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Independent Business Review Volume: 01, No: 1, January 2008

2008-01-01

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Towards a Model of Strategy Implementation for Organizations in Developing Economies

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ABSTRACT

The essence of strategic success lies in effectiveness of strategy implementation rather than the sophistication of strategy formulation. This paper reviews existing models or frameworks of strategy implementation, comments on the impediments to strategy implementation, and derives the themes of strategy implementation. Suggestions to remove the impediments to strategy implementation are: adopting a clear model of strategy implementation, effective management of change in complex situations, and setting down clear measures of effectiveness. These three suggestions are utilized to build up the three themes of strategy implementation: activating strategies, managing change, and achieving effectiveness to construct a model of strategy implementation. The proposed model has sets of activities such as project and procedural implementation that could find more academic and practical relevance to strategic management in developing economies.

Keywords: Strategy implementation, Implementing strategies, Framework of strategy implementation, Model of strategy implementation, Strategy execution.

INTORDUCTION

Often, success in strategic management of an organization is dependent on how effectively it is able to implement strategies rather than the finesse with which it formulates them. There is ample evidence to show that implementation is the bedrock of strategic success rather than strategy analysis and formulation. Yet, strategy formulation has developed more in terms of theories, models, and practices than has implementation. One reason why this has happened is that the level of complexity in strategy implementation is greater than what it could be in strategy formulation. Another reason could be the fact that there is greater likelihood of failures in strategy implementation. Rather, the only place where strategies could really fail is in the arena of implementation. A nicely drafted strategic plan on paper is hardly likely to fail! But odds are high that strategy implementation could experience hiccups when managers

are mired in the marshy grounds of day-to-day business realities.

In the course of their research, Bartlett and Ghoshal found that in all the companies they studied "the issue was not a poor understanding of environmental forces or inappropriate strategic intent. Without exception, they knew what they had to do; their difficulties lay in how to achieve the necessary changes" (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1987). Strikingly, organizations fail to implement a hefty majority of about 70 per cent of their new strategies (Miller, 2002). Another recent study is a bit less alarming: it says 40 per cent of the value anticipated in strategic plan is never realized (Mankins & Steele, 2005). Evidence keeps piling of how barriers to strategy implementation make it so difficult for organizations to achieve sustained success (Beer, Eisentat, & Spector, 1990; Sandelands, 1994). Bridging the gap between strategy formulation and implementation has since long been experienced as challenging (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, Lampel, 1998; Hempstead, Verweire & Van den Berghe, 2004; Grant, 2005).

No wonder, attention has shifted to an intense examination of strategy implementation. Unlike strategy formulation, where there are well-known frameworks such as strategic planning, SWOT analysis, Porter's generic strategies, industry analysis or competitive analysis, there are few models or frameworks available in the area of strategy implementation. Those that are available do not have finality to them meaning thereby that they are still in the process of being developed and refined. This paper is attempted to act as a review of the existing models and attempt to nudge the boundaries of understanding a bit ahead in this significant area of strategic management. While doing so, this study intends to focus on the special context in developing countries in contrast to what could be there in the case of developed countries. This means that scholars and practitioners in developing economies need to have additional factors of implementation that have to focus upon.

A REVIEW OF EXISTING MODELS OF STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

The need for models is sorely felt in the case of strategy implementation. The reasons are obvious: it's an extremely complex set of tasks and managers need to know what are the steps to follow, what is the sequence of those steps, why at all those steps are necessary, what is more critical in those steps, and so on. Having a model of strategy implementation in hand is like having a roadmap in alien territory. In the absence of a model, managers would still implement their strategies. But they would do so thinking of what they, as individuals, think is important resulting in disjointed and conflicting actions. A model, on the other hand, would serve as a beacon to guide managers at various levels spread over different functional areas within the organization.

There are several models or frameworks of implementation available in strategy literature. Okumus (2003) makes an insightful review of the available frameworks in strategy implementation. This paper will rely on Okumus review and add the later references during the course of this study.

One of the earlier models was in the form of the popular McKinsey's 7-S framework by Peters and Waterman, 1980 that considered seven factors of implementation. These factors are: strategy, structure, systems, style, staff, skills, and subordinate goals. The conceptual frameworks developed over the succeeding two decades, for instance, by Stonich (1982), Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984), Galbraith and Kazanjian (1986), Reed and Buckley (1988), Alexander (1991), Judson (1995), Miller and Dess (1996) and Thomspson and Strickland (2003) consist of well defined and critical implementation factors that is a point of similarity of approach in these frameworks.7 These frameworks, for instance, use quite similar factors of implementation such as organizational structure, culture, people, communication, control and outcome. Each of these scholarly contributions - whether based on empirical or conceptual work - recommends that the process of strategy implementation be built around a set of implementation factors. These frameworks might differ in terms of the selection of implementation factors, the nomenclature given to each factor, the relative emphasis on each factor in the set, and the way how the factors gets implemented. Nevertheless, the idea is clear: there are a set of implementation factors each significant enough to be treated separately in terms of the managerial emphasis laid on them.

As one moves towards more recent studies, one finds greater sophistication in terms of the identification of the implementation factors and clarity in the interrelationship that these might have, and the impact that they have collectively on the strategy implementation process. For instance, recent works by Aaltonen and Ikavalko (2002) and Freedman (2003) stress on organizational structure and culture that is receptive to change, elaborate building up of change management systems and skills, and communication and employee commitment to vision.

As an illustration of how the frameworks of strategy implementation are proposed, two contributions will be picked up for a bit lengthier elaboration. The first illustration is from the 1990s and the other more recent from 2003. Skivington and Daft (1991) selected three organizations in the integrated circuits, petroleum, and health care industries. They chose 57 strategic decisions and examined how these were implemented in the course of putting the competitive generic strategies of low-cost and differentiation. They could identify several factors such as intended strategy, structure, systems, interactions, and sanctions that mattered so far as implementation were concerned. They divided these factors into two broad groups of framework and process factors. It was found that both the framework and process factors could be used to implemented the low-cost and differentiation strategies.

The second work by Okumus, 2003 is seminal in the sense that it makes a comprehensive review and then proceeds to propose a strategy implementation framework. In doing so, Okumus creates a typology to provide a categorization of frameworks in three groups as below.

1. A simple approach to listing and describing the implementation factors (e.g. Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984)

2. Models that suggest a sequential, rational implementation process that might be difficult to adopt in complex situations (e.g. Noble, 1999)
3. Frameworks that lay emphasis on context and process ignoring elaboration of issues such as relative importance of implementation factors, their specific roles, and their impact on the overall implementation process (e.g. Dawson, 1994)

Okumus (2003), in his own framework of strategy implementation, lays emphasis on certain pre-conditions that are worth mentioning. He suggests, for instance, that implementation is too complex a process to be represented by linear models that project the implementation process as something that is rational and systematic. Another noteworthy observation is that researchers and practising managers should be able to make informed judgments about the strategy implementation process rather than adopt ready-made solutions. In doing so, they are advised to follow a holistic approach to considering formulation and implementation as intertwined rather than stand-alone. The latter observation is in line with the current thinking on the interdependence among formulation and implementation of strategies.

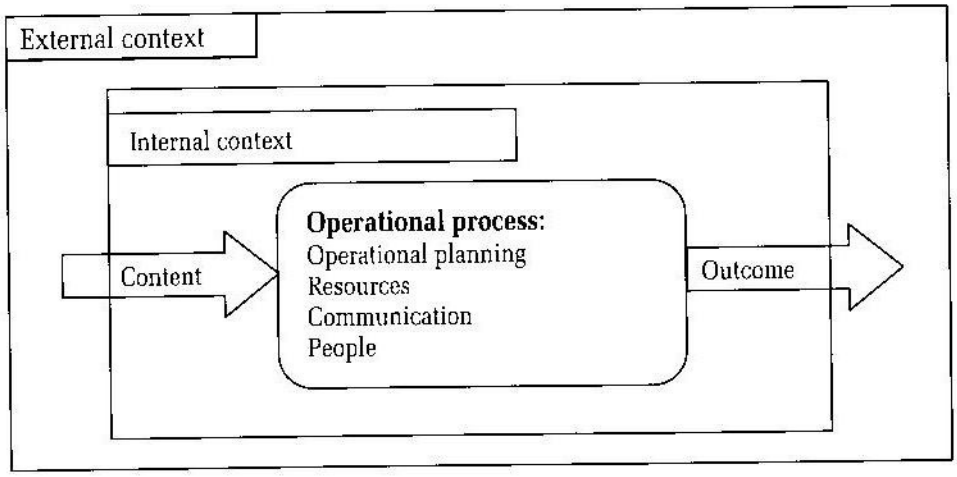


Figure- 1: Okumus's strategy implementation framework

The proposed framework by Okumus, 2003 is presented in a simplified form in Figure1. The various factors in the framework could be summed up as below.

- *Strategic content* refers to why and how strategy is initiated
- *External context* refers to the degree of uncertainty and changes in the task and general environments of the organization
- *Internal context* refers to the configuration of organizational structure, culture, and

leadership

- Organizational process refers to the configuration of operational planning, resource allocation, people, communication, control and feedback, and outcome

Undoubtedly, Okumus's strategy implementation framework is quite comprehensive as it attempts to take into account a wide variety of variables and bind them together into a compact model. However, as always, there could still be scope for improvement.

Beyond 2004, during the past three years at the time of writing this paper, some interesting trends can be observed in reported works in the area of framework of strategy implementation. There are papers reporting strategy implementation taking into account functional areas such as accounting, marketing, human resource management, or information management (Gil & Hartmann, 2006). These go beyond the purview of the theme of this paper as they move vertically, in-depth into the finer aspects of strategy implementation while the concern here is with the lateral system of the factors of strategy implementation. The next trend is the continuing emphasis on the well-accepted factors of strategy implementation such as structure, culture or organizational processes. For instance, the work of Olson, Slater & Hult, 2005 once again serves to remind the significance of organizational structure and processes in strategy implementation. The third trend noted is of reporting studies in specific socio-economic contexts such as those in specific countries e.g. China (Wu, Chou & Wu, 2004) or developing economies (e.g. Latin American). An example of the latter is a study on key success factors for strategy implementation in Latin America by Brenes, Mena and Molina (2007). Referring to strategy implementation as systematic execution, these scholars include organizational culture and structure, work and information system, and essential business processes as the key implementation factors. They also stress the significant point that the degree to which an organization succeeds in establishing a priority system for each implementation action is necessary.

This study's final reference will be to the larger framework for strategic management proposed by Hambrick & Fredrickson (2005) who propose that if a business has to have a single, unified strategy, then it must necessarily have parts. These parts form their framework of strategy design that includes five elements of arenas: where will we be active? vehicles: how will we get there? differentiators: how will we win in the marketplace? staging: what will be our speed and sequence of moves? and the economic logic: how will we obtain our returns? Using this comprehensive framework, for instance, Carpenter & Sanders (2007) use the implementation levers, as they call them, of organizational structure, systems and processes, people and rewards, and strategic leadership that involve making lever and resource allocation decisions, and communicating the strategy to stakeholders.

After the review of existing models or frameworks of strategy implementation, some space has been used for a reference to the impediments in strategy implementation that is another area that has attracted much attention by scholars in recent years.

IMPEDIMENTS IN STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Hrebiniak points some general, overarching issues that impede strategy implementation. Among them is the fact that managers are often trained to plan and not to execute strategies, the top managers are reluctant to soil their hands in the dirty tasks of implementation, formulation and implementation being interdependent yet being done by two different groups of managers, typically implementation taking longer than formulation putting pressure on the managers to show results, and formulation involving many more people within an organization than does formulation. Hrebiniak's (2006) own empirical findings listed the following major obstacles

- An inability to manage change
- Poor or vague strategy
- Not having guidelines or a model to guide implementation efforts
- Poor or inadequate information sharing
- Unclear responsibility and accountability
- Working against the organizational power structure

Although there could be several ways to improve upon the implementation process in the light of the shortcomings as noted above, the present study indicates that the means to overcome the barriers to strategy implementation usually revolve around the following three main suggestions:

1. *Adopting a clear model of strategy implementation.* Often, implementation activities take place according to the abilities and initiatives of managers involved in them. Even though being a process, implementation moves in fits and starts. This uneven progress of the process does not do much good for the effectiveness of implementation efforts. Again, managers often do things which they consider to be important; they do not do things which are important enough to be done. This results in a lot of confusion and uncoordinated actions. What is required is a clear model of the strategy implementation process that can provide unambiguous guidelines to the managers implementing the strategy. Such a model should lay down the elements, or at least the major themes, of implementation process so that there is a high level of understanding of how the process has to proceed. At the same time, there needs to be a comprehension of how the various elements or themes are interconnected. Is such a model available? Alexander (1991) states that "One key reason why implementation fails is that practicing executives, managers and supervisors do not have practical, yet theoretically sound, models to guide their actions during implementation. Without adequate models, they try to implement strategies without a good understanding of the multiple factors that

must be addressed, often simultaneously, to make implementation work." Noble (1999) observes that "there is a significant need for detailed and comprehensive conceptual models related to strategy implementation. To date, implementation research has been fairly fragmented due to a lack of clear models on which to build."

2. *Effective management of change in complex situations.* Implementation almost always creates the need to manage change in complex organisational contexts. Many of these areas of change are behavioural in nature and are therefore multifaceted and messy in nature. For instance, leadership style changes required to implement different kinds of strategies or the cultural changes to be brought about to facilitate new strategy implementation are intricate matters that call for careful handling. No wonder, managers often fail to manage these complex organisational issues satisfactorily creating conditions for sub-optimal implementation of strategies.

3. *Setting down clear measures of effectiveness.* Many of the failures in implementation of strategies can be attributed to the lacunae in setting down clear measures of effectiveness. To the extent that the measures of effectiveness on which the success of the formulated strategy could be adjudged are clear, the likelihood of strategy succeeding exists. This is an intuitively appealing argument and may be self-evident. Yet, efforts at setting down clear measures of effectiveness may be half-hearted or missing. There are reasons why this happens: lack of clarity in laying down objectives is reflected in ambiguity in setting down measures of effectiveness; it may be difficult to come up with an adequate set of effectiveness measures; and it may be cumbersome to follow through the achievement of effectiveness in the humdrum of organizational activities. The current popularity of performance management systems such as the balanced scorecard can be partly ascribed to inadequate measures of effectiveness.

Those three suggestion areas have been used to propose a model of strategy implementation in the main section of this paper.

A MODEL OF STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

Now the endeavor to present a model of strategy implementation. This takes into account the factors that might not be of interest to scholars in the context of developed economies but may be of relevance to the business environment in developing economies.

Figure-2 presents a model of strategy implementation that attempts to capture the

major themes in strategy implementation and the activities that make up each theme. The forward linkage from strategic plan guides the implementation process and connects it to the preceding phase of strategy formulation. The feedback flowing in reverse from the following step of strategy evaluation and control moves through the implementation phase and goes back to strategy formulation establishing the backward linkage.

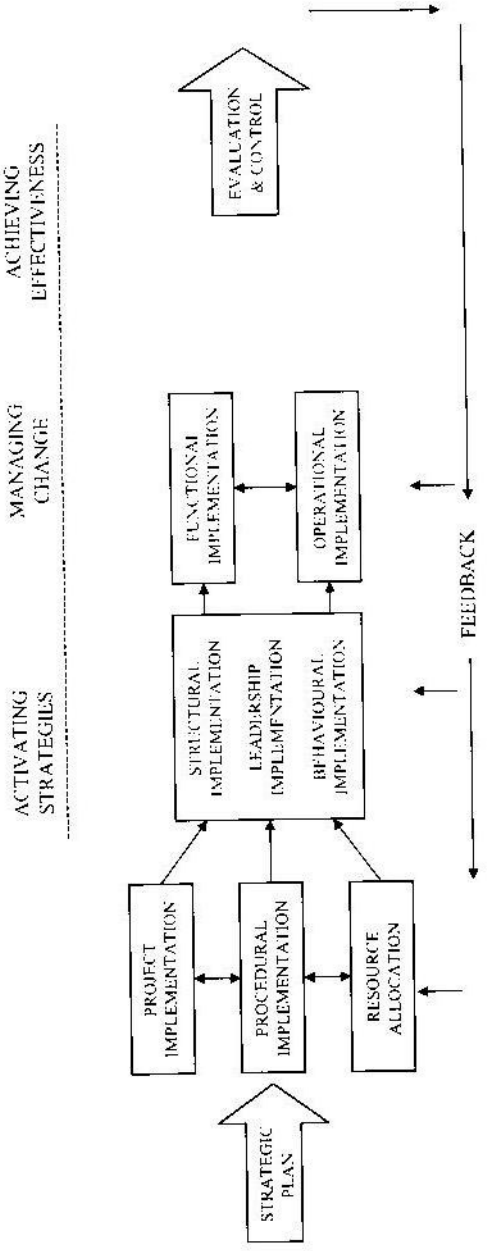


Figure- 2: A model of the strategy implementation process

MAJOR THEMES IN STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

The model of strategy implementation depicts three major themes:

1. Activating strategies. The theme of activating strategies serves to prepare the ground for managerial tasks and activities of strategy implementation. Three sets of activities have been identified under this theme. These could be more relevant for organisations in the developing countries. These are: project implementation, procedural implementation, and resource allocation. The first two sets of activities are rarely found in frameworks of strategy implementation developed in the context of developed economies.

2. Managing change. The next theme is the core of strategy implementation and deals with managing change in complex situations. Three sets of activities have been identified under this theme that should enable coverage of most of the major implementation tasks: structural implementation, leadership implementation, and behavioural implementation.

3. Achieving effectiveness. The last theme in strategy implementation is the outcome of the process. This theme will cover two sets of activities of functional and operational implementation.

For the purpose of discussion and orderly presentation, this study deals with the different themes and the activities of implementation in the sequence indicated above. But it should be noted that the sequence does not mean that activities under each of the themes are necessarily performed one after the other. Many activities can be performed simultaneously, certain other activities may be repeated over time; and then there are activities which are performed only once.

While dealing with the range of activities of implementation, a lot of ground has to be covered in terms of concepts, methods, techniques and approaches. In practice a strategist would have to draw upon diverse specialisations available within the organisation. Experts from different areas such as project management, corporate management, legal affairs, finance, marketing, operations, and personnel, and economists, planners, technologists and others contribute in some or the other way in the implementation of strategies. It would be futile here to go into details of each and every aspect of implementation as they are covered adequately in standard texts in the different specialisation and functional areas of management. However, emphasis will be laid on how strategy affects the different implementation activities and how they are adapted to suit the needs of a particular strategy. The study moves ahead on the assumption that a strategy creates its own requirements of the various activities of implementation. As the strategy is modified or replaced with a new one, each of the

activity of implementation need to undergo a change. No wonder, strategy implementation is also - and rightly so - called by some as change management.

THE THEME OF ACTIVATING STRATEGIES

The activation of strategies is depicted in Figure 3 in the form of a pyramid with strategies at the top. Strategies lead to several plans. Each plan leads to several programmes. Each programme results in numerous projects. Projects are supported by budgets prepared through the resource allocation process. The administrative mechanisms of policies, procedures, rules and regulations support the working of the organisation while it implements the projects, programmes, plans, and strategies. In this manner, strategy sits at the top of a pyramid its implementation being supported by an elaborate administrative structure within the organisation.

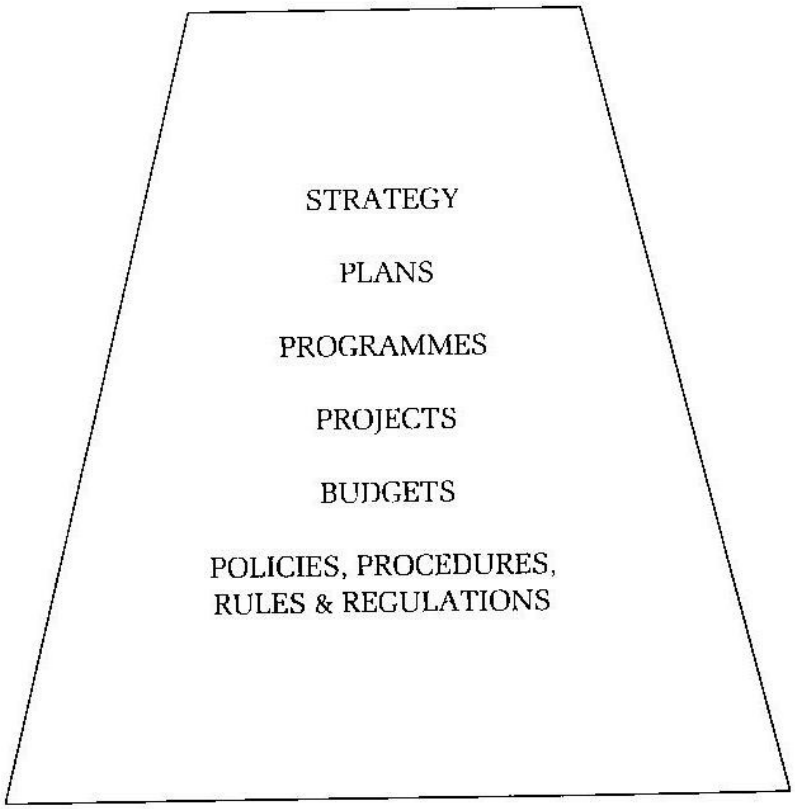


Figure- 3: The pyramid of strategy activation (Kazmi, 2002)

Plans result in different kinds of programmes. A programme is a broad term which includes goals, policies, procedures, rules and regulations, and other steps to be taken in putting a plan into action. Programmes are usually supported by funds committed for plan implementation. Programmes lead to the formulation of projects. A project is a highly specific programme for which the time schedule and costs are predetermined. It requires allocation of funds based on capital budgeting by organisations.

The administrative mechanisms of policies, procedures, and rules and regulations are ubiquitous in any organisation. Policies are guidelines to action. Since implementation is all about action, policies are of utmost importance to effective implementation of strategies. Procedures are the sequential steps described in sufficient detail required to implement a policy. Rules and regulations are the prescribed mode of conduct in a given situation – the dos and don't - that serve to make the policies and procedures explicit. Rules and regulation thus serve to make it clear what is and what is not be done in a given situation.

THE THEME OF MANAGING CHANGE

The literature on management of change is burgeoning, indicating keen interest of academicians as well as practitioners in the subject. For instance, courses in general management and organisational behaviour deal with various aspect of management of change. Some business schools also offer a separate course on management of change. Here is a very brief reference to the subject of management of change in so far as it is relevant to managing strategic change.

In general, strategic management has to deal with dynamic situations within and outside organisations. The external environment is dynamic and so is the internal environment of organisations. An organisation needs to possess the dynamic capabilities to continually adjust in order to respond to the external environment. It also needs to be perpetually on the guard to be internally fit to respond to, or better still to be proactive enough to anticipate, the changes in the external environment. Strategy implementation performs the significant task of keeping the organisation internally fit to be responsive to external environment.

Strategy implementation almost always necessitates change. Managing change therefore is an essential requirement for the success of strategy implementation. In contemporary management literature, managers are sometimes referred to as change agents. In the role of change agents, managers are expected to carry through the process of management of change.

Management of change requires understanding of the process of change. The process usually starts with the triggers of change that set off within or outside an organisation. The managers diagnose the organisational problems or proactively anticipate the future challenges and opportunities and then proceed to plan for change. They identify the need for change, prepare the organisation for implementing change,

take steps to manage resistance to change, and then start the actual change process. Having completed the change process, the managers then set monitoring system to check whether the planned changes are indeed taking place. They may take corrective actions if the change process is deviating from the set course.

Innovation and learning are considered as parts of any change process. Innovation is generally considered as new ways of doing things. A change programme often relies on new ways of doing things to tackle problematic situations or benefit from emergent opportunities. Learning from mistakes and not repeating them is also an essential feature of the change process. The change process offers valuable learning opportunities to managers and quite often they will emerge wiser after they have undergone a change programme.

There are many issues in management of change as it is a complex subject (Quinn, 1980; Helfat et al, 2007; Hellriegel, Jackson, & Slocum, 2005). Three issues are of relevance here as managing change is a significant theme of strategy implementation. These three issues are of: the degree of change, the timing of change, and the activity areas of change.

- *Degree of change.* Changes are usually classified as being radical or incremental, the difference being in the degree of change that occurs. Radical changes are 'big bang' changes that involve major transformation within organisation. Incremental changes are small, slow-moving and routine changes that take place over a long period of time and usually are limited to one part of the organisation. Looked at individually, incremental changes may not seem exciting but they might add up to big changes in the long-run. Incremental changes are a part and parcel of managing organisations and strategy implementation needs to take care of them. Yet, we are typically more concerned about organisation-wide, complex, significant changes as in the case of radical changes.

- *Timing of change.* The degree of change addresses the question: how much change? The timing of change focuses on the question: when to change? Organisations have choice. They can change either as a reaction to a crisis within or an eventful happening outside in which case it will be a reactive change. When organisations choose to foresee change and prepare to face it, it is anticipatory change. In strategy implementation we are concerned with both these types of changes: the reactive and the anticipatory changes. Ideally, planned strategy implementation would be expected to deal with radical, anticipatory changes.

- *Activity areas of change.* The literature on change management mentions several activity areas of changes sometimes called the methods or types of change. For instance, frequent references are available to technology, new products and services, job redesign, organisation redesign and the like as the activity areas of

change within organisations. For the purpose of strategy implementation, we are more concerned with three activity areas of structure, leadership, and behaviour. The reason for this choice is that these three areas might be of greater relevance to radical, anticipatory changes in the contemporary environmental context in the developing countries that are more likely to be encountered in strategy implementation.

Apart from the three issues in change, several other issues of significance have also been chosen for inclusion in the discussion. For instance, writings on change management refer to the speed of change as being slow or fast, or change programme being sequential or simultaneous, managing resistance to change by dealing with the barriers to change, and to the role of innovation and learning in change management. One must remember that all these issues are of relevance to strategy implementation.

THE THEME OF ACHIEVING EFFECTIVENESS

In strategic management, there is much concern about organisational effectiveness. Simply stated, organisational effectiveness means the degree to which an organisation is able to achieve its objectives. There are usually a range of measures based on multiple objectives that organisations set for themselves. Organisational effectiveness is a recurring theme in management. Like the theme of managing change, the theme of achieving effectiveness is of great interest to managers and scholars of management. It generates a lot of research, myriad viewpoints and many controversies. So far as strategic management is concerned, organisational effectiveness is the end sought to be attained through implementation of strategies. In other words, strategic management is all about achieving organisational effectiveness.

There are several issues in management and organisational studies literature on the theme of organisational effectiveness. There are myriad approaches or models available to understand what organisational effectiveness is, which measures can be used to assess it, what are the different methods of achieving it, and what can be done to improve organisational effectiveness.

Contemporary management literature provides us four models of organisational effectiveness: the goal model, resource-based model, internal process model, and the conflicting values model. The goal model suggests measuring how well the organisation achieves its goals. The resource-based model lays emphasis on the ability of the organisation to obtain resources. The internal process model focuses on the internal activities of an organisation to assess how well they are working. The conflicting values model is an integrative framework that attempts to consolidate different viewpoints and suggests that organisations do many things and have many outcomes so diverse indicators of performance should be used simultaneously (Daft, 2004). The methods of achieving and the means to improve organisational effectiveness cover a wide array of

managerial activities. These include, for instance, financial management, marketing management, operations management, human resource management, and information management.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The model of strategy implementation proposed here could be considered an addition to the existing literature on frameworks of strategy implementation. Besides its academic value, it may add to our understanding of how the complexity of the strategy implementation can be represented in the form of a model. It takes into account a range of topical issues such as change management and organizational effectiveness and attempts to cascade them into the framework in a way that makes sense.

The practical value of the suggested model may lie in the way that neglected factors of implementation such as project and procedural implementation have been incorporated. To managers in developing economies, matters related to the procedures for setting up a factory and seeking license to run them are 'strategic' in contrast to the way that developed economies work. To managers in the developed economies, procedures involved in setting up a factory or even closing it down may be routine work. Likewise, project management is of utmost importance in strategy implementation, a fact that has been curiously neglected in the most of existing frameworks. Lately, there are some signs that this neglect may be corrected (Morris & Jamieson, 2005). The proposed model of strategy implementation seeks to add to the efforts to provide project management its due place in strategy implementation. In doing so, the model undertakes the task of bringing to fore the role of executive management in contrast to that of top management. Many strategic management and strategy implementation models have an underpinning of an exclusive top management point of view assuming the executive management to be passive implementers of strategic directions from above. The reality of implementation might be different where executive management may be called upon to shoulder the major responsibility for strategic management-far removed from the ivory tower view of top management. The proposed model of strategy implementation seeks to do away with the overriding emphasis of organizations being led by top managers rather than being pulled by executive managers. In the end, the model proposed here in this paper is likely to reflect the organizational realities more realisticallly in developing economies.

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