

Employee Perceptions on Organisational Strategy Implementation in Covid 19 Era

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Abstract: The un expected onslaught of the COVID 19 pandemic has brought the need for change to organisations. This change is in terms of how they do their business. Strategy implementation process by a firm is one of the critical activities firms carry out. The success of this process is determined by the perception of the workers.

This research paper is about how employee's perception impacts the process of strategy implementation. A descriptive research design was adopted by the researcher. The sample size was 500 individuals from different countries working in different organizations within the United Arab Emirates. A pilot study of 15 respondents in similar firms and levels of operations was conducted to test the research instrument. The research instrument was a semi structured questionnaire which had been divided into two categories, which were the demographics and the study variables concurrently. Regression analysis was used to test the null hypothesis of the study. The null hypothesis was rejected since the study established that, employee perception has a significant influence on the strategy implementation. The results of the regression model summary showed that the adjusted r square was 0.265, indicating that the overall model accounted for only 26.5 percent of the predictor variables. In conclusion, it is evident that the way employees perceive affected the process strategy implementation during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Key words. Employee Perception; Strategy Implementation; COVID19; UAE; Strategy Implementation Process.

INTRODUCTION.

The COVID 19 pandemic has brought with it many challenges to almost all organizations. It has been an un anticipated disruption to many organization's ways of conducting business more specifically the strategy implementation process. This has resulted to unmitigated perceptive changes by employees as the process of

strategy implementation drastically changed. The size of the business, type of the industry and the location of the business regardless, implementation process has changed. This change is what might have triggered the change in employees' perception. Huang, Harris and Loyd (2021) established that employee perception of the strategy implementation process reflects on the reality of lean resourcefulness and goes to prove that models adopted for implementation may be effective as theoretical frameworks to the extent of the employees' perception. During strategy implementation process, perception changes when workers experience an outcome they deem successful and beneficial to them, career wise or otherwise (Mwando, Issa, & Kangotue, 2021). The COVID 19 ushered in *times of business unusual*. This era is characterized by constant and continuous reviews and changes of strategy, strategic and operational plans. It is suffused with utilization of business interventions and constant referencing to organizational documents which rarely are referred to, for instance an organisations' business continuity plans, risk management plans and contingency plans.

Since the onset of the pandemic from the year 2019 to date, a lot has happened in organizations in terms of loss mitigation initiatives, however limited information exists in terms how individual employees, with careers, families and futures to look into perceive the changes. Meechang, et al.,(2021) felt that, the perceived usefulness of an initiative is a good predictor of overall employee behavior. Changes in strategy implementation process may be perceived by employees in different ways, and this perceptual differences may trigger the way they behave. It is widely known that, perception has a relationship with employee's immediate supervisors' expectations, varying types and extents of organizational commitment, and leadership behaviors. In addition, Lin et al., (2008) felt that there is a relationship between a person's perception and his or her environment. Contextually when we talk of the environment it is the employee's environment. As part of the employee's environment, leadership approach, behavior, and commitment may again also determine the perceptive process of the employee (Rifai, 2005).

KNOWLEDGE GAP

Various research studies on perception and the role it plays on the strategy process have been done (Kuchta & Stankova, 2020; Kern, Brett, Weingart, & Chase, 2020; Nadanyiova, 2021), there is however limited research output on how employees perceive strategy implementation process during pandemic times. Bayo and Red-well (2021), while citing Abdul and Mas (2016), were of the opinion that, as a component of managing a firm's strategy, strategic implementation and thrust is the actual requirement to lead to the realization of firms specific goals. The process directly relates to decision making processes, provision of necessary management style and organizational culture, stimulation of employee anticipation, excellence and innovation, appraisal of performance of chosen strategy by means of control, and enhancement of the process of learning. It depends on as well as institutionalizes strategic thinking strategic reviews (Swayne et al., 2006). There is still paucity of knowledge and research on how employees perceive and how that is related to the process of strategy implementation process during pandemics and more specifically the COVID 19.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Perception

Different authors have defined perception in different ways, Hrebiniak (2013) defines perception as the process which people assemble and interpret their sensory inputs and give meaning to their surroundings. It is an intellectual process which entails the conversion of sensory stimuli to meaningful information. The process of perception entails the interpretation of anything and everything that stimulates our minds through our physical senses leading to judgment and giving a verdict on a context, an individual or a group. While dealing with the idea of organizational behavior, perception cannot be overlooked since the conduct of people is based on how they perceive reality, not on the reality itself. The culture of an organization is developed out of that which is behaviorally acceptable and these makes implementation process as part of an extension of workers behavior a critical aspect of an organization (Hrebiniak, 2013).

Employees as individual generally are afraid of uncertainty; this therefore is likely to lead them to interpreting any move or change from stipulated procedures and processes negatively. Having an understanding of how employees perceive a firm's preparedness for strategy implementation as necessary and mandatory for the management (Kleinbaum & Stuart, 2014). In the process of strategy implementation, the presence of certain conditions may positively support perceptions that a firm may not be ready to embrace change as change is likely to bring ambiguity and uncertainty of roles and individual responsibilities. Individual employees are likely to interpret the situation and context of what is happening and reach at a conclusion on the likely outcomes related to the proposed strategies. Therefore, workers are much more likely to form ideas and conclusions about the firm's preparedness and capacity for strategy, which in turn may be an indication of a firm's capability to effectively make its strategies work (Parmigiani & Holloway, 2011). Employee assumptions and their expectations make up the perception they have about a firm and its strategy implementation processes. Generally, the concept of perception has three critical components. These components are; the perceiver, the target, and the situation or the context. The perceiver is the person who interprets the stimuli, and in this case it will be the individual employee, the target in the study context is the strategy implementation process and the context or the situation of the prevailing circumstances of the organization, or the organization's culture.

Implementation

Strategy implementation specifically at an organization's top level of management, is likely to be chaotic with less basis of comparison and minimal evaluation of strategic options. Further, important decisions tend to become easy to be manipulated, the preferences of specific managers in-charge take precedence, present day fads are likely to outweigh more important issues, and even to sophistry may be sacrificed (Carlopio & Harvey, 2012; David, 2013). Håkansson et al., (2012) realized that, the most frequently emerging strategy implementation challenges included the underestimation of the time needed for implementation and the sudden surfacing of issues that had not yet been anticipated, further to this, there are also uncontrollable factors within the macro environment which have an adverse effect. In regards to workers, the competences of workers involved may often not be sufficient, myopic leadership and lack of clear vision (Hansson, Oskarsson, & Öhlmér, 2010). As opposed to the factors which leading to successful implementation, Čater and Pučko (2010), carried out a research on the factors that hinder effective strategy

implementation process and established that, insufficient and improper sharing of information, ambiguity in responsibilities, roles and accountabilities, and carrying out work contrary to the firm's power structure makes the implementation strategy to fail. Arshad et al., (2021), was of a contrary opinion that, employees correct perception is a fundamental reason for an implementation process, because it guarantees sustainability, affluence and gives a competitive advantage to an organization.

The process of determination of the relationship between employee perception and strategy implementation may not be an easy one for every one, but it is good for firms to understand the relationship during strategy formulation or the actual implementation. Zaribaf and Bayrami (2010) established that, most senior management in firms use a great deal of critical time, energy, and monetary resources in setting up strategies, but may not provide appropriate input during the implementation phase. Since the implementation process is dynamic and requires a huge resource commitment, the need of formalisation is high. Many firms change their strategy process in order to reposition within the industry, adopt and adapt or react or respond to their current market opportunities and situations. The process of strategy implementation requires one to consider constraints, challenges and overall expectations of the firm in the context of the environment it operates in. Of most importance is how workers perceive the process, it determines the overall performance of the firm. Therefore, balance needs to be struck between innovatively understanding employees' perception, devising a proper way of ensuring that it doesn't affect work negatively workable strategy and the process of strategy implementation.

In their research on the impact of the culture of a firm on the process of strategy implementation, Ahmadi et al.,(2012) established that there exists a meaningful relationship between individual workers' expectations, their own perceptions and the process of strategy implementation. Even though their research found out that there is a significant relationship between employee expectations and employee perceptions with the implementation process. The extent to which other components of the organization culture influence and determines the outcome of the process of strategy implementation may need not to be discounted (Bushman, Glascoff, & Doty, 2011).

Cater and Pucko (2010) established that, inadequate, poor information sharing, ambiguity in accountability and responsibility, and working contrary to the firm's power structure, and limited resource allocation results in non-successful implementation processes. Lorange (1998) researched on the criticality of the human factor in strategy implementation in organizations and established that, for strategy implementation to succeed, then the involvement of top management is a necessity especially in monitoring and reviewing the progression of every activity in the implementation process by the organization. Carpio and Harvey (2012) in a similar survey concentrated on social-psychological principles and how they influence the success of the implementation of strategy. They found out that, when there is misalignment of company's culture and structure to the implementation strategy and the expected employee conduct, the process of strategy implementation will certainly not succeed. In another study which involved Latin American firms, it was concluded that, firms culture which is supportive of the principles and the values of the firm resulted the in successful strategy implementation process. The same study also revealed that almost 88 percent of the highly successful organizations identify organizational culture alignment to strategy as very important, as opposed only those less successful ones (Brenes, Mena, & Molina, 2008).

STUDY HYPOTHESIS

The research paper had the intention of testing the following hypothesis; There is no significant relationship between employee perception and strategy implementation.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Sample

The researcher adopted a descriptive research approach as the investigation was on the relationship of the selected variables. The population of the chosen were the workers of companies in the UAE, both multinationals and local Small and Medium sized Enterprises. Primary data was gathered directly from the respondents through a tested research instrument as per Sekaran and Bougie (2020). The unit of analysis for the research paper were the respondents who worked in the firms identified above regardless of the level and responsibility held apart from the organization's senior management. As a probabilistic sampling design, random sampling technique was used as the total number of workers was large and the main assumption was that the unit chosen was in a position of entirely representing the population accurately (Bell, Bryman, & Harley, 2018). The study's sample size was 500 respondents out of which only 382 responded. Schindler (2021) says that, for the practicality of a sample and it to give correct results, it should be at least of 10 percent of the population and should not necessarily exceed 1000. A semi structured questionnaire was the research instrument used and had been categorised into two main categories for the purposes of getting the sought for information. The first section of the questionnaire was on the demographics of the respondents and the second section was focused on the study's variables. The study's variables had their parameters adopted from existing literature. Parameters for strategy implementation were adopted from Merchant and Chen (2010) which were non-financial measures and financial metrics of strategy implementation and employee capabilities and output based on the firm's performance measurement system. For the purposes of employee perception, Gestalt five principles were adopted as per Koffka (2013) which are similarity, continuity, figure and ground, proximity and closure. Likert scales were used in the instrument of research which was anchored on; strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Each respondent on the entire sample size received an online questionnaire, however only 382 respondents appropriately their respondent, therefore making the respondent rate of 76.4 percent. The demographic data showed that, 21.3 percent were UAE nationals and the rest were foreigners, 27 per cent were women with the remaining 73 percent being male, and of the 27 percent 61 percent were foreign females. Further characteristics of the respondents' also showed that 74.5 percent of the participants had a bachelor's degree, whereas only 23.3 percent had a graduate degree and the rest a certificate in their given field. Additionally, respondents had been grouped based on number of years they had worked in the same company, the results indicated that 51.2 percent had worked for the company for between 5 and 7 years, 38.1 percent had worked for the firm for between less than four years and 10.7 percent had worked in the company for seven years and above. 92 percent believed that the changes brought in by COVID19 would completely change the priorities in the strategy implement process. 67 percent perceived that the change would have negative consequences. Out of the 67 percent who perceived that change will affect them negatively, 48 percent connected the negative effect to their careers in the firms. This was closely followed by those who felt that relocation back to their countries was the only option at 26.8 percent, while only 15.5 percent felt that

Employee Perceptions on Organisational Strategy Implementation in Covid 19 Era

there was no need to change their normal way of doing things and 9.7 percent felt that the change has made them incompetent

For testing the null hypothesis of the study, regression analysis was used. The null hypothesis had been stated as; *'There is no significant relationship between employee perception and strategy implementation'*. The results of the model summary showed that the adjusted r square was 0.265, indicating that the overall model accounts for only 26.5 percent of the predictor variables. This is indicated as per table 1

Table 1. Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.524 ^a	.275	.265	.37826

a. Predictors: (Constant), Proximity, Continuity, Figure and Ground, Similarity, Closure

b. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

The overall model is statistically significant $F(5,377) = 28.6, p < 0.001, R = 0.28$

Table 2. ANOVA^a

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	20.423	5	4.085	28.546	.000 ^b
Residual	53.943	377	.143		
Total	74.366	382			

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy Implementation

b. Predictors: (Constant), Proximity, Continuity, Figure and Ground, Similarity, Closure

Results on table 3, indicate the coefficients. From the table, it is clear that closure and proximity are not significant since their p values are more the 0.05, so the amount of unique variance for similarity, continuity and figure and ground are statistically significant.

Table 3. Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.799	.134		5.980	.000
1 Similarity	-.405	.068	-.317	-5.992	.000
Continuity	.222	.044	.251	5.075	.000
Figure and Ground	.559	.074	.473	7.589	.000
Closure	-.064	.078	-.055	-.827	.409
Proximity	.010	.040	.011	.238	.812

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy implementation

DISCUSSIONS

From the research study it became obvious that employee perception and strategy implementation are related somehow and the extent of perception can affect the process of strategy implementation. Bayo and Red-well (2021), in their research clearly found out similar outcomes. The finding of this study pulls away from the findings of Čater and Pučko (2010) and Ahmadi et al.,(2012) who largely dealt with culture generally and its effect on the implementation process. The study further confirms the works done by Huang et al., (2021) on improved lean assessment o worker perception and Nadanyiova (2021) on perception and customer buying habits.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

The study therefore concludes that; perception of the environment contributes largely to the process of strategy implementation. Employee perception being a psycho-physical aspect of the worker, is a critical component of the functionality of an organization. It is therefore recommended that perception and its place in the organization should be studied. A parameter for Its contribution could possibly be developed.

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