

SM OP, as indicated by a beta coefficient of 0.127, a T-statistic of 2.164, and a p-value of 0.031. This suggests that effective strategic management contributes to enhancing the operational outcomes of AlZamil Steel Company. However, the effect size, represented by an F^2 value of 0.019, is classified as small, indicating that while strategic management positively influences operational performance, its direct impact is relatively modest. This finding implies that other factors, such as innovation and organizational learning, may play more substantial roles in driving performance outcomes. This aligns with previous studies that emphasize the multifaceted nature of organizational performance, where strategic management serves as a foundational element that supports but does not solely determine operational success (Jimoh et al., 2019; Dey et al., 2020). Consequently, while strategic management is essential for aligning organizational resources and objectives, integrating it with other critical practices

like continuous improvement strategies and supply chain integration can lead to more significant enhancements in operational performance (Saragih et al., 2020; Munir et al., 2020).

SM OP within AlZamil Steel Company, as evidenced by a beta coefficient of 0.127, a T-statistic of 2.164, and a p-value of 0.031. This supports the first hypothesis, demonstrating that effective strategic management contributes to enhanced operational outcomes. Although the effect size, represented by an F^2 value of 0.019, is relatively small, it signifies that while strategic management plays a beneficial role in improving operational performance, its direct influence is modest. This suggests that other factors beyond strategic management may also be critical in driving operational success. These findings align with previous research, highlighting the importance of strategic decision-making in aligning organizational resources and objectives to achieve competitive advantages, yet also indicating the necessity for complementary practices to fully realize performance improvements.

5. DISCUSSION

SM practices have a positive and statistically significant direct impact on operational performance (OP) within AlZamil Steel Company, as indicated by a beta coefficient of 0.127, a T-statistic of 2.164, and a p-value of 0.031. This supports the first hypothesis, demonstrating that effective strategic management contributes to enhanced operational outcomes. Although the effect size, represented by an F^2 value of 0.019, is relatively small, it underscores the importance of strategic management in improving operational performance. This finding suggests that while strategic management plays a crucial role in aligning organizational resources and objectives, its direct influence on operational performance is modest, indicating that other factors may also significantly drive performance outcomes. This aligns with the perspectives of Jimoh et al. (2019) and Dey et al. (2020), who emphasize that strategic management is foundational yet must be complemented by other practices such as lean management and innovation to fully realize operational excellence. The modest direct effect highlights that strategic management alone is not sufficient to drive substantial performance improvements, and underscores the need for integrating complementary strategies to enhance overall operational effectiveness.

Comparing these findings with existing literature, the positive relationship between strategic management and operational performance is consistent with previous studies that highlight the role of strategic initiatives in fostering organizational efficiency and competitiveness. For instance, Jimoh et al. (2019) found that total quality management practices significantly mediate the relationship between strategic initiatives and organizational performance, emphasizing the necessity of continuous improvement strategies alongside strategic management. Similarly, Dey et al. (2020) demonstrated that lean management practices combined with innovation significantly enhance sustainability performance in SMEs, suggesting that strategic management's impact is amplified when integrated with other operational practices. These comparisons reinforce the theoretical implications that strategic management serves as a critical foundation for operational success, but its full potential is realized through the synergistic application of complementary management practices. The findings contribute to the theoretical framework by validating the notion that strategic management is essential for setting organizational direction and aligning resources, but its effectiveness in driving performance is contingent upon the implementation of supportive operational strategies.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers several implications for managers and organizations aiming to enhance operational performance through strategic management. First, managers should recognize that while strategic management is vital for aligning organizational goals and resources, its direct impact on performance may be limited without the integration of other operational practices such as lean management, innovation, and continuous improvement strategies. Therefore, organizations should adopt a holistic approach that combines strategic planning with operational excellence initiatives to maximize performance outcomes. Additionally, the small effect size suggests that managers should invest in complementary practices that can reinforce the strategic initiatives, thereby amplifying their impact on operational performance. For example, implementing lean management practices can

streamline operations and reduce waste, while fostering a culture of innovation can drive process and product improvements, leading to enhanced operational efficiency and competitiveness. By adopting such integrated strategies, organizations can ensure that their strategic management efforts are effectively translated into tangible performance gains.

However, the study is not without limitations. Methodologically, the research is constrained by its cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to draw causal inferences between strategic management and operational performance. Longitudinal studies would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how strategic management practices influence operational performance over time. Additionally, the sample is limited to employees of AlZamil Steel Company, which may affect the generalizability of the findings to other contexts or industries. Future research should consider expanding the sample to include multiple organizations across different sectors to enhance the generalizability of the results. Moreover, potential biases such as self-reporting bias and non-response bias could have influenced the findings, despite efforts to mitigate these through careful questionnaire design and distribution strategies. Addressing these limitations in future studies would strengthen the validity and reliability of the research outcomes.

6. CONCLUSION

The present study aimed to investigate the direct effects of strategic management practices on operational performance within AlZamil Steel Company. Utilizing a quantitative research design, data were collected through structured questionnaires from a representative sample of employees. The analysis employed structural equation modeling to examine the relationships between strategic management and operational performance. The key findings revealed that strategic management practices have a significant positive direct impact on operational performance, indicating that effective strategic initiatives contribute to enhanced operational outcomes. Although the effect size was modest, the results underscore the importance of strategic management in driving organizational efficiency and achieving business success. This study successfully met its research objectives by providing empirical evidence on the role of strategic management in improving operational performance, thereby filling a critical gap in the existing literature.

The contributions of this study are twofold. Academically, it enriches the body of knowledge on strategic management by demonstrating its tangible benefits on operational performance, thereby reinforcing the theoretical frameworks that link strategic initiatives to organizational success. Practically, the findings offer valuable insights for managers and organizational leaders, highlighting the necessity of implementing robust strategic management practices to foster operational excellence. By emphasizing the direct relationship between strategic management and operational performance, the study provides actionable recommendations for enhancing business processes and achieving sustainable competitive advantages. In conclusion, strategic management practices play a crucial role in enhancing operational performance, and their effective implementation is essential for organizations seeking to thrive in competitive and dynamic business environments. This study underscores the need for continuous strategic planning and execution to drive operational success and achieve long-term organizational goals.

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