

2021

Strategies for Reducing Conflicting Organizational Issues of Cross-Border Mergers and Acquisitions in West Africa

Ernest Mfobujong Ngwa
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Walden University

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Ernest Mfobujong Ngwa

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

Strategies for Reducing Conflicting Organizational Issues of Cross-Border Mergers and
Acquisitions in West Africa

by

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MS, Southern New Hampshire University, 2016

BS, Obafemi Awolowo University Ile-Ife Nigeria, 1994

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

June 2021

Abstract

West African companies witnessed a reduction in cross-border merger and acquisition (CBMA) activities in 2017 resulting in an \$11 billion decrease in foreign direct investment. In addition, West African CBMA executives who do not reduce postmerger organizational issues are less likely to attract foreign direct investment, resulting in lower economic productivity. Grounded in Tannenbaum and Schmidt's situational leadership theory, the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. The participants comprised five CBMA executives of organizations active in CBMA in West Africa who had successfully reduced organizational issues in CBMAs and increased economic productivity. Data were collected from semistructured interviews and reviews of company documents. Yin's five-step data analysis process, methodological triangulation, and thematic analysis were used to analyze the data. Three themes emerged: establishing the foundation, developing the team, and cascading the change. A key recommendation is for CBMA leaders to integrate teams from merging companies and establish a separate human resource team that oversees the integration process to ensure successful acculturation. The implications for social change include the potential for CBMA executives to increase business growth, resulting in increased employment leading to an improved standard of living for the people in local communities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research study to God Almighty, who has given me the strength and granted me the grace to complete this doctoral degree journey successfully. Also, to my parents Christina Awango (late) and Joseph Mfobujong, who instilled in me the quest for knowledge and funded my learning pathway, even in their difficult moments. And to my wife Akwa and kids Lumbih and Anye, thank you for the sacrifices of service.

Acknowledgments

Immeasurable gratitude to Dr. Matthew Knight, Dr. Lisa Cave, and Dr. Edward Paluch for making a remarkable impact on my success! To Dr. Matthew Knight, my doctoral chair and supportive mentor throughout this challenging Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) journey, may God richly bless him for all his support and time for me. To Dr. Lisa Cave, my second committee member, and Dr. Edward Paluch, my university research reviewer, thanks for the guidance and feedback throughout this memorable and rewarding academic experience. To Dr. Susan Davis, my DBA program director, thank you for the dedication to this program's success. Finally, to friends and family, for the eccentric encouragement, I am indebted.

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Section 1: Foundation of the Study

Leke and Yeboah-Amankwah (2018) analyzed a McKinsey Global Institute study and suggested Africa's labor force contribution to global innovations was on a rising trajectory. Leke and Yeboah-Amankwah opined Africa's labor force is expected to surpass China and India's labor forces by 2034, with a working-age population to exceed 1.5 billion in 2050. Some western multinational enterprises (MNEs) taking advantage of Africa's growth potential have exhibited leadership strategies with western approaches rather than contextualized approaches that reflect cultural and societal values, and these approaches have failed (Oppong, 2017). Some western MNEs in Africa divested more than \$2 billion worth of assets to MNEs from developing economies, reducing cross-border merger and acquisition (CBMA) sales (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD], 2017). CBMAs significantly contribute to West Africa's most needed foreign direct investment (FDI); however, CBMA professionals have a role in successfully achieving acculturation.

Background of the Problem

CBMA represents the leading form of target-company FDI (Kim & Trumbore, 2010). MNEs operate in difficult settings defined by conflicting institutional and cultural forces (Pereira & Malik, 2015). The human factor is a significant cause of organizational conflict in CBMA, substantially determining merger success or failure (Bingöl, 2017). Context-specificity plays a pivotal role in resolving an organizational conflict of CBMA issues (Bingöl, 2017). CBMA executives require new perceptions on negotiation-related factors for proper design and execution of CBMA transactions (Ahammad et al., 2016).

West Africa's FDI projects earned the most robust growth in the African continent with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 27.7% (Anyanwu & Yameogo, 2015), making the subregion a profitable destination for CBMAs.

Ghana is home to West Africa's trade and investment hub created by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) under the African Growth and Opportunity Act to attract investments and drive commercial expansion within the subregion and to the global markets (Cook, 2018). USAID (2020a) is reducing barriers to trade with and within West Africa by improving the efficiency and transparency of cross-border transactions, harmonizing safety and quality standards, and reducing the time and cost of doing business in the subregion. Within the framework of this trade hub's new model of private sector-led development, for every \$1 of public money spent on trade programs in West Africa, the hub leverages \$9 in private investment (USAID, 2020a). Nonetheless, CBMA in West Africa, like any other developing economy, will require different methodologies and processes and utilization of tools that help maintain objectivity through joint ventures, alliances, acquisitions, and strategic partnerships. Therefore, finding the right strategic fit is primordial in establishing local presence on the ground, meeting the priority targets, and making the right deals happen. In this study, I used a qualitative multiple case study approach to explore strategies CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity.

Problem Statement

Cultural insensitivities reduce CBMA activities, decreasing FDI that business leaders need to enhance productivity (Mayer et al., 2017). In 2017, reduction in CBMA activities resulted in an \$11 billion decrease in FDI in West African companies (UNCTAD, 2018). The general business problem is conflicting organizational issues reduce CBMA activities, decreasing FDI that business leaders need to enhance business economic productivity. The specific business problem is that some CBMA executives lack strategies to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. The targeted population comprised five CBMA executives of organizations active in CBMA in West Africa. Executives who use CBMA found an increase in FDI, leading to business growth and employment opportunities (Zheng et al., 2016). The implication for social change is business growth that could result in employment leading to an improved standard of living for the people in local communities.

Nature of the Study

The three research methods are qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Saunders et al., 2019). In the quantitative method, researchers use statistical means to analyze variables' relationships and groups' differences (E. Taylor & Hignett, 2014). The

quantitative method was not appropriate because I did not plan to examine the relationships among variables by testing hypotheses. The qualitative method is suitable for exploratory research in which researchers seek to understand a phenomenon through open-ended interview questions, observations, and documentation (Holloway & Galvin, 2016). Researchers use a qualitative method to understand the phenomenon from different individuals in organizations (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014). Mixed methods researchers incorporate qualitative and quantitative methodologies because a single method is not sufficient to explore the depth and the scope of the study phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The mixed methods approach was not necessary for this study because the quantitative method was not necessary to explore the phenomenon. The qualitative method was a good fit for this study because I explored through open-ended interview questions the strategies executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs.

Researchers use ethnographic, narrative, phenomenological, and case study research designs in qualitative studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Ethnographic researchers observe participants in the participants' natural cultural setting (Yin, 2018). In a narrative design, a researcher collects data on a sequence of events that took place and presents them in a storytelling format (Benson, 2014). Ethnography design and narrative design were not suitable because I was neither studying participants' cultures nor collecting data in a storytelling format. Phenomenological researchers explore the meanings of participants' lived experiences of an event (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I was not seeking to understand the meaning of participants' lived experience with the

phenomenon, and therefore, a phenomenological design was not applicable. In a case study design, researchers extract rich data in a specific setting and through both primary and secondary sources to find the answer to the central research question (Yin, 2018). Case studies require using at least two distinct types of data (Yin, 2018). A case study was appropriate as I planned to collect data in an interview setting by asking open-ended interview questions and through company documents provided by the participants. I chose a multiple case study design because I was interested in exploring the phenomena of strategies that CBMA executives from multiple West African companies use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity.

Research Question

The central research question for the study was:

RQ: What strategies do CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity?

Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity?
2. What key challenges did you encounter while reducing the conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs?
3. What strategies and processes did you use in overcoming the key challenges you encountered while reducing conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs?

4. What leadership strategy was most appropriate to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity and, based upon your organization's experiences, why?
5. What leadership strategy was least appropriate to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity and, based upon your organization's experiences, why?
6. What further information could you provide about the strategies to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was the situational leadership theory developed by Tannenbaum and Schmidt in 1973. Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) model stresses the role of context as leaders must consider personal style inclinations while balancing relational, task, and situational elements before proceeding (Omilion-Hodges & Wieland, 2016). Hersey and Blanchard (1982) extended and refined the situational leadership theory. Hersey and Blanchard stated situational leadership style varies according to circumstances, knowledge, skills, and maturity of the leader. The management style of situational leaders is participating, selling, delegating, and telling. Participating is about sharing ideas, selling refers to explaining decisions, delegating means turning over the decisions for implementation, and telling is mainly about giving instructions. The primary construct of the situational leadership theory is leaders need to

adjust their management styles to match up with the team dynamics and the business situation.

The dynamics that influence leadership include the situation, the follower, and the leader (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). The leader's style is situationally dependent, and different forms of leading may impact the decisions made in the workplace (Winter & Chaves, 2017). CBMAs' results depend on executives' specialized situational competencies to reduce conflicting organizational issues. Leaders can leverage situational leadership theory to help identify the correct course of action by molding their leadership style to match the situation (Lu et al., 2017). Leadership constructs and task consideration make the situational leadership theory an appropriate framework for the researcher seeking to address conflicting organizational issues during CBMA design, development, implementation, and perpetuation.

Operational Definitions

Acculturation: Acculturation is the process of formation or development of a shared organizational culture exemplifying the result of two organizational cultures interacting, and the changes and adaptations that take place because of that interaction (Hurst, 2014).

Cascading the change: Cascading the change means funneling down the right messages and behavior throughout the new company postmerger to quickly change behaviors and establish the new normal (Engert et al., 2019).

Compound annual growth rate (CAGR): CAGR is used to indicate yearly growth. $CAGR = [End\ Value^{(1/n - 1)} / Beginning\ Value] - 1$, where n is the number of years (Choi et al., 2011).

Conflicting organizational issues: Conflicting organizational issues are internal and external identity conflicts of dissimilarities across business models among acquirers and targets that may harm postacquisition performance (Sohl & Vroom, 2017). These issues are of two kinds: *hard issues*, comprising financial, legal, and marketing problems, and *soft issues*, comprising human resource, national and organizational culture, languages, folkloric values, and leadership styles problems (Bari et al., 2016).

Cultural insensitivities: Cultural insensitivities refer to the neglect of value and respect for cultural differences in CBMA whereby the acquirer imposes its culture on the target firm without the willingness to tolerate and encourage organizational values of cultural diversity (R. D. Lewis & Bairatchnyi, 2017). Such insensitivities could cause feelings of resentment, anger, and hostility among target firm members that could result in distrust, affecting the ability to resolve conflicting organizational issues in the merged firms to increase economic productivity (Wang et al., 2017).

Economic productivity: Economic productivity is the enhancement of FDI through CBMAs in host countries to design policies and strategies aimed at maximizing the benefits associated with foreign acquisitions and minimizing related costs (Schiffbauer et al., 2017).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions, limitations, and delimitations are risks or areas not addressed in the research. Academic researchers should outline the uncontrollable factors that could influence the investigation as well as the weaknesses or impediments and boundaries of the inquiry within the researcher's control (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Assumptions

Assumptions are thoughts, ideas, or events not explored within the body of research but used as untested concepts by researchers (Yin, 2018). I assumed participant responses during the semistructured interviews were clear and honest explanations of their perceptions of the firm's CBMA. Another assumption was that the semistructured interview format allowed participants to provide rich, textural data and minimized researcher bias.

Limitations

Qualitative researchers understand and acknowledge the limits or shortcomings of their studies while pursuing the goal of producing trustworthy results (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I completed semistructured interviews with five members of the study population. The first limitation was the results of the study could be limited by the honesty and thoroughness of the participants' responses. The second limitation was the participants might have had insufficient time and knowledge to answer the interview questions.

Delimitations

Researchers use delimitations to establish boundaries or restrictions (Knafl et al., 2015). The scope of this study was to understand both the perceptions and experiences of expat executives from diverse organizations or institutions that have participated in CBMA in West Africa. The scope did not include variables outside cross-cultural insensitivities, nor did it include those whose organizations operate outside of the study area. I also did not discuss my experience of CBMA with the study participants.

Significance of the Study

CBMAs enable company leaders to access strategic assets such as managerial expertise, new technologies, and governance practices (Zheng et al., 2016). CBMA can be challenging because of information asymmetries relating to organizational issues (Humphery-Jenner et al., 2017). The findings of this study could result in successful CBMAs, which could enable business leaders to access strategic assets and contribute to social change.

Contribution to Business Practice

The study results may prove useful to multinational executives who face challenges to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. The success of CBMAs results in FDI that business leaders can use to facilitate business growth (Mayer et al., 2017). However, the need for FDI has become prominent for economic development in global commerce, and obtaining FDI has become a challenge to company leaders (Njiraini, 2019). The findings of this study could help business leaders in West African companies develop effective strategies to make

their companies attractive to foreign investment. The success of CBMA could result in a transfer of skills and technology, increase trade benefits, and open new markets to businesses for catalyzing revenues and profits.

Implications for Social Change

The CBMA failure trend is negatively affecting national economies in West African companies (UNCTAD, 2018). Enabling executives in West Africa to enhance management capability during CBMA could result in business sustainability and the growth of profitability. According to Asamoah et al. (2020), organizational leaders from profitable companies contribute to the society in which they do business by employing people in the businesses' communities. Employment reduces job search stress and improves the standard of living for people in communities. Business success results in growing tax revenues, which local government could invest in improving citizens' lifestyles.

A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature

The objective of this study was to identify strategies CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. In this section, I review the relevant literature relating to the study phenomenon. The literature review was current, thorough, and exhaustive. The review related to soft issues (leadership styles, national and organizational cultures, languages, folkloric values, and human resource management issues) with a concern for unifying aspects of hard issues (financial, legal, and marketing issues). Current CBMA conflicting organizational issues were the most associated with soft issues (Bari et al., 2019). The databases searched

included Business Source Complete databases, the ProQuest ABI/INFORM, EBSCO Host, Google Scholar, Emerald Management Journals, and ScienceDirect.

The strategy for searching the literature included a thorough review of conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs that hindered business productivity. The research strategy consisted of an in-depth investigation and analysis of information about the central research question for the study. I conducted an extensive search of over 150 scholarly, peer-reviewed literature and dissertations so as to yield sufficient materials relevant to the topic of CBMA in West Africa.

The keywords I used in database search were *leadership, cross-border merger, business acquisition, organizational culture, national culture, human resources, business management, and leadership types*. The literature review resulted in three main themes. The themes were (a) situational leadership theory, (b) leadership roles in CBMA, and (c) CBMA acculturation. Subtopics discussed under the themes included cross-cultural competency, CBMA leadership styles, and CBMA national and organizational culture.

Situational Leadership Theory

Researchers use situational leadership theory to relate executive behavior and subordinates to prevailing situations. Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1973) suggested in their situational leadership theory that executives should be more democratic and less autocratic in decision making. Subordinates exhibit a need for self-determination, willingness to assume responsibility, and eagerness to resolve difficulties when unified as a team. Consulting in the leadership process is unavoidable as success involves determining forces in the executive, the subordinate, and the prevailing situation

(Tannenbaum and Schmidt, 1973). Executives applying intimidation impression management strategies reduce subordinates' sense of company emotional attachment (Asawo & George, 2018). CBMA executives could use situational leadership theory as a framework to manage their levels of authority and the levels of freedom for subordinates.

Internal and external leadership challenges could be the root causes of merger failures. Business sustainability entails effective business management in terms of return on investment and improvement of the organization's well-being (Suriyankietkaew & Avery, 2016). Leadership plays an essential role in retaining talent following CBMA (Degbey et al., 2020), especially when the acquirer and target companies are from two different cultures (Rao-Nicholson et al., 2016). Pfajfar et al. (2016) found cultural values negatively impacted leadership effectiveness and suggested that managers need to apply both collective and distinctive leadership styles in different situations. In a study of the merger of two culturally distinct institutions, Mohuba and Govender (2016) identified conflicting issues that could significantly derail the merger success, and the conflicting issues were (a) poor communication, (b) lack of stakeholder convergence, (c) absence of buy-in from influential constituencies, (d) lack of coherent strategies to deal with change, and (e) lack of trust among the key drivers of the merger. Business sustainability during CBMA requires leaders to embrace cultural elements regarding the business environment.

In the postmerger and acquisition (M&A) integration process, leadership attributes are essential for business continuity. Leadership is necessary for management practices (Leavy, 2019). Hassett et al. (2018) found that managing managers' emotions

during M&A is essential as managers' emotional experience affects M&A outcomes. Valentino et al. (2019) showed that the psychological/emotional distance between managers from acquiring emerging economies' multinational enterprises (EMNEs) and their counterparts from developed economies resulted from cultural differences. Leaders may experience positive and negative emotions based on the organizational operating culture. Leavy (2019) posited that managers' psychology could interject inherent biases, but management tools relating to neuroscience could provide remedies for those biases and limitations. Company executives could benefit from the applied neuroscience to navigate unknowns within their organizations, generating reliable indicators of what leaders or their customers often cannot directly express.

Globally accepted leadership concepts have proven to be a good fit for multinational cross-cultural M&A. According to Blanchard et al. (2013), no one-size-fits-all leadership style concepts exist, and Blanchard et al. argued that different circumstances necessitate leaders to flex their styles to fit the situation. Leadership is a communicative practice to understand the tasks/relationships among leaders, followers, and situations. According to Deshwal and Ashraf Ali (2020), situational leadership theory is a basis for leaders to choose among alternative options to enhance leadership success in a given situation. Omilion-Hodges and Wieland (2016) stated followers' views of tasks and relationships are distinct from the leader's perception and practice, and followers could face challenges because of their distinctive views in understanding leaders' personalities with the power of influence.

Strategic leadership competencies of leaders enhance organizational competitive advantage and productivity. According to Oswald and Lingard (2019), a leader's level of maturity depends on leadership style, which affects teams' productivity and organizational growth. Leadership styles vary from task-based to humanist methods involving friendlier relationships with higher maturity levels (Hersey et al., 2013). Văcar (2018) researched leadership approaches within a changing environment to identify useful leadership traits and argued that effective leaders need to analyze the maturity level of the subordinates to adjust the leadership style in a context situation. During a cross border merger, a leader's ability to (a) affirm subordinates, (b) motivate workers, and (c) take responsibility, requires the leader to adopt, command, participate, train, and delegate to employees for a successful organizational acquisition.

During growth phases, company leaders could encounter challenges that require different leadership approaches to attain profitability and sustainability. Esowe and Kabir (2017) explored leadership styles that could appropriately sustain organizational growth using the Hersey-Blanchard model of situational leadership approach, which leaders could use to choose the best course of action. According to Brewer et al. (2020), leaders across cultures could adopt context-specific leadership approaches. Esowe and Kabir collected data from circulated conference and journal articles, magazines, newspapers, web sources, and company documents and found that leadership preference style is critical during an organization's growth phase. Rao and Zaidi (2020) suggested different leadership styles are necessary for particular types of decision-making processes. Hersey and Blanchard (1993) indicated leaders should focus on synchronized activity. Business

leaders need to adopt proper leadership styles that fit organizational culture involved in mergers or acquisitions to avoid issues that could hinder business productivity.

Organizational success depends on a blend of teamwork and leadership style. According to H. Zhu et al. (2020), corporate mergers often result in low employee self-esteem and relational conflicts, which could decrease productivity affecting companies' bottom lines. Ikpefan and Agwu (2015) examined leadership theories within the West African banking system to explore leadership attributes for global financial crisis management. According to Ebere and Fragouli (2015), an effective leadership style results in a positive influence that enables followers to work willingly and confidently with or without the leader. Ikpefan and Agwu observed various patterns of behavior and categories of leadership styles at different levels of an organization and found that the situational leadership framework was most appropriate for bank management. Situational leadership is specific to a situation requiring a more participative approach (Blanchard et al., 2013). Globalization and advances in technology could pose tremendous challenges to management, and therefore, leaders need to identify, in each circumstance, situational variables that best predict the most effective leadership style.

Contrasting Theories

Transformational and transactional leadership theories could be a possible contextual framework for the study of the CBMA surge in West Africa. Transformational leadership focuses on employee motivation by harnessing values, beliefs, and aptitudes, whereas transactional leaders motivate people with rewards and punishment approaches (Asghar & Oino, 2018). However, Walumbwa et al. (2004) suggested some principles

underlying transformational leadership predominantly developed in the West seem incompatible with the collective cultures of EMNEs. According to Aga (2016), transactional leadership is considered as a necessary precondition for transformational leadership to be effective. Rao-Nicholson et al. (2016) argued a conceptual model is needed that can be employed in a global context to understand the success of CBMA. Therefore, a hybrid conceptual model, which is a combination of transformational and transactional leadership, could help business leaders to identify factors and strategies that could reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. Situation leadership is a hybrid leadership style that could fill the weakness of a solo leadership approach. According to Omonigho et al. (2020), the situational leadership style could bridge the gap between different leadership approaches.

Cultural variation during CBMA could provide organizational challenges. Executives' roles in pre- and postmerger phases include (a) strategic, (b) tactical, and (c) operational planning. An effective leadership style enables followers to work willingly and confidently during pre- and postmerger activities (Ikpefan & Agwu, 2015). Mohuba and Govender (2016) found that due to merger complexities and resistance levels from antimerger advocates, a single leadership style was hazardous, and they suggested the use of hybrid leadership styles. In M&A, businesses go through multiple phases during the transition, and a hybrid of transformational and transactional leadership styles may seem appropriate. Kuchynková (2016) implied that Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) situational leadership model allows business leaders to integrate different leadership approaches to a

specific context. Context-specific leadership styles could be identified and allocated to the different role levels to assess conflicting issues that hinder successful mergers.

Cross Cultural Competency

Cross-cultural leadership perspectives require a dynamic understanding of the function of the multinational team. Using Hersey and Blanchard's (1977) situational leadership theory as a framework, Pfajfar et al. (2016) explored the effectiveness of a dynamic leadership style in a cross-cultural context. Pfajfar et al. found that dynamic leadership effectiveness is contingent on organizational (situation), national (context), and historical (time) perspectives of culture. Dynamic leadership style is about adjusting leadership styles to distinct situations, populations, and cultural locales (Tucker & Lam, 2014). Business leaders could benefit by adopting a dynamic leadership approach while managing multicultural teams during CBMAs.

Cross-cultural competence in leadership requires accurate diagnosis and identification of follower competencies to enhance organizational success. Kuchynková (2016) studied the impact of follower competences on their leaders using (a) sex, (b) level of management, (c) management area, (d) nature of the economic activity of an organization, and (e) the number of direct subordinates. Esowe and Kabir (2017) stated that the type of leadership the executives use depends on organization culture and executives' personalities. Kuchynková based the study on Tannenbaum and Schmidt's (1973) tenets of situational leadership to understand the relationship between leadership styles and corporate culture, nature of the task, kind of workforce, and the leaders' personalities and skills. The situational and contextual dimensions of leadership style

significantly affect different aspects of the business (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

Kuchynková argued the efficiency of a managers' leadership style depends on the sex of the manager. The number of employees subordinate to the manager, the management area of a manager, and the nature of the economic activity of an organization was not a good efficiency predictor of a managers' leadership style (Kuchynková, 2016). Exploring leadership style in the context of CBMA could help fill the gap regarding the effectiveness of leadership approach during business merger and expansion.

Cross-cultural management strategies may require mastery of situational social competence approaches. According to Chrupała-Pniak et al. (2017), executives with situational social competence instill mutual bonds between themselves and their followers. Wei et al. (2017) argued that by efficiently harnessing intellectual and emotional social competencies, executive leaders could accomplish their planned objectives and meet follower expectations. Cultural context-based leaders' social competence training could strengthen leadership effectiveness in interacting with followers, which could benefit leaders from both sides during CBMA.

Choosing appropriate leadership styles is necessary to understand individual task readiness levels. Ebere and Fragouli (2015) collected data from secondary sources and found that the leadership style influenced followers' commitment to leaders. Hofstede (1991) recommended leaders consider integrating a cultural dimension in their leadership approach. Leadership style practiced in Western culture may not be appropriate in West African companies. Ebere and Fragouli supported Hofstede's notion of adjusting leadership styles to followers' task readiness by observing companies' operating cultures.

CBMA Leadership Styles

Leaders need prior experience in CBMA for a seamless transition. Successful, delayed, and abandoned deals in the same industry and target country may enhance leaders' understanding of the deal mechanism, bargaining power, and the timing in diverse global markets (Li et al., 2018). Stroup (2017) explored how corporate leaders address barriers during CBMA. Stroup found that experienced leaders discussed obstacles such as different common language or legal origin than the United States, low levels of property rights protection, political stability, or contract enforceability regarding FDI. The findings supported prior studies that experiences and practices of leaders within a firm affect the international integration of trade and investment (Mion & Opromolla, 2014). Thus, experienced leaders are effective in minimizing hurdles during CBMA.

The competence gap closing in leadership is necessary to sustain successful CBMA. Chen et al. (2018) explored how business leaders addressed the competency gap by focusing on critical success factors (CSFs) that influence Chinese companies' overseas acquisition success. Chen et al. noted that the identified CSFs varied based on participating managers' judgment. Each CBMA is unique, and therefore, managers' prior experience could enable them to identify key success factors. Pressentin (2015) noted that addressing cultural dimensions alone do not provide solutions to the organizational challenges, and business leaders need to develop internal effective corporate strategies to address all key factors. Managers lacking experience in addressing key factors constitutes a lack of competency, which requires attention before becoming involved in CBMA.

CBMAs' success relies on the distributed leadership approach. According to Z. Khan et al. (2017), CBMA success hinges on the social integration of distributed leadership on the merger process. Pearce et al. (2008) defined distributed leadership as involving all members exercising meaningful influence through participation while performing work. A distributed leadership approach enhances employees' resilience, as it promotes collective and common vision across the organizational employees. Z. Khan et al. (2017) argued that by pursuing the distributed leadership model, leaders could delegate and disperse responsibility among various levels of hierarchy in decision-making. Employing distributed leadership also builds legitimacy for the acquirers in the target organizations.

Leadership Role in Cross-Border Mergers and Acquisitions

The role of human resource (HR) practices in CBMA requires further exploration. Rao-Nicholson et al. (2020) explored HR practices during CBMA by examining 84 deals of EMNEs and found that HR practices positively influenced the acquired firms' efficiency and adaptability. Resolving cultural differences and generating organizational level shared identity through HR integration could achieve an increase success rate (Joshi et al., 2020). Effective HR practices enhance enterprise output, leading to organizational efficiency and adaptability (Sánchez-Marín et al., 2019). Rao-Nicholson et al. suggested a disruptive leadership approach that enables HR professionals in the decision-making process could improve organizational efficiency and adaptability in CBMA. Disruptive leadership approach constituting HR professionals could influence post-CBMA activities by adapting institutional and cultural factors.

Human resource management 's role is restructuring and reconstruction of an organizational structure during CBMA. Losing core human resources in the course of CBMA integration could be a threat to company trade secrets (Sun et al., 2018). Sun et al. (2018) studied CBMA of Chinese firms and suggested reengineering the organization structure by constructing appropriate levels of management that achieve specific tasks in either a flat organizational structure or a hierarchical organizational structure. The objective of realigning organizational restructure is to help employees adapt to a new business climate as a result of CBMA.

HR's job is to mobilize and stabilize core strategic assets. HR policy is to utilize strategic assets to improve the self-sufficiency of management, retaining talents, and creating synergy (Zheng et al., 2016). Utilizing strategic assets during CBMA provides a competitive advantage in international markets (L. Cui et al., 2014). Zheng et al. (2016) conducted a case study research of Chinese multinational enterprises (CMNEs) and found that mobilization of strategic assets resulted in core competency on a global scale. Haspeslagh and Jemison (1991) suggested two dimensions of structural integration and degree of coordination to utilize strategic assets: (a) absorption (assimilating or consolidating the target firm), (b) symbiosis (operational autonomy of target firm), and (c) preservation (low degree of coordination of target firm). However, Cogman and Tan (2010) criticized these approaches stating traditional structural integration approaches to utilize strategic assets could fail. Therefore, management expertise seeking to mobilize strategic assets to focus on demand knowledge identification, transfer, assimilation, and absorption (Cogman & Tan, 2010). Thus, Zheng et al. (2016) proposed the partnering

approach among CMNEs to maintain synergies through selective coordination of business activities. The partnering approach accommodates the socially constructed system of rules, norms, and cognitive frames of the host country institutions, enabling CMNEs to earn legitimacy that ensures their survival and success in the host country.

CBMA National and Organizational Cultures

Inadequate national and organizational cultural integration is a contributing factor to unsuccessful CBMA. Conducting postmerger due diligence of firms' strategic tasks, operational activities, and cultural issues could improve the chances of successful CBMA (Latukha, 2017). Panibratov (2017) explored EMNEs for factors that influenced cultural and organizational integration processes in CBMA deals in the high tech and finance industries. Panibratov found that local communities' and stakeholders' attitudes, host and home country economic development, and the government policy and interest influenced CBMA deals. Paying attention to both the cultural impacts and organizational specifics of investment deals during decision making and using due diligence in the process could result in deal integration success.

National culture is a source of both positive and negative emotions, helping as well as hindering managers during CBMA. According to Moore (2019), the role of culture in CBMA depends largely in terms of questions of *compatibility, fit, or distance* between *units* of national culture. The growing trend towards positive organizational scholarship (POS) allows for cross-cultural management phenomena in business to view through an identity lens (Stahl et al., 2017). The notion of POS help assesses the degree to which the organization is healthy in a social environment (Zberowski & Bratniki,

2014). Moore found that national culture, in contrast to its treatment as a source of *distance or friction*, can also operate as an integrating agent. Moore suggested that during a merger, managers can use symbolic discourses of national culture in positive ways to define and understand areas of conflict and to find common ground upon which to develop a shared organizational culture.

The processes of postmerger integration from the perspective of national culture, cultural fit, and cultural distance draw some criticism. Xie et al. (2017) criticized Moore (2019), stating *compatibility, fit, or distance* between *units* of national culture could lead to inconclusive results. However, Moore defended his position, stating that the concept of "acculturation" is a process to understand what goes on with cultures in CBMA. The acculturation approach could be useful in understanding sensemaking during the integration CBMA process.

Organizational identity is of significant consideration in the CBMA acculturation process to meet the initial expectations of managers and stakeholders. CBMA may be complicated, but CBMA professionals have a role in successfully reaching acculturation (Hurst & Pattath, 2019). Understanding the organizational identity of the acquired organization's employees provide insights into the interaction of human resource development (HRD) initiatives (Wong et al., 2017). The identity of an organization is the result of the interplay of three closely connected and sometimes overlapping elements: formal claims, members' beliefs and understanding about what is central, enduring, and distinctive about their organization, and managers' aspirations (Lerpold et al., 2007). Formal claims are companies' statements that the company states as true, members' belief

is about how employees see their organization, and managers' aspirations are manager expectations of their organization. Hurst and Pattath (2019) explored the CBMA deal in which a U.S. company purchased an Indian firm and found that employees exhibited reliable identification with the organization by taking pride and were willing to maintain organization reputation. Cho et al. (2014) noted that maintaining a dual identity (both premerger organizational status and a new organizational identity simultaneously - like the long-term employees) can produce faster acculturation. Gaining an understanding of corporate identity and its implications for aiding employees to come together in support of the broader organizational goals is essential to the success of CBMA and multinational corporations.

Conflicts may reduce the identity of employees and their motivation for the success of CBMA. CBMAs pose threats to individuals as it may result in employees losing organizational identifies (Leigh & Melwani, 2019). Seizing synergy in CBMA relies on the human factor, such as cooperation and commitment of people involved in the success of the merger (Weber, 2019). Achieving congruence in terms of acculturation between the merged firms may smooth adverse outcomes during postmerger integration (de Oliveira Carvalho & Ogasavara, 2019). Cultural sensitivity could cause damper negotiation skills and conflict resolution abilities. Therefore, preserving identities between management groups build trust and minimize stress and uncertainty. Larsson and Lubatkin (2001) recommended preserving premerger identities. Li and Yang (2020) suggested promoting synergy during CBMA. Weber (2019) posited acquirers should measure the effectiveness of their communication not only by its effects on reducing

stress, negative attitudes, and turnover, and on increasing commitment and cooperation, but also by the creation of a new, merged organizational identity. Such a measure could reduce problems such as negative attitudes, low engagement, poor cooperation, and high turnover during CBMA.

Cultural integration in CBMA takes time, energy, and money. Creating awareness of cultural differences could avoid cultural conflicts and clashes in CBMA (Warter & Warter, 2017). Cross-national ventures are a regular source of cross-cultural disputes and have often turned out to be dramatic failures (Hofstede et al., 2010). During CBMA, focus on the human factor, relationship management, communication, trust, and a transparent people process, and social integration strategy are essential (Trompenaars & Asser, 2010). Warter and Warter (2017) explored the automotive industry to understand the CBMA phenomena (e.g., attitudes, cultures, values, tradition, etc.) to ascertain why merger operations sometimes fail to achieve the predefined goals. Warter and Warter found that CBMA resulted in cultural clashes, impact psychological aspects of employees, and conflicts within management teams. Hofstede et al. stated that understanding of the national and organizational culture for both merged companies is the primary responsibility of the top managers involved. Conducting cultural due diligence by adjusting each other's culture or making some cultural modifications to meet the interest of parties involved could benefit everyone involved.

Organizational justice fosters employee commitment and improves customer retention in post-CBMA. The dynamics of CBMA bring new factors such as cultural issues between host and home countries to bear on the association between organizational

justice and commitment, which may result in cultural collisions (Angwin et al., 2016).

Organizational justice refers to the extent to which employees perceive acquisition implementation procedures as being just and fair (S. E. Taylor & Lobel, 1989).

According to Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2018), CBMA could erode customer relationships where the customers react negatively to acquisition. Preserving loyalty and a strong commitment of existing employees could evade customer defections and customer dissatisfaction (Gomes et al., 2017). By fostering interaction and demonstrating respect, employees will perceive a high level of organizational fairness and become more loyal towards the organization (Markopoulos et al., 2020). Gomes et al. examined the association between perceptions of justice and organizational commitment in CBMA. Gomes et al. found a strong association between employees' perceptions of justice during the merger and commitment to the new organization. Therefore, eliminating organizational injustice could drive engagement resulting in favorable CBMA outcomes.

Good communication in CBMA could moderate the relationship between cultural differences and negative attitudes among employees, as well as the commitment and cooperation of the acquired employees with the buying firm (Yahiaoui et al., 2016). A leader with effective communication and a justified strategy can win the trust, motivation, and loyalty and reduce stress and uncertainty among employees (Bari et al., 2016). Omilion-Hodges and Wieland (2016) noted communication is essential to unite people and to enhance organizational performance. In a study of Danish, Japanese, and German acquirers, Yahiaoui et al. (2016) found that communication positively and significantly affected the performance of Danish and Japanese acquirers, but performance lagged

despite the proper communication protocol in German acquirers. Yahiaoui et al. posited that communication is essential, but one cannot undermine the cultural dimension.

Understanding intercultural communication is essential in reducing postmerger misunderstanding and conflict, though the application is challenging.

The gender effect on CBMA remains an underinvestigated area. The impact of organizational change may be gendered and intersected with other forms of employee diversity in cross-cultural settings (Tienari et al., 2005). The limited extant research on gender issues in M&As has focused mainly on the higher management/executive board level (Bazel-Shoham et al., 2020). Some researchers suggested the importance of exploring the role of gender across various stages of the M&A process (Risberg & Gottlieb, 2019). Conversely, Parola et al. (2015) opined gender diversity in top management teams was beneficial to pre-integration performance but hindered post-integration performance. More gender research on CBMA may develop an active diversity policy to enhance organizational performance.

Cross-Border Mergers and Acquisitions Acculturation

People management issues require additional research. Strategic human resource management in CBMA for EMNEs needs further exploration from institutional and cultural standpoints (Cooke et al., 2018). Using data on Indian acquisitions hosted in 70 countries over 8 years, Buckley and Munjal (2017) explored the concept of embeddedness to assess contextual factors such as resistance and challenges while transferring home country practices to the host country. Buckley and Munjal found that home countries offered contrasting benefits, and EMNEs exploited the benefits in host

countries during CBMA. Buckley and Munjal found that cultural differences between an acquirer and an acquired firm are primary obstacles to cultural integration. Kang et al. (2020) stated acculturation as an essential success factor for postmerger cultural integration. The acculturation process requires acquirer firms to adjust their acculturation patterns based on cultural diversity (Hurst, 2012). M. Cui et al. (2016) explored Chinese firms involved in CBMA and found that cultural integration enhanced the performance of the firms. Failure or success of the acculturation process depends on employees' adaptation of an integrated cultural climate within an organization (Dauber, 2012). M. Cui et al. identified four stages of the acculturation integration process: detecting, ice-breaking, interacting, and remodeling. Detecting process is about exploring options, the ice-breaking process entails experimenting alternatives, interacting involves implementing and reinforcing the right course of action, and remodeling is about finding the right fit. Combining cultures to create a preferred culture that is suitable for all employees could result in employee commitment and engagement, leading to success post-CBMA.

Exploring employee resistance to change and its influence on CBMA success requires attention. Cartwright (1996) opined that successful M&A reflects managers' ability to help employees to adapt to the integrated culture. Stress level depends on how employees perceive cultural differences. S. J. Lee et al. (2015) stated that national cultural differences possibly hurt acquired employees in postmerger integration resulting in serious acculturation stress. Effective change management in CBMA includes addressing resistance factors that hinder employees' adaptation to a new role and

organization culture. Donkor and Dongmei (2018) studied leadership styles of global business leaders following the global financial crisis and found that business leaders acted as change agents infusing creative thoughts of innovation and adaptability into their business operations. In the global market, business leaders need to nurture positivity to obtain the winning mindset of their followers (Bukusi, 2020). Donkor and Dongmei emphasized that business leaders need to build capacity in change management to achieve the highest sustainable business levels, starting with their cultural settings in CBMA. Employees' adaptation to change in CBMA results from effective communication, sound leadership, employee involvement, and organizational loyalty (Appelbaum et al., 2017). Proper management of CBMA could lower acculturative stresses that cause resistance and cultural clashes.

Culture clash could be detrimental in CBMA. Culture clash results in conflicts caused by dissimilarities in values, management, and communication styles (H. Nguyen & Kleiner, 2003). Breiner and Minei (2017) examined the impact of national culture on companies involved in the Danish-American companies' merger. Breiner and Minei found that the acquired firm employees felt their familiar corporate culture was neglected in favor of the communicative preferences of the acquirer. When companies decide to expand internationally, flexibility and attention to the host country's norms are pivotal for successful integration (Degbey et al., 2021). Therefore, effective internal communication minimizes frustration, uncertainty, and mistrust for employees of the acquired firm.

CBMA professionals confront challenges to conform to the practices to align with the host country's cultural and institutional environment. K. P. Lee et al. (2019) examined

643 Korean managers working at 60 MNEs subsidiaries in Korea and found that host country managers accounted for acculturative stress due to the challenges faced in verifying national cultural identity. Organizational identity emerges from the influence of the national culture and the interactions within the society (Liu et al., 2020). Therefore, host company managers need to adopt local organizational policies and practices, and cultural norms to minimize acculturative stress.

Promoting knowledge of cultures and adaptability to diversity could be a strategic tool for 21st-century organizational leaders. Pressentin (2015) found German and Japanese multinational companies struggled with postmerger organizational conflict issues because of organizational silos. According to Pressentin, organizational silos resulted from clashes between the dichotomy established by the Japanese collectivist culture and the Germanic individualistic culture. Hofstede et al. proposed focusing on cultural dimensions during globalization and localization. Training top executives in national culture and then concentrating on subordinates' training could enable managers to adapt to change for agility and to minimize stress in CBMA.

Cross-cultural issues are organizational-level CSFs. CSFs associated with the post-M&A phase include integration strategy, post-M&A leadership, speed of implementation, post-M&A integration team, communication, and the management of corporate and national cultural differences (Gomes et al., 2013). Arslan and Dikova (2015) analyzed ownership choices in CBMAs for MNEs in emerging economies and identified institutional distance (differences between national institutions of home and host country) that amplifies information asymmetries and uncertainties related to resource

transfer and resource acquisitions. Institutional distance results from laws, regulations, political systems, and cultural differences. In CBMA, managers need to leverage their knowledge of local customs, regulations, business networks, and customer preferences (Li & Yang, 2020). Local market experience reduces information asymmetries and investment risk associated with institutional distance in CBMA.

West African countries offer rich investment venues, albeit with political, institutional, economic, technological and cultural challenges, and fertile CBMA research opportunities. Ellis et al. (2015) conducted M&A studies in African markets, and highlighted factors deemed unique in distinguishing African countries as target nations. Ellis et al. found that African regions lagged behind cross-border M&A analysis from the international business perspective. The lack of access to data, combined with resource constraints for fieldwork, could be reasons why companies in the African region are lagging in cross border M&A analysis.

Corporate governance (CG) regulations can cause institutional tensions and complexity for CBMA professionals. Regulations in cross-border operations could subject firms to different national institutional systems and varying CG environments (Valentino et al., 2019). MNEs leaders need to show their commitment to overcome challenges by taking advantage of foreign CG listing regulations, which could improve firm-level CG quality in the home country (Temouri et al., 2016). Areneke and Kimani (2019) explored 400 MNEs operating in Nigeria and found that leaders articulated good CG as a prerequisite to reduce corrupt practices by many African governments (e.g., Kenya, Cameroon, Nigeria, Zambia, and multiple other African countries). With

expertise, experience, and knowledge of good CG practices from different institutions, multinational directors can mitigate institutional governance complexities and improve home country CG practices.

West African Regional Companies

Simplifying and reducing CBMA red tape accelerates globalization and encourages foreign investments. West Africa's cross-border constraints in the form of red tape deter foreign investors, attracting only 5% of Africa's FDI (WBG, 2017). West Africa's enormous potential encourages foreign investors to find other means to combat red tape. USAID's launching of the West Africa trade hub unlocks private capital investments that reduce the cost and risk of cross-border transactions with the United States (USAID, 2020b). Eradicating red tape could reduce bureaucratic blockages to enhance CBMAs, impacting job creation and sustaining regional business growth.

International private sector players engage in CBMAs that contribute to increasing host country FDI. Ghana and Nigeria attracted the highest number and value of CBMA transactions in West Africa (Wilson & Vencatachellum, 2016). The Commission of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) regional block is made up of 16 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. West African countries witnessed a plunge in FDI between 2017 and 2018 of 15% from \$11.2 billion to \$9.6 billion (UNCTAD, 2019). Nigeria's FDI drop of 43% from \$3.5 billion to \$2 billion accounted for the plummet

amidst Ghana's dampening 8% from \$3.3 billion to \$3 billion, though with the highest FDI earnings in the region. The result was a drop in CBMAs.

CBMA with West African firms is predominant in the financial, energy, telecommunications, infrastructure, and manufacturing sectors. Nigerian firms attract high deal values with the majority from oil companies (Hyde, 2019). Nigeria's new policy of a 40% reduction in government ownership of oil assets in joint ventures could increase its inbound FDI (UNCTAD, 2019). Ghanaian firms recorded a decade surge in deal values and FDI mostly in gas and minerals. Examples include Eni Group's greenfield investment project of Sankofa gas fields and the Gold Fields Ltd (South Africa) CBMA with Ghana's Asanko gold mine for \$185 million (UNCTAD, 2019). Ghana's automotive manufacturing industry accounts for 7% of GDP (McBain, 2019). Ghana's 10-year automobile tax breaks and the creation of a regional hub for car assembly could attract more automotive investors to West Africa. Approving all sectors of the economy through government interventions could boost West Africa's CBMA transaction values.

Social entrepreneurs could help drive CBMA in West Africa. Social impact investments increase the volume of marketable target opportunities as a result of vibrant capital streams (Basu, 2017). Using social impact business models could encourage innovative social change, making available information technology tools to facilitate knowledge transfer (Chahine & Mowafi, 2015). West Africa's economic gains from social impact investments have been used to benefit local households within their multifaced context specificities (Jackson & Harji, 2017). Implementing such hybrid

business models in West Africa drive small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) growth with better exit strategies to boost CBMAs that enhance regional inbound FDI.

Creating microenterprises and growing SMEs in West Africa through CBMA could increase the host country's GDP. Adopting Africa's economic impact investing search fund investment model could yield a high multiplier effect for SMEs (Mullen, 2019). Investors use the search fund concept (or entrepreneurship through acquisition) developed at Harvard Business School and Stanford Graduate School of Business to yield high returns in SMEs acquisitions (Dennis & Laseca, 2016). Using a 5-phase process (fundraising, search, acquisition, operation, and exit) of the entrepreneurship through acquisition, entrepreneurs could eliminate risk by creating and managing new companies after acquiring existing SMEs (Ruback & Yudkoff, 2017). Search funds benefit economies through talent retention, succession plans for failing businesses, international search networks, expand regional exports, and CBMA.

Impact entrepreneurs generate both social benefits and financial returns enhancing long-term economic growth. Sub-Saharan Africa impact investor allocations surpass other emerging market, with a tendency for an upward trajectory (GIIN, 2016). Such structured investments could be advantageous over straight equity and debt CBMAs achieving high investor expectations. Impact investors show a positive willingness to fund transactions addressing women issues, minority subjects, the environment, and poverty. The poverty focus category attracts 57% of impact funds in the SME category (Barber et al., 2021). Impact investors pre-invest in businesses to create streams of long-term investable opportunities. Impact entrepreneurs could use the entrepreneurship

through acquisition to build more platforms for West African SMEs to access capital and acquire talents. With the necessary resources for business sustainability and community impact, West African SMEs could compete in CBMA deal markets.

Regulations

CBMA regulation laws in West African countries seem deficient, incomprehensive, and risk global competition. CBMAs EMNEs growth is on an upward trajectory from US\$500 billion per annum to about US\$5 trillion between 2007-2017 (Babic et al., 2017). West African firms witnessed slow growth in foreign investments and a high-risk high-reward environment during the previous decade (Jackson & Harji, 2017). Investors pay attention to regulations to take advantage of host country incentives and also protect their investments. Lax regulatory regimes could trigger abuse from predatory investors. Governments of West African countries could encourage, review, and update their regulatory frameworks to spur CBMAs.

Foreign investors with stringent antibribery and anticorruption regulations face difficulties in environments of corrupt practices and bad governance. West Africa's institutional interplay of high corruption levels, political instability, and weak governance deter FDI through CBMAs (Tunyi & Ntim, 2016). Consequently, CBMA flow in West Africa declined, despite substantial economic integration within the regional bloc (Wilson & Bala, 2019). Efforts from governments and business leaders to enhance national governance quality could improve CBMA, an impetus for FDI in West Africa.

Foreign investors and social entrepreneurs have been gaining ground in West Africa through the governments' enactment of friendly policies and regulations. Impact

investing resulted in societal gains from the public legitimization of the investment environment from policymakers, governments, and regulatory authorities (Bitektine & Haack, 2015). Investors and fund managers in West Africa anticipate a healthier regulatory environment enabling social impact results and economic returns (Mungai, 2018). Improved organizational and institutional legitimacy could benefit social entrepreneurs in creating investable opportunities in SMEs, attracting CBMAs, and surging West Africa's FDI.

Transition

In Section 1, I presented the background of the problem, problem statement, purpose statement, the nature of the study, the research question, and the conceptual framework. In section 1, I discussed operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and a review of the existing literature on the topic under study. Section 2 consists of the research process and plans for protecting participants. Section 3 concludes this study with the presentation of the findings, application to professional practice, implications for social change, recommendations for action and further research, reflections, and the conclusion.

Section 2: The Project

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. The targeted population comprised five CBMA executives of organizations active in CBMA in West Africa. Executives who use CBMA found an increase in FDI, leading to business growth and increased employment opportunities (Zheng et al., 2016).

Role of the Researcher

Qualitative researchers serve as instruments for collecting data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In this qualitative case study, I reviewed company documents, conducted semistructured interviews, organized data, analyzed data, and presented the study findings. Qualitative researchers use semistructured interviews with open-ended interview questions to collect data relating to the study phenomenon (Farmer & Lundy, 2017). Malone et al. (2014) stated potential personal bias could affect research findings and suggested taking measures to minimize study bias during data collection. I used a structured interview protocol (see Appendix A) to mitigate personal bias while reviewing and validating interview transcripts.

The Belmont Report (BR; National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research, 1979) protocol consists of ethical guidelines for dealing with human subjects. Bromley et al. (2015) described the BR as research guidelines that include justice, ethics, and equal benefits to participants. Researchers use the BR guidelines to ensure ethical considerations when conducting

research (Bromley et al., 2015). I acted ethically and respected study participants within the parameters of the BR, ensuring that subjects entered the research voluntarily and had equal treatment. Participants' selection criteria to comply with the BR's guidelines eliminated vulnerable human beings. Participants' identities remained confidential while I reviewed the interview notes, transcripts, and interpretive reports.

According to Marais (2012), researchers identify assumptions and personal experiences with the topic and prospective participants before collecting data so as to minimize bias. Researchers can mitigate bias by recognizing multiple realities that exist, outlining their own experiences and viewpoints, and presenting a precise and accurate analysis of the participants' perspectives (Noble & Smith, 2015). To mitigate bias and avoid viewing the findings from a personal perspective, I mentally prepared to conduct interviews. Being open to inquiries and refraining from injecting my viewpoints enabled me to embrace information from participants' views.

The interview protocol is a valuable tool to regulate the process of questioning study participants to avoid personal bias (Patton, 2015). The interview protocol helps researchers ensure consistency in the interview process to enhance the accuracy and reliability of data collected. The rationale for the interview protocol is to maintain an ethical standard through consistency and following the same guidelines with all participants during interviews. Castillo-Montoya (2016) suggested following the 4-phase process to refine the interview protocol. The 4-phase process I followed included confirming that the interview questions aligned with the research question, building an

inquiry-based interview, receiving feedback on interview protocols, and piloting the interview protocol.

Participants

The eligibility criteria set standards to identify participants knowledgeable of the study phenomenon (Beaver et al., 2017). Participants' characteristics (e.g., desired skills, knowledge, and experience) need to align with the study phenomenon to provide answers to the central research question (Yin, 2018). Respondents in qualitative case studies should have a significant amount of experience on the topic of interest (S. Lewis, 2015; Streagle & Scott, 2015). Participants' eligibility criteria in the case study required identification of business leaders who (a) were successful in growing their company through international expansion, (b) worked in a senior-level management position, and (c) had at least 5 years CBMA experience.

Gaining access to participants can be challenging, especially when the researcher is not known to the organization or does not have a prime contact within the organization (Saunders et al., 2019). The strategy for gaining access to eligible participants was through personal and professional relationships with businesses. I utilized my relationships with international businesses to identify participants who had experience with CBMA strategies. Establishing working relationships with participants is a necessity for the researcher to conduct a successful case study (Yin, 2018). Contacting potential participants via emails, telephone calls, and Skype enabled me to foster a working relationship with participants.

Researchers must maintain a relationship of transparency, respect, and trustworthiness with participants (Nadal et al., 2015). Yin (2018) noted researchers should maintain a comfortable atmosphere for participants as an observer to promote trustworthiness during the interview. I established a collaborative working relationship with each participant through professional interaction in obtaining consent and conducted each interview in a complimentary manner, showing respect. It was also imperative to request and obtain a signed letter of cooperation from the leadership of participants' organizations before commencing the interviews and data collection. Establishing an alignment of participants' characteristics with the overarching research question involves participants understanding the criteria to participate in a research study (Pinsky, 2015). Selected participants had the essential knowledge to answer the research questions regarding strategies that a CBMA executive would use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity.

Research Method and Design

The selection of the methodology and design for this study originated from the business problem and research question. I selected a qualitative multiple case study approach to answer to the central research question. Qualitative research involves the collection of data that reflects the opinions, beliefs, or attitudes of the participants towards the phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019). Researchers use case study design to systematically and thoroughly explore specific inquiries in natural settings (Cronin, 2014).

Research Method

Empirical researchers can use one of three research methods: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods (Jain et al., 2015). Researchers use qualitative methods with open-ended questions to discover what is occurring or had occurred (Yin, 2018). Nontraditional data collection methods such as the use of open-ended questions in a semistructured interview setting strengthen study results (M. Zhu et al., 2015). Qualitative inquiry falls under the constructivist learning approach (Dağhan & Akkoyunlu, 2014). Using the constructivist approach (i.e., having a conceptual framework), there is no use for quantitative study (Yin, 2018). Guest et al. (2020) stated quantitative research method involves a collection of numerical data and analysis of the data through a mathematically based technique. Mixed methods is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Arris et al., 2015). Using mixed methods involves considerable time and effort to reach an outcome (Yin, 2018). The qualitative method was suitable for this study over quantitative and mixed methods because I was neither collecting numerical data nor testing hypotheses as mandated in quantitative and mixed methods research methodology. Ahmed and Ahmed (2014) suggested qualitative methods are preferable when assessing strategies.

Research Design

Qualitative research designs include narrative, phenomenological, ethnographic, and case study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). A narrative design entails the use of stories, journals, autobiographies, and interviews as a way of sharing knowledge (Tsang, 2014). I did not select the narrative design because it does not provide an appropriate platform to

explore strategic decision-making in an organization. Researchers use narrative design to focus on the knowledge sharing of participants' stories. The phenomenological design entails the search of opinion from a group of people regarding the lived experience of a phenomenon (Jain et al., 2015). A researcher uses the phenomenological design to find out how people respond to a situation, and it could lead to potentially biased opinions based on personal experiences of the respondents. (Koopman, 2015). I was interested in the strategy applied to garner a specific result, not in exploring the lived experience of the phenomenon, making the phenomenological design not applicable for this research. The ethnographic study is the long-term investigation of culture through immersion into the group (Marais, 2012). Ethnographic research was not appropriate due to time constraints, and my research question was not related to the culture of CBMA executives.

A case study design is appropriate to address four sets of research: (a) what questions to study, (b) what data are relevant, (c) what data to collect, and (d) how to analyze the results (Barclay & Stoltz, 2016; Landry, 2016). Case study research is useful in exploring a complicated phenomenon that requires a thorough investigation in a real-life setting (Dasgupta, 2015). Case studies consist of inquiries that are contingent on individual interpretations and experiences (Harland, 2014). Yin (2018) distinguished case studies into a single case and multiple cases. A single case entails the exploration of one critical or unique case, while multiple cases involve the comparison of findings of two or more cases. I relied on a multiple case study design. I found the multiple case design appropriate because I explored the phenomena of strategies CBMA executives across

multiple companies use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity.

In qualitative research, data saturation is a significant element of rigor (Morse, 2015). A researcher achieves data saturation when there is sufficient data to replicate the study, and an additional collection of data results in no further themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Participants' responses were collected until no new information emerged to ensure data saturation. In qualitative case study research, researchers employ the right sampling technique that enables achieving data saturation (Rowlands et al., 2015). I used purposeful sampling techniques to identify and select participants knowledgeable in the study phenomenon to reach data saturation.

Population and Sampling

A researcher defines the population sample (Bell et al., 2018). Qualitative case study researchers do not determine a representative population sample (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). According to Yin (2018), case studies can rely on small samples if the researcher prompts the participants for in-depth insights about each question. The sampling method for this study was purposive. Purposive sampling involves the following: (a) having a general sense of the expected criteria of the multiple case study, (b) selecting cases information-rich, and (c) selecting participants to answer the question, "Do the participants share the occurrence of the phenomenon that the researcher is looking for?" (Englander, 2016). Researchers use purposeful sampling to selectively choose a set of participants the researcher considers to be knowledgeable and eligible for the study based on the purpose of the study and the overarching research question (Duan

et al., 2015). To understand the strategies to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity, I used a purposeful participant selection of leaders who had experience and knowledge in successful CBMA transactions.

Alternative methods to purposeful sampling include convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Valerio et al., 2016). In the case of a purposeful sampling technique, the researcher narrows down the participants in a study using a set of predetermined criteria to select a sample size out of the total population of potential participants (Valerio et al., 2016). Researchers use the convenience sampling technique because of the ease and convenience of recruiting participants (Valerio et al., 2016). The convenience sampling technique was not appropriate for this study because qualitative researchers require the participants in a case study research to possess some relevant specialized knowledge. The snowball sampling technique is a sampling technique where the already recruited participants suggest some other participants that they know to the researcher (Valerio et al., 2016). Researchers use the snowball method when recruiting participants proves difficult (Waters, 2015). Snowball sampling was also appropriate since choosing specific people within the population to use for the research proved difficult.

The targeted population comprised CBMA executives of organizations active in CBMA in West Africa. West African companies witnessed a reduction in CBMA activities in 2017 that resulted in an \$11 billion decrease in its FDI (UNCTAD, 2018). The sample size consisted of five participants involved in CBMA activities for more than 5 years who successfully influenced positive performance and growth in CBMA transactions. I conducted 45-60-minute interviews via videoconferencing for each

participant to answer open-ended questions in a risk-free, comfortable, and safe setting for a semistructured interview. Participating interviewees require a comfortable setting to be free to share information so that the interviewer gets the participants' meaning (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). The perception of cultural sensitivity is evident when conducting participants' interviews (T. Q. T. Nguyen, 2015). Hofstede's cultural dimensions have applicability in an interview setting by observing power distance, individualism, gender, and uncertainty (Vasile & Nicolescu, 2016). I established rapport with participants to overcome cultural insensitivity by observing and responding to their reactions toward me, putting participants at ease, and gaining their trust for honest and full responses.

Gentles et al. (2015) asserted qualitative research typically had smaller sample sizes compared to quantitative research because the primary objective involves gaining a comprehensive understanding of a complex and dynamic phenomenon rather than to achieve generalizability. Robinson (2014) argued data saturation should assist researchers in deciding the appropriate sample size. I reached data saturation with five study participants. The number of participants in qualitative research is an essential factor in determining an adequate sample size to fulfill the study objectives (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Nguyen et al. (2020) suggested study participants should have adequate knowledge and the required experience about the research topic.

Researchers achieve data saturation when they discover no new themes, ideas, or categories during the interviews with participants (Kelly et al., 2016). Repeatability of participants' responses ensures the achievement of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Fusch and Ness (2015) suggested assessing data saturation was unique to each specific

case study, as were the quality (i.e., rich) and quantity (i.e., thick) of the data collected. Guest et al. (2020) asserted qualitative researchers should identify preliminary themes and categories after conducting a few interviews to evaluate data saturation on an ongoing basis as the remaining interviews progress. To ensure data saturation, I continued conducting interviews until participants communicated no new information, categories, nor themes.

Ethical Research

The BR protocol consists of ethical guidelines for dealing with human subjects (Bromley et al., 2015). Following ethical approaches enabled me to obtain Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number 08-07-20-0737742 before dealing with human subjects. The IRB oversees ethical conduct to ensure a researcher has the qualifications to conduct the study, abides by all administrative guidelines, and produces the appropriate informed consent forms (Walden, 2020). Informed consent highlights study guidelines and participants' roles so they can make an informed decision about research participation (Halkoaho et al., 2016). The researcher must provide the subject with adequate information explaining the potential risks and benefits of participating in a study, and must receive informed consent (Rao, 2016). I obtained informed consent from participants before the actual interview. The consent form was sent with invitation emails so that participants became aware of study guidelines and what informed consent was. Interested participants received pre-interviews to go over the consent form and confirm their consent to participate in the study.

Informed consent makes provision that the informants will participate voluntarily without coercion and any monetary incentives. McLaughlin and Alfaro-Velcamp (2015) stated the importance of voluntary participation in research and how it improves the credibility of the findings. The consent form contained provision that allowed participants to withdraw from the study at any time by giving the researcher a verbal or written notice. This study had no incentives for participation. Bromley et al. (2015) specified that to obtain voluntarism, the interviewer must provide benefits to participants. The consent form highlighted the benefits which included getting a two- to three-page summary of study findings that participants could use to their benefit.

Some information from interviewees may have negative implications for their careers if accessed by unauthorized individuals. Using a unique pseudonym (e.g., code, fictitious name, etc.) to identify participants and their companies throughout the study, maintained confidentiality. The consent form includes an assurance of privacy for participants and to protect them from harm (Tam et al., 2015). Details regarding demographics and the site that might allow the audience to guess the identity of the participants or the organization was confidential. These privacy preservation techniques removed unconcealed identifiers from data to minimize potential risks to the participants.

A. Khan (2014) highlighted the importance of keeping the confidentiality of the research findings by destroying the research data after some time. After completion of the study, all electronic data were stored on my password-protected computer and paper data in a locked cabinet. After 5 years, I will permanently shred the paper data, and delete the electronic data from the computer and hard drive.

Data Collection Instruments

Using instruments that are valid and reliable is an essential element of research quality (Anderson & Holloway-Libell, 2014). Qualitative researchers act as primary data collection instruments because the researcher has the responsibility to hear, see, and interpret the information (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The goal is to listen to and understand the experiences and reflections of the participants about the phenomena. I was the primary data collection instrument in the interview process, using semistructured interviews to collect information from key informants. Data collection included interview information from participants and company documents. Using methodological triangulation consistently can increase the validity and reliability of the information obtained from the participants (Cleland, 2015). Researchers must acknowledge their potential for bias and be mindful during the research (S. Lewis, 2015). To mitigate research bias, I followed the interview protocol, learned about other cultures to dispel stereotypes, and created ways to give and receive feedback concerning my behavior.

The interview is a crucial element in developing case study evidence (Yin, 2018). Researchers traditionally have relied on face-to-face interviews because of a high response rate (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The emergence of modern technologies facilitates *face-to-face* and interaction can be facilitated through online platforms (Janghorban et al., 2014). I benefited from modern technological facilities as in-person face-to-face interviews were impossible with COVID-19 restrictions and relied on web-based videoconferencing. I audio recorded the interview sessions while abiding by the procedures for ethical protection of participants set forth by the IRB regarding (a)

boundaries between research and practice, (b) the primary ethical rules, and (c) applications. Participants voluntarily made decisions and were attracted to the likelihood of receiving research benefits. The interview protocol (see Appendix A) included: (a) garnering consent, (b) recording the interview, (c) focusing on my participants, and (d) developing follow-up questions by listening to respondents during the interview. The interview protocol process was standardized to ensure the validity of the research process and to mitigate researcher bias. Each participant answered the same interview questions included in Appendix B.

For establishing reliability and validity, the research must accurately reflect the data and be consistent (Saunders et al., 2019). Reliability and validity are essential criteria used to evaluate quality research (Noble & Smith, 2015). Reliability is the measure of the data dependability and internal consistency of measurement instruments (Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). The methods used in empirical research to enhance reliability and validity include panel review of interview questions, member checking, triangulation, pilot testing, and transcript reviews (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Through member checking, I shared my interpretive reports of the interviews with the participants to assess the credibility of the qualitative results. Member checking is a validation technique a researcher uses to ensure accurate interpretation of the participants' responses (Birt et al., 2016). Using pamphlets to countercheck preliminary data increases validity through member checking. Pamphlets empower participants and reorient the researcher by creating a space for inclusion, discussion, and reciprocal learning (Caretta, 2016). I conducted member checking interviews that allowed the

participants to confirm the accuracy of the interpretive reports and make the comments or corrections needed for validation.

Data Collection Technique

I used a semistructured interview technique and reviewed company documents to collect data. Yin (2018) described semistructured interviews as one of the required data collection techniques in qualitative research. Other data collection techniques in qualitative research are focus groups and action research. Focus groups work when it is better to use a group rather than individuals to obtain information, either due to time constraints or when a population is small (Silverman, 2016). Focus groups generally consist of six to 12 participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Action research is when a researcher takes part in an activity and records the outcome (Silverman, 2016). Action research lacks rigor and contains bias (Yin, 2018). Therefore, I used the interview technique and review of company documents over a focus group or action research to collect data because corroborating interview data with information from other sources was a reasonable approach.

Interviewing a small number of participants often results in a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Individual interview research and review of company documents, according to Silverman (2016), are most appropriate to determine strategies organization leaders use. Fletcher et al. (2016) cited examples of the use of such mixed data sources. Researchers can conduct interviews through face-to-face interaction (site visit), telephone, or through a web-based technique such as videoconferencing (Janghorban et al., 2014). I planned to use a mix of face-to-face, telephone, and

videoconference interview techniques, but due to cost concerns and COVID-19 restrictions, I used the videoconference interview technique.

Each interview technique is unique and has advantages and disadvantages. The use of face-to-face interviews captures the verbal cues, nonverbal cues, emotions, and behavior, but it is costlier for the researcher to go to the site (Mahfoud et al., 2015). Based on cost considerations, some researchers prefer phone or web-based interviews, such as videoconferencing. Phone interviews, as opposed to face-to-face interviews, are practical, convenient, and comfortable for participants because they do not have to incur any travel expenses (Drabble et al., 2015). Interviewees often participate in interviews at a time most convenient to them (S. Lewis, 2015). Videoconferencing reduces the costs associated with the completion of the study because the researcher does not have to travel to the site (Robinson, 2014). Web-based interviews also reduce the spatial and geographical distance between the respondents, which could complicate the data collection process (Nielsen, 2011). According to Nielsen (2011), web-based interviews do not suffer from a low response rate because the respondent and the interviewer interact at a personal level. Nevertheless, web-based interviews require the presence of technologies that can facilitate interaction.

The initial step of the interview process was to email the consent form to the prospective study participants and answer any questions they had over the phone and via email. After obtaining the signed consent form, I set up a mutually convenient time for an actual interview through videoconferencing. I allocated 45 to 60 minutes for the interview. I sought permission to use a digital recording device to record the interview.

Yin (2018) recommended a recording of interviews for transcription purposes. I audio-recorded each interview, took notes, and created reports of my data interpretations. The notetaking process should create rich passages that emulate the participants' perceptions of the topic (Yin, 2018).

The six open-ended questions centering on the research question and listed in Appendix B comprised the interview questions. Silverman (2016) suggested semistructured individual interview research technique assures a researcher to collect information by asking open-ended questions and probing questions. I followed the interview protocol (see Appendix A) during interviews, which were the same for all participants. I continued with interviews until I reached data saturation. A pilot study is suitable for an experimental study (Dwarika-Bhagat et al., 2017; Foster & Gaughf, 2015). I did not conduct a pilot study because I was conducting an exploratory study.

Member checking was important in validating information. Researchers use member checking to gauge the accuracy of the participants' responses (Birt et al., 2016). Member checking is the process of bringing back an interpretive report of the interview to the interviewee for review and confirmation (Harvey, 2015). I used member checking to enhance the unreliability and validity of the research as part of the process of confirming data saturation.

Data Organization Technique

Researchers use data organization techniques to categorize information by participant, date, application, and themes (Williams & Moser, 2019). I used Microsoft Excel to track, store, and categorize research articles and journals. Through journaling, I

scanned the interview notes and administrative documents, recorded the dates and times of the interviews, and categorized the themes that emerged from the participant responses. Researchers also use a reflective journal to maintain methodological rigor and consistency in the analysis and interpretation of data (Applebaum, 2014; Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014). I transcribed audio recordings into Microsoft Word documents using Dragon NaturallySpeaking transcription software. The cataloging process included labeling electronic files and hardcopy files using designated codes for each research participant. Notes of the interview sessions were stored in a hardcopy format for future reference, that allowed me to analyze the data systematically based on first-hand information acquired. I locked paper-based data in a cabinet to be shredded after a minimum of 5 years.

It is mandatory to protect the privacy of the research participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Yin, 2018). As mentioned in the informed consent form, I stored the collected data on my password-protected computer and created a backup on a password-protected hard drive to protect the privacy of the participants. After 5 years, I will permanently shred the paper data and permanently delete the electronic data from the computer and the hard drive.

Data Analysis

Researchers use a data analysis process to organize and analyze data in a way that may allow them access to deeper levels of inquiry (Bearss et al., 2016). Data analysis comprises discoursing the assessment(s), which a researcher can use to answer the interview questions and confirm the selection (Humble, 2015). I followed Yin's (2018) 5-

step data analysis process for a case study, which includes collecting data, disassembling data, reassembling data, interpreting data, and concluding the findings.

Data analysis is the most complex and mysterious of all the phases of qualitative research, where the aim is to rigorously and creatively organize data, find patterns, and elicit themes from data (Houghton et al., 2015). Organizing and coding data helps a researcher successfully merge perceptions and cases to describe typical and composite patterns (Houghton et al., 2015). The software NVivo supports coding as a modern application of the use of qualitative data analysis processing (Patton, 2015). Researchers use the NVivo platform to collect and analyze data in detail through coding and theme identification, which provides validity, reliability, and justification for the conclusions and recommendations stemming from data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I used NVivo for the responses to track and organize the data collection, facilitating the labeling and cataloging of the data.

All participants responded to six open-ended questions relating to the study phenomenon. Study participants provide full explanations on the study topic when asked open-ended questions (Bone et al., 2017). After collecting data, I disassembled the collected data to the units of analysis, such as words and phrases using NVivo software. According to Long et al. (2015), researchers use NVivo to identify keywords and phrases in the collected data. Researchers also use NVivo to code data into themes, serving as an able assistant, and a reliable tool (Yin, 2018). NVivo software is used to convert coded data automatically into themes (Zamawe, 2015). I used NVivo to visualize the data for identifying and determining common themes.

I used classical content analysis to identify themes. Researchers use classical content analysis to understand the concepts respondents discussed most (Schabenberger & Gotway, 2017). During classical content analysis, I placed all the ideas and different thoughts on separate cards and categorize them by themes, which helped question reoccurring concepts and ideas. Schabenberger and Gotway (2017) clarified the importance of classifying the different themes. Fusch and Ness (2015) emphasized the use of mind maps throughout the data analysis process. I analyzed the data using a large board on the wall, known as a mind map.

I used methodological triangulation by integrating the data from company documents, such as charts, graphs, and figures, to support or refute the findings. Researchers rely on methodological triangulation in the analysis of the data in case studies (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Collecting data from multiple sources strengthens the validity of case study analysis (Yin, 2018). According to Antoniadou (2017), thematic analysis across various sources enables the identification of emerging patterns and themes from qualitative data making study findings more credible. I performed a thematic analysis by comparing themes from the data analysis with the themes from new journals and company documents to make the study current.

Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of a qualitative study illustrate data is accurate and trustworthy (Yin, 2018). The reliability of the study increases when a researcher conducts a skillful review of data collection techniques to garner reliable information (Cleland, 2015). The validity of the study is a determination of how well a researcher measures

what is claimed to be measured (Yin, 2018). Reliability and validity were demonstrated by triangulating transcribed responses to the conceptual framework, the literature review, and secondary and archival data.

Reliability

In qualitative studies, reliability addresses the dependability of the data (Noble & Smith, 2015). Dependability refers to the stability of data over time and under different conditions (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015). Dependability is obtaining the same results if a future researcher repeats the study under the same condition (Di Fabio, 2016).

Thorough and careful interaction between the researcher, the research, and collected data is key to a high level of accuracy, increasing the study's dependability (Thomas, 2017).

The researcher seeks to establish dependability through trustworthiness by reporting the data collection method, sampling strategy, and the selection of data analysis techniques (Hays et al., 2016). Trustworthiness was essential in all stages of research. I used the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to achieve dependability.

Validity

The focus of validity is the extent to which study findings get applied to other situations (McKim, 2016). Validity in qualitative case study refers to study credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Cope, 2014). By attaining data saturation, and achieving credibility, transferability, and confirmability of the research findings, I ensured validity by completing member checking for consistency.

Credibility

Credibility means establishing the results of the research trustworthy from the participants' perspective (Leung, 2015). Researchers can enhance credibility through member checking of the interpretation, triangulation, transcript review, interview protocol, focus group protocol, as well as participant observations (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). I ensured credibility through member checking. Member checking in qualitative research is informative feedback or respondent validation to help improve the study accuracy and credibility (Harvey, 2015). I conducted member checking after data analysis that ensured my interpretation of the data represented participants' responses and added new information that was relevant to the study phenomenon. Qualitative research results are valid only when participants review the information.

Transferability

In research, transferability refers to the extent to which researchers can generalize the findings or use them in other settings or contexts (Aravamudhan & Krishnaveni, 2015). Ensuring transferability requires provision for detailed documentation of the study process (Rowlands et al., 2015). Description of the phenomenon, relationship, if any, with the participants, and the exhaustive description of data analysis provides clarity to readers about study transferability (Sarma, 2015). I enhanced the transferability of the study through a thorough description of the process involved in participant selection, interview data, field observations, documents and archival sources, and the coding and analysis processes.

Confirmability

The confirmability criteria of a qualitative study refer to the extent to which the findings of the study reflect the data and the responses of the participants in the study (Baskerville et al., 2015). Researchers establish confirmability when they document the procedures for checking the data throughout the study (Bearss et al., 2016). An audit trail will enable the researcher to adhere to research practices which in turn increase the acceptability of the findings (Sarma, 2015). Readers can use the audit trails to trace the course of data analysis from data gathering to the formation of results during the research work (Sarma, 2015). I kept a journal and maintained an audit trail throughout the research and utilized a research log that ensured confirmability by minimizing personal bias throughout the study. I used the bracketing technique recommended by Mortl and Geo (2015) to guard against tainting the data with personal experiences, biases, and preconceived notions about the research topic.

Data Saturation

The researcher achieves data saturation when additional data provide little or no additional information that would significantly affect the themes, insights, or perspectives of the study (Gentles & Vilches, 2017). Methodological triangulation ensures data are rich in depth using multiple relevant sources to promote saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Through triangulation, a researcher can reach data saturation by examining different levels and perspectives of the explored phenomenon, ensuring the richness of data is met (Fusch & Ness, 2015). I attained data saturation starting with the commonality of

participants' responses, and established the emergence of no new information, codes, or themes.

Transition and Summary

In Section 2, I justified using a qualitative multiple case study. I outlined the use of open-ended questions, member checking, and document and archival analysis to explore strategies some CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. A description of the role of the researcher, the participants, and the sampling technique was presented. The section closed with a discussion of the qualitative academic rigor needed to demonstrate the reliability and validity of strategies in this multiple case study. In Section 3, I will conclude this study with themes and the data emerging from the interview process and consisting of the following subsections: (a) presentation of the findings, (b) application to professional practices, (c) implications for social change, (d) recommendations for action, (e) recommendations for future study, (f) reflections, and (g) conclusions.

Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies some CBMA executives used to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity. Under the umbrella of situational leadership theory and using Yin's (2017) five-step data analysis, I identified three themes: establishing the foundation, developing the team, and cascading the change. Under Theme 1, participants discussed a deliberate and disciplined approach to planning during premerger to lay solid foundations for a smooth transition and improved business success. Theme 2 is about identifying teams from merger companies and developing teams responsible for cascading the change. Theme 3 constitutes implementing strategies that enable leaders to focus on cultural issues, human factors, training, relationships, and communication.

Presentation of the Findings

The study's central research question was:

RQ: What strategies do CBMA executives use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity?

Six semistructured interview questions, follow up questions, and analysis of company documents resulted in three themes. The identified themes constitute strategies for improved business practices and imply social change. Table 1 includes the themes, number of respondents identifying the theme, and their corresponding number of occurrences from the interviews and company documents.

Table 1*Frequency of Themes*

Themes	Number of respondents identifying the theme	Number of occurrences
Establishing the foundation	5	60
Developing the team	5	57
Cascading the change	5	49

Theme 1: Establishing the Foundation

All participants noted that before CBMAs, the executives established a purpose. P1 said that the merger's rationale was to develop the market and products penetration, widen the client base, and build substantial global footprints. According to P1, the planning process began with a meeting with the executives of both companies. P1 added that the objective of the planning process was to capture synergies for effective transitioning. All participants looked at the operating market conditions and ensured growth through merger was feasible. During merger planning, P4 company executives were under time constraints and reviewed operational derivatives, regulatory compliance, and cultural issues. Table 2 shows establishing the foundation subthemes, the number of respondents identifying the theme, and the number of occurrences during data collection.

Table 2*Establishing the Foundation Subthemes*

Subthemes	Number of respondents identifying the theme	Number of occurrences
Due diligence process	5	27
Change management	5	33

P4 said, "All mergers are not the same and depend on the level of synergies and integration magnitude." While planning the merger, all participants noted that they tailored their change to many situations and made a cultural adjustment. Participants noted that executives ensured companies' governance policy included cultural hardwiring and stress-testing the processes to ensure its effectiveness. The company documents revealed that the leaders implemented cultural adjustments using an HR-led exercise to embrace cultural differences during the change management process.

P4 presented planning documents and documents that included merger policies, strategic plans, merger timelines, and risk assessments. P4 added that the planning guidelines also involve building the foundation from the top management to meet the strategic priorities and baseline targets. Upon a successful merger agreement, the P5 company executives started the transitioning process through the actual merger signing, which took place in a year. Before essential merger activities, participating company executives established a transitioning management office, which consisted of newly identified officers from both companies to drive the change management. Senior executives then communicated a robust change management plan, business model, and reinforcement mechanism to transitioning management officers. The executives communicated the operating model, which included cultural and architectural integration. The participants noted that the company executives had regular meetings with transitioning officers to ensure they understood expectations during the due diligence period. The documents revealed that leadership teams seek outside management consultants to forecast and analyze future financials during the diligence period.

P2 said that their transition management officers communicated the transitioning strategies with stakeholders to keep them in the loop. P3 stated that their transitioning officers assured the customers that there would be no compromise in the quality of products and services. The transitioning officers' planning process involved addressing potential overlaps or gaps in skills. If there was an overlap of skills, the planning process included how to offer employees assurance of their job status. P2 said that the planning process included managing internal politics after the merger, modification or addition of technologies, stress management, and meeting regulatory requirements. P2 presented documents relating to the integration planning phase, which included using synergies as the primary focus of operation planning. The documents included the policy for managing conflicting organizational cultures, communications channels, and the rationale for compelling strategies illustrating leaders' preparedness to premerger awareness.

According to participants, the executives ensured that the transition officers prioritized cultural consideration. P4 said, "Planning process involved organizational design, which included cultural consideration because cultural misalignment could rattle employees." P2 supported the notion of cultural consideration stating that company culture dictates work-life balance, pay scale, work environment, personal development, and company benefits depending on the company's norm. P2 added that combining conflicting organizational cultures could create chaos postmerger. All participating company leaders envisioned how the culture should look after a merger and enforced strategies to facilitate smooth transformation. The company documents presented included a detailed checklist and procedures for cultural integration. P2 said, "Strategies

are today's plan for the future outcome, whereas the past shapes culture. So, planning the future for what we know was forged by the past could have huge implications for the business."

Transitioning officers were responsible for building a leadership team to cascade the change throughout the organization. P2 noted that their transitioning officers did a pulse survey of newly established leadership personnel to capture their enthusiasm and competency in managing postmerger change. P5 said, "The primary goal of transitioning officers was to enforce a new operating model, and identify the new leaders, and then ensure the new team understands and are capable of meeting the target." The transitioning officers established core metrics to measure the effectiveness of identified leaders in executing change management. The transitioning office had policies and procedures to provide feedback, risk management, and direct execution.

After establishing the teams, all participants stated that transitioning officers communicated a comprehensive business strategy to newly formed leaders. P4 said that the communication to leaders carried out through in-person meetings included a justification for M&A, new organizational culture outlook, change in department and management personnel, and any mass layoffs. The checklists in the documents relating to in-person meetings included a process to bridge the operational gaps and training topics in WebEx video clips. According to all participants, downsizing was the last option in the planning process. According to P5, transitioning officers structured severance packages, job search assistance, and transferring employees to sister companies if the downsizing was necessary.

The preplanning process of merger activities requires attention to detail. The transitioning officers planned merger activity in confidentiality until the newly assigned leaders were ready to cascade the change. According to P5, "The reason for confidentiality was to avoid rumors and gossip, which could negatively affect the organization's health." All participants noted that the preplanning documents revealed policy modifications to help employees adjust to the new operating model. Participants noted that executives ensured that companies' governance policy included cultural hardwiring and stress testing the processes to ensure its effectiveness.

Connecting Theme 1 to the Literature

Establishing the foundations of CBMAs requires consideration of soft issues such as leadership styles, human resource management, stakeholder convergence, and cultural challenges. Current CBMA conflicting organizational issues are most associated with soft issues (Bari et al., 2019). Participants added that establishing foundations is essential to improve employees' self-esteem and to avoid cultural clashes. According to H. Zhu et al. (2020), corporate mergers often result in low employee self-esteem and relational conflicts, decreasing productivity and affecting companies' bottom line. Participants stated setting priorities, assessing risk, and planning strategic tasks during the due diligence period before the merger were important. Conducting due diligence of firms' strategic tasks, operational activities, and cultural issues could improve the chances of successful CBMA (Latukha, 2017).

The leaders implemented cultural adjustments, an HR-led exercise to embrace cultural differences during the change management process. Pressentin (2015) noted that

addressing cultural dimensions alone does not provide solutions to the organizational challenges, and business leaders need to develop effective internal corporate strategies to address all key factors. The participating company leaders established transitioning officials to develop a leadership team responsible for cascading the organization's change. Khan et al. (2017) noted CBMA success hinges on transitioning teams' social integration on the merger process.

Connecting Theme 1 to the Conceptual Framework

Executive constructs and task considerations make the situational leadership theory an appropriate framework for researchers seeking to address conflicting organizational issues during CBMA design, development, implementation, and perpetuation. Leaders can leverage situational leadership theory to help identify the best course of action by molding their leadership style to match the situation (Lu et al., 2017). According to Deshwal and Ashraf Ali (2020), situational leadership theory is a basis for leaders to choose among alternative options to enhance leadership success in each situation. The executives could leverage situational leadership theory to find the best course of action among alternative options by adjusting their leadership style during CBMA activities.

Theme 2: Developing the Team

Participants stated that the criteria for choosing leadership varied, one being leaders' ability to understand both companies' cultural components. P2 said, "The leaders need to understand the gaps between the two cultures capable of building strategies to build the bridge." The participants noted that building a team with decision-making

capabilities and oversights is the primary component of the integration process. All participants noted that the team-building process included giving priority to internal candidates from both companies. Table 3 shows developing the team subthemes, the number of respondents identifying the theme, and the number of occurrences during data collection.

Table 3

Developing the Team Subthemes

Subthemes	Number of respondents identifying the theme	Number of occurrences
Integration process	5	23
Building the bridge	5	18
Shared identity	5	16

However, P1 and P5 said transitioning officers advertised the leadership positions to explore external candidates who had previous M&As experience. According to the participants, applicants provided resumes, and qualified applicants went through a robust vetting process. P3 posited, "Applicants discussed the matters that matter the most to them, the challenges they encountered while integrating two different organizational challenges, and how they overcome such challenges." P5 added that some of the interviews lasted for hours as there were no time constraints for applicants to make their case. P1 noted once the transitioning officers identified the leadership team, they created a group where new leaders made their case among other hired leaders to discuss their business roles and explained person-job fit on various available positions. Each leader spent significant time getting to know their teams and discussing strategies to build the bridge between cultures. The document revealed that leaders kept all essential

communication documents in a central location accessible through the company portal to new leaders. The portal included essential contact information, all memos, future projects, and FAQs to break down the barriers to information and ease communication.

Participating companies' portals included training modules on companies' new policies, work environment, understanding cultures, and human relationships. The transitioning officers requested feedback from the new leaders to discover additional training and workshops before assigning them tasks. Transitioning officers established a new HR team to monitor the execution of the integration process. P4 said that assigning new roles to the existing HR team could create collateral damage with overwhelming work. P4 said:

The new HR team is different from the existing HR teams. The new HR team under transitioning departments is responsible for integrating two organizational cultures ensuring managing and all the changes needed to bridge the cultural gap. In contrast, regular corporate HR is responsible for another aspect of businesses: company fringed benefits, performance management, talent acquiring, and retention.

The participant presented a printout of documents used for leadership development; the documents related to improving skills, team assessment, problem-solving, conflict management, and risk assessment. The participants noted that transitioning officers reached out to external management consultants to evaluate their merger activities. The consultants used their level of expertise to help transition professionals and guide the change management process. Consultants identified possible

constraints and bottlenecks that could hinder the integration process. P3 said that management consultants helped them minimize overheads and prevented costly employee turnover through seamless integration during M&As.

The documents relating to consultants led activities included solutions to horizontal and vertical integration of resources pre- and postmerger. The documents revealed that horizontal business integration, included strategies on acquiring and merging. As per the document, the vertical integration was aligning the processes between two companies after the merger. Moreover, documents revealed that horizontal integration was broad in scope overseeing market penetration, product development, and differentiation strategies by aligning resources. According to the document, the vertical integrations reduced the cost and refined the business processes by combining, modifying, or adding resources.

According to P3, cross-border cultural integration has two aspects: organizational culture and national culture. P3 said, "It is easier to mold employees to adapt to organizational culture, and extremely difficult to change people's national culture." P2 and P3 said that they had few HR officers who speak the native language of people from the newly acquired company in their transitioning department. P2 contended, "The national culture is about one's norms and belief system. The HR professional from an acquired company thoroughly understands the local people's norms and culture."

All participants stated that they had adopted many policies to meet their newly acquired employees' needs in a different culture. For example, according to P3, "We added policies regarding religious beliefs, race, age, and family structure." Participants

said that the HR team provides ongoing training to the leadership team to align employees' perspective backgrounds to meet organizational goals. P2 added, "On one occasion, we found that supervisors' inability to connect to individuals' identity resulted in miscommunications and discomfort." P1 showed the HR toll-free number the company leaders and employees could use to discuss any discomfort while dealing with cultural issues. P1 said that the leaders take these calls seriously as they see them as training opportunities.

P2 said that the participants noted that they had adopted the three-prong approach to deal with cultural diversity: cognition, behavior, and motivation. P2 noted that culture is embedded in a persons' brain and affects behavior, habits, and world view. Cultural diversity is reflected in persons' clothes, smells, rituals, attitudes, and values. For example, according to P2, people carry a conversation in close proximity in some cultures whereas another culture prefers some distance between individuals. In some cultures, people view others as a part of self, their parents, or siblings, whereas others see them as independent. P2 contended that the cognitive aspect requires leaders to view the world from the employees' perspectives and be mindful that some people look at the phenomenon differently than they do. P2 said that the motivational aspect of cultural diversity is about energizing ones' curiosity to learn about others and a strategy of doing so is by guarding against any bias or projecting personal feelings, which could be sensitive to others. P2 suggested adjusting ones' behavior to the surroundings to improve neural plasticity. P2 said employees receive training on three-prong approaches in their company portal. P2 presented a printout of training modules based on sociocultural,

cognitive theory, and upon review, the documents contained exercises with real-life examples designed to improve behaviors through the cognitive process.

All participants said that HR professionals are aware that unforeseen challenges could arise while dealing with cultural challenges during CBMAs. Therefore, P3 noted that their company policies are flexible, and contingency plans are intact from a legal perspective. According to P3, "When we acquired the new company, at first, we allowed the continuation of current practices and behaviors. Later we gradually started teaching the workforce a new concept." P5 warned that the shuffling at the beginning with new policies and practices could create chaos. All participants agreed that policies and practices align with organizational goals, and proper communication is essential. All participants stated that they had a weekly meeting with leadership teams, and memos were funneled out to employees preparing for a transition, ensuring everyone was on the same page.

People are accustomed to old habits of doing things, said P4. People feel threatened, thinking new policies and practices could threaten their job security, added P5. According to P1, "Proper communication is important to dispel rumors and gossips and prepare the mindset of employees for the change." All participants noted that communication focused on how new policies address fundamental issues and how employees' new roles interact with new processes and practices. P1 posited that the communication also included the justification for change, job security, and support system such as training and tools provided to employees to carry out their functional roles.

According to P5, transitioning officers carried many community-building events. P5 added that the workshops between leaders from different organization settings were interactive discussing strategies, reviewing documents, and exploring border organizational and national cultures based on real data. P4 said, "We are seeking and building common language through our workshops to build alignment and trust." P4 said the leadership team for cross borders reviewed each other's existing business model, newly developed postmerger model, and strategies for cascading the changes throughout each company's department. P4 showed company policy regarding community-building events. The policy outlined that employees' tenure does not outweigh each other; companies' culture does clash, and there is no battle of power.

Connecting Theme 2 to the Literature

Participants supported leadership capabilities for successful postmerger activities. Leadership plays an essential role in retaining talent following CBMA (Degbey et al., 2020), especially when the acquirer and target companies are from two different cultures (Rao-Nicholson et al., 2016). According to Brewer et al. (2020), leaders across cultures could adopt context-specific leadership approaches. Participants noted establishing a separate HR team responsible for postmerger activities. Resolving cultural differences and generating organizational level shared identities through HR integration could increase the success rate (Joshi et al., 2020).

The participants noted a leadership alliance between two companies to build the bridge during the merger. Zheng et al. (2016) proposed the partnering approach among CMNEs to maintain synergies through selective coordination of business activities.

During the selection process, a participant noted, leaders who have previous overseas experience and have flexibility received consideration. When companies decide to expand internationally, flexibility, and attention to the host country's norms are pivotal for successful integration (Degbey et al., 2021).

Participants stated that understanding both merged companies' national and organizational culture is the managers' primary responsibility. Buckley and Munjal (2017) found that cultural differences between an acquirer and an acquired firm are primary obstacles to cultural integration. Participants stated that leaders follow the three-prong approach to deal with organizational silos because cultural aspects affect individual behaviors. According to the participants, multinational companies experience organization silos because of clashes between the dichotomy established by collectivist culture and individualistic culture, which aligned with Pressentin's (2015) findings.

Connecting Theme 2 to the Conceptual Framework

The participants suggested developing the right team who could cascade the change in the organizations. The primary construct of the situational leadership theory is leaders need to adjust their management styles to match up with the team dynamics in any situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). The situational leaders adapt to the different business environments to cascade change in the workplace (Winter & Chaves, 2017). Hersey-Blanchard's situational leadership model could enable leaders to choose the best course of action during team building. Participants noted the teams are responsible for participation, delegation, and executing tasks, and to do so, leaders need to bridge the cultural gap resulting from the merger. Kuchynková (2016) implied that Hersey and

Blanchard's (1977) situational leadership model allow business leaders to integrate different leadership approaches to a specific context, which could bridge the gap between two cultures.

Theme 3: Cascading the Change

All participants stated that the challenge is employees from the parent company needing to adjust to the company's organizational culture across the border and that country's national culture. P1 said that the leadership experienced challenges as they cascaded the change after the merger. Leaders identify, recruit, and train the most influential employees as change agents, giving them skills to adapt to the change effectively. P4 said that the acquired company's employees needed to adjust to the parent company's organizational culture. P4 noted, "If adjustment not administered properly, it could result in low self-esteem, career interruptions, and impaired relationship." Table 4 shows cascading the change subthemes, the number of respondents identifying the theme and the number of occurrences during data collection.

Table 4

Cascading the Change Subthemes

Subthemes	Number of respondents identifying the theme	Number of occurrences
Organizational adjustments	5	31
Context-specificity	5	18

According to the participants, while cascading the change, the newly formed leadership team focused on individual-level factors that could deter cross-cultural adjustment. The individual-level factors are people's personality and self-efficacy. P2

said that culture shapes peoples' personalities, and self-efficacy enabling them to adjust to new settings. P2 added that the extent of interest and motivation to adapt to a new cultural setting depends on individuals' self-efficacy level. P5 posited that while cascading the change postmerger, leaders focused on three criteria: general adjustment, interaction adjustment, and work adjustment. P5 said:

General adjustment is about helping employees to adjust to the culture and living conditions of the acquired company. Interaction adjustment is about engaging employees through interpersonal development to interact with employees from the acquired company comfortably. Finally, work adjustment is about getting accustomed to working conditions, work culture, and expectations.

According to P5, all three levels of adjustments start with the realistic job preview with employees. Participants contended that employees receive accurate, favorable, and unfavorable information regarding their new roles during CBMA to set expectations. P5 presented a printout of job requirements and leaders' responsibilities of few new-formed management positions. The documents also included the company's internal checklist to ensure a person-job fit. The document revealed that companies' leaders had the right processes to align the person-job fit. Participants supported that setting expectations upfront helps employees cope with stress and improve their perception of the employer as honest and truthful. P4 said that after setting the expectations, the HR team selected employees who could live up to the expectations, including those who were willing to embrace cultural challenges that emerged after mergers and acquisitions.

P2 and P3 presented the printout of training to employees from trained professionals on psychological and emotional adjustment starting their new roles after the merger. According to P2, during the selection process, consideration was given to those who had previous overseas experience, flexibility, and were capable of making family adjustments. Participants noted that additional training included in-country adjustments after arriving at the host company and completing the selection process. The host company's employees received similar training depending on their engagement level with the acquired company's policies and interaction with new leadership teams, said the participants. According to P2 and P3, all three levels of adjustments were phased out within a realistic timetable illustrating a smooth transition.

Merger news could bring fear of the unknown. Participants discussed a series of workshops to bring both the employees and leaders aboard. The workshops compromised team building, understanding cultures, learning strategies of each other's organizational practices, and embracing synergies. P3 said, "Postmerger, people showed frustration when they lost control over their authority or task. So, we gave control back to people whenever allowable." The participant presented a copy of internal memos the leaders used to inform the employees why the merger was happening in practical terms and included them in the solution.

All participating companies' senior leaders trained the leaders and provided the tools to channelize the resources. Participants said that the leadership team involved in capabilities building efforts, which included extensive cultural hardwiring training. The cultural hardwiring process started with leaders as a role model. P2 said that when leaders

exhibit cultural adaptation and show support for behavioral change, employees better understand expectations and convictions. P2 presented the company agendas on their calendars, which comprised dates for training related to culture and channeling the resources. The participating company leaders removed barriers and rewarded employees for adjusting to the change through correct mindset and behaviors.

The new operating model resulted in a behavioral change to adjust to a new culture. After the merger, P2 company leaders monitored employees for 2 years for cultural adjustment. Participants said that after the first announcement of the merger, there was resistance and fear. Though we noticed a sadness, employees were adjusting to the change after the merger, said P3. A year after the merger, employees fully adjusted to the new work environment, and after 3 years, employees felt comfortable in their roles. Though it took 3 years for employees to adjust fully, the company leaders developed customized ongoing training to assist employees. Ongoing training resulted in the delivery of operational synergies. P3 company employees adjusted to their new model by committing to strategic priorities. Participants said that ongoing training facilitated the sharing of tacit and explicit knowledge, a broader understanding of cultural discrepancies, and the development of trust among employees.

Many business leaders struggle to integrate people and culture into the new change management business model. P1 said, "When acquiring a multimillion-dollar business, our strategic challenges are building synergies and obtaining a commitment from our employees to support the company 100% in its endeavor." P1 said, "Compelling

message resonated well with employees, which improved the level of employee engagement."

Participants said that cascading the change is about executing the plan through the company. P5 said that the bottleneck was resisting the change because people were comfortable with the status quo. Therefore, department-level meetings with employees are essential than merely sending out polished memos. "We noticed resistance, usually coming from senior workers accustomed to the old habit of doing things," said P5. P2 noted that a new business model or plans could be intrusive in a cultural setting, and dialogue can be combative. So, according to P2, "We take these meetings as contact sports, where we address every single concern of employees to set expectations." Usually, at the end of each meeting, the company leaders concluded what is best for business.

Organization leaders used department-level meetings with employees during premerger to explain benefits from CBMA to employees and the company. The leadership team responsible for facilitating department-level meetings went through workshops to ensure they could gain employees' trust. The objective of department-level meetings was to build understanding, align interest, and obtain commitment through collaborative exercise. The company document revealed that employees' turnover was low postmerger, illustrating the effectiveness of leadership initiatives.

Some of the routine department-level meetings included HR personnel and employees openly discussing the effectiveness of policies integration and cultural dilemma. P3 added, "We welcome healthy conflicts. This way, we know what is working

and what is not, allowing us to improve." P3 showed few employees' feedback after completing meetings; the feedback included personal challenges, supervisor's effectiveness, and factors contributing to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction both. All department-level meetings feedback went to the transitioning officers, and officers used corrective action to strengthen the change management integration process further. Transitioning officers closely regulated the cascading process, and if any roadblocks emerged, the leadership team swiftly acted to reduce the risk.

Connecting Theme 3 to the Literature

Participants noted that cascading change is about promoting operational synergy. Li and Yang (2020) suggested promoting synergy during CBMA. Participants stated that employees view other cultures and practices through their identity lens. Warter and Warter (2017) found that CBMA resulted in cultural clashes, an impact on employees' psychological aspects, and conflicts within management teams. While cascading the change, the leaders stated integrating the cultural dimension in the training process. Hofstede (1991) recommended that leaders integrate cultural dimensions in their training approach.

Participants stated employees were afraid of the unknown, losing control, and lay off during mergers. Participants supported psychological and emotional adjustment through counseling through trained professionals. Valentino et al. (2019) found that the psychological/emotional distance between managers from acquiring EMNEs and their counterparts from developed economies resulted from cultural differences. Therefore, participating company leaders carried out workshops and training to reflect

organizational justice to gain employees' trust. According to Rodríguez-Sánchez et al. (2018), by fostering interaction through workshops, employees perceive a high organizational fairness level and become more loyal towards the organization (Markopoulos et al., 2020). Organizational loyalty in CBMA could lower acculturative stresses that cause resistance and cultural clashes.

Connecting Theme 3 to Conceptual Framework

Cascading the change throughout the organization requires social competency in leaders. According to Chrupała-Pniak et al. (2017), leaders with situational social competence instill mutual bonds between themselves and their followers. Participants noted that no one size fits leadership style is practical while cascading the change because of cross-cultural issues. Blanchard et al. (2013) argued that different circumstances necessitate leaders to flex their styles to fit the situation. While cascading the change after cross-border mergers, a situational leadership approach enables leaders to affirm the subordinates, motivate workers, and take responsibility. Therefore, leaders need to adopt, command, participate, train, and delegate employees for successful organizational acquisition.

Applications to Professional Practice

The need for FDI has reached a prominent height for economic development globally and obtaining FDI has become a challenge for company leaders (Njiraini, 2019). Business leaders in African regions struggled to conduct CBMA analysis from international perspectives because of the absence of real data and strategic business models (Ellis et al., 2015). The participants noted that exploring border organizational

and national cultures premerger based on real data and reviewing each other's existing business model could help leaders develop a strategic business model to cascade changes throughout the company. Successful CBMA in the subregion could result in interest from the U.S. Trade Development Agency (USTDA) and industry partners such as the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA), which could result in foreign investment leading to future growth (Odularu, 2020).

According to Moilanen (2016), employees exhibit emotional behaviors during CBMA. The study findings revealed that leaders focused on organizational and national culture to support employees' cultural identity through transparency and communication. Participants noted that a multicultural management approach could result in shared identity, workplace ethics, and collaboration before and after CBMA. According to the participants, organizational benefits from a successful merger include improved leadership, increased productivity, and larger market share. Successful mergers result in a broader market, diversified products, and increased services, leading to FDI, which business leaders can use to facilitate further growth (Mayer et al., 2017). Participants noted that effective pre-and postmerger strategies could enable executives to stay focused on priorities, empower employees, and gain a competitive edge in the market.

An effective leadership style enables followers to work willingly and confidently during pre- and postmerger activities (Ikpefan & Agwu, 2015). The participants noted a hierarchy of leadership in the CBMA process. For example, executives were responsible for laying down the foundations, transitioning officers identified and developed the leadership team, and newly identified team leaders cascaded the change. Establishing the

hierarchy's apex could improve organizational meeting targets during the CBMA process (Arbel & Orgler, 1990).

Participants noted that a deliberate and disciplined approach to planning during premerger enables a business leader to lay a solid foundation for a smooth transition, leading to business success. Ebere and Fragouli (2015) collected data from secondary sources and found that a well-developed competent team influenced followers' commitment to leaders. Strategic leadership competencies affect teams' productivity and organizational growth (Oswald & Lingard, 2019). Participants noted that the leaders need to avoid cultural conflicts to cascade the change. Creating awareness of cultural differences could avoid cultural disputes and clashes in CBMA (Warter & Warter, 2017), resulting in business continuity without interruptions. Resolving cultural differences and generating organizational-level shared identity could increase the CBMA success rate (Joshi et al., 2020).

Implications for Social Change

CBMA failure negatively affected West African companies (UNCTAD, 2018). Enabling executives in West Africa to enhance management capability during CBMA could result in business sustainability and profitability growth. Executives who were successful in CBMA secured FDI, leading to business profitability and growth (Zheng et al., 2016). According to Asamoah et al. (2020), organizational leaders from profitable companies employ people in the communities they do business. Employment reduces job search stress and improves the standard of living for people in communities. Moreover,

business success results in growing tax revenues, which local government could invest in public amenities such as parks and schools to benefit local communities.

Knowledge transfer and access to information technology could result in innovative social change (Chahine & Mowafi, 2015). Transitioning officers conducted many community-building events, building common language through workshops to create alignment and trust. During CBMA, the companies shared technologies, methodologies, resources, philosophies, and social systems benefiting societal development. Participants noted that when companies are accessible to a foreign culture, methodologies of doing things, and new ideas, employees get exposure to innovative living and working styles, improving their quality of life.

Recommendations for Action

The study findings resulted in strategies for successful CBMAs. The strategies have three elements: establishing the foundation, developing the team, and cascading the change. Each of the identified strategies could enable a smooth transition from premerger activities to postmerger activities leading to business continuity and profitability. Failure of CBMA could deter future reduction of CBMA activities among West African companies. Failure in CBMA activities resulted in an \$11 billion decrease in FDI in West African companies in 2017 (UNCTAD, 2018).

West Africa's FDI projects earned the most robust growth in the African continent with a CAGR of 27.7% (Anyanwu & Yameogo, 2015), making the subregion a profitable destination for CBMAs. Therefore, company executives in African regions and outside of Africa interested in future CBMAs could benefit from the study findings to

carry out their business venture. CBMA constitutes complex activities. Discussing all intricacies in detail is beyond the scope of this research. Future researchers could use study findings and conduct additional research in CBMAs to bridge the gap.

Thousands of businesses worldwide report their social and environmental initiatives to the Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS; Urban & George, 2018). IRIS is performance metrics on social and environmental aspect of businesses, which are available to institutional investors. My recommendation for business leaders involved in CBMA is to report their social and environmental performance to IRIS, attracting institutional investors interested in social impact investing.

To reach a wider audience, I plan to disseminate the study findings through ProQuest publication and peer-reviewed journals. Additionally, I plan to participate in the M&A conference in 2022 sponsored by International Bar Association, which will occur in NYC and Barcelona. Also, I plan to join the International Network for Merger and Acquisition advisors. The platform is suitable to publish my findings and to interact with other professionals in the field.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study involved participants from different industries, improving the transferability of study findings to broader populations. However, the CBMA is a context-specific activity, and narrowing down the research to one specific industry could result in detailed findings suitable for specific settings. The first study limitation was honesty in the participants' responses and thoroughness. Therefore, future scholars could research the topic with a mixed-method study to validate qualitative data with secondary

quantitative data such as companies' financials to improve study credibility. Moreover, a future researcher could conduct the study with larger sample size, machine learning, and topological data analysis to gain additional insights from different perspectives. Mixed research methodology, the population outside the study area, and larger sample size could enable future researchers to generalize study findings to larger settings. Such findings could benefit companies by improving practices relating to CBMA.

The second limitation was the participants might have insufficient time and knowledge to answer the interview questions. In this study, I allocated 45-60 minutes for interview time, and participants were knowledgeable, and I reached data saturation within that time frame. The study findings revealed that the participating companies involved in CBMA for growth purposes. A future researcher could interview leaders from institutional investment firms to explore strategies to gain access to social impact funds. Additionally, future researchers could use the social impact business model as a conceptual framework in their research. Social impact-focused research could benefit CBMA leaders because of the availability of social impact funds from institutional investors (Chahine & Mowafi, 2015). Access to social impact funds could help business leaders to improve their business practices relating to corporate social responsibility.

Reflections

The doctoral study was rigorous but rewarding. Though it took a long time, the feeling that I will obtain a terminal degree is fulfilling. Throughout the doctoral journey, I received numerous feedbacks, and as I addressed them, I learned new things and improved my business capabilities and writing standards. The study involved an

extensive literature review and exploring participants' perspectives, which improved my understanding of the phenomenon.

During the doctoral study process, I learned how to conduct research, which could be useful for my future publications. In many instances, I felt exhausted and ready to give up; however, I kept motivating myself. I understood the importance of prioritization and working with others. I learned writing is easy, editing the work to meet the university's standards is hard. I am hopeful that the lessons learned during my doctoral journey will enable me to contribute to the field by finding solutions to real-life business problems.

My interest in the study topic resulted from my desire to work as a CBMA consultant. Therefore, the quality of research findings is essential to my success. To mitigate bias and avoid viewing the conclusions from a personal perspective, I embraced information from participants' views. Considering the rigor and time requirement for doctoral study completion, I recommend that future researchers choose a study topic of interest to avoid boredom.

Conclusion

West Africa's enormous potential coupled with governments' enactment of business-friendly policies and regulations have attracted foreign investors and social entrepreneurs. Conducting due diligence of firms' strategic tasks, operational activities, and cultural issues could improve the chances of successful CBMAs (Latukha, 2017). Participating company leaders who envisioned the postmerger organizational culture were successful in facilitating smooth transformation.

The findings of this study showed that no one-size-fits-all leadership style is practical while cascading the change because of cross-cultural issues. When companies decide to expand internationally, flexibility and attention to the host country's norms are pivotal for successful integration (Degbey et al., 2021). Business leaders in different circumstances need to flex their leadership styles to fit the situation. Leaders can leverage situational leadership theory to help identify the best course of action by molding their leadership style to match the situation (Lu et al., 2017). Using a situational leadership approach enables leaders to adopt, command, participate, train, and delegate to employees for successful CBMA design, development, and implementation.

The study findings revealed three capacities during the CBMA process: executives to build the foundation, transitioning officers to develop leadership teams, leadership teams to cascade the change through the organizations. Khan et al. (2017) argued that leaders could delegate and disperse responsibility among various levels of hierarchy in decision-making by pursuing the distributed leadership model. The primary challenge leaders encountered during CBMA was a cultural difference, which, according to participants, could affect change management.

The study findings disclosed building a strong foundation before premerger through stakeholder engagement, proper planning, social integration, and communication for compatibility fits. Transitioning officers carried out the planning process by integrating teams from merging companies and establishing separate HRs to oversee the integration process. The new HR role was to ensure successful acculturation. The leadership teams under the guidance of the transitioning department cascaded the change.

The leaders focused on the human factor, communication, building trust, and team building to disseminate change across the organization.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Before the interview

I will email the potential participants an invitation to participate in the study, the consent form, and interview questions.

I will confirm the receipt and understanding of the provided documents, schedule a 45 to 60-minute telephone or videoconference interview with each participant who agrees to take part in the study at a convenient location and provide answers to concerns and questions raised.

During the interview

I will obtain the signed consent form, if not already received from the participant, offer a brief introduction and an overview of the research topic, confirm participant's agreement for the interview to be recorded for transcription purposes, and confirm participant's understanding of the right to withdraw voluntarily from the interview and study at any time, for any reason by notifying me by email or phone.

I will remind participants that the interview will remain confidential, with identifiable interview responses and participant identity kept strictly confidential.

I will ask open-ended questions in the semistructured interview to collect data that explore the perceptions and experiences of the central research question.

After the interview

I will thank the participant for contributing to the study and transcribe the interview responses. I will contact the participant on a later date to verify the accuracy of the

transcript and to engage in member checking to obtain any additional information that might be offered.

I will confirm the accuracy of meaning interpretation from all participants, convert all received paper documents to digital format, destroy paper documents, and save all files to a hard drive and maintain in the cloud for 5 years, then destroyed.

I will send participants the summary of findings and an electronic copy of the completed study if requested.

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. What strategies did you use to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity?
2. What key challenges did you encounter while reducing the conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs?
3. What strategies and processes did you use in overcoming the key challenges you encountered while reducing conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs?
4. What leadership strategy was most appropriate to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity and, based upon your organization's experiences, why?
5. What leadership strategy was least appropriate to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity and, based upon your organization's experiences, why?
6. What further information could you provide about the strategies to reduce conflicting organizational issues in CBMAs to increase economic productivity?