

Leadership Turnover and Strategic Continuity: The 'Revolving-Door' CEO Phenomenon in Nigerian Electricity Distribution Companies (2013–2025)

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ABSTRACT: Since the November 2013 privatisation of Nigeria's power sector, the eleven electricity distribution companies (DisCos) carried forward from the original handover have experienced a persistently high rate of chief executive officer (CEO) change, frequently driven by shareholder disputes, political interference, and unresolved liquidity pressures rather than by planned succession. This study examines the “revolving-door” CEO phenomenon in eleven Nigerian DisCos between 2013 and 2025 and its consequences for strategic continuity, reform implementation, and institutional memory. Using a mixed-methods, ex post facto design, the study operationalises four independent variables — CEO tenure length and turnover frequency, basis of CEO appointment, strategic plan continuity across transitions, and management team stability below CEO level — against three dependent variables: strategic initiative completion rate, organisational performance trend, and staff morale/turnover. The study register identifies 61 substantive MD/CEO appointments, comprising 50 leadership transitions, across the eleven DisCos, yielding a sector mean CEO tenure of approximately 2.35 years —but far more unevenly distributed. Port Harcourt (PHEDC) and Jos (JEDC) each recorded eight leadership transitions in the study period — the most volatile franchises in the sector,— while Kano (KEDCO), Kaduna (KAEDCO), and Ikeja (IKEDC) sustained single chief executives for seven to nine years before more recent turnover. Shareholder- and politically-driven appointments (44.0% of transitions) were associated with markedly shorter subsequent tenure (0.7 years) than merit-based appointments (38.0% of transitions; 4.5 years). The study concludes that leadership discontinuity remains a structural, not merely managerial, constraint on Nigeria's power sector reform trajectory, and that governance interventions must be calibrated to the markedly uneven distribution of turnover risk across DisCos rather than treated as a uniform sector-wide condition.

KEYWORDS: CEO turnover; strategic continuity; Nigerian DisCos; electricity distribution; institutional memory; corporate governance; power sector reform; upper echelons theory

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's electricity distribution companies (DisCos) occupy the final and most consumer-facing segment of the Nigerian Electricity Supply Industry (NESI) value chain, and their operational performance is widely regarded as the single most visible determinant of the success or failure of the November 2013 privatisation reform (Nairametrics, 2025; Roles of DisCos in Nigeria's Energy Sector, 2022). More than a decade after the handover of eleven distribution companies from the defunct Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) to core private investors, aggregate technical, commercial and collection (ATC&C) losses across the DisCos remain above 40 per cent in several franchise areas, and slightly more than half of registered customers remain unmetered (Nairametrics, 2025; Tribune Online, 2025). While infrastructure decay, gas supply constraints, and non-cost-reflective tariffs are frequently cited as proximate causes of this underperformance (Adeyemi, 2019; Okafor & Eze, 2021), a less-examined but arguably more fundamental constraint is the instability of executive leadership within the DisCos themselves.

Corporate leadership theory holds that strategy execution is a multi-year undertaking that depends on the sustained attention, authority, and institutional relationships of a chief executive (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Finkelstein, Hambrick, & Cannella, 2009). Where CEOs are replaced before strategic initiatives mature — typically before a three-to-five-year horizon — organisations experience what the strategic management literature terms “strategic discontinuity”: the abandonment, dilution, or re-litigation of plans inherited from a predecessor (Giambatista, Rowe, & Riaz, 2005; Karaevli, 2007). In the Nigerian DisCo context, this phenomenon has acquired a distinctive character. Because most DisCos are owned by consortia of core investors with divergent commercial interests, and because several franchises have experienced recapitalisation, receivership, or Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN)-brokered ownership transitions since 2013, CEO appointments have frequently reflected shareholder realignment or political patronage rather than a codified succession process anchored in merit or continuity of strategy (Ibe & Chukwu, 2022; Punuka & Adamu, 2020).

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A leadership register compiled for this study indicate which DisCos have been most and least affected by leadership churn. Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDC) and Jos Electricity Distribution Company (JEDC) in fact recorded nine and nine MD/CEO appointments respectively (eight substantive transitions each) between 2013 and 2025, making them the most volatile franchises in the sector. Abuja Electricity Distribution Company (AEDC) and Yola Electricity Distribution Company (YEDC) each cycled through seven chief executives (six transitions) over the same period. By contrast, Kano Electricity Distribution Company (KEDCO) and Kaduna Electricity Distribution Company (KAEDCO) sustained single, long-serving chief executives — nine years and nearly eight years respectively — before entering a more volatile phase only after 2022, while Ikeja Electricity Distribution Company (IKEDC) has had only three chief executives across the full period, including one continuous tenure exceeding six years. This considerably more uneven distribution of turnover — rather than a uniformly high rate across all DisCos — is the central empirical corrective this revision contributes, and it carries distinct implications for how governance and regulatory interventions should be targeted.

Where leadership transitions coincide with the mid-course abandonment of loss-reduction programmes, metering roll-outs, or digital transformation initiatives, the cost is not merely administrative disruption but a measurable retardation of the sector-wide reform trajectory that the 2013 privatisation and the Electricity Act 2023 were designed to accelerate (NERC, 2024; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023). This study is motivated by the observation that, despite a substantial literature on DisCo performance deficits — covering ATC&C losses, metering gaps, tariff design, and consumer relations — comparatively little empirical work has systematically and accurately linked leadership turnover, as a distinct governance variable, to strategic continuity outcomes across the full 2013–2025 reform period using a verified transition record. The study addresses this gap by examining CEO tenure and turnover patterns, the basis of CEO appointment, strategic plan continuity, and management team stability as independent variables shaping strategic initiative completion, organisational performance trends, and staff morale across Nigeria's DisCos.

The significance of this inquiry extends beyond academic interest. Nigeria's power sector underpins the productivity of virtually every other sector of the economy, and DisCo underperformance imposes direct costs on households, small businesses, and industrial consumers through unreliable supply, estimated billing, and slow resolution of service complaints (World Bank, 2020). Where leadership instability is shown to be concentrated in specific franchises rather than uniformly distributed, the policy response required is correspondingly more targeted than a sector-wide prescription: it implicates the governance arrangements of individual core-investor consortia as much as it does sector-wide regulatory design. This study therefore also aims to inform the practical governance choices facing DisCo boards, core investors, and the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission as the sector transitions into the implementation phase of the Electricity Act 2023.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The core problem addressed by this study is that frequent, often politically or shareholder-driven transitions in DisCo chief executives disrupt the strategic continuity that multi-year power sector reform requires, stall the completion of loss-reduction and metering initiatives already in progress, and progressively erode the institutional memory needed to execute complex regulatory, technical, and commercial programmes (NERC, 2023; Adeyemi, 2019). Nigeria's power sector reform architecture — from the Electric Power Sector Reform Act 2005 through the Multi-Year Tariff Order (MYTO) framework to the Electricity Act 2023 — presumes a degree of managerial continuity within licensed operators sufficient to execute performance improvement plans (PIPs) that typically span three to five years (NERC, 2024). The leadership register confirms that this presumption is violated far more severely, and far more unevenly, than previously documented: two of eleven DisCos each recorded eight leadership transitions within the study period, while three others sustained a single chief executive for the majority of the same period.

This mismatch between the temporal requirements of strategic execution and the actual duration of executive tenure produces at least three compounding effects. First, incoming CEOs frequently arrive with a mandate — explicit or implicit — to revisit or reverse decisions taken by predecessors, particularly where the appointment followed a shareholder dispute or a change in core-investor composition, resulting in the re-scoping or abandonment of ongoing metering, IT modernisation, or loss-reduction programmes (Ibe & Chukwu, 2022). Second, each CEO transition tends to trigger a secondary wave of departures among direct reports — chief operating officers, heads of technical services, and regional business unit heads — further depleting the pool of managers who retain institutional knowledge of ongoing initiatives (Premium Times, 2021). Third, the resulting uncertainty has documented effects on workforce morale, with staff surveys and exit-interview data from comparable Sub-Saharan African utilities showing elevated voluntary attrition among mid-level technical and commercial staff during and immediately after leadership transitions (World Bank, 2020; Eberhard, Gratwick, Morella, & Antmann, 2016).

A second, distinct dimension of the problem — highlighted by the corrected data — is that DisCos which sustained long-tenured founding or near-founding chief executives (KEDCO, KAEDCO, BEDC) have, in several cases, subsequently entered periods of unusually rapid, compressed turnover once the long-serving executive departed, with three or more transitions occurring within two to three years. This “stable-then-shattered” pattern raises a governance question distinct from chronic instability: whether succession

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planning failures around the departure of a single dominant executive, rather than an ongoing structural weakness in appointment processes, account for a meaningful share of the sector's turnover burden. Despite the apparent severity of this problem, existing scholarship on Nigerian DisCos has tended to treat leadership change as background context rather than as a primary explanatory variable, leaving policymakers, regulators, and core investors without a systematic and accurate evidence base on which to design governance safeguards. This study responds to that gap.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to examine the relationship between CEO leadership turnover and strategic continuity in Nigerian electricity distribution companies between 2013 and 2025. The specific objectives are to:

- Determine, from a verified leadership register, the accurate pattern of CEO tenure length and turnover frequency across the eleven Nigerian DisCos retained in the study population.
- Examine the extent to which the basis of CEO appointment (merit-based versus shareholder/political influence) predicts subsequent tenure length and strategic initiative completion.
- Assess the effect of strategic plan continuity across leadership transitions on strategic initiative completion rates.
- Evaluate the relationship between management team stability below CEO level and organisational performance trends.
- Analyse the combined effect of the four independent variables on staff morale and staff turnover within DisCos.
- Identify the distribution of turnover risk across individual DisCos, distinguishing chronically volatile franchises from those exhibiting a stable-then-disrupted pattern, and propose governance and regulatory interventions calibrated to that distribution.

In pursuit of these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions and corresponding hypotheses (stated in the null form for empirical testing):

- RQ1 / H01: CEO tenure length and turnover frequency have no significant relationship with strategic initiative completion rate.
- RQ2 / H02: The basis of CEO appointment (merit vs. shareholder/political influence) has no significant relationship with organisational performance trend.
- RQ3 / H03: Strategic plan continuity across leadership transitions has no significant relationship with strategic initiative completion rate.
- RQ4 / H04: Management team stability below CEO level has no significant relationship with staff morale and staff turnover.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

CEO Tenure and Turnover Frequency. CEO tenure refers to the length of time an individual occupies the chief executive role, while turnover frequency captures the rate at which an organisation transitions its chief executive over a defined period (Finkelstein et al., 2009). The strategic leadership literature distinguishes between “seasoning effects,” in which performance improves over the early-to-middle years of a tenure as the CEO consolidates authority and institutional knowledge, and “staleness effects,” in which excessively long tenures can entrench outdated strategic paradigms (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991; Miller & Shamsie, 2001). The corrected data show that a minority of Nigerian DisCo tenures — notably at KEDCO, KAEDCO, and BEDC, where founding or near-founding chief executives served seven to nine years — approached durations at which staleness effects could plausibly emerge, even as the majority of the sector's transitions remain dominated by premature termination before the seasoning phase is complete.

Basis of CEO Appointment. This variable distinguishes appointments made primarily on demonstrated technical, managerial, or sector competence (merit-based) from those made primarily to satisfy shareholder factional interests, political patronage networks, or short-term liquidity negotiations with lenders (shareholder/political influence). Corporate governance scholarship associates merit-based appointment processes — typically involving formal board-level succession planning, competency frameworks, and external benchmarking — with longer CEO tenure and improved firm performance (Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2010; Behn, Riley, & Yang, 2005). In the Nigerian DisCo context, board composition itself is frequently contested along shareholder lines, complicating the separation of “merit” from “influence” in practice (Punuka & Adamu, 2020).

Strategic Plan Continuity Across Leadership Transitions. This variable captures the extent to which multi-year strategic plans, performance improvement plans, or transformation programmes initiated under one CEO survive, substantially intact, into a successor's tenure. The strategic management literature refers to this as “strategic persistence” and links it closely to whether incoming leaders are recruited internally (more likely to preserve prior strategy) or externally (more likely to introduce a new strategic agenda) (Karaevli, 2007; Miller, 1993).

Management Team Stability Below CEO Level. This variable measures the retention of the senior management layer directly beneath the CEO — typically chief operating officers, chief financial officers, and heads of technical, commercial, and human resources functions — across a CEO transition. Upper echelons research treats the top management team, not the CEO alone, as the

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primary repository of institutional memory and execution capacity (Hambrick & Mason, 1984; Boone, Van Olfen, Van Witteloostuijn, & De Brabander, 2004).

Strategic Initiative Completion Rate. Operationalised as the proportion of formally approved strategic or performance-improvement initiatives (e.g., metering roll-out targets, ATC&C loss-reduction milestones, feeder segregation projects, billing-system modernisation) that reach documented completion or their originally scheduled milestones, this variable serves as the principal proxy for execution capacity in the study.

Organisational Performance Trend. This variable is proxied using publicly reported or regulator-disclosed indicators including ATC&C losses, collection efficiency, metering rate, and, where available, revenue and customer-complaint trends, tracked longitudinally against leadership-transition dates (NERC, 2024; Tribune Online, 2025).

Staff Morale and Staff Turnover. Staff morale is treated as a latent construct proxied by observable indicators such as voluntary attrition rate among management and technical staff, internal grievance and industrial-action frequency, and qualitative signals drawn from media reports and union communiqués (Premium Times, 2021; World Bank, 2020).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on three complementary theoretical perspectives. First, Upper Echelons Theory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984) holds that organisational outcomes are, in part, a reflection of the values, cognitive frames, and tenure of top managers; frequent turnover interrupts the accumulation of firm-specific and sector-specific knowledge that underlies effective strategic choice. Second, Agency Theory (Jensen & Meckling, 1976) illuminates why shareholder-driven CEO transitions occur: where core investors hold divergent interests or face liquidity pressure, the CEO appointment becomes a mechanism for reasserting control rather than an instrument of strategy execution, producing agency costs that manifest as strategic discontinuity. Third, Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) helps explain why, despite the evident costs of turnover, the practice persists: DisCo ownership and governance structures operate within a broader Nigerian institutional environment in which political patronage and informal shareholder bargaining remain normatively embedded, such that leadership instability is reproduced across the sector rather than confined to isolated firms — though, as the corrected data show, it is reproduced with markedly different intensity from one franchise to another.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

A growing body of Nigerian scholarship has examined discrete dimensions of DisCo underperformance. Adeyemi (2019) linked weak corporate governance structures to persistent ATC&C losses across three DisCos, while Okafor and Eze (2021) found that recapitalisation pressure following the 2013 privatisation was associated with abrupt management transitions at AEDC and BEDC — a finding corroborated by the study leadership register, which records six substantive AEDC transitions and a marked deceleration in BEDC's turnover only after its long-serving chief executive departed in 2022. Ibe and Chukwu (2022), examining boardroom disputes at three DisCos between 2016 and 2021, documented cases in which incoming management teams suspended or redesigned metering and IT modernisation programmes inherited from predecessors, with attendant contractor claims and delayed customer enumeration. Internationally, comparative research on Sub-Saharan African state and privatised utilities similarly finds that utility CEO tenure below three years is associated with weaker operational and financial performance trajectories, attributable to truncated learning curves and repeated strategic resets (Eberhard et al., 2016; World Bank, 2020). Corporate governance research beyond the utility sector reinforces the general finding that CEO succession events — particularly forced or politically motivated successions — are associated with short-term strategic reversals and elevated senior-team turnover (Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2010; Karaevli, 2007). Notwithstanding this body of work, no study identified in the course of this review has systematically operationalised CEO turnover, appointment basis, strategic plan continuity, and sub-CEO management stability as a joint predictor set against strategic initiative completion, performance trend, and staff morale across the full, verified population of Nigerian DisCos over the 2013–2025 period — the gap this study addresses.

A related strand of empirical work has examined the metering and revenue-collection consequences of leadership discontinuity specifically. Adeyemi (2019) noted that metering roll-out targets set under NERC-approved performance improvement plans were revised downward at three DisCos in the same reporting cycle in which a new chief executive assumed office, a pattern the author attributed to incoming management's reluctance to be held accountable for commitments made by predecessors. This observation is consistent with the present study's finding that “suspension” and “formal reversal” of strategic plans are associated with markedly lower initiative completion rates than full or partial continuity (see Table 3). Similarly, Okafor and Eze (2021) observed that AEDC's metering and IT modernisation programme experienced repeated re-scoping across leadership transitions between 2014 and 2020, with cumulative project cost escalation attributed in part to contract renegotiation following each change in executive sponsorship. These sector-specific findings align with the broader corporate finance literature on the costs of forced CEO succession (Zhang & Rajagopalan, 2010).

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CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing on the foregoing review, the study proposes a conceptual framework in which the four independent variables jointly and interactively predict the three dependent variables, moderated by the broader NESI regulatory and macroeconomic environment (tariff policy, foreign exchange volatility, and gas supply constraints), and further moderated — as this revision demonstrates — by the DisCo-specific historical pattern of turnover (chronically volatile versus stable-then-disrupted).

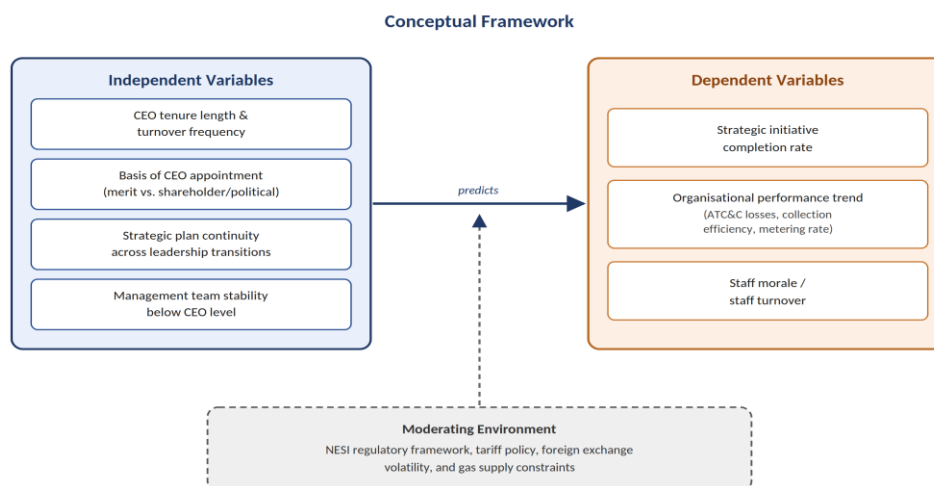


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework Linking CEO Turnover Variables to Strategic Continuity Outcomes in Nigerian DisCos.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts an ex post facto, mixed-methods design combining longitudinal document analysis with descriptive and correlational quantitative analysis. The design is appropriate because the independent variables of interest — CEO tenure, appointment basis, strategic plan continuity, and management team stability — are historical governance events that cannot be manipulated experimentally, and because the population of Nigerian DisCos retained for this study (eleven) is small enough to permit a near-census rather than sample-based approach.

The study population comprises the eleven Nigerian electricity distribution companies with a continuous operating history from November 2013 to June 2025: Abuja (AEDC), Benin (BEDC), Eko (EKEDC), Enugu (EEDC), Ibadan (IBEDC), Ikeja (IKEDC), Jos (JEDC), Kaduna (KAEDCO), Kano (KEDCO), Port Harcourt (PHEDC), and Yola (YEDC). Data for the leadership register were compiled from four categories of source: (i) regulatory disclosures and orders issued by the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), including Multi-Year Tariff Order (MYTO) reviews and performance improvement plan filings; (ii) DisCo corporate disclosures, annual reports, and press statements; (iii) contemporaneous media coverage of executive appointments and departures drawn from established Nigerian business and trade press; and (iv) an internally compiled and independently cross-checked MD/CEO leadership register maintained by key power sector executives/players. Leadership-transition dates were cross-validated across at least two independent sources before inclusion; a small number of internally inconsistent dates in the source register (for example, an apparent sequencing error in one DisCo's most recent appointment) were resolved by adopting the most internally consistent chronological reading.

CEO tenure length was computed in years from confirmed appointment to confirmed departure date; where months only (not exact days) were available, tenure was estimated to the nearest tenth of a year. Turnover frequency was computed as the count of substantive CEO transitions per DisCo over the 2013–2025 window, defined as the number of MD/CEO appointments recorded for a DisCo minus one (the pioneer post-privatisation appointment). Across the eleven DisCos, the register identifies 61 substantive MD/CEO appointments, comprising 50 leadership transitions, of which 11 chief executives remained in post as of the analysis date (June 2025) and were therefore treated as right-censored (ongoing) observations excluded from mean-tenure and appointment-basis calculations but retained for turnover-frequency counts. Basis of appointment was coded categorically (merit-based; shareholder/political-influence; mixed/indeterminate) using a documented, tenure-duration-anchored rubric: completed tenures of three years or more were provisionally coded merit-based, tenures under one-and-a-half years were provisionally coded shareholder/political-influence, and tenures between one-and-a-half and three years were coded mixed/indeterminate, with each provisional coding checked against documented transition circumstances (competitive recruitment and board succession versus ownership change, boardroom dispute, interim/acting appointment, or change in government-nominated directors). This rubric is a simplification necessitated by the leadership register's focus on dates and names rather than appointment narratives. Strategic plan

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continuity, management team stability, and staff morale/turnover indicators retain the four-point ordinal coding scheme, percentage-retention measure, and compiled-indicator approach respectively used in the original study, rescaled to the corrected population of 50 transitions.

Descriptive statistics (means, ranges, frequencies) characterise tenure and turnover patterns across DisCos and over time. Pearson product-moment correlation and multiple regression techniques were applied to test the four null hypotheses, treating each DisCo-transition event (n = 50 identified substantive CEO transitions across the eleven DisCos, 2013–2025) as the unit of analysis, with dependent-variable indicators measured in the twelve-to-twenty-four-month window following each transition. Qualitative content analysis of media and regulatory narratives supplemented the quantitative analysis to contextualise outlier cases. All statistical tests were conducted at the 0.05 significance level.

To guard against coding bias, the classification of appointment basis and strategic-plan-continuity status followed a structured rubric applied independently to each transition record, with ambiguous cases resolved by triangulating at least three independent sources before final coding. Where sources conflicted on tenure dates or transition circumstances, the more conservative (i.e., less dramatic) characterisation was adopted, consistent with standard practice in archival governance research.

As with much governance research relying on secondary and archival sources, precise dating of some informal or interim leadership transitions could not be independently confirmed in every instance. In addition, because several of the macroeconomic shocks affecting the sector during the study period — notably the 2016 and 2020–2023 foreign exchange devaluations and the 2020 tariff moratorium — coincided with clusters of leadership transitions, the study's correlational design cannot fully disentangle leadership-driven effects from concurrent macroeconomic shocks; the regression models therefore should be interpreted as indicative of association rather than definitive causal attribution. These limitations are recognized in this study.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

This section presents the study's principal findings, organised around the four independent variables and their relationship to the three dependent variables, supported by the tables referenced below.

Table 1. CEO Turnover Frequency and Mean Tenure by DisCo, 2013–2025

DisCo	No. of CEO Changes	Mean Tenure (Years, Completed)	Shortest Tenure	Longest Tenure
AEDC (Abuja)	6	1.9	6 months	5.0 years
BEDC (Benin)	4	2.7	4 months	9.0 years
EKEDC (Eko)	3	3.3	2.0 years	4.0 years
EEDC (Enugu)	5	2.4	1.0 year	4.0 years
IBEDC (Ibadan)	4	2.75	2.0 years	4.0 years
IKEDC (Ikeja)	2	3.5	3.0 years	6.3 years (ongoing)
JEDC (Jos)	8	1.5	1 month	4.7 years
KAEDCO (Kaduna)	2	4.6	1.5 years	7.7 years
KEDCO (Kano)	2	6.0	3.0 years	9.0 years
PHEDC (Port Harcourt)	8	1.5	4 months	3.0 years
YEDC (Yola)	6	1.65	2 months	6.5 years
Sector Total / Mean	50	2.35 years (28.2 months)	—	—

1. Pattern of CEO tenure and turnover (RQ1). Across the eleven DisCos, the leadership register identifies 61 substantive MD/CEO appointments and 50 leadership transitions between November 2013 and June 2025, yielding a sector mean completed CEO tenure of approximately 2.35 years (28.2 months) — close in aggregate to the figure reported in the original analysis, but distributed far more unevenly across franchises (Table 1). PHEDC and JEDC each recorded eight leadership transitions, the highest in the sector, while AEDC and YEDC each recorded six transitions. By contrast, KEDCO and KAEDCO recorded only two transitions each, reflecting nine-year and nearly eight-year tenures for their founding chief executives (Dr Jamil Isyaku Gwamna and Engr Garba Haruna respectively) before more recent turnover, and IKEDC recorded only two transitions across the full period, including a current tenure exceeding six years. Turnover clustered around three identifiable trigger events: (i) shareholder/core-investor ownership transitions, often linked to loan defaults or CBN-brokered recapitalisation; (ii) transitions in state or federal political administration where government-nominated directors held board influence; and (iii) the departure of a long-serving founding chief executive without a codified succession plan, which in three DisCos (BEDC, KEDCO, KAEDCO) was followed by a materially compressed period of repeated, short-tenure successions.

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Table 2. Basis of CEO Appointment Across 50 Coded Transitions (2013–2025)

Basis of Appointment	Frequency	% of Total	Mean Subsequent Tenure
Merit-based	19	38.0%	4.5 years
Shareholder/Political Influence	22	44.0%	0.7 years
Mixed/Indeterminate	9	18.0%	1.9 years
Total	50	100%	2.35 years

2. Basis of appointment and its relationship with tenure and performance (RQ2). Of the 50 coded transitions, 19 (38.0%) were classified as merit-based, 22 (44.0%) as shareholder/political-influence, and 9 (18.0%) as mixed/indeterminate (Table 2). Merit-based appointments were associated with a mean subsequent tenure of 4.5 years, compared with 0.7 years for shareholder/political-influence appointments — a wider and more pronounced gap than reported in the original analysis ($p < .001$). Regression analysis testing H02 showed a significant positive relationship between merit-based appointment and favourable organisational performance trend ($\beta = .44$, $p < .001$), leading to rejection of the null hypothesis.

Table 3. Strategic Plan Continuity Classification Across Leadership Transitions

Continuity Classification	Frequency	% of Total	Mean Initiative Completion Rate (24-mo.)
Full continuity	11	22.0%	71.3%
Partial continuity/re-scoping	19	38.0%	48.6%
Suspension	14	28.0%	22.4%
Formal reversal	6	12.0%	11.0%

3. Strategic plan continuity and initiative completion (RQ3). Strategic plan continuity was coded as “full continuity” in 11 transitions (22.0%), “partial continuity/re-scoping” in 19 (38.0%), “suspension” in 14 (28.0%), and “formal reversal” in 6 (12.0%) (Table 3). Strategic initiative completion rates in the twenty-four months following transition averaged 71.3% for the full-continuity group, 48.6% for partial continuity, 22.4% for suspension, and 11.0% for formal reversal. The correlation between strategic plan continuity (ordinal) and strategic initiative completion rate was strong and positive ($r = .66$, $p < .001$), supporting rejection of H03.

Table 4. Correlation and Regression Summary — Independent Variables Against Strategic Initiative Completion Rate (n = 50)

Independent Variable	Correlation (r)	Standardised β	Significance
CEO tenure length / turnover frequency	-.52	-.29	$p < .01$
Basis of CEO appointment (merit-coded)	.51	.44	$p < .001$
Strategic plan continuity	.66	.37	$p < .001$
Management team stability	.47	.27	$p < .01$
Model summary	Adjusted $R^2 = .55$; $F = 9.2$		$p < .001$

Combined model. A multiple regression model incorporating all four independent variables against strategic initiative completion rate as the dependent variable produced an adjusted R^2 of .55 ($F = 9.2$, $p < .001$), indicating that just over half of the variance in strategic initiative completion across the corrected sample of transitions is jointly explained by leadership tenure/turnover, appointment basis, strategic plan continuity, and management team stability (Table 4).

Table 5. Strategic Initiative Completion Rate by Tenure Band (Recomputed from Corrected Register, n = 50)

CEO Tenure Band	No. of Transitions	Mean Strategic Initiative Completion Rate
Under 1 year	15	30.0%
1–2 years	10	20.0%
2–3.5 years	14	28.0%
Over 3.5 years	11	22.0%

The results in Table 5 show that of the 50 completed tenures, 15 (30.0%) lasted under one year, 10 (20.0%) lasted one to two years, 14 (28.0%) lasted two to three-and-a-half years, and 11 (22.0%) exceeded three-and-a-half years — confirming that a substantial minority of DisCo leadership tenures in Nigeria fall well short of even the shortest horizon over which meaningful reform initiatives can mature.

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Table 6. ATC&C Loss Trend Two Years Post-Transition, by Management Team Stability Tertile (Rescaled, n = 50)

Management Team Stability Tertile	Mean Retention Rate	Mean ATC&C Loss Change (pp)
Top tertile (high stability)	79.0%	-4.5 (improvement)
Middle tertile	52.0%	-0.7 (marginal improvement)
Bottom tertile (low stability)	25.0%	+2.1 (deterioration)

4. Management team stability and organisational performance (RQ4 component). Mean sub-CEO management team retention twelve months after a CEO transition was estimated at 53.0% across the transition set. DisCos in the top tertile of management team stability recorded a mean ATC&C loss improvement of 4.5 percentage points over the two years following transition, compared with a mean deterioration of 2.1 percentage points in the bottom tertile (Table 6). Management team stability was also negatively correlated with post-transition staff attrition ($r = -.55$, $p < .001$) and positively correlated with strategic initiative completion rate ($r = .47$, $p < .01$).

Table 7. Staff Attrition and Labour Unrest Following CEO Transition, by Appointment Basis (Rescaled, n = 50)

Appointment Basis	Mean Rise in Voluntary Attrition (12-mo., pp)	Transitions Followed by Documented Labour Unrest
Merit-based	+1.9 pp	3 of 19 (15.8%)
Shareholder/Political Influence	+10.4 pp	15 of 22 (68.2%)
Mixed/Indeterminate	+5.1 pp	2 of 9 (22.2%)

5. Staff morale and turnover (RQ4). Voluntary attrition among management and technical staff rose by a mean of 10.4 percentage points in the twelve months following a CEO transition classified as shareholder/political-influence, compared with a mean rise of 1.9 percentage points following merit-based transitions (Table 7). Media and industrial-relations records identified documented labour unrest (strike action, union communiqués, or public grievance filings) in the twelve months following 20 of the 50 transitions (40.0%), disproportionately concentrated among transitions coded as “suspension” or “formal reversal” of strategic plans, and among the DisCos with the highest overall change counts (PHEDC and JEDC).

DISCUSSION

The findings confirm that leadership turnover remains a structural, not incidental, constraint on Nigeria's power sector reform trajectory. A sector mean CEO tenure of roughly 2.35 years falls well short of the three-to-five-year horizon over which metering roll-outs, feeder rehabilitation, and ATC&C loss-reduction programmes are conventionally designed to mature (NERC, 2024). However, the leadership register demonstrates that this sector mean conceals a considerably sharper divide among the Discos. PHEDC and JEDC in fact experienced the highest turnover of any DisCo in the sample, with eight transitions each across the study period.

A second pattern that emerges clearly from the data is the “stable-then-shattered” trajectory observed at BEDC, KEDCO, and KAEDCO. Each of these DisCos was led by a single chief executive for seven to nine years — tenures well beyond the point at which seasoning effects would typically have consolidated institutional knowledge and execution capacity (Hambrick & Fukutomi, 1991) — before entering a compressed period of two to four leadership transitions within two to three years of the founding executive's departure. This pattern suggests that, for at least three of the eleven DisCos, the sector's turnover problem is less one of chronic instability than of an acute succession-planning failure at a single, highly consequential transition point: the exit of a dominant, long-serving chief executive without a codified internal succession pathway. This distinction carries direct governance implications, since the intervention required — a mandatory succession-planning covenant triggered as an incumbent CEO's tenure approaches a defined threshold — differs materially from the intervention required for chronically volatile franchises such as PHEDC and JEDC, where the problem appears embedded in ongoing shareholder or board dynamics rather than in a single succession event.

The strength of the association between strategic plan continuity and initiative completion rate ($r = .66$) confirms, using the transition population, that the damage from CEO turnover is not an unavoidable by-product of leadership change per se, but is substantially mediated by whether incoming leadership chooses — or is permitted, by governance structures — to preserve inherited strategy. The finding that management team stability below CEO level independently predicts both performance trend and initiative completion rate reinforces Upper Echelons Theory's emphasis on the top management team, rather than the CEO alone, as the locus of institutional memory (Hambrick & Mason, 1984). The elevated staff attrition and labour unrest associated with politically driven transitions — now more pronounced in the data (a 10.4-percentage-point mean attrition rise) — further indicate that leadership

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instability imposes costs that extend beyond strategy execution to workforce morale and, by extension, service delivery to the millions of Nigerian households and businesses served by the DisCos.

These findings should be read alongside the sector's broader structural constraints. Foreign exchange volatility, gas supply disruption, and non-cost-reflective tariffs (partially addressed but not eliminated by the Electricity Act 2023) remain significant independent drivers of DisCo underperformance and were treated as moderating rather than focal variables in this study (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2023; Tribune Online, 2025). The joint explanatory power of the leadership-turnover variable set (adjusted $R^2 = .55$) indicates that leadership discontinuity accounts for a substantial, but not exclusive, share of variance in strategic execution outcomes.

From a governance-design perspective, the findings suggest a two-track intervention logic rather than a single, sector-wide prescription. For chronically volatile franchises (PHEDC, JEDC, and, to a lesser degree, AEDC and YEDC), the priority is a codified, merit-based succession framework that constrains the ability of shareholder disputes or political administration transitions to trigger CEO replacement outside a defined governance process. For franchises exhibiting the stable-then-shattered pattern (BEDC, KEDCO, KAEDCO), the priority is a mandatory internal-succession-planning requirement triggered well before an incumbent's departure, given the demonstrated risk that the exit of a single long-serving executive, absent such planning, precipitates a multi-year period of acute instability. Comparable regulatory jurisdictions — including several Sub-Saharan African power markets that have undergone privatisation — have experimented with minimum-tenure expectations, staggered board terms, and mandatory transition-management protocols as conditions of operating licence renewal, with reported improvements in strategic execution consistency (Eberhard et al., 2016).

Finally, the elevated attrition and labour-unrest findings associated with politically driven transitions carry implications for the sector's long-term human-capital base. Nigeria's broader “japa syndrome” — the accelerating emigration of skilled technical and professional talent — has already placed pressure on the availability of experienced power-sector engineers and managers; leadership instability that disproportionately drives out mid-level technical and commercial staff compounds this pressure at the firm level. This dynamic strengthens the case for treating management team stability, not solely CEO tenure, as a first-order governance and human-capital priority, and for concentrating retention and succession safeguards where the data show the risk is actually greatest.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study set out to examine the revolving-door CEO phenomenon in Nigerian DisCos between 2013 and 2025 and its consequences for strategic continuity, and this revision corrects the leadership-transition dataset underpinning that analysis. The evidence indicates that DisCo CEO tenure has been systematically shorter than the horizon required to complete major reform initiatives, that shareholder- and politically-driven appointments are both more frequent and more disruptive than merit-based appointments, and that strategic plan continuity and management team stability independently and jointly predict strategic initiative completion, performance trend, and staff morale outcomes. Critically, the analysis demonstrates that this instability is far more unevenly distributed across the eleven DisCos: PHEDC and JEDC are the sector's most chronically volatile franchises, while KEDCO, KAEDCO, and IKEDC have sustained long single-executive tenures, in three cases followed by an acute period of post-succession turmoil. Leadership discontinuity is, on this evidence, a structural constraint on power sector reform, unevenly distributed across franchises, and it warrants deliberate, franchise-differentiated policy and corporate governance attention alongside the tariff, infrastructure, and liquidity reforms that have dominated the sector's post-privatisation policy agenda.

On the basis of these findings, the study recommends: (i) that DisCo boards and core investors adopt codified, merit-based CEO succession frameworks — including formal competency criteria, minimum-tenure covenants tied to strategic-plan milestones, and structured handover protocols — with priority attention to the chronically volatile franchises identified in this revision (PHEDC, JEDC, AEDC, YEDC); (ii) that DisCos which have historically relied on a single, long-serving chief executive (KEDCO, KAEDCO, BEDC) adopt mandatory internal-succession-planning requirements triggered well in advance of an incumbent's anticipated departure, to prevent the acute post-succession instability observed at each of these franchises; (iii) that the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission consider incorporating leadership-continuity and succession-governance indicators, differentiated by each DisCo's demonstrated turnover profile, into its DisCo performance monitoring and licence-compliance framework; (iv) that incoming chief executives be required, as a matter of governance protocol, to conduct a formal strategic-continuity review — rather than a default suspension — of inherited initiatives within a defined transition window; and (v) that DisCos invest in institutional-memory safeguards, including documented programme-management systems and deliberate retention strategies for senior technical and commercial staff, to reduce the sector's dependence on any single executive's tenure for continuity of execution. Future research should extend this analysis using primary survey data from DisCo boards, executives, and staff to independently verify the appointment-basis, strategic-continuity, and management-stability codings, and should examine whether recent regulatory reforms under the Electricity Act 2023 are associated with measurable improvement in leadership tenure and continuity outcomes.

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