***THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF BUSINESS & MANAGEMENT***

# A Literature Review on the Effect of Strategic Orientation on Skilled Births in Public Health Facilities in Western Kenya

**Osiemo Chrisanthus Titus Auma**
Ph.D. Student, Department of Business Administration,
Masen University, Kenya
**Dr. Beatrice E. Abong'o**
Senior Lecturer, Department of Business Administration,
Maseno University, Kenya
**Dr. Fredrick O. Aila**
Dean, School Business & Economics,
Department of Business Administration, Maseno University, Kenya

***Abstract:***
*Strategic orientation is the strategic direction a firm executes to create proper behaviours for continuous superior business performance, leading to a competitive edge. Porter's strategic orientation is a very useful tool in streamlining businesses in such cases. Public health facilities provide free maternal services, while faith-based and private health facilities charge fees for these services in Kenya. Therefore, public health facilities seem to face no competitors in providing free maternal services, thus promoting skilled births. However, an important research question is, does strategic orientation influence organisational performance in such health facilities? We used a narrative literature review by searching Google's search engine to find journal articles related to strategic orientation, competitive advantage, differentiation strategy, low-cost strategy, and focus strategy. We find that Porter's generic strategies are unsuitable in public health facilities as they have no competition in providing free maternal services. Strategic orientation variables: entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation and technology orientation support performance, while market orientation and interaction orientation do not support performance. This feedback can be grounded in contingency theory, which stresses that decisions should be flexible in nature and present adaptations to current situations as they arise. We recommend that further studies be conducted to establish why Porter's strategic orientation does not support public health facilities' performance in terms of skilled births in Western Kenya.*

***Keywords:*** *Strategic orientation, competitive advantage, differentiation strategy, low-cost strategy, focus strategy*

## 1. Introduction

Strategic orientation is a guideline for a company to achieve its strategic goals. It can fully reflect the company's values and appears as a general understanding and cognitive interpretation of its external environment and internal resources (Selmi & Chaney, 2018). Strategic orientation in itself does not necessarily give an organisation a competitive advantage in the market or an outstanding performance as a standalone, but the interrelationship of the different strategic orientations (Mwenda, 2020).

Strategic orientations are guiding principles that affect an organisation's strategic plans and activities (Noble, Sinha & Kumar, 2002), and in fact, organisational success is generally attributed to strategic orientation (Slater & Narver, 1994). A firm's strategic orientation reflects the strategic directions implemented by a firm to create the proper behaviours for the continuous superior performance of the business (Narver & Slater, 1990). Strategic orientation is the efforts of organisations to create organisational behaviours appropriate to the strategies of managers. Moreover, the effects of strategic orientation are influential on the values, beliefs, norms and organisational culture of the employees in gaining a competitive advantage in the market (Bulut, Alpkan & Yilmaz, 2009). Grinstein (2008) opined that myriads of scholars and gurus in management have identified several types of strategic orientation ranging from market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, customer orientation, cost orientation, innovation orientation, competitor orientation, learning orientation, employee orientation and interaction orientation. The strategic orientation used in this study refers to Porter's generic strategies.

Strategic orientation represents the map an organisation uses when choosing a path towards gaining a competitive advantage. It reflects its cognitive interpretation of both its internal resources and the external environment in which it operates (Selmi & Cheny, 2018). Slater, Olson, and Hult (2006), as cited in Ndubuisi-Okolo, Nosike, and Anekwe (2020), opine that strategic orientation is influenced by both internal and external environmental factors. These factors can either positively or negatively impact strategic orientation. According to Ndubuisi-Okolo, Nosike, & Anekwe (2020), the major obstacle to strategic orientation is a paucity of a systematic approach, a feature which results when the diverse dimensions are not properly streamlined and effectively blended to achieve a genuine purpose.

According to Jassmy and Bhaya (2016), strategic orientation involves implementing strategic trending that guides an organisation's activities to embedded behaviours that achieve permanence in optimal business conditions. Porter (1985) identified two types of focused strategies: focused cost leadership and focused differentiation. Business management literature recognises strategic orientation as an intangible resource that has a positive influence on business decisions and performance.

In healthcare, Altuntas *et al.* (2013), while conducting research on healthcare providers, found that there was a relationship between strategic orientation and company performance. Strategic orientation focuses on resources to achieve desired outcomes (Adiguzel & Sonmez Cakir, 2022; Nassani & Aldakhil, 2021). According to Uzoamaka *et al*. (2020), strategic orientation is the strategic direction that a company should take to continuously improve its performance in order to gain a competitive advantage over others. The research question in the study is, does strategic orientation influence organisational performance?

## 2. Methodology

The researcher chose to conduct a review on Porter's strategic orientation and its effect on organisational performance and, more so, performance in health care, which in this particular case is represented by skilled births conducted in public health facilities. To this end, the researcher used Google Scholar to investigate the effect of Porter's strategic orientation (differentiation, low cost and focus strategies) on performance in for-profit organisations and in healthcare. Searches were made from journal articles on differentiation strategy, low-cost strategy, focus strategy, and competitive advantage, and they examined how each one of them played out in the various studies concerning for-profit organisations and healthcare with regard to performance. By using journal articles, the researcher was able to pick articles that are current and authentic and that are of scholarly stature, thereby reinforcing the results of the study.

## 3. Concept of Strategic Orientation

Strategic Orientation is a general or permanent train of thought, trend or interest. It broadly encompasses the way in which a company adapts to the external environment (Ibarra-Cisneros, Demuner-Flores, & Hernandez-Perlines, 2021; Obel & Gurkov, 2021). Strategic orientation has been conceptualised as a continuous and iterative process that must focus on the different effects of rational, economic, political and subjective aspects of strategic change on competitive performance (Porter, 1980; Whipp, Rosenfeld, & Pettigrew, 1989; Zhou, Gao, & Zhou, 2005). According to Weinzimmer, Robin, & Michael (2012), in consideration of strategic orientation, employees share values and execute actions toward maintaining a coherent strategic approach given broad environmental factors; this cognitive and behavioural attention influences aspects of organisational performance. Literature has it that strategic orientation is the ability to link long-range visions and concepts to daily work and that at the lowest levels, it includes a simple understanding of strategies; at the highest level, it is a sophisticated awareness of the impact of the world at large on strategies, and how in turn that affects choices.

Strategic orientation reflects an outward-looking view of the business's strategic choices and environmental compatibility (He, Chen & Tsai, 2020). Strategic orientation evaluates the ways in which businesses acquire, allocate and use resources to create dynamic capabilities (Amentie-Kero & Sogbossi, 2017). Looking at the effects of strategic orientation positively affects the innovation climate of business, especially if strategic orientation is adopted within an intensely competitive and technological environment with unpredictable development (Lee, Chan, & McNabb, 2017). Another important effect of strategic orientation is the positive effect that businesses have on performance in innovation activities (Adams, Freitas & Fontana, 2019). Therefore, it is possible to successfully adapt the internal elements of the businesses to the external (industry/competition) environment within the framework of strategic orientation (Adiguzel & Cakir, 2022).

According to Yang *et al*. (2022), competitive advantage expanded the effect of strategic orientation on economic sustainability. Lee, Che-Ha, and Alwi (2019) stated that strategic orientation boosts different levels of competitive advantage. Corporate strategic orientation can reflect the underlying philosophical systems, values and corporate culture. It can reflect organisational strategies' essential characteristics and attributes (Mu, Thomas, & Peng, 2017). According to Eccles, Ioannou, & Serafeim (2014), the strategic orientation is socially complex, irreplaceable, reticent and practical. A precise strategic orientation can enhance a company's competitive advantage through the rational allocation of resources. It can drive the sprouting of new products, services and technologies. A precise strategic orientation helps bring a new paradigm for the organisation to succeed (ibid).

The enterprise adopts a strategic orientation to achieve high performance based on the response and reshaping of the real environment. The strategy includes building new trading methods to meet potential market demands, rationally allocating resources to improve organisational efficiency (Zhang *et al*., 2020), and building high-efficiency trading networks to create user value to optimise and expand the industrial ecosystem (Eccles *et al*., 2014). On the other hand, corporate strategic orientation can reflect the underlying philosophical system, values, and corporate culture. It can reflect organisational strategies' essential characteristics and attributes (Mu, Thomas, & Peng, 2017).

Strategic orientation is the all-encompassing method that an organisation uses to develop and carry out its business strategy (Han, Zhou & Lu, 2022). It encompasses a diverse range of activities, such as market analysis, resource allocation and innovation. A strategic orientation guides the decision-making process and shapes the company's actions and initiatives to effectively achieve its objectives (Xiao, Al Mamun & Yang, 2023). To successfully implement Porter's generic strategies, a business must have a deep understanding of the competitive landscape, analyse the strengths and weaknesses of competitors, identify potential threats, and understand the key success factors in the market (Stanke, 2023).

Strategic orientation refers to the manner in which a firm adapts to its external environment. Balodi (2014) stated that strategic orientation manifests in the firm's culture and serves as an antecedent to organisational practices and decisions associated with resource allocation and pursuing opportunities. Nguli and Odunga (2019) describe strategic orientation as principles that direct and influence the activities of a firm and generate the behaviours intended to ensure the viability and survival of the firm, and yet Akilo and Olaosebikan (2021) describe strategic orientation as a strategic choice, strategic inclination, strategic thrust, or strategic fit.

Organisations opting for a differentiation strategy look to differentiate themselves from their competitors by providing unique products or services (Porter, 1985). Differentiators focus on providing a broad product or service range, utilising high-end technology, and improving their staff's capabilities to provide high-quality customer service (Porter, 1980). A **differentiation strategy** is the way in which a firm stands out from otherwise similar competitors in the marketplace. Usually, it involves highlighting a meaningful difference between a firm and its competitors. Moreover, that difference must be valued by potential clients. A strong differentiator will provide a competitive advantage for the firm (Frederiksen & Harr, 2024).

As Porter's generic strategies are discussed, it is important to also take note of the stuck-in-the-middle concept. Porter (1980, 1985) (as cited in Pertusa-Ortega, Claver-Cortes & Molina-Azorin, 2007) points out that a firm which engages in each generic strategy but fails to achieve any of them is "stuck-in-the-middle". Becoming "stuck-in-the-middle" is often a manifestation of a firm's unwillingness to make choices about how to compete. Bowman 1992 posits that the "stuck-in-the-middle" option can also be interpreted as a decision to adopt a "middle-market" position where the firm occupies a middle position both in costs and in differentiation with respect to its competitors.

Institutions opting for a focus strategy aim to obtain a competitive advantage by concentrating on a specific niche market and creating services and products to suit that particular niche (Porter, 1985). They pay special attention to the specific needs of consumers in isolated geographic areas and tailor their services or products to meet those customers' demands (Wanjogo & Muathe, 2022). Wanjogo and Muathe (2022) contend that these organisations attain a competitive advantage by dedicating their resources to the implementation and delivery of a specifically focused strategy by aligning their organisational culture with their corporate strategy and by implementing clear performance management and evaluation systems. The focus strategy has two alternative types: where type one is a low-cost focus strategy that offers products or services to a small range (niche group) of customers at the lowest price available on the market. Type two, on the other hand, is a best-value focus strategy that offers products or services to a small range of customers at the best price value available on the market (Thompson, Strickland, Gamble & Zengan, 2018; David, 2017).

In the service industry, like health and education, the services offered may be almost similar; therefore, creating a focus strategy requires proper research and a well-designed implementation style (Faulkner, 2006; Hikmawati & Alamsyah, 2018). According to Zahra & George (2002), focus strategies made in a centralised structure are going to have less diversity of ideas and are more likely to be consistent over time than in a decentralised organisation where input is likely to be diverse and the people providing that input may change depending on the situation. Focus strategy involves targeting a specific market segment or niche and understanding it so well that the firm can meet its specialised needs better than anyone else. This strategy can be executed either through cost focus or differentiation focus (Mutuku, Oloko, & Muturi, 2024).

David (2017) posits that a successful low-cost strategy usually infiltrates the entire firm, as evidenced by high efficiency, low overhead, limited perks, intolerance of waste, intensive screening of budget requests, wide spans of control, rewards linked to cost containment, and broad employee participation in cost control efforts. According to Porter (1985), the relationship between low-cost strategy and performance is one where low-cost strategy is a successful way to realise a stable competing advantage by reducing and controlling costs and, as a result, raising organisational performance.

Organisations in the healthcare industry tend to differentiate themselves by providing either a broader range of medical services/products or unique services like open heart operations or organ transplants, by equipping their facilities with state-of-the-art systems equipment (for example, high-end surgery robots), by utilising top-notch technology such as the latest diagnostic imaging technology, or by providing high-quality hotel-like accommodation services or customised patient consultation services (Ghiasi *et al.*, 2022).

The firm adopting a focused cost leadership strategy will provide services or products at the lowest price on the market, whereas a focused differentiation strategy will be adopted by firms aiming to provide the best value services or products to a niche target market (David, 2017). In the healthcare industry, these two types of strategies are adopted by healthcare organisations targeting either a certain geographic area or a niche group of patients (for example, those suffering from rare diseases, expecting high-end services or medical treatments, physically impaired, and the like) (Stefan, Popa, & Taraban, 2023). Healthcare units adopting cost control strategies tend to decrease their waste by removing procedures that are repetitive in order to make personnel cuts, eliminate marginal services, upgrade their systems and use technology to become more efficient, have better coordination among hospital functions, and foster innovation (Kumar & Subramanian, 1998).

Organisations opting for a differentiation strategy look to differentiate themselves from their competitors by providing unique products or services (Porter, 1985). Differentiators focus on providing a broad product or service range, utilising high-end technology, and improving their staff's capabilities to provide high-quality customer service (Porter, 1980).

The low-cost strategy concentrates on low cost in terms of businesses' activities and could be functionalised as low pricing, low input (Sabir *et al*., 2021), experience, the design of the products, economies of scale and the design of the process (Saleh *et al.,* 2021). Nason & Wiklund (2018) posit that to save costs, firms implementing low-cost strategies make the best use of their remaining resources and redirect resources from one purpose to new and more efficient activities. They enhance their resource mix capabilities by skillfully integrating resources and producing affordable substitutes to achieve growth. According to Zheng *et* al. (2023), low-cost breakthrough innovation highlights low-cost strategies as the basis for achieving major innovations and breakthroughs in products and technologies. Firms focus on breakthrough innovation as the basis for integrating attributes such as low cost, design thinking, openness, and inclusiveness to provide consumers with better-quality products and services.

Liu & Atuahene-Gima (2018) aver that low-cost strategies can provide consumers with the opportunity to purchase products at low prices, which increases sales revenue and contributes to firm growth. The low-cost strategy puts importance on an increment in organisational performance. It includes the process by which the company is capable of producing or distributing goods and services at a lower cost than the competitors (Pulaj, 2014). Pulaj (2014) posits that pursuing a low-cost strategy should be considered not as a product/service offered, which is an inferior product, but as a product/service that has the same comparative qualities with competitors and an appropriate price.

Differentiation strategy concentrates on product or service uniqueness, which provides consumers with valuable products (Ahmed*,* Ali & Top, 2021). According to Akoi *et al*. (2021), differentiation can be done by special features, brand name/image, technology, supplier or distributors, marketing messages or advertising. Ali *et al.* (2021) aver that in case the differentiation strategy fails and the low-cost strategy fails, then the focus strategy can be implemented for limited products or services. Wang, Wang & Li (2021) stated that based on the resource perspective, the differentiation strategy relies primarily on product or service uniqueness and customer loyalty to build competitive advantage.

Thompson, Strickland, Gamble, & Zengan (2018) state that managers can enhance differentiation based on value drivers by:

- Creating product features and performance attributes that appeal to a wide range of buyers;
- Improving customer service or adding extra services; investing in production-related R&D activities;
- Striving for innovation and technological advances; pursuing continuous quality improvement;
- Increasing marketing and brand-building activities;
- Seeking out high-quality inputs and
- Emphasising human resource management activities that improve the skills, expertise, and knowledge of company personnel.

Franczak, Weinzimmer, and Michel (2009) at Bradley University (Illinois) conducted a study on the empirical examination of strategic orientation (SO) and SME performance. The study surveyed 857 respondents from 21 SMEs. Strategic orientation was measured as a cultural dimension, while performance was measured longitudinally using the following parameters: profit growth, return on investment, and return on assets. The study found a positive and significant association between strategic orientation and performance.

Szymaniec-Mlicka (2016) in Poland studied the impact of strategic orientation adopted by an organisation on its performance, with reference to public healthcare entities. The study, which involved 120 managers, was quantitative and used questionnaires. It measured performance using BSC with the dimensions of stakeholders, financial, internal processes, and growth. The strategic orientation of the organisation was measured by a resource-based view and a market-based view. The study found that there was a significant positive association between strategic orientation and performance.

Lee, Choi, and Kwak (2014) studied the effects of four dimensions of strategic orientation, that is, technology, entrepreneurial, market, and learning orientations, on firm innovativeness and performance in emerging market small- and medium-sized enterprises in South Korea. The study surveyed 374 firms, of which chief executive officers and senior managers were the respondents. Performance was measured by relative performance, profitability and market share. The study found that technology orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, and learning orientation were significant, while market orientation was insignificant. South Korea, one of the four Asian Tiger countries, is a powerhouse on the global stage, and for her SMEs to fail in market orientation is a serious omission. This shows that the customer-centred approach to product design was, for some unknown reasons, overlooked.

Otieno, Bwisa and Kihoro (2012) studied the influence of entrepreneurial orientation on Kenya's manufacturing firms operating under East African Regional Integration. In this study, which was both quantitative and qualitative exploratory research design, 525 firms were involved. The firms are based in Nairobi and its surroundings. Performance was measured by sales, profits, and employees, while entrepreneurial orientation was measured by product innovativeness, process innovativeness, technological innovativeness, risk-taking management, and a proactive competitive posture. The study found a significant and positive association between strategic orientation and performance. In this study, the strategic orientation variables, product innovativeness, process innovativeness, technological innovativeness, management risk-taking and pro-active competitive posture, all are activities within the domain of corporate management, and so for them to have a significant and positive relationship with performance are expected.

Nasir, Mamun and Breen (2017) did a study on the strategic orientation and performance of SMEs in Malaysia. From a sample of 1500 questionnaires sent out, only 473 questionnaires returned were found usable for the study. Firm performance was measured by managerial perceptions, perceived financial performance and financial aspects of the business. Strategic orientation was measured by market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation and interaction orientation. The study found that the direct relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and firm performance was significant. Interaction orientation was proven to have no effect on firm performance, while market orientation was found to play a reduced role in conditions of competitive intensity. It emerged that entrepreneurial orientation plays the most significant role for Malaysian SMEs.

From the studies highlighted, various types of strategic orientation influenced performance. A cross-sectional study by Lee, Choi, and Kwak (2014) found that the strategic orientation variables, technology orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, and learning orientation, were significant, while market orientation was not significant. Arising from the facts of the case, entrepreneurial orientation, which is a creation of the management, is significant - the reason management is in control of the process, leading to improved performance. Market orientation was found to play a reduced role with respect to competition, implying that market orientation, which is about an organisation being able to put up businesses which are able to create products and services that meet the needs and desires of the consumers, failed to actualise its part of the bargain. In this case, market orientation failed to impact performance.

Otieno, Bwisa, and Kihoro (2012) found a significant and positive association between strategic orientation and performance. This particular study leveraged innovativeness, risk-taking, and pro-activeness — the variables of strategic orientation — to secure performance. These variables are strengths within the organisation, so corporate managers have the capacity and ability to manipulate the strategic orientation variables to achieve their goal of improved performance.

The study by Franczack, Weinzimmer, and Michel (2009), which considered strategic orientation as a cultural dimension, found that it had an impact on performance. According to Gatignon & Xuereb (1997), strategic orientation as a cultural dimension entails the ability of a firm to focus on strategic direction and build or sustain the proper strategic fit for superior firm performance. Strategic orientation as a cultural dimension has also been defined as a continuous and iterative process that must focus on the different effects of rational, economic, political and subjective aspects of strategic change on competitive performance (Whipp, Rosenfeld, & Pettigrew, 1989). Culture in an organisation evolves over time, and once it has taken root, it has the tenacity to hold for a long time. Culture can be considered as a glue that holds together a people to meet certain goals and objectives.

Szymaniec-Mlicka's (2016) study of public health entities used strategic orientation, whose variables were resource-based view and market-based view, found it impacted performance. The study found that strategic orientation, which was measured by a resource-based and market-based view, had a significant positive association with performance and was not a far-fetched imagination but a reality. The healthcare entities relied on their resources of sorts, resources they have acquired through entrepreneurial manoeuvres to gain association with performance. In the same vein, healthcare entities use a market-based view focused on the market, thereby tailoring their services to meet market needs and improve performance.

Nasir, Mamun, and Breen (2017) had the strategic orientation variables as market orientation, entrepreneurial orientation and interaction orientation and found that the relationship between entrepreneurial orientation and performance was significant, meaning it influenced performance. Interaction orientation, on the other hand, had no effect on performance, while market orientation played a reduced role in competitive intensity. Market orientation is known to be a customer-centred approach to product design. For market orientation to have a reduced role in competitive intensity means there was insufficient push to gain competitive advantage. Every business goes out there to stamp its authority in the market, and market orientation helps to do just that, which translates into high performance. In a similar manner, interaction orientation, which was found to have no effect on firm performance, points to the fact that the SMEs do not have the ability to interact with their individual customers; this is a systemic failure that the enterprises must address to keep them solidly in the market. The Malaysian SMEs failed to provide an enabling environment for interaction orientation and market orientation to facilitate performance.

Blanchard (2008), writing on contingency theory, stated that decisions made by contingent leaders are flexible in nature and present adaption to current situations as they arise. Thus, leadership characteristics are dependent on contextual factors, and there is no "one size fits all" style of leadership. Porter's strategic orientation is central to this study. However, none of the empirical studies used a differentiation strategy, low-cost strategy or focus strategy (Porter's strategic orientation) to measure strategic orientation. Consequently, the effect of Porter's strategic orientation on skilled births - a measure of performance in the public health facilities in Western Kenya remains unknown.

From the studies by Franczack, Weinzimmer and Michel (2009), Szymaniec-Mlicka (2016) and Otieno, Bwisa and Kihoro (2012), all the strategic orientation variables used supported performance. According to Nasir, Mamun and Breen (2017), entrepreneurial orientation supported performance, while market orientation had a reduced role in performance. Interaction orientation had no effect on performance. In the study by Lee, Choi and Kwak (2014), the strategic orientation variables, technology orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, and learning orientation, were significant when market orientation was not significant. The results from these studies show that not every strategic orientation variable supported performance. Market orientation and interaction orientation did not support performance. Both market orientation and interaction orientation are opportunities in the external environment, and the firms do not have control over them. The firms, however, have a duty to make their presence felt, and to this end, the firms must re-invent themselves to reap from the external opportunities.

Since the studies bordered on for-profit concerns, it is evident that the strategic orientations were tailored to enable performance, which is the ultimate aim of an organisation. The free maternal service in public health facilities is a government policy that entrenches skilled births in the provision of healthcare with the aim of promoting healthy living for the mother and her newborn baby. This is a service by the government of Kenya to its citizens. Although the literature has it that strategic orientation reflects the strategic directions implemented by a firm to create the proper behaviours for the continuous superior performance of the business, this has not been confirmed in the free maternal services. Strategic orientation (Porter's generic strategies) has been known to be applicable in the healthcare industry; Ombati & Muturi (2019), in a study of AgaKhan University Hospital, found Porter's strategic orientation strategies applicable when they used cost leadership, differentiation and market focus strategies. The same has not been tested in the public health facilities. Skilled births in public health facilities are free services as opposed to the mission hospitals and private hospitals, which levy fees for similar services. The public health facilities face no competition from the non-public health facilities, which charge fees for maternity services.

**4. Effects of Strategic Orientation on Performance**

The method of strategic orientation is applied to create appropriate behaviours for the continuous superior performance of a business (Kim, Im & Slater, 2013). Strategic orientation is the strategic direction implemented by a firm to create the proper behaviours for the continuous superior performance of the business (Nasir, Mamaun, & Breen, 2017). According to Hao & Song (2016), strategic orientation does not necessarily give an organisation a competitive advantage in the market or an outstanding performance as a standalone, but all relationships of the different strategic orientations.

There is a strong relationship between organisational performance and the several dimensions of strategic orientation. Strategic orientation provides an organisation with a better understanding of its customers, which leads to enhanced customer satisfaction and, thus, organisational performance (Ngetich, 2023). A firm's strategy can have a major impact on its structure, activities, investments, relation to the market, and business performance (Obeidat, 2016). Firms leverage orientations to maximise their competitive advantage against rivals in the market.

Healthcare units aim to achieve superior performance compared to competitors by differentiating the products/services offered rather than reducing costs and the tendency to aim to achieve one or both type(s) of competitive advantage, as well as the scope of strategic activities in which it is achieved, differ according to several contingency factors, including location in a certain geographical area, the type of health organisation, and their age and size (Stefan, Popa & Taraban, 2023). According to Kumar, Subramanian, and Yauger (1997), hospitals that follow a focused cost leadership strategy have superior performance on a variety of performance measures, while hospitals that use a combination of cost leadership and differentiation perform the poorest. Achira & Mutua (2023), in a study of public hospitals in Nairobi County - Kenya, found that focus strategy was a key driver of performance.

**5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The firms involved in the empirical studies used strategic orientations composed of numerous variables. Most of the variables, like technology orientation, learning orientation and entrepreneurial orientation, supported performance. Where resource-based view and market-based view were used as strategic orientation variables, they supported performance. These variables are strengths that the firms have within their internal environment. The management has control over them. However, it emerged that market orientation and interaction orientation were not significant. These variables did not support performance. Both market orientation and interaction orientation are opportunities in the external environment. The firms do not have control over these variables, yet they have a duty to understand the operations of the market so that the goods/services they produce can meet the needs and desires of customers, not forgetting that they also need to have the ability to interact with individual customers to get information leading to profitable customer relationships.

However, Porter's strategic orientation has not shown that it influenced free maternal services, leading to improved skilled births in public health facilities. The study recommends further studies to establish why Porter's strategic orientation does not influence free maternity care, an undertaking in which competition is lacking. Measurement of performance should be left to operate freely. Every activity seems to have a unique manner of measuring performance. In this study, skilled births were used as a measure of performance in public health facilities. With regard to implications to theory, practice, and policy, the study recommends that public health facilities re-invent the service delivery approach so that Porter's strategic orientation can have a serious impact on performance. This finding contributes to policy by making it known that strategic orientation does not apply in cases where there is no competition among firms. Scholars can benefit from the study by gaining insights into the relationships between strategic orientation and performance, especially when there is no competitive advantage. This finding enriches theoretical understanding in the field of business management.

**6. Acknowledgement**

We would like to acknowledge Dr. Beatrice E. Abong'o (ORCID: 0000-0001-7899-8542) from the Department of Business Administration at Maseno University, and Dr. Fredrick O. Aila (ORCID: 0000-0002-4967-5442), also from the Department of Business Administration at Maseno University, for their invaluable contributions and support.

**7. References**

i. Achira, S., & Mutua, J.J.N. (2023).Focus strategy on the performance of level four public hospitals in Nairobi County, Kenya. *The International Journal of Business & Management, 11*(11), 16–22.
ii. Adams, P., Freitas, I.M.B., & Fontana, R. (2019). Strategic orientation, innovation performance and the moderating influence of marketing management. *Journal of Business Research, 97*: 129–140. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.12.071
iii. Adiguzel, Z., & Cakir, F. S. (2022).Examining the effects of strategic orientation and motivation on performance and innovation in the production sector of automobile spare parts. Journal of Management Studies, 27(2), 131–153.

iv. Ahmed, S. Y., Ali, B. J., & Top, C. (2021). Understanding the impact of trust, perceived risk, and perceived technology on the online shopping intentions: A case study in Kurdistan region of Iraq. *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Business and Government*, *27*(3), 2136–2153.

v. Akilo, A., & Olaosebikan, T. W. (2021). Effect of strategic orientation on employee performance in private universities in Nigeria. SSRN, 1–28. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3836569

vi. Akoi, S., Ali, J.B., Saleh, F.P., Najmalddin, B., Mustafa, S. R., Abdulmajid, M. R., & Hama, A. R. (2021). Elaborating the characteristics that affect buyers in online shopping: The case of Generation Z Girls in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. *Black Sea Journal of Management and Marketing, 2*(2), 42–64.

vii. Ali, B. J., Gardi, B., Othman, B. J., Sabir, B. Y., Sorguli, S., Ismael, ... Anwar, G. (2021). The role of shopping malls in Kurdistan Regional Government's Economy. *Journal of Humanities and Education Development, 3*(3), 39–53.

viii. Altuntas, G., Semercioz, F. and Eregez, H. (2013). Linking strategic and market orientations to organisational performance: the role of innovation in private healthcare organisations. *Procedia-Social and Behavioural Sciences, 99*, 413–419. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.10.509.

ix. Amentie- Kero, and Sogbossi, B.B. (2017). Competitive strategy orientation and innovative success: Mediating market orientation a study of small-medium enterprises. *Global Journal of Management and Business Research*, *17*(3), 75–89, available at: https:// journalofbusiness.org/index.php/GJMBR/article/view/2348.

x. Balodi, K., C. (2014). Strategic orientation and organisational forms: An integrative framework. *European Business Review, 26, 188–203.*

xi. Blanchard, K. H. (2008). Situational leadership: Adapt your style to their development level. *Leadership Excellence, 25*(5), 19.

xii. Bowman, C. (1992). Interpreting Competitive Advantage. In: D. Faulkner and G. Johnson (eds.), The Challenge of Strategic Management, 64–83, Kogan Page, London.

xiii. Bulut, Ç. Alpkan, L. and Yilmaz, C. (2009), "Stratejik Oryantasyonlar ve Firma Performansı _ Ilis¸ kisi: Literat€ur Gelis¸imi €Uzerine Kavramsal Bir Çalıs¸ma", *Dokuz Eyl€ul €U niversitesi _Is¸letme Fak€ultesi Dergisi, 10* (1), 1–3.

xiv. David, F.R. (2017). *Strategic management concepts and cases. A competitive advantage approach;* Pearson Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ, USA.

xv. Eccles, R. G., Ioannou, I., Serafeim, G. (2014). The impact of corporate sustainability on organisational processes and performance. *Management Science, 60*, 2835–2857.

xvi. Faulkner, D. O., & Campbell, A. (Eds.). (2006). The Oxford Handbook of strategy: A strategy overview and competitive strategy. Oxford University Press.

xvii. Franczak, J., Weinzimmer, L., & Michel, E. (2009). An empirical examination of strategic orientation and SME performance. *Small Business Institute National Proceedings, 33*(1), 68–77.

xviii. Frederiksen, L., & Harr, E. (2024).Mastering differentiation strategy for professional service firms. Accessed on 22/7/2024 from: https://hingemarketing.com/blog/story/expertise-as-a-differentiation-strategy

xix. Gatignon, H. and Xuereb, J. M. (1997). Strategic orientation of the firm and new product performance. *Journal of Marketing Research,* 34, 77–90.

xx. Ghiasi, A., Weech-Maldonado, R., Zengul, F., Puro, N. (2022). The association between strategic group membership and hospital financial performance. *Journal of Hospital Management, Health Policy*, 6, 24.

xxi. Green, S. D., Larsen, G. D., & Kao, C.C. (2008). Competitive strategy revisited: contested concepts and dynamic capabilities. *Construction Management Economics, 26* (1): 63–78.

xxii. Grinstein, A. (2008). The relationship market orientation and alternative strategic orientations: A meta-analysis. *European Journal of Marketing, 42* (1/2), 115–134.

xxiii. Hao, S. & Song, M. (2016). Technology-driven strategy and firm performance: Are strategic capabilities missing links? *Journal of Business Research, 69*(2), 751–759. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.07.043

xxiv. He, J., Chen, H. &Tsai, F.S. (2020). Strategy orientation, innovation capacity endowment, and international R&D intensity of listed companies in China. *Sustainability, 12*(1), 1–20. doi: 10.3390/su12010344

xxv. Hikmawati, N. K., &Alamsyah, D. P. (2018). The digital company based on competitive strategy*. Third International Conference on Informatics and Computing (ICIC): 1–4. IEEE.*

xxvi. Ibarra-Cisneros, M. A., Demuner-Flores, M. D. R., & Hernández-Perlines, F. (2021). Strategic orientations, firm performance and the moderating effect of absorptive capacity. *Journal of Strategy and Management, 14*(4), 582–611. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSMA-05-2020- 0121

xxvii. Kim, N., Im, S. and Slater, S.F. (2013). Impact of knowledge type and strategic orientation on new product creativity and advantage in high-technology firms. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 30* (1), 136–153. doi: 10.1111/j.1540 5885.2012.00992.x.

xxviii. Kumar, K. & Subramanian, R. (1998). Porters Strategic Types: Differences in internal processes and their impact on performance. *Journal of Applied Business Research*, *14*, 107–124.

xxix. Kumar, K., Subramanian, R., & Yauger, C. (1997). Pure versus hybrid: Performance implications of Porter's generic strategies. *Health care Management Review, 22*(4), 47–60.

xxx. Lee, C. M. J., Che-Ha, N., Alwi, S. S. F. (2019). Service customer orientation and social responsibility: The case of small, medium enterprises. *Journal of Business Research*, 122, 751–760.

xxxi. Lee, D. H., Choi, S B., & Kwak, W.J. (2014). The effects of four dimensions of firm innovativeness and performance in emerging markets small and Medium Size Enterprises. *Emerging Markets Finance and Trade, 50*(5)*, 78–96.*

xxxii. Lee, C.S., Chan, L., & McNabb, D.E. (2017). The role of strategic orientation in business innovation.

xxxiii. *Portland International Conference on Management of Engineering and Technology* (PICMET), IEEE, pp.1–5. doi: 10.23919/PICMET.2017.8125241.
xxxiv. Liu, W. & Atuahene-Gima, K. (2018). Enhancing product innovation performance in a dysfunctional competitive environment: The roles of competitive strategies and market-based assets. *Industry and Market Management, 73: 7–20.* doi: 10.1016/j.indmarman.2018.01.006.
xxxv. Mu, J., Thomas, E. & Peng, G. (2017). Strategic orientation and new product development performance: The role of networking capability and networking ability. *Industrial Marketing Management. 64*. 187–201.
xxxvi. Mutuku, C.K., Oloko, M. & Muturi, W. (2024). Influence of Customer Focus Strategy on Financial Performance of Deposit-Taking SACCOs in Kenya. *International Journal of Business Strategies, 9*(1), 20–29.
xxxvii. Mwenda, G. (2020). Strategic orientation and organisation growth: A review. *International Academic Journal of Human Resource and Business Administration (IAJHRBA),* 3(8), 133–142.
xxxviii. Nassani, A. A., & Aldakhil, A. M. (2021). Tackling organisational innovativeness through strategic orientation: Strategic alignment and moderating role of strategic flexibility. *European Journal of Innovation Management*, 26(3), 847–861. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJIM-04-2021-0198.
xxxix. Nasir, W. M. N. W. M., Mamun, A. A., & Breen, J. (2017). Strategic orientation and performance of SMEs in Malaysia. 1–13. DOI: 10.1177/2158244017712768
xl. Nason, R.S. & Wiklund, J. (2018). An assessment of resource-based theorising on firm growth and suggestions for the future. *Journal of Management*, 44: 32–60. doi: 10.1177/0149206315610635.
xli. Ngetich, M. (2023). Effect of strategic orientation on the performance of large retail stores in Nairobi. *International Journal of Social Sciences Management and Entrepreneurship 7*(1): 113–122.
xlii. Nguli, J. N., & Odunga, R. M. (2019). Does entrepreneur innovativeness moderate the relationship between strategic orientation and financial inclusion? *SEISENSE Journal of Management, 2*(6), 30–48.
xliii. Noble, C.H., Sinha, R.K. and Kumar, A. (2002). Market orientation and alternative strategic orientations: a longitudinal assessment of performance implications. *Journal of Marketing, 66* (4), 25–39. doi: 10.1509/jmkg.66.4.25.18513.
xliv. Obel, B., & Gurkov, I. (2021). Strategic orientation of the firm towards its stakeholders and inclination towards sustainability – the conceptual framework. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 31(2), 462–475. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJOA-04-2021-2721.
xlv. Obeidat, B. (2016). The effect of strategic orientation on organisational performance: the mediating role of innovation. *International Journal of Communications, Network and System Sciences*, **9**: 478–505. doi: 10.4236/ijcns.2016.911039.
xlvi. Ombati, E.B. & Muturi, W. (2019). Influence of Porter's Strategies on Competitive Advantage in Hospitals: A Case Study of Agakhan University Hospital Kenya. *International Journal of Business Management Technology,* 3: 177–186.
xlvii. Otieno, S., Bwisa, H. M., & Kihoro, J. M. (2012). Influence of strategic orientation on peformance of Kenya's manufacturing firms operating under East African regional integration. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 3* (5), 46–55.
xlviii. Pertusa-Ortega, E, M., Claver-Cortes, E., & Molin-Azorin, J. F. (2007). Pure, hybrid or "stuck-in-the-middle" strategies? A revision and analysis of their effects on firm performance.
xlix. Porter, M.E. (1985). *Competitive Advantage. Creating and Sustaining Superior Performance*; First Free Press: New York, NY, USA.
l. Porter, M.E. (*1980*). *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analysing Industries and Competitors; Free Press: New York, NY, USA.*
li. Pulaj, E. (2014). Atraktiviteti i industrisë së ndërtimit nga këndvështrimi i strategjive konkurruese të porter-it. Universiteti i Tiranës - Fakulteti i ekonomisë - Departamenti i menaxhimit, Tirane.
lii. Sabir, B. Y., Othman, B .J., Gardi, B., Ismael, N. B., Hamza, P. A., Sorguli, S., ...Anwar, G. (2021). Administrative Decentralisation: The Transfer of Competency from the Ministry of Education to General Directorates. *International Journal of Rural Development, Environment and Health Research, 5*(3), 1–13.
liii. Saleh, P. F., Ali, B. J., Akoi, S., Najmalddin, B., Ali, R. S., & Anwar, G. (2021). Factors Affecting the Success of Female Entrepreneurs in Kurdistan. *International Journal of Engineering, Business and Management (IJEBM)*, *5*.
liv. Selmi, N. & Chaney, D. (2018). A measure of revenue management orientation and its mediating role in the relationship between market orientation and performance. *Journal of Business Research, 89*, 99–109. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.201.04.008
lv. Stanke, B. (2023). Porter's generic strategies: An overview of competitive advantage. https://www.bobstanke.com/bolg/porter;s-generic-strategies Accessed on 3/5/2024.
lvi. Stefan, S. C., popa, I., & Taraban, I. (2023). Strategic orientation of Romanian health care organisations from a contingency theory perspective based on Porter's generic strategy model. *Systems, 11* (488), 1–28. https://doi.org/10.3390/systems11100488.
lvii. Szymaniec-Mlicka, K. (2016). Impact of strategic orientation adopted by an organisation on its performance as shown on the example of public healthcare entities. *Management, 20* (2)*, 278-290.* ISSN; 1429–9321.
lviii. Thompson, A. A., Strickland, A. J., Gamble, J. E., & Zengan, G. (2018).*Crafting and executing strategy: The quest for competitive advantage – concepts and cases,* 21st edn. McGraw-Hill Education, New York.
lix. Uzoamaka, N. - O.P., Ifeoma, A. R., & Nosike, C. J. (2020). Strategic orientation dimensions: a critical review. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 4(9).

lx. Wang, Z. J., Wang, H., & Li, Z.Z. (2021). Competitive strategy, capital operation and firm performance. *Economic Survey*, 38(6), 103–112.

lxi. Weizimmer, L. G., Robin, J., & Michael, E. J. (2012). The measurement of strategic orientation and its efficacy in predicting financial performance. *Journal of Business Strategies, 29*(2), 81–98.

lxii. Wanjogo, J.W., Muathe, S.M. (2022). Gaining Competitive Advantage through Generic Strategies in Medical Training Colleges in Kenya. *International Journal, Research Business Social Science*, 11, 29–41.

lxiii. Whipp, R., Rosenfeld, R., & Pettigrew, A. (1989).Culture and competitiveness: evidence from two mature UK industries. *Journal of Management Studies 26*(6), 561–85.

lxiv. Xiao, H., Al Mamun, A & Yang, Q. (2023). Modeling the significance of strategic orientation on green innovation: mediation of green dynamic capabilities. *Human and Social Sciences Communications, 10,* 777.

lxv. Yang, M., Jaafar, N., Al Mamun, A., Salameh, A. A., & Nawi, N. C. (2022). Modeling the significance of strategic orientation for competitive advantage and economic sustainability: the use of hybrid SEM-neural network analysis. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship. 11*: 44.

lxvi. Zahra, S. A., & George, G. (2002). Absorptive capacity: A review, Reconceptualisation and extension. *Academy of Management Review, 27* (2), 185–203.

lxvii. Zhang, Y, Liu, J., Sheng, S. (2020). Strategic orientation and participation intentions for technical standardisation. *Technical Analysis in Strategic Management, 32*, 881–894. http://doi:10.1080/09537325.2020.1719057.

lxviii. Zheng, Y., Li, M., Hao, C., Kiani, A., &Wang, Y. (2023). Research on enterprise innovation Modes choice and alternate evolution from ambidextrous perspectives. Technological Analysis of Strategic Management, 1–15. doi: 10.1080/09537325.2023.2209219.

lxix. Zhou, K.Z. and Li, CB (2010). How strategic orientations influence the building of dynamic capability in emerging economies. *Journal of Business Research, 63*(3), 224–231. doi: 10.1016/j.jbusres.2009.03.003.

lxx. Zhou, K. Z., Gao, G. Y., & Zhou, N. (2005). Developing strategic orientation in China: Antecedents and consequences of market and innovation orientations. *Journal of Business Research, 58*: 1049–1058.