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A descriptive study of corporate meetings interaction as a strategic instrument for organizational effectiveness

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Abstract
The science of corporate meetings have assumed increased academic interest (Allen *et al.*, 2008) in the past three decades seemingly due to increases in corporate scandals, increased corporate failures, rapid and disruptive changes in the business environment, growth in conglomerate structures, increased competition, and reduced product lifecycles. The present descriptive study seeks to critically analyse the significant role of corporate meetings as instruments for organizational effectiveness. There is limited research related to corporate meetings from a social network perspective. The corporation is the main form of corporate activity in any country; hence the proper functioning of the corporation is essential for economic development. Corporate meetings are essential in ensuring the alignment of corporate activities at various levels of the organization's hierarchy. The effectiveness and alignment of all corporate meetings determines an organization's overall effectiveness and subsequently economic performance.

The research adopted an inductive methodology by means of discourse analysis and social network analysis of qualitative meeting descriptions with reference to four companies. The discourse analysis was important in understanding the ties in an interaction network. The social network analysis was applied to examine meetings interaction data among different levels of the organization's hierarchy based on three fundamental social network theory constructs of bridging, closure and leader centrality. It is useful in visualizing and understanding the diverse relationships that either facilitate or impede knowledge sharing. The researcher adopted purposive sampling in order to assess the meetings in the four organizations. The interpretivist epistemological position was adopted based on the researcher's first hand information about corporate meetings and the respondents' last three corporate meetings and general workplace experience. The study was exploratory, explanatory, and predominantly descriptive.

The study shows that corporate meetings save several purposes and are essential in driving organizational effectiveness. The nature of the aims and purposes of an organization varies at different levels of the organization's hierarchy based on the extent of closure and bridging ties. Results show that all the six meetings, has an inclination towards discussions on the state of the business. In line with the hierarchical view of the corporation, the results from the analysis of the different meeting purposes indicate the power and politics differences in organizational life (Finkelstein, 1992). Meetings interaction is an important ingredient for organizational effectiveness as the different purposes at different organizational levels will be aligned. The study shows that when an organization's strategy, goals, and activities are aligned, the organization will gain and sustain a competitive advantage.

Keywords: corporate meetings, organizational effectiveness, strategic alignment

1. Introduction

Corporations have assumed a dominant position in the 21st century society; and organizational effectiveness is undoubtedly a key pillar to economic transformation. The dominance of the corporation can be measured by the number of corporate entities, employment levels, economic growth in different counties, the pace of technological innovations, and the extent of social impact by corporate entities. The corporation is the main form of corporate activity in any country. In the modern corporation, it seems meetings are an essential instrument for enhancing organizational effectiveness. The effectiveness and alignment of all corporate meetings determines an organization's overall effectiveness and subsequently economic performance. From the vantage point of the stakeholder theory, the outcomes of any organization's meeting have significant implications on different stakeholders and the whole corporate ecosystem.

This is equally important in view of the globalization of markets.

The science of corporate meetings have assumed increased academic interest in the past three decades seemingly due to increases in corporate scandals, increased corporate failures, rapid and disruptive changes in the business environment, growth in conglomerate structures, increased competition, and reduced product lifecycles. These factors therefore call for an extensive inquiry into the alignment of corporate meetings in order to drive organizational effectiveness. In view of the complexity of the 21st century business environment, the importance of corporate meetings in accomplishing organizational work cannot be overemphasized. Corporate meetings enable the collective accomplishment of organizational tasks by individuals and teams (Romano and Nunamaker Jr, 2001) [20]. It is important for organizations to continually strive to increase the effectiveness of corporate meetings because prior research showed that ineffective meetings are likely to have lasting psychological effects on employees (Nixon and Littlepage, 1992) [17]. Corporate meetings are "microcosms for the entire organization where the power, structure, and functions of the organization is manifested, legitimized and perpetuated" (Schwartzman, 1986) [21].

An organization is a social unit of people that is structured in order to pursue collective goals. Theorists of formal organization state that organizations have objectives and purposes. The effectiveness of an organization is influenced by decisions from within and from outside the formal structure. Can an organization operate effectively without integrated, organized, and effective meetings? Meetings are an integral and pervasive part of any social construction. People in organizations meet to generate ideas, solve organization's problems (Romano and Nunamaker Jr, 2001) [20], share information (Vree, 2011) [26], socialization (Horan, 2012), shaping an organization's culture, relationship building, and training. Organizations also use meetings as forums to communicate the organization's strategic intent, craft strategic plans, and develop responses to environmental changes. Organizational effectiveness refers to efficiency within which an organization achieves its objectives. Meetings and meetings integration are essential instruments in strategic alignment and subsequently organizational effectiveness.

This paper aims to explore the strategic role of meetings as instruments for organizational effectiveness. This exploration covers six categories of meetings in terms of their essential ingredients, incentives for effectiveness, and the interface of these meetings in order to create alignment of the different units of the organization, streamline each unit and enhance innovation for organizational effectiveness. The six categories of meetings that form part of this exploration are the General Shareholder Meeting (GSM), Board meetings, Executive Committee meetings, Management meetings, Stakeholder engagement meetings, and Staff meetings. The formal and informal meeting styles are essential in ensuring the integration of meetings in any organization. Though on the surface an organization presents a single entity, the hierarchical view of an organization is considered in the categorization of corporate meetings. An organization has boundaries, levels, operating controls and authorities. However, the context of meetings actually vary depending on the subcultures of which the employee belongs in the organization, subcultures defined by such things as organizational rank and orientation, job functions, educational level, length of employment, age and so on (Kramer, 2001). The alignment of these six meetings and the harmonious interaction between all members of these distinct categories of meetings is fundamental to this study.

Statement of the Problem

Meetings are an integral part of any organizational. However, recent studies reveal that corporate meetings are costly and in most cases unproductive. Earlier studies by McKenzie (1972) state that corporate meetings invariably appear among the top three time-consuming corporate activities. Further research shows that most organizations spend 7-15% of their personnel budget on meetings (Doyle and Straus, 1982; Monge *et al.,* 1989). According to a more recent study, employees spend on average six hours a week on meetings and even more hours in large organizations (Rogelberg *et al.,* 2006) [19]. It seems with the complexity of organizations the costs of meetings continue to soar whilst meetings are increasingly becoming misaligned and unproductive. The extent of meetings misalignment and unproductivity can be determined by the number of failed corporations, deepening agency problems, project failures, lack of employee engagement, and internal corporate conflicts. There seem to be a serious lack of strategic alignment between the different functions of the modern complex organizations. A continued state of meetings misalignment between the different levels of the organization has significant financial and social costs which affect the overall effectiveness of the firm. Other hidden costs of unsuccessful meetings include the total emotional recovery time for an employee after attending a meeting that was frustrating for the employee due to unsuccessful outcomes (Romano and Nunamaker Jr, 2001) [20]. "Unsuccessful meetings can be a disaster – they're unpleasant to be in, they're ineffective, they're a waste of time, and they create a huge productivity hole" (Masters and Wallace, 2011).

In response to the cost implications and the seemingly unproductive nature of the modern organizations' meetings, this study considers meetings alignment as fundamental to organizational effectiveness. This is equally important in view of the emergence of conglomerate structures in all sectors of the different countries' economies. The study therefore analyses the ingredients, incentives and interfaces of different categories of corporate meetings in the context of organizational effectiveness. The proper functioning of any social construction is founded on clear cooperation, collaboration and communication among the social actors and functional areas.

The present study primarily seeks to explore the strategic role of meetings and meetings alignment as instruments of organizational effectiveness. The following are the specific objectives:

- To critically analyse the key categories of corporate meetings that drive sustainable organizational effectiveness
- To examine the form and essence of corporate meetings in relation to organizational effectiveness
- To critically analyse the interrelationships of the different categories of corporate meetings in building highly effective organizations

The hierarchical view of the organization considers three main levels of an organization: lower level, middle level, and top level management. The focus of each level in view of organizational effectiveness varies from operational to strategic as one move up the organization's hierarchy. Each level forms part of the total organization and as such this research seeks to critically analyze the meetings at each level in view of driving sustained organizational effectiveness.

Each level of the organization provides strategic support to the other levels in order to perform the core work of the organization. However the skills, structure, processes and systems required to conduct effective meetings at each level varies. There seem to be significant variations in terms of the incentives of corporate meetings at different functional levels of an organization. This study therefore examines the form and essence of the different categories of corporate meetings in relation to sustainable organizational effectiveness.

It is expected that corporate meetings should be aligned and there should be harmonious interaction between all members at different levels of the organization. Synergy, adaptation, goal-orientation and coordinated balance are essential to sustainable organizational effectiveness. Meetings alignment is therefore essential to ensure streamlined and innovative activities at each level of the organization. The study therefore seeks to critically analyse the integration mechanisms of the different categories of corporate meetings.

Significance of the study

The modern corporation has assumed a dominant position in today's highly globalized society. As a social construction the corporation is made up of different components and functional areas which should be coordinated in order to ensure synergy and achievement of the overall strategic intent. Organizational effectiveness is a product of effective synergy, adaptation, goal-orientation and coordinated balance between the different functions and levels of an organization. Effective meetings and meetings alignment are instruments for organizational effectiveness. Organizations with coordinated meetings across the organization's hierarchy exhibit strength in leadership, decision-making, people, work processes, systems, and culture. An understanding of the ingredients, incentives, and integration mechanism of the different categories of corporate meetings is essential in collaborative working, competency building, collaborative leadership, community building, creative leadership, change leadership, and capacity building at each level of the organization.

The present study considers meetings as a tool for strategic alignment and as such the integration of meetings is fundamental to this study. Integrated and effective organizations posses significant financial and social benefits to economies. Meetings and meetings alignment plays an important role in driving organizational effectiveness.

The emergence of conglomerate structures, effects of globalization, and the intensity of competition in all markets call for a study in corporate meetings alignment in relation to organizational effectiveness. There has been an increase in corporate failures, corporate governance deficiencies, project failures, and corporate conflicts in most countries during the past two decades, yet effective meetings can produce lasting solutions. Most organizations exhibit the characteristics of the bureaucratic organization as developed by Max Weber (1864-1920). These characteristics include degree of division of labor, well-defined chain of command, formal relationships between organizational members, well-defined rules and regulations, and recruitment based on qualifications. To counter the bureaucratic organization's criticism on hampered coordination and communication, meetings alignment is essential. This study could be among the few attempts to explore the integration of meetings from a hierarchical point of view.

2. Theoretical Review of corporate meetings literature

Meaning of Meetings and their importance

Corporate meetings play an integral role in an organization. An organization cannot function effectively without engaging in corporate meetings. Meetings provide all corporate stakeholders with an opportunity to communicate and coordinate the strategic intent of the organization (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2006) [19]. Corporate meetings are the engines for a multitude of organizational activities, from problem solving to interactions between different organizational functions. The process of defining meetings is at the centre of meeting sciences because an accurate definition of meetings reveals the purposes and the specific techniques required for each meeting to be effective. There is no consensus among corporate meeting scholars and researchers on the exact definition of meetings. According to Schwartzman (1986) [21] meetings represent any form of pre-arranged, work-related gatherings and interaction between two or more individuals. Consistently, and more recently, Rogelberg *et al.*, (2006) [19] defined meetings as "purposeful work-related interactions occurring between at least two individuals that have more structure than a simple chat, but less than a lecture". "A meeting is a gathering where people speak up, say nothing, and then disagree" (Kayser, 1990). According to Nunamaker *et al.,* (1991) a meeting is "any activity where people come together, whether at the same place at the same time, or in different places at different time." Van Vree (2011) [26] corroborated on the definition of meetings by Boden (1994) which state that meetings refer to the social action through which members of an organizational produce and reproduce the organization's strategic intent.

Meetings Styles

Literature on the typologies of meeting types and meeting purposes is relatively scant. Schwartzman (1986) [21] described the first typology of meetings which encompass scheduled or unscheduled (Schwartzman, 1986) [21]. The difference between these two is the time spent on planning or preparing for the meeting. Most of the current research focuses on the regularly scheduled, formal meetings rather that the highly marginalized unscheduled meetings (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2006) [19]. The meetings typology by Schwartzman (1986) [21] can be summarized as an early attempt to categorize meetings and provide a means for differentiating between formal versus informal meeting settings. Another typology of meetings was developed by Bilbow (2002). This typology distinguishes between cross-departmental meetings, weekly departmental meetings, and brainstorming meetings. These different meetings fall the "scheduled" meeting category by Schwartzman (1986) [21]. Therefore, meetings can generally be categorized as formal and informal meetings. The interaction between these two categories of meetings styles is essential for organizational effectiveness.

Types of Meetings

Corporate meetings provide huge value to companies, employees, and the wider society (Boden, 1994). This value is in the form of shareholder wealth maximization, stakeholder value or shared value, and embedded sustainability. The six general types of meetings in modern organizations are: "Status Update Meetings, Information Sharing Meetings, Decision Making Meetings, Problem Solving Meetings, Innovation Meetings, and Team Building Meetings" (Boden, 1994). In addressing these six types of meetings, this paper looks at meetings from a hierarchical perspective of the organization (Chinoperekweyi, 2018) [4].

Staff Meetings/ Team meetings

These are meetings that are typically called by a team leader or manager to direct or indirect subordinates. Staff motivation is paramount to 21st century leadership and management. Organizations use energized staff meetings as an effective way to motivate staff (Eller and Eller, 2006). Staff meetings are a useful and powerful instrument for organizational development, for the sharing of views (Van Vree, 2011) [26], and for decision making (Reinig and Shin, 2003). The key problems affecting the alignment of staff meetings include lack of charter, lack of clarity, and staff uncertainty (Topman, 1996). The staff meeting is the most effective way through which managers communicate objectives (Rogelberg *et al.*, 2010). Staff meetings are useful to chart progress and keep staff informed of all office activities. "The interaction of many minds is usually more illuminating than the intuition of one" – Theodore C. Sorensen. Staff meetings are generally an important part of communication in the workplace. Corporate meetings represent the general mode for staff to share information, discuss work-related challenges and opportunities, and make corporate decisions (Boden, 1994). Corporate managers and leaders prioritize meetings as a strategic activity because meetings encourage discussion and yields optimal solutions for the organization. Staff meetings encourage two way communication and are often used to pull together information for decision making, communicating problems or solutions, and provide focus for teams (Masters and Wallace, 2011). The promotion of two-way communication is an essential element of the integration process and mutual decision making.

Management Meetings

Meetings at which management or administrative staff from various levels in the organization gather to report on their areas of responsibility and learn about new policies, procedures, and challenges. Management meetings should be held on a regular basis. Management meetings mainly save to secure corporate wealth maximization, coupled with the maximum prosperity for individual employees. The words "maximum prosperity" does not give exclusive focus to shareholder wealth maximization, but the expansion, development, and transformation of every unit and function of the business to its highest state of excellence. This is important in ensuring sustained prosperity for the employer and for each employee. Maximum prosperity for individual employees encompasses the growth of each employee to a state of maximum efficiency. This is essential in ensuring the employees can perform to the best of their natural abilities. Scientific management supports the view that the long-term prosperity of the employer can only be achieved and sustained if accompanied by the prosperity of each employee, and vice-versa. The close, intimate, personal cooperation between employers and employees is of the essence of modern scientific management (Taylor, 2008). Management meetings are instrumental is ensuring this close cooperation.

According to the University of Manitoba (2014) the functions of management meetings are important for the following reasons:

- Make decisions at an operational level, consistent with the strategic intent
- Operationalize and monitor progress toward the achievement of strategic goals
- Suggest policy changes
- Review requests and decisions by departmental units
- Develop departmental budgets based on departmental priorities

The basic functions of management are useful in determining the importance of meetings. These functions are planning, organizing, leading, controlling, and coordination. Management controls aims at transforming firm boundaries and sustaining hybrid organizations to mitigate risk and facilitate collaboration in intra-firm transactions. Management meetings are essential in facilitating coordination in intra-firm transactions (Shannon and Dekker, 2014) [22].

Executive Committee Meetings

The executive committee is more of a smaller board and as such should function more like a board than an actual committee. The executive committee plays an important role in recommending strategic policy and priorities, governance policy and structure, financial planning, fiscal policy, and human resources and labor relations. The reports generated from the executive committee meeting forms the basis of the board meeting and GSM. The focus of the executive committee meeting is to ensure the proper functioning of the organization and make strategic decisions. The executive committee meetings should be held prior to and just after the board meetings and the GSM. The significance of the executive committee meetings can be reviewed in the context of the functions of the committee. These functions include: driving the management's agenda, reviewing the company's performance, reviewing corporate strategy and risks, setting operations and financial objectives, structuring and managing internal business controls, corporate social responsibility issues, and review of compliance with applicable laws and regulations (Shannon and Dekker, 2014) [22]. The committee provides guidance and leadership to the overall organization's work and enhances the effectiveness of the board.

Board Meetings

These are meetings held at definite intervals and for administrative purposes. Strategic decision making is central to organizational effectiveness. Strategic decisions include infrequent decisions taken by top management of the firm. These decisions have a direct bearing on a firm's survival and health. A board is reckoned as "a team brought together to work towards achieving organizational goals" (Langton and Robbins, 2007). The difference between the board and executives or management is that executives and management are in the organization's chain of command whilst directors are not in the chain of command but are there to provide technical service to it. Boards have a crucial responsibility towards strategy and organizational effectiveness, hence the importance of board meetings. A large body of board and governance literature has now been published because companies are a legal construction that has a dominant role in society. The increase in reports of moral failures, hubris, incompetence, judicial investigations and sanctions published in popular press and practitioner literature have heightened awareness amongst a broad constituency. The objective of much of the body of research published to date has been the discovery of the optimal board configuration through which to minimize a perceived agency problem thought to exist between the board and management (Chandler, 1962).

The significance of board meetings as instruments for strategic alignment, corporate sustainability and profitability can be determined by reviewing the roles of the board. Board meetings are essential for strategic management, especially strategy development, strategic decision-making and monitoring of strategy implementation. The responsibility for the performance of the limited liability firm lies with the board (Cadburry, 1997). Board meetings are important in enhancing the oversight function of the board. Letende (2004) pointed out that boards should regularly review the performance of management and the performance of the firm. Board meetings therefore enhance the monitoring of management, resulting in improved corporate performance. Directors use the board meeting as a platform to develop the mission of the organization (Bart and Bonits, 2003), setting and reviewing the organization's mission (Walker, 1999) [27], and implementing strategic initiatives in the context of predefined corporate objectives.

Board meetings also provide a platform for directors to engage in strategic thinking (Garrett, 1996) [8], and strategic leadership (Davies, 1999) [7]. "Strategic thinking is related to long-term organizational effectiveness and involves strategic analysis, strategy formulation and corporate direction" (Garrett, 1996) [8]. Strategic leadership is a balance of strategic skills and experience relative to the organization's strategic intent. The top responsibility for board meetings includes the establishment of the firm's policy/vision, financial analysis and performance monitoring, and supporting strategies to achieve competitive advantage (Van der Walt and Ingley, 2001) [9]. A study in Australia identified "strategy formulation, strategic decision-making and strategic control" (Kemp, 2006) [13] as the reasons for board meetings. According to Wheeler and Hunger (2004), the board meetings should focus on monitoring the market and performance to keep abreast of competitors; evaluating, influencing and examining management proposals, decisions, and actions; and initiate and determine the organization's mission and specify strategic options to management. According to Tricker (1984) the board functions include establishing the vision, overseeing corporate strategy, assessing and monitoring performance. The board meetings are also useful for examining alternative business opportunities (Coulson-Thomas, 1993) [6].

Board meetings should focus on key organizational and managerial levers in order to expedite ambitious growth strategies (Penrose, 1959) [18]. The cognition lever is a key governance lever to influence managerial decision-making (Witz, 2011). 'Relationship' is also an important factor in supporting and sustaining growth (Anderson and Reeb, 2003). This is because an organization is a social construction whose functioning is greatly influenced by relationships. The disciplinary lever focuses on monitoring and control (Chandler, 1991).

Organizations also use board meetings to determine the intensity of board activity and value relevant board attribute (Vafeas, 1999) [25]. Despite the benefits associated with board meetings, there are significant costs involved such as: managerial time, travel expenses, and directors fees (Vafeas, 1999) [25]. The number of board meetings also has significant implications of the quality of audit (Carcello *et al.,* 2002) [2]. This assertion implies that a higher quality audit work protects the shareholders' interest and improves firm performance. According to Lipton and Lorsch (1992) [15] and Jensen (1993) [10], "board meetings are not necessarily useful because, given the limited time available they cannot be used for meaningful exchange of ideas among directors."

General shareholder meetings (GSM)

This category of meetings is granted high legal importance in all jurisdictions. This follows the view that "shareholders, as suppliers of finance to the companies, are in need of mechanisms to ensure positive returns on their investments" (Shleifer and Vishny, 1997) [23]. The significance of annual general meetings was published by the European Commission published a 2011 green paper. The green paper highlighted the importance of annual general meetings as instruments to achieve long-term sustainable returns in the corporate sector. Most of the European national corporate governance codes also emphasize on the importance of general meetings (de Jong *et al.,* 2006).

The GSM is a mandatory yearly meeting of the general membership of an organization. The meeting represents all shareholders and the shareholders exercise all the rights that correspond to the company. The three types of general shareholder meetings are ordinary, universal, and extraordinary. "General meetings first appear as initial attempts to practice local democracy in the twelfth century" (O'Donnell, 1952). In Switzerland, for example, townsfolk gathered to vote for a number of agenda items once a year (Cordery, 2005), and the early parish structure in Great Britain contained yearly general meetings to vote for top officials in a local governance system (Cordery, 2005). There is an increasing body of literature that emphasizes the shareholders' need to monitor management (Shleifer and Vishny, 1986; Maug, 1998). The classical theoretical dilemmas surrounding the power between owners and managers in terms of ownership separation necessitate the importance of the annual general meetings. Annual General Meetings are an active response to the agency problem (Berle and Means, 1932). The annual general meetings are therefore historically founded as mechanisms to regulate agency relationships (Cordery, 2005). Shareholders utilize the GSM as a forum to exercise their right to vote, which is a mode of decision-taking by a plurality of people. Voting rights complement and compensate shareholders for incomplete contracts (Baums, 2000), and thus, constitute an important part of the share value (Amzaleg *et al.,* 2005).

The legal explanations of annual general meetings vary across jurisdictions (Baums, 2000). In Germany, the general meeting focuses on a limited number of corporate issues. On the other hand, general meetings in Sweden are the ultimate decision making body (Baums, 2000). The purposed of holding general meetings range from agency perspectives. The general meeting has been considered a "key mechanism for promoting transparency and accountability in the management of company" (Company Law Review Steering Group, 1999). General meetings are to be seen as "rituals" and the main purpose is to maintain the organization's status quo (Hodges *et al.,* 2004). General meetings are aimed to "make important business decisions, monitor internally appointed directors, and provide advice to management" (Iwantani and Taki, 2009). In general, the GSM provides a platform for directors to exercise of corporate democracy, assess the performance of managers, and collectively deliberate on strategic issues affecting the business by shareholders (Sjostrom, 2006).

Startling (2003) indicates that general meetings help in regulating agency relationships through providing shareholders with information on financial performance of the firm. The trabnsfer of corporate information from the management to shareholders is crucial in enhancing corporate decision making, evaluating the performance of management and the board, and hold managers to account of their actions. Organizations also use the general as a forum where directors can gain shareholder consent for decisions outside managerial discretion. The general meeting also offers an opportunity for interaction of shareholders on pertinent issues about the growth of the business. Shareholder proposals and proxy voting are the primary tools for corporate investors to attempt to affect corporate decision-making (Gillan and Starks, 1998). Yermack (2010) concludes that "shareholders use voting as a channel of communication with board of directors, and protest voting can lead to significant changes in corporate governance and strategy" (Yermack, 2010). Shareholders also has an opportunity to exercise 'voice', defined as attempts to affect a change in the state of affairs "through individual or collective petition to the management directly in charge or through various types of actions and protests, including those that are meant to mobilize public opinion" (Hirschman, 1970). This includes face-to-face communication with management and other stakeholders. Gray *et al.,* (1988) state that general meetings function as a counterweight to managerial priority of major shareholders since all shareholders are given the right to question management. This opportunity to question management on pertinent business issues represents a valuable accountability mechanism.

Stakeholder Engagement Meetings

A stakeholder refers to any individual or group who has a vested interest in the outcome of an organization's actions. Stakeholders can be divided into internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders represent individuals who are already committed to serving an organization. Examples of internal stakeholders are staff, executive leadership, and board members. External stakeholders represent individuals who are impacted by an organization's work as service recipients. Examples include customers, competitors, community members, government, funders, and advocacy/interest groups. According to Freeman (1984) the definition of stakeholders can either be "narrow" or "broad". The narrow definition encompasses groups which are vital to the survival and success of an organization. The broad includes "individuals and organisations who affect or are affected by the activities of an organisation" (Freeman, 1984). Mitchell *et al.,* (1997) indicated power, legitimacy and urgency as the three important relationship attributes useful for classification of stakeholders.

According to Clarkson (1995), stakeholders can be classified as primary and secondary stakeholders. Primary stakeholders encompass individuals vital for the survival of the organization. The level of interdependence is high on primary stakeholders as compared to secondary stakeholders. Secondary stakeholders are those who affect or are affected by the organization, but without direct interaction with the organization. The organization does not necessarily depend on secondary stakeholders but sometimes can have negative impact on business (Clarkson, 1995).

The engagement of stakeholders is an essential and mutually beneficial strategic function that results in organizational effectiveness. Stakeholder engagement meetings are crucial for enhanced collaboration and shared decision-making. The four levels of stakeholder engagement are inform, consult, involve, and collaborate/empower (DCFS, 2013). There is no common understanding on the meaning and characteristics of effective stakeholder engagement (Sloan, 2009). Greenwood (2007) purports that stakeholder thinking and stakeholder engagement areas are under-theorised. Stakeholder engagement is one of the several principles "to successfully create, trade and sustain value'' (Freeman *et al.,* 2007). Effective organizations view stakeholders as active collaborators and partners to create sustainable opportunities (Sloan, 2009). "Stakeholder thinking is about being interactive, mutually-engaged and responsive with stakeholders in doing business, thus building the foundation for transparency and accountability. It serves to understand and remedy the business problems of creating values, connecting capitalism with ethics and helping management development to address the corporate problems" (Parmar *et al.,* 2010). Unlike the shareholder perspective, stakeholder engagement takes into account all the company's stakeholders (Freeman *et al.,* 2007; Kakabadse *et al.,* 2005).

In support of stakeholder dialogue and stakeholder knowledge integration, Ayuso *et al.,* (2006) pointed out that "stakeholder dialogue leverages organizational resources that promote two-way communication, transparency and appropriate feedback to stakeholders; stakeholder knowledge integration relies on non-hierarchical structures, flexibility and openness to change." The literature on stakeholder engagement mechanisms is relatively scant; as such the definition and mechanisms of stakeholder engagement vary among different organization.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this qualitative paper is founded on the argument that corporate meetings are important instruments of strategic alignment. To ensure organizational effectiveness corporate meetings should be conducted in terms of a strategic process where certain responsibilities and specific behaviors determine the achievement of corporate goals. In line with the organization's hierarchy, the three major strategic processes responsibilities are creation, translation, and execution (Phillips, 2011). Corporate executives are primarily responsible to create the plan, managers are responsible to translate the plan and make it meaningful and comprehensible to all employees, and front line employees are responsible to execute the plan.

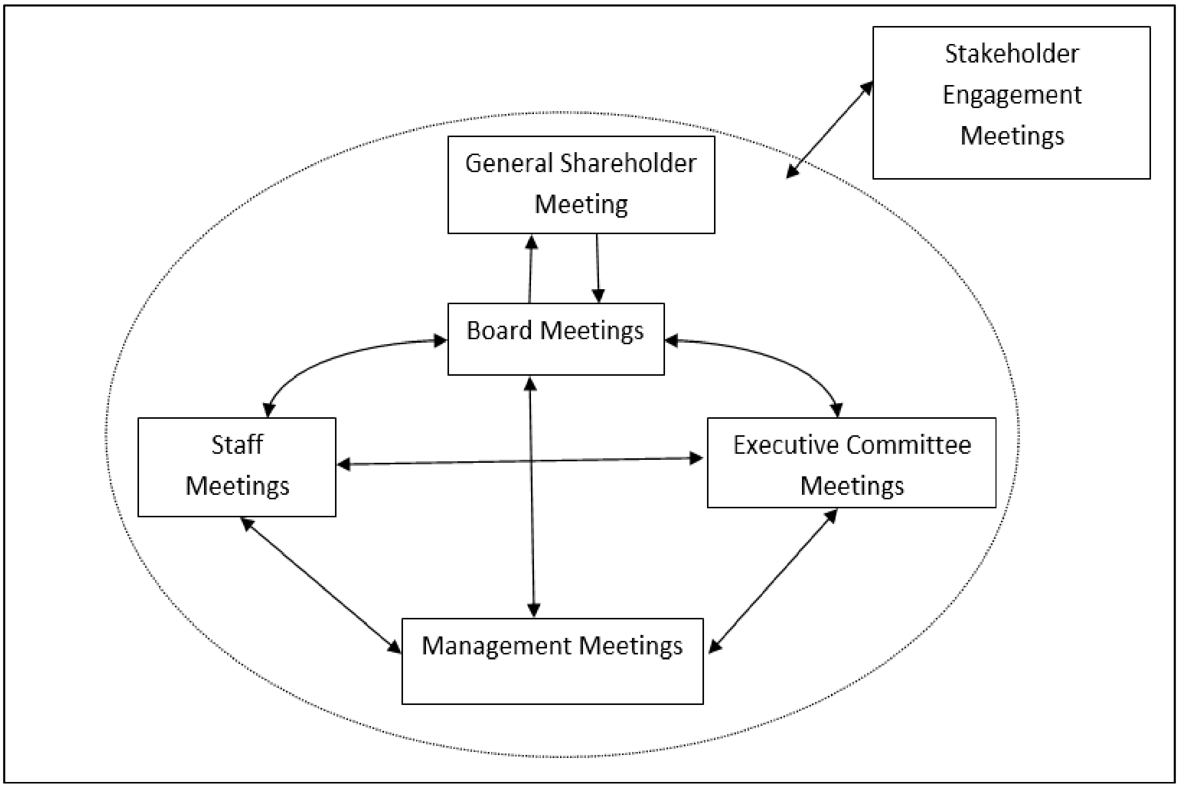

Fig 1: Meetings Alignment Model: A systems network perspective

The above framework considers an organization as a collective unit comprising internal and external stakeholders. There is collaboration and harmonious working relationship between all constituencies of the social structure. Though the exercise of power and authority exists in line with the hierarchical structure, the collaborative structure proposed in this model is essential for organizational effectiveness. The interaction of the different constituencies of the organization can either be formal or informal. The alignment of all the six constituencies is fundamental to this model. The GSM is primarily concerned with the vision of the organization whilst the board of directors is responsible for developing the strategy, strategic thinking, and strategic leadership. In line with the leader centrality construct, the GSM is considered the core of the interaction. The executive committee is responsible for policy, process, and resource recommendations whilst the management meeting focuses on planning, organizing, reporting, and execution of strategic plans. The Board meetings play a bridging role between the leader and everyone else in the organization. Staff meetings focus on the operational issues of the organization and acts as the contact point for stakeholder engagement. Stakeholder engagement meetings focus on collaboration and shared decision making with all the people or firms who have an interest in the organization. This is in line with the corporate community model and the objective of creating shared value (Porter, 2013).

3. Method

The research used a qualitative research approach based on four organizations in the banking sector, microfinance, education sector, and retail and distribution sector. The research adopted an inductive methodology using discourse analysis and social network analysis of qualitative meeting descriptions. According to Schriffrin *et al.*, (2008) discourse analysis includes "the study of social practice that includes linguistics, nonlinguistic, and non-specific instances of language." The analysis was important in understanding the ties in an interaction network. The social network analysis was applied to examine meetings interaction data. It is useful in visualizing and understanding the diverse relationships that either facilitate or impede knowledge sharing.

The researcher adopted purposive sampling in order to assess the meetings in the four organizations. The study used a sample that was taken from a cross-section of employees from four different organizations. Research approval was first sought for from the respective institutions. An interpretivist approach was adopted based on the first hand information of the meetings that the researcher has attended in these four organizations. A questionnaire with open-ended questions covering the ingredients, incentives, and interfaces of the different meetings was hand delivered to employees at different levels of the selected organizations. The researcher made use of the organizations' hierarchical structure in order to ensure an even distribution of the questionnaires. The Figure 2 below shows the different levels of the organization for this study.

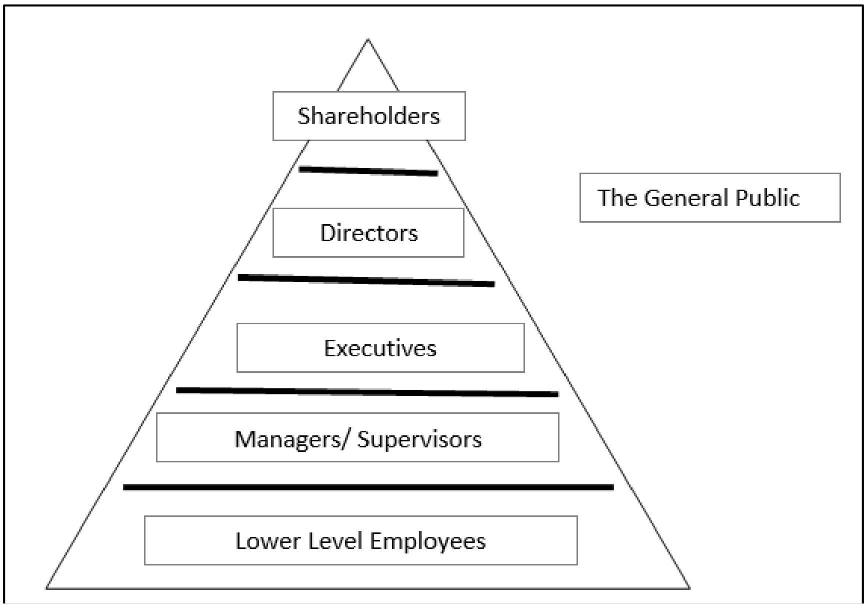

Fig 2: Organizational Levels: A functional perspective

The response rate was 42% as 343 usable questionnaires were received. The questionnaire focused on participants' last three corporate meetings, their academic knowledge, and general workplace experience. Most studies investigating workplace meetings also focused on participants' last work meetings is similar to recent work investigating workplace meetings in general. Questionnaire information was supplemented by secondary data from company websites and the researcher's first-hand experience. The researcher measured the perception of participants regarding the alignment and interface of meetings. Table 1 shows the distribution of the response rate:

Table 1: Distribution of Responses

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Shareholders/Owners	21	6.12%
Directors	35	10.20%
Executives	57	16.62%
Managers	84	24.49%
Lower level employees	104	30.32%
General Stakeholders	42	12.25%
Total	343	100.00%

As shown in Table 1 above, most of the respondents were lower level employees (30.32%), managers (24.49%) and executives (16.6%). Figure 3 below represents the distribution of these responses.

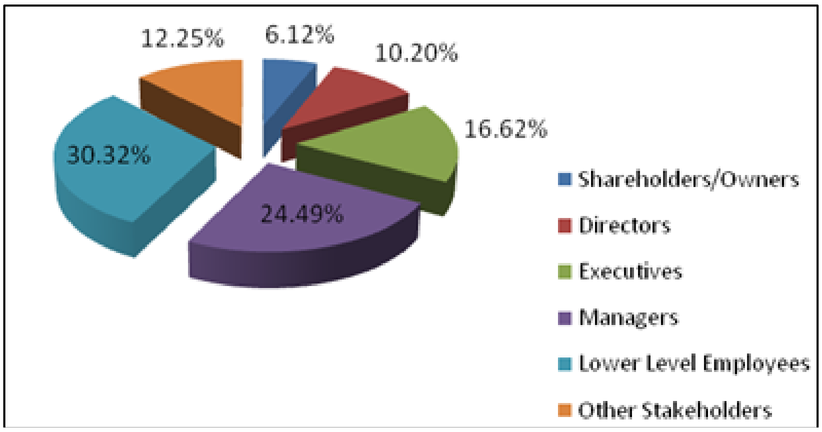

Fig 3: Responses Distribution

Out of the 343 completed questionnaires, the majority 59% were males. All respondents were employed on a full-time basis. In terms of education, all of the respondents had at least a Bachelors degree. The analysis of the responses was focused on the alignment and interaction of the different levels of the organization as per Figure 2 above. The researcher selected job level as key group variables of interest to many areas of the organizational sciences. Specifically, the study focused on the alignment of the meetings at the different organizational levels (Weber, 1968) in view of the overall strategic intent. A review of the participants' job titles was conducted in order to confirm each participant's category. Those in the stakeholder segment were not supposed to provide their job titles but the specific category of stakeholder. The discourse analysis was essential in enhancing a system of categories based on participants' responses.

4. Results and Discussion

Literature indicates that meetings save multiple purposes in accomplishing work within organizations (Schwartzman, 1986) [21]. The organization's vision and mission statement is the foundational ingredient for organizational effectiveness. Earlier scholars, Fayol (1944) and Urwick (1946) indicate that organizations have several aims and purposes; and corporate meetings at various levels of the organization provide the forum to actualize them. The nature of the aims and purposes of an organization varies at different levels of the organization's hierarchy. All meetings are generally expected to have a written agenda (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) [5]. The meeting agenda typically reflects the aims and purposes of the organization. The development of the meeting agenda should consider the organization's vision and mission statement. Results show that meeting agendas are not normally used in ad hoc staff meetings.

In all the four organizations, the main purposes of meetings at different levels where indicated as follows:

Table 2: Meeting Purposes

Type of Meeting	Purpose
General Shareholder Meeting	To set the vision, mission and goals of the organization.
Board Meeting	To develop, monitor, and implement strategy; and review performance.
Executive Committee	To develop, monitor the organization's structure and culture
Management	To brainstorm, plan, organize, and control the key processes
Staff/Team	To discuss the operational issues of the business
Stakeholder engagement	Collaboration and shared decision-making

Meeting Purposes by Percentage

Respondents indicated the main purposes of meetings as shown below. Most of the respondents (84%) indicated that meetings are important to solve organizational problems and change. Very few respondents (18%) indicated conflict resolution as an essential meeting purpose. At the lower level of the organization, respondents indicated that any form of conflict was resolved on an individual basis.

Table 3: Meeting Purposes By Percentage

Meeting Purpose	%
Solve organizational problems and change	84%
Ensure that concerned parties understands	63%
Facilitate staff interaction	70%
Explore new and existing ideas and concepts	48%
Discuss and accept reports	30%
Reconcile conflicts	18%
Brainstorming and planning	56%

As shown in the Table above, the different purposes of meetings at the different levels clearly communicate the different strategic work at each level. Results show that the different strategic work should support the core work of the organization. The different functions in an organization work to support the organization in achieving its strategic intent.

The results from the analysis of the different meeting purposes indicate the power and politics differences in organizational life (Finkelstein, 1992). Power refers to "the degree to which individuals are able to exert influence and control over others" (Scott, 2003). In view of the hierarchical structure, the degree of power declines as one moves down the organization's hierarchy. Organizational life is therefore situated around the hierarchical structure of both power distribution and decision making (Weber, 1968) and control systems (Mintzberg, 1980).

Organizational hierarchy helps in understanding the different functions, work-processes, and roles within an organization (Scott, 2003). The different roles, functions, and work-processes at each level implies that it is likely that the meetings at each level will differ relative to the nature of work at each level. Results show that the most common meeting purpose at each level is to routinely discuss the financial performance of the business: shareholders (32.3%), directors (47.2%), executives (45.6%), management (57.8%), staff (24.4%), and other stakeholders (6.2%). However, this purpose was mainly prevalent among the top level of the organization's hierarchy. This is in line with the shareholder primacy theory, which indicates shareholder wealth maximization as the primary objective of the firm.

Results show that all the six meetings, has an inclination towards discussions on the state of the business. For limited liability companies, the General Shareholder meeting is conducted once a year, and board meetings at least three times a year. Results indicate the different meeting purposes at each level of the organization. Respondents indicated that staff and management meetings, also focus on discussing service/product quality, policies and procedures, and compliance issues. The three meetings at executive, management, and staff meetings all focus on discussing employee benefits and brainstorm ideas and solutions in the face of changes in the business environment.

Respondents pointed out that managers and executives also discuss project management issues and issues dealing with the introduction of new products and services. The growth of team-based projects and cross-departmental initiatives in all the sampled organizations explained the prevalence of mid-level employees meetings (Barker, 1993; Morgeson *et al.*, 2005). Research results also show that managers and executives interact to discuss marketing plans, productivity and efficiencies issues. Research on executives and boards suggest that executive committee and board meetings focus of decisions related to the overall organization's strategy (Carpenter *et al.*, 2004). Respondents pointed out to such decisions as the organization's orientation towards addressing stakeholder needs and wants. Content analysis shows that in most organizations, productivity and efficiency issues are not premier concerns of executive and board meetings. Due to specialization and division of labor (Weber, 1968), executives and directors may deliberately push the decision making concerning productivity issues to the managers. Content analysis shows that executives and directors will prioritizes macro issues of strategy than micro issues of employee performance.

The results of the present study indicate the distinction between one-tier and two-tier boards as a way of enhanced interaction between the board and the executives and management. In a two-tier board the Supervisory Board consists of executive directors. Two-tier boards also allow for a greater opportunity for stakeholder inclusion (Solomon, 2013) [24]. It is the Supervisory Board's responsibility to network with all stakeholders (Jungmann, 2006) [11].

The results of this study are corroborated by a study conducted by Jarzabkowski and Seidl (2008) which recognize that meetings are used to accomplish pertinent organizational tasks, but more importantly meeting value is derived through social exchange. They note that the role of meetings is not just to accomplish some task, but instead they represent routinized social practices and serve to stabilize the wider organization of which they are a part. The view of meetings as "routinized social practices" suggest that meeting participants are likely to focus more on "the content of the meeting rather than the activities or processes used during the meeting" (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008).

Meetings Interaction

The results indicate that information management is a core competence that drives organizational effectiveness. Meetings interaction is considered crucial to the success of an organization because an organization takes the form of a network with different set of nodes or vertices joined together by edges as shown in Figure 1 above. There are six main collaborating groups of actors that form part of the organization. The extent of coalescence between these collaborating groups and alignment of goals is essential to organizational effectiveness. The present study focused on the relations and ties between the different collaborating groups.

Table 4 below shows the formal participation of different actors in different meetings. This is important in determining the strength of ties between the different collaborating groups.

Table 4: Meetings Interaction

Actors/ Meeting Types	GSM	Board Meeting	Executive Committee	Management Meeting	Staff	Stakeholders
Shareholders	X	X				
Directors	X	X	X	X	X	X
Executives	X	X	X	X	X	X
Managers		X	X	X	X	X
Staff				X	X	X
Other Stakeholders	X					X

The meetings interaction data shows that shareholders actively participate in GSM and board meetings. Directors and executives are involved in all meetings whilst lower level employees participate in management meetings, staff meetings, and stakeholders meetings. These actors are the bridging actors and facilitate easy access to resources and information by all other actors in the network. Directors and Executive meetings can positively influence the success of the network. Literature points out to exceptions, for example in Germany where employee representation in board meetings is practiced. Table 4 also indicates the extent of closure among the different players in the organizational network. Burt (2000) pointed out that, high closure within a network improves resource utilization, creates cohesive groups, and supports shared norms and trust. As shown in Table 4, out of the 36 possible meetings interaction, a total of 24 meetings interaction should occur within an organization. In terms of density of the corporate meetings, there are therefore 24 observed relationships that drives organizational effectiveness.

Meetings Purpose Matrix

Table 5: Meetings Purpose Matrix

Purposes/Meeting Types	GSM	Board Meeting	Executive Committee	Management Meeting	Staff	Stakeholders
Solve organizational problems	X	X	X	X	X	
Ensure that everyone understands	X	X	X	X	X	X
Facilitate staff communication	X	X	X	X	X	
Explore new ideas and concepts		X	X	X	X	
Accept corporate reports		X	X	X	X	X
Reconcile conflicts	X	X	X	X	X	X
Brainstorming and planning	X	X	X	X	X	X

Meetings Standardization

Respondents at the executive and board levels emphasized on the meetings standardization as the different players in the organization form a social network, there is need for standardization. The standardization is essential in ensuring a more cohesive interaction among the different functional units. Cohesiveness implies that all the functional areas in a network are bound closely by ties of interaction. The ties of interaction in meetings alignment is the vision and mission statement. As in any social network, density, transitivity and reciprocity in a social network are essential to ensure balance or harmony among the different levels and functional areas of the organization. Bridging, through the board and executives meetings is essential in ensuring close collaboration between the different sub-groups and eventually organizational effectiveness.

5. Practical Implications

Implications to corporate stakeholders, organizational effectiveness, and the academic community

Strategic alignment is essential for organizational effectiveness. Organizational effectiveness determines the success of an organization in achieving their missions, goals, and objectives, and advancing their visions through their core strategies. The achievement of organizational effectiveness demands that human resource and organizational development efforts are tied directly to the desired business outcomes. "The main reason companies do so poorly at execution is that their leaders have either been unable or unwilling to make a connection between their company's goals and the realities of how their companies actually operate, how the market is actually performing, or how their customers' needs can change almost every day" (Charan, Burch and Bossidy, 2002) [3]. Organizational effectiveness requires leaders to manage all the interrelated and interdependent business components, mainly people, strategy, and operations. The study is essential in terms of ensuring leadership and talent management alignment, strategic alignment, cultural alignment, performance alignment, and customer focus alignment. Corporate meetings alignment is essential in ensuring real organizational alignment. The study shows that when an organization's strategy, goals, and activities are aligned, the organization will gain and sustain a competitive advantage. This study accentuates the importance of connections between the different levels of an organization.

Systems theory informs that all the parts must fit properly for the system to work as intended. The concept of fit has assumed a heightened attention in an organizational context (Chandler, 1962). Chandler (1962) argued largely on inductive and experiential grounds that an organization's strategy, its structure, and its managerial processes have to "fit" with one another. There are two types of fit which drive organizational effectiveness. "Internal fit refers to the degree to which human resource practices complement and support each other, while external fit refers to the extent that human resource management components fit the developmental stage of the organization".

The study has implications on participatory management and leadership theory. Participatory management or leadership encompasses the degree to which all the views of employees are involved in the day-to-day, work-related decisions. The study has positive implications on the two-tier board systems in order to enhance the supervisory board oversight function. This is because the two-tier board allows for "a greater opportunity for stakeholder inclusion than one-tier boards" (Solomon, 2013) [24].

The present research emphasizes the main reasons why meetings are so prevalent in modern organizations. The purposes of different types of meetings can be used by managers to assess organizational effectiveness. The understanding of meetings within different strategic groups in an organization is important in ensuring strategic alignment and achieving organizational effectiveness. The results of this study could be useful in predicting differences in organizational strategy at the different levels of the organization (Miles *et al.,* 1978). This understanding is important in enhancing stakeholders' insight into the internal functioning of the organization. Organization's stakeholders can use meetings alignment results to assess the effectiveness of different types of corporate meetings. In live with earlier studies if various meeting purposes are related differentially to meeting satisfaction, organizations may be able to capitalize on those differences to engage employees in the workplace and improve employee performance.

The present study was initiated without a priori hypotheses, but was motivated by the genuine interest to understand meetings and meetings alignment as instruments of organizational effectiveness. In terms of institutional theory, the results indicate main corporate meeting purposes across different organizations. The results are corroborated by Rogelberg *et al.,* (2006) [19] and Allen *et al.,* (2014) who found out different meeting purposes in organizations. The findings also add to the social network theory the importance of meetings alignment in achieving organizational effectiveness. As was suggested by Allen et al., (2014), the present study examined the different types of related coordinating mechanisms to ensure meetings alignment. Scott (2003) suggested different organizational structures and the variations in terms of the coordination and design of work. This study adopted the social network theory perspective to coordinate the different levels of an organization. In line with the study by Allen *et al.,* (2014) and Easton et al., (2003) the present study used the qualitative interpretivist and quantitative discourse analysis method to examine meetings and meetings alignment in the context of achieving organizational effectiveness. The study considers meetings alignment as an important workplace phenomenon that ensures a properly functioning organization. The findings therefore provide further validation for the usefulness of these methods and their appropriateness for organizational theory and development.

The present study also indicates that meetings at different levels of the organizations require different meeting processes and behavioral dynamics that is, the ingredients and incentives of meetings at each level varies. The differing ingredients and incentives have significant implications on organizational effectiveness. This is corroborated by a study conducted by Kauffeld and Lehmann-Willenbrock (2012) that showed that there is a direct relation between behavioral dynamics in team meetings and team productivity. Different meetings and different levels of the organization have different processes that are necessary in order for the meeting to be effective.

The study broadens the conceptualization of shareholder-board-management interaction (Berle and Means, 1932; Eells, 1960; Tricker, 1984) to include all stakeholder interaction as appropriate for strategic management.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

From a social network theory perspective, the study emphasized the importance of meetings in organizational effectiveness. The study adopted the definition of an organization as a nexus of social relationships among different stakeholders. Organizations should invest heavily in ensuring meeting effectiveness at all levels of the organization's hierarchy because information is a core competence of an social network. Corporate meetings are "microcosms for the entire organization where the power, structure, and functions of the organization is manifested, legitimized and perpetuated" (Schwartzman, 1986) [21]. There are various purposes that meetings save at different levels of the organization, and these purposes must be aligned to the organization's overall strategic intent. Organizations also use meetings as forums to communicate the organization's strategic intent, craft strategic plans, and develop responses to environmental changes. There are a total of 24 meetings interactions that the different collaborating groups can interact and as such drive organizational effectiveness. Organizational effectiveness refers to efficiency within which an organization achieves its objectives. Meetings and meetings integration are essential instruments in strategic alignment and organizational effectiveness. There are different purposes of meetings and these purposes vary at each level of the organization. This study concludes that an organization is a social network and its effectiveness depends on the interaction between the different actors in an organization. The study shows that the alignment of the different levels of an organization should be top priority in achieving organizational effectiveness.

Limitations of the study

This research has been instrumental in understanding meetings and the interaction between the different functional areas in an organization. The study used four organizations in different industries. However, this study is not without limitations. Meetings are a prevalent feature of the modern organization, hence future researches in this area need to use larger datasets in order to succinctly confirm findings on meetings. Accessing larger datasets should be relatively easy given the high base rate activity necessitated by the prevalence of corporate meetings. Few respondents identified more than one key or main meeting purpose when they responded to open-ended questions. However, most meetings have multiple purposes and this is typically reflected in the use of an agenda to help control the time spent on any given topic. However, given the variety of purposes identified, this limitation does not seem overly problematic.

The study also began with specific information about meetings and meetings alignment, "thus moving from the particular to the general". The main reason for this meticulous piece of information at the beginning is because nobody starts from a *tabula rasa*. In the present study, the researcher's bias was acknowledged and well managed through horizontalization, bracketing, phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. This was mainly done through using multiple methods, that is, triangulation of methods and approaches.

The other limitation is that the researcher was not present when respondents were filling in questionnaires. However, participants were given an opportunity to seek clarity from the researcher. The less interaction between the researcher and the respondents also led to a reduction in bias (Kumar, 2008) [14]. The research was also a general study of the private sector firms and as such certain special industries such as the small and medium enterprises and banking firms might require an exclusive way of analysis.

This study does not signal, and it should not be interpreted as signaling, the arrival at any particular destination. It is an attempt to explain, explore, and describe the ingredients of corporate meetings towards organizational effectiveness.

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