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Chimakati Fredrick Mutsoli & Dr. Edward Nzinga

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[*1]Chimakati Fredrick Mutsoli & [2]Dr. Edward Nzinga

[1]Student, Pan Africa Christian University

[2]Lecturer, Pan Africa Christian University

***Email of corresponding author: freddiechi@gmail.com**

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Abstract

Strategic leadership is a critical practice in modern organizations, and the various schools of thought illuminate its complexities. This study explores into these schools of thought, including the Power School, Cultural School, Environmental School, and Configuration School, highlighting their distinct points of view, strengths, and weaknesses. The objective of the study is to provide a comprehensive examination of these strategic management schools of thought, shedding light on their distinct perspectives. This research employs a literature-based methodology, drawing on a diverse set of scholarly sources and research articles. The study provided a comprehensive overview of each strategic management school, exploring their key concepts, characteristics, and contributions to the field by reviewing and synthesizing existing literature on the subject. The study found that each strategic management school provides valuable insights into strategy formation through our literature-based analysis. The Power School emphasizes power dynamics, the Cultural School emphasizes the importance of shared values, the Environmental School emphasizes adaptability to external factors, and the Configuration School views strategy as a dynamic transformation process. While each of these schools has its own set of advantages and disadvantages, they all emphasize the multifaceted and dynamic nature of strategic management. The study concluded that the importance of organizations adopting a multifaceted approach to strategic management. Organizations can benefit from integrating insights from multiple schools of thought rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all strategy. This approach enables the development of robust and adaptable strategies, improving an organization's ability to thrive in a rapidly changing business environment. Strategic management is still a complex and dynamic process that is required for modern organizational success.

Keywords: *Strategic Leadership, Power School, Cultural School, Environmental School, Configuration School*

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1.0 Introduction

The subject of strategic leadership has received significant interest from both professionals and scholars (De Kluyver & Pearce, 2009; Mintzberg et al., 2005; Hughes & Beatty, 2005). De Kluyver and Pearce (2009) assert that strategic leadership encompasses a comprehensive approach to navigating an organization through the intricacies of the contemporary business environment as cited by Chimakati (2023). This amalgamation entails the integration of conventional leadership attributes with the capacity to devise and execute efficacious strategies. The notion of strategic leadership is not a novel concept; however, it has undergone evolutionary changes throughout its existence. According to Mintzberg et al. (2005), the concept of strategy has evolved over time, encompassing various schools of thought such as design, planning, entrepreneurship, and cognitive perspectives as cited by Chimakati (2023). Each of these educational institutions contributes to the advancement of our comprehension of strategic leadership by emphasizing distinct facets, including the significance of vision, planning, or adaptability. The practical application of strategic leadership carries extensive and significant implications. According to Chimakati (2023), Hughes and Beatty (2005) argue that the attainment of strategic leadership is not merely an individual objective, but rather a crucial factor for the long-term prosperity of an organization. The authors place significant importance on the role of strategic leaders in cultivating an organizational culture that places a high value on both strategic thinking and execution. This influence extends beyond the current state of the organization and also encompasses its future trajectory (Thomas, 2008).

In the realm of academia, strategic leadership has become an interdisciplinary subject, drawing from fields like psychology, sociology, and economics to create a more complete understanding of what effective strategic leadership entails (Hughes & Beatty, 2005). This also highlights the need for a multi-faceted approach to studying and teaching this critical subject, especially at the doctoral level. In terms of empirical research, there is an ever-growing body of work that aims to quantify and measure the impact of strategic leadership on various organizational outcomes (De Kluyver & Pearce, 2009). These studies often employ a range of methodologies, from case studies and surveys to experimental designs, thereby enriching our understanding of the field (Sull, 2009). Given the ever-changing landscape of the modern business environment, marked by factors such as globalization, technological advances, and social shifts, the role of strategic leadership has never been more critical. As Mintzberg et al. (2005) note, the 'wilds of strategic management' are complex and challenging, requiring a sophisticated approach that only strategic leadership can provide. The literature also emphasizes the ethical dimensions of strategic leadership (Hughes & Beatty, 2005). In a world where short-term gains are often prioritized, strategic leaders have a responsibility to consider the long-term implications of their actions, not just for their organizations but also for society at large (Satterlee, 2013).

1.1 Discussion

Strategic leadership helps organizations navigate today's complex business environment. The concept includes the cognitive, behavioral, and persuasive skills needed to sustain an organization. Effective strategic leaders can create and communicate a clear vision and mission and understand the importance of continuous learning, adaptation, and tactical execution. Strategic leadership is now a multidimensional field thanks to diverse schools of thought. According to Mintzberg et al. (2005), educational institutions provide theoretical frameworks and practical strategies to help strategic leaders overcome challenges and seize opportunities as cited by Chimakati (2023).

Strategic leadership has been defined and implemented differently by different schools of thought. The Design School emphasizes aligning an organization's capabilities with its external opportunities, giving leaders a clear and direct strategic planning method. The Learning School emphasizes emergent processes and organizational learning, emphasizing adaptability. These educational institutions offer a variety of methods that have advanced strategic leadership in both practical and theoretical domains. In strategic management, Johnsen (2015) identified ten schools of thought. Prescriptive, descriptive process-oriented, and integrative schools are the main categories. Strategy formulation is the focus of prescriptive schools like Design, Planning, and Positioning (Quaye et al., 2015). In contrast, descriptive schools of thought examine and analyze organizational strategy development and implementation processes (Glatthorn et al., 2018). The Configuration School integrates diverse components from other schools. Strategic leaders must understand the strengths and weaknesses of each school as they navigate the complex and ever-changing business landscape (Chimakati, 2023).

1.1.1 Design School (Conception)

The Design School is one of the first and most influential frameworks for understanding strategy-formation (Bellamy et al., 2019). According to Chimakati (2023), the Harvard Business School General Management group popularized this school of thought, which is rooted in Philip Selznick and Alfred D. Chandler. Its model is simple but fundamental: strategy is about matching an organization's SWOT and external opportunities and threats. The Design School model emphasizes external and internal evaluation. External appraisal involves understanding industry structure and social, political, and economic factors that may affect the business. Internal appraisal examines an organization's strengths and weaknesses, or 'character', which has developed over time. Conception is central to strategy formation, according to the Design School and according to Chimakati (2023). This educational institution emphasizes simplification and aligning an organization's internal capacities with external prospects. The school in question is often credited with establishing the foundations for other schools of thought. Thus, it has given scholars and practitioners essential tools for understanding strategy (Mintzberg et al., 2020). Germain-Alamartine and Moghadam-Saman (2020) say the Design School's focus on organizational strengths and environmental opportunities is important and suggests using the company's core competencies to capitalize on opportunities. The focus on 'fit' helps managers and leaders make strategic decisions and efficiently mobilize resources (Kabetu & Iravo, 2018). The Design School's simplicity makes strategy easy to understand (Savin-Baden & Major, 2023). It provides a foundation for businesses and other organizations without the resources to use more complex or analytical strategies. For smaller companies or those in the early stages of strategic development, strategic thinking can be started directly (Mintzberg et al., 2005).

1.1.2 Planning School (Formal Process)

The 1970s saw the rise of strategic management's Planning School (Küng, 2016). This school emphasized formal procedure, training, and analysis. Strategic planning departments with direct access to the CEO were established. This strategy formation method influenced academia and business, but it suffered setbacks. Critics say the Planning School's influence waned due to a lack of quality development in its ideas and empirical research supporting its practices. The SWOT model underpins many Planning School models. Setting objectives, conducting internal and external audits, evaluating strategies, and operationalizing them are the steps in this approach

(Thomas & Thomas, 2021). The goal is to explicitly set and quantify organizational goals. This phase evaluates market trends and competitors. Planners forecast future conditions using scenario building and other methods. This audit examines the company's internal strengths and weaknesses. Strategic effectiveness is assessed using ROI (Return on Investment), risk analysis, and shareholder value calculations. In the final step, strategies are subdivided for easy implementation. The Planning School is criticized for its rigidity and insistence on formalities (Bromiley et al., 2015). Given its often rigid, pre-defined goals and steps, critics say it doesn't adapt well to change. Empirical research on the Planning School is lacking. The school has also been criticized for reducing strategic planning to quantifying control goals rather than inspiring innovation.

1.1.3 Positioning School (Analytical Process)

The Positioning School is often considered an analytical strategic framework. Business strategists like Michael Porter developed this perspective, which is known for its analytical rigor (Porter, 1980). Porter's Five Forces, PESTEL, and other analytical tools are used to understand the competitive landscape and position the company advantageously. These tools help businesses identify their market position and create strategies that capitalize on their strengths. Objective-setting is also shared by this school and the Design and Planning Schools. The Positioning School stands out for its emphasis on quantitative metrics and analyses. KPIs and other performance metrics are widely used to assess strategic effectiveness (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). These numerical goals help companies visualize and measure their strategies. Another highlight of this school is its thorough internal and external audits. Companies that take this approach heavily collect and analyze data to assess their internal and external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Grant, 1991). This dual focus gives a more complete picture of the business environment, enabling better strategic planning.

The Positioning School develops strategies in layers. This school favors multi-tiered strategies over the Design School's simpler ones. This strategy is robust and considers various scenarios and contingencies by carefully analyzing and reviewing each tier (Mintzberg, 1990). Despite its strengths, the Positioning School has been criticized. Analytical tools may make the process too complicated and disconnected from business realities (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Analytical frameworks are sometimes criticized for being too rigid and neglecting human factors in strategy formation. However, the Positioning School remains influential. The concept has influenced economics, marketing, and other academic fields beyond business strategy (Rumelt, 2011). In the changing world of strategic management, its frameworks and methods remain essential in MBA and professional training programs worldwide (Wheelen et al., 2017).

1.1.4 Entrepreneurial School (Visionary Process)

The Positioning and Planning Schools are diametrically opposed to the Entrepreneurial School of Thought in Strategic Management. This school of thought emphasizes the importance of the leader or entrepreneur in shaping strategy (Mintzberg, 1994). While other schools may emphasize analytical processes or formal planning, the Entrepreneurial School is often distinguished by the intuition, judgment, and vision of a single leader. The emphasis on opportunism and flexibility is one of the key features that distinguishes this school. In a volatile market, the founder or leader is regarded as someone who can capitalize on opportunities and steer the organization accordingly (Covin & Slevin, 1991). In this model, the role of analytical tools and structured planning is frequently minimized in favor of gut instinct and instinctual decision-making. According to Collins

and Porras (1996), the entrepreneur has a distinct 'vision' for the organization, which serves as the primary motivator for strategy development.

However, this emphasis on the entrepreneur's central role has drawn criticism, primarily because it risks concentrating too much power in the hands of a single individual (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Critics argue that this places the strategy too heavily on one person's abilities and limitations, increasing the risk of oversight or misjudgment (Finkelstein & Hambrick, 1996). Despite these reservations, the Entrepreneurial School provides significant advantages in rapidly changing environments or in the context of new ventures. Traditional planning or analytical tools may not be adequate in such scenarios, and the ability to quickly adapt to new circumstances can be a valuable asset (Stevenson & Jarillo, 2007). Startup companies, for example, frequently take an entrepreneurial approach because they must navigate an uncertain landscape where formal strategies may be less effective (Ries, 2011).

1.1.5 Cognitive School (Mental Process)

The Cognitive School of Strategic Management emphasizes the mind in strategy formation (Walsh, 1995). The Cognitive School emphasizes how all key decision-makers in an organization perceive and process information to make strategic decisions, unlike the Entrepreneurial School, which emphasizes a single leader's intuition and vision (Porac & Thomas, 1990). This school believes decision-makers' cognitive biases and mental models heavily influence strategy formulation (Schoemaker, 1993). These mental frameworks influence information processing, viable options, and strategies. Understanding organizational leaders' subjective realities is crucial because their "cognitive maps" can shape strategic action (Ladeira et al., 2019). Despite its cognitive focus, this school has been criticized for being in actional. Critics say mental models can explain, but they don't help you create effective strategies (Knight et al., 1999). Too much cognitive focus may paralyze by analysis, making it hard to move from understanding to action (Simon, 1979). Proponents say cognitive approaches can explain why organizations choose one strategy over another, even when objective conditions suggest otherwise (Weick, 1995). They claim that the Cognitive School's frameworks can diagnose deep-seated cognitive biases that organizations may need to challenge to adapt to changing conditions (Fiol & Huff, 1992). Strategic change is also better understood thanks to the Cognitive School. According to this perspective, strategy formulation relies on mental models and perceptions, so any change in these cognitive maps can transform strategy (Barr et al., 1992). In times of upheaval or fundamental change, the Cognitive School helps managers understand how changing mental models affect strategy (Kaplan, 2011).

1.1.6 Learning School (Emergent Process)

The Learning School, sometimes referred to as the "emergent school," posits that strategy formation is an evolutionary process, which develops gradually through learning and adaptation (Mintzberg, 1994). Unlike the prescriptive nature of schools such as the Planning School, the Learning School maintains that strategy emerges organically over time as an organization adapts to its changing environment (Moorman & Miner, 1998). Central to the philosophy of this school is the belief that not all variables can be fully accounted for in advance, making flexibility and adaptability key assets (Levinthal & March, 1993). Therefore, instead of crafting a rigid long-term strategy, organizations should focus on developing a set of guiding principles that allow them to adapt to unforeseen challenges and opportunities (Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997). The premise is that

learning from both successes and failures enables an organization to refine its strategies continuously (Senge, 1990).

One criticism of the Learning School is its perceived lack of direction and focus, potentially leading organizations to react rather than act (Easterby-Smith & Prieto, 2008). Critics argue that an emphasis on learning and adaptation could result in a lack of coherent strategy, making it challenging to communicate a clear organizational direction to stakeholders (Porter, 1980). They worry that in the absence of a formal strategy, organizations might become vulnerable to environmental changes and competitive pressures (Hambrick, 1983). However, proponents counter that in today's rapidly changing business landscape, the ability to learn and adapt is more crucial than ever (Teece, 2007). They argue that the Learning School's focus on adaptability provides a framework for organizations to evolve their strategies in real-time, which can be particularly useful in volatile or uncertain markets (Volberda, 1996). The Learning School not only aids in navigating complexity but also fosters a culture of continuous improvement and organizational resilience (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

1.1.7 Power School (Negotiation Process)

The Power School approaches strategy formation as a series of negotiations, both within the organization and with external stakeholders. Rooted in the works of early theorists like Pfeffer (1981), this school of thought has gained traction for its emphasis on the role of power dynamics and politics in shaping organizational strategy. The basic premise is that strategy is the outcome of complex bargaining among key actors who have vested interests (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). In the internal context, the Power School emphasizes that various departments or groups within an organization often have differing objectives and resources, leading to power struggles (Cyert & March, 1963). Strategy, in this sense, becomes a negotiated order where the interests of the most influential parties are more likely to prevail. While this might sound like a limitation, proponents argue that acknowledging these internal power dynamics can result in more realistic and executable strategies (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Externally, the Power School also looks at how organizations negotiate their positions with other stakeholders like suppliers, customers, and even regulators (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). These negotiations often involve leveraging organizational assets for better contractual terms or policy influence. The school suggests that successful strategy involves managing these external relationships effectively to secure favorable outcomes (Hillman & Hitt, 1999). However, the Power School has received criticism for being too Machiavellian, implying that strategic development is purely a game of power manipulation (Hambrick & Cannella, 2004). Critics also argue that the focus on negotiation and power dynamics might neglect other essential aspects like innovation and operational efficiency (Porter, 1985). They worry that strategies born out of internal politics may not necessarily align with the organization's overall objectives or the external environment (Christensen & Armstrong, 1991).

1.1.8 Cultural School (Collective Process)

The Cultural School of strategic management focuses on the shared beliefs, values, and practices that shape the collective behavior of an organization. The seminal work of Schein (1985) laid the foundation for the importance of organizational culture in shaping strategies. This school of thought emphasizes that strategy is not a top-down mandate but rather emerges from the collective interactions and shared understandings of the people within the organization (Hofstede, 1980). Within this framework, the role of leadership is different from other schools. Leaders are seen

more as stewards of culture rather than the ultimate decision-makers (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). They foster conditions that encourage shared problem-solving and collective interpretation of external events. In other words, the strategy comes from 'how we do things around here' rather than being imposed or negotiated (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). In practice, the Cultural School often focuses on rituals, stories, and symbols that reinforce the organization's core values (Martin, 1992). These cultural elements act as a kind of social glue, aligning members around common objectives and thus facilitating the development of shared strategies (Smircich, 1983).

For instance, a company emphasizing innovation will create rituals and rewards that celebrate creativity, thereby encouraging strategies focused on market differentiation (O'Reilly & Tushman, 2004). However, the Cultural School has been criticized for its potential to create echo chambers or blind spots. Critics argue that a strong culture could limit strategic flexibility, as it tends to reinforce existing beliefs and practices at the expense of adaptation or change (Sørensen, 2002). Strong cultures can make it challenging to integrate new perspectives or to pivot when market conditions change (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Despite these challenges, the Cultural School's emphasis on shared values and collective identity provides a cohesive force that can significantly enhance strategy implementation (Denison, 1990). This approach has found particular relevance in today's increasingly complex business environments, where the ability to draw on collective intelligence can provide a meaningful competitive advantage (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). This school also ties well with the modern understanding of brand equity and customer loyalty. Companies with strong cultures often have strong brands, as the internal culture is reflected in external interactions with customers and stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2006). This mutual reinforcement between internal culture and external perception has made the Cultural School particularly relevant in the age of social media, where organizational values are more transparent than ever (Fournier & Avery, 2011).

1.1.9 Environmental School (Reactive Process)

The Environmental School posits that strategy formation is largely a reactive process, primarily influenced by external forces. The cornerstone of this school is the idea that organizations are subject to the conditions set by their external environment (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Therefore, strategy formation is often about responding to or coping with these external influences, rather than proactively shaping them. Unlike other strategic frameworks that focus on internal processes or decisions, the Environmental School emphasizes that factors beyond an organization's control—such as market dynamics, regulation, and competition—play a decisive role in shaping strategy (Emery & Trist, 1965). Essentially, organizations must adapt or perish. In this context, Pfeffer and Salancik's (1978) notion of "resource dependence" is relevant. It suggests that organizations are fundamentally dependent on their environment for resources and must, therefore, adopt strategies that align with the environment's constraints and opportunities. Within this paradigm, the role of leadership is largely about environmental scanning and adaptation (Duncan, 1972). Managers are less strategists in the classical sense and more akin to skilled interpreters of the environmental context. They must understand how social, economic, or political trends could impact their business and adapt accordingly (Choo, 2001). The Environmental School has often been critiqued for its somewhat deterministic viewpoint. Critics argue that by focusing so heavily on environmental factors, it underplays the role of agency, creativity, and innovation within organizations (Child, 1972). In other words, it risks painting a picture where companies are passive

entities wholly shaped by external forces, neglecting the potential for proactive strategy formulation (Porter, 1980).

1.1.10 Configuration School (Transformation Process)

The Configuration School views strategy formation as a transformational process, subject to distinct periods of stability and change. Mintzberg (1994) is particularly well-known for his contributions to this school, which posits that strategies are not constant but shift according to different phases or "configurations. This school of thought recognizes that organizations can exist in various states or configurations such as entrepreneurial, machine-like, professional, and others (Mintzberg & Lampel, 1999).

Each of these configurations comes with its own ideal type of management and strategy, suggesting that an organization's strategy needs to fit its configuration. Furthermore, the transitions from one state to another often called "revolutionary periods"—are as crucial as the stable phases in shaping the strategy (Greiner, 1972). The Configuration School also brings the element of time into strategic management. It acknowledges that organizations, and by extension their strategies, go through life cycles (Adizes, 1979). During these cycles, what worked well in one phase may become obsolete, necessitating a transformation or shift. According to Miller (1987), these shifts could be triggered by a change in leadership, an innovation, a crisis, or other significant events. A notable strength of the Configuration School is its holistic view. It does not focus solely on internal elements like core competencies or external factors like market conditions; rather, it takes into account the entire system, including culture, structure, and external environment (Whittington, 2001). This holistic view allows for a richer understanding of what strategy formation entails, making it relevant for diverse types of organizations, from startups to established corporations (Mintzberg, 1978).

2.0 Conclusion

Exploration of various strategic management schools of thought reveals the complexities and depth of this critical organizational practice. These schools, which range from the Power School, which focuses on negotiations and power dynamics, to the Cultural School, which emphasizes shared beliefs and collective processes, to the Environmental School, which emphasizes adaptability to external factors, and finally, the Configuration School, which views strategy as a series of transformational stages, provide divergent but complementary lenses through which to view strategy formation. The Power School emphasizes the significance of understanding internal and external power dynamics. While this approach has been criticized for potentially undermining innovation and operational efficiency, it allows organizations to develop realistic and executable strategies in the face of competing interests and power dynamics. The Cultural School, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of shared values and norms in shaping strategy. Although some argue that strong cultures can become echo chambers, it is clear that a cohesive internal culture can have a significant impact on strategy effectiveness and implementation.

Similarly, the Environmental School emphasizes the influence of external conditions on strategy development, encouraging organizations to be adaptable. However, this approach has been criticized for underestimating organizations' agency and innovation capacities. Finally, the Configuration School approaches organizations through a transformative lens, viewing them as going through distinct cycles or configurations, each requiring its own tailored strategy. This

holistic perspective incorporates both internal and external elements, making it adaptable to a wide range of organizations. While each school provides valuable insights, they also emphasize that strategy is not a one-size-fits-all endeavor. Organizations are best served by utilizing multiple schools of thought to develop strategies that are not only robust but also adaptable to changing conditions. These nuanced approaches to strategic management become increasingly important as businesses navigate increasingly complex environments, reminding us that strategy formation is a multifaceted and dynamic process that is critical for organizational success.

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