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Why Strategies Fail? A Review on Strategy Implementation

Faustina Oduro Twum
Chief Administrator, School of Business, Valley View University, Ghana

Abstract:
Increased global competition has necessitated the recognition and critical role of strategy implementation by businesses and other organizations to ensure success. Although several studies admit that strategies frequently fail, it is not because of inadequate strategy formulation but due to deficiency in implementation. This is because the implementation aspect of strategy has attracted less research interest than strategic planning despite its crucial role in achieving performance outcomes in the organization. Therefore, this study seeks to guide decision-makers to identify the barriers to strategy implementation by reviewing literature using a narrative synthesis approach. The insights from the reviewed analysis showed that strategy implementation determines whether an organization excels, survives, or succumbs to the environmental pressure of competition. Further, it was revealed that strategy implementation fails due to low employee involvement, communication barriers, insufficient resources, low leadership capacity, inadequate monitoring, and evaluation practices. However, the major weakness was top management's lack of responsibility and initiative to convert strategic plans into workable actions that transform performance to accomplish desired outcomes. Thus, the study recommends that leaders communicate crafted strategies to stakeholders, prioritize allocation of resources, and design a practical roadmap to achieve strategy implementation to gain competitive advantage. The research suggested an outline to improve strategy implementation.

Keywords: Strategic planning, strategy implementation, leadership, implementation barriers

1. Introduction

One of the major unresolved problems in strategic management is the persistently high rate of strategy implementation failure over the years. According to literature, between 60 to 90 percent of strategies fail (Kalyal, Huey, Blaskovits & Bennell, 2020; van der Maas, 2017; Kihara, 2017), with fewer than 15 percent claiming successful implementation. Although a remarkable improvement has been ascertained in the field of strategic management, this problem still exists, which calls for a continuous investigation to know the underlying factors behind the failure. However, in the 21st Century, employees' involvement in managerial activities can be considered since decision-making is not the sole prerogative of management. Currently, the dynamic nature of organizations demands a positive response to the competition, which is about involving employees in strategic decision-making to improve commitment, job performance, and productivity. According to Bakotić and Rogošić (2017), involving employees empowers innovation, professionalism, demonstrate initiatives, and high commitment to the task. Also, involvement entails building employee capacity, ownership, and responsibility to ensure that organizational goals are met. Consequently, managerial practices that receive employee input encourage a united vision, shared values, problem-solving skills, job satisfaction, and heighten a sense of ownership, promoting adherence to strategy implementation (Oyebamiji, 2018).

Kabeyi(2019) aver that an organization's pursuit of competitive advantage begins with developing a vision or strategies to drive performance. These strategies are planned to secure the future of the organizations by actively ensuring successful strategy implementation to gain the expected result. Josephine and Kimencu (2021) refer to strategy implementation as the process of turning plans into workable action to accomplish organizational goals. Thus, the success of organizations rests on strategically inclined leaders (Nisar, Hanif& Bilal, 2020), because they 'know the way, goes the way, and shows the way' (Sushma, 2021). Thus, leadership refers to a person having the capability to influence a group of persons to move towards a specific direction to achieve a strategic vision (Alvesson, 2020). Similarly, Nwachukwu and Vu (2020) share the view that leaders have unique competencies that direct set objectives to gain organizational success. Hence, the study reviewed extensive literature to find the reasons behind strategy implementation failure and provided a suggestive programme to ensure an in-depth understanding of successful strategy implementation.

2. Strategic Planning and Employee Involvement

A strategic plan is a document that communicates an organization's vision, mission, goals, and objective with the stakeholders and the relevant action planto inspire the achievement of the planning exercise. According to Sara, Saputra, and Utama (2021), strategic planning is a systematic process that defines an organization's direction and makes strategic decisions to pursue the successful accomplishment of set goals. Similarly, Henderson and Hines (2019) posit that strategic planning is a procedure that authenticates and establishes the direction for business activities for sustainability. It involves determining organizational vision and strategies and making decisions on resources to support the set plans (AlQershi, 2021). A strategy is a framework that guides and determines the organization's direction by coordinating resources, skills,

and environmental trends to enhance performance and competitive advantage (ibid).Similarly, Waller, Lemoine, Mense, and Richardson (2019) assert that planning is a vital key to operational effectiveness that ensures that future uncertainties are outwitted through strategic activities. Therefore, the planning stage, the firm's choice of strategy allows management to match available resources and attract market opportunities to gain competitive advantage.

Strategic planning is an ongoing process for developing goals and implementing actions for better positioning of the organization in the ever-changing environment. Umar, Muhammad, and Hassan (2020) posit that strategic planning is one of the most essential management activities that drive organizational direction, even though it does not guarantee success until set strategies are implemented to gain the intended outcome. Peter Drucker once said,'plans are only good intentions unless they are generated into actions and achieved through hard work. 'According to Adobor (2019), strategic planning is not an exclusive role of management since some employees can be good strategists due to their competence and experience. A strategist is a person who hasa unique skill and ability to connect the past and the present in order to make informed predictions into future happenings. Hence, there is the need for top management to take employees' input at the operational level to bring together intellectual capabilities since the implementation is the responsibility of workers in the organization. Also, the involvement of employees in the decision-making makes them to appreciate managerial performance to sustain the organization amid the turbulent competition (Orishede, 2020). It inspires a sense of purpose and the eagerness to go the extra mile to accomplish set goals. Similarly, Nadikattu (2020) maintains that employees feel valued and trusted when involved in decision-making activities; and reciprocate through commitment and hard work towards organizational success. In addition, inclusiveness in strategic decisions creates a more conducive working environment where employees are excited, confident, innovative, motivated, and proactive in contributing to achieving desired expectations (Kaburu& Simba, 2020).However, when leaders deliberately exclude employees in the strategic planning process, it lessens their enthusiasm at the operational level, and performances suffer due to dissatisfaction (Karbasi & Rahmanseresht, 2020). Hence, planning and formulating strategies are vital to business success, specifically where functional members are actively involved for smooth implementation.

3. Strategy Implementation and Performance

The present business environment is highly uncertain and unpredictable (Darvishmotevali, Altinay&Köseoglu, 2020).According to Suifan, Abdallah, and Al Janini (2018)the role of leadership is determining organizational goals and formulating relevant strategies through the integration of resources (skills, funds, materials) to achieve successful implementation of set goals. Mugo (2017) definesa leader as a managerial employee whose duty is to oversee the successful implementation of strategic initiatives despite its complex nature.Thus, Weiser, Jarzabkowski, and Laamanen (2020) explain that strategy implementation plays a critical role in managerial practice, job performance, and organizational success. Although strategy implementation is usually considered after strategy formulation, it is the operational key to organizational success.Kabui (2018) refers to strategy implementation as how decisions are executed within the organization to increase performance. Also, Kihara, Bwisa, and Kihoro(2016) posit that strategy implementation determines whether the organization is productive and sustainable by using appropriate procedures to place objectives, strategies, and policies into achievable actions. Meaning that effective implementation of strategy is a significant source of productivity and competitive advantage.

Josephine and Kimencu (2021) postulate that the most innovative strategies become valueless, especially when it does not lead to actions that would transform efficiency. However, implementation of strategies ismore challenging than formulating strategic plans(Kalyal, Huey, Blaskovits & Bennell, 2020). While strategizing is a creative and intellectual activity, implementation requires managerial skills to translate the working plan into achievable results. Hence, converting a strategy into reality is extremely difficult than its formulation (Mugambi, 2017). Therefore, to effectively implement set strategies, decision-makers should integrate the activities of functional units for shared responsibility and easy execution. Elbanna, Andrews and Pollanen (2016) maintain that strategy formulation and execution need input from the operational level to ensure teamwork for effectiveness. This means that encouraging strategy implementation requires the direct participation of stakeholders, where leaders create an enabling working environment to steer performance. Tabesh, Mousavidin and Hasani (2019)state that implementation requires diverse actions to motivate employees to execute formulated strategies successfully without any resentment. Thus, accomplishing successful implementation depends on aligning and reinforcing strategic choices to ascertain competitive advantage.

4. Leadership and Strategic Performance

Abdallah and Al Janini (2018) explain that leadership's role is to determine organizational goals and formulate relevant strategies to guide work processes; and influence the adherence of strategic decisions to achieve the set goals (Osborne &Hammoud, 2017). According to Ali and Anwar (2021)a leader is someone with a unique set of behaviour that identifies an organization's needs and influences people to work towards harnessing opportunities to solve complex problems. Accordingly, Nonthanathorn (2021) leadership encourage performance by inspiring, empowering and motivating employees to be committed to accomplishing organizational goals. Hence, leaders are to introduce good governance practices to connect planning to capabilities and individuals' support, which is significant to impact performance. Also, Yousaf and Majid (2018) aver that strategic performance represents how an organization achieves its long-range objectives by maximizing profitability through actionable strategies to achieving success. It is a measure to ascertain the success or failure of an organization (Huynh, Pham, & Le-Hoai, 2021). Similarly, Staci, Michelle, Barbara and Bryan (2020) maintain that strategic performance depends on several components inside the organization and others from the outside to direct, control, and improve performance for sustainability. Further, it is a management system that ensures that strategic decisions inform organizational performance.

Kaburu and Simba (2020) aver that the organization's survival depends on the commitment of the leadership by making the right decisions to drive the articulated success. Similarly, Momanyi, Senaji and were (2018) posit that strategic accomplishments depend on strategically focused leaders who have the competence to manage the organization to achieve the desired outcomes. Strategic leaders determine the organization's direction by recognizing the internal and external environmental factors that would either promote or inhibit strategic planning and implementation (Du Toit, 2018).Strategic performance gives a distinction between high-performing organizations from low-performing ones (Yasir & Majid, 2017). It seeks to strengthen the activities of all functional units of the organization and empower them to meet set targets efficiently. Furthermore, it creates a path that interacts with the environment to achieve long-term goals and equally gains competitive strength (ibid).So, the leadership provides a basis for employees' commitment to work by ensuring successful implementation of the strategy (Xenikou, 2017); where clear guidelines are given to educate employees on how to contribute efficiently towards achieving set strategies. Consequently, the working environment should be conducive to promote best organizational culture for easy implementation of planned strategies.

5. Barriers to Strategy Implementation

Mafini (2016) refers to a strategy as a plan of action employed by an organization to accomplish set targets to drive competitive advantage. Implementation of planned strategies depends on a multiplicity of factors such as availability of resources (funds, capabilities, materials, workers), leadership competence, communication, organizational culture, and operational process. Lack of these factors could be a stumbling block that would impede strategy implementation, adversely affecting the realization of organizational goals. Table 1 depicts some barriers as indicated in the literature.

Author(s)	Findings
Muteti (2017)	The findings showed that inadequate resources, improper coordination, resources misappropriation, and lack of accountability are the barriers to strategy implementation.
Obeidat, Al-Hadidi and Tarhini (2017)	The study revealed that operational process factors such as resource availability, communication, and operational planning strongly affect successful strategy implementation.
Shateri and Danaei (2018)	The results outlined that operational, structural , human , communication, and strategic barriers are the factors that hinder the execution of strategic plans in industrial companies.
Köseoglu, Yazici and Okumus (2018)	The research findings revealed that lack of comprehensive strategic analysis and lack of stakeholders' participation in decision-making obstruct implementation of strategic planning decisions.
Vermunt, Negro, Verweij, Kuppens and Hekkert (2019)	The barriers identified were related to the firm's internal factors such as processes, inputs and capabilities; and external environment as supply chain issues (resources).
Cândido and Santos (2019)	The study specified that obstacles to a successful strategy implementation process were complex behaviours that were interrelated in the environment.
Jahani and Mohammadlou (2020)	The research results showed that academic culture, organizational structure, and human resources were the factors that inhibited strategy implementation.
Nwachukwu, Zufan, and Chladkova(2020).	This research submits that employee commitment and organizational policy hasa direct positive relationship with strategic performance. And that lack of attention to employees'commitment to strategy implementation can inhibit successful execution of strategic decisions.
Eresia-Eke and Soriakumar (2021)	The study revealed that strategy implementation barriers emanate from both the internal and external environments of an organization, specifically, resources, culture, structure, stakeholders, politics, infrastructure, and government regulations.
Dutta, Talaulikar, Xavier and Kapoor (2021)	It was shown that the barrier to strategy implementation was a lack of management initiatives, responsibility, and capabilities.

Table 1: Empirical Strategy Implementation Barrier (2017-2021)

6. Factors for Successful Implementation

The development and implementation of a strategic plan is not an easy task (Cândido& Santos, 2019);yet, implementation is known to be more complex and challenging (Kalyal, Huey, Blaskovits&Bennell, 2020; Al Shobaki& Abu-Naser, 2017). Hence, there is a need to adopt peculiar guidelines to ensure the smooth transition from planning to implementation. This is because a strategy is about *making* the right choices to enhance performance, whereas implementation is about *taking* the right actions to accomplish the expected results (competitive edge).The reviewed literature mentioned somecrucial factors to a successful implementation of formulated strategies: leadership competence, operational process, resource availability, communication, reward systems, monitoring,and evaluation.Table 2 shows

empirical literature reviewed (Stanitsas & Kirytopoulos, 2021; Mensah, 2020; Mwanthi, 2018; Obeidat, Al-Hadidi&Tarhini, 2017; Mafini, 2016).

Implementation Problems	Suggestive Framework
Poor leadership	• maintain shared values in strategizing organizational objectives • seek inputs from employees for effective team building and problem-solving. • defining the key strategies for work schedules, structures and build a positive culture to promote performance.
Lack of operational process	• defined a roadmap to direct work processes for smooth implementation activities and tasks. • provide extensive training and orientation to employees to understand set strategies for easy implementation. • assigning lead responsibilities for strategy implementation to a person or a team in the organization. • provide timelines for implementation outline
Poor communication	• communicate clearly to provide knowledge dissemination and learning during the process of strategy implementation. • announce clearly the essence of strategies for easy implementation
Inadequate resources	• allocate adequate resources in terms of funds, human capability, materials, and technology to support strategy implementation.
Monitoring and evaluation	• ensure continuous supervision onan assigned task. • constantly monitoring the implementation process for regular feedback to revise strategic decisions. • evaluate the performance to check any impediment.
Reward systems	• value employees' contributions and share accomplishments together. • clearly defined rewards system to accompany successful strategy implementation.

Table 2: Diversity of Views Synthesized as a Framework for Successful Strategy Implementation

7. Conclusion

In managerial practice, strategic planning is usually regarded as an exclusive responsibility of management; whereas, employees are implementors. However, planned strategies become irrelevant when they are not translated into actions for smooth execution.Also, it is very important that corporate leaders are equipped as good planners, innovators, motivators, and implementors to enable them to accomplish their mandate of holding managerial positions in the organization. This is because, no matter how crafted strategies are formulated, it becomes ineffective without employees accepting it for operationalization. The workable actions should detail the process, roles, responsibilities, resources, targets, deadlines, and reward packages to promote a successful outcome. In addition, leadership should coordinate the implementation of strategic activities through applicable leadership style that would encourage positive change culture (Fielder, 1967) according to the prevailing situationto determine successful actions. Consequently, there is the need for leaders to give employees the opportunity to partake in the planning process, which will serve as an orientation to guarantee effective implementation to drive organizational success and competitiveness.

8. Recommendation for Future Research

This study reviewed related literature from several journals to make conclusions on the subject-matter. Thus, a future research could consider using primary datafrom organizations and industries for a comparative analysis on the impact of strategy implementation.

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