

Effective strategic planning process: A backbone of strategic performance in Public Health Service Sector: A Case of Addis Ababa City, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Strategic planning is a crucial process for governments, communities, and organizations to adapt to changing internal and external circumstances. This article focuses on the strategic planning formation process within the public health service sector of Addis Ababa city's administration. The study found that organizations with a formal strategic planning process are more likely to formulate strategic plan documents than those with low process formality. Organizational elements such as size, age, organizational level, and the availability of the strategic planning unit influence the formality of the process. The article recommends considering all internal and external factors, including organizational characteristics, in the strategic planning formation process. Organizations with well-planned strategies can spearhead in the right direction amid challenges and socio-political changes. However, it is important to continuously update the plan to adapt to new circumstances and future ideas. Strategic planning is essential for public service organizations to deliver quality service, increase satisfaction, and maximize the standard and quality of the organization.

Keywords: strategic planning, public service organization, effective strategic plan, strategic planning process.

Introduction

The importance of strategic planning in organizational management cannot be overstated. From its origins in military tactics to its current use in various contexts, including government organizations, strategic planning has evolved to encompass a range of applications (Betz, 2021). This research aims to investigate the effectiveness of strategic planning in the public service sectors, using the administration of Addis Ababa city as a case study. The concept of strategy has been defined and redefined over time, with the word "strategy" originating from the Greek word 'strategos', meaning to plan the destruction of one's enemies through effective use of resources. Strategic planning is an ongoing process that brings stakeholders together to examine current realities, define a vision for the future, and anticipate future trends (Drucker, 1974 & 1990; Adair, 2002). It also involves setting clear goals and necessary processes to achieve them, enhancing coordination and communication, setting priorities, and focusing on resource allocation in key areas, and enhancing the

appreciation of organizational goals among stakeholders (Edwards, 2002).

According to Alan S. Gutterman, (2017) strategic planning has been widely adopted by organizations of all sizes and sectors, measuring its effectiveness in government organizations is a challenging task. The dynamic nature of the government environment means that gains in efficiency or effectiveness cannot be exclusively attributed to strategic planning efforts. However, several studies have documented the importance of strategic planning in enhancing organizational performance and improving decision-making processes. This research also examines the influence of organizational size, age, and level on strategic planning effectiveness. Organizational size is a structural property that significantly affects its structure, while organizational age or maturity can affect an organization's ability to change and grow. Formal strategic planning has been associated with the field of strategic management, and it is crucial to establish a clear understanding of the environment within which an organization operates for effective decision making (Kotter, 2013).

According to Addis Ababa (2021) and New World Encyclopedia (2022) Ethiopia is one of the second largest population counties in Africa which is found in the Eastern part of the horn of Africa. The total population in Ethiopia 2020 population is estimated at about 114 million people according to United Nation data of the latest national census. The country has eleven (11) regional states and two Chartered Cities of Administration, the latter being the country's capital Addis Ababa, and Dire Dawa, which was chartered in 2004. Ethiopia is moving fast towards industrialization and civil reform to advance productivity (bloom, 1998).

In Eastern part of Africa over the past several decades, public sector strategic planning was not known. But now strategic planning has become a fairly routine and common practice at all levels of government and it can be part of the broader practice of strategic management that links planning with implementation (Foreign Policy Strategy 2020-2023 & Sub-Saharan Africa Strategy 2021-2024). Because it can be applied to organizational functions. So, the overall strategic planning is improved quality of life for the less privileged public service sector organization performance and hard to reach communities of East African region through promoting strong societies (Bryson, 2004).

Managing public organizations in Ethiopia, especially in the capital city of Addis Ababa, is a complex endeavor that involves balancing organizational arrangements, community interests, political choices, individual views, and organizational objectives (Robert E Stevens, David L Loudon, R Henry Migliore 2013). Decision-makers within public organizations are often managers, policymakers, and constitutional lawyers, and it is challenging to satisfy all the managerial, political, and constitutional demands placed upon them (Ethiopian chamber of commerce and sectoral Association 2014/5-2018/9 strategic plan).

In conclusion, this research aims to investigate the effectiveness of strategic planning in the public service sectors, with the administration of Addis Ababa city as a case study. The study will examine the influence of organizational size, age, and level on strategic planning effectiveness and contribute to the literature on the impact of strategic planning on organizational performance. Understanding the effectiveness of strategic planning in the public service sectors can enhance organizational performance, improve decision-making processes, and ultimately contribute to the sustainable development of Addis Ababa city and Ethiopia as a whole.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Strategic Planning Formation and Environmental Challenges

Strategic planning formation is a crucial process for organizations, but it faces many internal and external challenges that must be navigated successfully to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the strategic plan. This literature review highlights the various internal and external factors that impact the strategic planning horizon and explores the integration of these factors to achieve effective strategic planning (Bryson, 2004 and Loasby,

1967).

Internal Factors Impacting Planning

Numerous internal factors impact the strategic planning horizon, including leadership skills, team capacity, technological resources, and time management (Stewart, 1989). Leadership competency, staff awareness and attitudes, and organizational commitment and resources all influence strategic plan success (Nouri & Baradaran, 2019; Dabic & Bulog, 2018). Larger institutions impact service facilities based on their internal strengths and weaknesses (Schneider, 2014). These findings reveal that internal organizational factors play a crucial role in strategic plan success. Strong leadership, engaged employees, efficient resource utilization, and motivated teams drive effective strategic planning processes within organizations.

External Environmental challenges

External environmental factors also shape the planning horizon. Political stability, economic conditions, stakeholder interests, and technological advancements can impact the time frame of strategic plans (Wennekers & Thurik, 1999; Kesner & Stokes, 1989). Healthcare organizations must monitor their environment and adapt plans to incorporate changes (Ndiaye, 2019; Adair, 2017). External factors can also affect healthcare policy and practice, and the lack of skilled professionals in lower-income countries requires workforce planning (Ndiaye, 2019; Adair, 2017). These external challenges reveal the need for healthcare organizations to engage stakeholders, adopt new technologies, and foster a dynamic strategic planning process to remain effective.

Internal and External Integration

The strategic planning process must consider both internal and external issues. Organizational culture, resource utilization, and stakeholder relationships all impact plan success (Gao et al., 2020; Morrison et al., 2019; Hunter, 2020). Integrating internal and external factors is crucial to achieving effective strategic planning.

Strategic Planning Procedures and Tools

Effective strategic planning procedures minimize risks and increase efficiency. Tools like gap and SWOT analyses align activities with the organizational vision (Nelson et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2019). Regular updates ensure goals adapt to new issues over time. These tools and procedures are essential to achieving effective strategic planning.

Contributions of Strategic Planning

When implemented effectively, strategic planning improves healthcare quality, utilization, and patient satisfaction (Chastain, 2022). Together, internal and external factors determine the quality, implementation success, and overall contributions of strategic planning within organizations.

Research Objective

Main objective of this research is to study the strategic planning process in public health sector in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and factors affecting effectiveness of strategic Planning process.

Research Methodology

To explore the problem in-depth and provide a comprehensive understanding of the strategic planning formation process in public service sector organizations in Addis Ababa the study aimed to explore this problem through exploratory research design. Exploratory research design helped to gain a better sense of the

exact nature of the problem without necessarily providing a definitive answer.

Qualitative data collection was used to shed light on the "softer" side of the respondents, and in-depth interviews were conducted to collect data from 34 permanent employees working in different levels of the health public service sectors in Addis Ababa. Semi-structured open-ended interview questions were designed to collect data from top-level managers and directors.

Data was collected from different sources of evidence, including documents, archival records, and interviews. The interviewees were selected through purposive sampling techniques to provide a comprehensive picture of the strategic planning formation process structure, performance, conduct, environmental factors, and efficiency aspects.

The interview data was transcribed, translated, and analyzed using inductive thematic analysis to identify a set of main themes that captured the diverse views and feelings expressed by participants. The thematic analysis helped to summarize key features of a large data set and produced a clear and organized final report. The transcripts were coded by all members of the research team to improve inter-coder reliability and ensure consistency in analysis. Categories and themes were constructed, and direct quotations were presented with thick descriptions as findings.

The study acknowledged that most of the strategic planning literature in Ethiopia was obtained from Western countries, leading to leadership problems in implementing frameworks and styles due to cultural differences. Public service sector organizations in Addis Ababa also faced major leadership problems in the process of strategic planning due to the leadership's lack of awareness of such problems, necessary change leadership initiative, or identification of external and internal obstacles. The environment in which public organizations operated became more uncertain, leading to management challenges.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Respondents Profile

There were a total of 34 participants in this study who volunteered for in-depth interviews. Of the selected 36 participants, only two refused to participate in the study. The participants selected were those who have experience in the development of strategic plan documents and are still working in the leadership positions like head, director, or general manager. All 34 individuals who were willing to participate in the study were working in the administration of Addis Ababa City Public Service Sector, 3 were from the health office, 15 were from the district health office, and 16 were from the hospital.

Of the participants, 29 were male and 5 were female. Regarding the age group, 4 people were 31 years old and below, 22 in the age range of 31-41, 7 in the age range of 41-52, and only 1 over 52 years old. In terms of education level, 8 of the participants have a first degree, 2 Masters', and 7 were Medical Doctors leading their respective institutions.

When we look at the job experience of the study participants, 16 have work experience up to 10 years, 12 have work experience from 10 to 20 years, 5 have work experience from 21 to 30 years, and only 1 person has work experience of 31 years and above. Indicating that the participants selected are with an experience goes along with the changes of the time, making it ideal for this study.

Looking at the level of responsibility, from the participants, there were 25 directors, 1 consultant, 2 deputy CEOs, and 6 CEOs. According to this, all study participants have spent enough time at a higher level to pass through strategic planning at the list as team members of the leadership of the strategic plan development.

From the research following factors were found out which were affective effective strategic planning process. Strategic performance of organization is dependent on effective strategic planning process.

Factors affecting strategic planning formation process

Challenges of the strategic planning formation process are factors that affect the formation of strategic plan documents. These factors become a challenge when the document fails to meet its minimum criteria of having all components of a strategic plan document. These challenges can arise from inside of the organization and/or outside of it. Internal organizational challenges can be summarized into leadership, Strategic Plan development team capacity, and institutional resources. The leadership of the institution is the major internal factor in strategic planning formation.

Knowledge, skill, attitude, and leadership commitment are the stepping-stones to the successful planning design and implementation of the strategic plan. But the accountability of the leader to the system, his or her capacity to secure and allocate a budget, and installing and implementing proper monitoring and evaluation are also factors that can show the leadership position and capacity in strategic plan development and implementation. One of the participants iterated the issue like this.

“The main primary internal organizational factor is the leaders who lead the whole organization, and the proficiency of the leadership is a very determinant internal factor. Leadership’s potential competency readiness, interest, and commitment determined the effectiveness of the planning horizon. If the leadership is good, then the planning horizon will be effective while the leadership is not good enough skilled leaders the planning horizon will not be effective.”

For a successful strategic plan document, the team working on the document plays a critical role. The composition of the team, their educational status, compensation mechanisms like incentives and the overall working culture of the institution makes the team destined to succeed or fail in the development of the plan. One of the participants of the interview stated the following:

“Poor understanding of strategic planning, its importance, and absence of team members in strategic plan preparation not believing the contribution of the plan for the institution and resources availed for the team always affect the plan development.”

Internal and external organizational factors

Internal organizational factors are very important component, especially in health care institute. Internal factors have known to have immense effect service facilities. Larger institutes at bureau or sub-city levels that operate on regulation and inspection activities affect for goodness or weakness on the effectiveness of strategic planning depending on their internal strength or weaknesses. If an organization is well-aware of the importance of the strategic planning and effectively operating on major or core activities as stated on the strategic planning document, the organization and strategic planning will be effective and successful.

External environmental factors can pose either be positive or negative impacts. The strategic plan of the health sector should be designed on detail assessment of external factors and establish good integration with external actors to focus on major activities that favor better community health status. That means external factors significantly influence the strategic plan of the health sector

Components of the quality strategic plan document Quality components of a strategic plan are the approaches taken or adopted for the effective strategic plan, components of the strategic planning formation process, identifying and adopting the importance of the tools used for planning. When we specifically see the approaches taken or adopted for effective strategic planning; will come across effective and efficient resource utilization, identifying and working to customer needs, and setting the culture of accountability and transparency are d to the major approaches that should be taken or adopted. One of the participants stated it like this.

“It basically is related to the resources. As we have a shortage of resources, effective and efficient resource utilization must be one of the systematic approaches to be followed i.e., ensure the success of our work by

matching the resources we have with the practical activities. Another approach is customer satisfaction. For example, there is the need of the patient and the capacity of the health services. Here we must make sure that there is a balance between these two conditions. The other issue is related to accountability and transparency for those who are in leadership and expertise positions. Equity and fairness can also be considered.”

The other major document qualities are knowing the components of the strategic planning formation process. The strategic planning formation process is the journey from identifying the right team up to making sure that each step is implemented to get the quality document secured. Knowing what environmental discovery is and using the right tools, identifying customers and stakeholders, doing value propositions on customers and stakeholders and identifying the right way to cascade the plan are considered as components of the strategic planning formation process. One of the participants stated this.

“It is the base to start, and the experts involved plan becomes effective and makes successful for they know what to do and when, and from the plan, we know they predicted threat a head and act accordingly. Strategic planning formation process helps in this way.”

The other quality component is the tools and methods used. Tools like what method are used to do gap analysis, SOWT analysis, the different matrixes adopted, and the overall data collection and analysis. The methods and tools can make the planning document the right strategy that can spear the organization to the right placed per its vision or stay doing the as – is and contribute nothing per its potential. One of the participants said this.

“Also, health sector in Ethiopia going from where and reach where or to understanding the destination first must be understood the recent status. Generally, the plan is one strategic principal, in document the expression of existential situation should be included deeply then estimating our destination therefore our strategic goals, achievement should be included. In general, my comment deeply understands existential situation then our destination in between each and everything what we going to do by objective, methodology, what we utilize resource in day, month and year should be calculated.”

Strategic planning process

Procedures are the most important components of the planning process. Because they describe the exact manner in which something has to be done. They basically guide actions for activities that managers and employees perform. Procedures also included step-by-step. The major contributions of strategic planning components are its effectiveness in leading the organization to achieve its vision and live by its mission. The extent it can push the organization per the priorities identified and align the resources and day-to-day activities to the achievement of the vision.

When we see the extent, it can push the organization to the priorities identified. The priorities given that they are developed using the right tools and methods. It can also make the organization achieve its goal, minimize waste, and avoid risks. One of the participants stated this.

“If it is well understood, it may be supportive, and yield positive effect. For example, to deliver quality service, increase satisfaction, minimize complain, increase the skills of budget utilization, maximize the standard and quality of the organization etc.”

The other major contribution is its role in aligning day to day activities and resources to the vision of the institution. In health care sector of Ethiopia where it is challenging quadruple burden of health and health related problems and continuous socio-political changes, having a plan done properly can spear the organization to the right direction. One of the participants said this.

“There is a way to influence how the healthcare services sector plans its strategy. Every yet, I don’t believe it will have a significant impact. As time changes and new things emerge, our strategy will be affected if we don’t update it. For instance, the last five-year documents cannot be replaced by the current circumstance. As a

result, it ought to be updated as time changes. However, our strategy would assume that with future ideas, it would be possible to plan for a long period without updating.”

Figure 4.1: Conceptual framework
(Source: researcher 2023)

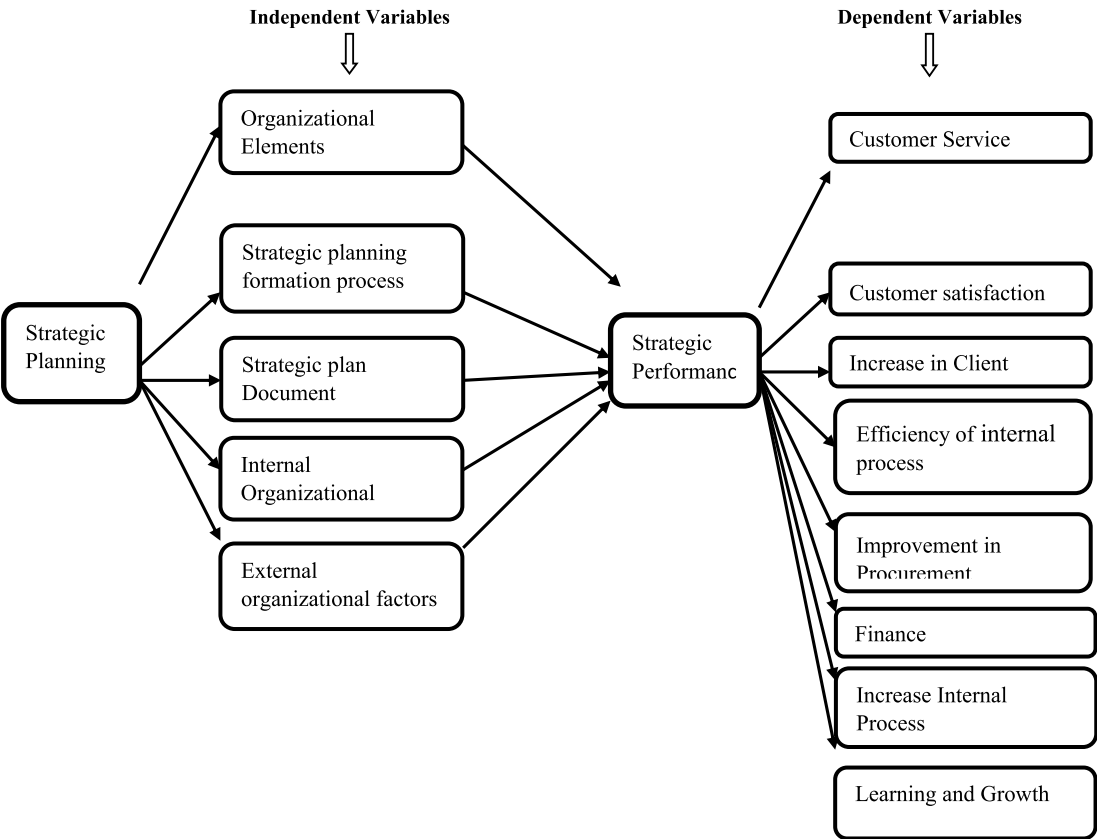


Figure 4.2. Independent Variables with their factors

Organizational element • Organizational age • Organizational size • Planning unit • Level of planning	Strategic plan document quality • Objectivity • Measurability • Coverage • Openness • Flexibility • Clarity & Transparency • Efficiency • Formality • Planning Horizon/Time bounded/ • Smart • Specific • Consideration Organizational set up • Consistency • Evaluable • Rechecked & sustainable • Unambiguity • Easily Understandable by non-professional • Accessible • Aligned with vision & target • Reduce turnover • Reduce wrongly understandable • Based on Institutional Structure
Strategic planning formation process • Initiating and agreeing on strategic planning • Organizational mandate • Vision Statement • Assessing the Environment • Mission Statement • Strategic Issue • Monitoring & Evaluation • Strategic plan development	
Internal organizational barriers • Attitude • Resource • Organizational Structure • Awareness • Service Delivery Systems • Organizational Culture • Ambition of the owners • Knowledge of Deficiency • Leadership Hierarchy • Leadership Skills/ Incompetency/ • Leadership Commitment • IT Infrastructure • Work Morality • Lack of Team Sprits • Incapability of Professionals	External environmental barriers • Political situation • Poor technological advancement • Political Instability • Political Power • Stakeholder Interest Variations • Inflation in macro economy/Economic inflation/ • National policy • Social factors like stakeholders awareness/ • Policy Document • Geographical location • Absence of uniform plan with similar organization

Discussions of The Study

For any organization, formulating an effective strategic plan is a complex process that requires addressing both internal and external challenges. Internally, leadership competency, employee skills and organizational resources play an important role in determining the success of the strategic planning process. Organizations must ensure they have strong leadership, a motivated and competent workforce, and adequate resources to implement their plans effectively.

Externally, factors like technological changes, economic conditions and stakeholder interests influence the planning horizon and impact how goals are set and implemented. Organizations must actively monitor their external environment and adapt their plans accordingly to stay relevant and competitive.

Moreover, there needs to be proper alignment between the organization's mandate, vision and mission statements. These should empower the organization while also providing clear guidelines on how to achieve targets.

The literature agrees that time management practices and constant environmental scanning are essential to formulating strategic plans within defined timelines. Organizations must invest in tools that facilitate efficient resource utilization and accountability to produce high quality strategic plans. Tools like SWOT and gap analyses are useful for environmental scanning and identifying areas for improvement.

Once implemented strategic plan contributes in the important ways. They guide the actions of managers and employees through established procedures and goals. They also align resources and daily operations to achieve organizational visions, provided the appropriate tools and methods are used.

In the healthcare context specifically, strategic planning helps to improve quality of care, patient satisfaction and resource optimization. However, plans also need to be reviewed and updated regularly to account for changing circumstances and emerging issues.

Addressing internal challenges entails ensuring strong leadership, motivated employees and sufficient resources. External factors including technological changes, stakeholder interests and economic conditions also require monitoring.

Vision and mission statements must empower while providing clear guidelines for targets. Time management and environmental scanning enable planning within timelines.

Tools like SWOT and gap analyses identify improvement areas. Strategic plans guide actions through procedures and goals, aligning resources with visions when appropriate tools are used.

In healthcare, strategic planning improves quality, satisfaction and optimization. However, plans require regular review and goal readjustment to account for changes.

Overall, addressing internal and external factors while incorporating quality components and proper tools maximizes strategic planning's benefits for organizations. Only then can plans achieve their potential to guide organizations towards their visions.

Conclusions

For any organization, formulating an effective strategic plan is a complex process that requires addressing both internal and external challenges. Having a clear mission statement as a significant component in developing a cohesive strategic plan and it should align with internal factors, such as leadership and team capacity, in ensuring the success of strategic planning formation. The success of a strategic plan lies in the high level of relationship between the organizational mandate and vision. When these two components are integrated effectively, it creates a fabulous opportunity to implement an effective strategic plan while creating

fair agreement grounds with stakeholders. To develop a successful strategic plan, it is essential to address internal challenges such as leadership, team capacity, and institutional resources while ensuring that the plan's objectives are well-defined and all components are interrelated. Considering external environmental factors can significantly influence the effectiveness of healthcare services. Thus, strategic plans should be designing based on a comprehensive assessment of external factors, integration with external factors, and prioritizing of major activities for achieving better community health status. It is fundamental to address internal organizational factors such as leadership competency, staff awareness and attitudes, motivation and overall commitment to successfully implement a strategic plan. The availability and adoption of technology, coupled with human resources and capacity, can significantly affects the success of healthcare institutions. Successful strategic plan requires careful consideration of all three components: effective planning approaches, comprehensive strategic planning formation process, and appropriate tools/methods used. Internal organizational factors are the key to the success of strategic planning within healthcare organizations.

Recommendations

Healthcare organizations need to invest in developing their leadership capacity and ensure that the strategic planning team has access to the required resources for developing and implementing a successful plan. Healthcare organizations should develop a cohesive strategic plan that includes a clear mission statement, good leadership, an efficient team with sufficient capacity, and all the necessary interventions needed to ensure a successful outcome. Healthcare organizations should integrate organizational mandate statements and vision during strategic planning formation process. Healthcare organizations must invest in effective strategic planning practices by placing a strong emphasis on internal organizational factors.

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