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Strategic Management of Performance: An Examination of Public Sector Organizations in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract: This paper outlines a mechanism for the development and implementation of a strategic performance management framework within government departments in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The work also addresses corporate performance management for governmental organizations dealing with service and operations with the aim of evaluating existing performance management systems and identifying major issues and challenges affecting their implementation. This research has enabled the identification of the most appropriate systems and indicators for utilization within all government divisions. Thus, through the use of effective performance management systems, an organization can develop performance related strategies and generate accurate and timely reports pertinent to organizational management activities. Consequently, organizational leaders and senior managers are equipped for decision-making based on proper measures, with the aim of boosting organizational efficiency and productivity.

Keywords: Performance, Strategy, Management, UAE

Introduction

THIS PAPER HYPOTHESIZES that 1) there is a lack of alignment between strategy and operation management; and 2) applied performance measures are inadequate. The research thus focuses on corporate performance management for organizations' service and operations. The main aim of the research was to evaluate existing performance management systems in government organizations in the UAE and to identify the major issues and challenges that are affecting the implementation of performance systems. The paper also suggests a mechanism for building and implementing a strategic performance management framework in government organizations through the analysis of current performance management methodology specifically in Dubai Government and suggests the best tool and indicators that can be used for all government organizations.

This paper aims to benefit newly established organizations and highlights areas for improvement in existing organizations by providing detailed procedures and critical success factors for establishing a performance management system in organizations. The main objectives of implementing a strategic performance management in government organizations are as follows:

- Review and assess new strategic planning methodology: conducting a review and assessment of the current strategic planning process to identify rationale and understand performance drivers while providing an assessment of the tool mapping requirements.

- Develop performance management framework: develop a structured methodology for identifying critical performance drivers and definition of appropriate performance measures.
- Develop performance management methodology: develop a guidebook to explain the methodology to users.
- Develop performance management templates: develop templates required to enable the management and reporting of the new performance management methodology.

The research focused on performance management in government organizations, performance management frameworks, obstacles in government organization that affect the implementation of performance management and measurement tools. The literature review has therefore been divided into four parts, namely, management control systems, performance management in the public sector, strategic performance management and strategic performance management frameworks.

Difficulties were faced when conducting the literature review particularly in searching for materials about local governments adopting performance management. This is because a performance system is normally adopted in the private sector and government organizations do not believe they add value. Another obstacle was in finding interviewees from top management or middle management who are aware about the performance system concept. Finally, few government organizations that have a moderate understanding about performance management are not in favor of sharing their experience with researchers.

However, designing and implementing a performance management system would support government organizations in the delivery of services in a more effective and efficient way and would improve staff motivation and involvement as they will be rewarded on higher performance and achievement. Such a performance system would also lead to transparency as the activities are linked with employees in the hierarchy, thus, each will be responsible about the tasks. Moreover, government organizations would be forced to plan more rigorously, particularly in linking their articulated objectives with programs, measurements and targets, resulting in better utilization of budget and resources.

Management Control System

A management control system concentrates on financial and non-financial performance measurements. The financial aspect is clear, relating to monetary and fiscal transactions of government departments. Non-financial aspects are quality, reputation, customer service and employee behavior in the organization. Overall, all departments can be considered as being on a 'performance improvement wheel' that aids in developing the current results or performance, whether they be financial or non-financial in nature. The management control system that is established, must be implemented in all functions, including understanding the market, developing and communicating organizational values, building and adapting a delivery system and upgrading implemented performance management systems (Anthony & Govindarajan, 2001).

Performance Management in Government Sector

The public sector is facing extraordinary pressure to change the way it manages performance. This presents government departments with opportunities and challenges involved in achieving a new approach to performance management. There are a number of factors that are forcing organizations in the Arab world to become more focused on performance from the point of view of their customers and key stakeholders. This major transformation can be achieved by lessons learned from public sector organizations elsewhere that have already undergone such a transformation. All growing public sector organizations must be interested in developing and deploying effective performance management systems. This is because only through such systems can they continue to ensure outstanding performance and provide their communities with high quality services and products. Government organizations must develop and execute strategic plans that demonstrate their commitment to enhancing the quality of their services and thereafter evaluate the performance to ensure future best practice. Strategic plans are thus the starting point for an effective performance management system as they establish organizational goals and objectives, define how an organization intends to achieve those goal and demonstrate measurement parameters on performance (DCA, 2000, Kanakri, 2005 and Sanderson, 2001).

Strategic Performance Management

Corporate performance management is one of the latest strategic mechanisms for measuring the results of an organization's functionality in the light of organizational interaction with surrounding elements of internal and external environment. Organizational performance is an outcome of the sum total performance of individuals in an organization, which reflects the performance of organizational units, which in turn reflects the performance of the organization. Therefore, organizational performance is a an aggregation of individual performance impacted on the working units systems and programs. Consequently, this reflects how the organization is performing in achieving maximum production with minimum cost, in less time and at an appropriate level of quality. The work units performance is measured through various indicators that cover economic, political, social and environmental aspects. There are other external factors that influence the performance of work units, such as government policies and industrial changes (DCA, 2001 and RTA-2, 2006).

Furthermore, performance management is a mechanism to measure Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) of an activity that is critical to the success of an organization. Hence, KPIs will differ depending on the nature of products or services and organizational objective. Thus, selectivity is needed in identifying appropriate KPIs for implementation and measurement.

The performance mechanism enables alignment of the objectives with the mission, vision and processes that deliver the desired results. It also helps in cascading actions to deliver objectives, assists with reporting systems which track progress against objectives and take corrective actions, provides a benchmarking tool to compare against best practice and utilizes a continual improvement cycle. Finally, performance management is used to provide a practical action plan by setting out an approach for managing the transformation of performance management for emphasis on strategic goals and performance improvement (Johnson & Scholes, 2002 and Bourne *et al*, 2003).

Strategic Performance Management Models

Excellence in performance management and measurement is a well-established concept in the private sector. It is now becoming equally important in the public sector which is adapting existing frameworks and models from the private sector. The creation of public sector categories in awards such as European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) and the Malcolm Baldrige Award underline this intersection of performance management practice. The EFQM Excellence Model helps to identify organizational priorities whereas the balanced scorecard model facilitates the deployment of strategy inside the organization (QS News, 2007 and Lawrie and Cobbold, 2004). In selecting an appropriate framework, there needs to be a clear understanding of what the organization wants to achieve and where the opportunities for improving performance management lie. Through the development of quality movements, a number of benchmarking performance models were developed including the Prism model in United States and EFQM Excellence Model, launched in the early 1990s. As a result of the competitive pressures of globalization and rising customer expectations, the corporate world responded by improving its performance management practices. Many of the innovations were inspired by the total quality management movement which led to the development of self-assessment and award schemes that celebrate high standards of achievement. Moreover, the logic model concept has been developed which shows a causal relationship between organizational objectives, output and outcomes (EFQM, 1999, 2003 and Cogburn and Schneider, 2003).

During the early 1990s, the balanced scorecard was introduced by Kaplan and Norton and is currently being used by about 50 per cent of large organizations in Europe and the Middle East, including the Arabian Gulf region, largely driven by governmental quests for cost effective public sector management and transparency, as well as society's demand for better service and performance from their government bodies (Kaplan & Norton, 2005 and Kanakri, 2005). Adopting a strategic management framework allows management of public sector organizations to align initiatives, activities and projects with strategic priorities and eliminates those that do not add value for stakeholders. Furthermore, the framework can assist the organization in establishing a centralized communication method, to monitor any changes in strategy and serves as the central reporting tool for meeting the various mandates of performance reporting. A strategic management framework provides a formalized structure for viewing and delivering priorities (Kaplan, 2002 and Rebenitsch *et al*, 2003).

Strategic Alignment

Strategic alignment is tested through a detailed framework that consists of strategic plans and operational plans. Also, the availability of policies for organizations to ensure that objectives and strategies agreed upon in the strategic plan will be implemented. Moreover, an existence of a performance management system within the organization to compare the achieved performance results with plans.

The elements of alignment are as follows:

- *Strategic planning*: through it the organizational long term strategic aims, objectives and targets are illustrated with activities and resources that will be needed to achieve the objectives.

- *Policy design*: it includes evaluating and choosing the best approach to achieve the objectives documented in the strategic plan.
- *Performance management*: it is the control element where the achieved results are monitored and evaluated, also corrective actions are taken to ensure that objectives will be achieved. The KPIs are developed and cascaded down to departments with clear targets and accountability to evaluate the achievements of plans.

Methodology

The methodology followed were interviews, focus groups and brainstorming sessions with performance management employees and benchmarking with best practice utilizing the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) assessment criteria.

These methods are holistic in the sense that they will aid in the identification of potential areas of improvement, revenue enhancement and cost reduction or containment opportunities within the organizations.

Additionally, they allow alternative courses of action in areas that were beneficial to the organization to be highlighted, as well as determining the effectiveness and efficiency of management control systems.

The qualitative research methodology adopted provides thorough information that enables the extraction of different views, opinions and working approach.

The Dubai Government comprises thirty-two divisions of which three were selected as the sample population for the research. These were selected as they demonstrate similarity in size, budget and are dominant compared to the remaining thirty-nine divisions.

Facilitated Meetings

Inquiry procedures involve discussions with performance process managers, staff and those key stakeholders affected by the process - for example, customers and suppliers. This technique is used as with focus groups, many of these people can participate in an active interchange of ideas and issues. The absence of facilitated meetings would mean that management problems faced would not be captured.

Questioning and Interviewing

Questioning is probably the most pervasive technique used by the researcher who is reviewing operations. This type of testing may involve suggesting a viewpoint of the process to gauge management reaction.

Around thirteen questions were asked in an open questions format. The interview was for around one hour from the time of each performance manager of the organization selected in the research scope.

The interviews have been conducted with performance management focal points in government organizations, a selection of three main organization's employees will be interviewed. Through interviews, interviewees will have some suggestions and recommendations for enhancing performance management in government organizations, as well as to highlight important indicators across the government.

Benchmarking

Assessing current performance of government organizations through:

- Agreeing on the research objectives and critical issues related to the scope of the study.
- Study the available data for the current performance in the three areas of government concern that are customers, human resources and efficiency dimensions.

Current market practices through:

- Perform benchmarking with similar organization through literature review.
- Study and analyze the applicability and strategic impact of the proposed key initiatives.

Feedback and communication through:

- Presenting a complete study on the performance management framework, with indicators, acceptable targets and implementation process.

The benchmarking methodology allowed equivalency of working practices and suggested areas that can be implemented to enhance an organization's work techniques.

European Foundation for Quality Management Assessment (EFQM)

The scope of the assessment entails an assessment at the organizational level to ensure the minimum compliance and implementation of the performance management model. The assessment covered enablers criteria only and a questionnaire was designed based on the excellence model and detailed as per the sub-criteria. The two selected enablers that have an impact of the performance management were strategy and policy and human resources.

Management's comments on the questions should be supported by evidence. Based on a thorough analysis of the As-Is situation, this assessment provides the management with an insight on their strengths and areas for improvement that need to be filled to bridge the gaps between the current performance and the leading practices.

The assessment methodology is based on interviewing key personnel and documenting the understanding of the current systems. Also, by obtaining evidence to support the implementation and compliance with current procedures. Finally, suggesting recommendations to enhance the overall organizational performance.

The absence of assessment would mean that completeness of controls or logic of business procedures is not assessed and areas of weaknesses or inefficiencies are not identified.

Analysis

The research methodology adopted for this paper was qualitative, utilizing interviews, focus groups and brainstorming sessions with performance management employees. The research analysis was the outcome of the results obtained using the mechanisms that have been selected in the methodology. Also, an assessment has been conducted on some of the government organizations that were researched. The assessment was carried out through the EFQM criteria questions for two enablers: human resources and strategy / policy.

There are various roles of leadership in government organizations. These include building the culture of performance management within organizational departments; involvement with key stakeholders (customers, partners and representatives of society); ensuring employees and organizational objectives are in alignment; motivating, encouraging, empowering and supporting employees in achieving organizational objectives.

Most organizations put financial considerations first to satisfy shareholders by generating return. But in government organizations, the primary objective is to support top management by providing them with all the resources they need to work efficiently and effectively to serve customers and keep them loyal to the organization. For this reason, government organizations consider the customer perspective as top of their strategy map. The balanced scorecard links strategic objectives and performance measures at the corporate level in an organization. On the other hand, the strategy map provides a powerful way to demonstrate the links between each of the perspectives. However, through the interviews conducted these strategic objectives are not applied in government organizations. In the examined organizations, it was evident that there was a lack of utilization of the strategy map as an effective and efficient tool to develop the strategy.

Another point that was highlighted is that KPIs are not derived from the strategic plan, thus there is no alignment between KPI's and objectives. This is where the balanced scorecard and in particular a strategy map are not aligned due to the lack of alignment of key performance indicators with the corporate strategy. It was clear that there was no route map for staff in helping them to see how their individual activities fit into the overall strategy of the organization.

Developing an organizational strategy is a process that builds on inputs from a team of executive members, top management, as well as the rest of the management staff in the organization. As a real example, and to demonstrate lack of will within government departments, an attempt by a government department to implement a strategy began the process with a presentation from the strategy division to the top management team and to board members, which described the concept of the strategy. However, there was a lack of top management attendance for the presentation followed by management requesting the strategy division to prepare an entire strategic plan, with responsibility for shortcomings being directed to the strategy division.

Government organizations are non profit oriented, but there are vital stakeholders to satisfy in terms of services or resources provided. However, there is a gap in delivering services and products to stakeholders, since organizational values are not communicated to internal stakeholders, such as employees. This create ambiguity for middle management and other staff in the organization about the organization's direction. This was a major obstacle in the implementation process of performance management systems.

Senior management contribution is the main critical success factor for the development of a successful performance management system in an organization. However, research interviews revealed inadequate communication channels between top management and other employees and their was a lack of commitment and unclear responsibility sharing mechanisms for strategy development and execution. Furthermore, strategy forms the basis of the performance management system. However, meetings to set important strategic objectives and performance measures were often overtaken with the discussion of minor issues unrelated to corporate strategy. The process of strategy was unclear to management and not communicated in a timely manner, nor was there evidence of communication of decisions to all

departmental levels. There was also a lack of regular strategy review meetings between top management and the strategy division.

Continuous improvement processes must be properly designed and used for describing the processes in consistency with one another. The research demonstrated that there was no evidence that review and compliance of the process was carried out on a regular basis. Each of the processes should be clearly chartered with identification of the parties in charge and measurable performance indicators, aiming at continuous improvement.

Additionally, there was no mechanism to review and measure the effectiveness of the processes in achieving the overall goals and strategy of organization. Also, there was a lack in a methodology for determining the link between the processes within the directorate itself and those processes owned by other directorates. Also, directorates must frequently seek opportunities for the application of new tools and methods to improve their processes.

There is little evidence that strategies, objectives and key result areas are supported by KPIs, based on which the overall performance of the directorate can be evaluated and possible corrective actions can be taken as part of the planning process. Despite the fact that each directorate has developed its KPIs, it is not clear how those divisional KPIs are aligned with the KPIs of the directorate and respectively the corporate ones. Also, there is no evidence that any performance benchmarking initiative is undertaken by the directorates to identify possible gaps between current performance and best practice.

The linkage between training, performance, evaluation and reward could not be established. Currently, the Human Resources Directorate (HR&D) handles this issue on ad-hoc basis. There is no evidence in this research that there exist clear communication channels between HR&D and its strategic partners. Enhancement of communication with the Executive Office will improve HR&D understanding of Central Government aims and expectations and will provide a good benchmark for the performance of HR&D in comparison to other government organization.

The analysis of data demonstrated that there are no employee evaluations based on individual KPIs. In the absence of such performance evaluations, there was evidence of a perception that the reward system was biased and subjective, negatively affecting motivation levels throughout the organization.

Recommendations

In selecting an appropriate performance management framework, the first step is to conduct an evaluation of the organizational environment and identify the type of service the organization provides. This is needed in order to clarify the strategic direction of the organization. Secondly, planning and establishing targets to help management monitor the day to day organizational performance of operations. Finally, evaluating management performance and implementing incentives and rewards schemes (Artely *et al*, 2001).

Public employees need to be trained in how to develop corporate and operational plans in addition to establishing KPIs and targets for performance measures that will be used to evaluate operations. Therefore, top management and all level government employees must attend training programs and courses in the preparation of plans and performance management techniques. The Balanced Scorecard is recommended for use in government organizations. This module directly influences four critical organizational outcomes which are financial, internal processes, customer satisfaction and learning and growth perspectives. Also, im-

improvements can be clearly identified because the system is flexible and is linked to strategic goals with results in the four critical areas (Kaplan, 2002).

Furthermore, aligning performance management to support organizational goals and integrate with other systems proved to be the most critical differentiator in system effectiveness. The most successful performance management systems require training in using the system, established clear accountability for the people using it and are focused on competencies. For that purpose government bodies should select the balanced scorecard model.

Performance based management is a systematic approach to performance improvement through an ongoing process of establishing strategic performance objectives, measuring performance, collecting, analyzing, reviewing and reporting performance data and using that data to drive organizational performance improvement.

A combination of two performance modules can be used to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of implementing the performance management system in an organization. The best two modules to be used together is the Balanced Scorecard and EFQM. The Balanced Scorecard enables linking the strategy to objective, initiatives, targets and measures. Thereafter, measurement of the performance on a regular basis by comparing achieved results with previously identified targets is required. On the other hand, EFQM provides an 'as is' situation about the organization and highlights areas for improvement.

Performance based management follows the Continuous Improvement Cycle often described as 'Plan – Do – Check - Act'. In this cycle, the first step is to define the organization's mission and to establish its strategic performance objectives (also known as the strategic planning phase). The next step is to establish performance measures based on and linked to the outcomes of the strategic planning phase. Thereafter, work activities are executed and performance information is collected and the data is analyzed, reviewed and reported. The last step is for management to use the reported data to drive performance improvement, make changes and corrections where appropriate or fine tune organizational operations. Accountability for performance is established at all steps in the framework (Artely *et al*, 2001).

The strategic plan identifies the foundation for effective performance measurement systems. Traditional performance measurement systems focus on the wrong set of performance measures thus weakening the organization's strategic mission due to non - visionary business practices, in the sense that measures are for control and not for growth. Thus, it is vital to discuss the strategic plan and review the compatibility of the plan to provide an integrated performance measurement system (Gee *et al*, 2001).

Moreover, there should be a manageable number of key business processes as this will reflect on the number of performance measures. The number of measures must be moderate but meaningful because too many results lead to an overwhelming amount of data, whereas too few can lead to inadequate information on which to base business decision upon (Heizer and Render, 2001).

Stakeholders are the people who have or might impact the future success of an organization or organizational unit. Thus, it is essential to have a clear idea of who these people are and what are their needs, expectations and aspirations. Additionally, their points of view and expectations should be considered in developing strategic goals and objectives (Mind Tools, 2004).

Senior management involvement is essential in pioneering organizations. Performance measurement initiatives are introduced, championed and promoted by top executives, since

leadership commitment to the development and use of performance measures is a critical element for the success of performance measurement system. Employee involvement through developing the performance measurement system is important also. They are the ones who directly contribute to the input, output, outcome, performance, process and every other aspect of the organization's operations. Also, employees involvement is one of the best ways to create a positive culture that will flourish on performance measurement. The level and timing of employee involvement in each phase should be based on the size and structure of the organization.

Successful deployment of a performance measurement system is related strongly to developing a successful system of accountability. Managers and employees are alike in being accountable for some parts of the performance measurement process, which must be based on their responsibilities and authority matrix (Artley and Stroh, 2001).

Communication is another key area where performance improvement is needed. According to David Carter "Communication lights the path of successful change," therefore, communication is crucial for establishing and maintaining a performance measurement system. Contemporary thinking regards communication as requiring buy in from all levels within the organization as it has positive effects on organizational culture, productivity and motivation. Consequently, it should be multi-directional, running top-down, bottom-up and horizontally within and across the organization.

The final issue in establishing a performance measurement system is to ensure commitment to the system. Performance measures need to be integrated both vertically and horizontally. Vertical integration of performance measures motivates employees and improves operating performance by focusing employee efforts on organizational strategic objectives and is initiated once the company's strategic plan is identified. Horizontal alignment of performance measures ensures optimization of work flow across all processes and organizational boundaries. These performance measures are customer-focused and assess the enterprise-level capability of a process to provide value from the customer's perspective. Customers do not see the process boundaries through which their products flow, but they care about the attributes of the product delivered to them (Artley and Stroh, 2001, Kanakri, 2006 and Blazey, 2004).

Conclusions

The evaluation of strategic performance management in government organizations demonstrated a lack of strategic alignment and an inadequate performance management system. By implementing the recommendations of building a performance management framework, organizations can ensure proper and adequate performance management. Moreover, the recommendations for improved performance management processes would assist in establishing strategic alignment between organizational objectives and operational goals.

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