



Managing Political Behaviour in Strategy Implementation

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the intricate challenge of managing political behavior in strategy implementation. The paper identified the management of political behavior as the most determinative factor in strategy implementation process. It contended that among the three content elements; people, technology and process, the people element of organization is by no comparison to the other the most volatile and reactive to organizations decisions. The paper thus, contended that analysis of organizational stakeholders is very necessary to outline the potential interests and power in the political tussle. Also, the assessment of change agents power is also necessary to understand their wit. The paper therefore, implore the use of negotiation and lobbying to win critical stakeholders who are influential. The use of transactionary leadership approach is also suggested as an effective way of managing political behavior.

KEYWORDS: Political Behaviour, Strategy Implementation, Organizational Change, Strategic Management.

INTRODUCTION

Strategy is key to the survival and successful operation of any organization, particularly in business, as it gives competitive edge over competitors. However, institutions, societies and organisations are good at formulating these strategies, but one major challenge is the implementation. In view of this, David (2011) cited in Hittmar and Jankal (2015) aptly puts that the value of an imperfect but implemented strategy or plan is worth more than that perfect strategy or plan that is wrongly implemented. It therefore follows that the value of the strategy that is wrongly implemented is not better than the value of the paper upon which it is written.

As Hrebiniak (2006), aptly argues that it is one thing to formulate a strategy and another to implement the strategy throughout the organization, which is the most tasking thing for management. However, the implementation stage is usually what makes well planned and formulated strategy relevant. It is worthy of note that managing behavior in strategy implementation is very essential for a strategy to be effective. In line with this Li, Guohui and Eppler (2008) opine that there are several factors influencing a successful implementation of a strategy, which range from these responsible for communicating and implementing the strategy to the set of modalities or systems put in place to coordinate and ensure control.

The critical element in strategy implementation is the behavior of person involved, and that may represent negative or

positive manifestation of commitment, values, perception and attitude. To be on the guard, Robins (2016) argued that every behavior should be viewed by managers as political behavior. Thus, resistance to change in strategy implementation is perceived as a political behavior. This contention derives relevance when any behavior in strategy implementation is viewed in its teleologic contents, which very certainly involves the distribution of either disadvantages or advantages. This corresponds to the philosophy of teleology, that every behavior is intended, arising from the presumed rationality of man (Robbins, 2008).

It is therefore logical to reason that the rational man will calculatively resist strategies that are perceived to threaten his interest and conversely support strategies that are positive to his interest. The interests here are dominantly self serving and may rob off the interest of the organization and those of others. Kazmi (2008) recognized the behavior of the strategist in guiding the organization to success as very crucial. Thus, as part of strategy implementation behavior, the strategist must engage in behavioural management necessary for efficient and effective strategy outcomes. This involves handling the political behavior of all stakes in the strategy implementation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategy Implementation

Strategy implementation is a phenomenon which has drawn attention of various scholars. However, the definition of

strategy implementation differs because there is no globally accepted definition or meaning. Here strategy implementation from a process point of view refers to a pattern of a well-planned chronological step (Li, Guohi & Eppler, 2008). However, for the purpose of this paper, strategy implementation as seen from a behavior point of view refers to a series of related action and these actions are seen behaviorally political to enhance or militates the progression in strategy implementation.

It also refers to a series of decision and outcomes of such decisions which achieves goals and objectives with the commitment of resources, (Gringer & Spender, 1979 cited in Werham,1985). Also, Floyd and Wooldridge (1992) cited in Noble (1999) defines implementation as that which entitles management involvements that brings the managerial actions and strategic intent in tangent with each other. In view of this, Hrebiniak & Joyce (1984) cited in Noble (1999) also describes implementation of strategy from the behavioural point of view as a series of managerial involvements that has to do with structures of organizations, actions of major personnel and the system of control responsible for controlling performances.

Implementation refers to the operations and behaviours of top executives that transmutes plans into an evident and realistic nature (Schaap, 2006).

Implementation according to Varadarajan (1999) cited in Homburg & Krohmer and workman (2004) refers to the interaction between external factors and actions constituted internally within the framework of an organization to actualize a strategy. Strategy implementation according to Pearce and Robinson (1994) is the management of various managerial/organizational tools that direct and control the use of the firm's resources in the pursuit of the chosen strategy. It involves the initiation and coordination of organisational actions geared towards the realization of some objectives

From a holistic view of the above definitions of strategy implementation from the behavioural perspective, it is important to state that strategy implementation refers to a changing, repetitive and complicated process that involves organizational activities that are influenced by the interaction between internal and external constituents, which is geared towards transmuting well formulated plans into a realistic state of intended strategic and political behavior outcomes.

Understanding behavior is key in managing strategy implementation because according to Lorange (1998), human resource become the key resource, on which to focus the implementation of an organizations business strategy". An organizational activity can be crippled because of behavioural traits of two major individuals who are very useful in the organization, in a bid for a strategy (which can also be a form of change) to favour their respective interests (Bhatnagar, 1992). Politics in organization as described by Mintzberg (1983:26) refers to "individual or group behavior that is

informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all, in the technical sense, illegitimately sanctioned neither by formal authority, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise (though it may exploit any one of these). The objective of such behavior then is to 'displace' legitimate powers."

Political behavior here refers to influencing people in order to be either be satisfied or dissatisfied. In other words, political behavior is a behavior that influences people interest, and most to establish the superiority of one's interest in the distribution of advantages and disadvantages (Bhatnagar, 1992).

Influences here according to Crozier (1973), refers to the propensity of a party to affect the behavior of the other party in a setting. It therefore can be said that the act of influencing is prevalent in organizations that is, management trying to influence its employees to actualize its goals and objectives as well as members of an organization trying to influence the organization to achieve individual goals.

In an attempt to characterize political behavior, Porter, Allen and Angle (1981) characterized it into four elements;

Political behavior as an attempt to influence

Here political behaviour is a conscious attempt to induce actions from others within the organization. It therefore follows that any action that is not targeted at inducing actions from others within the organization cannot be characterized as a political behaviour.

Political behavior as an informal attempt to influence

Here political behavior is comprised of attempts to induce actions from others in an informal pattern. Therefore, any attempt to induce actions that is not informal is not a political behaviour.

Political behavior as an informal attempt to influence which is voluntary

Here political behaviour is necessitated out of an individual's willingness to be involved in a political behavior. It is not a compulsory norm for the organization. However different situations determine how these actions come to play which can be inferred from anything within the organization.

Political behavior as a voluntary attempt to influence with the aim of safeguarding the interests of both the units and the individuals.

Here Robbins (1976) argued that political behaviour is geared towards self- gratification and personal gains which is sometimes detrimental to others. According to Bhatnagar (2002), political behaviour is affected by three main characteristics viz a viz; Situational characteristics, influencer characteristics and influence target characteristics

Characteristics of the Situation: Here there have been scholars who have extensively emphasized on the

characteristics of the situation. Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck and Pennings (1971) argues that the extent to which there is uncertainty, how significant the activity is to the larger system how centralized the work flow is and how and the extent to which some activities are replaceable are the kind of conditions in which situation characteristics is obtainable. The above argument was not in line with Tushman (1977), he opposed the fact that results, inadequate know-how about how tasks are interdependent and its causes serve as causation conditions. Also, Pfeffer (1978) argues that another thing that encourages political behaviour is the inability to clearly understand standards for performance and making the process of decision making seemingly a secret venture.

Characteristics of the Influencer: It is pertinent to understand clearly how the characteristics of the influencer is key in political behaviour. There have been few empirical studies with regard to this. Porter, Allen and Angle (1981) outlined some influencer features they include relationship between effort and outcome, potentials to take risk, the degree to which one possess control.

Influence Target Characteristics: In the real organizational world, the attempt to influence and select accurate influence modalities is intensified by some features of the target to be influenced. The first feature is the amount of control the target has over organizational resources valued by the person influencing. Once a person has been perceived to possess certain amount of control over organizational resources, the person becomes a target for the influencer which is geared towards obtaining favour to meet desired individual goals or targets. Apart from the spectrum of trying to influence there are certain cost that are incurred which emanates from negative outcomes from perceived targets. The cost may range from how the target presently perceives the influencer as a result of negative outcomes, also there could be leakage of information of the intention to influence the target, there is also wasted resources in terms of time and energy that must have be expended in trying to influence. Sometimes these targets are powerful and have some influence within the organization.

CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Political Behaviour in Strategy Implementation

For strategies to be implemented, certain dimensions of political behaviour must be put into consideration they include the inward versus outward, upright vs side to side, lawful vs unlawful (Kazmi, 2008; and Daft, 2001).

The Inward Vs Outward Dimension: Constitutes a process whereby actors are interested in the sphere of resources upon which their interest and desires lie. Here, the political behavior is carried out within the organization whereby their powerbase is brought about by giving benefits, sharing favours, formation

of an formidable force(cliques) etc. While the outward dimension looks outside the organization to exhibit a political behavior through gaining favours and inducing external units or even organizational boundaries to support the organization, this leads to upright and side to side dimensions.

Upright vs Side to Side: Political behavior is obtained here by trying to induce favour or support through an attempt of influencing the powers that be, and trying to initiate a superior- subordinate relationship with an attempt to induce favours. Conversely side to side here refers to peers or colleagues who exchange favours or form coalition, Individuals engage themselves in political behavior because of what they stand to gain. For example, an individual may decide to play the ‘stoop to conquer’ game, that is accepting to be a fool because of his or her desire to occupy a leadership position, when it is time for appointment, support is sought from every nook and cranny of the institution.

The third dimension here is lawful vs unlawful. If the political behavior is neither detrimental to the organization nor the individuals in the organization it is then seen as lawful. Organisations support political behavior, however the behavior is seen to get out of hand when it engages in destroying or hampering or obstructing change so that it would not see the light of the day, deciding to induce orders not to take commands, instructions and orders from superiors or cheating the organization by being crafty, then all these as seen as unlawful (Kazmi, 2008; and Afolabi & Onwudinjo, 2008).

Initiation and implementation of change are often hindered by some interplay of forces whose interests are to stop the change because of what they either stand to lose or gain. In view of this, Eketu (2017) in his Organizational change theory (unpublished) opines that there are sets of forces that play out concurrently in trying to implement strategy which is a form of change

The Centrifugal forces: this refers to behaviours that are geared towards pulling out from the status quo, that is they desire the strategy to be implemented, they are ready to accommodate the change, they would do anything to have the change

The Centripetal Forces; this refers to those behaviours that are geared toward being a clog in the wheel of organizational progress. In other words, they would slow the movement and progress of implementing a strategy or change. This is as a result of what they stand to benefit or loose in terms of position, experience, charisma, economically, fame and a host of several other factors. As long as there is an interplay of these forces, there is either a pull or a stagnation.

It is imperative to understand that in trying to implement a strategy, there are those who fall into these two categories and

there are those who are one-sided. The political behavior of those who are one sided can be influenced by those who are on both sides with the aim of pulling them to collectively achieve their aims.

The management of the political behavior is the most challenge aspect of strategy implementation. In Afolabi and Onwudinjo (2008),it is argued that from a political perspective, organizations can be seen as loosely structured coalitions of individuals and groups having different preferences and interest. They act to pressure or to enhance their self interests while managing to arrive at a sufficient balance of power to sustain commitment to the organization and to achieve overall effectiveness. This complexity may also arise from personality, process or task based conflict making the political behavior process more entangled (Robbins, 2008). The suggested management approaches to political behavior are making positive use of power; accessing change agent power; identifying key stakeholders, influencing key stakeholders through lobbying; and engaging in serious negotiations to communicate the short and long term benefits of the strategy (Afolabi & Onwudinjo, 2008). Kazmi (2008) suggested stakeholders analysis, and engagement tactics for stakeholders as means of understanding the political environment within the company.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The paper so far establishes the fact that political behavior is majorly a way of inducing actions that can either be of an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on what the intentions are. It therefore follows that organisations should come to terms with the reality of political behavior and how it plays key role to the success of strategy implementation with the understanding that it is traceable to the fact that there is an attempt to influence formally, an attempt to influence informally and an attempt to willingly influence informally. All these attempts to influence could be a way of safeguarding self-interests.

From the studies reviewed in this work, it is gainful to assert the following implications: In strategy implementation, it is important to understand that individuals have various needs and desires. Failure to successful execute a strategy sometimes could be because of the way it is formulated. It therefore follows that in trying to formulate strategies, it should be all encompassing. The behaviours of individuals either make or mar the successful implementation of strategy. There should be inclusiveness at every level, both at the formulation and the implementation stage because it gives organisational members a sense of belonging which makes them enthusiastic at implementing the strategy. As a manager, you must understand that members could easily be influenced to transit from the category of being centrifugal to being centripetal, as such a manager must act firmly to curb the transition between

these categories because the centripetal forces have greater influence than the centrifugal and this is in the best interest of the organization. Managers must think out of the box to implement the strategy considering that there could be unseen forces inhibiting a successful execution

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