



## Phenomenological Exploration of Executive Experience in Corporate Governance and Strategic Decision-Making in Multinational Leaders

Pipit Sundari

Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Ekonomi Semarang, Indonesia

[pipit.sundari02@gmail.com](mailto:pipit.sundari02@gmail.com)

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### ABSTRACT

Corporate governance is a crucial component of organizational success, influencing decision-making and strategic planning, particularly in global markets. However, the subjective experiences of corporate leaders navigating governance frameworks in these complex environments remain underexplored. Despite existing research on governance structures and their effects on organizational outcomes, little is known about how these structures shape leaders' personal decision-making processes. This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of corporate leaders in multinational companies and examines how governance frameworks influence their strategic decisions. Using in-depth interviews with 10 senior executives, this research reveals that governance systems serve not only as regulatory guidelines but also as a source of tension between governance structures and decision-making when leaders must adapt quickly to external market pressures. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of corporate governance by emphasizing the subjective dimensions of leadership decision-making. These insights highlight the need for governance frameworks that balance structure with flexibility, offering implications for the design of more effective governance systems in global businesses.



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## INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving global business environment, the complexity of corporate governance and strategic decision-making has become increasingly significant. Corporate governance, which refers to the systems, principles, and processes by which companies are directed and controlled, plays a crucial role in shaping business strategies and ensuring that organizations operate in an ethical, transparent, and accountable manner (Bui dkk., 2020). With globalization, businesses are not only navigating local markets but are also competing and collaborating across international borders, which adds layers of complexity to the decision-making processes. This complexity is compounded by the diverse cultural, legal, and economic environments in which multinational companies operate. The experience of corporate leaders, particularly those at the helm of multinational organizations, in managing strategic decisions within these contexts, forms the core of the phenomenon being investigated.

This study seeks to address two main research objectives: 1) to explore the subjective experiences of corporate leaders in managing governance frameworks in a global context, and 2) to examine how these frameworks influence their strategic decision-making processes. The research questions guiding this study are: How do corporate leaders perceive and navigate governance structures? How do these perceptions shape their strategic decisions in the context of complex global environments?

The relevance of this phenomenon lies in the significant role that corporate governance plays in shaping strategic decisions, and its influence on both short-term and long-term organizational success. From a human experience perspective, leaders' subjective interpretations of governance frameworks, strategic choices, and their personal responses to market dynamics offer insights into how governance structures affect the decision-making process (Buur & Sumich, 2019). These subjective experiences, however, are often underexplored in existing literature, especially in the context of global markets where the interplay of diverse influences presents a unique environment for decision-making. Understanding these experiences is crucial because it provides valuable insights into the internal workings of businesses as they strive for alignment between governance structures and business strategies in a globalized world.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Study Design**

The study adopted a phenomenological approach to explore the subjective experiences of corporate leaders in managing strategic decisions within the context of global markets. Phenomenology was chosen as the research design because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of participants, focusing on how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences (He dkk., 2023). This approach is particularly relevant for understanding the complexities of decision-making and governance frameworks in global businesses, where the subjective meanings attributed to these phenomena by leaders play a critical role in shaping organizational strategies. A descriptive phenomenology approach was employed, which aims to capture the essence of participants' experiences without attempting to interpret or theorize beyond the participants' perceptions. This approach ensures a rich, detailed description of the phenomena as experienced by the individuals involved.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those included in the study had direct experience with strategic decision-making and corporate governance in a global business context. The inclusion criteria required participants to be senior leaders, such as CEOs or executives, who had at least five years of experience in corporate governance or strategic decision-making within multinational companies (Jouber, 2022). Individuals who had limited experience or were not directly involved in strategic decision-making were excluded. A total of 10 participants were selected for the study, with an average age of 45 years. The sample consisted of both male and female executives, with a variety of professional backgrounds and industries represented, ensuring a diverse range of experiences relevant to the research focus. It is important to note that while the sample size of 10 participants is relatively small, it is appropriate for a phenomenological approach, which focuses on the depth of individuals' experiences rather than the generalizability of the findings. The sample size is sufficient to reach data saturation, where no new themes or patterns emerge from additional interviews, ensuring that the data collected adequately captures the essence of the participants' lived experiences.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interview protocol was developed to capture participants' personal experiences with strategic decision-making and the influence of corporate governance on their leadership practices. Each interview lasted between 60 to 90 minutes and was conducted in a quiet, private setting to ensure comfort and confidentiality for the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and field notes were taken to document non-verbal cues and contextual observations. The interview guide was designed to allow flexibility for participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely while ensuring that key topics related to the research questions were covered. Data collection occurred over a period of three months, and interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing, depending on the participant's location and availability.

## Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a common method in phenomenological research, to identify and interpret the key themes and patterns in participants' descriptions of their experiences. The analysis followed a systematic approach, starting with transcribing the interview recordings verbatim. After the transcripts were prepared, the data was reviewed multiple times to ensure familiarity with the content (Keeves & Westphal, 2021). Key units of meaning were then identified and coded. These codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected the central aspects of participants' experiences with corporate governance and strategic decision-making. The analysis was supported by NVivo software, which assisted in organizing and categorizing the data but did not drive the analytical process itself. The final themes were interpreted to reveal the essence of participants' lived experiences and to answer the research questions regarding the influence of corporate governance on decision-making in a global business context.

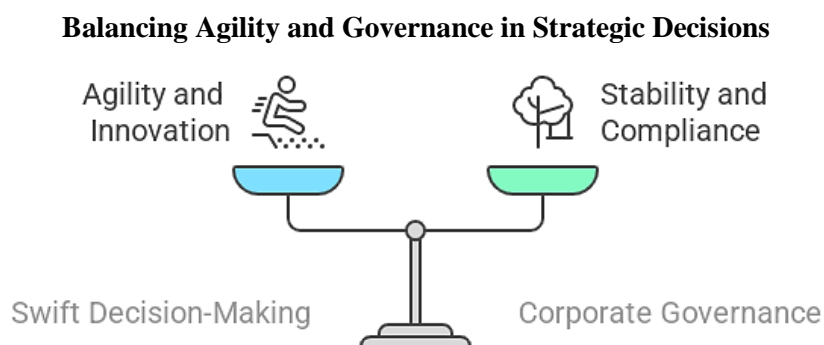
## Ethics

The study adhered to ethical standards in research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant research ethics committee before data collection began. All participants provided informed consent, which included an explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to confidentiality and voluntary participation. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous and that their data would be kept confidential. Written consent was obtained prior to each interview, and participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. The research followed international ethical guidelines for conducting research with human subjects, ensuring that participants' rights and privacy were respected throughout the study.

## RESULTS

### Strategic Decision-Making in a Competitive Global Market

The experience of strategic decision-making in the context of global markets emerged as a significant theme from the data. The participants shared their subjective experiences of navigating the complexities of international business while balancing corporate governance expectations. For example, one CEO emphasized how rapid technological changes and globalization forced their company to adopt a more agile decision-making process, despite the constraints posed by traditional governance structures. As one participant remarked, "The pressure from international competition and the rapid pace of technological change forced us to rethink our strategies, but we had to ensure that these changes aligned with our corporate governance principles." This quote highlights the tension between the need for swift decisions and the desire to maintain robust governance structures, showing how leaders experience the balancing act between innovation and adherence to governance.



### The Role of Corporate Governance in Strategic Leadership

Another key theme was the influence of corporate governance on the leadership strategies employed by the company heads. Participants consistently noted that the governance frameworks in place often shaped, and at times limited, the scope of strategic decisions. A participant described,

"Corporate governance is like the invisible hand guiding our decisions; it's not just about following the rules but ensuring that every move we make aligns with our long-term vision and values". This suggests that corporate governance is not just a compliance measure, but a crucial part of the strategic decision-making process. The experience of leaders in different organizational contexts reveals that governance structures, while promoting ethical business practices, can sometimes create friction when trying to adapt to a fast-evolving market.

### **Overcoming Barriers in Implementing Governance Frameworks**

The third theme identified was the challenge of implementing effective corporate governance frameworks in global businesses. Participants shared personal anecdotes about the difficulty of aligning diverse cultural perspectives with a unified governance model. As one executive explained, "In global markets, you deal with a wide range of legal systems, cultural expectations, and business practices. Aligning all of this under one corporate governance framework is both challenging and rewarding." This sentiment underscores the complexity that comes with trying to maintain a cohesive governance structure across various international jurisdictions. It was evident that leaders faced significant challenges when their governance models did not align with local practices, creating a tension between standardization and localization.

### **The Perception of Corporate Governance's Impact on Organizational Performance**

Finally, the perception of how corporate governance directly affects organizational performance was another prominent theme. While governance was universally seen as essential for sustainable performance, there were mixed views on its immediate impact. One participant reflected, "Corporate governance has long-term benefits, but in the short term, it can feel like an obstacle to moving quickly. However, looking back, it's clear that our commitment to governance has helped us build trust and long-term success." This quote illustrates the perceived trade-off between immediate strategic gains and the long-term stability provided by a strong governance framework. Many participants noted that while corporate governance may appear restrictive in the short run, its long-term influence on organizational resilience and trust in leadership could not be overstated.

The results of this study illustrate that corporate governance plays a pivotal role in shaping the strategic decisions made by leaders in global companies. The challenges of maintaining governance structures in a rapidly changing environment are significant, but participants consistently reported that these frameworks provided necessary stability and long-term success. The subjective experiences of corporate leaders reveal the complexity of balancing innovation with governance, and how the cultural and legal diversity in global markets impacts the implementation of these frameworks. These findings underscore the necessity of aligning governance with both organizational strategy and local market conditions to foster sustainable growth and competitive advantage.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal the complex and multifaceted nature of strategic decision-making in a global corporate context, with particular emphasis on the influence of corporate governance frameworks. Leaders' subjective experiences in managing these decisions reflect a balancing act between adhering to governance principles and responding to the dynamic pressures of the global market. The main conclusion from the research underscores the importance of governance structures not only as a regulatory framework but also as an integral part of leadership strategies, shaping both short-term decisions and long-term organizational success.

The study contributes significantly to addressing the primary research question regarding how corporate governance influences strategic decision-making. The experiences shared by participants highlight that governance frameworks serve as guiding principles that shape leaders' approaches to decision-making, particularly in the face of external market pressures. This contribution expands the existing literature by emphasizing that governance is not merely a compliance mechanism, but an essential component of the strategic decision-making process. Moreover, the findings suggest that

while governance frameworks provide structure and stability, they can also create friction when leaders must respond to rapidly changing market conditions. This tension between governance and agility in decision-making is a critical aspect of the leadership experience, which had not been fully explored in previous research.

In relation to previous literature and theories, the findings support the notion that corporate governance is pivotal in ensuring ethical leadership and long-term organizational stability (Krause dkk., 2019). However, the study also reveals a gap in the existing research, particularly in terms of the personal experiences of leaders within these governance frameworks. While much of the literature focuses on corporate governance's role in organizational outcomes, less attention has been paid to how leaders interpret and internalize governance structures and their influence on strategic decisions. This study extends the work of scholars like Krause & Miller,(2020), who emphasized the importance of governance in strategic leadership, by providing qualitative insights into how these structures impact leaders' personal decision-making processes in practice. The results also resonate with the work of Kurzhals dkk.,(2020), which highlighted the importance of aligning governance frameworks with organizational culture, although this study adds a layer of depth by focusing on the subjective experience of the decision-makers themselves.**Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this study have significant implications both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical standpoint, the research highlights the importance of understanding corporate governance not only as a regulatory mechanism but as a critical component of leadership decision-making. The study emphasizes the dual role of governance frameworks: they provide structure and accountability while simultaneously influencing how leaders perceive and respond to challenges in the global market. Practically, the study's insights can guide organizations in designing more effective governance structures that account for the subjective experiences of leaders. By incorporating the personal experiences of executives, organizations can foster governance systems that are both flexible and resilient in the face of rapidly changing market dynamics. This has the potential to improve decision-making processes and organizational adaptability, particularly in multinational companies where leaders must navigate complex, multicultural environments.

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without its limitations. The primary limitation is the relatively small sample size, consisting of only 10 corporate leaders, which restricts the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population of executives. Additionally, the study focused exclusively on multinational companies, which may not fully capture the experiences of leaders in smaller, local businesses or those in different industries. The use of purposive sampling, while ensuring a focused group of participants with relevant experience, may have introduced selection bias. Moreover, the study relied on self-reported data through interviews, which can be subject to personal bias and may not fully reflect the complexities of real-world decision-making. Future research could benefit from larger, more diverse samples, as well as a longitudinal approach to examine how governance frameworks and leadership experiences evolve over time.

### **Prospective Directions for Future Research**

The findings of this study open up several avenues for future research. One potential direction is to explore how different types of governance structures, such as stakeholder versus shareholder models, influence leaders' decision-making in various cultural and organizational contexts. Additionally, future studies could expand on the role of emotional intelligence in leadership decisions, particularly in environments where governance frameworks are perceived as restrictive. Another promising area for exploration is the impact of digital transformation and technological advancements on the subjective experiences of leaders in multinational organizations (Zeitoun dkk., 2019). Given the global nature of business today, further research into how leaders adapt governance structures in response to emerging global challenges—such as climate change or geopolitical tensions—could provide deeper insights into the intersection of corporate governance and strategic decision-making. These areas of exploration would contribute to a richer understanding of the dynamic interplay between governance, leadership, and organizational performance.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the influence of corporate governance frameworks on strategic decision-making from the perspective of corporate leaders in multinational organizations. The findings reveal that governance structures play a vital role in shaping leadership decisions, acting both as a guiding principle and as a potential source of tension when leaders need to adapt to rapidly changing global markets. The research highlights the importance of understanding corporate governance as more than just a compliance mechanism, emphasizing its role in the decision-making process and the subjective experiences of leaders.

Based on these findings, practitioners, particularly multinational leaders, are encouraged to reassess and adapt their governance frameworks to better balance structure and flexibility. Specifically, multinational companies may consider incorporating more flexible decision-making processes within their governance structures to allow for faster responses to market changes. Leaders should ensure that governance systems do not become overly rigid, hindering the agility required to thrive in dynamic global markets. Additionally, cross-cultural training for leadership teams is crucial to help executives navigate the complexities of governance in diverse legal and cultural environments. Furthermore, stakeholder-oriented governance models may be particularly beneficial in global contexts, as they foster greater collaboration and adaptability, enabling organizations to better align their strategic goals with the diverse needs of stakeholders across borders.

These findings contribute to filling the gap in the literature by offering qualitative insights into how executives navigate the complex balance between governance and strategic agility. Future research could further explore the impact of different governance models on leadership experiences and extend this study to other organizational contexts and industries. By examining how governance frameworks evolve in response to global challenges, future studies can provide deeper insights into their long-term influence on corporate decision-making.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The research was conducted without any financial or personal relationships that could be perceived as influencing the results or conclusions.

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