

Strategic Planning, Innovation, and Employee Performance in the Nigerian Public Service: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Strategic planning is a critical management tool for enhancing service delivery, institutional efficiency, innovation, and employee performance in the public sector. Despite successive reforms, the Nigerian public service continues to experience poor employee performance due to weak strategic implementation, bureaucratic rigidity, inadequate innovation, and limited leadership commitment. This study employed a qualitative research design to examine the relationship between strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance in the Nigerian public service. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with senior managers, middle-level administrators, and policy implementation officers from selected federal and state public institutions. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that strategic planning improves employee performance when organisational goals are clearly communicated, employees participate in planning processes, leadership demonstrates commitment, and innovation is embedded in organisational practices. Innovation emerged as a critical mechanism linking strategic planning with enhanced productivity, service quality, accountability, and organisational effectiveness. However, inadequate funding, political interference, weak monitoring systems, resistance to change, and limited technological capacity constrain effective implementation. The study concludes that strategic planning should be institutionalised as a continuous strategic management process that promotes innovation, employee engagement, and adaptive leadership. It recommends strengthening strategic leadership, advancing digital innovation, institutionalising performance-based management, and promoting continuous organisational learning to improve public service performance in Nigeria.

Background to the Study

Public sector organisations across the world operate in an increasingly complex environment characterised by rapid technological change, fiscal constraints, heightened citizen expectations, global competitiveness, and demands for transparency and accountability. These dynamics have compelled governments to shift from traditional bureaucratic models towards strategic and performance-oriented systems of governance. Within this changing administrative landscape, strategic planning has emerged as a fundamental management instrument for improving organisational effectiveness, fostering innovation, and enhancing employee performance. Rather than serving merely as a procedural requirement, strategic planning has evolved into a continuous management process through which organisations establish long-term priorities, align resources with strategic objectives, anticipate environmental uncertainties, and create mechanisms for sustainable institutional development. Contemporary evidence consistently demonstrates that organisations with robust strategic planning systems are better positioned to improve service delivery, strengthen organisational resilience, and achieve superior workforce outcomes.

Strategic planning refers to a systematic and participatory process through which organisations formulate their mission, vision, strategic objectives, implementation strategies, and performance indicators to achieve long-term organisational goals. Unlike operational planning, which focuses primarily on routine activities, strategic planning integrates environmental scanning, stakeholder engagement, resource allocation, implementation mechanisms, and performance evaluation into a coherent framework for organisational transformation. Within the public service, strategic planning facilitates policy coherence, institutional coordination, prudent resource utilisation, and evidence-based decision-making while strengthening organisational accountability and responsiveness to citizens' needs. Numerous studies have reported that effective strategic planning significantly improves organisational adaptability, employee commitment, and institutional performance when supported by committed leadership and effective implementation mechanisms.

The growing emphasis on strategic planning has coincided with global public sector reforms inspired by New Public Management (NPM), Public Value Management (PVM), Results-Based Management (RBM), and more recently, digital governance paradigms. These reform movements advocate a transition from rule-bound bureaucratic administration to performance-driven governance characterised by strategic leadership, innovation, citizen-centred service delivery, and measurable organisational outcomes. Consequently, governments increasingly require ministries, departments, and agencies to prepare strategic plans that define institutional priorities, establish performance targets, and strengthen organisational accountability. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these reforms depends less on the production of strategic documents than on their successful implementation through capable employees, adaptive leadership, and supportive organisational cultures.

Innovation has become one of the defining characteristics of high-performing public institutions. Historically associated with private-sector competitiveness, innovation is now recognised as an indispensable component of effective public administration. Public sector innovation encompasses the development and implementation of new administrative processes, digital technologies, organisational structures, policy instruments, service delivery models, and managerial practices that create public value and improve institutional performance. Innovation enables public organisations to respond proactively to changing societal needs, improve operational efficiency, reduce bureaucratic delays, strengthen transparency, and enhance citizen satisfaction. Increasingly, scholars argue that innovation should be viewed not as an isolated organisational activity but as a strategic capability embedded within organisational planning and leadership systems.

Strategic planning provides the institutional foundation upon which innovation flourishes. Through strategic planning, organisations identify emerging challenges, encourage creative problem-solving, allocate resources to innovation initiatives, and establish performance systems that reward continuous improvement. Strategic planning also promotes organisational learning by creating opportunities for employees to participate in decision-making, share knowledge, and contribute innovative ideas for improving service delivery. Recent empirical studies demonstrate that innovation frequently mediates the relationship between strategic planning and organisational performance, suggesting that strategic planning enhances institutional effectiveness primarily by creating environments that encourage innovative behaviour among employees.

Employee performance remains one of the most important determinants of organisational success in public administration. Public servants constitute the principal mechanism through which government policies are translated into tangible developmental outcomes. Their competence, commitment, responsiveness, creativity, efficiency, and professionalism directly influence policy implementation, institutional effectiveness, and citizens' trust in government. Consequently, improving employee performance has become a strategic priority for governments seeking to strengthen governance and achieve sustainable national development. Recent studies increasingly emphasise that employee performance extends beyond productivity to include innovation, adaptability, collaboration, service quality, accountability, and organisational citizenship behaviours.

Within the Nigerian public service, however, employee performance continues to face significant institutional challenges despite decades of administrative reforms. Successive reform initiatives—including civil service reforms, SERVICOM, the Treasury Single Account (TSA), the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), and broader public sector modernisation programmes—have sought to improve institutional efficiency, accountability, and service delivery. Although these reforms have introduced important structural improvements, implementation challenges continue to undermine their effectiveness. Persistent bureaucratic rigidity, political interference, inadequate

leadership commitment, weak monitoring systems, limited employee participation, and poor technological infrastructure continue to constrain workforce productivity and organisational innovation.

Recent qualitative evidence further indicates that performance management systems within the Nigerian public service remain characterised by weak institutionalisation, subjective appraisal processes, inadequate digital integration, and poor linkage between performance evaluation, rewards, and career progression. These weaknesses reduce employee motivation, undermine accountability, and weaken the strategic alignment between organisational objectives and individual performance. Anam and Anyin (2025), for example, argue that effective performance management in the Nigerian public service requires stronger institutional frameworks, digital transformation, objective performance metrics, and continuous monitoring to support policy implementation and public sector reform.

Another significant challenge confronting many Nigerian public institutions is the tendency to regard strategic planning as a statutory compliance exercise rather than a dynamic management process. Strategic plans are frequently developed to satisfy government requirements or donor expectations but receive limited managerial attention during implementation. Consequently, organisational visions often remain disconnected from operational realities, employee responsibilities, resource allocation decisions, and innovation initiatives. This disconnect contributes to poor strategic execution, duplication of functions, inefficient resource utilisation, low employee morale, and limited institutional learning. Similar observations have been reported in recent Nigerian studies, which conclude that the performance benefits of strategic planning are realised only when planning is integrated with leadership commitment, employee engagement, innovation, and continuous performance monitoring.

Innovation within Nigerian public organisations also remain constrained by institutional and cultural barriers. Hierarchical administrative structures, centralised decision-making processes, limited technological infrastructure, inadequate investment in research and development, resistance to organisational change, and weak knowledge management systems often discourage creativity and experimentation among public servants. These institutional limitations reduce the capacity of employees to develop innovative solutions to emerging governance challenges and limit the ability of public institutions to respond effectively to rapidly changing environmental conditions. Consequently, strengthening innovation has become an essential requirement for improving employee performance and achieving sustainable public sector transformation.

Although a substantial body of literature has examined the relationship between strategic planning and organisational performance, the majority of existing studies employ quantitative methodologies that focus primarily on statistical associations between organisational variables. Such approaches provide valuable empirical evidence but often fail to capture the contextual realities, lived experiences, organisational cultures,

leadership dynamics, and implementation challenges that shape strategic planning processes within public institutions. Moreover, studies examining the simultaneous interaction among strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance in the Nigerian public service remain limited, particularly from a qualitative perspective.

This study addresses this gap by adopting a qualitative approach to explore how strategic planning influences innovation and employee performance within the Nigerian public service. Through in-depth interviews with senior administrators, middle-level managers, and policy implementation officers, the study seeks to generate rich contextual insights into the organisational processes through which strategic planning shapes innovation, employee behaviour, and institutional performance. A qualitative design is particularly appropriate because it enables an exploration of participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of organisational realities that are often overlooked in survey-based research.

The study contributes to public administration scholarship in three important ways. First, it extends existing knowledge by examining strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance within a single integrated conceptual framework. Second, it provides context-specific qualitative evidence from the Nigerian public service, where institutional complexities, governance reforms, and administrative traditions differ from those of developed countries. Third, the study generates practical recommendations for policymakers and public sector managers seeking to institutionalise strategic planning as a catalyst for innovation, employee engagement, organisational learning, and improved public service delivery. Through these contributions, the study advances scholarly understanding of strategic management within developing public sector contexts and provides evidence capable of informing future public sector reform initiatives in Nigeria and comparable administrative environments.

Statement of the Problem

The contemporary public service operates in an environment characterised by increasing demands for efficiency, accountability, transparency, innovation, and citizen-centred service delivery. Governments are expected to respond effectively to rapidly changing socio-economic conditions, technological advancements, and complex policy challenges while operating within constrained financial and human resources. In response to these pressures, strategic planning has become an essential management tool for aligning organisational objectives with available resources, enhancing institutional performance, promoting innovation, and improving employee productivity. Despite the widespread adoption of strategic planning across public sector organisations, evidence suggests that many public institutions continue to experience persistent implementation challenges that limit the realisation of intended organisational outcomes (Bryson, Edwards, & Van Slyke, 2018; George, Walker, & Monster, 2019).

In Nigeria, successive public sector reforms have sought to strengthen governance through strategic management, performance-based administration, digital

transformation, and institutional accountability. Reform initiatives such as the Civil Service Reform Programme, SERVICOM, the Treasury Single Account (TSA), the Integrated Payroll and Personnel Information System (IPPIS), and the National Strategy for Public Service Reforms were introduced to improve efficiency, transparency, and employee performance. However, despite these reforms, the Nigerian public service continues to face challenges including bureaucratic inefficiency, weak policy implementation, inadequate employee motivation, poor strategic execution, resistance to organisational change, and limited institutional innovation. These challenges have continued to undermine service delivery and public confidence in government institutions (Anam & Anyin, 2025).

One of the major concerns is that strategic planning in many public institutions has remained largely ceremonial rather than transformational. Strategic plans are often prepared to satisfy statutory or administrative requirements but are inadequately implemented due to weak leadership commitment, insufficient employee involvement, poor communication of organisational goals, limited resource allocation, and ineffective monitoring and evaluation systems. Consequently, employees frequently lack a clear understanding of organisational priorities, resulting in low commitment, reduced productivity, duplication of responsibilities, and weak organisational performance.

Innovation, which has become a central driver of organisational competitiveness and institutional effectiveness globally, remains relatively underdeveloped within many Nigerian public organisations. Administrative rigidity, hierarchical organisational structures, political interference, inadequate technological infrastructure, weak knowledge management systems, and a culture resistant to change continue to discourage innovation among public servants. Without an enabling environment that supports creativity, experimentation, organisational learning, and digital transformation, strategic planning is unlikely to produce sustainable improvements in employee performance and service delivery.

Although previous empirical studies have established significant relationships between strategic planning and organisational performance, much of the existing literature has concentrated on quantitative measurements of organisational outcomes. Most studies have relied on survey data analysed through regression models or structural equation modelling to examine direct relationships among strategic variables. While these studies provide useful statistical evidence, they offer limited understanding of how strategic planning is experienced by employees responsible for implementing organisational strategies or how innovation mediates the relationship between planning and employee performance within the unique institutional context of the Nigerian public service.

Furthermore, relatively few studies have simultaneously examined strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance using qualitative approaches capable of capturing organisational culture, leadership dynamics, employee perceptions, and implementation realities. Understanding these contextual factors is essential because

organisational performance is shaped not only by formal strategic documents but also by employees' experiences, organisational values, institutional leadership, and the capacity of organisations to encourage innovation. This study therefore addresses this important gap by exploring how strategic planning influences innovation and employee performance within the Nigerian public service through a qualitative inquiry. By examining the experiences of public sector managers and employees, the study seeks to generate context-specific evidence capable of informing policy reforms, strengthening strategic management practices, and improving organisational effectiveness across public sector institutions in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

To explore the influence of strategic planning on innovation and employee performance in the Nigerian public service using a qualitative research approach. The study specifically seeks to:

1. Examine how strategic planning is conceptualised and implemented within the Nigerian public service.
2. Explore the influence of strategic planning on innovation in public sector organisations.
3. Investigate how innovation contributes to employee performance in the Nigerian public service.
4. Identify organisational and institutional factors that facilitate or hinder the implementation of strategic planning.
5. Examine the experiences and perceptions of public servants regarding the relationship between strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance.
6. Develop policy recommendations for strengthening strategic planning and promoting innovation to improve employee performance in the Nigerian public service.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. How is strategic planning implemented within the Nigerian public service?
2. In what ways does strategic planning influence innovation in public sector organisations?
3. How does innovation affect employee performance within the Nigerian public service?
4. What organisational factors facilitate or constrain the implementation of strategic planning?
5. How do public servants perceive the relationship between strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance?
6. What policy measures can strengthen strategic planning and innovation to improve employee performance in the Nigerian public service?

Literature Review

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning has evolved from a traditional organisational planning mechanism into a comprehensive management philosophy that guides institutional transformation, resource allocation, and organisational competitiveness. Within the public sector, strategic planning provides a systematic process through which organisations establish long-term goals, assess internal and external environments, formulate implementation strategies, allocate resources, and evaluate organisational performance. Unlike conventional operational planning, strategic planning integrates environmental scanning, stakeholder engagement, risk assessment, performance measurement, and continuous organisational learning into a unified framework for institutional development.

Bryson (2018) defines strategic planning as a disciplined effort aimed at producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape organisational identity, priorities, and future direction. George et al. (2019) argue that strategic planning improves organisational effectiveness by aligning institutional resources with environmental opportunities while enhancing organisational adaptability. Similarly, Poister, Pitts, and Edwards (2010) maintain that strategic planning strengthens organisational coordination, accountability, and decision-making within public institutions. Within developing countries, strategic planning has increasingly become an essential component of public sector reforms aimed at improving governance, promoting transparency, and enhancing institutional effectiveness. In Nigeria, strategic planning has been incorporated into numerous public sector reform initiatives designed to improve policy implementation and service delivery. However, successful implementation remains dependent on leadership commitment, employee participation, effective communication, resource availability, and institutional culture.

Strategic planning consists of several interconnected dimensions, including strategic vision, mission formulation, environmental analysis, stakeholder engagement, strategic goal setting, implementation planning, performance monitoring, and organisational evaluation. These dimensions collectively determine whether strategic plans become effective management tools or remain merely administrative documents. Contemporary studies suggest that employee participation significantly enhances strategic implementation because employees develop greater ownership of organisational goals when actively involved in planning processes. Likewise, effective communication of strategic objectives improves employee understanding, motivation, and accountability, thereby strengthening organisational performance.

Innovation in the Public Service

Innovation refers to the introduction and application of new ideas, technologies, processes, administrative systems, or service delivery approaches that improve organisational effectiveness and create public value. While innovation has traditionally been associated with private sector competitiveness, contemporary public administration

recognises innovation as a critical determinant of effective governance and sustainable institutional performance. Public sector innovation encompasses digital government initiatives, administrative reforms, policy innovations, organisational restructuring, service redesign, and technological transformation. These innovations enable governments to improve efficiency, reduce operational costs, strengthen accountability, enhance transparency, and increase citizen satisfaction. Innovation within public organisations is influenced by organisational leadership, strategic vision, institutional culture, employee competence, technological infrastructure, and knowledge management systems. Organisations with supportive leadership and participatory strategic planning processes are more likely to encourage creativity, experimentation, and continuous organisational improvement.

Digital transformation has become one of the most significant manifestations of public sector innovation. The adoption of electronic governance systems, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, big data analytics, and digital service delivery platforms has fundamentally transformed public administration across many countries. However, the Nigerian public service continues to face challenges relating to digital infrastructure, funding constraints, technological capacity, and resistance to organisational change, thereby limiting innovation. Strategic planning provides the institutional platform through which innovation can be systematically integrated into organisational processes. Organisations that strategically prioritise innovation generally demonstrate higher employee engagement, stronger organisational learning, greater institutional resilience, and improved service delivery.

Employee Performance

Employee performance represents the extent to which employees effectively accomplish assigned responsibilities while contributing to organisational goals and overall institutional effectiveness. Within public administration, employee performance extends beyond productivity to include service quality, accountability, responsiveness, innovation, ethical conduct, collaboration, adaptability, and commitment to public service values. Modern performance management systems increasingly evaluate employees using multidimensional indicators rather than focusing solely on task completion. Contemporary indicators include quality of service delivery, customer satisfaction, innovation capability, teamwork, organisational citizenship behaviour, knowledge sharing, and continuous professional development.

Several organisational factors influence employee performance, including leadership effectiveness, strategic communication, employee engagement, organisational culture, performance appraisal systems, training and development, technological support, and resource availability. Strategic planning contributes significantly to employee performance by providing role clarity, organisational direction, measurable performance expectations, and opportunities for employee participation in decision-making. Employees who understand organisational priorities and perceive leadership commitment to strategic implementation are generally more motivated, productive, innovative, and committed to achieving institutional objectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Dynamic Capabilities Theory (DCT).

Resource-Based View (RBV)

The Resource-Based View was pioneered by Wernerfelt (1984) and subsequently developed by Barney (1991), who argued that an organisation's competitive advantage depends on its ability to acquire, develop, and effectively utilise valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources. Unlike traditional theories that attribute organisational success primarily to external environmental factors, RBV emphasises the strategic significance of internal organisational resources and capabilities. Within public administration, organisational resources extend beyond financial assets to include human capital, organisational knowledge, leadership competence, institutional culture, technological infrastructure, administrative systems, and strategic planning capabilities. These resources collectively determine the capacity of public institutions to implement policies effectively, innovate continuously, and deliver quality public services.

Strategic planning serves as a mechanism through which public organisations identify, coordinate, and optimise these resources towards achieving institutional objectives. Effective strategic planning aligns organisational capabilities with long-term priorities while ensuring that employees possess the knowledge, skills, motivation, and resources necessary to implement strategic initiatives successfully. Consequently, organisations that strategically invest in employee development, digital technologies, organisational learning, and knowledge management are more likely to achieve improved employee performance and institutional effectiveness. The Resource-Based View is particularly relevant to this study because employee competence, organisational knowledge, leadership quality, and innovation capacity constitute strategic assets that influence organisational performance. Strategic planning enables public organisations to identify these strategic resources and deploy them efficiently in response to changing governance demands. However, RBV has been criticised for placing excessive emphasis on internal organisational resources while paying relatively limited attention to rapidly changing external environments. Public organisations operate within highly dynamic political, economic, technological, and social contexts that require continuous adaptation beyond resource possession alone. This limitation necessitates the incorporation of Dynamic Capabilities Theory.

Dynamic Capabilities Theory

Dynamic Capabilities Theory emerged from the work of Teece, Pisano, and Shuen (1997) and was further developed by Teece (2007, 2018). The theory argues that sustainable organisational performance depends not only on possessing valuable resources but also on the ability to continuously integrate, build, and reconfigure organisational competencies in response to environmental changes. Dynamic capabilities refer to an organisation's capacity to sense emerging opportunities and threats, seize strategic opportunities through innovation, and transform organisational structures, resources,

and processes to sustain long-term performance. The theory therefore emphasises organisational adaptability, strategic flexibility, continuous learning, innovation, and leadership responsiveness. Within the public service, dynamic capabilities are reflected in the ability of government institutions to adapt to technological change, evolving public expectations, policy reforms, digital transformation, and increasingly complex governance challenges. Strategic planning plays a central role in developing these capabilities by encouraging environmental scanning, stakeholder engagement, organisational learning, innovation, and continuous performance improvement.

Innovation represents one of the most significant manifestations of dynamic capabilities. Organisations that cultivate innovative cultures are better positioned to redesign administrative processes, improve service delivery, adopt emerging technologies, and strengthen employee performance. Public institutions that fail to develop dynamic capabilities often experience policy implementation failures, organisational rigidity, declining employee motivation, and poor service delivery. The Nigerian public service operates within a rapidly changing governance environment characterised by digital transformation, increasing public accountability, economic uncertainty, and growing citizen expectations. Consequently, strategic planning must extend beyond routine administrative planning to become an adaptive management process capable of fostering innovation, organisational learning, and continuous institutional improvement.

While the Resource-Based View and Dynamic Capabilities Theory provide a comprehensive explanation of the relationship among strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance, the Resource-Based View explains what organisational resources are essential for improving performance, while Dynamic Capabilities Theory explains how organisations continuously utilise, renew, and transform those resources through innovation and strategic adaptation. Within the Nigerian public service, strategic planning serves as the connecting mechanism between organisational resources and dynamic capabilities. Through effective strategic planning, organisations identify their strategic assets, develop employee competencies, encourage innovation, allocate resources efficiently, and establish performance management systems that improve employee productivity and institutional effectiveness.

The conceptual relationship underpinning this study is illustrated as follows:

Strategic Planning

- i). Resource Allocation
- ii). Organisational Learning
- iii). Innovation
- iv). Employee Performance
- v). Improved Public Service Delivery

Accordingly, this study argues that innovation functions as an important organisational mechanism through which strategic planning translates into improved employee performance within the Nigerian public service.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on strategic planning have consistently reported positive associations between strategic planning and organisational performance across both private and public sector organisations. Nevertheless, findings vary considerably depending on organisational context, leadership commitment, implementation capacity, employee involvement, and institutional culture. Bryson, Edwards, and Van Slyke (2018) examined strategic planning within public organisations and found that planning contributes significantly to organisational effectiveness when accompanied by leadership commitment, stakeholder participation, and continuous implementation monitoring. The study emphasised that strategic plans alone do not improve performance; rather, successful implementation determines organisational outcomes.

George et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of strategic planning literature and concluded that organisations adopting participatory planning approaches generally experience higher organisational performance than those relying on top-down planning processes. Their review further indicated that employee participation improves commitment to organisational goals and facilitates successful strategy implementation. Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2020) investigated strategic planning practices in public organisations and reported that planning effectiveness depends largely on implementation quality, organisational learning, and performance evaluation systems. The authors observed that organisations integrating strategic planning with innovation initiatives demonstrated superior organisational performance.

In the Nigerian context, studies have similarly identified strategic planning as an important determinant of organisational effectiveness. However, implementation challenges continue to limit its impact. Existing research frequently identifies inadequate funding, political interference, weak leadership commitment, poor communication, limited employee participation, and insufficient monitoring mechanisms as major constraints affecting strategic implementation within public institutions. Research on innovation similarly demonstrates its positive influence on organisational performance. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2019) argues that innovation enhances public sector responsiveness, improves administrative efficiency, and strengthens citizen satisfaction through better service delivery systems. Digital innovation, in particular, has become increasingly important in modern public administration because it improves transparency, accountability, and institutional effectiveness.

Studies examining employee performance consistently identify strategic leadership, employee engagement, organisational culture, continuous training, and innovation as important determinants of workforce productivity. Employees working within innovative organisations generally exhibit higher levels of commitment, creativity, adaptability, and organisational citizenship behaviour than those operating within highly bureaucratic environments. Despite these contributions, empirical evidence from Nigeria remains dominated by quantitative survey research. Most studies utilise structured

questionnaires analysed through correlation, regression, or structural equation modelling. While these methods establish statistical relationships, they provide limited understanding of employees' lived experiences regarding strategic planning and innovation. Very few studies have employed qualitative methodologies to investigate how public servants perceive strategic planning, experience organisational innovation, and interpret the factors influencing their performance. Consequently, there remains insufficient contextual evidence explaining the organisational processes through which strategic planning influences innovation and employee performance within the Nigerian public service.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore how strategic planning influences innovation and employee performance in the Nigerian public service. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it provides rich insights into participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of organisational practices that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods. The study employed a multiple case study approach, involving selected federal and state public sector organisations that have established strategic planning frameworks. Participants comprised senior management staff, directors, heads of departments, planning officers, and experienced administrative personnel purposively selected based on their knowledge of strategic planning and organisational management. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews, complemented by document analysis of strategic plans, annual reports, policy documents, and performance reports. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, involving familiarisation with the data, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition, and interpretation. To ensure trustworthiness, credibility was enhanced through member checking and triangulation, while dependability and confirmability were strengthened through audit trails and reflexive documentation. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, and institutional approval, were strictly observed throughout the study.

Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis generated six interrelated themes that explain how strategic planning influences innovation and employee performance within the Nigerian public service. The findings reveal that strategic planning extends beyond the preparation of strategic documents; rather, its effectiveness depends on leadership commitment, employee participation, organisational learning, institutional support, and the integration of innovation into everyday administrative practices.

Objective 1: Strategic Planning Provides Organisational Direction and Improves Employee Focus

Participants consistently emphasised that strategic planning provides a clear organisational direction by defining institutional priorities, expected outcomes, and

performance expectations. Employees indicated that organisations with clearly articulated strategic goals enable staff to understand their responsibilities and align their activities with broader organisational objectives.

One participant observed:

"When employees understand the vision of the organisation and know exactly what management wants to achieve, they become more focused and committed to their responsibilities."

This finding suggests that strategic planning enhances role clarity and reduces ambiguity in task execution. The result corroborates Bryson (2018), who argued that strategic planning improves organisational coordination by aligning organisational resources and employee activities toward common objectives. It also supports the Resource-Based View, which identifies human resources as strategic assets whose productivity depends on effective organisational coordination.

Objective 2: Employee Participation Strengthens Strategic Implementation

Participants overwhelmingly indicated that employee involvement during strategic planning enhances ownership, commitment, and successful implementation. Respondents explained that when employees contribute to planning processes, they better understand organisational priorities and demonstrate stronger commitment to achieving strategic goals. Conversely, participants reported that strategies imposed through top-down decision-making frequently encounter resistance because employees perceive them as management directives rather than collective organisational goals. These findings reinforce contemporary strategic management literature emphasising participatory planning as an essential determinant of successful strategy implementation. Employee participation also strengthens organisational trust, communication, and accountability while promoting collaborative problem-solving.

Objective 3: Innovation Serves as the Bridge Between Strategic Planning and Employee Performance

A dominant finding emerging from the interviews is that innovation constitutes the principal mechanism through which strategic planning improves employee performance. Participants explained that strategic planning encourages organisations to adopt digital technologies, redesign administrative processes, strengthen knowledge sharing, and improve service delivery systems. Several respondents highlighted the increasing adoption of electronic document management systems, digital communication platforms, online performance monitoring, and automated administrative procedures as examples of innovation stimulated by strategic planning.

One director remarked:

"Innovation makes work easier. Strategic planning helps management identify better ways of doing things instead of relying on outdated procedures."

The findings suggest that innovation enhances employee efficiency, reduces bureaucratic delays, improves decision-making, and strengthens organisational responsiveness. This supports Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which emphasises continuous organisational adaptation through innovation and learning.

Objective 4: Leadership Commitment Determines Strategic Success

Leadership emerged as one of the strongest determinants of effective strategic planning. Participants consistently observed that strategic plans succeed only when organisational leaders demonstrate commitment through resource allocation, continuous monitoring, effective communication, and employee motivation. Respondents noted that many strategic plans fail not because they are poorly designed but because organisational leaders gradually lose commitment during implementation. Leadership was therefore viewed as the driving force behind organisational innovation, employee motivation, and performance improvement. This finding aligns with contemporary public management literature, which recognises transformational leadership as an important catalyst for innovation, organisational learning, and strategic implementation.

Objective 5: Organisational Barriers Limit Innovation and Employee Performance

Despite recognising the benefits of strategic planning, participants identified numerous institutional barriers affecting implementation. The most frequently mentioned constraints included:

1. Inadequate funding;
2. Bureaucratic procedures;
3. Political interference;
4. Poor technological infrastructure;
5. Resistance to organisational change;
6. Inadequate employee training;
7. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems; and
8. Inconsistent government policies.

Respondents argued that these institutional weaknesses often prevent strategic plans from translating into measurable organisational improvements. The findings illustrate that successful strategic planning requires supportive institutional environments rather than merely producing planning documents.

Objective 6: Organisational Learning Enhances Sustainable Performance

Participants stressed that continuous learning, staff development, mentoring, and knowledge sharing significantly strengthen strategic implementation and innovation. Organisations that regularly invest in employee training were perceived to adapt more quickly to changing technological and policy environments. Employees also reported greater confidence in implementing reforms when management encouraged experimentation, collaborative learning, and continuous professional development. The findings therefore indicate that organisational learning represents an important strategic capability linking strategic planning with sustainable employee performance.

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrate that strategic planning significantly influences employee performance through multiple organisational mechanisms. Rather than exerting a direct effect alone, strategic planning improves employee performance by promoting organisational learning, encouraging employee participation, strengthening leadership commitment, and fostering innovation. The study confirms the assumptions of the Resource-Based View, which argues that employee competence, organisational knowledge, leadership quality, and institutional capabilities constitute valuable strategic resources. Strategic planning enables public organisations to coordinate these resources effectively toward achieving organisational objectives. Similarly, the findings validate Dynamic Capabilities Theory, which emphasises continuous adaptation through innovation and organisational learning. Participants consistently described innovation as the mechanism through which strategic planning improves employee productivity, service quality, and organisational effectiveness.

The findings further demonstrate that innovation should not be viewed solely as technological advancement but also as administrative reform, process improvement, collaborative decision-making, knowledge management, and organisational learning. These innovations collectively enhance employee effectiveness and improve institutional performance. Importantly, the study reveals that strategic planning alone cannot improve employee performance unless supported by committed leadership, employee engagement, adequate funding, technological infrastructure, and effective monitoring systems. This explains why many strategic plans within the Nigerian public service produce limited organisational outcomes despite being technically sound. The study contributes to public administration scholarship by demonstrating that strategic planning functions as a dynamic organisational capability that stimulates innovation, strengthens employee commitment, enhances organisational learning, and ultimately improves employee performance within the Nigerian public service.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship among strategic planning, innovation, and employee performance within the Nigerian public service using a qualitative research approach. The findings reveal that strategic planning serves as a strategic management tool that shapes organisational direction, facilitates innovation, strengthens employee commitment, and improves institutional performance. However, its effectiveness depends largely on the quality of implementation rather than the mere existence of strategic plans. The study established that innovation functions as the critical mechanism through which strategic planning translates into improved employee performance. Public organisations that encourage innovation through digital transformation, organisational learning, employee participation, and knowledge sharing demonstrate higher levels of productivity, service quality, and organisational effectiveness.

The study also identified leadership commitment, employee involvement, organisational culture, continuous learning, adequate resource allocation, and effective monitoring as

essential conditions for successful strategic implementation. Conversely, bureaucratic rigidity, political interference, inadequate funding, weak technological infrastructure, and resistance to organisational change remain significant barriers limiting innovation and employee performance within the Nigerian public service. Overall, the study concludes that strategic planning should evolve from being a routine administrative exercise into a dynamic strategic management process that continuously promotes innovation, organisational learning, adaptive leadership, and employee engagement. Such a transformation is essential for strengthening institutional effectiveness and improving public service delivery in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Institutionalise Participatory Strategic Planning: Public sector organisations should actively involve employees at all levels in the formulation, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of strategic plans to enhance ownership, commitment, and accountability.
2. Strengthen Strategic Leadership: Government should prioritise leadership development programmes that equip public sector managers with competencies in strategic thinking, innovation management, change leadership, and performance management.
3. Promote a Culture of Innovation: Public institutions should establish innovation units, encourage idea-generation platforms, recognise innovative employees, and create incentives that support continuous organisational improvement.
4. Accelerate Digital Transformation: Government should invest in digital infrastructure, integrated information systems, e-governance platforms, and emerging technologies to improve administrative efficiency, transparency, and employee productivity.
5. Enhance Employee Capacity Development: Continuous training, mentoring, coaching, and professional development programmes should be institutionalised to strengthen employees' strategic, technological, and innovative capabilities.
6. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: Public organisations should adopt performance-based management systems with clearly defined strategic indicators, regular performance reviews, and evidence-based feedback mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of strategic plans.
7. Reduce Bureaucratic Constraints: Administrative procedures should be streamlined to minimise unnecessary delays, encourage timely decision-making, and provide employees with greater flexibility to implement innovative solutions.
8. Improve Resource Allocation: Government should ensure that strategic plans are supported by adequate financial, technological, and human resources to facilitate effective implementation and sustainable organisational performance.
9. Encourage Organisational Learning: Public institutions should establish knowledge management systems, communities of practice, and cross-departmental learning initiatives to facilitate knowledge sharing, continuous improvement, and institutional memory.

10. Align Strategic Planning with Performance Management: Individual performance objectives should be directly linked to organisational strategic goals through transparent appraisal systems that reward innovation, accountability, collaboration, and measurable contributions to institutional performance.

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