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# The Challenges Faced by Stakeholders in Implementing Sustainable Strategic Management Practices (SSMP) in the Food Industry: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: Strategic management has turned out to be an important business aspect that businesses cannot do without. This study intended to have a better understanding with regards to the challenges that are faced by various stakeholders as they are implementing Sustainable Strategic Management Practices (SSMP). This research study's main purpose was to categorically articulate the challenges that are being faced by stakeholders in the food industry in implementing SSMP. The Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach was performed using a six-phase approach. In each stage, the literature is reviewed and reduced, where the paper was seeking to retain only the most appropriate literature that was very close to what the paper was looking forward to most relevant articles. Ultimately, the process resulted in 121 journals that were reviewed and analyzed in relation to the research topic using the SLR approach. The findings of the study indicated that there are a number of impediments that tend to emanate from the internal and external environment which act as challenges for the implementation of SSMP within the food industry. It has been noted that there are issues to do with the scarce resources, the regulatory environment amongst others. The study therefore concluded that for effectiveness the businesses need to monitor with efficiency the internal and external business environment for sustainable implementation of SSMP.

Keywords: strategic management, systematic literature review, food industry, business environment, challenges, stakeholders

## INTRODUCTION

The food industry has a whole lot of aspects that tends to impact and affect the adoption of Sustainable Strategic Management Practices (SSMP). The businesses in the food sector need to come up with strategies that are targeted at dealing with the challenges that are encountered in the adoption and implementation of SSMP. The businesses need not to focus merely on the short terms aspects but rather focus on the long-term aspects within the business environment. In an attempt to deal with the challenges which are encountered in the business environment there is massive need and desire to concentrate on the variable customer needs, the seasonal

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK changes and fluctuations which tends to play a pivotal role in hindering the adoption of long-term strategic management practices.

Smith and Rosa (2019) however are of the notion that the majority of firms that are operating within the various industries tend to concentrate on prioritizing short-term profitability instead of concentrating on the investments that have the capacity of offering long terms returns for the businesses. This therefore denotes that the variables that are affecting businesses in the business environment needs to be well understood such that long term sustainable goals can actually be put in place to enhance the business operational capacities. According to Jones, & Williams, (2019) the majority of the businesses that are operating in the food industry tend to choose strategic approaches that have the capacity of enhancing short term business profitability and hence hindering the potential detriment for the adoption of environmental sustainability as well as social accountability.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

## Organisational culture and SSMP implementation

According to Hernandez, & Cook, (2023), the effectiveness in terms of strategic management largely depends on the ability of the organization to align its organizational objectives with its sustainability goals; nonetheless many institutions within the food industry are finding it difficult to successfully align the sustainability goals with the organizational objectives, hence leading to the absence of coherence. The misalignment usually occurs owing to the ingrained organizational cultures that have the capacity and capability of offering much priority to performance instead of sustainable results and outcomes.

## Institutional vision alignment and SSMP implementation

Brown, Green, & Patel, (2020), indicated that despite the fact that the various Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) within the majority of food industry organizations acknowledges the importance of sustainability, they most often encounter a significant number of challenges in turning the sustainability ideas into practice which can be adopted in all the organizational levels, (Carter, & White, 2019). Kitchell (1995) is of the understanding that the lack of alignment between an institution's vision and sustainable practices has the capability of undermining the various environmental initiative and exposing the company to several harms, this is owing to the fact that the consumers are increasingly emphasizing on the critical aspects that have to do with eco-friendly environment as well as corporate responsibility in the business endeavors.

## Management systems complexity

It has also been noted that one of the critical aspects that impacts on the adoption and implementation of SSMP within the food industry is mainly due to the intricacy of the internal management systems within the food industry, (Khan, Rao-Nicholson, Akhtar, & He, 2020). There seems to be a whole lot of complexity when it comes to the supply chain systems, the industrial processes are complex and the distribution processes desire robust flexible management approaches which have the capacity of fluently integrating the aspect of sustainability to the several business activities. According to Green and Patel (2020) the ineffective management approaches lack the adaptability capacities and capabilities which are a prerequisite in the facilitation of sustainable activities such as resources optimization and waste reduction within an industry. Jones, Smith, & Taylor, (2022) are of the notion that the reluctance of the management to embrace change has high capacity of hindering the key aspects of innovation and adaptation of the various efforts that are being put towards the aspect of sustainability within the business and the food industry in general. Harrington, & Moore, (2016), the issues to do with innovation are complex as they require the businesses to successfully reengineer the current institutional frameworks in order for them to encompass the sustainable practices, these may require the adoption of new technological developments and advancements as well as extensive trainings and team building which have the capacity of enhancing process improvements within the organization.

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## METHODOLOGY

There is a lot of literature that has been reviewed around the challenges that are faced by various stakeholders in the implementation of SSMP within the food industry. Consequently, it was challenging for the current study to conduct an all-inclusive literature review. As much literature has been reviewed around challenges of implementing SSMP in the food industry, it appeared very costly and unrealistic for the research to review all of the literature on challenges of SSMP adoption within the food industry. A description literature review was similarly one of the directions that the study might have taken; nevertheless, it contains countless disadvantages and has likewise remained imperiled to several criticisms. The finest method noted to be appropriate for the current study was the use of a systematic literature review approach (SLR). This approach analyses the literature in an evidently classified manner that can be easily comprehended by readers. According to Thorpe, Holt, Pittaway, and Macpherson (2006), SLR is categorized by pellucidity, accuracy, equality, and suitability, and is a very much captivated methodology in the analysis of literature on a given subject area.

In addition to the reimbursements offered by the SLR methodology, it similarly bids a vigorous style for signifying the field of study thematically. Pittaway and Cope, (2007) were of the perception that the SLR approach has the ability and aptitude of connecting various studies around a given area together, thus allowing the researcher to link the findings and make helpful contrasts for the research subject being pursued by the research. Petticrew and Roberts (2006) are of the empathetic that the SLR has the ability to deliver numerous researches together; it helps in dealing with the shortcomings offered by narrative literature review, which in some cases is open to criticisms around the choice of articles being prejudiced, subjective, and limited in their scope.

As research is implementing the SLR approach, it has to follow certain phases. The current study implemented the SLR approach in six stages, as presented in Table 1. Various articles around SSMP look at the approaches as well as the strategies that are being adopted by institutions to implement SSMP, the current study aims at revising a large volume of journals that stems from the diverse business journals that are around strategic management, change management, environmental management, innovation as well as information communication and technology in relation to the challenges encountered in the implementation of SSMP.

## Stages in the SLR

The current study undertook the following approach to gather the relevant literature and review the appropriate documents around the challenges of implementing SSMP within the food industry. Table 1 depicts the stages adopted in the SLR in this study.

Stage	Description
1	Identification of major journals in the area of strategic management, the articles were made use
	of in the coming up with keywords. After the identification of journals a comprehensive search
	of all related journals was undertaken to the selected strategic management journals.
2	Phrases were used to search key journals, "Strategic management", "and sustainable strategic management". The selected journals were downloaded and there has been the removal of duplicated articles to remain with the key articles that speaks to the study.
3	Software was used for the purposes of identifying the research study key words, many key words were found and there was further screening in order to find key words that are directly linked to SSMP.
4	The key words were developed into search strings and those resulted in the identification of more articles, which have to be treamed down in relation to the research focus.

#### Table 3.1: Stages in the SLR

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- 5 Further streaming of the key words was undertaken in the current study in order to link them to the focus and emphasis of the current study. The number of articles that were streamlined in relation to the key words was found to be 175 articles.
- **6** The selected articles were then reviewed and assessed in relation to the inclusion approach which included the SSMP in the food industry, strategic management, and sustainable strategic management. The study ended up having to review 120 articles around the issues of SSMP within the business environment, out of the 120, 38 articles were found to be clearly articulating the challenges faced by stakeholders in the adoption of SSMP in the food sector.

## **REVIEW OF THE FINDINGS**

The current study reviewed and analyzed 38 articles using content analysis. The literature is going to be reviewed around the critical issues that are the challenges being faced by several stakeholders in the food industry. The challenges have been presented in the following approach in the current study;

#### Stakeholder engagement

The business environment that the businesses are operating constitutes a whole lot of challenges which hinder the effective execution of SSMP. One of the problems that were noted in the current research study is the issue is the issue around the aspect of stakeholder engagement, (Lee, 2020). The issues regarding SSMP calls for the participation of various stakeholders, failure to engage these stakeholders becomes an issue that can actually lead to poor adoption of SSMP within the businesses. The findings are in relation to the findings that were noted by Freeman (2010) who emphasized that effective strategic management necessitates the engagement of a varied array of stakeholders, each of whom has distinct interests and goals towards the sustainability of the organization.

This variability may result in conflicts and misconceptions, complicating the attainment of consensus on sustainability objectives and hence affecting the implementation of SSMP within the food industry. In the same notion Harrington, & Moore, (2016), illustrated that effective stakeholder participation is essential for the successful execution of sustainable plans. Stakeholders are very imperative and these could be coming from the internal stakeholder groups and or the external stakeholder groups who have to be engaged in order for the organization to effectively develop strategies that can actually take the organization from where it is to the next level in terms of competitiveness as well as growth, (Kaplan, & Norton, 2001). Freeman, (2010) noted that successful implementation of SSMP requires the stakeholders to be operating in one voice; this means that the various stakeholders have to understand the needs of each other for the success execution of SSMP.

## **Knowledge gaps**

Knowledge gaps have also been regarded as one of the challenges that the food industry is facing and this tends to have an effect on the SSMP implementation within the food industry, (Garcia, 2021). The understanding of the importance of SSMP can be well understood by merely a few individuals and this eventually creates knowledge gaps within the organization, (Thompson, & Hill, 2023). Lozano (2015) emphasizes that education and training are essential for closing the knowledge gap, allowing stakeholders to make educated choices that match with sustainable goals.

Moreover, the intricacy of sustainability, as highlighted by Bansal and DesJardine (2014), can be overwhelming for stakeholders lacking expertise in strategic management, resulting in implementation issues. This therefore denotes that as the organizations are implementing various SSMP, they need to have a robust comprehension of the internal stakeholders and understands their levels of knowledge such that proper educational campaigns can actually be implemented and adopted in relation to the levels of knowledge and understandings within the various internal stakeholders, (Barney, 1991). Lack of knowledge has resulted in many institutions failing to

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK adopt and implement SSMP, they are not aware of its importance, they are not aware of the effective approaches that can be adopted in order for SSMP to effectively work and function within organizations.

## **Regulatory compliance**

Regulatory compliance issues have also been noted as challenges that impede the implementation and adoption of SSMP within the food industry, (Briones, & Felzen, 2019). The food industry needs to have massive comprehension of the existing regulations as well as the new regulations that are coming in, so as to tailor make strategies in line with the requirements of the new regulations. These rules and regulations give a sense of direction to the organizations as they are undertaking their various business activities. Bansal, & DesJardine, (2014) assert that uneven and swiftly evolving rules and regulations might generate confusion for organizations striving to implement sustainable strategies.

This calls for massive comprehension of the rules and regulations for the purposes of implementing sustaining SSMP in the food industry in Zimbabwe. Davis, & Moore, (2021) conducted a study in the energy sector revealing that corporations frequently encounter challenges in maneuvering through intricate regulatory frameworks, which may encumber their capacity to execute fruitful sustainability initiatives. The regulatory frameworks have to be well understood by the organizations so that they are capable of developing unique strategies that have the capacity of enhancing the implementation and adoption SSMP effectively.

Failure to effectively understand the rules and regulations within the country can lead to failure to produce satisfactory results for the food industry in Zimbabwe. Many countries are going green; they are implementing strategies that are in relation to the environmental changes that are being witnessed at global level, (Dyer, Godfrey, Jensen, & Bryce, 2020). This therefore means that as institutions are operating, they have to guard against the various changes that are emanating from the external business environment and make strides to link closely all the activities they are undertaking with the dictates of the environment. Unstable government policies and economic challenges reduce operational efficiency.

#### **Resources availability**

The current research noted with great concern the aspect of resources availability as a huge challenge that impede the adoption and implementation of SSMP. A number of organizations lack financial, human capital as well as infrastructural resources, (Garcia, Lee, & Patel, 2022). This presents a huge challenge when the organization is intending to implement SSMP. The adoption and implementation of SSMP calls for enough resources that leads to the full adoption of SSMP, these findings can be linked to the findings by Stead, & Stead, (2015) who observed that the substantial initial expenses linked to sustainable innovations and procedures can deter smaller organizations. Due to the absence of resources, organizations will find it difficult to embrace the changes that which are brought by the adoption and implementation of SSMP since they require adequate resources for them to bring about unique and appealing results, (Goyal, & Singh, 2022).

#### Policy inconsistence, supply chain complexity and economic uncertainty

Other critical aspects that were found to be intriguing include the aspect of policy inconsistence, supply chain complexity as well as economic uncertainty, (Weiss, & Meyers, 2022). Strategies when they are being implemented tend to be long term aspects that are implemented with the desire of propelling the organisation from where it is to the next level. The changes that usually take place within the economy usually the changes on monetary policies among other imperative aspects lead to the decision by so many not to plan ahead of time because they fear to be caught in with these aspects, (Zhang, & Chen, 2023).

Developing countries tend to come up with overnight policies and these policies have an impact on the supply chain, as well as the general operational efficiency of the organizations. Many food institutions within the developing nations are finding it difficult to deal with the issue of policy inconsistence, one day a policy say this and the other day the same policy has a different interpretation altogether, (Peterson, & Lee, 2021). This

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Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK therefore means that as organisations, there is the much need for the comprehensive understanding of the external environment particularly the policy environment and eventually come up with strategies that are in situ with the policies, this can lead to sustainability of the business operations.

## **Cultural barriers**

Cultural barriers also resemble as critical issues that have the capacity of impeding the implementation of SSMP found within the organization, (Miller, & Dawson, 2020). Each and every organization tends to be having its own culture that guides its day-to-day functionality, this therefore means that there have to be a link between the cultural practices and the adoption of SSMP within organizations, failure to provide such critical linkage results in the organizations failing to effectively embrace change as well as adopting new effective approaches to sustainability.

Schein (2010) asserts that organizational culture significantly influences attitudes towards sustainability. Resistance to change, entrenched habits, and insufficient awareness of the advantages of sustainability can all impede the rapid adoption of sustainable practices. Lozano (2013) discovered that organizations with robust sustainability-oriented cultures were more effective in executing sustainable initiatives, underscoring the need of cultivating a supportive organizational environment. Miller & Dawson, (2020) are of the view that a culture of innovation has to engulf organizations as they are operating, they need to embrace innovative changes that are coming within the business environments, the organizations also needs to be well aware of the changes as well as the offering of training and development with regards to the new changes that are coming into the business environment. Such aptitude has the capacity of leading organizations into competitive powerhouses in the ever-competitive business environment.

## **Technological barriers**

Technology is an important business component in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Organisations that are failing to embrace technological changes and transformations find it difficult to find the right footing with regards to institutional competitiveness as well as providing the much-needed customer satisfaction in the long run, (Lien, & Mguyen, 2018).

This means that in order for the organisation to be able to implement the various SSMP, they need updated technology, they also need to have a unique engagement with various stakeholders so that when they are taking their day-to-day engagements, resistance is limited as well there is massive contribution between the various participants. Where there is high levels of resistance there seems to be decreased desire in terms of implementing SSMP within the food industry, (Khan, et al, 2020). The systems that are used by the public sector institutions are very old and dilapidated hence resembling a huge challenge when it comes to the implementation of various critical aspects within the food industry. There is limited adoption of advanced systems in terms of technology in several institutions which acts as a challenge for many businesses to embrace the demands of implementing and adopting SSMP.

## The implications of the study

This study is imperative in the sense that it offers a better and enhanced understanding of the significant challenges that are associated with SSMP adoption. In the developing countries technological investment has turned out to be a key issue, many firms are failing to adopt SSMP owing to the technological requirements for enhanced SSMP adoption, (Brown & Green, 2021). The market in which businesses are operating is ever changing and this calls for businesses to understand the business environment and adopt strategies that have the capacity of enhancing institutional development as well as sustainability, (Brown et al, 2023).

Thus, the current research is going to advance knowledge on SSMP, this therefore leads to improved practices, where organisations in the food industry will be implementing unique approaches that address the challenges these organisations are facing. Through the enhanced comprehension of challenges faced in the adoption of

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SSMP, this study will inform policy formulation, implementation as well as making sure that policies are developed with robust evidence and eventually the policies become effective in the long and short run for the food industry players, (Freeman, 2022). Understanding the challenges that are impacting on the implementation and adoption of SSMP leads to enhanced stakeholder engagements, these stakeholders include such critical stakeholders as the policy makers, industry leaders, who will be better positioned in implementing unique approaches that leads to the competitiveness of the food industry, (Zhang and Chen, 2023). The addressing of the challenges also leads to capacity building which significantly enhances the skills and knowledge of the diverse stakeholders.

#### Rational and justifications of the study

This research study is an eye opener with regards to the challenges that businesses are certainly going to face in the implementation of SSMP. The paper also addressed the gaps that are noted in literature on the sustainability of strategies implemented and adopted in the food industry, (Green & Brown, 2021). When businesses are aware of the challenges they face in implementing a certain strategy, they will be positioned with the right acumen on the best practices that which they have to adopt in order to be competitive and circumvent the challenges they are facing as an institution, (Lee, 2021). This paper has the capacity of enhancing the various issues around the awareness on the environmental and social issues that have the capacity of impacting on the sustainability of business operations, (Smith, 2022). When a business is operating in the environment, it has to understand the external influences and device strategies that are targeted at enhancing institutional development in the long run, (Lopez & Kim, 2023).

The current paper brings about a unique comprehension of the impact of the food industry on to the environment. According to Lopez & Kim, (2023) the food industry tends to impact on the environment through waste disposal, pollution and waste generation. This paper therefore conveys the much-needed strategies that are targeted at enhancing the approaches that have the capacity and capability of enhancing the harmony operating of businesses within the food industry and the environment, (Green & Brown, 2021). Through this paper, businesses tend to have a better and enhanced comprehension of sustainable practices that are to be adopted in relation to the functioning of the businesses as well as giving the business the much-needed impact in relation to the ever-changing business environment, (Garcia & Patel, 2022).

The findings of the current paper have the capacity of informing the businesses on policy development, (Smith, 2022). The policies that have to be developed must have a clear link to environmental sustainability as well as institutional performance in the long run, (Zhang and Chen, 2023). The study managed to convey the muchneeded insights into the various challenges that which businesses face and the appropriate strategies that which businesses can adopt targeted at enhancing institutional development in the long run, (Freeman, 2022). The findings of the current paper have the capacity of having a constructive impact on the environment, the society as well as the economic performance of the country.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The current paper was designed with an emphasis of assessing the challenges that are faced by the stakeholders in the food industry in the implementation of SSMP. It has been noted that there are a number of critical factors that impede the implementation and adoption of SSMP within the food sector. The aspect of regulation has been pivotal in the implementation and adoption of SSMP in the food industry, (Kaplan, & Norton, 2001).

Regulations are being developed over and over again, this therefore means that as organisations are operating, they need to have a better comprehension of the regulations and identify their level with regards to the regulations that are coming in, (Davis, & Moore, 2021). Businesses have to be well prepared to dance according to the music that is presented by the new regulations. In Zimbabwe, it has been noted that regulations are changing owing to the ever-changing business landscape; this has resulted in the country developing new rules

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and regulations that have to be well observed by the business players in the food industry. Taking for instance recently there has been a wide call for the businesses whether big or small to have a swipe machine for electronic transactions, this meant that those that are found without such critical requirements will have to face the consequences which may not be pleasant for the functionality of the business into the long run.

As businesses are operating, they need to be well aware of the business environments in which they are operating. There is robust need of understanding the external and internal forces that are happening within the business environment, (Harrington, & Moore, 2016). Such understanding has the capacity of enhancing the understanding of proper strategies to effectively deal with in the business environment.

Challenges are found to be emanating from the internal environment as well as the external environment and hence the need for institutions to effectively manage the both environments for the purposes of developing informed strategies that can lead organisations into powerful players within their businesses. Some of the challenges are coming from the internal business environment while other challenges are coming from the internal business environment while other challenges are coming from the external business environment. It is therefore imperative for the organisations to efficiently manage the two environments if they are to create positive and sustainable strategies for their businesses. Aspects such as innovations and technological developments are aspects that are found from the external business environment, (Khan, et al, 2020). This means therefore that organisations have to well understand the external environments as they play a pivotal role in shaping the sustainable strategies that they have to develop in the long run for the businesses.

## Contributions, policy and the future

Organisations have to have a better understanding of the challenges that are found within the business environment. Understanding these challenges denotes to the fact that the organisations will develop strategies that address these challenges and eventually come up with unique strategies that have the capacity of enhancing institutional competitiveness in both the long and short run. The understanding of the external environment can lead to the revolutionalisation of the policies as well as the robust engagement of the businesses when it comes to policy development and formulations. The businesses need to be engaged as they are an important constituent in the business environment on the issues that have to do with policies. Policies are imperative and they have to be well understood by the business players as they capacitate the development of informed strategies as well as the effectiveness in terms of resources allocation within the business.

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#### Author contribution statements

Spy Mukonori and Abubaker Qutieshat participated in conducting this research study. Their participation in this study was equal; they were all involved in the conceptualization, data curation as well as the formal analysis, the initial composition of the paper, writing, reviewing and manuscript editing. All the authors equally contributed to the data analysis. All the authors performed analysis and they were liable for the creation of visualisations in the study that included diagrams with the desire of clarifying the study conclusions. All the authors brought intellectual content, thoroughly edited the manuscript, approved the final version for submission and significantly agreed to be accountable for all the work contained in the paper.

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