

THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP IN A VUCA (VOLATILITY, UNCERTAINTY, COMPLEXITY, AMBIGUITY) SITUATION

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The extant literature demonstrated that an organization is unprepared for the constraints that come with a crisis and may experience complexity within that organization. The chief executive officer and the top management set the organization's policies for acquiring and integrating resources. Hence, reducing uncertainty, increasing stability, increasing resources, and reducing competition are a few of the goals of the top management. In VUCA (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity) environments, complexities arise from interconnected factors and rapid changes. Strategic leaders can analyze complex situations, break them down into manageable parts, and develop strategies that address multiple dimensions simultaneously. They prioritize initiatives and resources to tackle the most critical challenges. Therefore, strategic leadership is particularly important in VUCA situations because it provides the necessary framework and capabilities to navigate such challenging environments effectively. This study uses a qualitative research approach to explore strategic leadership in top-performing startups in Sri Lanka that operate in VUCA conditions. A purposive sampling technique is used to find top-performing startups in Sri Lanka recognized on the startup ranking website. Semi-structured interviews are used to collect primary data from the senior leadership team. Additionally, researchers collected data using secondary sources related to the visionary leadership, adaptability, and innovative approaches of leaders. Recurring themes and patterns in the interviews were identified using thematic analysis. The findings show that successful leaders create a culture of collaboration and continuous learning, enabling their startup organizations to adapt to the changing market conditions. Furthermore, it is highlighted that data-driven decision-making and technology integration are critical success factors in achieving competitive advantage. Hence, the study emphasizes how effective strategic leadership contributed to overcoming short-term obstacles while securing long-term success. Accordingly, this study offers insightful information about successful leadership practices in a VUCA setting for entrepreneurs and organizational leaders in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Crisis, strategic leadership, VUCA environment