

EFFECT OF STRATEGIC ORIENTATION AND HRM STRATEGIES ON ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGIC PERFORMANCE: EXAMINING MEDIATING ROLE OF STRATEGIC LEARNING AND INNOVATION

Parvin Abbaspour¹

¹Department of Human Resources Management, Faculty of Management, UAE Branch, Islamic Azad University, Iran.

ABSTRACT

Current paper aims at investigating effect of strategic orientation and human resource strategies on organizational strategic performance with emphasis on mediatory role of strategic learning and innovation using path analysis. To this end, 253 managers and supervisors of insurance companies in Tehran took part in this study. They completed questionnaires of strategic orientation, human resource strategies, strategic learning, strategic innovation and organizational strategic performance. Path analysis results showed direct effect of strategic learning and strategic innovation on strategic performance is positive and significant. Direct effect of strategic learning, human resource strategies, and strategic orientation on strategic innovation is positive and significant. Direct effect of human resource strategies and strategic orientation on strategic learning is positive and significant. Indirect effect of strategic orientation and human resource strategies on strategic performance through strategic learning and strategic innovation is positive and significant. Indirect effect of strategic orientation and human resource strategies on strategic innovation through strategic learning is positive and significant. Indirect effect of strategic learning on strategic performance through strategic innovation is positive and significant. Overall, findings emphasize role of strategic orientation, human resource strategies, strategic learning and strategic innovation on organizational strategic performance.

KEYWORDS: strategies, learning, innovation, performance.

INTRODUCTION

Over two recent decades, organizational performance has become one of the attractive topics and it has led to innovations in research and application fields (Seyed Taghavi *et al.*, 2012). Organizations need identification of factors affecting their strategic performance for successful implantation of formulated strategies, so that success in the organization's strategies is guaranteed. Thus, identification of factors affecting organizational strategic performance is necessary. Current research investigates role of strategic orientation, human resource strategies, strategic learning and strategic innovation on organizational strategic performance. Strategic orientation is one of the critical variables in improvement of organizational performance (Ferraresi *et al.*, 2012). Organizational orientation is directing goals which the organization pursues (Lau *et al.*, 2008; Lau, 2011). Strategic orientation is regarded as a management understanding and awareness about organization's internal and external characteristics, attitude and skill preparations, motives, tendencies, and demands which guides strategic planning and strategic development process. In other words, strategic orientation means perception of managers about competitive environment and their comprehensive and rapid reaction considering long term goals (Sponjoul *et al.*, 2012). Strategic orientation develops company's readiness for dealing with phenomena and internal and external changes, and enables managers to have proper decision making and thereby it can influence organizational performance (Morgan and Strong, 2003; Griffith *et al.*, 2012). Studies show strategic orientation influences organizational performance (Zho *et al.*, 2005; Lau, 2001; Ferraresi *et al.*, 2012; Noble, Sinha and Kumar, 2002; Zahra and Covin, 1993; Chow, Teo, and Chew, 2013).

On the other hand, in today competitive world, human element is one of the main tools for creating change and survival of the organization and achieving respective goals and missions. Meanwhile, HR survives change and guarantees survival of organization. Role of human in the organization and his view plays significant role in success or failure of the organization (Hashemi and Pouraminzadeh, 2011). Since 1980, human resource management has been raised as one of the main areas in management fields. Importance of human resource management strategy (HRMS) is because it is a tool for improvement of competitive situation of the organization and improvement of its effectiveness through attraction and recruitment of unique HR for the organization (Wire, 1983). Organizations can develop and nurture some characteristics and behavior in employees through application of effective strategies of HRM which are necessary for success of organization (Schuler and Jackson, 1987). In other words, HRM strategy facilitates HR development for achieving requirements of overall strategy of the organization. Thus, goals and missions of the organization can be

achieved (Cowling, 1986). Regardless of size or nature of the organization, activities which are done and the environment, success of the organization is determined through decisions which are made by employees and behaviors which are encouraged. Hence, a vital source for competitive advantage is not often having smartest product or service design, having the best strategy or marketing, latest technology or intelligent financial management; rather it is having suitable systems for HR recruitment, motivation, and management (Abaspour, 2008).

On the other hand, chaos and economic crisis has increased the importance of strategic human resource management. Chaos (crisis), globalization, technology, considerable demographic changes, and difference in labor force values lead to unprecedented uncertainty in the environment. Strategic human resource management and sub-processes of HR planning are used as a means against such environmental uncertainties. HR management is involved in formation of organizational strategies and planning process. Since gradually HR management is turning to an important element which plays role in competitive strategy of the organization, top managers of the organization have special sensitivity for ensuring consistency between organizational strategy and HR policies and actions (Greer *et al.*, 2003). Studies by Bowen and Ostroff (2004), Lawler (2011), Bae and Lawler (2000), Khatiri (2000), Liao *et al.* (2009) show HR management methods can lead to improvement of company's performance. The other variable which plays role in organizational performance is organizational strategic learning. Organizational learning means increasing power of the organization for performing effective and efficient works. For survival of organizations speed of their learning should be higher than environmental change speed and it shows importance of organizational learning. It should be noted that organizations as a complex of individuals and human groups are exposed to rapid environmental changes and they acquire experience regarding their actions and measures over the time. In other words, organizations should have learning capacity similar to individuals. One of the major challenges of today organizations at different management levels is increasing organizational learning capacity. According to Guns, organizational learning is defined as follows: "acquiring and applying improving knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and attitudes in holding, growing and development the organization" (Ebili, 1999). Strategic learning as organizational dynamicity capability includes inter-organizational processes for strategic knowledge distribution, interpretation, and implementation (Pietersen, 2002; Thomas *et al.*, 2001; Sirén, Kohtamäki and Kuckertz, 2012). Kuwada (1998) defines strategic learning as process of knowledge creation and acquisition, information interpretation, knowledge transfer, distribution and storage in organizational memory. Recently some authors found such strategic learning capabilities enable companies to share strategic knowledge from previous entrepreneurs and strategic measures leading to competitive and performance advantage (Anderson, Covin and Slevin, 2009; Anderson, Green and Slevin, 2009). Literature on organizational learning shows organizational learning is a basis for achieving sustainable competitive advantages and a key variable in increasing organizational performance (Brockman and Morgan, 2003). Studies show there is positive relationship between organizational learning and organizational performance (Keskin, 2006; Rhodes *et al.*, 2008; Camps and Luna-Arocas, 2012).

Organizational innovation is one of the major variables affecting organizational strategic performance. Innovation is regarded as an important issue for individuals, institutions and for all communities due to its relationship with flexibility and production. Innovation is necessary for every organization and non-innovative organizations would diminish over the time and although such organizations may be periodically successful, ultimately they have to stop or change their system (Mohamadi and Tabari, 2008). Ker and Galgiardi (2003) believe that the main factor in human development in all areas is innovation and creativity. Thus, innovation is an important factor for survival of organizations in today competitive environment. Organizational innovation is creating value from new technologies or new administrative activities in terms of new products or services (Wang, 2007). One outcome for innovation is value making and increasing efficiency and thus the business is grown. It is a stimulus for moving organizations and individuals upward. But how is it possible that an organization can implement innovation so that it is in line with its goals and its role is fundamental changed in competition arena versus its competitors. Studies on successful organizations show that they emphasized "strategic innovation". Cherito and Markids (2004) define strategic innovation as follows: "innovation in business model leads to a new way of playing the match and strategic innovators are seen as attacking companies which utilize various business models". Markids (2000) considers strategic innovation as a totally different way of competition in the industry which emerges through breaking play rules and thinking of other ways. According to him, a basic element is "reconceptualization of business and the ways which lead to different playing in the industry." Strategic innovation means competition in the existing industry in a totally different way which redefines customer values and promotes them. Unlike traditional innovation, this different way of competition

does not just include product innovation. Such innovation may be associated to concept of product, production, or marketing related products and services (Sorati Ashtiani, 2008). To this end, it is necessary in the world with changing and dynamic conditions and in the conditions where production is not art anymore and rather the art is offering and selling, organizations should either utilize innovation or to be eliminated from competition arena. Studies indicate organizational innovation has positive effect on organizational performance (Damanpour, 1991; Gopalakrishnan, 2000; Cho *et al.*, 2007; Name, 2007). Review of literature show a few studies have been dedicated to effect of strategic orientation and HR strategies on organizational strategic performance with emphasis on mediatory role of strategic learning and strategic innovation. Thus, the main research question in the current work is investigating effect of strategic orientation and HR strategies on organizational strategic performance with emphasis on mediatory role of strategic learning and strategic innovation so that richness of research and experimental literature in this area is improved and a step is taken for improvement of organizational performance.

Conceptual Model

Considering research literature, research conceptual model is given in Fig 1. As observed, strategic orientation and HR strategies are considered as independent variables and strategic learning and strategic innovation are regarded as mediatory variables. In addition, organizational strategic performance is considered as dependent variable. Thus, research hypotheses are described as follows:

- H1: strategic orientation has direct effect on strategic learning and strategic innovation.*
- H2: HR strategies have direct effect on strategic learning and strategic innovation.*
- H3: Strategic learning has direct effect on strategic innovation and strategic performance.*
- H4: Strategic innovation has direct effect on organizational performance.*
- H5: Strategic learning and strategic innovation have mediatory role in relationship between strategic orientation and organizational strategic performance.*
- H6: Strategic learning and strategic innovation have mediatory role in relationship between HR strategies and organizational strategic performance.*
- H5: Strategic innovation has mediatory role in relationship between strategic learning and organizational strategic performance.*

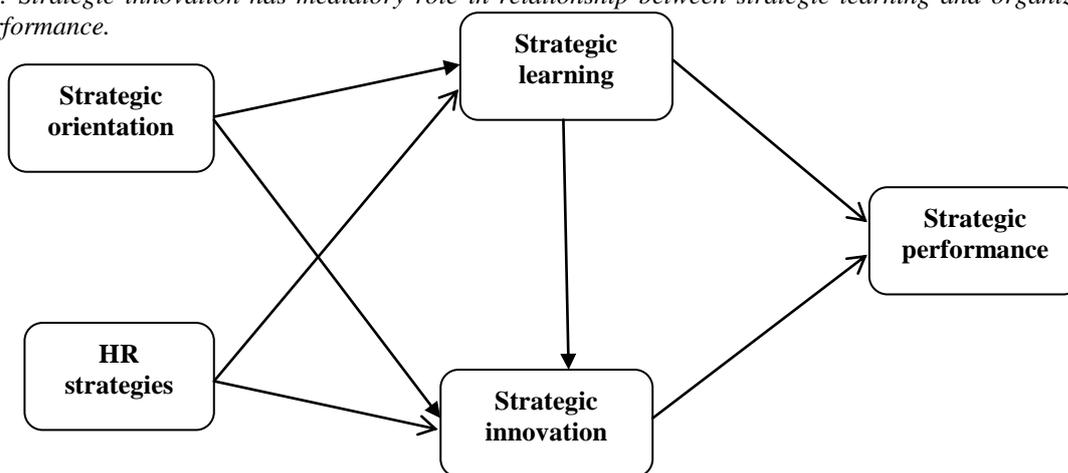


Fig 1. Research conceptual model

Materials and Methods

It is a descriptive (non-experimental) research and research design is correlation of path analysis type, because relationship between variables is investigated in this research in the form of causal model.

Statistical Sampling

268 questionnaires were distributed among managers and supervisors of insurance companies in Tehran. Out of 168 questionnaires, 259 were completed. 6 ones were excluded in analysis since a large number of items were left unfilled. Finally, 253 questionnaires were entered in analysis.

Research Scales

Strategic Orientation: In order to measure strategic orientation, the questionnaire developed by Zahra and Covin (1993) was used. It includes 16 items. The items are measured based on five-point Likert scale from totally disagree to totally agree. Internal consistency coefficient was obtained as 0.86 using Cronbach alpha. Also, indexes obtained from confirmatory factor analysis as GFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.038, and AGFI = 0.94 suggest fit of model with data.

HR Strategies: In order to measure HR strategies, the questionnaire developed by Lawler *et al.* (2006) was used. It includes 27 items. The items are measured based on five-point Likert scale from totally disagree to totally agree. Internal consistency coefficient was obtained as 0.82 using Cronbach alpha. Also, indexes obtained from confirmatory factor analysis as GFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.041, and AGFI = 0.93 suggest fit of model with data.

Strategic Learning: In order to measure strategic learning, the questionnaire developed by Sirén, Kohtamäki and Kuckertz (2012) was used. It includes 14 items. The items are measured based on Likert scale from totally disagree (1) to totally agree (5). Internal consistency coefficient was obtained as 0.79 using Cronbach alpha. Also, indexes obtained from confirmatory factor analysis as GFI = 93, RMSEA = 0.90, and AGFI = 0.044 suggest fit of model with data.

Strategic Innovation: In order to measure strategic innovation, the questionnaire developed by Jafari (2013) was used. It includes 16 items. The items are measured based on Likert scale from totally disagree (1) to totally agree (5). Internal consistency coefficient was obtained as 0.78 using Cronbach alpha. Also, indexes obtained from confirmatory factor analysis as GFI = 94, RMSEA = 0.054, and AGFI = 0.90 suggest fit of model with data.

Strategic Performance: In order to measure strategic performance, the questionnaire developed by Jafari (2013) was used. It includes 8 items. The items are measured based on Likert scale from totally disagree (1) to totally agree (5). Internal consistency coefficient was obtained as 0.81 using Cronbach alpha. Also, indexes obtained from confirmatory factor analysis as GFI = 94, RMSEA = 0.037, and AGFI = 0.92 suggest fit of model with data.

Data Analysis

Following calculation of descriptive indexes of the research variables, path analysis was used for investigating causal relationship between variables. Path analysis was originally developed by Sewall Wright (1934). It is application of multivariate regression in relation with formulation of causal models, aiming at obtaining quantitative estimates of causal relationships between a set of variables (Hooman, 2008). SPSS and LISREL software were used for data analysis.

Results

Since correlation matrix is basis of analysis in causal models, correlation matrix, mean and SD of the variables is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation matrix of research variables

Variable	Strategic orientation	HR strategies	Strategic learning	Strategic innovation	Strategic performance
Strategic orientation	1				
HR strategies	0.61**	1			
Strategic learning	0.47**	0.48**	1		
Strategic innovation	0.40**	0.55**	0.48**	1	
Strategic performance	0.49**	0.51**	0.45**	0.50**	1
Mean	50.86	70.69	40.89	40.48	23.85
SD	11.11	19.96	8.85	12.17	7.07

**P < 0.01 *P < 0.05

As observed in Table 1, among research variables, HR strategies (r = 0.51), strategic innovation (r = 0.50), strategic orientation (r = 0.49), and strategic learning (r = 0.45) have highest correlation with strategic performance. Also, among research variables, HR strategies (r = 0.55), strategic learning (r = 0.48), and strategic orientation (r = 0.40) have highest correlation with strategic innovation. Correlation of strategic learning and strategic orientation (r = 0.47) and HR strategies (r = 0.61) is positive and significant at level P < 0.01.

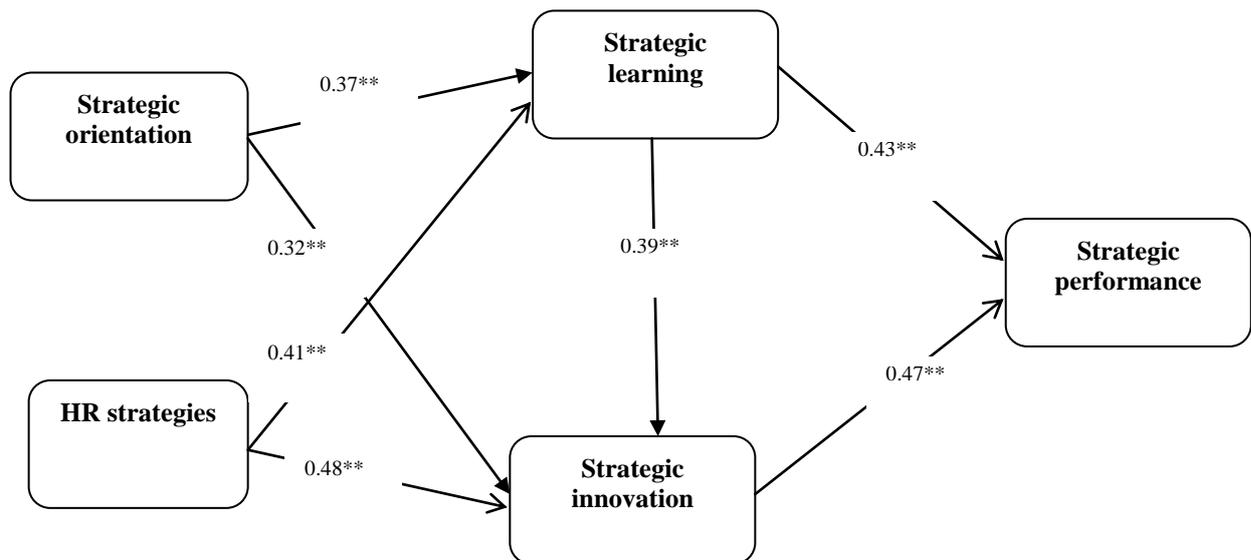


Fig 2. Fit model of research

Fig 2 shows fit model of the research. Figures on the paths are standardized parameters. According to Fig 2, all paths are significant at level $P < 0.01$. Among variables in the model, strategic innovation speed has highest direct effect on organizational strategic performance. Features of fit of path analysis model are given in Table 2.

Table 2: Features of fit of path analysis model

NFI	CFI	AGFI	GFI	RMSEA	χ^2/df
0.99	1	0.97	0.99	0.037	1.34

According to Table 2, chi square ratio to degree of freedom ($\chi^2/df = 1.34$), goodness of fit index (GFI = 0.99), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI = 0.97), and *Root Mean Square Error of Approximation* (RMSEA = 0.037) are at acceptable level. Thus, model fit is acceptable in this research. Since current work aims at investigating mediatory role of strategic learning and strategic innovation regarding strategic learning, HR strategies and strategic performance variables using path analysis, Table 3 gives direct effect, indirect effect, total effect, described variance and significance level of research variables.

Table 3: Estimation of standardized coefficients of direct, indirect, and total effect

Path	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Total effect	Described variance
To strategic performance from				
Strategic innovation	0.47**	-	0.47**	40%
Strategic learning	0.43**	0.18**	0.61**	
HR strategies	-	0.48**	0.48**	
Strategic orientation	-	0.38**	0.38**	
To strategic innovation from				
Strategic learning	0.39**	-	0.39**	48%
HR strategies	0.48**	0.16**	0.64**	
Strategic orientation	0.32**	0.14**	0.46**	
To strategic learning from				
HR strategies	0.41**	-	0.41**	31%
Strategic orientation	0.37**	-	0.37**	

**P < 0.01

As observed in Table 3, direct effect of strategic learning ($\beta = 0.43$) and strategic innovation ($\beta = 0.47$) on strategic performance is positive and significant at level $P < 0.01$. Direct effect of strategic learning ($\beta = 0.39$), HR strategies ($\beta = 0.48$) and strategic orientation ($\beta = 0.32$) on strategic innovation is positive and significant at level $P < 0.01$. Direct effect of HR strategies ($\beta = 0.41$), and strategic orientation ($\beta = 0.37$) on strategic learning is positive and significant at level $P < 0.01$. Indirect effect of strategic orientation and HR strategies on strategic performance through strategic learning and strategic innovation is positive and significant at level $P < 0.01$. Indirect effect of strategic orientation and HR strategies on strategic innovation through strategic learning is positive and significant at level $P < 0.01$. Indirect effect of strategic learning on strategic performance through strategic innovation is positive and significant at level $P < 0.01$. Overall, 40 per cent of strategic performance variance, 48 per cent of strategic innovation variance, and 31 per cent of strategic learning variance is described by the research model.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Current paper aims at investigating effect of strategic orientation and human resource strategies on organizational strategic performance with emphasis on mediatory role of strategic learning and innovation using path analysis. Results of path analysis showed proposed model is in relatively good fit to the research data and it can describe 40 per cent of strategic performance variance, 48 per cent of strategic innovation variance, and 31 per cent of strategic learning variance.

Results of path analysis showed strategic orientation have positive significant effect on strategic learning. It is consistent with findings by Zhou *et al.* (2005) and Yu *et al.* (2013). This finding shows when organizations emphasize on uniqueness of products / services, offering products/services for the high prices, intensified marketing efforts, creating a strong brand identity, offering an extensive line of products/services, integrated range of products/services, advertising intensity, quality of products/ services, development of new products /services, levels of capacity utilization, levels of operational efficiency, effectiveness in securing raw materials, finding ways to reduce the cost, and efficiency of production and distribution channels and services, they influence strategic learning. Thus, in describing this finding, it can be stated strategic orientation leads to increased strategic learning, that is, as process of knowledge creation and acquisition, information interpretation, knowledge transfer, distribution and storage in organizational memory.

Findings also show strategic orientation has positive significant effect on strategic innovation. In describing this finding it can be said transition process in rapid economic and industrial changes era has caused that organization attempt to promote their competition and compatibility capacities to adapt the conditions. In order to achieve this goal, strategic orientation which match them constantly to the new world seems necessary. Companies with strategic orientation are more probable to use knowledge management systems for acquiring knowledge from competitors, partners, and internal employees. Thus, in describing this finding it can be said strategic orientation influences organizational strategic innovation through attempt for competition and compatibility, identifying customers and paying attention to their satisfaction, ability to cope with competitors and using modern technologies in products and services.

Results of path analysis showed HR strategies have direct effect on strategic learning and strategic innovation. It is consistent with findings by Schuler and Jackson (1987). According to them, organizations can develop and nurture some characteristics and behavior in employees through application of effective strategies of HRM which are necessary for success of organization. Today importance of human factor and its unique role as a strategic source and designer and executive of organizational systems and processes has become more than ever so that human is regarded as the main source and asset for the organization in advanced organizational thinking. Hence, today organizations attempt to achieve rapid growth, ongoing improvement, efficiency, profitability, flexibility, compatibility, preparation for future and superior situation their activity area through learned human resources in order to survive and develop. Without these qualities organizational are not able to act effectively and competitively in coping with the best ones.

Results of path analysis showed strategic learning have positive significant effect on strategic performance. In describing this finding it can be said if search for new ideas and information, new ways of performing tasks, acquiring knowledge from different sources, knowledge sharing and distribution, and knowledge application in the organization is emphasized, it will lead to increased innovation and improved organizational strategic performance. Authors maintain that strategic learning capabilities enable companies to share strategic knowledge from previous

entrepreneurships and strategic measures leading to competitive and performance advantage (Anderson *et al.*, 2009; Anderson *et al.*, 2009). Path analysis results showed strategic innovation has direct effect on organizational performance. It is consistent with findings by Damanpour (1991), Gopalakrishnan (2000), Cho *et al.* (2007), and Nam (2007). In describing this finding it can be said if organization offers valuable products and services to the customers, eliminates low activities for present and future market, seeks for offering new values to the customers, searches for providing new products for new needs, acts differently from competitors, uses new ways for providing services to the customers, utilizes modern technologies to achieve the market, uses new approaches for marketing products and services, and seek for delivering distinct products and services compared to competitors, its organizational performance will be improved.

Results of path analysis showed that strategic learning and strategic innovation have mediatory role in relationship between strategic orientation and organizational strategic performance. Thus, organizational strategic orientation increases organizational performance through influencing strategic learning and strategic innovation. In addition, findings showed strategic learning and strategic innovation play mediatory role in relationship between HR strategies and organizational strategic performance. Thus, HR strategies affect strategic performance through strategic learning and strategic innovation. Individuals work in the organization and they are regarded as a source and basis for application of other sources. Thus, through an efficient and effective human resource management system, they can be viewed as strategic asset. Organizations should match to strategic approach for management of the individuals. It seems they can consider individuals as strategic source for achieving competitive advantage by adopting strategic approach. They can use comprehensive planning system, they can have coherent and logical approach toward HR policies and methods (as external coherence tool), match HR policies and methods to organizational strategy (as internal coherence tool), to be active instead of being passive, and they can take basic measured regarding HRM with serious involvement of top management (Abaspour, 2008). Findings also showed strategic innovation plays mediatory role in relationship between strategic learning and organizational strategic performance. This finding shows strategic learning influences organizational strategic innovation through searching new ideas and information, knowledge creation and acquisition, knowledge sharing and distribution, and its application, and thus organizational performance is influenced.

Overall, research findings emphasize role of strategic orientation, HR strategies, strategic learning, and strategic innovation on organizational strategic performance. Managers and supervisors of insurance companies in Tehran were studied in this work, thus generalizing findings to other organizations and companies is limited. Also, findings are based on self-reporting data. It is recommended qualitative and mixed research methods are used in the future works for identifying factors affecting organizational strategic performance.

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