

# Strategic Planning and Leadership Profile

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**Abstract:** Strategic planning is an essential lever for companies, allowing them to set long-term objectives and develop strategies to achieve them. This process is particularly relevant for SMEs operating in competitive environments with limited resources. However, its adoption varies based on the leader's profile, which affects how formal strategic practices are perceived and implemented. This study aims to explore the relationship between the profile of 108 leaders and the use of strategic planning, focusing on the context of Moroccan SMEs, specifically in the Oriental region, to better understand these interactions. Our study thus confirms that strategic planning in Moroccan SMEs is sensitive to several characteristics of the leader's profile.

**Keywords:** Strategic Planning ; Leadership Profile ; SMEs ; Morocco.

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## 1. Introduction

Strategic planning is a fundamental process that enables companies to define clear long-term objectives and develop appropriate strategies to achieve them. This process is particularly crucial for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which operate in a competitive environment with often limited resources. By engaging in rigorous strategic planning, SMEs can better anticipate changes in their industry, optimize their resources, and strengthen their market position. Despite these advantages, the adoption of strategic planning within SMEs remains variable due to the diversity of factors influencing decision-making.

Among the factors impacting strategic planning, the profile of the leader is crucial. The leader, as the main decision-maker, not only shapes the company's vision but also determines the approach adopted to achieve set objectives. This profile can be described through various dimensions: age, level of education, field of study, and professional experience. These characteristics influence the leader's perception of the benefits of strategic planning and their ability to mobilize the resources necessary for its implementation.

Based on the above, the research question we will try to address is as follows: **Is there a relationship between the leader's profile and the use of strategic planning in Moroccan SMEs?**

## 2. Literature Review

In this literature review, two critical aspects of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) will be examined. First, the concept of strategic planning will be explored, beginning with an analysis of the three principal approaches to strategic thinking in businesses, followed by a more focused examination of strategic planning within SMEs. The second part of the review will address the profiles of SME leaders, analyzing the characteristics and roles of these leaders and their influence on strategic decision-making.

### 2.1 Strategic Planning

Strategic planning can be understood as a methodical process wherein a company's strengths are deliberately aligned with the opportunities present within its business environment. For this process to be effective, it is imperative that managers systematically gather, evaluate, and analyze pertinent information regarding the business environment while simultaneously assessing the company's internal strengths and weaknesses. This thorough analysis serves as the foundation for formulating a clear organizational mission alongside a set of realistic goals and objectives, which subsequently guide the development of tactical and operational plans [1].

#### 2.1.1 Key Approaches in Strategic Planning

The evolution of strategic planning in business is centered around three principal approaches: strategic fit, strategic intent, and blue ocean strategy. These approaches have progressively shaped the significance and utility of strategic planning over time.

##### 2.1.1.1 Classical Approach: Adaptation and Positioning

Between the 1960s and 1980s, business success was predominantly grounded in two fundamental principles: a rigorous analysis of the external environment and its strategic adaptation, alongside pursuing a competitive advantage to outpace rivals. The SWOT model, developed by Learned, Christensen, Andrews, and Guth in 1965, emerged as a central tool for evaluating strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. However, this model was criticized for its static nature and inadequacy when applied to multiproduct or multimarket firms [2].

Michael Porter refined this approach with his concept of competitive advantage, emphasizing the significance of analyzing the five forces to identify key success factors [3]. He proposed three primary value-creation strategies: cost leadership, differentiation, and focus. Despite its foundational influence, the classical approach revealed limitations, mainly due to its rigid and deterministic nature, thereby paving the way for new strategic perspectives.

### **2.1.1.2 Intermediate Approach: Strategic Intent and Movement**

The 1980s marked a shift towards a more dynamic understanding of strategy, wherein long-term planning became increasingly elusive amidst an uncertain and competitive environment. Japanese firms, in particular, underscored the necessity of developing a portfolio of evolving competitive advantages. Hamel and Prahalad (1989) introduced the concepts of strategic intent and core competencies, highlighting the critical role of an ambitious vision and essential capabilities in navigating a rapidly changing market landscape.

### **2.1.1.3 New Approach: Blue Ocean Strategy**

Introduced by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne in 2005, the Blue Ocean Strategy distinguishes itself by advocating for creating new market spaces far removed from direct competition. Unlike the saturated and fiercely contested "red oceans," "blue oceans" represent unexplored opportunities and undefined markets. However, this approach demands substantial investment and continuous innovation to prevent these newly established markets' saturation—a particularly pronounced challenge for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

## **2.1.2 Strategic Planning within SMEs**

Research on strategic planning within SMEs is generally limited and scarce, particularly in developing countries such as Morocco. Most publications on SMEs tend to focus on factors that contribute to their survival, such as financing, rather than on a deeper understanding of the growth process and attaining a sustainable competitive advantage [6]. However, it is evident that, despite its critical importance for the sustainability and development of businesses, strategic planning within SMEs is often regarded as incomplete, unstructured, irregular, sporadic, and rather reactive and informal due to the distinct characteristics of SMEs compared to larger enterprises. Numerous scholars argue that most SME owner-managers do not engage in formal planning or strategy [7].

Similarly, according to [8], the time horizon for SMEs is often short, whereas strategic planning typically requires a medium- to long-term perspective. Moreover, the owner-manager frequently lacks the necessary perspective to manage the enterprise effectively, as they are often preoccupied with addressing day-to-day operational issues.

Carrière (1990) also notes that *"in SMEs, the frequent absence of formal planning means that the future of the enterprise is more often governed by strategic vision"* (p.55). [10], [11] further links vision to business strategy, describing vision as a systemic thinking approach for setting goals and objectives and a capacity to envision scenarios for achieving those goals and objectives. According to Fillion, vision refers to a systemic thought process that serves as a guiding thread around which the organization of activities is structured. To elaborate on his perspective, Fillion (1996) identifies planning as a visionary process, explaining that *"to move into action, a work framework is provided, with minimal planning, often at the request of financial partners. This embryonic stage eventually takes the form of a business plan or a strategic plan"* (p.7). Thus, vision becomes a technique used to anticipate change and construct scenarios for predicting the future [12]. This technical skill can only be developed by the entrepreneur or the leader. This naturally leads us to the subsequent discussion: the pivotal role of leadership within SMEs.

## 2.2 Leadership Profile within SMEs

Numerous scholars highlight that the owner-manager often embodies the strategic apex of an SME's organizational structure [13]. The management of Moroccan SMEs adheres closely to this pattern, characterized by a high degree of decision-making centralization in the hands of the owner-manager. This centralization is reinforced by the owner-managers constant presence within the enterprise, which amplifies their hierarchical dominance and affords them a clear vantage point to assess the company's performance. However, this observation predominantly applies to very small and medium-sized enterprises with limited operations.

Furthermore, this individualism and the desire to maintain control often contribute to lacking a well-defined strategy within SMEs. Instead of being grounded in systematic planning and foresight, decision-making in these enterprises tends to rely more on reaction and intuition [14].

### 2.2.1 Definition of Leadership Profile

A profile can be defined as the set of distinctive traits that characterize an individual, group, or entity [15]. It also encompasses the qualifications, skills, and personal attributes that equip an individual to perform a specific job or assume a particular role.

The leadership profile can also encompass various dimensions, including economic, social, cultural, geographical, experiential, and competency-based elements [16]. Indeed, analyzing the characteristics of SME leaders is crucial for understanding and interpreting their behavior and management style within the enterprise. Numerous studies have confirmed a direct correlation between the leader's foundational education and their behavior within the organization. Guthrie and Satta (1997) investigated the direct relationship between educational attainment and training on leaders' attitudes and behaviors. Social characteristics or social belonging, such as age, gender, basic education, tenure within the company, tenure in the leadership position, tenure within the industry, management style, competencies, personality traits, as well as the environmental characteristics of the business, are all influential factors.

However, it is essential at this stage to differentiate between the owner-manager and the professional manager. Schein (1983) explains that the latter is characterized by rational thinking, as their decision-making is based on logical analysis rather than intuition. In contrast, the owner-manager is influenced by values derived from their personality and position.

### 2.2.2 Characteristics of the Leadership Profile

The literature provides extensive studies on SME leaders and their characteristics. Benmira and Agboola (2021) trace the evolution of leadership theories from the 19th century to the present, illustrating how these theories have adapted to the changing understanding of leadership.

The Trait Era began with the Great Man theory, which suggested that leadership qualities are innate. This evolved into trait theories in the 1930s and 1940s, focusing on identifying specific traits linked to effective leadership. However, this approach was eventually abandoned due to the difficulty of establishing a consistent set of traits.

In the Behavioral Era of the 1940s and 1950s, the focus shifted to leadership behaviors, emphasizing that effective leadership could be learned through specific actions rather than being an inherent quality. This was followed by the Situational Era in the 1960s, which introduced the idea that leadership effectiveness is context-dependent. This led to the development of contingency theories that advocated for adaptable leadership styles based on the environment.

The New Leadership Era emerged in the 1990s and 2000s, responding to the complexity of modern organizational environments. This era introduced Transactional and Transformational Leadership

theories, the former focusing on structured, reward-based leadership and the latter on inspiring and motivating followers. It also saw the rise of Shared, Collaborative, and Collective Leadership models, emphasizing distributed leadership across organizations, and Servant and Inclusive Leadership, which focus on empowering and developing followers. The era culminated in Complexity Leadership theory, which advocates for a holistic, systemic approach to leadership in the face of increasing organizational complexities.

Moreover, several scholars have sought to propose formal categorizations of leadership characteristics. For instance, Storey (1994) categorizes these characteristics based on familial background, education, experiences, and personal traits, such as age, personality traits, and motivation. Similarly, Lee and Tsang (2001) classify leadership characteristics according to educational and experiential background, relational networks, and personality traits. Chapellier (1997) identifies three objective variables—education, age, and experience—that distinguish SME leaders.

### 3. Materials and Methods

Selecting an epistemological position must align with the researcher's approach to data analysis. This study adopts a positivist stance, which views reality as independent, distinct from the researcher, and posits that knowledge is objective. The primary objective of this research is to examine whether there is a relationship between the leadership profile of SME leaders and strategic planning. This inquiry follows a hypothetico-deductive approach, wherein theoretical reasoning has led to the formulation of the following central hypothesis:

**There is a relationship between SME leadership profile and their engagement in strategic planning.**

To validate or refute this hypothesis, a survey was conducted among SMEs in the Oriental region of Morocco.

It is important to note that, according to the Moroccan Observatory of SMEs in its report titled "*Study of the Entrepreneurial Fabric of the Oriental: Oriental Region (2023 Edition)*," 12,924 SMEs were recorded in 2020.

Furthermore, a convenience sampling method was employed, with a questionnaire distributed to as many target companies as possible. This approach resulted in 108 completed and usable questionnaires.

The dependent variable in this study is strategic planning (coded as 0 for "No" and 1 for "Yes"), indicating whether an organization engages in formalized strategic planning. The independent variables analyzed include:

- **Age:** Less than 30, Between 30-40, Between 41-50, and Over 50 years.
- **Experience:** Less than 5 years, Between 5-10 years, and More than 10 years.
- **Level of Education:** Less than High School Diploma, High School Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, and PhD.
- **Field of Study:** Management Sciences, Other Disciplines, and No Specific Field.

Each independent variable was analyzed using Logistic Regression to determine its influence on the likelihood of strategic planning. A Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA) was also employed to assess relationships between these leadership characteristics and strategic planning engagement among SMEs in the Oriental region of Morocco.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Logistic Regression

#### 4.1.1 Impact of Age on Strategic Planning

The variable Age was analyzed with three categorical levels compared against the reference group of Over 50 years (table 1).

**Table 1:** Nominal Coding of Age Categories for Logistic Regression Analysis

Age	Frequency	Parameter Coding		
		(1)	(2)	(3)
Between 30-40 years	31	1,000	,000	,000
Between 41-50 years	34	,000	1,000	,000
Less than 30 years	11	,000	,000	1,000
More than 50 years	32	,000	,000	,000

The results of the logistic regression are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Logistic Regression Results for Age and Strategic Planning

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
							Lower bound	Upper bound
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Age			2,949	3	,400			
Age (1)	,489	,601	,662	1	,416	1,630	,502	5,296
Age (2)	-,201	,538	,139	1	,709	,818	,285	2,347
Age (3)	-,756	,722	1,096	1	,295	,470	,114	1,933
Constante	,938	,393	5,695	1	,017	2,556		

a. Variable(s) entered at Step 1, B: Regression coefficient, S.E.: Standard error, Wald: Wald test, df: Degrees of freedom, Sig.: Significance level (p-value), Exp(B): Odds ratio, and 95% CI for Exp(B): 95% confidence interval for the odds ratio.

The logistic regression analysis for age did not show a statistically significant overall effect on the likelihood of having a strategic plan (Wald Chi-Square = 2.949,  $p = 0.400$ ). The reference category was “more than 50 years”.

- Age (1): “Between 30 and 40 years” had a coefficient ( $B = 0.489$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.630$ ), but the effect was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.416$ ).
- Age (2): “Between 41 and 50 years” had a coefficient ( $B = -0.201$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.818$ ), with a p-value of 0.709, indicating no significant effect.
- Age (3): “Less than 30 years” had a coefficient ( $B = -0.756$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.470$ ), which was also not statistically significant ( $p = 0.295$ ).

The findings indicate that age alone does not significantly influence the likelihood of having a strategic plan. Although individuals aged 30-40 years and 41-50 years showed slightly different odds compared to those over 50 years, the effects were not statistically significant. The reference group (over 50 years)

appears to have higher odds of having a strategic plan, but the lack of statistical significance across the age groups implies that age may not be the primary determinant of strategic planning. Other factors, such as experience and leadership roles, might play a more critical role.

#### 4.1.2 Impact of Experience on Strategic Planning

The variable Experience was analyzed with two categorical levels compared against the reference group of More than 10 years (table 3).

**Table 3:** Nominal Coding of Experience Categories for Logistic Regression Analysis

Experience	Frequency	Parameter Coding	
		(1)	(2)
Between 5 and 10 years	30	1,000	,000
Less than 5 years	15	,000	1,000
More than 10 years	63	,000	,000

The results of the logistic regression are summarized in Table 4.

**Table 4:** Logistic Regression Results for Experience and Strategic Planning

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
							Lower bound	Upper bound
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Experience			4,813	2	,090			
Experience (1)	-1,323	,674	3,854	1	,050	,266	,071	,998
Experience (2)	-,112	,520	,046	1	,829	,894	,323	2,476
Constante	1,190	,432	7,594	1	,006	3,286		

The logistic regression analysis for experience revealed a marginally significant effect on the likelihood of having a strategic plan (Wald Chi-Square = 4.813,  $p = 0.090$ ). The reference category was “more than 10 years”.

- Experience (1): “Between 5 and 10 years” had a coefficient ( $B = -1.323$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.266$ ), with a p-value of 0.050, indicating a marginally significant effect.
- Experience (2): “Less than 5 years” had a coefficient ( $B = -0.112$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.894$ ), which was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.829$ ).

The results suggest that individuals with more than 10 years of experience are more likely to engage in strategic planning compared to those with less experience. Specifically, those with 5 to 10 years of experience were 73.4% less likely to have a strategic plan than those with more than 10 years, and this effect was marginally significant. This finding indicates that extensive experience is likely necessary for effective strategic planning, while individuals with less than 5 years of experience showed no significant difference compared to the reference group, suggesting that very limited experience does not significantly impact strategic planning practices.

### 4.1.3 Impact of Education Level on Strategic Planning

The variable Education Level was analyzed with four categorical levels compared against the reference group of Less than High School Diploma (table 5).

**Table 5:** Nominal Coding of Education Level Categories for Logistic Regression Analysis

Education Level	Frequency	Parameter Coding			
		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Bachelor's Degree	27	1,000	,000	,000	,000
High School Diploma	11	,000	1,000	,000	,000
PhD	8	,000	,000	1,000	,000
Master's Degree	44	,000	,000	,000	1,000
Less than High School Diploma	18	,000	,000	,000	,000

The results of the logistic regression are summarized in Table 6.

**Table 6:** Logistic Regression Results for Education Level and Strategic Planning

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
							Lower bound	Upper bound
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> education level			18,486	4	,001			
education level (1)	1,145	,633	3,275	1	,070	3,143	,909	10,863
education level (2)	,270	,775	,121	1	,728	1,310	,287	5,980
education level (3)	2,398	1,173	4,177	1	,041	11,000	1,103	109,674
education level (4)	2,755	,713	14,914	1	,000	15,714	3,883	63,597
Constante	-,452	,483	,874	1	,350	,636		

The logistic regression analysis for level of education demonstrated a statistically significant effect on the likelihood of having a strategic plan (Wald Chi-Square = 18.486,  $p = 0.001$ ). The reference category was “Less than High School Diploma”.

- Education Level (1): “Bachelor’s Degree” had a coefficient ( $B = 1.145$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.143$ ), with a p-value of 0.070, suggesting a marginally significant effect.
- Education Level (2): “High School Diploma” had a coefficient ( $B = 0.270$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 1.310$ ), with a p-value of 0.728, indicating no significant effect.
- Education Level (3): "PhD" had a coefficient ( $B = 2.398$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 11.000$ ), with a p-value of 0.041, indicating a significant effect.
- Education Level (4): "Master’s Degree" had a coefficient ( $B = 2.755$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 15.714$ ), with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a highly significant effect.

The results indicate that higher levels of education are associated with a greater likelihood of having a strategic plan. Specifically, individuals with a Master's degree are 15.7 times more likely to have a



strategic plan compared to those with less than High School Diploma, and those with a PhD are 11 times more likely. These effects are statistically significant, highlighting the importance of advanced education in fostering strategic thinking and planning capabilities. However, the effect of a High School Diploma was not significant, and Bachelor's Degree showed only a marginal effect, suggesting that postgraduate education plays a crucial role in strategic planning.

#### 4.1.4 Impact of Field of Study on Strategic Planning

The variable Field of Study was analyzed with two categorical levels compared against the reference group of No Specific Field (table 7).

**Table 7:** Nominal Coding of Field of Study Categories for Logistic Regression Analysis

Field of Study	Frequency	Parameter Coding	
		(1)	(2)
Other Disciplines	39	1,000	,000
Management Sciences	57	,000	1,000
No Specific Field	12	,000	,000

The results of the logistic regression are summarized in Table 8.

**Table 8:** Logistic Regression Results for Field of Study and Strategic Planning

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% CI for Exp(B)	
							Lower bound	Upper bound
Step 1 <sup>a</sup> Field of Study			12,521	2	,002			
Field of Study (1)	-,642	,691	,863	1	,353	,526	,136	2,039
Field of Study (2)	1,119	,721	2,407	1	,121	3,062	,745	12,593
Constante	,693	,612	1,281	1	,258	2,000		

The logistic regression analysis for field of study also showed a significant overall effect on the likelihood of having a strategic plan (Wald Chi-Square = 12.521,  $p = 0.002$ ). The reference category was "No specific field".

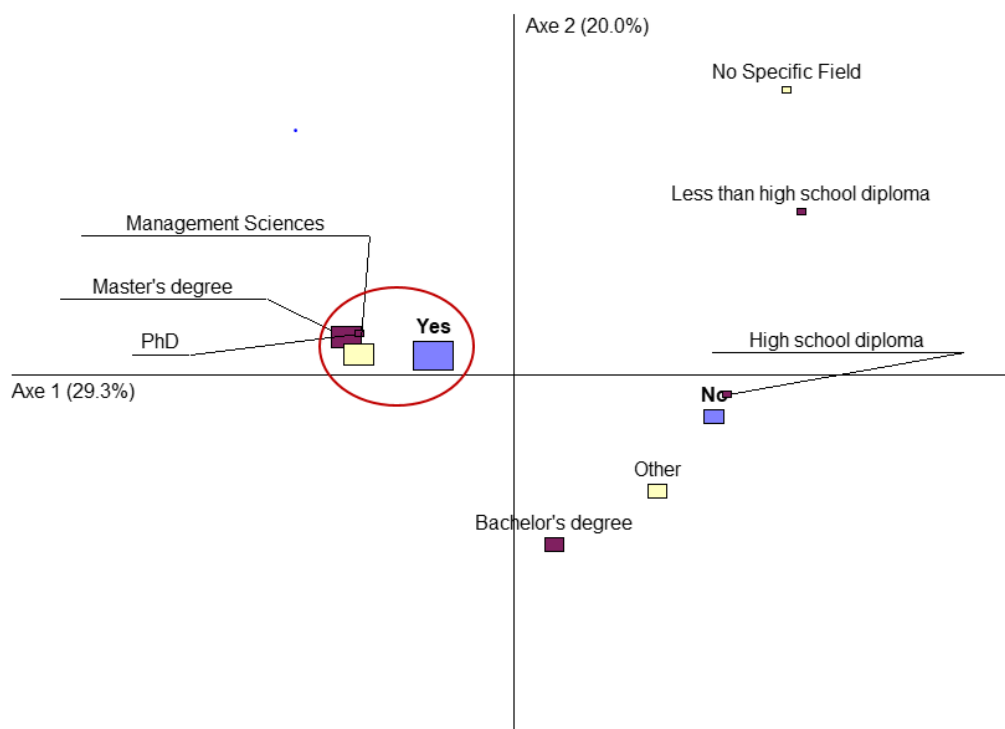
- Field of Study (1): "Other Disciplines" had a coefficient ( $B = -0.642$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 0.526$ ), which was not statistically significant ( $p = 0.353$ ).
- Field of Study (2): "Management Sciences" had a coefficient ( $B = 1.119$ ) and an odds ratio ( $\text{Exp}(B) = 3.062$ ), with a p-value of 0.121, indicating no significant effect.

The analysis suggests that field of study has an overall impact on strategic planning, but none of the specific fields showed a statistically significant individual effect. The odds ratio for individuals in management sciences indicates that they are about 3 times more likely to have a strategic plan compared to those without a specific field, but this effect was not statistically significant. Similarly, those in other

disciplines were less likely to have a strategic plan, but the effect was not significant. These findings imply that, while the type of education might influence strategic planning, other factors may be more determinative.

#### 4.2 Correspondence Factor Analysis (CFA)

To enrich our logistic regression analysis, a Correspondence Factorial Analysis (CFA) was conducted to explore the multidimensional relationships between the leader's profile and strategic planning. This method allows us to highlight key associations between variables (categories represented by rows and columns in a multiple contingency table) and to identify the most discriminating factors among them.



**Figure 1: Correspondence Factorial Analysis of Relationships Between Leadership Profile and Strategic Planning**

The factor map shows that the first two axes explain only 49.3% of the total information on the phenomenon being studied (29.3% on the horizontal axis and 20% on the vertical axis). However, several interdependencies between variables can be observed. Specifically, the analysis reveals that SME leaders holding master's or doctoral degrees in management sciences are more inclined to use strategic planning.

## 5. Conclusion

The objective of this research was to investigate the relationship between leader profiles and the adoption of strategic planning, with a focus on Moroccan SMEs, especially in the Oriental region, to gain a clearer understanding of these interactions

The analyses conducted for each independent variable—age, experience, level of education, and field of study—highlight several key insights into the factors influencing strategic planning within organizations:

- Experience and level of education emerged as significant factors in determining the likelihood of having a strategic plan. Notably, individuals with more than 10 years of experience and those

with advanced education (Master's Degree or PhD) were significantly more likely to engage in strategic planning.

- Age and field of study did not show strong individual effects on strategic planning, although the overall model for field of study was significant, as also shown on the factor map. This suggests that while these factors might contribute to strategic planning behaviors, they are likely moderated by other variables such as experience and organizational role.
- The findings underscore the importance of advanced education and extensive professional experience in shaping strategic planning capabilities. Postgraduate education likely provides individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for effective long-term planning, while accumulated experience equips them with the practical insights needed for strategic decision-making.

Future research should explore the interaction between these factors, as well as the potential influence of other determinants, such as leadership style, leadership style, organizational culture, and external environmental factors, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of what drives strategic planning within organizations.

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