

**STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY JIANGXI ZHONGMEI FOR  
PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT IN TURBULENT TIMES**

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL  
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD  
OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF BUSINESS  
ADMINISTRATION, FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND  
MANAGEMENT SCIENCES, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**2022**

## DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented for the award of degree in any other university or institution for any other purpose.

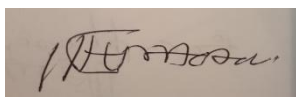
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This research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as University Supervisor.

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this project to my beloved family members who gave a magnificent input and support towards the success to this work. Alongside, to my friends and colleagues whose encouragement and understanding during the period of study made the task became lighter.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My gratitude to the almighty God through his amazing grace, I was able to undertake and complete this study, to him I give all the glory and honour. I am deeply indebted to my supervisor Professor E. Aosa whose patience, dedication and continued guidance, encouragement made it possible to complete this project. Kindly accept my sincere gratitude.

Furthermore, I wish to thank the top management of Jiangxi Zhongmei who agreed to be interviewed and all my interviewees who took their time and sit for the interviews. It was through them that I was able to collect data. Special thanks to my workmates who understood very well the time required to complete this study and was even kind enough to give me study leave. I also thank my schoolmate Doctor Chen from University of Nairobi who gave me a lot of suggestions and guidance on the project steps and documents search.

Special thanks to my dear wife whose word of encouragement and continued pressure which helped me to finalize this project. May the Almighty God bless you and many others not mentioned by name who contributed in one way or the other for the successful completion of this endeavor.

It may not therefore be possible to mention all of them individually. However, I am greatly indebted and grateful for their contributions one way or another. I also wish to acknowledge the contributions of my classmates whose keenness to detail and critique helped in refining the document. Last but not least, I am grateful to the almighty God for the sufficiency of his grace.

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## ACRONYMS

<b>KeNHA:</b>	Kenya National Highways Authority
<b>KeRRA:</b>	Kenya Rural Roads Authority
<b>KURA:</b>	Kenya Urban Roads Authority
<b>NCA:</b>	National Construction Authority
<b>NTSA:</b>	National Transport and Safety Authority
<b>EBK:</b>	Engineers Board of Kenya
<b>FIDIC:</b>	International Federation of Consulting Engineers
<b>BNQP:</b>	Baldrige National Quality Programme
<b>KPDA:</b>	Kenya Private Developers Association
<b>TMT:</b>	Top Management Team

## ABSTRACT

The main objective of the study was to determine the strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times. The study revealed that the most dominant strategy adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei was the use of technology to promote remote work processes and prevent physical interactions. The study established that Jiangxi Zhongmei had adopted several strategies for performance improvement. It further showed that all the strategies used were appropriate and necessary to address the actual and anticipated challenges resulting from the turbulent times. In implementing performance improvement strategies, managers should remember that it is not just the systems or structures that need to change, but the behavior and attitudes of the individuals too, and that acknowledging and respecting this is essential for success. This included adjusting wage incentives, tighter stock control, financial and capacity controls. The responses also brought out asset retrenchment at Jiangxi Zhongmei during the 2008/2009 economic recession and recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. There is the risk that asset sales will compromise future strategic options, while conversely, they may be necessary to generate cash and reduce losses. Jiangxi Zhongmei had to focus on core business activities and abandon non-core activities. Successful performance improvements have been associated with a focus on main projects for which the firm is best known, customer segments that are particularly loyal or less price-sensitive, and areas with distinct competitive strength. The firm also maintained the activity for which it was well known in the past construction. Put another way, Jiangxi Zhongmei maximized its chance of recovery by exclusively serving the essential customers' desires to strengthen or broad any favorability in the firm's current position as compared to its competitors. Jiangxi Zhongmei realigned its operations to withstand future economic uncertainties. Building for the future prospects of the firm can be stressing following hard economic times given that workers may feel they require a break from the changes and turbulence they have experienced. There is a need for a harmonized risk management framework for all construction firms. This will provide guidelines and procedures to be followed in the event of the occurrence of economic turbulence. A different industry may bring a different perspective of the strategies used to improve performance during turbulent times. A study can measure the implementation and effectiveness of the strategies used. The implementation aspects can provide helpful insights when compared with the financial performance of the studied firm. Organizations adopt different strategies, and a measure of this would be beneficial information to establish a correlation between the implementation of the strategy and the financial performance. On economic concerns for firms the study suggests that there is a need for a harmonized risk management framework for all construction firms. This will provide guidelines and procedures to be followed in the event of the occurrence of economic turbulence. While on policy and practice recommendations the study recommends that the government should also compel all organizations to set aside special funds to safeguard themselves against disruptions and risks during unforeseen events such as Covid-19 pandemics .



# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Background of the Study

Jiang and Carpenter (2013) assert that globally strategies adopted by construction companies are meant to grant them an advantage of gaining marketing leadership by outperforming existing rivals in the industry. Competitive strategies are essential in affecting the performance of the companies in the industry, especially when business performance is facing uncertainty. In their study, Thompson and Strickland (2012) reveal that business strategies for any organization are essential in establishing financial reward and retaining its role amidst the opposition from rivalry and industry forces.

This study focused on strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei construction company to enhance operation in Kenya as the country's construction market fluctuates in the pandemic of Covid-19. The Kenyan construction sector is dynamic and profoundly competitive as many new registered companies have their origins within and outside borders. A company operating in such an environment can either work best or adversely interfere with its market place in the industry based on the selection of its strategy. Jiangxi Zhongmei in Kenya establishes that the fierce rivalry experienced in the construction sector, especially at these turbulent times, requires a well-outlined strategy to guarantee their performance. The government has also cut down expenditure on mega projects because of the low revenue collected from the citizens. The government concentrates on cautioning its citizen and tends to suspend mega projects like construction, among others. Even if the company had to win a contract, they have to accomplish the tasks at a lower cost than past times when they could charge higher amounts. This, therefore, calls for strategies to balance the cost and quality of the projects.

The two theories will guide this study: the strategic conflict model (Shapiro, 1989) and the Contingency theory (Betts, 2003). The strategic conflict model explains how business is affected by the environment in which they are operating. It also offers a way to use the resources at their disposal to gain a competitive advantage. The Strategic Conflict model is a rivalry-based hypothesis in business methodology. The model involves the use of experts to make recommendations. In this model, the companies analyze a particular conflict concerning its cause and the outcomes resulting from the decisions made before allowing the expert to provide the most appropriate tentative solution. The critical point in the Strategic Conflict model is to comprehend the source of conflict and prevent its outbreak in the future (Johnson, 1999). The strategy perceives the capacities that an organization needs to control its commercial center, which is viewed to enhance the competitive standpoint in the market in times of uncertainty. Consequently, the Contingency Theory suggests that an organization's effectiveness depends on managers taking into account various factors that can negatively or positively impact the organization—the main contingent factors being environment, technology, size, product diversity, and people employed (Betts, 2003). Overall, the theory emphasizes task characteristics, especially task programmability, to choose the control strategy. The existence of "people" or social control is an alternative to control through performance evaluation.

### **1.1.1 Concept of Strategy**

Yawson (2020) describes strategy as the capacity of a business firm to favorably react to an ever-changing environment through implementing a well-thought-out plan and nonstop changes. This implies that these business organizations ought to be flexible when designing and implementing its strategic practices when operational in the dynamic environment. Moreover, Yawson and Greiman (2016) posit that strategic business ideas should be designed that shows a joint resultant favorable effect that a business organization may realize

when operating under unclear business environment. According to Grant (2013), it's right to further explain that strategic ideas show the direction and the boundaries of operation that guide the business organization for a lasting period. These business tactics also guide the business organizations on how to allocate their resources to attain the set organizational objectives (Thompson, 2017).

Porter (1997) posits that strategy is about competition and how an organization tries to gain a competitive advantage. He further establishes that businesses commonly use three categories: strategic scope, strategic decision, and strategic strength. Strategic scope is a demand-side dimension that looks at the size and composition of the market to be targeted. Green (2015) asserts that strategic decisions concern how the company chooses to match its resources with the environmental requirements through a co-evolutionary process to achieve its long-term objectives. To solve the increasing demands of their business environment, organizations have to make decisions and implement courses of action of multidimensional impact. These dimensions include time (short and long term), space (local, national, regional, or global), and matter (product or services).

A company exists and operates in the conditions of an external and internal environment. The internal environment of a company enables its development and operation. It can be a source of either business expansion or problems that disrupt its existence (Shatilo, 2019). The external environment provides a company with the resources required to support its internal capacities. The external and internal environment factors impact the overall operation, innovation, and management decision-making at the company level (Payne, 2017). It should be established that other than other justifications for poor performance of the business organizations, lack of innovation and invention similarly explains the dismal organization performance of the business organizations (Elif & Engül, 2015). A very important

consideration for any company development is the identification of the internal as well as external predictors of strategic management of innovation practices. Moreover, given that these factors influence diverse aspects of a business operations or activities inclusive of its innovation practices, the business organization ought to adopt viable external and internal structures that guides the firm in working on its prospects and threats for achieving organizational goals (Henry, 2018).

### **1.1.2 Organizational Performance**

Nelly (2014) defines organizational performance as quantifying the efficiency and effectiveness of the actions taken by the management team. Waggoner, Neely, and Kennerley (2017) further argue the importance of performance measurement in business activities to identify areas that need attention from the management team. According to Kaplan and Norton (2018), organization performance is thus a component of monetary and non financial monetary predictors. that gives enough information to the degree of achievement of impacts or goals. The central purpose of every industry is to have consistent performance. This is because firms realize that to advance and develop, there is a need for better performance. This is why organizational performance is imperative for management study, which is the crucial indicator of competitive technique.

Ingraham (2015) notes that performance comes with the responsibility of the actions. It is upon an organization to take action to witness increased performance in the market. Advanced performance means increased productivity. Various firms are opting for performance measurements, and they use this approach to gauge how well they are performing concerning their competitors (Van Dooren, 2012). There are various measures for determining performance. Most organizations allude to the capacity to achieve specific objectives as the best measure of their level of performance. Performance is gauged on producing superior

products, generating high profit for the company, increasing market share in the country, and survival during turbulent times (Koontz and Donnell, 2013). Organizational performance is an pointer of how well the company is performing alongside its competitors. The assessment should be based on the quality of the products, share of the industry, and levels of profits for the company compared to others. As the evaluation is carried out, there is a need to ensure that the business uses appropriate strategies and is compliant with the law (Lewis, 2019).

Kaplan and Norton (2018) came up with a sustainability balanced scorecard for measuring organizational performance holistically. The scorecard offers managers and directors of the organization an whole company perspective. The scorecard is both an evaluation framework and also an administrative framework. With this, the scorecard organizations can elucidate their approach and vision and interpret without much hesitation. Houck, Speaker, Fleming and Riley (2016) states that the advantage of a sustainable, balanced scorecard is that it gives input into both the inner business and outer results to improve the general execution of the business processes and the expected results. The scorecard can also change strategic plans from instructive exercises to an operational hub of a corporation. The scorecard also incorporates monetary actions and active actions. The monetary actions illuminate the move's effects, while operational actions are essential in driving subsequent general monetary accomplishment.

### **1.1.3 Road Construction Companies in Kenya**

Kenya's Vision 2030 acknowledges roads as drivers and enablers of economic growth to promote trade, agriculture, and industry (Maina, 2015). The sector has experienced numerous reforms, including changes in policy and creation of authorities such as KeNHA, KURA, and KeRRA, in 2007, responsible for construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of roads, and NCA NTSA and EBK to regulate the industry (Kwatsima, 2016). Other reforms in the sector

included classifying roads as National roads (class A, B, C, and S) and County roads (class D, E, F, G) based on function in 2016. In addition, the government has introduced alternative funding options, including Public-Private Partnerships and Road Annuity Fund, to finance road projects (The National Treasury and Planning, 2018).

Kenya being a developing economy, it's at the stage of improving existing dilapidated road infrastructure and creating new road networks to expand the transportation corridor. According to KeNHA (2019), Kenya's road network is about 177,800km, and 70 per cent of it is in good condition, while the remaining percentage requires reconstruction. To achieve the above development aims, the government relies on donors and loans from foreign governments to supplement its investment in roads (Maina, 2015). Kenya relies largely on external funding for public infrastructure projects and as at 1 June 2019, the structure of the funding is: China funds at 20.9% of East African project, government funds at 13.7%, international finance institutions funds at 13.2% and regional development finance institutions funds at 12.6%. In the past decade, over 70% of Kenya's large public sector infrastructure projects have been awarded to Chinese civil engineering and construction companies.

In the above complicated context, competition in the industry in Kenya is becoming extremely high especially among the Chinese construction companies inside because the China government's One Belt One Road Policy encourages its construction companies who previously base in China now are coming to Kenya. Chinese companies that dominate the civil construction market such as China Road and Bridge, China Wu Yi, Fubeco (China Fushun) and China Jiangxi Corporation. And these Chinese companies are sharing the similar characteristics and resources, which make the competition homogeneous, and thus leads low profitability and high demand for completion strategies.

Apart from the competition among Chinese companies, local road construction companies like Epco Builders, Put Sarajevo, Intext Construction, Landmark Holdings are also competing in the market. All these players make the external environment more complicated than ever.

#### **1.1.4 Overview of Jiangxi Zhongmei**

Jiangxi Zhongmei construction company is an affiliated company to the Coal Geological Bureau of Jiangxi province. Because of quality services and its financial stability, it is venturing into different areas in different countries worldwide. It is conducting trans-provincial, trans-regional, and trans-national business under the brand name Jiangxi Zhongmei. It has been listed among the top 250 contractors in the world five times a row. Guided by the international perspective and global business layout, Jiangxi Zhongmei company takes full advantage of domestic markets in China and the international markets and resources to build a grand blue blueprint for its domestic and domestic overseas market segment. At home, the group has about 67 branches. There are over 20 000 workers, with 1500 working permanently (Zhongmei Engineering Group Ltd, 2021).

The construction of infrastructure is an essential transformation path in addressing many of the challenges in developing countries. According to the report by the World Bank (2011), infrastructure encourages green and inclusive growth. Otherwise, nations will be in a worse circumstances to meet the difficult situation when meeting its fundamental needs hence not being competitive. FIDIC (2016) also adds that construction is the primary factor in achieving a competitive advantage globally. Therefore, the construction sector is a significant pillar in achieving socio-economic objectives. The construction industry is multifaceted. This is because many players execute it, and different parties have an interest in construction activities. They include regulators, contractors, consultants, and stakeholders, among others (Dayzie et al., 2012).

The road construction industry is among the imbalanced sectors with respect to the wealth of the world. Construction activities are uncertain as it unpredictable demand cycles, uncertain circumstances, project-specified demands combined with other factors. In the construction sector, the contractors are critical players towards the project's success will depend on their performance. With the onset of Covid-19, the pandemic has had substantial impacts on the sector of construction. This is because the industry is sensitive to economic cycles. On the upside, the construction sector has a high potential to stimulate the economy's recovery through job creation. In turn, the recovery measures help in supporting the transformation of the industry towards digitization and sustainability. Some strategies require external backups, tripartite cooperation and social dialogue, and global standards of labour to uphold the human-centred recovery of the construction industry seemingly in crisis.

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Projects involving firms are becoming difficult and complex due to the success factors (Chan et al., 2014). Most authors agree that strategies are an essential part for companies to continue with their competitive advantage. The strategy implemented impacts the performance of the companies in terms of the performance to better state (Kohtamäki, Kraus, Mäkelä and Rönkkö, 2012). This is true since a strategy that is successfully formulated will significantly benefit the company. A good strategic plan starts with appropriate input (Jiang & Carpenter, 2013). To be competitive, the firms need to develop essential strategies to improve their market performance. Successful implementation of the strategies by firms maximizes organizations' revenue, resulting in positive profit growth (Fukawa and Zhang, 2016).

There is no doubt that the construction industry is ever-growing with an increasing number of registered construction companies. With a growing number of players in the industry, both from the public and private sectors, this has increased this study's scope. There is a



close relationship between strategies employed by an organization and performance. This is especially at this time when there is a global pandemic of Covid-19. The pandemic has changed the way businesses are operating and also the profit margins realized by enterprises. Because of this, the strategies being made by an organization should be in line with the economic situation as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The prevailing economic problems engulfing the construction industry have prompted construction companies to be competitive tactics to increase their performance to attain the objectives and goals of Jiangxi Zhongmei.

Various researchers have carried out studies on strategies for improving performance in different industries. Baldrige National Quality Programme (BNQP) defines performance in the construction company as outcomes or outputs from a given process that allows assessment according to the set standards, goals, and past results (Henry, 2019). This was after research on five companies that had previously won the MBNQA in the manufacturing category. Isik, Arditi, Dilmen & Birgonul (2015) carried out a study on the role of the exogenous factors in the strategic performance of construction companies. The survey was carried out on 73 construction companies, and data were analyzed through structural equation modelling. The study results will help the executives of construction companies be more conscious of the market environment. Oyewobi (2015) examines how to measure strategic performance in construction companies using a proposed integrated model. The author compares performance framework and performance measurement systems in the construction sector. Like in other previous studies, the Balanced Scorecard is proposed as one of the popular performance indicators. Propelled by this knowledge gap, this study addressed this concern by responding to the research question: What strategies are Jiangxi Zhongmei adopting for performance improvement in turbulent times?

### **1.3 Research Objective**

This study's objective was to establish strategies used by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times.

### **1.4 Value of the Study**

The study findings of the research provide information to stakeholders in the construction companies and also Jiangxi Zhongmei on ways of improving their performance during turbulent times. It provides guidance to the construction companies and also Jiangxi Zhongmei on how they may maintain their performance and position in the market despite the global pandemic outbreak. This study provides insight into how global pandemics can influence the organizational performance of Jiangxi Zhongmei , as well as how to come up with viable strategies that would help in dealing with such turbulence or crisis to maintain optimal performance of the construction organizations.

The findings of the study provide information to members of regulatory organizations and policymakers on the strategies employed by construction companies during pandemic periods, as this will assist them in gaining more information about the sector and developing a proper regulatory framework that is necessary to control the industry. It also aids them in their attempts to cope with the dynamics that exist in their working environment, which is beneficial .

Researchers will also gain from the findings of the present study since it will give them with a better understanding of the construction sector, which will lead to the current literature on the construction sector and lay the groundwork for future studies. The findings helps in contributing to a more complete theoretical comprehension of the concepts of construction companies and strategies, which is a valuable contribution.

## **CHAPTER TWO : LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to discuss various works of literature related to the subject matter as presented by different researchers, scholars, analysts, and authors. It also discusses how to measure the success of projects and the theories associated with strategies for performance improvement.

### **2.2 Theoretical Foundation of the Study**

This study is founded on three theories, the Contingency Theory, the Strategic Conflict Model and chaos theory. The study explains how all these three theories underpins how different business organizations are affected by the environment and utilize the resources at their disposal to gain a competitive advantage even during turbulent times.

#### **2.2.1 Strategic Conflict Model**

Crafted by Karl Max, the strategic conflict theory asserts that society is in a state of perpetual conflict as people compete over the limited resources available. The theory holds that society is retained in order by power and domination rather than conformity and consensus. According to the theory, the people in power and wealth try to hold onto it by all means possible. This they achieve by majorly suppressing the poor and powerless individuals in society. Strategic conflict theory shows that individuals and groups within the community work to maximize their benefits. Therefore, strategic conflict theory applies threats, promises, or generally influencing another person's behavior to maximize self-benefits.

The strategic conflict model is one of the rivalry-based hypotheses of business methodology. The model augments Porter's generic strategies in that it perceives the capacity an organization needs to control its commercial center conditions, which later enhance its standpoint. When

utilizing a game-theoretic foundation, strategic conflict can assist companies in perceiving and pursuing a desired position within the industry. Moreover, as firms take action, they can count on what steps their competitors will probably take. According to Shapiro (1989), product standardization, strategic control of data, investment in physical capital and intangible assets, horizontal mergers, and strategic contracting are potential strategic moves that firms can adopt.

Teece (2017) establishes that the pertinence of utilizing strategic conflict's gaming standards can be set one of a kind. For instance, a firm with complete dominance over an industry should not have to be as mindful of the opponent company's diversions as an organization in an industry where uniformly scattered or inconspicuous, likewise strengthening the statute they need for a technique is pushed through the duration rivalry. Past studies have identified technology and market changes, government laws and regulations, social transformations, client preferences, supplier support, and competitor's behavior as some of the sources of environmental uncertainty (Pierce & Micheal, 2006).

This theory is relevant to the current study because it aids in understanding how business managers employ various strategies in managing conflicts caused by either external or internal factors, as well as their relational attitudes and ability to communicate and resolve conflicts for good organizational financial performance. The sorts of disputes that managers confront should also influence their conflict resolution tactics in organizational management. Knowledge how a complex conflict scenario incorporates one or more conflict types requires an understanding of the conflict's underlying structure. Knowledge of such a deep structure is essential for understanding what the disagreement is about and how it should be addressed for the company's excellent performance.

### **2.2.2 Contingency Theory**

At the structural level of analysis in organization theory, the Contingency theory is regarded the most influential, logical, open system model (Scott, 1992). The fundamental premise of the Contingency theory is that an organization's optimal organizational structure is determined by its operating environment. Organization theorists are able to identify a wide variety of organization features and characterize organizational success in several ways. These scholars attempt to establish a correlation between the features of the environment and those of the firms that result in excellent performance (Betts, 2003). This compatibility is known as "fit"; the greater the fit, the greater the performance. The term for this kind of match is contingency theory.

Establishing the difference between "mechanistic" and "organic" kinds of organization and management was one of the first achievements of research using a contingency-based methodology (Burns & Stalker, 1961). The mechanical appearance was connected with a steady setting and routine technology. The organic shape was connected with an unstable or turbulent environment as well as a changing technological landscape. There was a suggestion of a continuum, with organic and mechanical as the extremes and every organization lying somewhere in the middle. Subsequent research revealed that several forms of technology or technical systems place distinct demands on an organization. The suitable structure accommodates these requirements. (Woodward, 1965). These early thinkers suggested that, depending on the circumstances, an organization may use any of a number of alternative organizational forms. The contingency technique was developed when it was shown that parts of firms may have distinct subenvironments, emphasizing the necessity for distinct organizational structures. (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). Environment, technology, age, and size have emerged as the most significant contingency variables. Mintzberg (1979) identified eleven contingency factors, four of which were associated with the environment: stability,

complexity, variety, and antagonism. Moreover, he highlighted the design of positions, the design of superstructures, the design of lateral connections, and the design of decision-making systems as structural design characteristics.

Although the contingency theory has some benefits, it fails to adequately explain why different leadership styles are beneficial in certain contexts but not others. The validity of the least liked coworker scale is also challenged since it correlates poorly with other established leadership metrics. Inadequately explains what should be done regarding a mismatch between leader and circumstance in the workplace (Northouse, 2007, p.118-120). However, the theory is pertinent to the present research since it assists in comprehending management ideas or styles that are context-dependent and that adopting a certain, inflexible style is unproductive in the long term. Typically, managers of organizational contingencies pay attention to both the circumstance and their own personalities, making steps to ensure that the two interact well. Consequently, depending on the circumstances, management may learn how to adopt a different leadership style. Thus, businesses may learn from unique occurrences and apply these lessons to future management of the similar situations, which is a benefit of contingency theory. Additionally, the ability to adjust to external forces and changes is beneficial. The use of the principle of contingency may also result in more well-rounded leaders who can enhance their talents in several areas.

### **2.2.3 Chaos Theory**

This theory was promoted by Henri Poincaré promoted 1880s, and while exploring the three-body problem, he discovered non-periodic orbits that neither increase nor approach a fixed point (Kellert, 1993). In essence, "all things have a tendency of self-organizing into systems" (Kelly and Allison, 1999: 5). These systems establish patterns by applying a few simple rules repeatedly. Small variations early in the process can lead to huge variations in system performance. Inspiring one aspect of a system can have unforeseen consequences on other

sections of the system (Goldberg & Markoczy, 1998). Complex systems are interrelated and interdependent (Bar-Yam, 2000), and their elements interact and adapt to each other (Stacey, 1996). (Meade and Rabelo, 2004). To put it differently, the system is not completely uncontrollable. No single agent or manager enforces the rules that cause this behavior, and no single portion of the system can forecast it.

Decentralized portions of the system interact to form a self-organized system. Adaptive behavior emerges at the brink of chaos, where there is enough stability to survive but enough turbulence to inspire inventiveness (Waldrop, 1992). While complex adaptive systems' behavior cannot be predicted, it can be altered by creating mutually beneficial relationships among members (Baskin, 1998). Several chaos and complexity principles are pertinent to business and thus to this study. The key idea is self-organization, or how a set of simple rules in a network may produce a pattern of order. The process is not managed by an outside 'manager', but rather impulsively self-organizes from the bottom up (Holbrook, 2003). While individual managers cannot forecast or plan long-term outcomes (Wilkinson and Young, 1998), the system may be pushed between stability and chaos by fine-tuning simple rules (Lewin, 1993). A range of creative and innovative solutions emerge from shifting circumstances due to this ongoing self-organization (Dolan et al., 2003).

This theory is applicable to the present study because it explains a strong overlap between management techniques and entrepreneurial ideals, indicating how it provide the theoretical framework for the relationship between managerial orientation and turbulence working environment (Mason, 2006). The theory also shows how a management mindset might work in a chaotic situation or during turbulence times and how such mindset or strategy could aid organizations working in a complicated and volatile environment.

### **2.3 Strategy and Performance of Organizations In Turbulent Times**

Every organization's environmental success depends on how responsive it is (Porter, 1985). The environment might be either somewhat stable or very turbulent. Continuous strategic diagnosis is required since each level of the environment has distinct characteristics that need distinctive techniques and talents. To determine the changes that must be made to a company's strategy and internal capabilities to assure the company's success in the future environment, a strategic diagnostic is a rigorous process (Ansoff, 2010). According to Johnson and Scholes' (2016) study, a good strategy provides for interaction between the internal and external surroundings. A good strategy, according to him, is one in which an organization's resources and actions are matched to the business environment in which they function, establishing a strategic fit (coming up with strategy by detecting prospects in the environment and adapting resources and competencies to take advantage of these prospects).

A company operates most effectively when its strategic approach is aggressive and corresponds to the volatility of its environment. The firm's competency responds to client needs while its strategy is aggressive, and all of its pieces work well together. (Ansoff and McDonnell, 2015). This suggests that behavioral adjustments inside an organization are often necessary for strategic solutions. Depending on the organization's capabilities and the environment it operates in, these modifications may take a variety of different shapes. Strategic aggressiveness must be suitable for each level of environmental turbulence, and organizational competence must be sufficient for each level of strategic aggressiveness. (James, 2017).

According to Grant (2016), a successful strategy aligns with the organization's goals and values, as well as its organizational structure, resources, and external environment. This demonstrates that how an organization reacts to its external conditions and how it depends on



those settings for its survival will determine how successful that organization is. In order to ensure that there was a continuous strategic advantage, the organization's capabilities and strategy would need to be updated when there were changes in the environment. According to Thompson (2017), an organization encounters shocks from its surroundings, and how resources are utilized and managed has an impact on how well that organization is able to handle these shocks. In order to remain successful in a dynamic environment, a corporation must modify its methods, and sometimes even its beliefs. How well businesses are able to understand and fulfill their consumers' needs is what determines how successful they are. In this regard, managers in both the public and private sectors must anticipate significant environmental changes. A corporation must address environmental issues if it hopes to thrive. It must be able to fulfill the essential success criteria drawn from the needs and preferences of its customers. This depends on the assets, competencies, and strategic abilities it has. Johnson, Scholes, and Whittington (2016) assert that for the organization to exist, these must reach a certain threshold level.

General management is a crucial element in determining whether or not a strategy will be successful. It consists of the managers' capacity to respond, the organizational climate, and the organizational competence. The manager's ability to respond focuses on his attitude toward change, competence, and work capability. The phrase "corporate environment" refers to an organization's propensity to act in a particular way, such as by welcoming or resisting change. It is the organization's shared worldview, tendency to take risks, attitude toward change, and shared world model (John, 2014).

The strategies that multinational road companies in Ghana use were researched by Ofori (2012) and established that the strategies are similar to those noted in reports on construction companies in developing countries. The strategy mentioned by Ofori used to influence

performance aim to address adequate working capital, insufficient organization, poor workmanship, and inadequate engineering competencies in the host country. Other difficulties include calling for good management strategies, including high inflationary trends, unstable business environment, weak organizational structures, and poor organizational practices among the local people hired as foremen and site managers (Danson, 2017). Similar challenges are experienced in Kenya and call for effective performance strategies in the construction sector. A report by Kenya Private Developers Association (KPDA) in May 2011 on challenges facing the construction industry in Kenya cited capital as the main challenge facing the country's construction industry. Another challenge was compliance with legal regulations, discouraging foreign construction companies from coming into the country. During this pandemic time of Covid-19, construction firms in Kenya should develop strategies to ensure that they can continue their activities amid the pending payments from the implementing agencies and the client-mainly the government.

In today's fast-changing business environment, strategic thinking and strategy formation are essential tools for all organizations because they enable them to deal with future uncertainty. Slow change can be dealt with systematically; however, radical change requires rethinking of strategy (Wilson, 2018). According to Davis (2015), a company's strategy provides guidance while it navigates the business world's environmental minefield. A series of choices and activities known as strategic reactions lead to the creation and execution of strategies intended to help a company accomplish its goals (Pearce & Robinson 2014).

For an organization to be successful, it must develop strategies to plan, direct and control change. Strategic responses are concerned with decisions and actions meant to achieve business objectives and purposes. Strategy answers the fundamental questions of 'where do we want to go? Where are we now? How do we get there?' Three areas of an organization's

strategy are essential in identifying a firm's responses to environmental challenges. They include objective setting, vision, the mission of the organization, and the organization's strategic direction (Lowes, 2016).

The strategies an organization pursues have a significant impact on its performance relative to its peers (Hill & Jones, 2017). There are three levels of strategic responses, i.e., corporate-level, business-level, and operational-level. The corporate strategy helps establish a distinctive competence and competitive advantage at the business level. It is the first level of strategy at the top of the organization. It is concerned with the overall purpose and scope of the organization to meet the expectations of owners or major stakeholders and add value to different parts of the organization. These include issues of geographic average, diversity of products or services, and how resources are allocated between other parts of the organization (Johnson and Scholes, 2018). According to Ansoff (2010), firms diversify because the objectives of an organization cannot be achieved by continuing to operate in their existing market.

According to Oginni and Adesanya (2013), organizations encounter an environment that is becoming progressively dynamic, resource deficiencies, complicated and unpredictable, with dynamics such as technology, internalization, extensive changes in the business cycle, ever-changing social values, business rivals, customers, and suppliers influencing the industry. The business environment may be conceived of as characteristics and conditions that are outside the firm's direct control and influence. These aspects are reliant on the complexity and dynamism of the environment. Therefore, strategic responses are the collection of decisions and actions that define and implement strategies designed to achieve a company's objective (Payne, 2015). Chepureenko (2015) demonstrates that when a corporation recognizes an unpredictable economic climate, they modify their strategy accordingly.

Boyne and Meier (2019) and Ibidunni and Ogundele (2013) conceptually stated that environmental turbulence is one element of general models of the task environment that constrains organizational behavior and performance; it is the unpredictable change in philanthropy and complexity of an organization's environment. Pavlou and Sawy (2014) stated that environmental turbulence is also characterized by uncertainties arising from unexpected changes in market demand, consumer preferences, new technological developments, and technological breakthroughs. They found that in a turbulent environment, three types of capabilities will produce strategic advantage such as: operational (the ability to carry out processes), dynamic (planned capabilities to reconfigure operational capabilities), and improvisational (the learned ability to reconfigure operational capabilities spontaneously). The last two abilities can be seen as dynamic capabilities in general. Therefore, there is a relationship between dynamic capability and competitive advantage in a turbulent environment (Banerjee, Farooq and Upadhyaya, 2018)

Turbulent environments are characterized by high levels of dynamism, complexity, and uncertainty. Many factors cause turbulence in the business environment. Some of these factors include technological convergence and the consequential fall in the barriers to entry, increasing accessibility and availability of information, the increasingly global profile of competitors, and the existence of new global public sector trends. Construction firms in the current world, whether big or small, are increasingly confronted with environmental turbulence and complexity. As these firms' external environments continuously exist, adopting strategic choices in response to environmental uncertainty has become a significant challenge. Dwivedi (2011) agrees that environmental uncertainty is both a threat and an opportunity to develop a firm's internal structures and processes. Various scholars have also recognized that the inability to predict external changes can hinder success and even cause failure.

According to Anggraini and Sudhartio (2019), environmental turbulence is defined as environmental conditions with a high level of uncertainty and risk. Environmental turbulence is a necessary construct that captures volatility in the corporate environment. It comprises a competitive business environment, gambles that come up from the company, and the complexity and heterogeneity of the supply chain within and outside the domain of the industry (Rimita, 2019). Nnamani and Ajagu (2014) referred to environmental turbulence as the significant factors and forces outside the organization that can significantly affect the organization's performance. These factors that happen outside the business are known as external factors or influences that determine an organization's direction towards its goals and objectives. These external factors affect the main internal functions of the business and possibly the purposes of the company and its strategies (Gathenya, 2018).

The global environmental turbulence in the form of a health catastrophe started in 2020, hurting businesses in a variety of sectors. Despite the resilience of certain firms or even the discovery of a new operational niche, the majority of businesses have found themselves in "new normal" operating challenges known as turbulent times. There have been reports of the consequences of environmental instability in several spheres of life, including the economic, social, political, and psychological spheres (Bretas, and Alon, 2020). As an example, one of the most recent environmental disturbances was the COVID-19 pandemic, and in order to reduce the danger of COVID-19 transmission, several nations have ceased corporate activities and instituted social distancing measures. This has led to lockdowns, decreased consumption, the closure of communities and businesses (Bretas, and Alon, 2020).

In the words of many economists, this pandemic is a "black swan" event, described as "a sudden, unexpected event of enormous magnitude and severe impacts that dramatically changes the political and economic climate" (Ratten, 2020). Global disruption is a term used

by technology experts to describe an opportunity or threat to competitive tactics, as well as an opportunity for new technology to support corporate processes (Reeves, Haanes and Sinha, 2015).

The business environment is unpredictable and malleable (Akpan, Soopramanien, and Kwak, 2020), necessitating a change strategy, with whole organization renewal as an option. Due to travel limitations and ill travel advisories given by some international markets, business firms establish strategies to overcome the pandemic's impact while at the same time remaining strong in the market and sustaining if not improving their financial performance (Amankwah-Amoah, Khan and Wood, 2020). Market share has been struck hard in this business. A three-dimensional technique based on a shared knowledge of elements that influence how organizations cope with survival issues would be interesting to examine.

The performance and strategic responses of firms can be analyzed by the methodology of scenario analysis . In the scenario analysis process, many definitions and possible approaches to and techniques of scenario construction have been posited. Although the method is perceived as the basic one of future studies, the notion of a scenario is increasingly misused and abused (Godet, Roubelaut, 2016). As noted by Khakee gives rise to confusion (Bradfield, 2015). According to Ringland (2018), scenarios are the part of strategic planning and responses that relates to the tools and techniques of uncertainty management. At the same time, Ringland emphasizes that scenarios should not be equal to forecast understood as the description of reality projection or the vision and indicates that forecast is only a single picture of reality. Ringland's perception of the scenario method seems to correspond with that of other futures scholars such as Schwartz, Van der Heijden, and Schutte (Schwartz, Van der Heijden, and Schutte, 2014), and Sarpong, who states that the essence of the scenario method is not knowing about the future, but rather preparing for it (Sarpong, 2016).

Van der Heijden enlists five features of well-written scenarios, namely: linking historical and present events with hypothetical events in the future, carrying story lines that can be expressed in simple diagrams, plausibility, reflecting pre-determined elements, and identifying signposts or indicators that a given story is occurring (Saritas and Nugroho, 2019). A scenario is a description of factors' interdependence determining the development of the given situation in time. The interdependence between factors could be so minutely described that the simulation of the given situation is possible. The emphasis on the heterogeneity of experts stems from the authors' studies of minimum quality criteria for the scenarios introduced by Stewart (2018). The first criterion concerns the change in the world's perception by the people involved in the scenario construction. This criterion seems to be parallel to Wack's postulate, according to whom the most crucial aim of the scenario analysis is challenging decision makers' assumptions about the world's functioning, and at the same time convincing them to change their perception of reality, which may even result in revolutionary transformation (Wack, 2017).

Scenario analysis is praised for the radically different stance it takes towards environmental uncertainties. Whereas trend projecting forecasting techniques try to abandon any uncertainty by providing managers with only one forecast, multiple scenario analysis deliberately confronts managers with environmental uncertainties by presenting several different outlooks of the future (Bood & Postma, 2018). Generally, a scenario depicts some feasible future state of an organization's environment and mostly includes the dynamic sequence of interacting events and changes. The analyses focus on the causal processes and crucial decision points, highlighting fundamental uncertainties surrounding organizational managers' strategic decisions.

## 2.4 Empirical Studies and Research Gaps

Dean et al. (2019) investigated a firm's end game in seven US industries in decline during the late 1970s. The study focused on how businesses cope in an environment where future demand is lower than the current demand. Therefore, the resale value of business assets is likely to decrease over time. They identified a range of strategies that varied in the level of market share sought and the degree of reinvestment needed to maintain a particularly strategic position. These strategies included: increased investment to attain market leadership; holding investment levels to continue with the previously used tactics; shrinking selectively to reposition the business; retrieving the value of some prior investments to reinvest in other venture; milking investment to harvest their values without regard for long-run positioning, and divestment to recoup asset value.

The business turnaround literature investigated how organizations address performance decline and improvement (Chepurenko, 2015). The bulk of this literature does not relate strategy and performance to a recession, although turnaround attempts often occur during a recession and economic turbulence. Turnaround situations vary concerning the nature and extent of the performance decline and the benchmarks against which reduction is measured. Studies typically identify retrenchment and investment responses to secure survival and improve performance, even though some attempts may fail (Hartman, 2018). A review of the turnaround literature suggests that retrenchment is the key to a successful turnaround approach either as a stand-alone approach or a precursor to a recovery strategy. Arguably, businesses are likely to adopt differently during the recession and buoyant times as they perceive market opportunities and threats differently. It is evident from the various studies that favorable conditions support a broader range of strategies as compared to recession conditions, especially where market conditions are less forgiving.



Hill and Jones (2017) argue that focus strategy concentrates on serving a particular market niche, defined geographically, by type of customer, or by a product line segment. According to Johnson and Scholes (2015), business unit strategy competes successfully in particular markets. They added that operational strategies are concerned with how parts of an organization effectively deliver the corporate and business level strategies in terms of resources, process, and people. Construction companies adopt strategies directed at improving the effectiveness of basic operations, such as production, marketing, materials management, research and development, and human resources.

High levels of dynamism, complexity, and uncertainty characterize turbulent environments. Many factors contribute to business turbulence. These factors include technological convergence and the resulting reduction in entry barriers, increased information accessibility, and availability, the increasingly global profile of business rivals, and the emergence of a fresh global public sector patterns. Firms, large and small, are increasingly confronted with environmental turbulence and complexity in today's world. Given that these firms' external environments are constantly changing, making strategic decisions in response to environmental uncertainty has become a significant challenge (Paul, 2021). According to Dwivedi (2017), environmental uncertainty is both a threat and an opportunity for a firm's internal structures and processes to develop. Various academics have also acknowledged that the inability to predict external changes can impede and even cause failure.

According to Grant (2016), a good strategy takes into account the organization's objectives and values, its external environment, its resources and competencies, and its organizational structures. This suggests that the organization's existence is reliant on its environment, and that its performance will be determined by its answers to the external condition. Consequently, as the environment changes, the organization's skills and strategy must be

modified to maintain strategic fit. Thompson (2017), posit that the environment presents an organization with shocks, and the way in which resources are deployed and managed influences the company's capacity to deal with these shocks. For continued success in a volatile environment, the company must modify its tactics and philosophies. The success or failure of a business firm is defined on how effectively it comprehends and satisfies the demands of its customers. In this context, managers in both the public and commercial sectors must anticipate substantial environmental changes.

Peng, Huo, and Meng (2020) conducted a survey in Guangdong Province, China, to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on businesses. The study sample consisted of 524 businesses located in 15 cities around Guangdong Province. The study selected these companies from a list released by the government, taking into account the industrial characteristics of Guangdong province as well as the size of the company. The questionnaire was prepared on the basis of earlier investigations conducted by the United Nations Development Programme. It was divided into four categories and contained a total of 17 questions. The CEOs of the companies were contacted by phone or WeChat, and they were requested to participate in a self-administered questionnaire survey conducted through an online survey platform. The SPSS statistical package was used to analyze the data. Firms in the province of Guangdong have suffered significant difficulties as a result of the pandemic. There has been a major reduction in their production and operating activities, and they are exposed to significant dangers. It is vital to put in place rules that would significantly reduce production costs for businesses, so assisting them in surviving this difficult moment and gradually returning to normal operations. However, reviewing this study by Peng, Huo, and Meng (2020) shows that the study failed to highlight the coping up strategies of the businesses working in Guangdong Province during the COVID-19 outbreak or turbulence times and how such strategies would influence the organization performance of these SMEs.

The present study filled these gaps by assessing strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times.

Gregory, Tomicic Furjan and Tomicic-Pupek (2021) conducted an international investigation on how SMEs working in Croatia's service firms have been managing the distractions created by the COVID-19 outbreak and published their findings. Using this research, we hope to get insight into which transformation predictors they have prioritized and which technologies they have chosen as a means of responding to the disruptive forces in their industry. SMEs are next investigated based on their influence on the redefining of maintainable business frameworks in SMEs, which is done in accordance with the findings. Using a developed research framework with three dimensions and 30 sub concepts, the data from the review was evaluated and interpreted. It is evident from the findings that drivers and technologies are distributed throughout service sectors. This collection of resources is grouped into a Business Model Canvas and may be of interest to both academics and practitioners. When deciding whether to trail incumbents, become a competitor, or rediscover themselves with respect to their transformation motives and desire to use digital technologies, the exceedingly uncertain environment permits just a few viable strategic choices for SMEs.

. However, reviewing this study by Gregory, et al., (2021) shows that the study failed to highlight how the coping up of SMEs working in Croatia's service industries with the disruptions of COVID-19 outbreak using various strategies influence the organization performance of these SMEs. The present study filled these gaps by assessing strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times.

Taylor and Francis (2010) carried out a study on the tactics utilized in cross-border financial transactions. The information was obtained from 60 of the world's largest banks. According to the findings of the study, most of the banks investigated focussed their efforts on regions

with whom they shared cultural or economic connections. The data demonstrated that the vast majority of the banks were multinational rather than global in nature. Mariotto and Verdier (2015) carried out a study in Paris that explored how competitive tactics impacted competition in ICT banking industries. They found that the current strategic structure for financial establishments should be enhanced by ensuring that policymakers are capable of striking a balance between competitiveness and stability in the banking sector. However, reviewing this study by Taylor and Francis (2010) and Mariotto and Verdier (2015) shows that they both failed to highlight how competitive strategies adopted by the business firms influence the performance of the organization during during turbulence times. The present study filled these gaps by assessing strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times.

Achieng (2013) conducted a study in Kenya that focused on the competitive strategies employed by bank agents in an effort to maintain their share of the market in the county of Migori. The findings of the study revealed that the success of agency banking was dependent on the level of customer service provided, the efficiency of the technology used, the product knowledge possessed by the agents, as well as the visibility and support provided to the agents based on the organization's organizational structure. However, reviewing this study by Achieng (2023) shows that it failed to highlight how competitive strategies employed by bank agents in an effort to maintain their share of the market in the county of Migori influence the performance of the organization during during turbulence times. The present study filled these gaps by assessing strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times.

Alves and Kamau (2020) investigated crisis management for small and medium-sized businesses during the Covid-19 outbreak. A qualitative investigation of small enterprises in

Nairobi County, Kenya, in the months following the outbreak is provided in this paper. The data was gathered by interviewing six small businesses in Nairobi. A recent study discovered that small businesses are more susceptible to a sudden fall in demand. When compared to major corporations, new startups and small businesses have greater adaptability to the current economic climate, which is partly attributable to the lower degree of bureaucracy and restricted social responsibility acquiescence. All the participating companies implemented flexible human resource strategies. Other typical survival methods include increasing product diversification, exploring new markets, and expanding one's knowledge base. However, this study by Alves and Kamau (2020) failed to highlight how crisis management for small and medium-sized businesses during the Covid-19 outbreak turbulence times influence the organization performance of these business organizations. The present study filled these gaps by assessing strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter presented the study methodology that was adopted to achieve the intended objective. The areas of consideration in this chapter comprise the study research design, target population, and procedures involved in data collection.

### **3.2 Research Design**

The study used a case study, research design technique. This choice was based on the knowledge that case studies were more suitable for examining the course of events, demonstrating causal links, and providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena via one-on-one interviews. The study's objective was to assess the performance enhancement strategies used by Jiangxi Zhongmei road construction companies. The case study method was selected because it offers a means of getting data from the business and connecting the factors under investigation at any given time (Machuki 2011).

### **3.3 Data Collection**

The research used primary data source primary data was collected using interview guide. The study mainly depended on on primary data, which was gathered through interviews. The various interviews was recorded in audio. An interview guide was essential in providing a list of high-level questions under each variable. The interviews involved five key personnel, including a project manager, procurement manager, accounting manager, human resource manager, and operations manager. They are more involved in policy-making and strategic planning in any organization. They are, therefore, able to provide helpful information that informed this study. While the secondary data was collected from the firms existing records. Secondary means "next after the first" or "derived"(Kinoti, 1998). Hart (2005) defines secondary data as data previously assembled for some project other than the one at hand.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Content analysis was used to analyse the gathered data. The data was analyzed and evaluated to confirm its application, consistency, credibility, and dependability. Because it assists in obtaining findings by systematically and objectively classifying specific messages and likening them to recurring patterns, content analysis was used. Armule (2003) evaluated how the Kenyan family planning association reacted to changes in its operational environment, while Kandie (2001) examined how Telkom Kenya Ltd. behaved strategically in a competitive context using its market share as a benchmark.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS, AND DISCUSSION**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter looks into the findings and responses obtained from the interviews. The responses obtained are determined by the research questions and the study objective. In addition, the chapters also outline the participants' demographics. This was done to attain the aim of the study, which was to determine the strategies used by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times.

### **4.2 Respondents demographics**

Jiangxi Zhongmei Construction has a staff population of 5,329 across the globe. Another 50,741 are casual workers recruited from different localities (Host countries) of the construction site. 27 out of the 5,329 permanent staff are senior decision-makers responsible for strategy. Therefore, the entire senior management team was pre-informed of collecting data. However, only 25 of them were available for interview. Some of the responses were similar and summarized because they echoed the same sentiments. Outstanding responses were identified and quoted for analysis. 14 of the responses were more credible because they were from staff members who had worked at Jiangxi Zhongmei for more than ten years hence had first-hand experience of the strategies adopted during turbulent times.

### **4.3 Strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei in Kenya for performance improvement in turbulent times**

The study found that strategic management is essential in several ways: First, it was found that strategic management helps point out the organization in the right direction during times of turbulent. This includes making the right decisions, involving the right decisions, and making helpful decisions in solving the issue. Strategic management helps keep the



organization's vision alive even during a crisis. This helped in keeping the organization in the truck.

One of the respondents said:

*“Our organizations have been faced with different turbulence and challenges, however, through proper strategic measures, the organization has survived and has put measures in place to mitigate against a future occurrence of the same challenges.”*

**(Source: 35-year-old respondent)**

The study's findings are in accordance with those of James (2017), who observed that organizational responses to tactics generally imply alterations to their behavior. These adjustments may take many various forms relying on the firm's proficiencies and the environment in which it operates. Organizational competencies must equal to every degree of plan aggressiveness and must be suitable for every level of environmental turbulence. There is so much emission from construction sites which may also lead to the closure of sites, especially in conservationist's countries. This presents a turbulent time which may lead to economic losses. The study revealed that environment conservation should be a priority in every setting of a business or management of an organization. Every employee should endeavour to conserve the environment at all costs. Any form of environmental pollution is punishable, and this has gone a long way in bringing discipline to environmental conservation.

From one of the respondents:

*“In every aspect of organizational management, the management of our organization encourages all the employees to create a good working environment friendly to all and also for environmental conservation.”*

**(Source: 30-year respondent)**

The study finding agrees with the study done by Ghoshal (2014), who says that the challenge for people scanning the environment is to produce information perceived as useful. Most managers agree that environmental information is essential, but they often don't use the information. Those who use it because of experience have shown that new developments might positively or negatively impact the organization.

Further, during the COVID-19 crisis, the organization implemented an online staff reporting system and an online site progress tracking system. This helped in bringing out continuity in the business activities. The management conducted several online meetings on Zoom and Wechat for strategic planning and organization for adequate real-time progress tracking from the study findings.

From the interview sessions, one of the respondents said that:

*"Since the onset of COVID-19, the lock-downs that followed almost brought some shock to the normal operation of the organization. To gap this, the management adopted remote work processes and virtual supervision of construction sites, a practice that is in place to this date."*

**(Source: 32-year respondent)**

The study findings further indicated that online meetings were essential in adhering to the current measures of the COVID-19, increasing efficiency and maximum utilizing the available resources such as time and people. The study further revealed that there has been improved effectiveness and increased profits.

From one of the respondents:

*"I can now comfortably work from home; no need to go the site to do daily check, just go site when it's really necessary. The site manager shows me the construction progress by video call and they arrange people do checks with tools by live video records; the effects are outstanding. The client has also appreciated the good work being done."*

**(Source: 40-year respondent)**

The study found that to increase the implementation of the online strategy, the company organized capacity building and training to adopt the online strategy. Other strategies of adoption include allocation of finance to gap the implementation process. The respondents also showed that most of them were very aware of the strategic responses employed by the organization.

One of the respondents said that:

*"Since the year began, we have attended virtual capacity building seminars once every three months; this has created awareness among the employees on the vision of the company, the scope, and the target market."*

**(Source: 39-year-old respondent)**

The study found that the Jiangxi Zhongmei in Kenya has adopted competitive strategies to meet the current market standards. These strategic decisions may include: differentiation strategy, cost leadership strategy, best cost strategy, and specific market focus strategy. The study showed that the company had realized success and profits in its transaction. There was a suggestion that the company still needs to implement other strategies to contain this. Further, it was established that the company's competitive strategy has increased performance in terms of profits, clients, effectiveness, project completion, and employee satisfaction.

From one of the respondents:

*“Other construction companies have their ways of strategic management and spearheading their organization. Our company has effectively, and purposeful identified a market niche and addressed a specific gap that has given it a strong competitive nature and outstanding in the market space.”*

**(Source: 29-year-old respondent)**

The study further sought to identify challenges facing the organization in implementing the strategies, this includes: poor goal setting, lack of alignment of strategy, poor or inability to track the progress of the implementation, and the situation where the employees do not own the strategy. The study further revealed that a business strategy creates a vision and direction for the whole organization. All people within a company must have clear goals and follow the organization's direction or mission. A strategy can provide this vision and prevent individuals from losing sight of their company's aims.

From one respondent:

*“The process of implementing the strategies in a company is not easy and comes with different challenges, including the employees' attitude and perspective towards the same. However, as an employee, I have realized that the organizational strategies are very much helpful and sustainable.”*

**(Source: 27-year-old respondent)**

The study further sought to identify detailed measures that Jiangxi Zhongmei has taken during COVID-19, which has helped them successfully overcome the difficulties. Measures are involved from human resources management, financial management, aim management

from the top, and even daily operation management from the site. It is essential that all employees within a company have clear goals of dealing with COVID-19, and they are following the same direction, even sacrificing the progress of construction. The company aims at People Priority, which cares for all the employees' health.

From one of the respondents:

*“We stopped outside visitors enter the site camp strictly when COVID-19—reduced workers quantity by reducing site operation scale. We usually constructed the road with total capacity, even sub-contract to other companies for fast construction and deadline. But during covid-19, we just built a road on every small scale and stopped two out of three-part of the site to reduce people shifting and reduce personal touch. What’s more, daily sanitizer is strictly done every 2-3 hours, wearing masks and temperature testing three times a day. Do COVID testing every week. Our company does well in workers management and gathering them live in a fixed area isolated from outside. Strictly control local employees' visits and going out, anyone going out will be given a new COVID test when accessing the site. The material like cement, water for site construction use, pitch, sand, and so on supplied to the site are also been strictly sanitized by specific workers when they are delivered in. And E-transaction helps to solve daily operation funds problems and no face-to-face contact with non-employees. To save cost, instead of renting machines like shovels, excavators, rollers, and so on from outside, we used free machines from paused or stopped site, by which saved huge active capital.”*

**(Source: 48-year-old respondent)**

This is in agreement with the findings of Jennings (2021), who concluded that health pandemics have always been contained through the reduction of physical interactions. Super

spreaders such as end-year parties and get-together should also be banned to reduce the risks. Jiangxi Zhongmei have implemented this to stop the spread of COVID-19 in the year 2020.

The study sought to find other measures related to cost reduction during the COVID-19 pandemic. The response below was provided by a 52-year-old respondent from the Research and strategy department of Jiangxi Zhongmei:

*"In a bid to stop the spread of COVID-19, paper printouts were banned in the year 2020. Everybody was compelled to embrace paperless communication. Physical files were digitized and stored in backup devices for easier references. Physical memos were abolished and replaced with email memos. This reduced the cost of operations by up to 6% hence considered a cost-saving measure."*

**Source: 52-year-old respondent**

According to Bimish (2021), cost reduction is one of the essential aspects of performance improvements. Modern organizations have adopted paperless operations to reduce costs (Bimish, 2021). Jiangxi Zhongmei has adopted this strategy to curb the spread of the virus and ended up with saving on costs.

Culture change was presented to the respondents, with some pointers identified. One of the respondents said the following:

*"Certain aspects of culture were changed immediately after the COVID-19 pandemic hit the organization. There was the introduction of flexible working hours to enable employees to work in shifts."*

**Source: 25-Year-old respondent**

Another respondent made the following sentiment with regards to cost reduction:

*"We were all forbidden from printing without permission from the controller of the budget as well as the health and safety officer. This was to curb the spread of COVID-19. This directive has since remained in effect to date, and we do not think it will be lifted anytime soon. Similarly, water and power bill have also reduced due to the work from a home directive issued last year (2020) for all staff involved in non-physical activities."*

**Source: 47-Year-Old Respondent**

One respondent mentioned that asset retrenchment ensured stability during the 2008/2009 economic downturn.

*"During the 2008 economic downturn, there was a move to retrench asset in a bid to promote efficiencies."*

**Source: 48-Year-old respondent**

Jiangxi Zhongmei was keen on its core business activity. There was room for expansion, as brought out by one of the respondents:

*"There were concerted efforts to achieve focus through aggressive marketing, initiatives to improve customer understanding, build closer customer relationships, increase the number of marketing channels, optimize after-sales service and employ cost-effective advertising. This was witnessed on several occasions during turbulent times."*

**Source: 36-year-old respondent**

#### **4.4 Discussion of Findings**

The study sought to identify the strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei to improve performance during turbulent times. The responses obtained and analyzed indicate that the effective strategies adopted were eight (8) in total. The eight strategies adopted by Jiangxi

Zhongmei are the measures that it takes to maximize the benefits. And they are adopted to match between the characteristics of the environment and those of the organization. They are supported by the two theories generally. The Strategic Conflict Theory states that when firms are competing over the limited resources available, according to the Strategic Conflict Theory, the one in power and wealth try to hold onto it by all means possible. It also shows that individuals and group withi the community work to maximize their benefits. The Contingency Theory's fundamental claim is that a firm's operating environment dictates the optimum manner for it to be organized. Researchers strive to determine if there is a correlation between environmental elements and organizational features that contribute to good performance (Betts, 2003). This compatibility is referred to as "fit," and the greater the fit, the greater the productivity.

The first and most dominant response was reducing physical interaction during health pandemics. This response was mainly provided in line with the recent outbreak of COVID-19. Jiangxi Zhongmei adopted virtual meetings to curb the spread of Covid-19 and reduce infections. Virtual technologies such as Zoom, Webex, Wechat, and Google meet were used in all staff meetings. All staff members were provided with smartphones to access the virtual technologies. Reducing physical interaction is the key strategies adopted to gain competitive strength. Successful performance improvements have been associated with a focus on product lines for which the firm is best known, customer segments that are particularly loyal or less price-sensitive, and areas with distinct competitive strength (Lai, 2012).

Employees of Jiangxi Zhongmei whose daily activities involved little or no physical activities were instructed to work from home to avoid the risks of spreading the virus. This also reduced power and water consumption by up to 5%. Performance is a function of cost (Ahmed, 2020). There exists an indirect relationship between performance and cost. This,



therefore, implies that when costs go down, performance improves and vice versa (Ahmed, 2020).

The second dominant response was that paperless communication has always been adopted to manage cost-cutting measures. Email communication was encouraged. Whats-App communication came in handy as all other staff from a given locality (site) had to create a single Whats App group for communication. According to Wong (2019), printing is one of the costliest activities in office operations during turbulent times.

Most of the responses analyzed were provided concerning the recent COVID-19 pandemics. However, the research sought to obtain a diverse range of responses other than the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the researcher asked strategic questions concerning general turbulent times and not just COVID-19. Six outstanding strategies were brought out the responses about the strategy: culture change, cost efficiencies, asset reduction, focus on core activities, build for the future, and top management change. In implementing performance improvement strategies, managers should remember that it is not just the systems or structures that need to change, but the behavior and attitudes of the individuals too (Armenakis et al., 2011).

The responses indicated that it has always been necessary for Jiangxi Zhongmei to change the culture to challenge past beliefs and assumptions, which were no longer relevant to the changing environment the firm was facing, only then could historic operating routines be abandoned and new employee behaviors adopted. Stopford and Baden Fuller's (2018) study of turnaround strategies adopted by UK manufacturers showed that when the culture changes, past beliefs are abandoned and new innovative solutions adopted. Communication was also part of the culture change turnaround strategy. It indicated a transition from the old way of behaving to the new method for the firm to move forward. The collection and dissemination of up-to-date market information, reflecting the new realities of the marketplace, was one of

how historic beliefs were challenged at Jiangxi Zhongmei. Others have found that the use of symbols facilitates a change in the cognition and behaviors of employees, which is essential for performance improvement to progress swiftly and achieve quick results.

The most prolific performance improvement strategy executed by Jiangxi Zhongmei was the quest for cost effectiveness. Cost efficiencies included a varied range of actions, which could all be characterized as "belt-tightening" or "fire-fighting," intending to ensure stability to either stabilize finances in the short term until more complex strategies are devised or to improve cash flow quickly (Bibeault, 2021). Cost efficiency measures are frequently used in the first step in any recovery strategy. They can be rapidly implemented, have an almost immediate effect, and generally require little or no capital or resource outlay. Indeed, one study concluded that cost retrenchment was so pervasive as to be considered indispensable in achieving performance improvements during turbulent times (Pearce & Robbins, 2020). The most commonly reported cost efficiencies at Jiangxi Zhongmei included stopping renting machines from outside by using internal resources, and reducing printing and water and power consumption due to the "Work from a home directive."

Barker and Mone (2019) argue that pursuing cost efficiencies carries some risks as with any strategy. Some authors have warned that cutting costs can reduce employee morale and commitment, increasing staff turnover. Others caution that cost efficiency activity should be halted after a suitable length of time not to damage assets or resources needed to maintain the firm's core focus (Sudarsanam & Lai, 2018). Boyne and Meier (2009) found out that, indeed, some studies present evidence that firms that were unsuccessful in their performance improvement efforts over-pursued cost efficiencies to the extent that they exacerbated the decline. Similarly, Hambrick also cautions that while R&D is often one of the first areas to be

cut, this alone is unlikely to be a significant contributor to performance improvement during turbulent times and may weaken the firm for the future (Hambrick & Schechter, 2016)

The respondents indicated a move to retrench Jiangxi Zhongmei to reduce liabilities. An asset retrenchment strategy is where areas of the firm that are under performing are appraised to determine if efficiencies can be made or whether it is best to divest the asset entirely rather than allowing it to continue operating at a weaker level than the rest of the firm (Hofer, 2017). Retrenchment at Jiangxi Zhongmei was implemented only where cost efficiency strategies did not have enough impact to stabilize the firm's finances because it is the natural second step following cost efficiencies. In conjunction with this, the firm needed to redesign or restructure to align itself more effectively with its core purpose, entailing the rationalization, divestment, or closure of operations, products, or assets that do not fit this purpose (O'Neill, 2020). Arogyaswamy et al. (2011) report that if a firm is in an environment characterized by a temporary economic downturn, scaling back the number of activities involved could be needed to survive the conditions.

Filatotchev and Toms (2015) highlight that the use of asset reduction as a component of performance improvement during turbulent times depends on the firm's ability to generate cash flow from any disposal. It is often assumed that this will be the case. Yet, there can be significant difficulties surrounding simple disposal and cash generation due to asset specificity, liquidity in the second-hand market, and exit barriers. Similarly, where asset retrenchment involves the disposal of aging assets and their replacement with new, state-of-the-art counterparts, for example investing in new firm, equipment, or technology, careful assessment is required to ensure that the efficiency savings will more than cover the investment and implementation costs (Sudarsanam & Lai, 2019). Retrenchment also served to free up scarce marketing, operational and financial resources at Jiangxi Zhongmei for reinvestment in the

chosen core activities, including appropriate acquisitions where specific further capability is required (Grinyer et al., 2018)

The responses indicated that there was some realignment of activities to focus on construction and abandon all other sources of revenue. This was witnessed on two occasions during different times of turbulence: during the 2008/2009 economic downturn and recently during the COVID-19 pandemic. Focusing on the firm's essential undertakings is a performance improvement strategy often recommended in parallel with asset retrenchment (Boyne & Meier 2014). This strategy involves establishing the products, markets, and customers that can generate the most extraordinary profits and refocusing the firm's activities on these areas.

To reinforce the importance of focusing on the core, some studies explicitly warn that following a strategy with "no distinguishing characteristics, hence qualifying as a piecemeal approach" is unlikely to lead to performance improvement. Focus allowed Jiangxi Zhongmei to develop a clear competitive strategy in construction. This was achieved through an increased focus on marketing, initiatives to improve customer understanding, build closer customer relationships, increase the number of marketing channels, optimize after-sales service and employ cost-effective advertising. Grinyer et al. (2010) found that best performers during turbulent times concentrated on reducing production costs relative to their industry peers that pursued more general overhead reductions. This included adjusting wage incentives, tighter stock control, financial and capacity controls, and investment in a new plant to enable greater efficiencies and streamlined processes.

The restructuring was done at Jiangxi Zhongmei to support long-term growth and future stability during uncertainties. This was undertaken cautiously and in line with the strong core focus that Jiangxi Zhongmei had developed. It is about positioning for long-term growth rather

than short-term day-to-day survival. In this phase, firms tended to follow an entrepreneurially driven reconfiguration of assets, leveraging existing resources and entering new geographic territories. The build for the future strategy has been seen as re-complicating the business by adding back some of the complexity removed during cost-cutting and retrenchment. It has been argued that a performance improvement strategy is only successful when the firm in question has been left with the capacity for self-renewal to be agile in responding to changing circumstances in the future (Ghoshal, 2021). The firm can replenish and renew and is described as the most challenging stage to attain. It is difficult to maintain momentum to keep the firm agile enough to transform and not get "stuck" in its current position or revert to a usual way of operating.

During turbulent times, there was a change in the top management team at Jiangxi Zhongmei. Replacement of part or all of the Top Management Team (TMT) is often advocated. Some research has identified the replacement of the TMT as one of the first actions that a firm should take as a precondition for almost all successful performance improvement (Lohrke, 2014). In his research into organizational decline, Whetten (2016) identified that incumbent managers may fear taking responsibility for failure. As such do not have the incentive to halt the implementation of problem strategies. Instead, they tend to pour good money after bad in the hope of salvaging the operation and their reputations.

Gopinath also found that the incumbent management may not want to admit the firm was in difficulty. Instead, it would rely on well-rehearsed responses and indulge in self-deception", explaining that this may continue until the firm is in severe decline. Long-serving senior managers may also be too ensconced in decline-causing extant strategies to accept the need for change (Barker & Patterson, 2012). When new external senior managers join a firm, they may be better equipped to deal with the present psychological, sociological, and general issues. The

change in the top management team has symbolic power. It is a sign that the current situation is no longer tenable. The firm is serious in its willingness to change and that the turnaround process has begun (Boyne, 2016).

These arguments are also highlighted by Grinyer et al. (2010), who found that while 55% of the successful well-performed firms during turbulent times had a change of leadership. More important was that the new leadership brought a new committed, positive approach. This was closely linked to the injection of new values, new vision, strong drive, and improved motivation and communication. Subsequently, several other changes to the TMT, including external appointments were made. It is too early to comment on the long-term sustainability of these actions, but the short-term recovery has been marked. While the European and US motor vehicle markets declined a further 9% between 2009 and 2011, Harley-Davidson's net profits turned around to US\$146m in 2010, rising to US\$599m in 2011, with sales revenues also up by 11% since the recovery strategy was initiated.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATION

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's summary, study conclusion, and study recommendations based on the findings established in the preceding chapter. This chapter summarizes the study on the strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times. It also outlines the study conclusions and gives study recommendations based on the study's findings.

#### 5.2 Summary

The study revealed that the most dominant strategy adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei was the use of technology to promote remote work processes and prevent physical interactions. Jiangxi Zhongmei had adopted several strategies for performance improvement. It further showed that all the strategies used were appropriate and necessary to address the actual and anticipated challenges resulting from the turbulent times. The responses also brought out asset retrenchment at Jiangxi Zhongmei during the 2008/2009 economic recession and recently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to the responder, layoff choices are often challenging. There is a chance that asset sales may limit future strategic alternatives, yet they may be required to create revenue and decrease losses. In such a circumstance, survival and the desire to guarantee continuity seem to be the guiding principles for decision-making (Gopinath, 2011). Jiangxi Zhongmei was required to prioritize key business operations and eliminate non-core ones. Additionally, the company continued the activities for which it was renowned in the past. Jiangxi Zhongmei enhanced its likelihood of recovery by catering only to the demands of its core clients in

order to strengthen or grow the company's current competitive advantage. Jiangxi Zhongmei restructured their operations in preparation for future economic uncertainty. Bartlett (2019) says that this may be achieved by ensuring that all managers, regardless of level, operate as leaders and comprehend the significance of the individual employee, their behaviors, and how their actions have a substantial influence on the firm's flexibility. Other strategies pursued by Jiangxi Zhongmei include Remote work processes, cost efficiencies, and adoption of new technology (Virtual meetings).

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The study was guided by one main objective: establishing Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement during turbulent times. Based on the study's objective, the findings imply that it is essential to anticipate and apply appropriate strategies to manage the resultant challenges of turbulent times and still maintain good performance.

From the analysis, six (6) essential strategies were adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei, which positively impacted performance. The strategies include using technology to promote remote work processes and prevent physical interactions, cost efficiencies, asset reduction, build for the future, and top management change.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

Economic uncertainties significantly affect the operations of construction companies. This is because they mostly rely on imports as raw materials. Therefore, this study recommends establishing a special fund to caution Jiangxi Zhongmei and other construction companies against unprecedented losses and imminent collapse during harsh economic times. The study recommends introducing risk management measures in all construction firms to assess risks and devise potential solutions to unprecedented harsh economic turbulence. There is a need



for a harmonized risk management framework for all construction firms. This will provide guidelines and procedures to be followed in the event of the occurrence of economic turbulence.

On policy and practice recommendation, the study suggests that governments should give reaction solutions or measures to the public to guide them do self protection during turbulent times such as Covid-19 pandemic. What's more , the governments should set aside special financial reserves to caution companies against collapse during turbulent times such as Covid-19 pandemic. Also, the government should also compel all organizations to set aside special funds to safeguard themselves against disruptions and risks during unforeseen events such as Covid- 19 pandemics .

This study acts as a source of information to other studies as a secondary source for the researchers in strategy for improvement, critical in economics. Therefore, the study recommends the need for all institutions of higher learning to introduce crisis management for all their management programs. This will address the problem of eminent collapse of firms during pandemics and other related forms of turbulence such as the economic recession of 2008/2009.

The study findings established that most strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement are closely and positively related to its endurance in turbulent times. These findings have a positive implication for the strategic conflict model. The pertinence of utilizing strategic conflict model standards can be set as one of a kind. For instance, a firm with complete dominance over an industry should not have to be as mindful of the opponent company's diversions as an organization in an industry where uniformly scattered or inconspicuous, likewise strengthening the statute they need for a technique is pushed through the duration rivalry.

The study's findings are that economic uncertainties significantly affect the operations of construction companies; these findings have a positive implication with contingency theory which indicates that an organization could use any of several different forms under its given conditions. The contingency approach was further refined when it was shown that subunits of the organization might have different sub-environments indicating the need for differing forms of organization.

### **5.5 Limitation of the Study**

Most of the senior managers interviewed were not fluent speakers of English, therefore, making it challenging to translate what they say in oral Chinese to professional written English.

There was general reluctance by some interviewees to respond due to fear of victimization or disciplinary action against them. However, after some reassurance and confirmation of the senior management's approval, they were interviewed. The busy official schedules of the managers lengthened the time taken to collect data from all of them. However, despite this challenge, a reasonable response rate was attained in the end.

### **5.6 Suggestions for Further Research**

A similar study on the same organization will be necessary after a particular duration, preferable in the next five years, to establish the long-term effects of the turbulence caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges and strategies highlighted were those experienced in the short run. Similar studies may also be done in other industries on the same topic to acquire new knowledge. A different industry may bring a different perspective of the strategies used to improve performance during turbulent times.

A study can measure the implementation and effectiveness of the strategies used. The implementation aspects can provide helpful insights when compared with the financial performance of the studied firm. Organizations adopt different strategies, and a measure of this would be beneficial information to establish a relationship between the implementation of the strategy and the financial performance.

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## Appendix I: Interview Guide

This interview intends to assess strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei for performance improvement in turbulent times. The information provided is for academic purposes only. Your time will be highly appreciated.

### Section A: Personal details

1. Name of the respondent (optional).....

2. Highest level of education attained?

CERTIFICATE  DIPLOMA  MASTERS  DEGREE

3. Position in the Company

Project Manager  Procurement Manager  Accounting Manager  Human Resource Manager  Operations Manager

### Section B: General questions

1. What is the role of strategic management amid turbulent times in the organization?

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2. How can an organization maintain a match between the environment and the business strategy to increase its performance improvement in the market?

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3. What are the strategies adopted by the firm amid turbulent times (During CORONA-19) ?

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4. Does the firm implement these strategies?

Yes () No () if yes explain

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5. What are the advantages associated with the use of the strategies such as online meetings and full use digital payment?

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6. How has these strategies adopted transformed and shape the company?

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7. Explain how the adoption of strategies gained momentum and diffused across the company.

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8. Are you familiar with the concept of strategic responses? What are the environmental factors that influence such responses?

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9. What are the competitive strategies adopted by Jiangxi Zhongmei in Kenya? Are they effective?

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10. What is the relationship between the competitive strategies and the performance of commercial banks?

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11. What are the challenges Jiangxi Zhongmei face in implementing strategies?

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12. What is the significance of strategies to the business performance of Jiangxi Zhongmei?

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13. Any other views, e.g., additional comments and complicated wording.

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