

Leadership Development Programs Today: A Guide to Effective Strategy Execution or *Fads du Jour*?

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Abstract: Leaders are answerable. *Organizational performance* is attained by successful *strategy* execution. Consequently, organizations heavily spend on *leadership development* to hone leaders' *competence* aimed at ensuring the organization's *competitive success*. However, the success of such programs is questioned because of, amongst others, (a) frequently reported strategy implementation failure, allegedly owing to the absence of a *competitive advantage* and (b) observations that leadership as a mandatory source of competitive advantage has declined, despite *leadership development* initiatives. Thus, the *question* arises whether organizations systematically use leadership development foundational metrics (e.g., direction-setting capacity, trust, etc.) for effective strategy implementation. As part of a larger study, this report accounts for organizational use of leadership development metrics in strategy implementation. We followed the guidance of reputable scholars in conducting the empirical study. Limited information on the topic dictated an *exploratory approach* to gain insights to lay the foundation for future descriptive and explanatory studies. The considerable amount of data required to answer the question necessitated an exploratory survey. We collected data from a purposely selected population with an online questionnaire, based on a literature review and pre-tested with Human Resource professionals, complying with ethical principles. The *findings* include: The study met norms for exploratory surveys and trustworthiness criteria. More than half of the diverse respondents (concerning demographic variables, strategies applied, and ensuing organizational performance) reported the use of leadership development metrics in strategy implementation. However, few respondents linked the metrics used to competitive advantage. The *implications* include that the leadership development interventions may not have been optimal in ensuring effective strategy implementation based on competitive advantage. It can be *concluded* that the leadership metrics the respondents' organizations have used may have been ineffective in ensuring competitive success. The *value* of this paper stems from its actionable insights based on proven theory and validated by an exploratory survey. However, the main *limitation* of the study is its cross-sectional nature. Hence, we recommend further descriptive and explanatory research to enable broader generalizations.

Keywords: Leaders, Organizational performance, Strategy execution, Competitive advantage, Leadership development, Leader competence

1. Introduction

Leaders are answerable. Their main accountability is *organizational performance*, namely, realizing the organization's intent to deliver value (Aaker and Moorman, 2019; Ansoff, 1965; Holbeche, 2022; Rothwell, Hohne and King, 2018). *Organizational performance* is attained through successful *strategy* execution (Aaker and Moorman, 2019; Balogun, Best and Lê, 2015; Barney, 1991; Holbeche, 2022). Thus, strategic intent and execution must be aligned.

Effective leaders drive execution guided by *competitive advantage* (Aaker and Moorman, 2019; Ansoff, 1965; Barney, 1991; Porter, 1985). Competitive advantage signifies that the organization offers customer value either at a lower cost than or differentiated from the competition (Porter, 1985). Competitive advantage arises from leaders accomplishing *coordination* and *cooperation* that align key actions fulfilling strategic intent (Nienaber and McNeill, 2022; Skivington and Daft, 1991). In essence, coordination and cooperation facilitate value-creating activities which depend on (a) the competitive market that the organization elects to serve, (b) customer value - whether economic, functional, psychological, or a combination, and (c) access to resources to provide customer value (Nienaber and McNeill, 2022). All resources, regardless of their significance, are required in value creation. Therefore, leaders must optimally combine all resources to ensure performance (Barney, 1991; Teece, Peteraf and Lee, 2016). Human resources are the most significant due to their *competence* to provide customer value by transforming inputs into customer-valued offerings (Barney, 1991; Becker, 1962; CIPD, 2016; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Holbeche, 2022; White, 1959). Effective leaders create an environment conducive to unleashing employee competence by encouraging risk-taking behaviors that can spur innovation. Innovation drives employee engagement as they are available to use their competence in value creation (Drucker, 1985; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Teece, Peteraf and Lee, 2016).

Scholars interpret ‘*competence*’ differently (cf. George, 2021). However, most explanations conform to that of McClelland (1973) and are consistent with Hogan and Warrenfeltz(s)’ (2003) taxonomy which accounts for all competency frameworks or models. Competence, sometimes called *competency*, comprises knowledge, skills, experience, and behavior required to perform a job successfully (George, 2021; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; McClelland, 1973). Competence denotes that (a) employees understand their role and purpose in organizational performance, (b) they are afforded the chance to apply their competence/competency in fulfilling their role/purpose, and (c) they strive to continuously improve their performance (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Ryan and Deci, 2001; White, 1959). It is imperative that leaders ensure a shared purpose enabling employees to understand the rationale for their efforts, thus motivating them to perform better (CIPD, 2022a; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; White, 1959). Consequently, organizations heavily spend on *leadership development* to hone leaders’ *competence* aimed at ensuring the organization’s *competitive success* (Beer, Finnström and Shrader, 2016; Holbeche, 2019; Leimbach, 2021).

The latest available figures show that in 2019 organizations globally spent US \$3.5 billion on leadership development ([trainingindustry.com](https://www.trainingindustry.com), 2020). However, the success of such programs is questioned for many reasons, such as, (a) frequently reported strategy implementation failure, allegedly owing to the absence of a competitive advantage and (b) observations that leadership as a mandatory source of competitive advantage has declined, despite *leadership development* initiatives (Beer, Finnström and Shrader, 2016; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Holbeche, 2019; Leimbach, 2021; Mintzberg, 1994; Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021; Pfeffer in Leavy, 2016).

However, a primary and repeated reason for the strategy implementation failure is the physical or psychological ‘unavailability’ of people to implement strategy (Bourgeois and Brodwin, 1984; Gallup, 2021; Kahn, 1990; Nienaber and McNeill, 2022; Pfeffer in Leavy, 2016). Furthermore, it is maintained that leaders do not know how people link to strategy (Hamilton and Sodeman, 2020; Marler and Boudreau, 2017). Hence, people are deployed in positions that do not utilize their competence (CIPD, 2018). Additionally, research has shown that some employees are not afforded the chance to apply their competence even after attending training (Beer, Finnström and Shrader, 2016). In essence, leaders neglect human competence as a major organizational resource to attain performance. As a result, leaders fail to attain a competitive advantage, i.e., aligning intent and execution, by accomplishing coordination and cooperation.

2. Leadership Competence/Competency

The above observations are perplexing since leadership competence can be learned and taught through leadership development interventions/programs (CIPD, 2022a; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; McClelland, 1973; Parker-Follett, 1933). Leadership competence can be assessed relative to the requirements of the job, identifying deficiencies that need to be improved through training to enable leaders to be effective (Beer, Finnström and Shrader, 2016; CIPD, 2022a; George, 2021; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Levenson, 2018; McClelland, 1973; Pfeffer in Leavy, 2016). A range of measurements is available to assess leadership competence. These form part of (a) people analytics which provides information about people to solve business problems and (b) psychological testing (CIPD, 2016, 2022b; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Metrics assessing leadership competence are output measures present at the organization’s strategic and operational levels, as illustrated in Figure 1. These metrics include leadership’s capability to (a) set direction, (b) influence and align members towards a common goal, (c) motivate employees to act, and (d) take charge of their own performance, such as in 360° feedback. These metrics are compatible with the four leadership competence domains discussed in the next section: intra-personal, interpersonal, leadership, and business skills (vision/planning, organizing, command, control, etc.).

The four competence domains indicate multi-variacy. However, in scrutinizing research it appears that many leadership development interventions and reform programs dominantly focus on *one* of the *four* competency domains: *interpersonal* skills development (cf. [trainingindustry.com](https://www.trainingindustry.com), 2020). On the surface, this seems a rational approach since research has shown widespread failure of leadership effectiveness due to impoverished interpersonal competence (Hogan and Sherman, 2020; [trainingindustry.com](https://www.trainingindustry.com), 2020). Some scholars justify this single-variable focus. Certainly, it is easier to measure obvious leadership behaviors - such as how people communicate – which flow from interpersonal competence potency, or lack thereof, and which clearly *impact* business results (George, 2021; Gifford and Wietrak, 2022). True, but what about the other variables – what about measuring the *actual* results/outcomes?

Unsurprising, research indicates that leadership development also needs to emphasize business results expected and address, for example, technical and financial skills required (CIPD, 2022a; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003;

Leimbach, 2021; Rothwell, Hohne and King, 2018). However, business skills belong to another of the four competence domains necessary to succeed.

Thus, leadership development programs are incomplete. Some of these programs do not address all four competence domains required to be effective leaders and neither according to a trainees' competence needs (cf. Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Hence, some scholars point out that leadership is "poorly understood" (Hogan and Kaiser, 2004:75), resulting in a lot of "dogmatic nonsense" (Barnard, 1948:432), and organizations being seduced by "unscientific nostrum" (Pfeffer in Leavy, 2016:3). These lead to disappointing performance outcomes for people (i.e., psychological ill-being) and organizational financial results (Beer, Finnström and Shrader, 2016). Hence, to ensure the effectiveness of leadership development programs, all four competence domains should be addressed according to the assessment needs of the participants.

As previously mentioned, the four competence domains imperative to succeed are (a) intra-personal skills, (b) interpersonal skills, (c) leadership skills, and (d) business skills, all of which are intertwined and interdependent (CIPD, 2022a; George, 2021; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Moreover, intra-personal skills are foundational to mastering all other competence domains and the most difficult of the domains to master (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003).

2.1 Intra-Personal Competence

Intra-personal competence relates to self-awareness (internal identity and external reputation), skillful expression of personal qualities, self-regulation, and self-management (cf. CIPD, 2022a; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Intra-personal competence domain consists of three components viz. (a) core self-esteem, emotional security, or resiliency, (b) balanced attitudes towards authority, and (c) self-control (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Persons with core self-esteem are self-confident, have stable, positive moods, are not easily frustrated, and quickly recover stasis after setbacks. Persons with balanced attitudes towards authority intelligently and appropriately follow rules, respect procedures, are socially appropriate, culturally aware, and within bounds, accept leadership guidance. People with good self-control, in most situations, can restrain their impulses, curb their appetites, stay focused, maintain schedules, and follow routines, i.e., self-disciplined. [Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003]. Further, Hogan and Kaiser (2004) suggest that this domain, intra-personal competence, coincides with emotional stability and conscientiousness factors of Wiggins' (1996) *Five Factor Model*. Moreover, people with good intrapersonal skills project integrity – the most important characteristic of good leadership (Kouzes and Posner, 1987). Leaders with core self-esteem and self-control accomplish *cooperation* through actions and exemplification. Leaders with balanced attitudes towards authority - contingently ranging between authoritarian and participatory – accomplish *coordination*. As mentioned, cooperation and coordination are essential in accomplishing competitive advantage, as reflected in Figure 1.

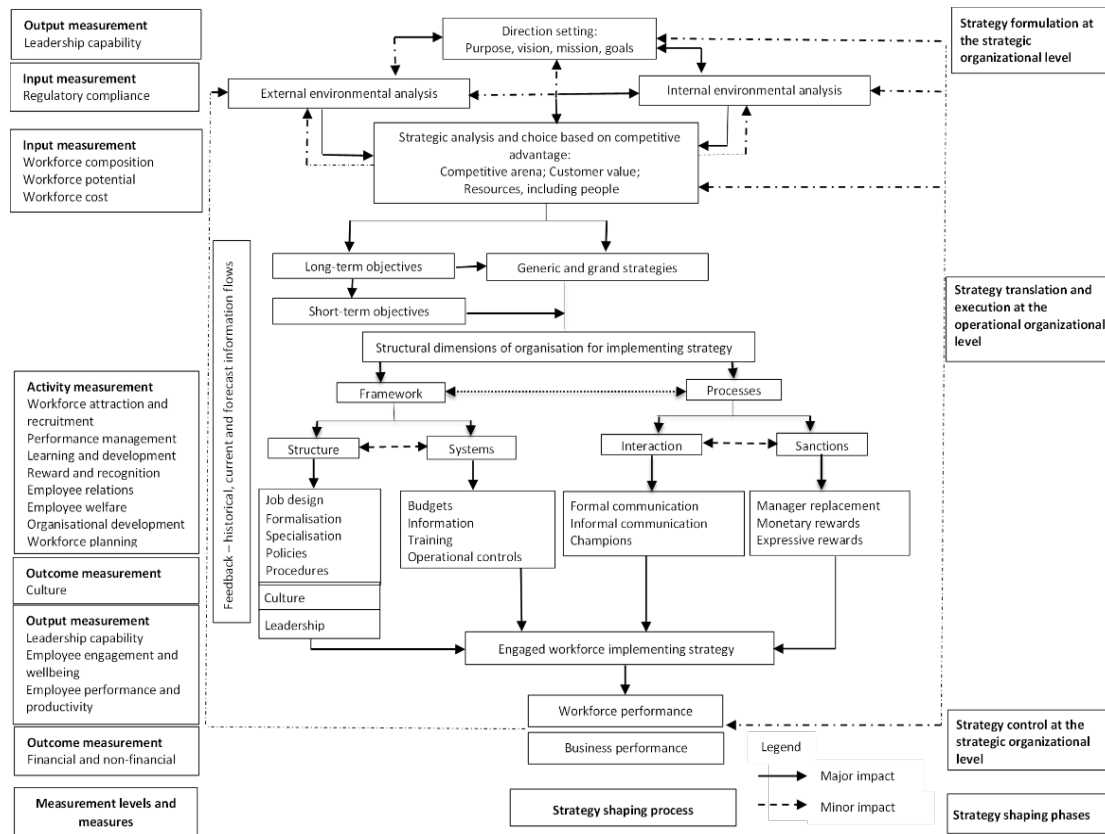
2.2 Interpersonal Competence

Interpersonal competence concerns initiating, building, and maintaining positive relationships with many diverse people (CIPD, 2022a; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). People with good interpersonal skills are agreeable, calm, socially adept, approachable, and rewarding to deal with (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Interpersonal competence consists of four components viz. (a) a disposition to place oneself in the 'shoes of another person,' (b) the skill to anticipate how the other will see the world, i.e., accuracy of interpersonal perception and what the person would expect during an interaction, (c) to integrate the expectations of how the other will respond to the initiating actor's subsequent behavior, and (d) to exercise self-control in focusing on the other person's expectations (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). According to Hogan and Kaiser (2004) interpersonal competence coincides with extraversion and agreeableness of the *Five Factor Model* of Wiggins (1996). Interpersonal skills impact accomplishing *cooperation*, as reflected in Figure 1.

2.3 Leadership Competence

Leadership competence involves building and maintaining effective teams, which depends on intra- and interpersonal skills (CIPD, 2022a; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). Leadership skills comprise five components viz. (a) identifying and recruiting talented team members needed to do the job, (b) retaining talented team members, which involves more than monetary rewards, (c) motivating the team to perform by building positive relationships with every member, (d) developing, sharing, and promoting an inspiring vision for the team, that legitimizes the team effort, and instill moral conduct, and (e) perseverance, i.e., being persistent and hard to be discouraged which stems from intra-personal skills (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). According to Hogan and Kaiser (2004) leadership competence coincides with openness of Wiggins' (1996) *Five Factor Model*, which

relates to vision. Leadership skills impact accomplishing both *coordination* and *cooperation*, as reflected in Figure 1.



Source: Nienaber and McNeill, 2022

Figure 1: Unlocking human competence for effective strategy execution

2.4 Business Competence

Business skills include: *Planning* (to foresee the future by setting the direction as stated in vision, mission, and goal statements and drafting action plans to realize the future), *organizing* (bolstering human and other resources of the enterprise), *command* (directing employees and their interaction), *coordination* (harmonizing all activities and effort throughout the enterprise), *control/monitor* (ensuring everything occurs as planned), *decision-making*, *communication*, and *motivation* which rely on cognitive abilities, rather than the ability to deal with people (CIPD, 2022a; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003). However, to meet business/performance goals, leaders need the cooperation of people in a coordinated fashion (Morkel, Nienaber and McNeill, 2021; Nienaber and McNeill, 2022; Skivington and Daft, 1991). Furthermore, who wants to follow a leader who is incompetent or impotent? By implication, effective leadership requires intra-personal, interpersonal, leadership and business competence, which impact accomplishing *coordination* and *cooperation*, and, thus a competitive advantage, as reflected in Figure 1.

3. Meta Motives

Additionally, people are moved by meta motives in life, i.e., a need for acceptance and approval (relatedness), status, power, and control of resources (competence), and predictability, order, and outside of chaos (autonomy/meaningfulness), which drive successful learning (Baumeister and Leary, 1995; deCharms, 1996; Hogan and Sherman, 2020; Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; White, 1959). All four competence domains, i.e., intra-personal, interpersonal, leadership, and business skills, can be linked to these meta motives which drive learning. The content of the leadership development programs – focusing on one of the four competence domains - discussed in the literature (a focus on soft/interpersonal skills) is, thus, an incomplete representation of leadership development, stemming from a flawed assessment of what is needed, i.e., behavior vs. results (Rothwell, Hohne and King, 2018). Hence, the accounts of failed leadership development programs are not surprising.

As mentioned, results matter most in organizational performance rather than singular individual behaviors. Results derive from leaders accomplishing *coordination* and *cooperation*, which are encapsulated by the structural dimensions of organization for implementing strategy. Coordination and cooperation are, respectively, accomplished by the framework and processes structural dimension of organization to implement strategy (Skivington and Daft, 1991), as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 illustrates that the process of strategy formation and execution is intertwined. It allows leaders to align strategic intent and action. Information about leadership capability to align intent and action stems from output measurement, shown on the left hand-side. These measurements are present at the organization's strategic level, where strategy is formulated, and the organization's operational level, where strategy is translated and executed (right hand-side).

Effective leaders create a competitive advantage by accomplishing coordination and cooperation, which align key actions fulfilling strategic intent. The mechanism to accomplish coordination and cooperation is structural dimensions of organization to implement strategy at the organization's operational level, where strategy is translated and implemented into action (middle). The framework dimension arranges coordination and comprises structure and systems. The processes dimension arranges cooperation and comprises interaction and sanctions.

According to Figure 1, effective leadership development programs should advance leadership competence to accomplish competitive advantage through both *coordination* and *cooperation* via the structural dimensions of organization to implement strategy. *Coordination* is accomplished via the framework structural dimension of organization to implement strategy. *Three* of the competence domains, namely, intra-personal, leadership, and business skills, impact the accomplishment of coordination via the structure and system components (i.e., attitude towards authority and identification of talent to do the job at hand specified in job design) of the framework dimension of organization to implement strategy. *Cooperation* is accomplished via the processes structural dimension of organization to implement strategy. All four competence domains, i.e., intra-personal, interpersonal, leadership, and business skills impact the attainment of cooperation via the interaction (core self-esteem, self-control, communication) and reward (retaining talent, interaction fostering good interpersonal relationships with team members) components of the processes structural dimension of organization to implement strategy.

4. Research Question

Given the above exposition, it seems that current leadership development programs often miss the simple logic, i.e., aligning strategic intent with execution, by becoming side-tracked on *fads du jour*. Thus, the question arises whether organizations systematically use leadership development foundational metrics (e.g., direction-setting capacity, trust, etc.) for effective strategy implementation. The next section addresses the research methodology (approach, design, and method) to answer the research question, followed by the presentation and discussion of the findings, and closes with conclusions, contribution, limitations, and directions for future research.

5. Methodology

We observed the direction of reputable scholars in conducting the empirical study (Daniel, 2012; Forza, 2016; Jann and Hinz, 2017; Jansen, 2010; Kelly et al., 2003; Lavrakas, 2008; O'Leary, 2021). The limited empirical evidence on the topic investigated (Hamilton and Sodeman, 2020; Marler and Boudreau, 2017) dictated an exploratory approach (Forza, 2016; Jann and Hinz, 2017; Jansen, 2010; Lavrakas, 2008). The study aimed to uncover insights early on to lay the foundation for future descriptive and explanatory research, instead of conclusive analyses and generalizations (Forza, 2016; Jann and Hinz, 2017; Jansen, 2010).

6. Exploratory Survey

We needed large amounts of standardized factual data to answer the research question. Hence, a survey was appropriate. Survey research systematically collects large amounts of (standardized) factual data, such as behaviors and trends, or opinions, at a relatively low cost, in as short a period, from a diverse sample of respondents, using an instrument, such as a questionnaire, consisting of closed-ended and/or open-ended questions (Forza, 2016; Lavrakas, 2008; O'Leary, 2021). Surveys are classified as exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory (Forza, 2016; Jansen, 2010). Given the exploratory nature of our inquiry, we selected an exploratory survey, however, an underused research design.

Surveys collect data by conducting structured or unstructured face-to-face or telephone interviews or administering a questionnaire via mail or online (Forza, 2016; Jansen, 2010). A disadvantage of survey research is the low response rate due to survey fatigue, the proliferation of junk emails, and perceptions of bias (Fulton, 2016; O'Leary, 2021). The advantages of surveys include: (a) Many potential respondents, with a range of views, and over a large geographical area can be reached, (b) Responses allow for comparisons, (c) Generate standardized, quantifiable numeric data, (d) Generate textual data through open-ended questions, and (e) Confidential and anonymous responses (Forza, 2016; O'Leary, 2021).

7. Sample

Exploratory surveys use a small number of responses to gain insight which is more important than a large sample size that allows for generalizations (Forza, 2016; Jann and Hinz, 2017; Jansen, 2010; Lavrakas, 2008). To be useful, the small number of respondents should be diverse and cover all existing relevant varieties of the phenomenon studied (Forza, 2016; Jansen, 2010, Lavrakas, 2008). 'Small number', however, is not adequately addressed by these scholars. Forza (2016) and Daniel (2012) address the issue of an acceptable number constituting small. Forza (2016) hints at no minimum response rate for exploratory surveys while providing specific guidance on minimum number of responses for descriptive and explanatory surveys. Regardless, Forza (2016) and Daniel (2012) concur that: (a) The sample size should be adequate to satisfy the objectives of the study, (b) Return useful results with scientific and practical value, (c) Should not violate the assumptions of statistical analyses, and (d) In terms of ethical considerations, one should use the smallest sample necessary to satisfy the objectives of the study. Based on these guidelines, Daniel (2012) indicates a sufficient parameter of 20 to 150 responses for exploratory research, pilot studies, and pretesting.

8. Instrument

We based our questionnaire on an intensive literature review (Forza, 2016; Jan and Hinz, 2017; O'Leary, 2021). Trustworthiness was enhanced by attention to construct identification, the questions were linked to the study objectives, and we followed basic design rules, namely: Selecting an appropriate data collection method, attending to flow, layout and the wording of questions, and the face-to-face pre-testing of the questionnaire with (HR) experts before the main study (Forza, 2016; O'Leary, 2021). The pre-test indicated that an online self-report questionnaire would be a better data collection option than face-to-face interviews. Consequently, we adjusted the questionnaire and the wording of a few items to improve readability.

The questionnaire comprised two sections. One collected demographic variables, such as the organization's size in terms of number of employees. The second section pertained to respondents' perceptions about the use of people analytics, including leadership development, to implement strategy for organizational performance. Examples of questions in this section include: "My organization uses the following metrics (accompanied by a short description of the metric) to manage organizational performance"; and "How do these metrics link with competitive advantage." The questionnaire contained 16 questions, 14 of which were closed-ended and two of which were open-ended. The survey was conducted following ethical research principles. Ethical clearance was obtained from the relevant institutions and participation was voluntary based on informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality. Participants could withdraw at any stage without penalties.

9. Our Research Site

We used purposive sampling, which is appropriate for exploratory surveys (Forza, 2016; Jansen, 2010). We selected the South African Board for People Practices (SABPP) as data collection site. The SABPP was chosen for its many diverse members in terms of economic activity, size of organizations, and potential use of people analytics in implementing strategy. Furthermore, SABPP members could be informed of and support advances in HR practices, including workforce measurement in support of organizational performance. Thus, SABPP members would be the best source of information to answer the research question investigated, according to survey research scholars (Forza, 2016; Lavrakas, 2008; O'Leary, 2021).

We shared a cross-sectional survey link with the SABPP in June 2018. They (SABPP) distributed the link to their members, inviting their voluntary, anonymous, and confidential participation based on the stated purpose and objectives of the survey, the importance of participation, and the promise that aggregated anonymized survey results would be shared with both the SABPP and interested respondents. The survey closed in September 2018. Anonymized feedback was provided to the interested parties in January 2021.

10. Findings and Discussion

Sixty-one responses were received, which met the norms for exploratory surveys (i.e., between 20 and 150) and trustworthy criteria as discussed by Daniel (2012), Forza (2016), Jansen (2010), and Lavrakas (2008). Most respondents (36/61) reported using leadership development metrics in strategy execution.

10.1 Responses to Close-Ended Questions

Most respondents (10) measured leadership development on an annual basis, followed by a quarterly (seven), 2-yearly (four), 5-yearly (one) and six-monthly (one) basis. Only 23 of the 36 respondents completed the section on control variables. The 23 responses still met the norms for exploratory surveys. Responses were diverse in terms of:

- Profile of respondents: specialists (12), top managers (seven), frontline staff (four); 21 had more than 10 years' experience, 14 held a post-graduate degree, seven a degree, and two a certificate.
- Respondents represented a range of industries, viz. electricity, gas, and water (five), finance and business service (five), transport, storage, and communication (seven), construction (three), wholesale trade, commercial agents, and allied services (one), mining and quarrying (two).
- The business size ranged from 21-50 employees (three), 51-200 employees (two), and more than 500 employees (18).
- Perception of performance ranged from *excellent*, i.e., they achieved their goals 80-100% of the time (six), to *good*, i.e., they achieved their goals 60–79% of the time (10), and *average*, i.e., they achieved their goals 40-59% of the time (seven), suggesting room for improvement.
- Respondents reported the application of a range of strategies, and some employed more than one strategy, i.e., growth (18), maintenance (15), low cost (eight), differentiation (eight), and focus (seven).
- Respondents' satisfaction with the results produced by these strategies ranged from very successful (five), somewhat successful (12), neutral (five), and very unsuccessful (one), suggesting room for improvement. Reasons for somewhat successful, neutral, and very unsuccessful related to either applying an inappropriate strategy to achieve the organizational goals or the organization's goals were inappropriate.

10.2 Responses to the Open-Ended Question: Competitive Advantage

An open question asked respondents how the people metrics they used in implementing strategy link to competitive advantage. Sixteen respondents answered this question. Responses to this question varied. Most of the responses were incoherent (e.g., "strategic input" and "planning, organizing"), even from respondents who indicated that their organizations achieved excellent performance.

Two respondents from regulated industries such as electricity, gas, and water responded that competitive advantage is irrelevant as they are not subject to competition. Four respondents (three top managers and one specialist) from diverse industries referred to people, but not necessarily their competence, to achieve a competitive advantage. Two respondents (a specialist and a top manager) from construction referred to innovation as part of achieving competitive advantage. These responses are consistent with the literature discussed, i.e., people are the most important resource to implement strategy, while innovation unlocks peoples' competence to create value (cf. Barney, 1991; Becker, 1962; CIPD, 2016; Holbeche, 2022; Teece, Peteraf and Lee, 2016).

In total, six responses from diverse industries partly address accomplishing coordination and cooperation that align key actions fulfilling strategic intent, as discussed (Nienaber and McNeill, 2022; Skivington and Daft, 1991). However, most of these responses signify that leaders neglect human competence as a major organizational resource to attain performance. Therefore, it can be inferred that leaders fail to attain coordination and cooperation, and thus a competitive advantage aligning intent and execution. Hence, it is questionable if the leadership development programs based on leadership metrics used by these respondents address the leadership competence domains that develop skills to create a competitive advantage accomplished by coordination and cooperation. Furthermore, it appears that the respondents did not view competitive advantage entirely as indicated in the discussed literature. This observation supports the responses showing organizational performance/results can be improved.

Thus, leadership development metrics used by these respondents may not have been applied to their full advantage (i.e., identifying competence domains to be developed) to accomplish competitive advantage

ensuring effective strategy execution (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Levenson, 2018). Some answers imply that the respondents did not have a clear view of the link between the people metrics used and organizational goal achievement, creating a competitive advantage, and link with business performance (CIPD, 2018, 2022a; Hamilton and Sodeman, 2020; Levenson, 2018; Marler and Boudreau, 2017; Rothwell, Hohne and King, 2018). These responses suggest an ineffective integration of leadership development to effective strategy execution, but instead and possibly *fads du jour*.

These responses corroborate the literature, namely, investments in leadership development do not consistently benefit organizations in guiding effective strategy execution based on competitive advantage arising from leaders accomplishing coordination and cooperation that align key actions to fulfill strategic intent (Hogan and Warrenfeltz, 2003; Hogan and Kaiser, 2004; Holbeche, 2019; Leimbach, 2021; Rothwell, Hohne and King, 2018).

11. Conclusions, Contribution, Limitations, and Directions for Future Research

Given the foregoing, the study answered the research question. As discussed, the responses to the survey suggest that participating organizations (a) did not systematically use leadership development foundational metrics for effective strategy execution, (b) as the leadership development programs have missed the simple logic, i.e., aligning strategic intent with execution, (c) by accomplishing competitive advantage through coordination and cooperation, and thus (d) ineffectively linked metrics to competitive advantage, the foundation of an effective strategy. By implication the leadership metrics used did not identify the leadership competence domain i.e., intra-personal, interpersonal, leadership or business skills, to develop to guide effective strategy implementation. Thus, it can be concluded that the leadership development programs of the participants were not a guide to effective strategy execution but possibly *fads du jour*. This conclusion is, regrettably and predictably, consistent with the literature as discussed.

This paper offers actionable information based on sound theory and corroborated by an exploratory survey. It shows how leadership competence i.e., intra-personal, interpersonal, leadership, and business skills, links to accomplishing coordination and cooperation, the crux of competitive advantage, aligning key actions fulfilling strategic intent, guiding successful strategy execution, and consequently attaining organizational performance or results. The link between leader competence (domain) and competitive advantage has not explicitly been made before and thus we extend the literature on leadership development to guide effective strategy execution. The survey met norms for exploratory surveys and trustworthy criteria, and thus contributes to valid conclusions. Organizations can use this study's information to design comprehensive programs/interventions aimed at leadership development, hopefully, and comprehensively, to enact leadership strategy execution skills guided in the four essential key domains by the mandatory requirement of *competitive advantage*. Bottom line: This all arises and is the essence of leaders accomplishing coordination and cooperation, as shown in Figure 1. Current and singular-variant leadership development programs are inadequate – the world is more complex from the simple-obvious, easily measurable, and descriptive.

Let us acknowledge the obvious. The cross-sectional nature of the study is the main limitation. Hence, we recommend further descriptive and explanatory research to enable broader generalizations. Specifically, how the content of leadership development programs initiated in organizations link with the four competence domains, accomplishing coordination and cooperation, to create a competitive advantage guiding effective strategy execution to attain organizational performance.

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