THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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Strategy is the driver of behavior; however, in reality, it is the culture, the underlying norms, common values, and belief systems which dictate how organizations. Culture affects strategic planning indefinitely. The cultural component of the administration dictates the manner in which employees interact with one another and in turn, with stakeholders. The thought chronology is as follows: Culture determines values, beliefs and ideas and these very ideas determine the standards of behavior of public administrators. Thus, culture is to be taken into consideration when countries adopt Max Weberian rigid systems of management when they design strategic plans for developing their respective public sectors.

Keywords: strategic planning, culture, public administration.

Introduction

There are infinite factors that can affect organizations productivity and efficiency, namely: people behavior, needs, emotions, technology, financial resources, political factors, strategic planning and most importantly culture. Organizational culture plays a major role in strategic planning and has a strong impact on institutions. Organizations must design their strategies in alignment with organizational culture in order to implement their vision and provide public sector organizations with competitive tools and an efficient outcome.

The culture of an organization must be linked to the values and norms that are prevalent are a society. This is extremely urgent in the reconstruction of public administrations in especially in post conflict state were there a need to reestablish a good public service amidst a number of challenging elements including the legitimacy problem, the bad economic situation, the absence of a good justice system and the lack of financial means. Social dimension of culture in multi-ethnic societies The social dimension of culture is defined as the "cultural skills and values, inherited from the community's previous generation and undergoing adaptation and extension by current member of the community that influence how people express themselves in relation to others and how they engage in social interaction" [1].

Some of the components of the social dimensions include pride and prejudice, time orientation, aesthetics, social interaction, language, religion and belief. Taking all of these factors into consideration in public administration is very challenging to adapt to different cultural needs for different cultures have varying beliefs, norms, and languages. Trying to work with people coming from different backgrounds is very demanding mainly in multi-

ethnic countries that suffer from discrimination and public sector bias. In fact, the way that certain cultures behave may be seen as offensive depending on the content; it is easy to comprehend this seeing that every culture views aesthetic features differently. Without grasping the importance that the social dimensions of culture play, success in the public sector is difficult to attain. Even though globalization comes with many advantages, it also has some complications that need to be tackled in order to perform well productivity -wise. There is a need to understand the context of every society. Moreover, it is vital for any organization to understand the cultural differences and map them in order to bridge the cultural gaps while when performing its tasks.

Strategic Planning Foundations

Strategic planning is the planning process upon which organizations, institutions, corporations, and administrations in both the public and private sectors develop strategies for accomplishing visions, missions and objectives. Strategic planning has four basic elements: studying the organization's internal and external environment, formulation of the strategy, implementation of the strategy and the evaluation of the strategy – internally and externally. The four aforementioned steps lay the foundation for a successive strategic process whereby the administration in question analyzes its current standing, prepares strategies, works on ensuring their implementation, and then reviews their strategic feasibility.]

Strategic planning is not merely a functional or administrative exercise. A feasible strategic plan can make all the difference between being a struggling administration and an innovative, cause-driven administration which truly possesses a vision and mission to make a difference in the public sector within the scope of its mandate. Creating awareness about the paramount importance of strategic planning, not just to survive a short-term project, but to thrive long after the project is completed, must be at the core of administrative training, and at the core of the value system of the individuals in positions of leadership especially within the public sector. Strategic planning is the sole mechanism which takes ideas, inspiration, and visions, and turns them into tangible and implementable realities on the ground. A public servant at all levels must be aware of this reality, as well as the reality that their administration will not be able to function on a basic level without a strong, clear vision materialized in a strategic plan [2].

The Baldrige National Quality Program and Barry converge in their understanding of the four essentials of strategic planning that any administration or organization across either the public or the private sector can employ in order to transform their administrations [3]:

 • Beginning from top to bottom: For administrations, especially those in the public sector, it is often about preserving a legacy by allowing new leadership to move forward and think bigger while still being within the spectrum of unified vision, mission, and values of the administration itself.

• Being inclusive: This ensures that the passion of an administration's internal community runs deep, and that their loyalty and integrity in serving their administration becomes a reality.

• Consulting internal and external expertise: A thorough understanding of the expert experience needed in order to accomplish your final vision through your strategic plan is vital for its success.

• Understanding that flexibility to a certain extent is critical: "Only a fool does not change his mind"1 (1 Spanish proverb)

Realities are subject to shifts each and every single day. A strategic plan needs to act as a guidebook, but also needs to be a flexible, evolving document which takes unforeseen realities, cultural differences, emergencies, and other shifts into account. It may also be the foundation for significant social impact, and transparent and efficient public service [4].

The Link between Strategic Planning and Culture

Culture along with is values and norms and not strategy, with its underlying norms, and belief systems dictate how organizations act, the manner in which employees behave in an outside the organization. Culture escorts strategy throughout the entire process and conditions results [5]...

Culture acts at the emotional level while strategic plan is more rational. Strategy is the headline, while culture is an understood common "language" that encompasses everything from an administration's mission, to its vision, its values, and its expectations and desired outcomes. Organizational culture although the common beliefs and aspirations that keep an organization as well as its strategic plan running, it is more precisely the essence which fosters the sense of belonging, duty and integrity among the organization employees. A strategic plan within the public sector which takes cultural realities into account urges employees to function in the same spirit and head in the same direction in the institution. This makes the vision and mission of the institution, as well as the public service it provides, more reachable and more efficient.

The organizational, sustainable, and strategic development of the public sector's various institutions and services is consequently a domino effect (Davis, 1984). Strong organizational culture strongly affects the public sector's strategic decision-making, strategic options as well as the action of its strategies [6].

Additionally, the quality of decision-making is closely linked to the management of employees' performances as well as the outcomes of these performances. This is particularly important in the strategic decision-making of the intuitions' leaderships. Organizational culture consequently is capable of dictating priorities, concerns and focuses of an institution [7].

The Importance of Leadership in Promoting Organizational Culture in Strategic Planning

Organizational culture not only assists an institution in making suitable and feasible decisions through its strategic plan, but may also be a catalyst for the understanding of leadership qualities and understandings across cultures. On a macro scale, and rippling down to the

micro level, institutions in both the public and the private sector face a growing need to understand leadership as it is exercised across different cultures.

Today, globalization means leaderships across borders and with different cultural backgrounds cross paths daily, and encounter cultural clashes and intersections in almost each and every field of service. Two people from the same nationality who were raised on different corners of the Earth might have different manners of doing things, and are both qualified to assume positions in both public and private institutions back in their country of citizenship. Picture a completely plausible situation within the 21st century, whereby an English manager, who studied at an American business school, is tasked with running an Argentinian company of a Japanese firm. In the public sector picture two government officials of Lebanese decent, one trained in France, the other in the United States, both working within a public institution in their home country. In cases of the like, leadership in expressed across a number of layers, and understood differently. Organizational Culture takes all of these layers into account. It couples their international experiences with local cultural realities in order to come out with a strategic plan which is not only tailored for the institution itself, but one which also caters to the overall cultural realities of Lebanon as a whole. Because organizational cultures offer strategic advantages, it makes sense that institutions across public and private spheres would consider culture in strategic planning. In the private sector, a clear example of this may be to consider an institution whose vision is to provide a friendly customer centered environment. This would not align with a stagnant culture and apathetic employees. Instead, it would be recommended that the institution hire and customer-oriented staff in order to provide an environment which rewards customer-friendly behavior. In the public sector on the other hand, one might wish to consider a government institution with a vision of providing the most efficient health care services in the country.

This would not align well with a corrupt internal culture, a central leadership mentality, a mistreatment of employees, as well as unhealthy work conditions. In order to ensure this service, employees need to be treated with more progressive and cultivating work environments. In short, providing a public service needs to stem from an employee's wish to "help their community". The public service is particular because the services provided to citizens are intended to serve a greater purpose. If employees in the public sector are mistreated, their sense of civic duty will perish along with their morals [8].

External and Internal Strategy: Can Culture Become a Burden?

When a strategic plan supports the influence of organizational culture it creates a necessary balance between external and internal strategic elements.

As mentioned previously, strategic planning assists in carrying out missions and visions and in turn an organization's purpose and value system. Strategic planning is intended to act as a direction and guide for interactions between different institutions across the public sector, while maintaining internal strategies which benefit the institution. For this reason, when all cultural understanding is accounted for within a strategic plan, this balance between internal and external is created and maintained. It allows for feasibility inside the institution, as well

as efficiency in its external interactions. In order to grasp the concept more concretely, it is possible to compare between the public and the private sector. In the private sector, a company that markets itself as an environmentally friendly organization (a green organization) in order to get ahead in its profit and business would likely also promote environmental responsibility on the internal level as well as incorporate it within the organizational culture among its staff.

On the other hand, in the public sector a government institution wishes to work in coordination with other institutions which have visions that intersect with its own, without overlapping and without being exclusive in their strategy. In this case a government institution embeds its transparency in its internal affairs for instance, as well as in its image to other institutions and to the public [9].

The content of culture acts as a valuable asset to an organization's strategic plan only if it eases communication, facilitates organizational decision-making and promotes control over internal and external efforts. In this case, the result is increased productivity. Moreover, just like absolutely any other double-edged sword, culture may become a liability when fundamental shared values and belief systems interfere with the organization's objectives. Because of the influence of the culture on behavior, and because of the fact that some strategic plans do not take culture into account when they are constructed, an individual or even an entire staff, may not want to behave as called upon by the strategic plan. They also may not comprehend how to behave efficiently and in compliance with the strategic plan in place. The above situations happen when cultural understandings are in conflict with what needs to be done in order to achieve the organization's vision. For this reason, a strong leadership is capable of constructing a plan which is able to build upon the existing culture without compromising the overall direction of the institution, administration, or organization across any sector [9].

The closer actual behavior matches required behavior, the more productively and efficiently the individual and organization accomplishes its objectives. A successful grasp of culture permits for the support the organization's strategy. Furthermore, significant changes in the strategic plan must be made by modifications in culture if the plan wishes to comply with what it wants to achieve, as well as wishes to comply with the society it wishes to achieve it in [10].

How to prevent cultural barriers in public administration?

It is important to focus on the following factors:

 • Understand culture and how it is perceived by others in society.

 • Understand verbal and non-verbal communication. This is self-explanatory; one needs to learn how to read between the lines.

 • Learn the culture even if it will take sometimes

• Speak in a neutral tone. Though some cultures may find this cold, it is still better than taking it to the extreme.

• Promote appreciation of cultural differences.

• Be accommodating of different needs and accept that different cultures have varied perceptions.

• Learn the basics of the culture's language as a form of respect and preparedness.

Conclusion

Organizational culture's overall effect on strategic planning is pivotal. Culture affects decisions as well as the manner in which leadership and employees behave with the administration itself, but also with the organization's relationship with its external/internal environment and its strategy development. Thus, the comprehension of the organizational culture of an administration is highly important in ensuring the organization's success within a rapidly evolving and unpredictable environment. Keeping this statement in mind, one immediately identifies the evident link between strategic planning and culture.

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