Investigating the Degree of Attention to Key Components of Strategy Implementation in the Municipality of Isfahan

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Abstract : The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the degree of attention of components of strategy implementation in line with the strategies adopted in the Municipality of Isfahan. This applied study was conducted via a descriptive-survey research method. The population consists of managers and experts in the Municipality of Isfahan. The sample size includes a number of 120 participants selected via the Clustering Sampling Method. The data collection instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire. The data were collected in a cross-sectional way in February 2015. According to the literature, the components of strategy implementation were investigated in two main dimensions of institutionalization and execution of strategies. Data analysis was conducted at two levels of descriptive and inferential statistics (One Population Mean test and the Friedman test) were used in SPSS 22. According to the obtained results, only components of organizational systems, resources, and facilities (from the dimension of institutionalization) and strategy planning (from the dimension of execution) were paid attention to at a favorable level, while other components were not at the favorable level in the Municipality of Isfahan. The other results indicate that the component of strategy component as well as resources and facilities have higher significance than other components from the viewpoints of managers and exerts in the Municipality of Isfahan. All in all, the results obtained from the present study emphasize the necessity of paying more attention to key components of strategy execution in the Municipality of Isfahan.
Keywords: Strategies Implementation, Strategies Execution, Strategies Institutionalization, Municipality of Isfahan

INTRODUCTION

Almost any successful manager understands the importance of gaining distinctive competitive advantage as a success key and even the secret of survival. One of the most important competitive advantages in the current age is to develop and implement proper and competitive strategies in order to achieve a strategy-oriented firm (Akbari & Mohaghar, 2010). However, many plans that are referred to as corporate strategy and the firms are dependent on them are not durable. Probably these strategies have not been developed well and do not perform well across time (Lee & Sai On Ko, 2000). Similarly, it is noteworthy that developing a proper strategy is not the whole thing required for success; rather, strategy planning, implementation and prosecution of the strategy are highly important too.

Since any firm does not have unlimited resources and there is a competitive space, proper, competitive and action-oriented development and implementation of strategies across time is very important which will be led to realization of directional elements and macro-organizational purposes. This is because the fine for spending limited resources on minor issues in an ineffective manner is to transfer the competitive arena to a competitor who has concentrated his/her limited resources on major issues effectively (Ghafarian & Kiani, 2001). Therefore, flexibility and dynamism are essential in a strategic management process, because if there is no dynamism and flexibility, the adopted decisions will lose their reliability rapidly due to rapid change of conditions and if they are not corrected, managers will become misled. Obviously, paying attention to strategic evaluation and control is very vital for firms to be present actively in the market without submitting to change. Of course, it is clear that the role of strategic control becomes vital when discontinuity (severe environmental changes) in management and administration of a firm is increased.

Studies show that there is a deep gap between development and implementation of a strategy. In other words, what the firms intend to do is usually different from what they really do. The results of previous studies demonstrate that most firms are faced with problems in implementation of strategies at various organizational levels. If implementation of the developed strategies is weak, even the strong and accurate strategies will have no efficiency.

According to previous studies, almost 70% of strategic initiatives are not implemented successfully (Miller, Wilson & Hickson, 2004) and just 10 to 15 percent of firms have implemented their strategies

successfully (Li, Guo-hui & Eppler, 2010). The reason is that implementation of strategies is not stressed in firms. Successful implementation of strategies in a firm requires some conditions. Researchers have proposed these conditions as key factors for successful implementation of strategies. For instance, Braison has referred to the key role of human, process and structural issues and even institutionalization in implementation of strategies. Fred David, too, has referred to key factors such as determining annual purposes, developing policies, allocation of resources, change of structure and restructure and re-engineering, revision of rewards and motivational plans, decreased resistance against change, adaptation of managers against the strategy, strengthening the culture of supporting a strategy, adaptation of manufacturing and operating processes, and establishment of an effective human resource unit for successful implementation of strategies (Mamduhi & Seyed Hashemi, 2010). In order to control implementation of strategies, it is essential to consider and explore the status of key success factors of strategy implementation.

Given the importance of implementing the strategies in strategy-oriented firms, the present survey intends to explore degree of attention to each key component for implementing the strategies at Isfahan Municipality. Through the results of this survey, the weaknesses and strengths of Isfahan Municipality in the process of implementation of strategies can be identified; thus, implementation of strategies in this firm will be facilitated via identification and elimination of probable obstacles as well as strengthening of strengths.

Research literature
Strategy implementation

In recent decades, business leaders have mainly concentrated on developing a suitable strategy to create change in a firm. These leaders believe that if they create proper strategies, they will fulfill most of their responsibility for creating change in a firm and attach less importance to the challenge of strategy implementation. This is while previous studies show that strategy implementation is at least two times more difficult than its development (Speculand, 2009). Strategy implementation has an operating nature and depends on doing a group of activities at all corporate levels (Boer, Drejer, Minarro-Viseras, Baines & Sweeney, 2005). Different researchers have various viewpoints about implementation of strategies which can be divided into three main classes. The first class believes that the strategies are not implemented because they are not enforceable. From this aspect, it is believed that there is a deep gap between the strategic layer and operational layer of firms (emphasis on implementation of strategies). According to the second class, the firm and environment should have the capability to accept implementation of a strategy for realization of that strategy. Structure, corporate culture, systems, processes and beneficiaries of a firm should support strategy implementation in a firm. To put it differently, the ground for strategy implementation must be provided (institutionalization of strategy). The third group believes that strategy implementation is a change in the fullest sense of the word and the strategy is basically a revolution in their viewpoint. According to this standpoint, strategy implementation is interpreted as strategic change management (internalization of strategy) (Lashkar Boluki, 2016: 26). Indeed, implementation of strategies requires paying simultaneous attention to three dimensions of implementation, i.e. translation of directional elements and strategies into action including control purposes, quantitative purposes, initiatives, etc. (Akbari & Ghazi Nouri, 2011); institutionalization which means to accept and support the strategies on behalf of structure, culture, and so on (Scholz, 1987); and internalization of strategies that means strategic change management (Tichy, 1982).

It is obvious that shortages of methodology in each dimension of implementation, institutionalization and internalization of strategies can create damages in realization of directional elements and strategies in a firm. In fact, dealing with the three dimensions simultaneously gives a clear framework to the management in which the answer to challenges of implementation, responses to questions, and the existing obscurities and deviations in the obtained management dashboards from performance (related to controlling the implementation) are hidden.

Exploring the research background on strategic control shows that a few internal studies have investigated this issue. Nikukar et al.'s study (2009) is one of the related studies that aimed to design and explain a strategic control model for logistic systems. The results have been presented in the form of human-oriented strategic control model based on two strategic reference points: 1) degree of attention and 2) flexibility. Finally, four types of control strategies including commitment orientation, participation orientation, trust orientation and relationship orientation have been explained with the prioritization of time of peace and war.

In another study, Arabi and Chavoshi (2010) explored two variables of formality and number of performance criteria (transparency) in strategic control in holding companies listed in Tehran Stock Exchange which had been proposed theoretically by the headquarters in holding companies. The findings of this study showed that each holding company should employ one of the strategies of strategic control proportional to the type of development and implementation of strategy and more coordination between these three stages based on the strategic reference points in a firm will improve its performance.

Among the external studies related to strategic control, Muralidharan's survey (2004) can be mentioned in which the author emphasized that while there are many accessible research tools to design strategic controls but there is no tool to design strategic controls and shape the content of strategy during its implementation. Hence, it was tried to propose a framework for designing strategic controls to shape the strategy content during its implementation (Muralidharan, 2004). In another study, it was attempted to utilize a conceptual framework for invesatigation of the nature of change in management control in firms. This was based on four elements of managemet control system: structure of the firm and strategy, corporate culture, management information systems and the main control package. The result was to propose a conceptual framework for exploration of the nature of change in management control in firms (Kanthi Herath, 2007).

Considering the importance of strategy implementation, the main purpose of the present survey is to control this process and explore the status of key success factors at Isfahan Municipality. To this end, Isfahan Municipality will be explored in terms of implementation and institutionalization of strategies via key variables for these dimensions. The results will determine strengths and weaknesses of the municipality in implementation of strategies. Consequently, they can act as a guide for strategic planning to guarantee successful implementation of strategies.

METHODOLOGY

This survey is applicable from objective aspect and descriptive-field from methodological aspect. The statistical population included managers and experts of Isfahan Municipality. Cluster sampling was employed for sampling. Among 15 districts and 7 deputies under the supervision of Isfahan Municipality, districts 6, 9 and 13 and deputy of planning, research and information technology, transportation and traffic deputy, and financial-administration deputy were selected. The sample size was estimated equal to 120. Researcher self-made questionnaire was tool of data collection that contained two sections: personal information of respondents and components of strategy implementation with its various dimensions. In personal information section, sex, organizational post, and work experience were explored. Components of implementation of strategies were explored via 29 questions. According to the research literature, these components were explored in two major dimensions of institutionalization and implementation of strategies. Components of the institutionalization dimension are: culture, structure, corporate systems, and resources and possibilities and components of the implementation dimension include strategy development, strategic planning, and alignment of units. One-hundred twenty questionnaires were randomly distributed among the personnel. Saati's scale (from 1=very low to 9= very high) was used for scoring the items. The data was collected cross-sectionally in March 2016. Content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by the experts and its reliability was determined via Cronbach's alpha coefficient. It was calculated equal to 0.93 for the questions related to components of implementation of strategies which showed strong reliability of the questionnaire.

Research questions
How is the degree of attention to each component of implementation of strategies at Isfahan Municipality?
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Findings
The results of analysis of personal information show that 18/6 percent of respondents were female and 81.4 percent were male. According to the results, the highest work experience (53.5 percent) was related to the class with less than five years. Thus, 32.6 percent of respondents had 5 to 10 years of work experience, 9.3 percent had 10 to 15 years of work experience, and 4.7 percent had more than 20 years of work experience. Moreover, 81.4 percent were expert, 4.7 percent were expert in charge, 23 percent were chief and 11.6 percent were manager.

Data analysis
To explore questions 1 and 2, i.e. degree of attention to each component of implementation and institutionalization of strategies, one-sample t-test was used. In this test, mean of the factors was compared with the average value. It was carried out for each component. According to the results, the significance level for strategy planning from implementation dimension and corporate systems and resources and possibilities from institutionalization dimension was less than 0.05. Therefore, mean of these factors has a significant difference with the average value. Two columns of upper limit and lower limit of confidence interval should be considered in exploring the status of each factor. Since the values in the above two columns are positive for strategy planning as well as corporate systems and resources and possibilities, the status of these factors is

interpreted at a higher level than the average level (Table 1). As the significance level for other factors i.e. strategy development and alignment of units from implementation dimension and culture and structure from institutionalization dimension is greater than 0.05, status of these components is evaluated at the average level. In view of this, the obtained values do not have a significant difference from the average level.

Table 1. Results of one-sample t-test for dimensions of implementation and institutionalization of strategies

Row	Variable		Mean	Sig	T	Confidence interval 95% for mean difference	
						Lower limit	Upper limit
1	Strategy implementation	Strategy development	4.93	0.78	-0.27	-0.58	0.44
2		Strategy planning	6.04	0.000	3.90	0.50	1.58
3		Alignment of units	5.37	0.28	1.08	-0.57	-0.51
4		Culture	4.96	0.90	-0.011	-0.31	1.06
5	Strategy institutionalization	Structure	5.13	0.66	0.43	-0.57	0.78
6		Corporate systems	5.74	0.02	2.35	0.10	1.38
7		Resources and possibilities	5.68	0.006	2.86	0.20	1.17

For more accurate exploration of the status of each dimension, each index was tested via one-sample t-test.

Table 2. Results of one-sample t-test for the dimension of strategy development

Row	Variable	Mean	Sig	T	Confidence interval 95% for mean difference	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
1	Revision and approval of perspective and mission	5.60	0.09	1.70	0.11	0.32
2	Exploration and re-analysis of the metropolitan environment	5.09	0.77	0.29	0.55	0.73
3	Revision of factors of value chain in a firm	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.64	0.64
4	Exploration and re-analysis of competitive powers and urban structure	4.53	0.09	1.70	1.01	0.08
5	Up to dating of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the municipality	5.18	0.57	0.57	0.46	0.84
6	Revision and flexibility of the strategy	5.46	0.13	1.53	0.14	0.07
7	Approval of strategy based on the coherent process of strategy development	5.27	0.36	0.92	0.33	0.88

Exploring the indexes of strategy development showed that all these indexes are at the average level.

Table 3. Results of one-sample t-test for the dimension of strategy planning

Row	Variable	Mean	Sig	T	Confidence interval 95% for mean difference	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
1	Determining strategic purposes	6.06	0.005	2.46	0.34	1.79
2	Depicting a strategy map (regulation of dependence or cause and effect relations among the strategic purposes)	4.95	0.90	-0.12	-0.82	0.73
3	Determining the indexes related to each strategic purpose	5.65	0.08	1.79	-0.81	1.38
4	Regulation of quantitative purposes related to each index	5.41	0.27	1.10	-0.34	1.18
5	Determining the projects and acts related to fulfillment of strategic purposes	6.39	0.000	5.00	0.83	1.95
6	Prioritization of projects and acts	6.34	0.000	4.68	0.76	1.93
7	Estimation of financial resources of projects and acts towards strategic purposes	6.06	0.001	3.5	0.46	1.67
8	Transferring the purposes and indexes to different units	5.97	0.001	3.5	0.41	1.53

Examining the indexes of strategy planning revealed that indexes of determining strategic purposes, determining the projects and acts related to fulfillment of strategic purposes, prioritization of projects and acts, estimation of financial resources of projects and acts towards strategic purposes and transferring the purposes and indexes to different units are higher than average and indexes of depicting a strategy map, determining the indexes related to each strategic purpose and regulation of quantitative purposes related to each index are at the average level.

Table 4. Results of one-sample t-test for the dimension of alignment of units

Row	Variable	Mean	Sig	T	Confidence interval 95% for mean difference	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
1	Interaction, cooperation and coordination among the deputies for realization of purposes	5.32	1.39	0.86	-0.43	1.08
2	Interaction, cooperation and coordination among the districts and deputies	5.65	0.06	1.89	-0.43	1.34
3	Interaction, cooperation and coordination among the deputies and firms	5.27	0.43	0.78	-0.43	1.99

Results of analyzing the indexes of alignment of units showed that all three indexes are at the average level.

Table 5. Results of one-sample t-test for the dimension of culture

Row	Variable	Mean	Sig	T	Confidence interval 95% for mean difference	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
1	Supporting the governing beliefs and values from implementation of strategies	5.04	0.87	0.15	-0.56	0.65
2	The number of employees who believe in organizational beliefs and values (municipality culture)	5.09	0.75	0.31	-0.50	0.69
3	Employees' commitment to organizational beliefs and values (strong, medium, and weak culture)	4.86	0.63	-0.47	-0.73	0.45

Results of analyzing the indexes of culture dimension showed that all three indexes are at the average level.

Table 6. Results of one-sample t-test for the dimension of corporate systems

Row	Variable	Mean	Sig	T	Confidence interval 95% for mean difference	
					Lower limit	Upper limit
1	Managerial systems (budgeting and control, strategic planning, etc.) for the realization of purposes and strategies	6.06	0.004	3.01	0.35	1.78
2	Human resource management systems (wage and salary, reward, training, etc.) for the realization of purposes and strategies	5.18	0.61	0.51	-0.54	0.91
3	Administrative-financial systems (accounting, budget control, payment, etc) for the realization of purposes and strategies	5.27	0.40	0.84	0.38	0.94
4	Information systems (information gathering, processing, sharing, etc.) for the realization of purposes and strategies	5.51	0.14	1.47	-0.18	1.21

Results of analyzing the indexes of corporate systems showed that management systems and administrative-financial systems are higher than the average level and human resource management systems and information systems are at the average level.

Table 7. Results of one-sample t-test for the dimension of resources and possibilities

| Row | Variable | Mean | Sig | T | Confidence interval 95% for mean difference | |
					Lower limit	Upper limit
1	Employees' knowledge, skill and experience for the realization of strategic purposes	5.79	0.006	2.87	0.23	1.34
2	Corporate infrastructures (physical, etc) for the realization of purposes and strategies	5.32	0.26	1.12	-0.25	0.91
3	Regulation of the budget based on financial estimation of projects and acts	5.93	0.002	3.35	0.37	1.47

Results of analyzing the dimension of resources and possibilities showed that indexes of employees' knowledge, skill, and experience towards realization of strategic purposes and regulation of the budget based on financial estimation of projects and acts are higher than the average level and corporate infrastructures index (physical, etc) is at the average level.

To explore questions 3 and 4, i.e. degree of importance of the components of implementation and institutionalization of strategies, Friedman test was employed. Given the presented results in Tables 8 and 10, H0 is rejected at level 95% because the significance level is equal to zero and less than the $\alpha= 5\%$. In other words, importance of components of implementation and institutionalization of strategies is not similar from respondents' viewpoint. Mean of rank of these factors is shown in Tables 9 and 11. Given the significant difference of ranks, it can be claimed that resources and possibilities component (mean rank of 2.88) has the highest importance.

Table 8. Significance of Friedman test

Index	Value
Number	120
χ^2	11.455
Degree of freedom	2
Significance	0.000

Table 9. Result of Friedman test for the dimension of institutionalization of strategies

Dimensions	Mean of rank
Culture	2.13
Structure	2.32
Resources and possibilities	2.88
Corporate systems	2.68

Likewise, according to the results of components of implementation of strategies, it can be claimed that strategy planning (with mean rank of 2.33) has the highest importance.

Table 10. Significance of Friedman test

Index	Value
Number	120
χ^2	21.700
Degree of freedom	2
Significance	0.000

Table 11. Result of Friedman test for the effective dimensions on implementation of strategies

Dimensions	Mean of rank
Strategy development	1.75
Strategy planning	2.33
Alignment of units	1.93

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Most companies have to pay special attention to strategic control because if it is not considered, many strategies which seem attractive are not implemented successfully (Goold & Quinn, 1990). Control in firms includes supervision, evaluation and improvement of various activities that are occurred inside a firm. A major part of any manager's job is to exercise control. Control means do something so that the affairs are done as they have been planned (Certo & Peter, 1995). Hence, managers should have a clear understanding of the results that are expected from doing certain acts. According to this, the main purpose of the current survey was to explore degree of attention to key components of strategy implementation at Isfahan Municipality. For this purpose, the components related to two main dimensions of implementation of strategies (implementation and institutionalization of strategies) were explored.

The results of exploring degree of attention to the components of implementation of strategies showed that among three components of this dimension, strategy planning has just been considered at a desirable level. This is while other components, i.e. strategy development and alignment of units have not been considered desirably.

For more accurate exploration of the dimension of implementation of strategies, its indexes were investigated too. The results showed that among nine components of strategy development, degree of attention to all indexes was at the average level. More accurately, it can be argued that revision and approval of perspective and mission, exploration and re-analysis of the metropolitan environment, revision of the factors of value chain in a firm, exploration and re-analysis of competitive powers and urban structure, up to dating of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the municipality, revision and flexibility of the strategy and approval of strategy based on the coherent process of strategy development have not been considered desirably at Isfahan Municipality.

Exploring the indexes of strategy planning revealed that determining strategic purposes, determining the projects and acts related to fulfillment of strategic purposes, prioritization of projects and acts, estimation of financial resources of projects and acts towards strategic purposes and transferring the purposes and indexes to different units have been considered desirably. Other indexes, i.e. depicting a strategy map (regulation of dependence or cause and effect relations among the strategic purposes), determining the indexes related to each strategic purpose and regulation of quantitative purposes related to each index have been considered averagely.

Results of exploring degree of attention to the two indexes of alignment of units demonstrated that interaction; cooperation and coordination among the deputies for realization of purposes, interaction, cooperation and coordination among the districts and deputies as well as interaction, cooperation and coordination among the deputies and firms are not at a desirable level. Thus, this illustrates that activities of districts, deputies and firms are not performed with desirable cooperation and this is one of the weaknesses of Isfahan Municipality in implementing the strategies.

Exploring the components of institutionalization of strategies indicated that corporate culture and structure is at an average level at Isfahan Municipality in terms of supporting the strategies and corporate systems and resources and possibilities have been considered desirably.

Exploring the dimensions of corporate culture showed that Isfahan Municipality has a medium culture in supporting the strategies. In other words, supporting the governing beliefs and values from implementation of strategies, the number of employees who believe in corporate beliefs and values (municipality culture) as well as employees' commitment to corporate beliefs and values are at the average level.

Exploring the corporate systems in the form of managerial systems, human resource management systems, administrative-financial systems and information systems showed that degree of attention to managerial and administrative-financial systems at Isfahan Municipality is at a desirable level and degree of attention to human resource management systems and information systems is at an average level.

Exploring the resources and possibilities of the municipality revealed that knowledge, skill and experience of employees and budget regulation based on financial estimation are considered desirably but infrastructures of the firm (physical, etc.) are at an average level.

According to the results, structure (division of labor, delegation of authority, etc.) is a medium support for realization of purposes and strategies of a firm. This is while change of structure to support the strategy is essential. Thus, system of activities, responsibilities, tasks, authorities, communications and responsiveness and structural dimensions including concentration, formality, complexity, vertical separation, horizontal separation and geographical separation and coordination should be changed proportional to the strategy in an integrated manner. Given that corporate structure of Isfahan Municipality is not a strong support for its strategies, senior managers of Isfahan Municipality have to change different dimensions of corporate structure proportional to the strategies.

Results of exploring degree of importance of dimensions of implementation and institutionalization of strategies showed that importance of these dimensions is not similar in viewpoint of managers and experts of Isfahan Municipality. On the basis of these results, resources and possibilities from the dimension of institutionalization of strategies and strategy planning from the dimension of implementation of strategies have the highest importance.

Generally speaking, the results of this survey disclosed that it is necessary to pay more attention to the components of implementation of strategies in order to guarantee successful implementation of strategies at Isfahan Municipality. Therefore, it is suggested to reinforce each of these components to facilitate the process of implementation of strategies. Obviously, strength of Isfahan Municipality in each of the above-mentioned components can be led to the implementation of strategies with more confidence.

One of the limitations of this survey was that implementation of strategies has been explored just from the aspect of institutionalization and implementation and dimension of internalization of strategies is ignored. It is suggested, hence, to explore internalization of strategies at Isfahan Municipality in future studies. Besides, the present study was carried out in some districts and deputies of Isfahan Municipality; thus, it is suggested to conduct similar studies in the ignored units in the present survey to provide the possibility to analyze implementation of strategies more accurately at Isfahan Municipality.

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