

A Strategic Management Framework Analysis and Research Agenda of Social Pressures, COVID-19 Pandemic, Russia-Ukraine War, and Global Sustainability of Organizational Responses – Implications, Insights, New Directions, and Challenges for Future

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The purpose of this paper is to explore a variety of social pressures influencing organizational performance and capabilities to achieve long term sustainability. Organizations continuously assess their business strategies to achieve their version of success. Both internal and external pressures greatly influence changes in these strategies for the organization to adapt to these social pressures at various levels of degree.

To better understand the impacts that social pressures have on an organization's strategic management efforts, this research has included published research articles along with fairly-recent news and opinion-based articles. Understanding that news and opinion-based writings typically present a bias leaning towards a particular perspective, this study believes that such events further accentuate the impact social pressures have on the strategic management process of an organization.

Strategic management involves the continuous planning, monitoring, analyzing, and assessing the needs of an organization to successfully achieve its goals and objectives. The impacts social pressures have require constantly revising an organization's strategy to adapt to these pressures, especially now with COVID-19. The implications this study highlights are the broader extrinsic values associated with multiple aspects of an organization.

Keywords: strategic management, diversity, ethics, social pressures, social media, political turbulence, stakeholders, COVID-19, Russia-Ukraine war, sustainability, leadership, global impact, ethical awareness, organizational strategies

OVERVIEW AND INTRODUCTION

It is important to better and deeply understand how the leaders of an organization should respond to social pressures throughout their strategic management processes. The introduction of so many complex and wide variety of social aspects, that are currently affecting us on the global stage, overshadows the

importance of developing a strategy that provides an organization the long term sustainability necessary (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2018; Chowdhury Paul, Kaiser, & Mokterdir, 2021; Kniffin et al., 2021; Posner, 2022; Porter, 2022), keeping in mind the COVID-19 pandemic and related supply chain challenges. Objectively, an organization relies on its leadership to follow a strategic management process, guided by internal policies, to develop this sustainable strategy. Over the last several years, reality has shown us how important it is to be aware of the social narratives that have been directly influencing some organizations to make strategic decisions.

Strategic management involves five process stages that include an organization setting their goals and objectives, analysis of the organization's needs, formulation of the organization's strategy, implementation of that strategy, and monitoring the effectiveness of this strategy (Rothaermel, 2021). This method allows organizations an opportunity to gain a competitive advantage over competitors by providing guidance through the development of policies and strategic initiatives (Barney, 1986, 1991; 1997; Powell, 1995). These are designed around the purposes of achieving strategic organizational goals and objectives and to appropriately allocate resources to implement these initiatives. Big-picture strategic initiatives that have been implemented require active monitoring to ensure they achieve the desired results.

An organization's proficiency to recognize, acknowledge, and rapidly adapt to a variety of social pressures has become increasingly important, in recently years, due to a multitude of rapidly changing situations (Shao, 2009; Ikram et al., 2020). These pressures are widely considered to be key determinants in the strategic management process as organizations continuously face an increasing number of external pressures that have a direct impact on an organization's strategic decisions (Chofreh et al., 2021; Shao, 2009). Some pressures can be considered externalities to an organization's business model, while others are intended to influence an organization's leadership style, strategic decision making process, and organizational culture and behaviors.

The leadership of any organization is responsible for shaping organizational strategies by implementing guiding policies and strategic initiatives to reach their goals and objectives (Jhamb & Carlson, 2020; Jhamb et al., 2021; Pinkow & Schulze, 2020). This requires a constant assessment of society and the internal relevance it has towards their organizational culture and ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment. Leadership's ability to be aware of these changes allow them to anticipate the impacts derived from each decision they make (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2018). This is difficult to achieve in a world with such complexity involved with navigating through recent political events, diversity issues, social media controlling narratives, and ethical considerations. All these external environmental factors include highly polarizing topics and can have a detrimental impact on the organization.

Some of the recent political events have had a significant impact on the strategic management process of organizations around the globe. As events unfold, it is important to assess each of these impacts to determine whether organizations should adapt their strategic initiatives to coincide with these events or to continue with strategies they have already established within the organization. One of the more immediate and traumatic political events impacting business on a global scale is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The unexpected invasion of a sovereign nation has corporate businesses in disarray pressuring business operations from some of the larger and better known brand names, such as Apple, McDonalds, and Mercedes-Benz, to pull their operations out of the country. This decision is made to shield their reputation from negative press while being able to promote their standards of corporate responsibility. Oil companies, like BP and Shell, have chosen to cease their operations within Russian along with voiding ongoing contractual obligations, investments, and any corporate ownership they may have with their Russian counterparts. These political decisions are forced upon an organization with very little time to react, limiting the ability to adequately plan the removal of their operational assets.

Topics of diversity have been a large part of the conversation when organizations are assessing their strategic priorities (Dezso & Ross, 2012; Jhamb et al., 2021). Using the term diversity introduces a wide variety of perspectives and rhetoric that tends to be a highly polarizing external factor from a perspective of strategic management. It affects an organization's understanding of multiple perspectives applied towards conflict resolution, differences between identity groups, improvements towards creativity, problem solving, and successful team building. Incorporating this understanding into an organization's culture

provides a competitive advantage (Barney, 1997, 2001; Powell, 1995). Topics of diversity can also have an immense impact on strategic decision making outside of implementing business policies or strategic initiatives (Dezso & Ross, 2012). It is shown that employers that value and respect their employee's perspectives, experiences, and skillsets tend to outpace their competition. Providing a diverse and inclusive work environment increases both the morale and loyalty of employees shows improved performance and morale that is easily sustainable (Jhamb et al., 2021; Richard, 2000; Todd, 2019).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

Social Media has had a profound influence on organizational strategy, leadership, competitive advantages of organizations, and diversity, inclusion, and social justice in recent years (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020). With the introduction of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, social media can reach millions of customers around the world almost instantly (Nordmeyer, 2022). This has transformed the global business landscape by allowing organizations to consistently communicate with their customer base and allows for public feedback on products and services that are offered. This method of customer engagement has become to be known as an omni-channel strategy. The downside that social media improvements have introduced are public expectations that organizations are required to listen and immediately respond to their customer base regarding social issues that are unrelated to the organization's primary business model. Organizations are now having to contend with social issues that are broadcast on global media platforms where the public can read, hear, interpret, and broadcast their own opinion based narratives on drive-by snippets of information. Unfortunately, this method of communication has become commonplace alongside the rapidly growing social media platforms (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020).

Ethical considerations are a major part of today's business world where the court of public opinion rapidly interprets strategic decisions and passes judgement against an organization. Ethical considerations that organizations commonly encounter is the ethical treatment of employees, whether they are paid a fair and equitable, wage or have good working conditions. These considerations become an ethical issue for an organization when they are based on the employee's race, ethnicity, sex, or other forms of personal identity, and are used to influence the outcome (Jhamb & Carlson, 2020; Jhamb et al., 2021). Other ethical considerations organizations make involve practicing good customer service, providing good quality products, and ensuring customers are receiving the expected value from the products or services they provide. In some capacities, the strategic management process is also responsible for implementing executive strategic plans to meet or exceed customer expectations while continuing to uphold a credible reputation.

The strategic management process can be difficult without strong leadership and an effective approach for developing strategic plans and to effectively implementing them, especially while navigating through a multitude of social pressures (Barney, 1986, 1997, 2001). While strategic planning is crucial to understanding where an organization is heading, it is just as important to understand how the organization will get there. An effective approach for this involves organizational leadership having a clear understanding of the strategic management process while affectively anticipating and understanding impending social pressures that may have an impact on the organization's strategic plans (Foltean, Trif, & Tuleu, 2019). The effectiveness of this approach relies heavily on the organization's strategic leadership and effectiveness of their communication.

An organization's culture is driven by its leadership and can be considered one of many tools used to influence and control strategic management behaviors. An organization's culture is of primary importance for the success of an organization by motivating employees to increase operational performance and maintain a competitive advantage over competitors (Shehada, 2020; Schein, 2010). Organizational culture is representative of values that are held by both leadership and employees creating the organization's public image. Typically, an organization's culture is primarily developed from within, but the increase of online media platforms available to the public has shifted this dynamic to one that is now heavily influenced by externalities (for a full review, please see Barney, 1997; Dezso & Ross, 2012; Jhamb & Carlson, 2020).

LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIES

The ability to adapt to change is essential for long-term sustainability in today's rapidly evolving business world. Leaders must be aware of external factors that could potentially impact their organization and adapt accordingly (Pinkow & Schulze, 2020). One theory suggests a model of "leadership for organizational adaptability" (Pinkow & Schulze, 2020) to handle tensions between externalities and the business operational environment. This relies on leadership's ability to recognize when adaptive change is necessary and provide a framework that supports the generation of new and innovative ideas for adapting to dynamic environmental changes (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2018).

In today's world we have an opportunity to apply this concept towards adapting organizational response to handle an increasing number of social pressures. Some of the more prominent categories of social pressures organizations face today include unanticipated political events like Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a wide range of diversity issues, ethical considerations, and the astounding impact social media has had over the last decade. The challenges that each of these elements provide are impossible for leaders to ignore, and require organizational leadership (Arena & Uhl-Bien, 2018) to be socially aware, promote innovation to maintain a competitive advantage, structure organizational culture to adapt to global cultures (Foltean, Trif, & Tuleu, 2019). Achieving success with transforming an organizational culture into one able to adapt to complex social pressures on a global scale, but high level contributions can be made towards this by observing the established culture, contributing to the cultural conversation, act as a role model for change, actively ignore or oppose problematic behaviors, and promote positive cultural elements to foster growth (Center for Creative Leadership, 2021).

SOCIAL PRESSURES AND TURMOIL – THE COVID-19 SHADOWS

There are many forms of social pressure that can impact organizations both positive and negative (Foltean, Trif, & Tuleu, 2019). Successful leaders focus on anticipating externalities as it relates to the organization's strategic management process to increase overall performance while attempting to mitigate unnecessary fallout with their customer base. "Social pressure matters. Firms need to be attentive to these kinds of pressure" (Shao, 2009). This accentuates the level of importance social pressure has toward the success, or failure, of an organization's strategic goals and objectives. With the assistance of the wide variety of available social media platforms and mobile devices, social influences can easily affect an organization in both positive and negative ways (Posner, 2022). Some of these influences can be attributed to the internal culture of an organization, while others are external factors like politics, environmental groups, or groups more recently identified as social justice warriors (Shehada, 2010). There have been several occurrences where organizational strategies are not congruent with certain social changes emerging over the last few years and have been met with fierce criticism for not adjusting their corporate strategies to be more in line with values that are currently deemed as socially acceptable to the public (Foltean, Trif, & Tuleu, 2019). Some of these organizations, and individuals, have experienced severe consequences for refusing to publicly realign their values that include bad publicity, boycotting of goods and services, and what has recently become known as cancel culture. There are many ways to respond to these pressures. A range of possible actions that seem to be commonly taken include not taking any action, conforming to social demands beyond what is legally required, integrating legal requirements into company policy, implementing superficial changes to seem socially compliant, and taking the minimal steps required as a symbolic gesture of conformance (Hawn, 2019).

SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS STRATEGIES

The benefits that social media platforms have provided organizations over the last decade are enormous. The ability of social media to support organizational processes to increase financial performance, marketing capabilities, and facilitate bi-directional communication with a global customer base has been impressive (Foltean, Trif, & Tuleu, 2019). This has provided companies the ability to expand their reach almost

instantaneously regarding public relations, customer relations, and easier methods of recruiting skilled employees that have provided smaller organizations a way to achieve a competitive advantage not previously available (Nordmeyer, 2022).

Some of the top social media platforms influencing strategic management decisions include Twitter, Facebook, and LinkedIn. These platforms have dramatically altered the social landscape of society by opening social discussions on a level playing field between society and organizations. Twitter is expected to exceed 329 million users in 2022 alone (Beveridge, 2022). This allows a single platform to rapidly distribute opinion based remarks on any topic, whether these opinions are based on fact, a result of an emotional outburst, or intentionally spreading false information. The reputation of a corporation can be directly impacted by a single stakeholder that is dissatisfied by any number of decisions a company makes (Chang et al., 2021). For example, this could be an organization that supports a certain social group, has investments in a particular foreign country, or simply make a statement that is interpreted differently than intended. Someone that finds this offensive on a personal level can express their opinions on Twitter and immediately garner a viral response supporting them. This has the potential to severely damage an organization's reputation requiring an immediate response (Porter, 2022). Similar situations can be seen with Facebook and LinkedIn where someone posts experiences and opinions they have towards organizations that often force leadership to form strategic responses or develop strategies to act on them (Ikram et al., 2020).

WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND FIRM COMPETITIVENESS PERFORMANCE

Diversity in the workplace has long been a contentious issue for businesses to deal with (Dezso & Ross, 2012). This is a wide ranging topic that can include a variety of meaning including racial diversity, gender diversity, and most recently sexual diversity. Merit can be attributed to both sides of the argument when it comes to any of these topics as it relates to effective strategic management within an organization (Jhamb et al., 2021). Diversity in the workplace is widely considered both important and even imperative as it provides an organization a competitive advantage. Even with the understanding that this provides a positive opportunity for growth, initiatives promoting diversity lag the narrative (Todd, 2019).

One of the more challenging aspects of diversity for a human resources department is cultural diversity. An organization's diverse workforce are assumed to influence an organization's strategic management process, as well as the impacts towards the bottom line, is much more elusive. (Richard, 2000). Evidence to support these assumptions have been virtually nonexistent. Further contradicting the assumptions that executive decision-making and strategic planning in executive diversity inhibits the comprehensive analysis of ongoing situations during the strategic management process. Cumulative research shows that the relationship between organizational performance and strategic analysis performs statistically significantly as well as both comprehensively and extensively, given the diverse nature of workforce and strategic business outcomes of global firms (Miller, Burke, & Glick, 1998).

POLITICAL EVENTS AND DEVELOPMENTS AMIDST THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Political turbulence has been on the rise over the past several years for many reasons. Some of the more prominent political events contributing to this turbulence has come from our presidential elections, the COVID-19 pandemic, and most recently Russia's unwarranted invasion of Ukraine. When Donald Trump was elected during the 2016 elections he proceeded to implement tariffs on Chinese goods coming into the U.S. One of the goals for this strategy was to leverage the increased cost of importing products into the U.S., that are manufactured in China, as an incentive to bring manufacturing businesses back to the U.S. (Reshoring Institute, 2019). Another major goal for this was to force China to make changes to their trade practices that hold U.S. based organizations at a disadvantage (Davis, 2019). This had a tremendous impact on trade relations with China and U.S. based businesses related to operational, manufacturing and shipping costs, requiring organizational leaders to rapidly change their strategies to adapt with this governmental shift in policy.

The next major event came with COVID-19 requiring a global economic shutdown for, well over a year, to stop the spread of a virus we knew very little about. This forced small businesses to either close their doors for an unknown duration of time or revise their strategy to assist with producing hand sanitizer, masks, or provide transportation for traditional medical supplies where needed (McKinsey Research, 2022). Another big impact this event caused was a dramatic shift with the concept of remote work capabilities instead of the traditional physical presence in a work environment. Virtual meetings and collaboration have been difficult for many businesses to adapt to. The same is said for a lot of education services that have been required to revise their platforms to provide remote learning alternatives. This has required each business to reengage their corporate strategic management process to develop new ways to operate moving forward (McKinsey Research, 2022).

The most recent and continuing political event involves an unwarranted invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This has caused an economic ripple across the world. It is difficult to anticipate the correct course of action your organization should take and how soon you should react to information as you receive it, or if you should react at all. The scale at which Russia's invasion of Ukraine has impacted the world since its inception is astounding, and we will continue to feel them years from now (McIntyre, 2022). The largest impacts will be seen through rising food prices, an increase in gas prices, and Russia's economy being completely shut off from the global economic community.

This is one of the most important wheat producing regions on the globe accounting for approximately one-third of global wheat exports. Ukraine is also a major exporter of corn and barley using the Black Sea as their primary shipping lane. Following the price increases for basic food items due to the pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine is anticipated to further increase food prices by nearly double what they currently are (MacDonald & Stiff, 2022). With most food producers relying on grains from this region, global producers will need to revisit their supply chain strategy to find alternative sources of wheat that can meet their demand requirements (Chowdhury et al., 2021).

This event has also been partly responsible for a decrease in the global oil supply which has helped increase gas prices in the U.S. to record highs. A large portion, approximately 40%, of Russia's economy is the exportation of oil and gas. Many of the larger oil companies have decided to withdraw their investment holdings from Russia including BP, Exxon, Shell, and Norway's Equinor (Posner, 2022). These companies stand to lose a substantial amount of money by suddenly withdrawing their holdings as well as halting any new investments in the country due to this massive humanitarian crisis willingly created by Russia's Vladimir Putin. This was a strategic decision made by each company that weighed the opportunity costs and business risks against a global public outcry in opposition to this invasion. Other industries have followed suit and made similar alterations to their strategic initiatives. Automobile makers have also made strategic decisions to exclude Russia from their business ventures moving forward. Toyota has halted local manufacturing and vehicle imports in St. Petersburg, Russia as they monitor the ongoing situation and adjust their strategic position accordingly (Toyota, 2022). Mercedes-Benz has also suspended vehicle exports and halt their manufacturing to comply with sanctions that have been enacted against Russia (Kirby, 2022). Volvo, Harley-Davidson, and Renault have also followed the same strategic path of halting business operations with Russia citing similar reasons. Brewing industries, Restaurants, textile companies, and financial institutions have all stopped operating their businesses until further notice. There is a long list of companies around the world that have made the same strategic decision to cease operations with Russia to mitigate their losses moving forward (Chan, 2022).

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

Leadership within an organization is responsible for the continuous development of effective strategic goals and objectives (Jhamb & Carlson, 2020; Jhamb et al., 2021). Having the mindfulness of certain ethical considerations helps guide them through this strategic planning process to effectively implement the organization's strategic initiatives (Saha, Cerchione, Singh, & Dahiya, 2020). Some key ethical considerations in this process include stakeholder engagement, internal values of an organization, individual values, and management of change, (Robinson, 2003), integrating ethics into the strategic

management process provides an organization with the ability to align their corporate values and initiatives with society's standards. Incorporating an internal code of conduct acceptable to their stakeholders provides direction for employee behaviors, during some situations, promoting organizational values over those of an individual. It is often difficult to balance ethical decisions with organizational goals if ethical boundaries are left unclear (Hill, 2022).

Considering stakeholder engagement as one of the key ethical considerations it is imperative to understand what this means in the context of strategic management (Jhamb & Carlson, 2020). Organization's often make significant changes in their strategies in reaction to various types of social pressure. This often parallels with structural changes in the organization to effectively implement these strategic changes. Engaging stakeholders in this process provides a variety of perspectives that only improves the outcome of the decision making process (Robinson, 2003). These stakeholders can either be internal or external to the organization, which may include the organization's customer base, employees, or shareholders.

Other key ethical considerations involve the ethical treatment of employees. This has a range of applications that can include diversity issues during hiring practices, offering promotions, or fair and equitable pay. These are all issues commonly brought up involving daily business practice and should be given proper consideration during the strategic management process (Saha, Cerchione, Singh, & Dahiya, 2020). Attention should also be given towards working conditions provided to employees. This could mean situations where proper equipment is supplied without defects, includes proper safety enhancements to prevent or mitigate injury, periodic inspections are performed, and training sessions for proper utilization procedures can be followed (OSHA - Occupational Safety and Health Administration, 2022). It is also important to ensure operational outputs such as adequate customer service is provided to customers wherever possible, and consistent quality standards are upheld for all products and services provided to meet or exceed customer expectations (BBC, 2022).

Throughout this research, it has become clear that the affect social pressures have on an organization. The ability to navigate through these influences is a significant factor for achieving long term sustainability and maintaining viability in their market field (Saha, Cerchione, Singh, & Dahiya, 2020). Any organization lacking the ability to recognize and determine an appropriate strategy moving forward can easily find themselves in a socially unacceptable position by a large portion of their stakeholders. In some cases, this can exceed a typical flare-up of emotions and end up with an organization facing some sort of social boycott or in more extreme circumstances socially cancelled.

ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACTS AND CHALLENGES

The impacts felt by an organization due to any of the social pressures, previously identified, can have a wide range of consequences felt not only by the organization itself, but to its stakeholders and customer base (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020). It is conceivable to note that strategic management works within a concept of cognitive control to assist organizations with achieving a successful balance of behavior that is socially acceptable while providing the financial performance and long-term sustainability that businesses strive for. It is understood that businesses operate under the incentive of financial profit. Typical business practice includes the use of metrics to gauge a sense of operational performance, project performance, investment performance, and overall financial performance to help measure an organizations operating performance. Over the last decade, the rapid development of social media platforms has elevated the importance that social pressures have towards strategic management decisions and the behaviors they elicit from today's leadership making those decisions (Foltean, Trif, & Tuleu, 2019). One example supporting this involves racial diversity and a narrative that has consistently circulated the media that states America is a racist country. Social media has allowed a relatively small number of people to promote this narrative and slander those that disagree. Social media platforms used for opinionated grandstanding of this nature tend to have severe consequences for businesses regardless of there being any truth to it (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020). On the other hand, the strategic benefit organizations have is to quickly organize and garner support that allow them to help the

people of Ukraine. This is a clear example of how a unified social response can pressure organizations to make decisions that provide them positive brand exposure in an otherwise horrible situation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This body of research substantiates in detail the many recent social pressures that have had global organizations weighing strategic decisions with little time to plan an appropriate response, given the COVID-19 shock and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Attempting to navigate through a constant variation of social diversity issues, political events, and ethical considerations simultaneously is near impossible without offending someone and igniting an overnight viral social media response (Chofreh et al., 2021; Jhamb & Carlson, 2020). These often overly opinionated responses seem to drive narratives of a situation forcing business leadership to be reactionary rather than proactively strategize an appropriate response. While social media platforms present exceptional opportunities for organizations to achieve success (Olanrewaju, Hossain, Whiteside, & Mercieca, 2020), it is imperative to have a good basis of understanding for the consequences of not having a strategic plan implemented to adequately deal with the variety of risks social pressures introduce. The most important aspect strategic management can provide any organization, to handle social pressures and political turmoil, is whether these impacts are positive or negative, and how influential they are towards the long-term sustainability of the organization.

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