

Strategic Leadership & Business Performance- A Mediation Model

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The present study has used two aspects of learning: organizational learning culture (OLC) and organizational learning (OL) as explanatory mechanisms of the relationship between strategic leadership (SL) and business performance (BP). A cross-sectional survey was conducted leading to 326 usable data from IT companies based in India. The analysis was done using SPSS and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). The study findings reveal that the SL has effect on BP directly as well as indirectly through OLC and OL in knowledge work intensive IT industry.

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Introduction

Extant literature reveals that competitive advantages rooted in organizational internal competencies can be safer in creating benefits for organizations, in contrast to its external opportunities (Arasa & K'Obonyo, 2012). One of the organizational internal competitive superiorities is leadership style (Safarzadeh et al., 2015). Strategic leadership (SL) has been widely accepted as popular leadership style that plays an effective and significant role in gaining competitive advantages (Yazdani, 2010). A strategic leader has the ability of perceiving, mental fictionalizing, making the flexibility continuous, thinking strategically, and being able to work with other people in order to initiate the changes that will create a viable future for the organization (Ireland & Hitt, 1999). SL is related with the ability of forming, improving, and sustaining the capacities of learning, changing, and managing mind in the organization (Boal & Hooijberg, 2000).

The transformation of firms from resource-based-view to knowledge-based-view has extended the importance of or-

ganizational learning (OL) (Chuang, 2004). OL has become the source of competitive advantage for dynamic organizations (Liao & Wu, 2010). Gong, Huang & Farh (2009) have suggested that organizations that have capacity to learn faster can get sustainable competitive advantage as compared to their rivals. Given the significance of organizational learning for business performance, understanding ways in which managers can influence the learning process in organizations is becoming increasingly important. Many organizations are convinced that organizational learning is important for achieving long-term organizational success, efficiency, and organizational effectiveness (Nold, 2012). The extensive literature stresses the importance of organizational learning for the survival of an organization and its effective performance (Schön & Argyris, 1996; Fiol & Lyles, 1985; Senge, 1990). As organizations face many environmental challenges, they need to adapt by ushering in immediate changes. Changes however have to be made through the process of organizational learning. The push for making changes is in-fact through strategic leadership, and of course an appropriate tool at the disposal of leaders to bring in changes is by transforming the old culture to a new one (Rijal, Yoshida & Umemiya, 2010; Caldwell, 2012). As organizational learning is an effective way to boost efficiency, increase productivity, and improve business performance (García-Morales, Jiménez-Barrionuevo & Gutiérrez-Gutiérrez, 2012), businesses need to seek more innovative ways and means to anticipate and respond to change more quickly and more effectively

through enhancing their learning processes (Yeo, 2007; Mallén, Chiva, Alegre & Guinot, 2016). The pace of change is only going to increase as it is the intricacy of its networks, unparalleled in any time in history, demand old leadership rules be thrown out and rewritten (Bolden & O'Regan, 2016). Extant literature has demonstrated that leadership, organizational learning, and organizational learning culture as important factors that enhance the business performance (Gusmão, Christiananta & Ellitan, 2018; Chung, Yang & Huang, 2015; Serfontein & Hough, 2011; Jyothibabu, Pradhan & Farooq, 2011; Škerlavaj, Song & Lee, 2010).

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There are a few elaborated investigation considering the Indian firms which explore the influence of strategic leadership on organizational learning (e.g., Jain & Moreno, 2015; Singh, 2011; Hashim, 2013). Further, there are studies associated with the business performance but such studies lack discussion about the flexible strategic leadership (e.g., Nadkarni & Herrmann, 2010), and the impact of organizational learning on business performance in Indian firms (e.g., Vij & Farooq, 2015). Similarly the impact of organizational learning cultures has been less explored when considering the case of Indian firms (Banerjee, Gupta & Bates, 2017). Although there

has been the underlying assumptions about the role of leadership in organizational learning (e.g., Nafei, Khanfar, & Kaifi, 2012), little is known about employing the explanatory role of organization learning and organizational learning culture into the relationship between SL and OL, SL and BP, SL and OLC as studied empirically in this research paper. Additionally, researchers have criticized transformational and transactional leadership theory for not considering organizational context (Yukl & Becker, 2006), therefore we believe the use of SL as an independent variable and OL and OLC as a mediator in this study addresses some of the limitations of previous studies.

Hypotheses Development

As the world continually becomes more complex, developing leaders who have the core competencies to manage and succeed in this ecosystem is essential. The high rate of failure of leadership in MNCs in the IT-sector is evident in today's VUCA –environment (Codreanu, 2016). Strategic leaders, who bring the kind of VUCA (where Volatile leads to Vision, Uncertainty yields to Understanding, Complexity yields to Clarity and Ambiguity yields to Agility), are often able to make a turnaround due to their immersive learning ability (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Codreanu, 2016). Organizations that survive in the future will manage their organizational structure, leadership, processes, competencies, and practices to allow sufficient flexibility/scalability to adapt to these changes. An organization needs leadership that reinforces learning. Organiza-

tional learning is strongly influenced by the behavior of leaders/ leadership style (Shao, Feng, & Hu, 2017). Such environments make it easier for managers and employees to execute concrete learning processes and practices and provide leadership that fosters learning and to cultivate a culture of learning (Santos-Vijande, López-Sánchez, & Trespalacios, 2012). The creation of a learning culture depends on the strategic leader (Hurley & Hult, 1998) and how well that leader can balance transactional and transformational behaviors, authoritarian and participative systems, and task and relationship orientations (Schein, 1992).

Strategic Leadership, Organizational Learning & Organizational Learning Culture

Various studies have asserted the relationships between strategic leadership and organizational learning (Aydin, Guclu & Pisapia, 2015; Lee & Welliver, 2018; Gusmão et al., 2018). Strategic leadership empowers to create the strategic change necessary to cope with the globalized business environment (Perry-Smith & Mannucci, 2017). Serrat (2017) locates organizational learning squarely in the camp of leadership, and argues that, to be able to respond to tomorrow's challenges and opportunities, strategic leaders must initiate a process that en-

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hances day-to-day learning. Further, organizational culture is viewed as a shared mental model that influences how individuals behave, and how they interpret behaviors (Schein, 2004). In fact, various researches have asserted the mediating effect of OLC in the relationship between leadership and OL (e.g., Hosseini, Hajipour, Kaffashpoor & Darikandeh, 2020; Syafii, Thoyib, & Nimran, 2015; Elshanti, 2017). Therefore:

Hypothesis H1: Organizational learning culture will mediate the positive relationship between strategic leadership and organizational learning.

Strategic Leadership, Business Performance & Organizational Learning Culture:

Various research works on strategic leadership have observed a positive relationship between strategic leadership and business performance (Pitelis & Wagner, 2019; Rahman et al., 2018). Sui and Wang's (2014) study on the role of strategic leadership in organizational performance suggested that strategic leadership would affect the organization's performance through work environment. Furthermore, OLC becomes more essential in the consideration of new ideas because it enables an organization to adapt to dynamic business environment. In fact, OLC is important in order to value learning and strive for high performance through the learning progression (Dixon, 2017). Therefore:

Hypothesis H2: Organizational learning culture will mediate the positive rela-

tionship between strategic leadership and business performance.

Strategic Leadership, Organizational Learning Culture, Organizational Learning and Business Performance

The significance of organizational learning for a firm's survival and effective performance has been highly emphasized in various works (e.g., Khandekar & Sharma, 2006; Jyothibabu et al., 2011; García-Morales et al., 2012; Mallén, Chiva, Alegre & Guinot, 2016; Saadat & Saadat, 2016). Further, aspects emanating from organizational learning culture which is established and embedded through process of learning orientation leads to organizational learning (Yeung, Lai & Yee, 2007). The creation of a learning culture depends on the strategic leader (Joo & Park, 2010; Lin & McDonough, 2011; Hussein, Omar, Noordin & Ishak, 2016) and how well that leader can balance transactional and transformational behaviors, authoritarian and participative systems, and task and relationship orientations (Baškarada, Watson & Cromarty, 2016). Škerlavaj et al. (2007) established the relationship between OLC and business performance through business and process change, enthused by the learning culture. A similar study was carried out by Elshanti (2017) to understand the mediating effect of organizational learning culture on leadership style and organizational learning. The study exhibits that organizational learning culture had a mediating effect on leadership style and organizational learning relationship. Similarly, various

researches have asserted the mediating effect of OLC in the relationship between leadership style and OL (Hosseini et al., 2020; Syafii et al., 2015).

Organizations with deep learning cultures usually perform better.

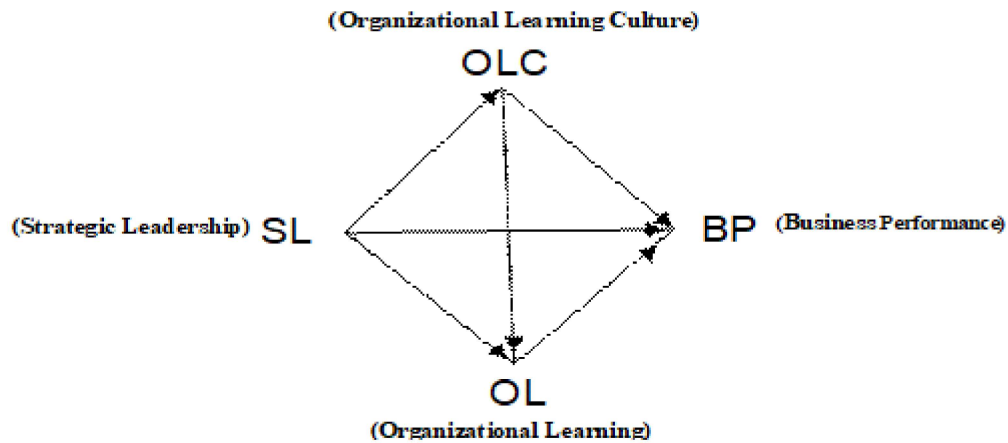
Organizations with deep learning cultures usually perform better (Hung, Yang, Lien, McLean, & Kuo, 2010). OLC enhances the organization’s capabilities, thus increasing the organizational performance (Škerlavaj et al., 2010). All these arguments suggest that organizational learning leads to superior business performance therefore:

Hypothesis H3: Organizational learning will mediate the positive relationship between Organizational learning Culture and Business Performance.

Hypothesis H4: Organizational learning will mediate the positive relationship between Strategic Leadership and Business Performance.

The hypothesized model to describe the relationships amongst the four constructs namely, strategic leadership, organizational learning culture, organizational learning, and business performance is provided in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1 Hypothesized Model



Methods

The measurement instrument used for this research is a survey. The survey included measurements for the key constructs of this study: Organizational Learning, Organizational Learning Culture, Strategic Leadership and Business Performance.

Participants/Sample & Setting

The current web-based study was conducted in information technology (IT) MNCs in India. The study has considered 326 respondents based on purposive sampling. Out of a total of 375 responses, 13 % (49 responses) were not considered for the final analyses. The responses

which were not considered for further analysis included those with missing values and those filled not so seriously (considered as those filled in less than half of the estimated time to complete this survey).

In order to eliminate the possibility of bias, participants from four IT organizations, [large (>1000 employees), medium (500-1000 employees) and small (<500 employees)] were included, enhancing the validity of the research findings. Data collection was done over a duration of two months. The target population of the present study was designated as project leaders, managers, deputy general managers, department managers and business-leads at different managerial levels operating in the different business verticals (twelve in number) at four IT MNCs based out of Karnataka region (India). The sample comprised 195 (59.8%) men and 131 (40.18%) women. Pertinent to their position, Project leads (35%), Managers (25%), Dy General Managers (15%), and Department Managers & Business Leads (25%) were included. Moreover, with respect to firm size, about 50% participants belong to large size organizations, 30% belong to medium size organizations and 20% belong to small size organizations. With regard to tenure, below 60 months (40%), 60-120 months (15%), 120-160 months (13%), 160-200 months (12%) and above 200 months (20 %) were included. The numbers presented above are rounded off to nearest integer for easy reference.

Measures

To empirically test the proposed relationship, a structured questionnaire was formed with the help of existing scales of the constructs on a five-point Likert scale from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree” for managerial perceptions. Strategic Leadership was measured on an 8-item scale derived from the work of Rahman et al. (2018) and Duursema (2013). Organizational Learning was measured using a well-validated 8-item scale derived from the work of Garcia-Morales, Lloréns Montes, and Verdú Jover (2008) and Imran, Ilyas and Aslam (2016). Organizational Learning Culture was measured using 8-item scale derived from the work of Mallén, Chiva, Alegre and Guinot (2015). Business Performance was measured using 8-item scale derived from the work of Rehman, Bhatti, and Chaudhry (2019). SPSS 25.0 and AMOS 26 were used for data analysis.

Results & Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test of sampling adequacy and Bartlett’s test of sphericity (value of .939 adequacy score and significant difference value score of Bartlett’s sphericity test; significant at .000 level) indicate that data is normally distributed (details in Table 1) The KMO test value is above 0.68 and Bartlett’s test levels (sig. = 0.00) are significant which indicates a satisfactory validity of the measure (Williams, Onsman & Brown, 2010).

Table 1 KMO & Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.939
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	5704.015
	Df	351
	Sig.	.000

Reliability of the Constructs

Reliability of the endogenous and exogenous variables in the model is measured through the Cronbach Alpha. Table 2 also shows confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results which were performed to determine the factor loadings for each item, along with its reliability scales. Factor loadings above 0.50 indicated fitness of the item to latent con-

structs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Further the constructs have reliability indicators above 0.70 and therefore are considerably internally consistent (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & William, 1995; Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). All the values in Table 2 for the four constructs are above the threshold levels. This indicates that the questionnaires have sufficient internal consistency and reliability.

Table 2 Factor Loading & Reliability Analysis

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor Loading Range
Strategic Leadership	6	0.889	0.68 – 0.85
Organizational Learning	7	0.899	0.71 – 0.77
Organizational Learning Culture	7	0.923	0.69 – 0.86
Business Performance	7	0.923	0.73 – 0.84

Validity Analysis

In this paper, we calculate the measurement (outer) model with the help of convergent validity and discriminant validity. All the variables are having convergent validity greater than 0.5 which indicates there is good convergent validity in the variables. In the convergent validity test for latent variables, the average variance extracted must be more than 0.5 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Table 3 shows that the latent variables are having convergent validity (Strategic Leadership = 0.574, Organizational Learning = 0.560, Organizational Learning Culture = 0.633, and Business Performance = 0.633).

Discriminant validity refers to a situation that tells that every variable of theoretical model differs from another variable (Rehman et al., 2019). In this study, discriminant validity calculated by using Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommended method. Discriminant validity can be calculated by using one of the methods. Table 3 demonstrates that this study fulfils the above-mentioned criterion. In the discriminant validity test for latent variables, the square root of average variance extracted (put along the diagonal in bold) must be more than the correlation values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Table 3 shows the existence of discriminant validity (Strategic Leader-

ship = 0.758, Organizational Learning = 0.748, Organizational Learning Culture = 0.795, and Business Performance = 0.795).

Model Fit Summary (Structural Analysis)

Concerning the criteria in order to evaluate the model fit, the study is based on the Bagozzi and Edwards (1998) pro-

posed preliminary fit criteria; overall model fit, and fit of internal structure of the model. The model provides an acceptable fit to the data, i.e.; the values of NFI, CFI, RMSEA, GFI & AGFI were found according to the cut-points in both the measurement models. Table 4 indicates the values of Fit Indices are well above or equal to the standards. All these values have been calculated at 95% of confidence interval.

Table 3 Convergent & Discriminant Validity

	Organizational Learning	Business Performance	Organizational Learning Culture	Strategic Leadership	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Organizational Learning (OL)	0.748				0.560
Business Performance (BP)	0.474***	0.795			0.633
Organizational Learning Culture (OLC)	0.401***	0.516***	0.795		0.633
Strategic Leadership (SL)	0.439***	0.646***	0.561***	0.758	0.574

Note: *** p < 0.001

Table 4 Evaluation of Measurement Models for the Constructs

Fitness Indices	Standard Values	Achieved Values
Goodness-of-Fit-Index (GFI)	Greater or Equal to 0.90	0.909
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	Greater or Equal to 0.90	0.922
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	<0.08	0.037
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	Greater or Equal to 0.90	0.974
Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI)	Greater or Equal to 0.80	0.892
Chi Square/df	Less than 3	1.450

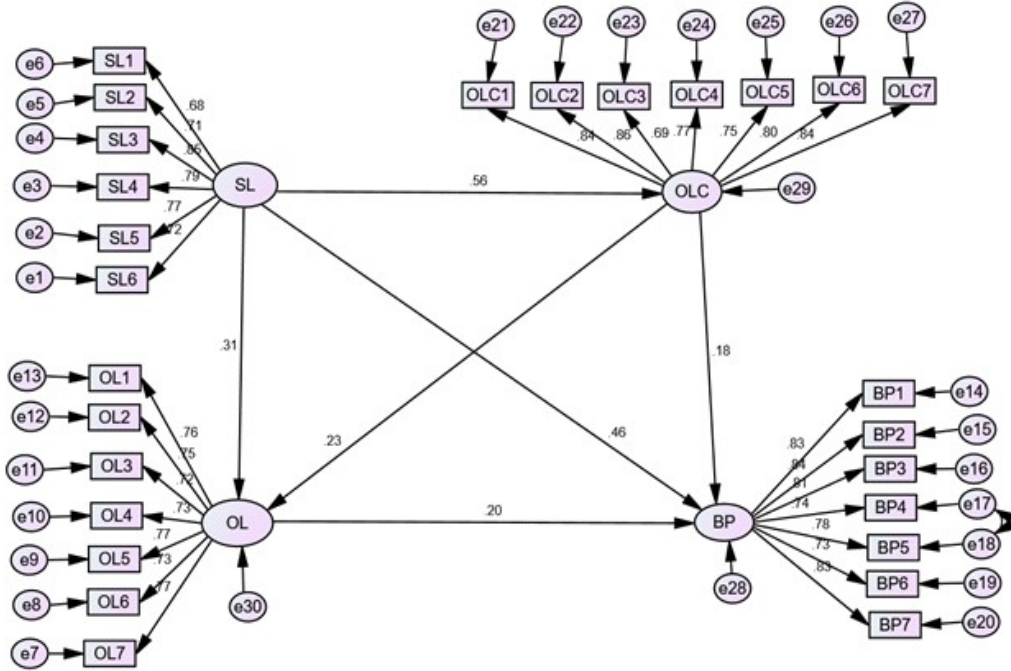
Analysis of the Model

As the assumptions underlying structural equation modelling were met, the coefficient parameter estimates were examined along with the overall model fit indices to test the hypotheses. The Structural Model was analyzed by using

AMOS 26. The final result of SEM for this study is presented in the Fig. 2:

The path coefficients of all relationships have been provided in Fig. 2. The details of test of the hypotheses with the standardized effect and the significance value in the brackets are given in Table

Fig. 2 Structural Equation Model Output



4. As the indirect effect in all the four hypotheses (H1-H4) are significant, all the four hypotheses were therefore supported. To further assess the mediation effects, we also followed the procedure recommended by James, Mulaik, and Brett (2006). We first estimated the indirect effects and then used a bootstrapping technique to construct confidence intervals (Stine, 1989). The indirect effects were all significant. The bootstrapping results of the mediating effects of OL and

OLC on SL and BP relationship have been provided in Table 6. Mediators were analyzed by computing bias- corrected 95% confidence intervals (Cis) using bootstrapping (sampling with replacement) with 5000 resamples. Specifically, the bootstrapped 95% confidence interval (CI) around the standardized indirect effect did not include zero in between the upper and lower bound values, therefore the mediation effect can be considered significant.

Table 5 Mediation Effect of OLC between SL & OL

Variables	Total Effect	Direct effect	Indirect effect	Conclusion
SL → OLC → OL (H1)	0.439 (0.001)	0.313 (0.001)	0.127 (0.001)	Supported
SL → OLC → BP (H2)	0.646 (0.001)	0.458 (0.001)	0.148 (0.004)	Supported
OLC → OL → BP (H3)	0.223 (0.002)	0.178 (0.005)	0.045 (0.001)	Supported
SL → OL → BP (H4)	0.646 (0.001)	0.458 (0.001)	0.093 (0.000)	Supported

Table 6 Examination of Indirect Effect

Paths	Estimated Indirect Effect	LowerBound	UpperBound	p-value
SL→ OLC → OL	0.127	0.059	0.198	0.001
SLàOLCàBP(Serial Mediation)	0.148	0.054	0.258	0.004
OLC à OL à BP	0.045	0.042	0.231	0.001
SLàOLàBP(Serial Mediation)	0.093	0.047	0.167	0.000

Discussion

In this study, the primary objective was to examine the linkage between Strategic Leadership and Business Performance through Organizational Learning Culture (OLC) and Organizational Learning (OL). This study explored the mediating effect of OL and OLC on the relationship between Strategic Leadership and Business Performance using SEM in the Indian IT MNCs. All the hypotheses were supported. Based on the result, it can be concluded that although SL has its own direct relationship with BP, both OL and OLC are also relevant in explaining how Strategic Leadership is able to facilitate Business Performance. The very act of indulging in strategic style of leading by way of making strategic choices and practicing flexible leadership in the business context facilitates organizational learning at all levels and thus creates a learning culture which eventually acts as a competitive advantage for IT companies.

IT MNCs have a need for strategic leadership to improve their business performance.

The results suggest that IT MNCs have a need for strategic leadership to improve their business performance and

the same is further enhanced with the combined effect of OL and OLC. This is due to the fact that when latest knowledge about products and technologies is fostered; as well as abilities and skills concerning acquisition of new technologies through organizational learning; this leads to improved business performance. Strategic Leadership generates consciousness and acceptance of the business firm’s mission, and nurtures a shared vision, reorienting the training and building of work teams. The leader ensures the availability of all necessary resources and overall supervision needed to establish learning so as to achieve business outcomes.

The findings of the study have relevance in the sense that it is able to suggest a possible alternative path to organizations that it is not necessary to always focus on achieving targets to get business outcomes. Alternatively, focusing on learning and fostering such a culture itself can generate business outcomes. And more interestingly, leaders who have strategically oriented leadership style can also get business outcomes by creating a learning culture and ensuring learning outcomes for the organization which are in knowledge work (IT) industry. Increased knowledge about Organizational Learning Culture can provide leaders, managers, and re-

searchers with exclusive insight into managing Organizational Learning to ensure alignment with the external business environment. As a result, appropriate strategies can be designed either to adapt the existing organizational culture or to try reshaping it in order to support the leaders' efforts toward shaping Organizational Learning Culture. Therefore, it is essential to articulate how the leaders, through their behaviors, create a positive organizational culture that is important for the positive organizational outcomes.

Other managerial implications of the proposed model could be that high potential managers/leaders might be groomed into strategic leaders down the line so that they have the requisite skills and competencies to succeed in this VUCA economy. 21st century's global economy is complex, challenging and filled with opportunities and threats. This study asserts that strategic leadership practices could help organization enhance their performance while competing successfully in the turbulent and unpredicted business environment. HR and Talent Management Professionals must position their organization to succeed in today's turbulent business environment by developing strategic leaders who are agile and adaptive both. The findings of this research may also assist HR policy makers of IT industries to optimize the allocations of resources in hiring, reward and recognition, training and other functions of human resource management to have the right leaders for building an appropriate organizational learning culture.

Limitations & Future Research

The first limitation concerns the generalizability of the findings, the targeted sample of this study being IT-industries of Karnataka (India) region only. Second, the cross-sectional nature of research into a series of dynamic concepts (e.g., Organizational Learning, Organizational Performance) facilitates analysis of only a specific situation to be studied and not their overall conduct over time; hence, future research could consider alternative mode of time horizon such as longitudinal survey which may bring different perspectives and additional insights in the above phenomena and how they relate to each other. Employing longitudinal methods of data collection might help in better understanding the cause and effect relationship with some kind of time-lag. Another limitation of the study is that it relies on the perceptions of the respondents about the behavior of their respective firms. Especially, in terms of firm performance data, perceptions may be misleading.

Further studies can focus on differential effects of various leadership styles on different facets of business performance such as financial, operational, effectiveness etc. and relevance of OL and OLC in each of these relationships. Future research could extend the understanding of study by considering relevant contextual variables such as organizational structure, organizational size, operational excellence etc.

Limitations aside, our study represents a significant step in leadership,

learning and business performance. In response to calls for research on managing business performance within organizations, our study not only examines how strategic leaders contribute to the organizational learning and OLC, but also reveals how OL and OLC in turn mediate the relationship between SL and BP.

Conclusion

Strategic Leadership facilitates Organizational Learning Culture and Organizational Learning, which in turn lead to enhanced Business Performance. The empirical research done in this study supplemented the theory surrounding Strategic Leadership by suggesting that if leaderships in organizations formulate and execute their strategies effectively, this strategic competitiveness will give them an advantage to survive in a turbulent and uncertain economy. In the face of continued environmental volatility, leaders must be strategically flexible. An OLC becomes more essential in the consideration of new ideas because it enables an organization to adapt to dynamic business environment changes in advance. In fact, it has been characterized in order to value learning and strive for high performance through the learning progression (Dixon, 2017).

Strategic Leadership provides the vision and direction for the success of a company. As change has become a staple in organizations, all executives need the skills and tools for both strategy formulation and implementation. Managing change is very important in today's VUCA environment and hence, there is a growing need for stra-

tegic leaders, who not only provide a sense of direction, but who can also build ownership and alignment within their teams and businesses to drive and implement changes through continuous learning.

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