

A framework to implement strategies in organizations

Fevzi Okumus

School of Hotel and Tourism Management, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Kowloon, Hong Kong, SAR China, and School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Mugla University, Mugla, Turkey

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Abstract

The implementation of strategy, directly or indirectly, relates to all facets of management. Therefore, it is essential to follow a holistic approach when analyzing and evaluating complex issues of implementation. However, research in this area is still limited, and offers few practical propositions. Given this situation, this article proposes an implementation framework by identifying key elements/factors of implementation and categorizing them into different groups depending on their role and importance. The role and importance of each implementation factor, as well as its relationship with other factors, are explained. It is believed that the framework developed in this article can assist executives and researchers to better understand and evaluate complex factors of implementation and deal with challenges from a holistic perspective. Suggestions for practice and future research are also given.

Introduction

Bartlett and Ghoshal (1987, p. 12) noted 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". Supporting this, Miller (2002) reports that organizations fail to implement more than 70 percent of their new strategic initiatives. Given the significance of this area, the focus in the field of strategic management has now shifted from the formulation of strategy to its implementation (Hussey, 1998; Lorange, 1998; Wilson, 1994). There are some commonly used models and frameworks such as SWOT, industry structure analysis and generic strategies for researchers and practicing managers in the areas of strategy analysis and formulation in strategic management. By contrast, there is no agreed-upon and dominant framework in strategy implementation. Concerning this, Alexander (1991, p. 74) has stated 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 (1999b, p. 132) has further noted 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.

In short, a comprehensive implementation framework has yet to be developed in the strategic management field and this paper therefore aims to achieve this. The main objectives of this paper are to identify and evaluate those factors that play a significant role in implementing strategies, and to propose a framework to explain and better understand complex issues of strategy implementation.

Previous research into strategy implementation

One of the most cited implementation frameworks was proposed by Waterman *et al.* (1980). Based on their research and consultancy work, these authors argued that effective strategy implementation is essentially attending to the relationship between the following seven factors:

- 1 strategy;
- 2 structure;
- 3 systems;
- 4 style;
- 5 staff;
- 6 skills; and
- 7 subordinate goals.

Although Waterman *et al.* defined and discussed each of these factors individually, they did not provide clear examples and explanations for the relationships and interactions between factors. Nor did they evaluate how their relationships actually make strategy implementation happen. The conceptual frameworks developed by Stonich (1982), Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984), Galbraith and Kazanjian (1986) and Reed and Buckley (1988) consist of explicit key implementation factors. These were the first implementation frameworks to have appeared in the field of strategic management; however, none have subsequently been empirically tested. An



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analysis of these frameworks reveals important similarities among them. For example, they consist of similar factors including strategy formulation, organizational structure, culture, people, communication, control and outcome. In their conceptual studies, Alexander (1991), Judson (1995), Miller and Dess (1996) and Thompson and Strickland (1999) also discussed and referred to similar implementation factors.

Hambrick and Cannella (1989) proposed an implementation framework based on an empirical research project in a multi-business company. They noted that their research findings support the propositions of frameworks devised by Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984) and Galbraith and Kazanjian (1986). However, in comparison with other studies, they emphasized the role and importance of communication when implementing strategies. A further framework developed by Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) for managing strategic change consists of five factors: environmental assessment, leading change, human resources, linking strategic and operational change and coherence. There are also a number of sub-mechanisms under each factor such as justifying the need for change, using rewards, designing plans and monitoring.

In their empirical research, Skivington and Daft (1991) investigated the implementation of 57 decisions in integrated circuits, petroleum, and health care organizations. These authors first identified several factors; namely:

- intended strategy;
- structure;
- systems;
- interactions; and
- sanctions.

They then divided them into two groups:

- 1 framework; and
- 2 process factors.

Unlike other empirical and conceptual studies, this research was specifically designed to investigate which framework and process factors need to be used when implementing differentiation or low-cost strategies. The findings of this research indicate that both framework and process factors could be used in implementing either low-cost or differentiation decisions.

Roth *et al.* (1991) empirically examined the importance of international strategy on organizational design and its influence on the strategy implementation process. A quantitative research strategy was employed and data was collected from 82 business units

competing in global industries. These authors identified six factors, which they argued should each be designed specifically in order to implement global or multi-domestic strategies. These factors are:

- 1 coordination;
- 2 managerial philosophy;
- 3 configuration;
- 4 formalization;
- 5 centralization; and
- 6 integrating mechanisms.

The results of their research indicated that global and multi-domestic strategies require different implementation requirements. They found that when there was a proper alignment between strategy, administrative mechanisms and organizational capabilities, it was much easier to implement the strategy and achieve the desired objectives. They therefore suggested that the administrative systems and capabilities of the organization should be readjusted if the intended strategy was to achieve its aims.

Hrebiniak (1992) proposed a conceptual framework to implement strategies in global firms. He incorporated earlier work carried out by himself and Joyce in (Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1984), and suggested the following new specific implementation factors:

- leadership;
- facilitating global learning;
- developing global managers;
- having a matrix structure; and
- working with external companies.

Another framework, consisting of four factors, was proposed by Yip (1992):

- 1 organizational structure;
- 2 culture;
- 3 people; and
- 4 managerial processes.

Yip argued that these four factors and their individual elements determine the crucial organizational forces that affect a company's ability to formulate and implement strategies. Bryson and Bromiley (1993) reported the results of a quantitative cross-sectional analysis of 68 case descriptions of major projects in public companies. These researchers identified several factors and grouped them into three categories; namely:

- 1 context;
- 2 process; and
- 3 outcome.

They then aimed to statistically illustrate how certain context factors influence the process factors and, subsequently, the outcome. However, their research results are not conclusive in terms of clearly illustrating

the relationships between the context and process factors.

Schmelzer and Olsen (1994) developed and empirically tested an implementation framework in three restaurant firms. A case study approach was chosen for the primary research. Upper, middle and lower level managers were interviewed and the relevant documents of participant companies were analyzed. Schmelzer and Olsen identified 14 factors, grouped them into context and process factors, and further into primary and secondary factors. They then developed several propositions to explain associations between the implementation factors. These authors referred to strategy implementation as a progression from context to process and argued that the two components work together to make strategy happen. They identified a number of factors, such as perceived environmental uncertainty, organizational culture, information systems, training, the size and geographic dispersion of the company, the life cycle of the company and the demographic background of the managers. However, the factors of environmental uncertainty, organizational culture, information systems and training have all been referred to in most previous frameworks.

Feurer *et al.* (1995) found that Hewlett-Packard mainly followed a structured approach to formulate and implement strategy. In particular, the strategies in this company were developed by special cross-functional task forces, and then were implemented mainly by business units. Feuerer *et al.* (1995) referred to the strategy development and implementation process in Hewlett-Packard as a learning process that was facilitated by the company's organizational structure and culture. Miller (1997) investigated the implementation process of 11 strategic decisions in six private and public companies. She did not specifically propose an implementation framework; however, based on in-depth interviews in sample organizations, she identified and evaluated ten factors and further categorized them into realizers and enablers. Realizing factors include backing, assessability, specificity, cultural receptivity and propitiousness; whereas enabling factors are familiarity, priority, resource availability, structural facilitation and flexibility. Miller concluded that realizers are more critical in implementing strategic decisions, whereas enablers are more heterogeneous and their combined effect is not as powerful as realizers.

Further to reviewing previous implementation frameworks, most of which

are cited above, Okumus (2001) identified a number of implementation factors and constructed a conceptual framework by categorizing those factors into four groupings:

- 1 content;
- 2 context;
- 3 process; and
- 4 outcome.

He then investigated the implementation process of two strategic decisions in two international companies via interviews, observations and document analysis. His research findings indicated that the factors identified earlier were found to be crucial in the implementation process of both companies. In addition, multiple project implementation, organizational learning and working with external companies were also identified as new implementation factors. Based on the research findings and incorporating the new factors, Okumus proposed a new framework and stated that it is the combination of all factors working together that makes the transformation process possible. However, the process factors are primarily used in a synergistic manner in an ongoing process, but understanding and manipulating the context in which strategies are implemented is particularly important. Okumus further claimed that strategic decisions are often implemented without having a proper fit between the strategy and the implementation factors. Any inconsistency with one factor influences the other factors and, subsequently, the success of the implementation process. Therefore it is not always feasible to achieve coherence between implementation factors in situations of dynamic and complex change.

The balanced scorecard technique has been linked to strategy implementation in recent years (Creelman, 1998; Epstein and Manzoni, 1998; Kaplan and Norton, 1996, 2001). This technique aims to provide executives with a concise summary of the key success factors of a business, and to facilitate the alignment of business operations with the overall strategy. It has four angles:

- 1 the financial perspective;
- 2 customer perspective;
- 3 internal business perspective; and
- 4 the learning and growth perspective.

The overall idea behind this technique is that organizations are advised to align their performance measures in these four perspectives. The developer of the technique, Kaplan and Norton (1996, 2000) suggested five principles:

- 1 translate the strategy to operational terms;
- 2 align the organization to the strategy;
- 3 make strategy everyone's job;
- 4 make strategy a continual process; and
- 5 mobilize change through leadership.

In terms of using the balance scorecard approach in implementing strategies, Kaplan and Norton (1996) identified four main implementation factors:

- 1 clarifying and translating the vision and strategy;
- 2 communication and linking;
- 3 planning and target setting; and
- 4 strategic feedback and learning.

Some sub-factors or tasks are also identified under each factor. Contrary to the claim of "being the best practice in strategy implementation" (Creelman, 1998), the balance scorecard technique neither solves all implementation problems nor provides new insights into strategy implementation. This is because, first, these four implementation factors (and sub-factors) are very similar to the factors that have been identified by previous scholars of implementation. Second, as stated by Nørreklit (2000), the balanced scorecard is mainly a control mechanism, suggesting a top-down approach with limited participation from lower levels. In this technique, strategy development and implementation are regarded as separate phases. In addition, the technique does not give much emphasis on or many explanations of problems in the strategy implementation process involving conflicts and power struggles among interest groups, organizational culture, resource allocation and training.

A number of recent studies on strategy implementation (Aaltonen and Ikavalko, 2002; Dobni, 2003; Freedman, 2003; Linton, 2002) identify similar implementation factors. These include:

- an organizational structure and culture that is receptive to change;
- the backing of senior executives, developing the management systems and skills for change;
- communication activities;
- the commitment of employees to the company's vision, providing incentives and achieving coalignment between implementation factors.

Unlike the above frameworks, several conceptual studies propose linear implementation models such as Vasconcellos e Sa's (1990) ten-step, Noble's (1999) four-stage, Galpin's (1997) six-stage,

Bergadaà's (1999) four-step and De Feo and Janssen's (2001) ten-stage models. There are important similarities among these works in proposing certain tasks to be undertaken, or certain aims to be achieved at each stage of the implementation process. These studies also referred to similar implementation factors, including organizational structure, culture, planning, resource allocation, communication and incentives to be considered or used at different stages of the implementation process.

Towards an implementation framework

There are important similarities between the previous frameworks in terms of the key factors forwarded and the assumptions made. For example, they generally refer to, and suggest, similar implementation factors. The overriding assumption of these frameworks is that multiple factors should be considered simultaneously when developing and implementing a strategy or strategic decision. Some frameworks combine several elements under one factor while others refer to each of these areas as a key factor. For example, in the frameworks proposed by Galbraith and Kazanjian (1986), Okumus (2001), Stonich (1982) and Waterman *et al.* (1980), the issues related to managers and employees are incorporated under a separate factor entitled "people" or "staff". In the frameworks developed by Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984) and Schmelzer and Olsen (1994) manager's style, incentives and training are presented as individual factors. In some frameworks such as Stonich (1982) and Waterman *et al.* (1980) systems include planning, resource allocations, budgeting and rewards.

However, each framework includes different numbers and types of factors and some frameworks identify more factors than others. In addition, various titles are given to similar factors. For example, communication is also called interactions (Skivington and Daft, 1991), information systems (Schmelzer and Olsen, 1994) and selling the strategy (Hambrick and Cannella, 1989). Strategy formulation is referred to as strategy, business strategy, intended strategy, market strategy, vision, new strategy and strategic decision. Outcome is referred as results and success. A further issue is that some frameworks have a starting point, which is usually the formulation of strategy (Hambrick and Cannella, 1989; Hrebiniak, 1992; Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1984; Galbraith and Kazanjian, 1986; Skivington and Daft,

1991; Stonich, 1982); whereas some other frameworks, such those proposed by Miller (1997), Schmelzer and Olsen (1994) and Waterman *et al.* (1980), do not specifically point to a starting point when looking at strategy implementation.

From an analysis of the previous frameworks discussed above, 11 key implementation factors can be identified. These are:

- 1 strategy development;
- 2 environmental uncertainty;
- 3 organizational structure;
- 4 organizational culture;
- 5 leadership;
- 6 operational planning;
- 7 resource allocation;
- 8 communication;
- 9 people;
- 10 control; and
- 11 outcome.

However, these factors are common suggestions of key elements for consideration when implementing strategy, this list should not therefore be regarded as a definitive one. Regarding the use, design and characteristics of the implementation factors, each school of thought in the field of strategic management has its own assumptions and suggestions (Mintzberg *et al.* 1998; Okumus and Roper, 1999; Stacey, 1996). With the exception of the "configurational" and the "complexity" views, each school of thought requires or advocates a standard design for each factor. For example, the "planning school" advocates a stable environment, a centralized organizational structure, formal and top-down communication activities and standard formal planning and resource allocation activities; while the "learning" school requires a decentralized organizational structure, bottom-up and informal communication, flexible planning and resource allocation activities. According to the configurational school, the environment can be both stable and dynamic, the organizational structure should allow flexibility and participation from different levels of management and the communication systems should allow top-down, bottom-up and informal and formal modes of communication. Finally, the complexity view states that it is difficult or even misleading to require standard factors for each situation, as strategy implementation is an evolving process; therefore, it may not be possible to have and maintain a certain pattern of factors. Previous studies on strategy implementation did not appear to specifically advocate any implementation approach.

A further similarity between these frameworks is that previous researchers have grouped the implementation factors into a number of categories as follows:

- context, process and outcomes (Bryson and Bromiley, 1993);
- planning and design (Hrebiniak and Joyce, 1984);
- realizers and enablers (Miller, 1997);
- content, context and operation (Dawson, 1994);
- content, context, process and outcome (Pettigrew, 1987, 1992; Okumus, 2001);
- framework and process components (Skivington and Daft, 1991);
- context and process (Schmelzer and Olsen, 1994);
- contextual, system and action levers (Miller and Dess, 1996).

Four areas of groupings emerge from an analysis of the above categories. Considering the role and characteristics of each implementation factor, those 11 implementation factors identified earlier can further be grouped into four categories: strategic content, strategic context, process and outcome (see Figure 1).

- 1 *Strategic content* includes the development of strategy.
- 2 *Strategic context* is further divided into external and internal context. The former includes environmental uncertainty and the internal context includes organizational structure, culture and leadership.
- 3 *Operational process* includes operational planning, resource allocation, people, communication and control.
- 4 *Outcome* includes results of the implementation process.

In order to provide further clarification, the role and importance of each implementation factor in the strategy implementation process is explained below:

Strategic content

Strategy development refers to why and how strategy is initiated. Key areas to be considered are:

- The new strategy should be consistent with the overall strategic direction of the company.
- The aims of the new initiative should be clearly identified.
- The expertise and knowledge of strategy developers in managing change are crucial.
- Active participation from all levels of management is recommended.

- The potential impact of ongoing and future projects on the new initiative should be considered.
- The potential impact of the new strategy on other ongoing strategic projects should be assessed.

External context

Environmental uncertainty: the degree of uncertainty and changes in the task and general environments. The main issues are:

- Changes and developments in the general and task environments require a new strategy.
- The new strategy should be appropriate to the market conditions, trends and developments in the external environment until the implementation process is completed.

Internal context

Organizational structure: the shape, division of labor, job duties and responsibilities, the distribution of power and decision-making procedures within the company. Issues to be considered are:

- The potential changes in duties, roles, decision-making and reporting relationships due to the new strategy.
- Whether the organizational structure facilitates the free flow of information,

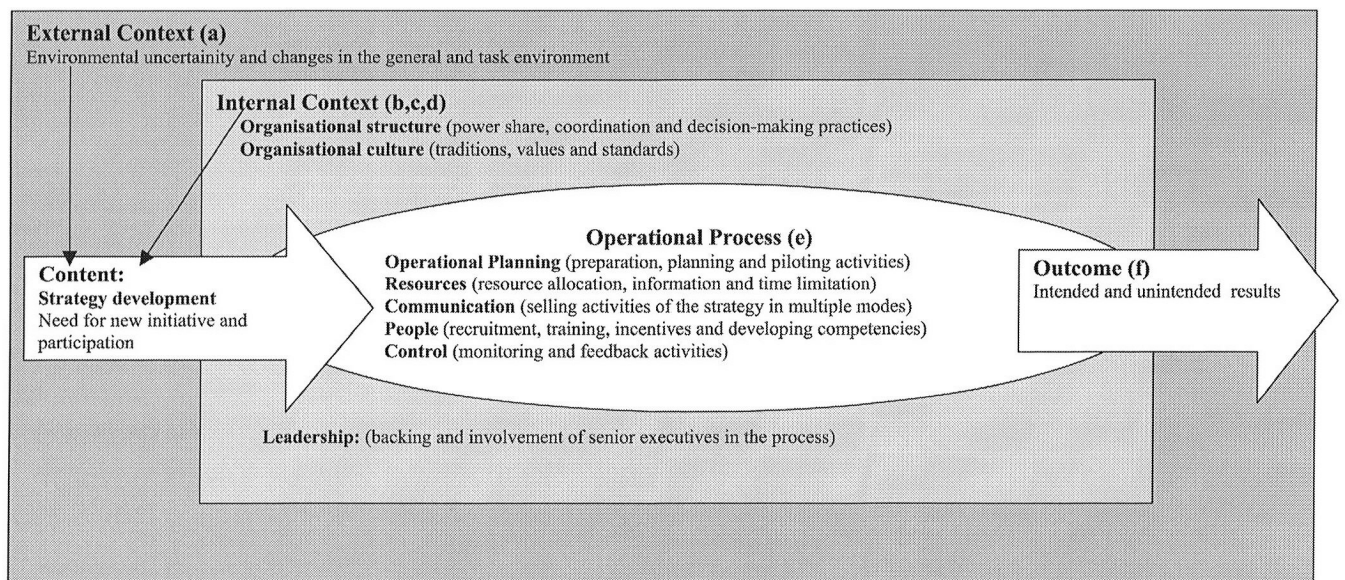
coordination and cooperation between different levels of management and functional areas.

- The potential impact of the new strategy on informal networks, politics and key shareholders.
- The attitude of powerful groups towards this new strategy.
- The potential challenges of using the existing organizational structure when using process variables including operational planning, communication and resource allocations.

Organizational culture: the shared understanding of employees about how they do things within an organization. Issues to be considered are:

- The company's culture and subcultures and their possible impact on the implementation process.
- The impact of organizational culture on communication, coordination and cooperation between different management and functional levels.
- The implications of the new strategy on the company's culture and subcultures.
- Efforts and activities to change the company's overall culture and subcultures and potential challenges.

Figure 1
 Strategy implementation framework



Key

- a Changes in the external environment influence the strategic context and force organizations to deploy new initiatives.
- b Problems and inconsistencies in the internal context require new initiatives.
- c The strategy is implemented in the internal context, and the characteristics of organizational structure, culture and leadership influence the process factors.
- d Having an organizational context that is receptive to change is essential for the successful implementation of strategy.
- e The process factors are primarily used on a continuous basis to implement the strategy and manipulate the internal context.
- f The characteristics of the context and process factors and how they are used directly influence the outcomes.

Leadership: the actual support and involvement of the CEO in the strategic initiative. Leadership is crucial in using process factors and also in manipulating the internal context to create a context receptive to change. Key issues to be considered are:

- The actual involvement of the CEO in the strategy development and implementation process.
- Level of support and backing from the CEO to the new strategy until it is completed.
- Open and covert messages coming from the CEO about the project and its importance.

Organizational process

Operational planning: The process of initiating the project, and the operational planning of the implementation activities and tasks. Operational planning has a great deal of impact on allocating resources, communicating, and providing training and incentives. Key issues to be considered are:

- Preparing and planning implementation activities.
- Participation and feedback from different levels of management and functional areas in preparing these operational plans and implementation activities.
- Initial pilot projects and the knowledge gained from them.
- The time scale of making resources available and using them.

Resource allocation: the process of ensuring that all necessary time, financial resources, skills and knowledge are made available. It is closely linked with operational planning and has a great deal of impact on communicating and on providing training and incentives.

Key issues to be considered are:

- The procedures of securing and allocating financial resources for the new strategy.
- Information and knowledge requirements for the process of implementing a new strategy.
- The time available to complete the implementation process.
- Political and cultural issues within the company and their impact on resource allocation.

People: recruiting new staff, providing training and incentives for relevant employees. Operational planning and resource allocation have a direct impact on this factor. Key issues to be considered are:

- The recruitment of relevant staff for the new strategy implementation.
- The acquisition and development of new skills and knowledge to implement the new strategy.

- The types of training activities to develop and prepare relevant managers and employees.
- The provision of incentives related to strategy implementation and their implications.
- The impact of company's overall HRM policies and practices on implementing new strategies.

Communication: the mechanisms that send formal and informal messages about the new strategy. The main issues are:

- Operational plans, training programs and incentives can be used as communication materials.
- The use of clear messages when informing relevant people within and outside the organization.
- The implications of using (or not using) multiple modes of communication (top-down, bottom-up, lateral, formal, informal, internal, external, one-time and continuous communication)
- The problems and difficulties related to communication and their actual causes.
- The impact of organizational structure, culture and leadership on selling the new strategy.

Control and feedback: the formal and informal mechanisms that allow the efforts and results of implementation to be monitored and compared against predetermined objectives. The main issues are:

- Formal and monitoring activities carried out during and after the implementation process.
- Communication and operational plans are key to monitoring the process and providing feedback about its progress.

Outcome: the intended and unintended results of the implementation process, which can be tangible and intangible. Key issues to be considered are:

- Whether the new strategy has been implemented according to the plan. If not, the reasons for this.
- Whether predetermined objectives have been achieved. If not, the reasons for this.
- Whether the outcomes are satisfactory to those involved in, and affected by, the process.
- Whether the company has learned anything from the strategy implementation process.

In addition, the relationship of each factor with other implementation elements and its potential impact on the implementation process is also explained in the same list. It is believed that the framework developed above

and explanations given above can help practicing managers and researchers when they examine and evaluate complex cases of implementation. In the proposed framework, strategy implementation is seen as a process that occurs in the strategic context. The strategic content is viewed as the strategic direction of the company and the need to design new initiatives. Strategies are initiated and implemented in a strategic context and the implementation factors in this grouping greatly influence the implementation process (Bryson and Bromiley, 1993; Okumus, 2001; Schmelzer and Olsen, 1994). The process factors primarily utilized in the implementation process and the outcome are seen as the expected and unexpected results of the initiated strategy. When considering the strategy implementation process in multiple sites, particularly in international firms, the type and characteristics of implementation factors in each region/site should be analyzed and necessary actions should be taken to prevent or overcome potential barriers and problems.

'... The overriding assumption among a very high majority of the frameworks discussed is that there must be "coherence" among the implementation factors if the strategy implementation process is to be successful...'

Previous frameworks on strategy implementation can be categorized into three groupings.

- 1 Frameworks in the first grouping developed by Hambrick and Cannella (1989), Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984), Stonich (1982), and Waterman *et al.* (1980) tend to simply list and describe the implementation factors.
- 2 Frameworks in the second grouping (Vasconcellos e Sa (1990), Noble (1999), Galpin (1997), Bergadaà (1999) and De Feo and Janssen (2001) suggest rational step-by-step implementation models that are often difficult to follow in complex situations of implementation.
- 3 Frameworks developed by Pettigrew (1987), Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) and Dawson (1994) emphasize the importance of context and process but do not provide detailed explanations and discussions about which implementation factors are important, what their specific roles are and their impact on the implementation process.

Having identified the limitations of each group, the implementation framework

proposed above both emphasizes the importance of content, context, process and outcome and also explains the potential role and importance of each factor in the process.

The implementation factors in these four groupings in Figure 1 should not be considered separately. This is because, as explained, a factor in one group can influence the other factors in the same and in other groups, then subsequently the outcome of the whole change process. This means that the implementation process needs to be examined and evaluated from a holistic perspective over a long period of time, which is referred to as the contextual and processual approach.

According to this approach, in order to understand and evaluate the implementation process, researchers and executives need to adapt a more comprehensive view and look at content, context, process and outcome simultaneously (Dawson, 1994; Pettigrew, 1987, 1997). On the other hand, Argyris (1988) and Buchanan and Boddy (1992) have stated that it may not be possible for everyone to understand and evaluate the content, context and process simultaneously, as more time and resources are required in such an approach.

However, the contextual and processual approach has received more support and attention in recent years, since it provides a more comprehensive view for understanding and evaluating complex transformation processes (Dawson, 1997; Hailey and Balogun, 2002; Pettigrew, 1997; Okumus, 2001). This is because having just a single focus for change and ignoring the wider context provides very limited understanding about the issues and their actual reasons. Following such a holistic approach is essential in evaluating the best implementation options, challenges and enablers. In terms of practical implications, considering these areas can help executives and middle managers to understand the wider implications of the processes of change in their organizations. It will encourage them to not simply focus on a specific part of the company, but also on other functional areas, customers and competitors.

The overriding assumption among a very high majority of the frameworks discussed above is that there must be "coherence" among the implementation factors if the strategy implementation process is to be successful. For example, Thompson and Strickland (1999) commented that:

... the stronger the fits, the better the execution of strategy.

Stonich (1982) argued that the effective implementation of strategy requires a

constant effort to match together the basic elements that drive the organization.

Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984, p. 17) stated that: ... everything depends upon everything else in strategy implementation

and that therefore there should be harmony among the key implementation factors. A whole range of questions can be directed at practicing managers concerning how a "harmony" can be achieved and maintained. Some sample questions for managers and executives may include whether the environment fits the strategy, culture and structure, or whether the proposed decision fits the organizational structure, culture, resources and people. Such questions can assist in assessing and evaluating the implementation process and perhaps help to diagnose potential problems and barriers to the strategy implementation process in advance. Previous studies by Alexander (1985), Kotter (1995) and Strabel (1996) found that the main barriers to the implementation of strategies include implementation taking more time than planned, poor communication, lack of coordination and support from other levels of management, resistance from lower levels and lack of or poor planning activities. It appears that these challenges and barriers are all related to individual implementation factors and also not being able to achieving coherence between these factors.

Potential implementation challenges and barriers can perhaps be foreseen and overcome by clearly assessing the implementation factors and the relationships among them that are illustrated in Figure 1 and explained in earlier.

Given the complex, dynamic nature of implementation situations, it may really be difficult or in some cases even impossible to achieve and maintain coherence between implementation factors. Therefore, it is perhaps essential to understand how strategies can be implemented without having a proper coherence between the implementation factors. In this regard, the complexity school of thought in the field of strategic management (Stacey, 1995) provides valuable propositions. According to the complexity view, successful companies are those that operate in a state of non-equilibrium or "bounded instability".

It is not good for companies to aim to achieve "coherence" between the environment and the internal systems of the company, particularly as certain factors such as organizational structure, culture and the company's environment are constantly changing or evolving. Companies should therefore attempt to develop diverse cultures,

informal working groups and networks, and allow for the emergence of internal conflicts among departments and groups. These mechanisms will help to challenge existing mental models and eventually allow, and perhaps force, the company to invent and create new ways of developing and implementing strategies even if there is no coherence between implementation factors.

Conclusions and recommendations

This article has provided a comprehensive review of strategy implementation literature and, based on this, proposed an implementation framework. The article neither suggests an implementation model that is linear and prescriptive, nor views strategy formulation and implementation as different phases. This is because strategy implementation is far too complex to be explained by prescriptive linear models. In order to understand implementation issues and make the right choices, it is essential that researchers and practicing managers should place themselves in a position where they can make informed judgments about the process of strategy implementation, rather than following ready-made solutions. To be able to do this, managers and researchers are advised to employ a holistic approach to viewing the formulation and implementation of strategy, and then evaluate how the implementation factors interact with each other and how they impact on the process. The framework developed above allows managers to view strategy formulation and implementation together.

Previous studies on strategy implementation provided partial explanations and examples of how implementation factors interact with and influence other factors, what the exact nature of the interactions is, and how the interactions help or prevent companies achieving coherence between strategy and key implementation factors. As illustrated in the framework and explained in Table 1, this paper provides explanations about the role and importance of each implementation factor and its relationship with other factors.

Concerning practical implications, the implementation framework and the guidelines can assist executives and researchers in a number of ways. The framework developed in this article can be used for a retrospective analysis of past, current and future cases of strategy implementation. The strategy content, the characteristics of the external and internal context, the operational process and the

outcome can be evaluated for specific implementation cases. Specific questions can be asked about the role and impact of each implementation factor on the process of change and, subsequently, the outcome. Finally, the challenges, problems and difficulties of implementation can be predicted and evaluated using the framework and checkpoints. The framework can further be used for group discussions and training workshops on strategy implementation.

'... Future studies should follow the processual research approach and collect empirical data in organizations from the top, middle and lower levels of management by employing both quantitative and qualitative data-collecting techniques over a long period of time. Only in these ways will a deeper and richer understanding of strategy implementation be gained...'

Linking with the above issue, providing change management training programs for middle and top managers should be seen as a necessity in today's organizations. This is because organizations now face problems most when implementing their strategic initiatives. Therefore, the expertise and knowledge of executives and middle managers in strategy implementation are crucial. This is because directly or indirectly, many executives and managers are engaged in developing and implementing strategic decisions or projects that have wider implications on many other functional areas. They may have sufficient knowledge and experience in their own functional areas, but they still need to be trained to manage complex cases of implementation. Thus, it is essential that senior executives and middle managers be trained about how best to put their strategies into practice in complex and dynamic environments.

For future research studies, a number of suggestions can be given. The framework developed in this study can be empirically tested and improved by investigating cases of strategy implementation in organizations. Concerning research methods, future studies should follow the processual research approach and collect empirical data in organizations from the top, middle and lower levels of management by employing both quantitative and qualitative data-collecting techniques over a long period of time. Only in these ways will a deeper and richer understanding of strategy implementation be gained. Comparative research studies in service and manufacturing firms or public and private firms can certainly provide invaluable propositions for the theory and practice of strategy implementation. Given

the limited amount of research in the area, future studies can investigate how international or global firms implement their strategies globally. Finally, it is evident that most of the previous studies on strategy implementation have been undertaken in Anglo-Saxon countries particularly the USA and the UK. Learning more about how companies in other countries and cultures are developing and implementing their strategies would also provide new insights on strategic management.

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