A proposed framework for strategy implementation in the Indian context

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to review the extant literature on strategy implementation with a view to highlight the pitfalls and use these to build a new framework that could be more relevant to the conditions existing in the Indian context.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper provides a review of strategy implementation frameworks available both in strategy literature and in strategy texts to identify the main pitfalls in effective strategy implementation and then proceeds to propose a framework that could be more suitable to the Indian context. This proposed framework is then applied and described in the context of a case study of the Reliance group of companies of India.

Findings – The proposed strategy implementation framework covers many of the aspects hitherto neglected in the frameworks suggested by researchers and authors more attuned to the Western context. Two of the major issues in strategy implementation not covered in the existing framework are of procedural and project implementation that may be considered as relevant in the Indian context.

Research limitations/implications – The proposed framework is demonstrated in the case of only one Indian company. The efficacy of the framework need to be further investigated.

Practical implications – Application of the proposed framework is likely to result in a more comprehensive coverage of the vital issues in strategy implementation that are expected to do away with the pitfalls that are commonly experienced in the process of strategy implementation.

Originality/value – The paper proposes a new framework of strategy implementation based on the unique requirements of the Indian context.

Keywords Corporate strategy, Strategic management, India

Paper type Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

A nicely drafted strategic plan, prepared through a sophisticated process by a team of accomplished management consultants or a group of top managers, is hardly like to fail by itself. Failure, when it occurs, almost always happens during the implementation of the strategic plan. Yet, strategy formulation hogs most of the attention of management and strategy thinkers while strategy implementation is sidelined. For instance, Okumus and Roper (1998, p. 219) note that "despite the importance of the strategy execution process, far more research has been carried out into strategy formulation rather than into strategy implementation", while Alexander observes that literature is dominated by a focus on long range planning and strategy content rather than the actual implementation of strategies, on which "little is written or researched" (Alexander, 1985, p. 91). The apathy to strategy implementation can be ascribed to several reasons, among them: greater likelihood of failures in implementing strategies; higher complexity in the process of strategy implementation; strategy implementation being considered to be less glamorous than formulation; and practical

difficulties in research involving middle-level managers (see, for instance, Alexander, 1985 and Aaltonen and Ikavalko, 2002)

Despite the benign neglect by academicians and consultants more challenges are experienced in practice in the course of strategy implementation. In their research, Bartlett and Ghoshal (1987) found that in all the companies they studied "the issue was not a poor understanding of environmental forces or inappropriate strategic intent. Without exception, they knew what they had to do; their difficulties lay in how to achieve the necessary changes". Strikingly, organizations fail to implement a hefty majority of about 70 per cent of their new strategies. (Miller, 2002) Another recent study is a bit less alarming; it says 40 per cent of the value anticipated in strategic plan is never realized. (Mankins and Steele, 2005) Evidence keeps piling of how barriers to strategy implementation make it so difficult for organizations to achieve sustained success[1]. Bridging the gap between strategy formulation and implementation has since long been experienced as challenging[2].

No wonder, increasing attention is being paid to an intense examination of strategy implementation. Unlike strategy formulation, where there are well-known frameworks such as strategic planning, SWOT analysis, Porter's generic strategies, industry analysis or competitive analysis, there are few models or frameworks available in the area of strategy implementation. Those that are available are still in the process of being developed and refined. Further, almost all the models of strategy implementation in vogue have the usual Western perspective embedded in them.

This paper reviews some of the existing models and then endeavours to nudge the boundaries of understanding a bit ahead in this significant area of strategic management. While doing so, the focus will be on the special context in developing countries, particularly India, in contrast to what could be there in the case of developed countries.

2. A review of existing frameworks of strategy implementation
The need for framework (or a model) is sorely felt in the case of strategy implementation. The reasons are obvious: it's an extremely complex set of tasks and managers need to know what are the steps to follow, what is the sequence of those steps, why at all those steps are necessary, what is more critical in those steps, and so on. Having a framework of strategy implementation in hand is like having a roadmap in alien territory. In the absence of a framework, managers would still implement their strategies. But they would do so thinking of what they, as individuals, think is important resulting in disjointed and conflicting actions. A framework, on the other hand, would serve as a beacon to guide managers at various levels spread over different functional areas within the organization. The review of strategy implementation frameworks will be done in two parts. First, a review would be done of the frameworks available in the strategy literature and secondly a reference would be made to those presented in strategy texts.

2.1 Strategy implementation frameworks in strategy literature
There are several frameworks of implementation available in strategy literature. Okumus (2003) makes an insightful review of the available frameworks in strategy implementation. Initially, this paper would lean on Okumus's review and add the later references later.

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

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

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

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

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

(2) Models that suggest a sequential, rational implementation process that might be difficult to adopt in complex situations (e.g. Noble, 1999).

(3) Frameworks that lay emphasis on context and process ignoring elaboration of issues such as relative importance of implementation factors, their specific roles, and their impact on the overall implementation process (e.g. Dawson, 1994).

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

The proposed framework by Okumus, 2003 is presented in a simplified form in Figure 1. The various factors in the framework could be summed up as below:

- *Strategic content* refers to why and how strategy is initiated.
- *External context* refers to the degree of uncertainty and changes in the task and general environments of the organization.
- *Internal context* refers to the configuration of organizational structure, culture, and leadership.
- *Organizational process* refers to the configuration of operational planning, resource allocation, people, communication, control and feedback, and outcome.

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

Beyond 2003 when Okumus wrote his review and during the past about five years at the time of writing this paper, some interesting trends can be observed in reported works in the area of framework of strategy implementation. There are papers reporting strategy implementation taking into account functional areas such as accounting, marketing, human resource management, or information management (for instance, Naranjo-Gil and Hartmann, 2006). These go beyond the purview of the theme of this paper as they move vertically, in-depth into the finer aspects of strategy implementation while the concern here is with the lateral system of the factors of strategy implementation. The next trend is the continuing emphasis on the well-accepted factors of strategy implementation such as structure, culture or organizational processes. For instance, the work of Olson *et al.* (2005) reiterates the

External context
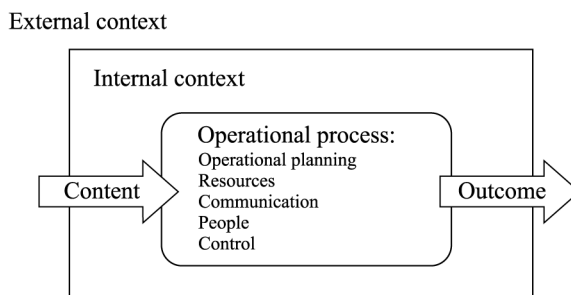
Source: Okumus (2003, Vol. 41 No. 9, p. 876)

Figure 1.
Okumus's strategy
implementation
framework

significance of organizational structure and processes in strategy implementation. The third trend noted is of reporting studies in specific socio-economic contexts such as those in specific countries (e.g. China as in Wu *et al.*, 2004) or developing economies (e.g. Latin American as in Brenes *et al.*, 2007). Referring to strategy implementation as systematic execution, these scholars include organizational culture and structure, work and information system, and essential business processes as the key implementation factors. They also stress the significant point that the degree to which an organization succeeds in establishing a priority system for each implementation action is necessary.

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

2.2 Strategy implementation frameworks in strategy texts

It is interesting to observe the strategy implementation frameworks adopted in strategy texts as they indicate the current state of thinking related to them. American texts in strategy dominate curricula around the world so more space will be devoted to them. Besides the eight American texts chosen two European texts would also be referred to. The choice of the textbooks is based on the author's experience of teaching and writing on strategy for the past about 28 years. Table I encapsulates the issues covered under strategy implementation in major texts in strategic management used around the world including in India.

As we observe from the data presented in Table I, the American and European strategy texts cover many of these issues under strategy implementation:

- *Structural issues* such as organization structure, organizational architecture, organization design, controls, rewards, etc.
- *Behavioral issues* such as leadership, culture, business ethics, managing change, etc.
- *Governance issues* such as corporate governance, strategic control, etc.
- *Functional issues* such as marketing, finance, operations, R&D, supply-chain management, etc.
- *Operational issues* such as resource allocation, technology, innovation, outsourcing, etc.

Besides the issues covered in strategy implementation, it is also noticed that only a few texts follow a well-defined framework of strategy implementation. In many of these popular texts, strategy implementation issues are dealt with in a random manner rather than being based on a definite framework or model of strategy implementation.

Strategy texts (in alphabetical order by first author's surname)	Country origin of author/s	Issues covered in strategy implementation
Carpenter and Sanders (2007)	American	Employing strategy implementation levers Considering new ventures and corporate renewal Corporate governance in the twenty-first century
David (2007)	American	Management and operations issues Marketing, finance/accounting, R&D
Dess *et al.* (2008)	American	Strategic control and corporate governance Creating effective organizational designs Strategic leadership: creating a learning organization and an ethical organization Managing innovation and fostering corporate entrepreneurship
Hill and Jones (2008)	American	Corporate performance, governance, and business ethics Implementing strategy in companies that compete in a single industry (organizational design, structure, strategic control systems, building distinctive competencies, restructuring and reengineering) Implementing strategy in companies that compete across industries and countries (multinational structure, entry mode and implementation, information technology, the internet, and outsourcing)
Hitt *et al.* (2008)	American	Corporate governance Organizational structure and controls Strategic leadership Strategic entrepreneurship
Johnson *et al.* (2008)	European	Strategy development processes Organizing for success Resourcing strategies Managing strategic change The practice of strategy
Morden (2007)	European	Structure, architecture, culture, and supply chain management Strategic management of technology, knowledge, and innovation Core competencies Resource stretch and leverage
Pearce and Robinson (2007)	American	Strategy implementation Implementing strategy through short-term objectives, functional tactics, reward system, and employee empowerment Structure, leadership, and culture
Thompson *et al.* (2008)	American	Building an organization capable of good strategy execution Managing internal operations: actions that facilitate strategy Corporate culture and leadership: keys to good strategy execution
Wheelen and Hunger (2007)	American	Organizing for action Staffing and directing

Table I.
Issues covered under
strategy implementation
in strategy textbooks

This is in sharp contrast to how systematically strategy formulation is presented in many of these texts.

Further, some space will be devoted to mentioning the pitfalls in strategy implementation to derive a few areas for proposing a framework of strategy implementation.

2.3 Improving the strategy implementation process

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

- an inability to manage change;
- poor or vague strategy;
- not having guidelines or a model to guide implementation efforts;
- poor or inadequate information sharing;
- unclear responsibility and accountability;
- working against the organizational power structure.

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

(1) *Adopting a clear model of strategy implementation.* Often, implementation activities take place according to the abilities and initiatives of managers involved in them. Though a process, implementation moves in fits and starts. This uneven progress of the process does not do much good for the effectiveness of implementation efforts. Again, managers often do things which *they* consider to be important; they do not do things which *are* important enough to be done. This results in a lot of confusion and uncoordinated actions. What is required is a clear model of the strategy implementation process that can provide unambiguous guidelines to the managers implementing the strategy. Such a model should lay down the elements, or at least the major themes, of implementation process so that there is a high level of understanding of how the process has to proceed. At the same time, there needs to be comprehension of how the various elements or themes are interconnected. Is such a model available? Alexander (1991, p. 74) states that "One key reason why implementation fails is that practicing executives, managers and supervisors do not have practical, yet theoretically sound, models to guide their actions during implementation. Without adequate models, they try to implement strategies without a good understanding of the multiple factors that must be addressed, often simultaneously, to make implementation work." Noble (1999, p. 132) observes that "there is a significant need for detailed and comprehensive

conceptual models related to strategy implementation. To date, implementation research has been fairly fragmented due to a lack of clear models on which to build."

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

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

Further, these three suggestions will be used to propose a framework of strategy implementation in the main section of this paper.
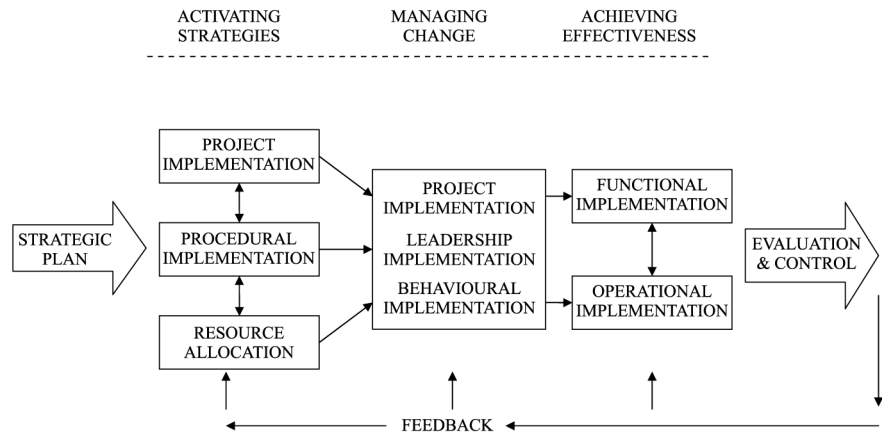
3. The proposed strategy implementation framework
This section of the paper presents a model of strategy implementation that includes all the relevant issues covered in strategy literature as well as the strategy texts. Besides these issues special emphasis would be laid on those strategy implementation issues that might not be of interest to scholars in the context of developed economies but may be of relevance to the business environment in developing economies such as the Indian economy.

Figure 2 presents a model of strategy implementation that attempts to capture the major themes in strategy implementation and the activities that make up each theme. The forward linkage from strategic plan guides the implementation process and connects it to the preceding phase of strategy formulation. The feedback flowing in reverse from the following step of strategy evaluation and control moves through the implementation phase and goes back to strategy formulation establishing the backward linkage.

- *Activating strategies.* The theme of activating strategies serves to prepare the ground for managerial tasks and activities of strategy implementation. Three sets of activities have been identified under this theme that in the author's opinion could be more relevant for organizations in the developing countries.

ACTIVATING
STRATEGIES

MANAGING
CHANGE

ACHIEVING
EFFECTIVENESS

Figure 2.
The proposed framework
of strategy implemention

Source: Kazmi (2008, p. 317)

These are: project implementation, procedural implementation, and resource allocation. It is to be noted that the first two sets of activities are rarely found in frameworks of strategy implementation developed in the context of developed economies. There does not seem to be any plausible reason why the western frameworks of strategy implementation disregard project and procedural implementation despite the evidence that "the alignment of project management and business strategy helps organizations focus on the right projects, given the objectives sought to be achieved" (Srivannaboon and Milosevic, 2006). In such a manner, project management is a key enabler of strategy implementation within organizations. Similar is the case with procedural implementation that is given short shrift in the western frameworks of strategy implementation. "For companies in many nations, regulatory policy increasingly shapes the structure and conduct of industries and sets in motion major shift in economic value ... The far-reaching impact of regulation means that for companies to maximize their long-term value, they must link their regulatory strategies with their product, business, and corporate strategies" (Beardsley *et al.*, 2005).

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

• *Achieving effectiveness.* The last theme in strategy implementation is the outcome of the process of strategy implementation. An organization looks forward to seamless implementation of its strategies. This can be visualized in terms of the well-known concept of fit. There are two types of fit: vertical and horizontal fit. The vertical fit ensures that strategies at lower levels are in consonance with those at the higher level. Thus, business strategies aligned to corporate strategies create vertical fit. The horizontal fit ensures that strategies at the same level are aligned to each other. Thus, marketing strategies should be in consonance with financial strategies. The consideration of vertical fit leads to

functional implementation while horizontal fit leads to operational implementation. This theme will thus cover two sets of activities of functional and operational implementation. Functional implementation deals with the implementation of functional strategies such as marketing or finance in a specific functional area, allocation of resources within that functional area, and coordination of activities in that area. Operational implementation deals with the nitty-gritty of strategy and is thoroughly action-oriented. It deals with operational effectiveness that is concerned with continual improvements in implementing strategies at the grassroots level. One approach to operational effectiveness is based on the four P's of operational implementation viz. the productivity, processes, people and pace (Kazmi, 2008, pp. 469-477).

4. Applying the strategy implementation framework to the case of Reliance group

This part of the paper would attempt an application of the proposed model of strategy implementation to the case of Reliance group of companies of India.

The Reliance group of companies, founded by Dhirajlal Hirachand – better known as Dhirubhai Ambani (1932-2002) – is the largest private sector company in India with total revenues of US 27 billion. Starting with a small trading establishment in 1958 after returning to India from Aden, Dhirubhai set up in 1977 a small textile company and achieved the status of a Fortune-500 company in less than three decades. The group exports products worth more than US $ 15 billion to more than 100 countries. The group bifurcated in 2005 between the two brothers Mukesh and Anil following a bitter succession dispute after the death of Dhirubhai Ambani in 2002. The combined worth of the Reliance group is estimated to be US $125 billion in 2008. Reliance Industries Limited is the group's flagship company besides which the group has several hundred of investment companies, satellite companies, and trusts. The Reliance group companies employ about 40,000 people.

The evolution and growth of the Reliance group is based on sustained backward vertical integration strategy starting with textiles in late-1970s leading to a fully-integrated company moving through the value chain from polyester, fiber intermediates, plastics, petrochemicals, petroleum refining, through oil and gas exploration and production. The business of the Reliance group include exploration and production of oil and gas, refining and marketing, petrochemicals, textiles, financial services and insurance, telecommunication and information technology. Reliance is in the process of strategic change from an organic growth model to a mix of organic and aggressive acquisitions-led mode of growth aimed towards a mix of local and international expansion into sunrise industries.

The corporate philosophy of the Reliance group are claimed to have the following components (Ambani, 2004):

- world-scale and world-class;
- state-of-the-art technologies;
- integration across the complete value chain;
- global competitiveness;
- leadership in chosen areas of business;
- superior project execution;

- financial conservatism;
- highest standards for health, safety and environment; and
- consistent overall shareholder value enhancement.

The core competencies that the Reliance group of companies has been able to develop and sharpen over the years include project management and execution, financial engineering, and infrastructure development for setting up global-scale plants and facilities.

All these core competencies can be observed in the case of project implementation by Reliance Industries, which operates the world's third largest single-location refinery in the world at Jamnagar, on the western coast of India in the state of Gujarat (with a capacity of 33 million tons per annum), has embarked on setting up India's first export-oriented refinery through a subsidiary, Reliance Petroleum, at a cost of Rs. 27,000 crore. The refinery will have a capacity of 29 million tons, and is expected to be operational by December 2008.

A typical refinery would take about 45 months to build but Reliance does the same in 36 months. Intense focus on costs, concept of extended owner-manager style of management, advance booking of vendor capacity, ordering longer-lead time items first, using standardized equipments to take advantage of bulk buying, and close monitoring of projects at every stage rather than adopting the lump-sum turnkey project approach are the key components of Reliance project management tactic. The Jamnagar project is a complex configuration based at a site that covers an area nearly equal to London and employs about 80,000 personnel including 7,000 engineers (Kumar, 2007).

Procedural implementation assumes significance in the case of the Reliance group as it has been continually involved in expanding its business interests. Any project of the global size that Reliance group normally undertakes involves a plethora of government permissions and sanctions. For instance, its Jamnagar project is based in a Special Economic Zone that attracts special incentives from the central (or federal) and state governments.

Dhirubhai is considered as a legendary industrialist credited with creating the equity cult in India. At the same time, he was often accused of bending government rules, manipulating the stock markets, and taking advantage of loopholes in the laws such as the complicated Indian taxation laws. The penchant for implementing projects quickly by the Reliance group could partly be ascribed to its ability to bend cumbersome government rules to its advantage. Dhirubhai developed close relationship with government bureaucrats and politicians and exploited this networking to expedite approvals for his various projects (Thakurta, 2005).

"He (Dhirubhai) had institutionalized the key factors that have contributed to his success. These can be summarized as a penchant for global benchmarking, intense cost consciousness, and determined pursuit of goals, flawless implementation, and the will to dominate. He challenged existing paradigms and bent the rules when they did not suit his entrepreneurial ventures" (Ravimohan, 2002). Of course, Dhirubhai was not the only one adept at tweaking the establishment or currying favors with politicians and bureaucrats. During the license-permit-quota raj in Indian economy, this was the typical way of extracting licenses from the government.

Resource generation and allocation becomes a significant part of strategy implementation when an ambitious business group such as Reliance is constantly looking for ways to garner resources. The ability to garner financial resources is a major core competence of the Reliance group. This ability goes back to Dhirubhai's vision of helping to create the equity cult in India. He was fond of describing Reliance shareholders as "family members" and the group's annual general meetings acquired the atmosphere of carnivals organized in open air stadiums attended by hordes of mostly middle-class investors. To nurture his entrepreneurial aspirations, Dhirubhai adopted a policy of raising money from the public rather than the conventional way adopted by other businessmen of relying on the banks and financial institutions. In 1977, Reliance Industries went public and raised equity capital from tens of thousands of investors, many of them located in small towns. Since then, Reliance's shareholders have often been handsomely rewarded not only in the form of dividends and rights and bonus issues but also appreciation of the market value of their investments. The money raised through equity has been invested in scores of large-scale capital-intensive projects in various parts of India mainly the states of Gujarat and Maharashtra.

Several elements of leadership implementation at the Reliance group can be traced back to the top leadership style institutionalised by Dhirubhai Ambani. He was a visionary who combined a unique sense of connecting to the realities of the business environment. Among his extraordinary personal qualities were ability to dream big and pursue success to its logical end, playing with a heavy hand against adversaries while exhibiting ample generosity with friends, modesty, humility, and simplicity.

In the words of his son, Mukesh, Dhirubhai's "... way of managing was to lead his team; first was to build a competitive team. He always believed that I want the best in the world in terms of competencies and in terms of people on my team. And then he would lead by trust and he would lead by love and he would lead by example. This in turn creates loyalty of the entire team and the loyalty is not to an individual, the loyalty is to the mission and to the vision that has been set forth and then that becomes a common mission and vision" (Ambani, 2005).

The two sons Mukesh and Anil have a contrasting leadership style. Mukesh is known for his conservative style being an engineer and a stickler for detail. Anil, in contrast, possesses a flamboyant, outgoing, aggressive style. Succession at Reliance group experienced a serious problem after the death of Dhirubhai in 2002. Eventually it was resolved by asset sharing between the two brothers (Rai, 2004).

Behavioural implementation at Reliance group has several facets of stakeholder management, corporate governance, corporate culture, business ethics and personal values, and corporate social responsibility.

Stakeholder management is seen in the case of the Reliance group as giving more importance to the investors and the government. Corporate governance is adopted and followed by the Reliance group of companies in the usual manner as required by law. There is a code of conduct and ethics for directors and management personnel displayed on the companies' web sites.

A quote from Dhirubhai goes like this: "Think big, think fast, think ahead. Ideas are no one's monopoly". This quote is probably a reflection of the corporate culture at Reliance group. A distinguishing feature of the corporate culture at Reliance group companies is reported to be performance-orientation geared to efficiency with no questions asked. Pursuing project deadlines – and beating them as is expected at the

Reliance group – certainly fosters a high concern for efficiency. But with it may result certain negative features such as stressful workplace teeming with workaholics, short-term focus on performance measurement, and overemphasis on efficiency at the cost of effectiveness.

Business ethics and personal values is a ticklish issue when it comes to describing the Reliance group's case. It is a matter of opinion whether some of the means adopted by Reliance group companies to achieve corporate success were fair or foul. When seen in the context of business ethics, clearly there are a few instances when Reliance group's ethical behaviour is not above board. Contrasting this with the general lack of ethical values in what in India is known as the corrupt *neta-babu-lala* (politician – bureaucrat – businesspeople) nexus the actions of Reliance group can be perceived as driven by utilitarian-eclectic approach to business ethics. Indeed, Reliance in achieving corporate success did benefit the national economy in several ways though questions remain as to how that success was achieved.

Social responsibility and community development are taken up by the Reliance group of companies in areas such as education, healthcare, environment and community welfare around its project sites. The group also publishes a corporate sustainability report. Compared to its peers in the Indian corporate world such as Infosys, Reliance is perceived to be lagging behind in terms of issues such as corporate governance as well as corporate social responsibility.

Among the areas of functional implementation there are several that have the unique brand of Reliance group's corporate philosophy imprinted on them. Finance is a major area for functional implementation at the Reliance group. It is characterized by relying on equity as source of finance, liberal dividend policy, maintaining close relationship with investors, conservatism in financial policies, intense focus on cost management, prudent cash, credit, and risk management, and accessing tax advantages.

Marketing plans and policies, as a component of strategy implementation, makes one recall the finesse with which Reliance Textiles – a group company in the early phase of the group's career – was able to create a unique brand name "Vimal" that continues as a success story in consumer marketing. But most of the group's products such as propylene, naptha or gasoline are industrial products requiring a very different approach to marketing.

Operations implementation at Reliance group is characterized by huge capacities, large-scale production, vertical integration, tight operations planning and control, and emphasis on quality control and management.

Personnel or HRM implementation at the Reliance group relies on building a varied skill set for its employees who serve a wide-ranging diverse portfolio of businesses. New employees are often poached from domestic and foreign companies attracted by higher pay and benefits. Earlier, the group was known for attracting managers from the public sector companies in India (Adhikari, 2006). There are training programs for various levels of managers and employees designed to enhance skills in the areas critical to the group's requirements such as project management, marketing and communication, manufacturing, and finance and accounting apart from continual professional development for senior managers. Employee Stock Options Scheme is in place to motivate employees to share the high returns on group companies' shares.

Information management at Reliance group tries to focus on its core competence of project management. The company's ITPMS (Information Technology Project Management System), for instance, gives a single-window view of the status of the group companies' IT projects that are initiated, in-process, and at completion stage. The system currently tracks around 1,200 running projects, of which 400 are development projects. Various infrastructure rollout projects constitute 250, and the remaining are operations and maintenance related (Raval, 2007).

Operational implementation can be viewed in terms of the four P's of productivity, processes, people, and pace (Kazmi, 2008). Productivity at Reliance group starts from creating capital productivity by implementing their projects at lower costs than competitors followed by operational productivity on an ongoing basis in their factories and plants. Processes have seen continual improvements at various Reliance group companies in terms of technology. Having latest technology even at high cost was one of the concerns of Dhirubhai Ambani that is shared by his sons. People are given due consideration at Reliance group of companies especially in the context of dearth of managers at the senior level and trained and experienced engineers and technologists in the Indian employment market at present. Reliance employees have been given liberal raises in their salaries so as to prevent attrition especially in the functions of engineering, manufacturing, and marketing. Pace has always been of great concern at the Reliance group. Dhirubhai was known for impatience with delays and his emphasis on swift implementation of projects has developed into a core competence for the group companies.

The case of Reliance group demonstrates how a strong founder-leader imparts his sense of vision and mission to an organization and how, in time, these percolate down to the nitty-gritty of strategy implementation. In retrospect, it may be said that Dhirubhai might never had a clear conception of how his ideas would get translated into reality but the case of Reliance demonstrates the power of a clear vision in driving the implementation of strategy. Further, the case illustrates the complexity of strategy implementation for instance when one observes how a vision-led leadership style impacts the choice of high technology or insistence on high quality demonstrating the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate issues in the strategic management of an organization. Only a clear model of strategy implementation can help to bring to the fore such complexity in a meaningful relationship.

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

The practical value of the suggested model may lie in the way that neglected factors of implementation such as project and procedural implementation have been incorporated. To managers in developing economies, matters related to the procedures for setting up a factory and seeking a license to run them are "strategic" in contrast to the way that developed economies work. To managers in the developed economies, procedures involved in setting up a factory or even closing it down may be routine

work. Likewise, project management is of utmost importance in strategy implementation, a fact that has been curiously neglected in the most of existing frameworks. Lately, there are some signs that this neglect may be corrected (Morris and Jamieson, 2005). The proposed model of strategy implementation seeks to add to the efforts to provide project management its due place in strategy implementation. In doing so, the model undertakes the task of bringing to the foreground the role of executive management in contrast to that of top management. Many strategic management and strategy implementation models have an underpinning of an exclusive top management point of view assuming the executive management to be passive implementers of strategic directions from above. The reality of implementation might be different where executive management may be called upon to shoulder the major responsibility for strategic management far removed from the ivory tower view of top management. The proposed model of strategy implementation seeks to do away the overriding emphasis of organizations being led by top managers rather than being pulled by executive managers that may, in the author's opinion, reflect organizational realities more realistically in developing economies such as that of India.

Lastly, the proposed model gives due recognition to the interrelatedness of the different issues in strategy implementation. For instance, the three issues in activating strategies of project implementation, procedural implementation, and resource allocation are considered as interrelated activities as they feed upon each other. Likewise, behavioural implementation is a compendium of structure, leadership, and other issues such as culture and ethics. Finally, effectiveness results from the continual interaction of implementation taking place at the functional and operational levels.

As with models and frameworks, the proposed framework may have limited applicability as this paper demonstrates its application only to one case of a specific organization in India. Future work may carry on the task of testing the applicability to a wider spectrum of organizations in varying contexts. The strong point of the proposed framework is the holistic manner it attempts to bring together the various elements of the strategy implementation. This strength can be utilized in capturing the complexity of strategy implementation as an ongoing process aimed at achieving effectiveness through management of change through activating strategies.

Notes

1. Many research studies are available that deal with the barriers to strategy implementation and suggest how to counter those barriers. For instance, Beer *et al.* (1990) and Sandelands (1994).

2. See, for instance, Mintzberg *et al.* (1998), Verweire and Van den Berghe (2004) and Grant (2005).

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Further reading

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