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Mapping the Impact of Strategic Leadership on Organizational Performance: A Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract: This study investigates the dynamic relationship between strategic leadership and organizational performance through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 22 peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025. It highlights how strategic leadership influences organizational outcomes through mediating factors such as innovation capability, identity framing, digital readiness, emotional intelligence, and perceived organizational support. Using the PRISMA protocol and Scopus-indexed sources, the review combines bibliometric mapping and thematic synthesis to reveal conceptual linkages, thematic clusters, and methodological gaps in the existing literature. Findings suggest that strategic leadership plays a pivotal role not only in setting organizational direction and driving innovation intensity but also in cultivating adaptive, inclusive cultures amid uncertainty. The study culminates in an integrative conceptual framework that redefines strategic leadership as a multidimensional catalyst for sustainable performance, offering a consolidated theoretical foundation and actionable guidance for scholars and practitioners navigating the VUCA business landscape.

Keywords: Strategic Leadership, Organizational Performance, Systematic Literature Review, Prisma Framework, Future Research.

INTRODUCTION

In today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) global landscape, organizations are under increasing pressure to adapt rapidly, innovate consistently, and build resilience to ensure long-term sustainability. Amid these dynamic shifts, strategic leadership has emerged as a pivotal force that influences how organizations set direction, marshal internal resources, and respond adaptively to external uncertainties (Ireland & Hitt, 1999; Rowe, 2001; Teece et al., 1997). No longer focused solely on operational control, contemporary leaders are expected to drive transformation through visionary thinking, strategic agility, and inclusive cultural development (Barney, 1991; Grant, 1996; Vera & Crossan, 2004). This expanded

leadership mandate demands a deeper understanding of how strategic leadership directly and indirectly shapes organizational performance.

Recent literature increasingly recognizes strategic leadership as a multifaceted and relational process, moving beyond hierarchical command to embrace emotional intelligence, identity framing, and inclusive governance (Fladerer et al., 2021; Haslam et al., 2020). Leaders who communicate in collective, identity-inclusive language ("we" vs. "I") tend to foster stronger psychological engagement among stakeholders, enhancing organizational commitment and performance outcomes (Dick et al., 2018). Moreover, strategic inclusion and diversity are no longer peripheral; when embedded into leadership discourse and decision-making, they serve as powerful enablers of creativity, legitimacy, and competitive advantage—what some scholars call the "diversity dividend" (Cox & Blake, 1991; Martins, 2020; Roberson et al., 2017).

The role of strategic leadership has also become increasingly intertwined with digital transformation (Qiao et al., 2024). Leaders are not only expected to navigate technological disruptions but also to leverage digital tools, such as AI, data analytics, and social platforms, to catalyze organizational learning, facilitate innovation, and improve stakeholder connectivity (Mahmoud et al., 2025; Wu, 2016). In this context, strategic leadership entails fostering digital resilience, cultivating adaptive learning systems, and aligning technological innovation with organizational values and culture (Woo, 2025). These evolving demands point to the strategic leader not merely as a planner but as a sense-maker and change agent in an era of continuous disruption.

Despite the growing relevance and expanding body of research, the literature on strategic leadership remains fragmented. Various studies adopt divergent theoretical frameworks, from resource-based views to identity theory, while empirical studies differ in scope, sectoral focus, and analytical method. As a result, there is no unified understanding of how strategic leadership mechanisms operate across different organizational contexts or how mediating variables such as innovation capacity, digital capability, and perceived organizational support shape this relationship. A structured synthesis is therefore required to consolidate fragmented insights and provide clarity on emerging themes and trends.

This study addresses this gap by conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and bibliometric analysis of 22 Scopus-indexed journal articles published between 2015 and 2025. The review aims to explore the evolving role of strategic leadership in enhancing organizational performance, with particular attention to mediating mechanisms such as identity framing, innovation, emotional intelligence, and digital adaptability. The combination of SLR and bibliometric techniques allows for both qualitative thematic synthesis and quantitative mapping of influential authors, institutions, and intellectual structures.

To guide this review, four research questions are posed:

1. How does strategic leadership influence organizational performance across industries and geographical contexts?
2. What are the key mediating factors, such as innovation capability, digital readiness, identity construction, and inclusion, that strengthen or weaken this relationship?
3. Which contextual variables (e.g., job stress, emotional intelligence, or organizational support) shape the effectiveness of strategic leadership?
4. What integrative conceptual framework can be proposed to capture the role of strategic leadership in the age of technological disruption and diversity?

The bibliometric dataset includes 22 peer-reviewed articles with diverse geographic and sectoral origins, collected using specific Scopus search criteria. Each article was evaluated based on publication year, citation impact, abstract content, author keywords, and thematic orientation. The bibliometric analysis employed tools such as VOSviewer to map keyword co-

occurrence, author collaboration, and thematic clusters. This methodological integration enables a multidimensional understanding of both the structure and substance of strategic leadership research.

The expected findings of this review include the identification of influential publications, thematic domains, and emerging paradigms that shape the discourse on strategic leadership. In particular, the review is expected to show that leadership effectiveness is significantly amplified by digital capabilities, inclusive governance, and innovation-oriented cultures (Khalifa et al., 2025). The review also aims to construct an integrative conceptual model that captures the interplay between strategic leadership practices and performance-enhancing mechanisms in the context of today's complex business environment. For scholars, this provides a research roadmap and conceptual clarity; for practitioners, it offers actionable insights into developing strategic leaders who are visionary, inclusive, and digitally fluent.

This article proceeds as follows: Section 2 outlines the methodology of bibliometric and systematic review processes; Section 3 presents the results, including keyword analysis, influential publications, and thematic clusters; Section 4 offers a discussion of theoretical implications and identifies areas for future research; and Section 5 concludes with practical recommendations and limitations.

METHODS

This study aims to establish a comprehensive and rigorous foundation for understanding the development of organizational capability by employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) framework. This methodological approach was selected for its transparency, replicability, and alignment with internationally recognized academic standards (Iksan et al., 2024; Saputra et al., 2024). As illustrated in Figure 1, the initial search process utilized the Scopus database, which yielded a total of 712 records. These records underwent a systematic multi-stage screening process to ensure their relevance, quality, and alignment with the research objectives. Following the screening of 214 publications, 37 full-text articles were reviewed in detail, resulting in the selection of 22 articles deemed most relevant for in-depth bibliometric and thematic analysis.

The search strategy was carefully designed and executed using Scopus, which offers access to a vast repository of peer-reviewed academic literature from more than 7,000 international publishers (Nishikawa-Pacher, 2022). As outlined in Table 1, the search utilized combinations of targeted keywords such as "strategic leadership" and "organizational performance", further refined by filters including publication year (2015–2025), English language, journal article type, and final publication status. These search parameters ensured that only high-quality, up-to-date, and relevant sources were retrieved, in accordance with the indexing criteria set by Scopus. This strategic filtering enabled efficient identification of literature pertinent to the study's core themes of organizational capability and performance development.

To further refine the dataset, the study implemented strict inclusion and exclusion criteria, as detailed in Table 2. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2015 and 2025 were included. Publications that fell outside of this range—such as older studies, conference proceedings, book chapters, editorials, and closed-access materials—were systematically excluded. From the original 712 records, 120 were removed for irrelevance or failure to meet indexing standards, and 57 were excluded due to restricted access. This refinement process resulted in a final dataset of 22 articles and were selected for detailed analysis.

The selected studies were analyzed using a robust suite of bibliometric techniques, including citation analysis, co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, and co-word analysis.

These methods were supported by advanced data visualization tools such as VOSviewer and Bibliometrix, which enabled the mapping of the intellectual structure of the field, identification of dominant themes, and detection of underexplored research areas (Maharani et al., 2024). The bibliometric insights derived from this analysis provided a multidimensional understanding of the current landscape in strategic leadership and organizational performance research. This cross-disciplinary synthesis highlights the integrative power of the SLR methodology in consolidating fragmented knowledge across academic domains (Greener, 2022).

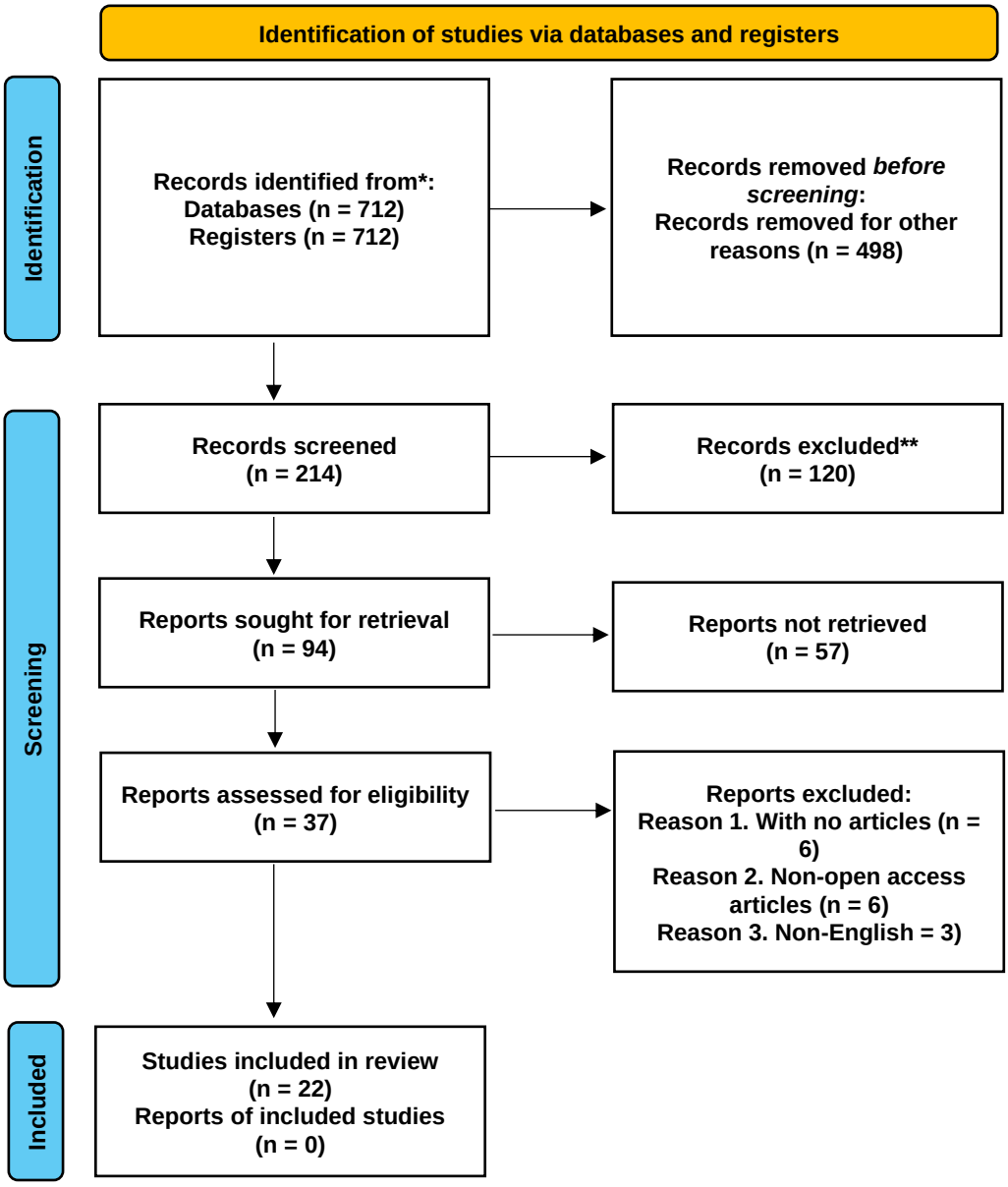


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Chart

Table 1. Scopus database search string

Source	Search String
Scopus	((TITLE-ABS-KEY ("strategic leadership") AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ("organizational performance")) AND PUBYEAR > 2014 AND PUBYEAR < 2026 AND (LIMIT-TO (LANGUAGE, "English")) AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBSTAGE, "final")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SRCTYPE, "j")) AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "ar") OR LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE, "re"))

Table 2. The inclusion and exclusion criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Year	2015-2025	Before 2015
Document Type	Article	Congressional proceedings, conference papers, review, editorial, books, book chapters and other non-peer-reviewed publications, closed access.
Source Type	Journals	Book, trade publications, book series, conference proceedings
Publication Stage	Final	Article in press
Language	English	Non-English

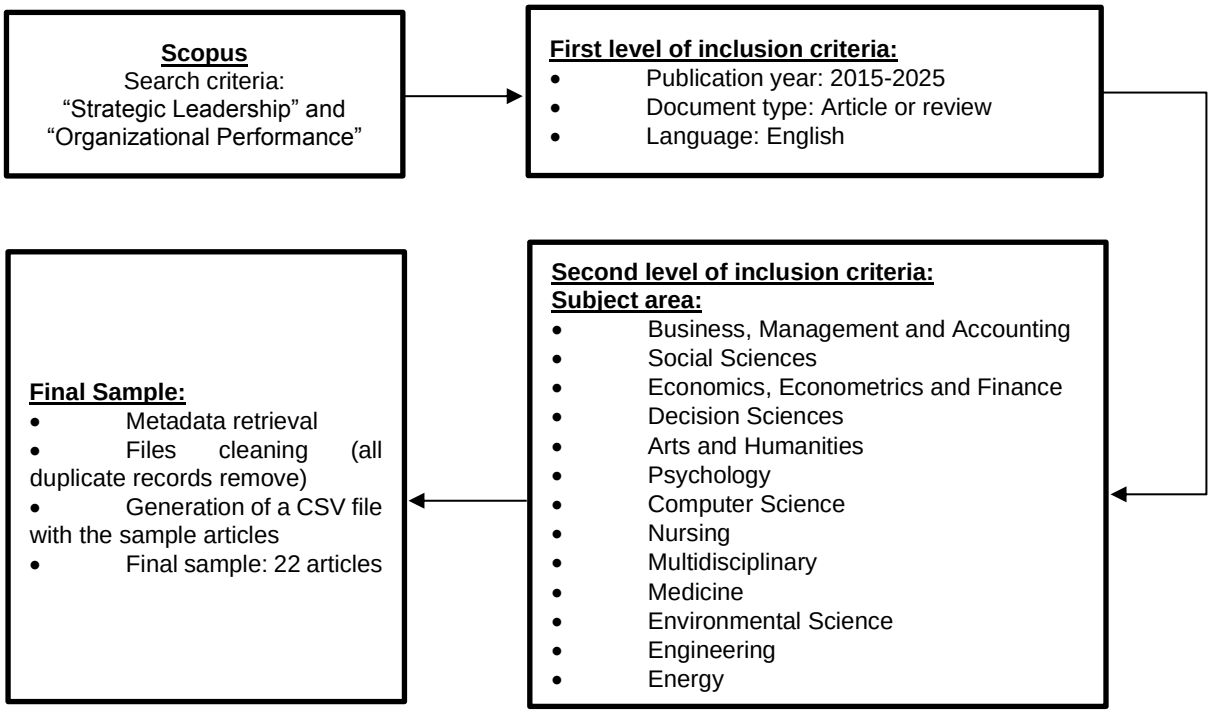


Figure 2. Protocol in This Study

The decision to utilize Scopus as the primary data source was based on its reputation for quality, comprehensiveness, and analytical functionality. Scopus not only offers access to a wide breadth of peer-reviewed content but also provides advanced metadata search capabilities and reliable citation tracking tools, making it ideal for bibliometric analysis. By integrating the PRISMA-guided SLR approach with data sourced from Scopus, this study ensures a methodologically sound foundation that supports the generation of both theoretical and practical insights (Lirio-Loli & Dextre-Martínez, 2022). Ultimately, this methodology facilitates the development of a robust conceptual framework that can guide future research and strategic decision-making in dynamic organizational environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Number of Publication by Year

The annual distribution of publications on the impact of strategic leadership on organizational performance reveals a variable but gradually increasing trend between 2015 and 2025 in Figure 3. This trend highlights the growing interest of researchers in understanding the impact of strategic leadership on organizational performance and sustainability in different contexts and over time.

In 2015, no publications were published on this topic, suggesting that research interest in the links between strategic leadership and organizational performance was either in its infancy or had not yet been thoroughly explored. However, in 2016, the number increased slightly, with two publications demonstrating the early identification of strategic leadership as a key factor in organizational success. This trend was followed by a sharp decline in 2017, 2018 and 2019, with the number of publications decreasing only once per year. This downward trend may reflect broader shifts in research interests or a lack of immediate global impetus to prioritize leadership research in these years.

Interestingly, although 2020 marked a global turning point with the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of publications related to it remained stable at only one. This finding can be explained by delays in research and publications at the height of the crisis, despite the importance of leadership in organizational resilience and change management.

In contrast, 2021 and 2018 were notable for three publications. These years reflect renewed scholarly interest in the role of strategic leadership, likely driven by the increasing complexity of the economic environment and the growing demand for adaptive and visionary leadership. 2022 and 2023 saw a period of stabilization, with two publications each, reflecting the continued commitment of scholars to this area.

A significant increase occurred in 2024, when the number of publications reached a peak of four, an 11-year high. This increase likely reflects the global scientific consensus on the critical importance of strategic leadership in improving organizational agility, competitiveness, and post-pandemic recovery. The number of publications decreased slightly to three in 2025, but this figure is consistent with the upward trend observed in recent years.

While the publication profile from 2015 to 2025 shows periods of stagnation, the overall trend suggests a growing and maturing interest in research on the impact of strategic leadership on organizational performance. This trend reflects the increasing complexity of modern organizational environments and the critical need for strategic leadership to manage uncertainty, improve performance, and ensure long-term sustainability. These findings not only support the validity of this study but also suggest future research opportunities that aim to deepen the theoretical and practical understanding of strategic leadership in diverse organizational settings.

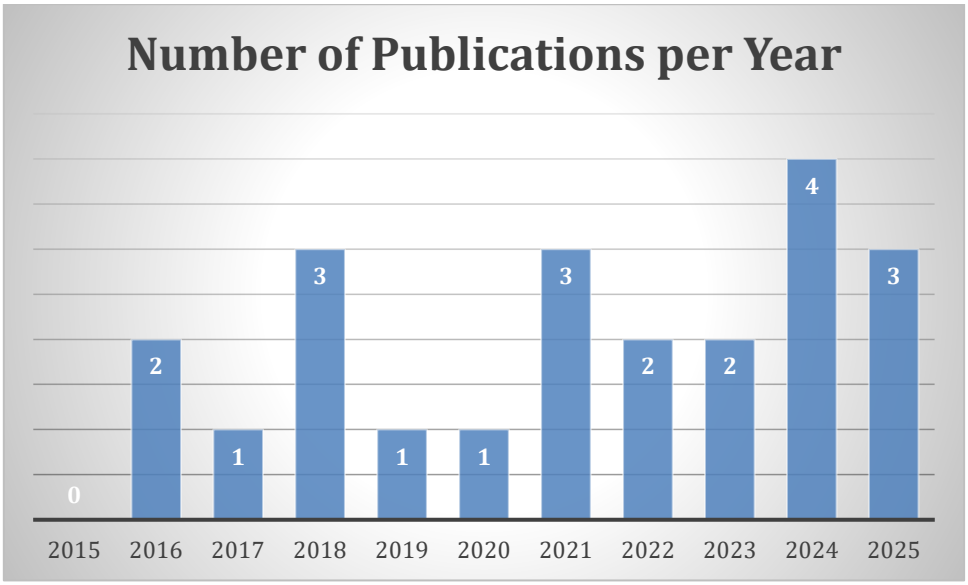


Figure 3. Publication Frequency by Year

Methodology Used in This Study

The reviewed studies employed a range of methodologies to explore the impact of strategic leadership on organizational performance (Table 3). Quantitative methods were the most dominant, used in 12 articles such as those by Mahmoud et al. (2025) and Woo (2025). These studies applied statistical tools to test hypotheses and produce generalizable insights. Conceptual approaches followed with 5 studies e.g., Anos (2025) and Twum et al. (2024), focusing on theoretical model development without empirical testing. Though lacking data, these works offer valuable frameworks for future research. Qualitative methods appeared in 3 studies e.g., Darling and Venkitachalam (2021), providing in-depth understanding through interviews or case analysis, albeit with limited generalizability. Mixed methods and literature review approaches were each used in only one study (Sjamsoeddin et al., 2023; Wu, 2016), indicating their relatively limited application in this domain.

Table 3. Types of methodology used in the article

No	Methodology	Total	Sample Articles
1	Conceptual	5	Anos (2025) and Twum et al. (2024)
2	Literature Review	1	Sjamsoeddin et al. (2023)
3	Mixed Methods	1	Wu (2016)
4	Qualitative	3	Darling and Venkitachalam (2021) and Yoon and Suh (2021)
5	Quantitative	12	Mahmoud et al. (2025) and Woo (2025)

Top 10 Document by Country

The geographical distribution of research on strategic leadership and organizational performance indicates a diverse global interest, with contributions from both developed and developing economies in Table 4. The United States emerges as the leading contributor, with five publications and the highest total citations (133), underscoring the maturity and influence of strategic leadership research in its academic landscape e.g., Anos (2025) and Gamache et al. (2024). Following closely is the United Kingdom, with six publications and 76 citations, further demonstrating the country's robust engagement with leadership and organizational studies (Avby, 2022; Darling & Venkitachalam, 2021).

Switzerland also exhibits significant involvement, contributing four publications and 21 citations, with studies such as those by Talajić et al. (2024) and Woo (2025) reflecting strong European academic interest in this domain. Similarly, Canada accounts for two articles and 31 citations, indicating both quantity and quality of output (Bilginoğlu & Yozgat, 2018; Rahman et al., 2018).

Interestingly, emerging economies such as Indonesia, Kenya, Turkey, and Ukraine are represented, though with fewer publications and citations. For instance, Indonesia and Kenya contribute one article each, reflecting nascent but growing interest in strategic leadership issues within their respective contexts (Sjamsoeddin et al., 2023; Twum et al., 2024). Turkey contributes two articles, though with zero citations, suggesting that the impact or visibility of these studies remains limited (Aksoy & Akaydin, 2024; Ashkevari & Ghasemi, 2023).

Table 4. Top 10 document by country

No	Country	Total Publications	Total Citations	Sample Articles
1	Canada	2	31	Bilginoğlu and Yozgat (2018) and Rahman et al. (2018)
2	Indonesia	1	2	Sjamsoeddin et al. (2023)
3	Kenya	1	1	Twum et al. (2024)
4	Switzerland	4	21	Talajić et al. (2024) and Woo (2025)
5	Turkey	2	0	Aksoy and Akaydin (2024) and Ashkevari and Ghasemi (2023)

6	Ukraine	1	3	Mahmoud et al. (2025
7	United Kingdom	6	76	Avby (2022) and Darling and Venkitachalam (2021)
8	United States	5	133	Anos (2025) and Gamache et al. (2024)

Journal Distribution

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the selected articles across peer-reviewed academic journals, highlighting the breadth and interdisciplinary reach of research on strategic leadership and organizational performance. The figure shows that the Management Science Letters and the Journal of Organizational Behavior Research are the most prominent sources in this review, each contributing 2 articles. This suggests these journals serve as key platforms for publishing work that links leadership practices to organizational outcomes, possibly due to their focus on decision science, organizational behavior, and managerial applications. The remaining journals each published one article.

This relatively even distribution of articles across diverse journals underscores the multidisciplinary nature of strategic leadership as a research topic. The presence of journals from the fields of history, sustainability, business psychology, law, and regional business studies indicates that strategic leadership is being investigated not only through mainstream management lenses but also through historical, psychological, and sustainability-related perspectives.

Such dispersion suggests that no single outlet dominates the scholarly discourse on this subject, reflecting a healthy diversity in epistemological approaches and methodological preferences. It also implies opportunities for future researchers to explore strategic leadership themes in underutilized journals or emerging platforms, especially those focusing on regional development, innovation, and organizational transformation.



Figure 4. Top 10 Journals on Strategic Leadership

Keyword Co-occurence Analysis

Figure 5 presents a bibliometric co-occurrence network visualization generated using VOSviewer, which maps the thematic structure of the literature on strategic leadership and its relationship with organizational performance. The map was constructed based on a co-occurrence analysis of keywords extracted from peer-reviewed articles published between 2015 and 2025. The keywords were grouped into several clusters, each representing a distinct but interconnected thematic area within the broader research domain.

At the center of the map, “strategic leadership” and “organizational performance” emerge as the most dominant nodes, indicating their pivotal role and centrality in the scholarly discourse. The high frequency and strong linkages of these terms with other keywords demonstrate that strategic leadership is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing various dimensions of organizational success.

Cluster 1 (yellow) focus on strategic leadership and organizational performance. This cluster serves as the nucleus of the bibliometric network. It encompasses keywords such as diversity, balanced scorecard, operational excellence, crisis management, and corporate strategy. The presence of these terms suggests that strategic leadership is frequently analyzed in the context of managing diverse teams, aligning organizational goals through performance measurement tools, and navigating uncertainties. The prominence of balanced scorecard and corporate strategy underscores a strong focus on integrating strategic leadership into performance management frameworks.

Cluster 2 (green) focus on leadership and behavioral insights. This cluster highlights the relationship between strategic leadership and behavioral dimensions such as leadership, decision-making, and drug therapy. This shows a surprising interdisciplinary extension possibly linked to healthcare leadership studies. The association with guardian may refer to ethical leadership or protective roles played by leaders in organizational contexts. Collectively, these themes point to the psychological and cognitive aspects through which leaders influence outcomes.

Cluster 3 (red) focus on strategic management and AI integration. This cluster combines keywords such as strategic management, artificial intelligence, culture, and digital transformation, illustrating the emerging nexus between leadership practices and technological innovation. The inclusion of decision-making and AI technologies indicates a scholarly interest in how strategic leaders harness advanced technologies to drive cultural change and improve strategic responsiveness in digital environments.

Cluster 4 (blue) focus on knowledge and innovation capabilities. This cluster centers on knowledge-based capabilities, comprising terms like organizational learning, innovation orientation, strategic competence, and performance. These keywords signify the emphasis on developing dynamic capabilities that enhance innovation and adaptability, which are the key mechanisms through which strategic leadership fosters sustainable organizational performance.

Cluster 5 (orange) focus on knowledge management and public sector. In this cluster, terms such as knowledge sharing, public sector, knowledge management, and AI technologies emerge. The presence of the public sector suggests that strategic leadership is not only a private-sector phenomenon but is also increasingly studied in government and non-profit contexts. Knowledge management appears as a critical mediator between leadership and performance, especially in bureaucratic settings.

Cluster 6 (purple) focus on competitive advantage and corporate strategy. This cluster highlights the linkage between competitive advantage, organizational ambidexterity, and China. These keywords indicate that many studies are conducted in the context of East Asia, particularly China, and focus on how strategic leadership builds ambidextrous capabilities to gain and sustain competitive advantage in dynamic markets.

Cluster 7 (pink) focus on governance and cronyism. Although smaller, this cluster raises important governance issues through the keyword cronyism. This suggests a stream of research examining the darker sides of leadership, especially in politically connected firms or regions with weak institutional governance. This cluster provides critical insights into how unethical leadership practices may undermine performance outcomes.

The bibliometric map reveals that strategic leadership functions as a multidisciplinary construct that influences organizational performance through various mediating themes such

as innovation, digital transformation, ethical governance, and knowledge management. The tight interconnections between clusters demonstrate that scholars are increasingly integrating behavioral, technological, and institutional perspectives to understand the impact of strategic leadership.

The map also highlights emerging areas of interest, such as the application of artificial intelligence, digital capabilities, and cultural dynamics, which offer fertile ground for future research. The presence of public sector-specific keywords suggests a growing recognition of the importance of leadership in non-corporate environments.

The visualization not only affirms the central role of strategic leadership in organizational research but also illuminates its evolving complexity across sectors and disciplines. Future studies should delve deeper into cross-cluster themes, particularly at the intersection of digital transformation and behavioral leadership, to enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of how strategic leadership drives sustainable performance.

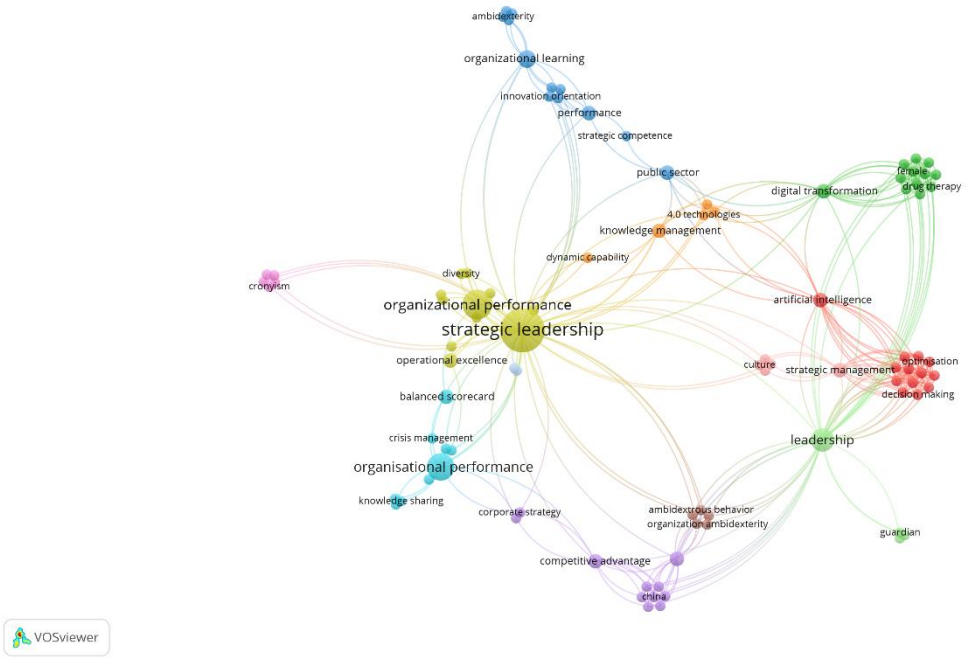


Figure 5. Keyword Co-Occurence Analysis

Mapping Central Keywords Overtime

Mapping central keywords over time enables researchers to trace the conceptual evolution and thematic development within a specific body of literature. This approach not only highlights prevailing research interests but also uncovers emerging directions and the shifting landscape of academic discourse. In the context of this study, the visualization in Figure 6 offers critical insights into the trajectory of key themes associated with strategic leadership and organizational performance from 2015 to 2025.

As depicted in the visualization, strategic leadership emerges as a central and enduring theme, strongly interconnected with organizational performance, yaitu a core concept that maintains prominence across the time period analyzed. This strong co-occurrence suggests that strategic leadership is consistently regarded as a critical driver of performance outcomes in organizational contexts. The spatial proximity and thickness of the links between these nodes indicate robust relational significance within the literature.

Throughout the observed timeframe, several peripheral but important keywords form satellite clusters that further enrich the understanding of strategic leadership's influence. For

instance, terms such as operational excellence, balanced scorecard, corporate strategy, and competitive advantage, all closely linked to both strategic leadership and organizational performance which reveal a recurring interest in performance measurement and strategic alignment.

The keyword evolution is also evident through the gradual emergence of newer themes. Keywords such as AI technologies, digital transformation, and optimization (primarily colored green and yellow) signal a more recent shift (2022–2025) in research focus toward technology-driven performance strategies. Their association with strategic management, decision-making, and artificial intelligence reflects the growing importance of digital capabilities and innovation in leadership research.

Moreover, the presence of keywords like knowledge management, dynamic capability, and organizational learning (situated between older and newer thematic clusters) demonstrates an intellectual bridge connecting foundational theories with contemporary innovation frameworks. This suggests that while strategic leadership remains a stable anchor, its contextual applications and interpretations evolve with technological advancement and market complexity.

The right-hand cluster featuring female, drug therapy, and digital transformation presents a niche yet growing research stream, possibly reflecting the intersection between leadership and healthcare or pharmaceutical sectors. This illustrates the adaptability of strategic leadership theory across diverse organizational domains.

Color progression in the map, from dark blue (earlier years) to yellow (recent years), visually captures the chronological development of these themes. The sustained centrality of strategic leadership and organizational performance reinforces their foundational role in the literature, while the peripheral emergence of newer topics highlights the dynamic and expanding scope of research in this field.

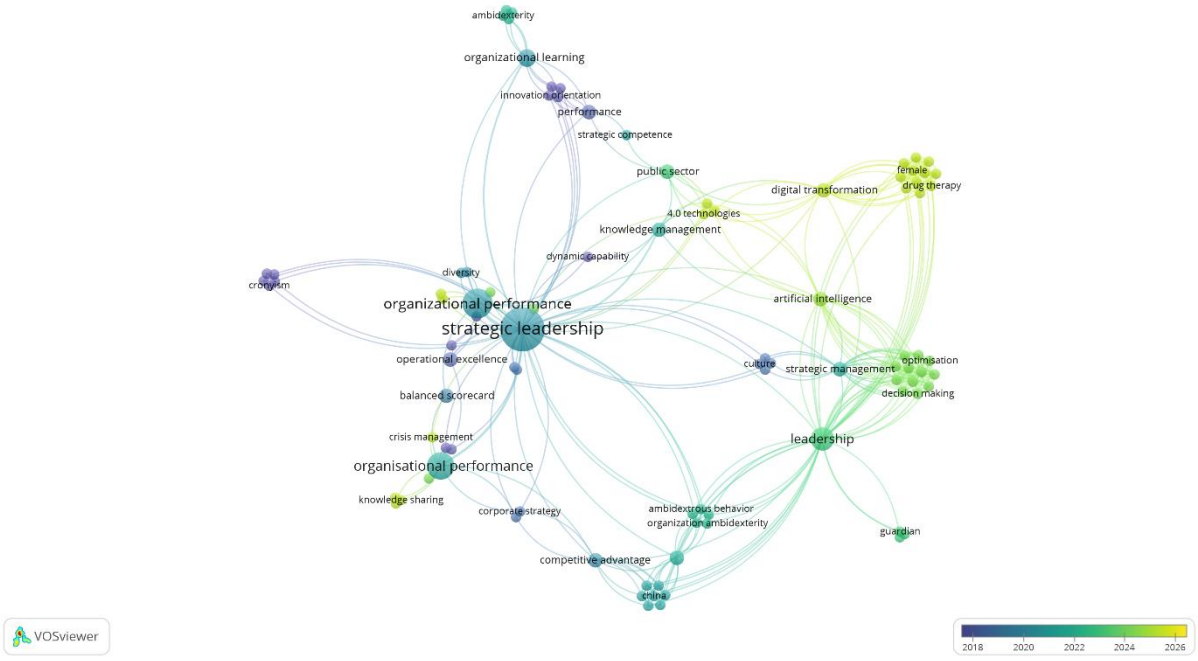


Figure 6. Mapping Central Keywords Over Time

CONCLUSION

This literature review confirms that in today's volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) environment, strategic leadership acts as a multidimensional and adaptive force that shapes organizational performance well beyond operational control. By compiling data from 22 studies indexed in Scopus, this study demonstrates that leadership effectiveness improves significantly when leaders integrate inclusive identity frameworks, innovation orientation, emotional intelligence and digital adaptability into their practices. These elements enable leaders to align their vision, mobilize resources and foster cultures that are adaptable to change. Importantly, mediating mechanisms such as innovation capability, digital readiness and perceived organizational support act as performance multipliers and translate strategic intent into sustainable outcomes.

The results also highlight that the impact of strategic leadership transcends industries and geographies, but is still determined by contextual variables. In developed economies, leadership impact is often enhanced by innovation ecosystems and advanced digital transformation, while in emerging economies, it is enhanced by identity-based engagement and resilience in the face of resource scarcity. Industry characteristics, workplace stress, emotional intelligence, and technological change also play a crucial role in supporting or constraining leadership effectiveness. Bibliometric mapping revealed conceptual clusters around participatory leadership, digital culture, and innovation potential, highlighting the need to integrate these themes into a coherent theoretical framework.

The proposed integrative conceptual model positions strategic leadership as a relational, transferable, and technological system that operates through context-specific mediators and facilitators. For researchers, this framework unifies disparate theoretical perspectives and provides a structured research agenda for examining leadership effectiveness in diverse contexts. For practitioners, it offers practical guidance on developing visionary, inclusive, and digitally literate leaders who can navigate the ongoing disruptions. Ultimately, organizations that embrace this paradigm holistically and align their leadership efforts with innovation, integration, and technology strategies, will be better equipped to achieve sustainable results and competitive advantage in an increasingly complex world.

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