

Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine how the integrated thinking of the CEO drives the transformation of an organization which is expected to result in improved performance. The literature review on integrated thinking, transformation and improved performance revealed that there is a dearth of research that has been undertaken, as to study how the integrated thinking of the CEO drives the transformation of an organization resulting in improved performance considering case studies in the real-world context. Also, this study examines how the upper echelon characteristics of the top management team moderate the relationship between the integrated thinking of the CEO and the transformation of an organization. The systems theory, Lewin's change theory and upper echelons theory were used to discover the phenomenon of improved performance of an organization through the transformation which is driven by the integrated thinking of the CEO.

The contemporary literature recognizes integrated thinking as the active consideration of the relationships between the different operational and functional units and the capitals that the organization uses or affects in the process of value creation. Hambrick and Mason (1984) identified the CEO as the figurehead and the most powerful leader in the organization. According to Chapman (2002), the CEO provides visionary leadership and enables change in a transformational change. Levy (1986) has classified the driving forces of a transformational change in an organization into four conditions as permitting conditions, enabling conditions, precipitating conditions, and triggering events. However, it is striking that there is a dearth of research that combines the two perspectives to explore the research phenomenon of how the integrated thinking of the CEO drives the transformation of an organization which is expected to result in improved performance. Therefore, the aforementioned background inspired the author to perform this study.

A qualitative, deductive approach was used in this study while adopting the descriptive, cross-sectional research design. The usage of multiple case studies was the research strategy. Three case companies with past experiences of triggering events were selected to study the research phenomena. The first company is a pioneer in the textile manufacturing industry, the second company is a pioneer in the glove manufacturing industry and the third company is an emerging company in the instant tea industry. Data were collected through multiple sources such as individual interviews with CEOs and top management team members together with the documentary reviews. The gathered data were transcribed and

read literally and interpretively. Then the data was classified and organized to identify themes based on ‘thematic analysis’ followed by cross-case analysis to make compelling arguments with the qualitative data.

As per the data analysis, it was found that the integrated thinking of the CEO embraces policy for vision and strategy, monitoring the strategy, improvements in integrated thinking and most significantly corporate sustainability practices. Also, it was found that the philosophy of CEOs in all three case companies includes honesty, walk the talk, effective communication and agility. It was found that making changes to both systems and culture is essential in the transformation and the integrated thinking of the CEO drove both changes to systems and culture. But CEOs of the three case companies followed different approaches when driving the transformation. Accordingly, it was observed that the integrated thinking of the CEO drives the transformation of an organization. Another finding of the study following the integrated thinking of the CEO, top management team members engaged in the transformation and their characteristics such as experience and common sense had a huge influence on the transformation of the organization. Accordingly, it was observed that the upper echelon characteristics of the top management team moderate the relationship between the integrated thinking of the CEO and the transformation of an organization.

Based on the findings, the study proposed several managerial implications. It is emphasized that integrated thinking begins with the CEO, and it should be cascaded down to the bottom, to become a part of the DNA of the organization. The CEO can drive a transformation with assistance from the top management team when there are changes and challenges in the internal or external environment that create threats to the organizational survival and going concern. The sustainability of the integrated thinking of the CEO can be assured through properly established systems and culture in an organization.