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The Nine 'S' Model for Strategy Implementation: A Review

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Abstract

This review analyzes the progression of strategic planning and implementation models from McKinsey 7's' to Higgins 8's' and then to the 9's. It examines how these frameworks improve strategy plan execution, leading to better organizational performance and competitive advantage. Integrating empirical and theoretical findings, the analysis compares these models, emphasizing leadership roles, the nexus between internal and external factors, and the critical integration of supply chains, goal-setting, and synergy. The study reveals that although McKinsey and Higgins' models offer initial insights into implementing strategies, they do not address the complexities between the organization's components. On the other hand, 9 'S,' which encompasses supply chain, objective focus, and synergy, offers an integrative approach to refining strategic execution and operational efficiency. The recommendation for organizations is a shift towards the 9'S' model, surpassing previous frameworks by focusing on supply chain management, precise goal articulation, and fostering collaborative synergy. This approach will help businesses develop integrated implementation processes concerning changing business climates, enhancing management capabilities, and maintaining competitive strength.

Keywords: Strategy implementation, McKinsey 7S Model, Higgins 8S Model, strategic leadership, 9S Model

Introduction

Formulating a business strategy is the basis for an organization's survival in a competitive business environment. Several organizations have collapsed, not because of their inability to plan but because of a lack of effective implementation of set goals (Twum, 2021; George, 2021; Yenipinar & Akgün, 2017). Over the years, strategic planning has gained enormous recognition in managerial practice to attain a competitive advantage (Otieno et al., 2018). However, planning does not see implementation in most firms but ends up on shelves. The strategy implementation process determines whether an organization can sustain, excel, survive, or succumb to the environmental pressure of competition (Nderitu et al., 2021; Kihara et al., 2016). During the implementation phase, strategies are implemented to drive performance, leading to an organization's success (Josephine & Kimencu, 2021).

According to Keney (2020), implementation refers to the execution of the planned strategies. However, most managers depend solely on strategic planning to address organizational challenges. Several studies have concurred that about 70% to 90% of strategic initiatives fail, not because of inadequacies in planning but due to the complex nature of accomplishing strategy implementation (Twum, 2021; Keney, 2020; Kalyal et al., 2020; Kabeyi, 2019; Köseoglu et al., 2018; Donkor et al., 2018). An organization without a strategy does not have a sense of direction to drive a competitive advantage. Although strategy implementation is next to strategy formulation, it is key to the strategic management process to ensure organizational performance (Wheelen & Hunger, 2018; Njoroge, 2017).

Leadership and Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is the most popular management approach in contemporary organizations, where it focuses on creating a mission and vision and formulating strategies to accomplish set goals (George et al., 2019). Typically, strategic planning is a leadership tool for defining an organization's direction to

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sustain it in the face of competition (Falqueto et al., 2020). It is a rigorous exercise where management critically brainstorms to strategically steer the organization’s daily affairs (AlQershi, 2021), considering global competition in the business environment. Additionally, strategic planning is not a mere task, because it involves a strategic thinking process that presents a set of management concepts, techniques, and relevant tools expected to drive what an organization does and its reason. Al Shobaki and Abu-Naser (2017) posit that strategic planning’s value is accomplished after successful implementation. Although strategic planning is needful, without strategy implementation, the realization of strategic decisions will not transpire in practice; thus, its usefulness cannot be overlooked (Du et al., 2019).

According to Mitchell (2019), ensuring strategy implementation involves representing management inspiration to guarantee strict adherence to decisions and actions that sustain an organization’s long-term performance (Bauman, 2018). Although strategy implementation is second to strategy formulation, it is action-oriented and provides the operational key to enhancing performance, leading to competitive advantage (Kabui, 2018). Leaders who do not know the importance of strategy execution may lack competence (Wassink-de Stigter et al., 2022). This means that such a manager does not have the skill to create actions to support the continuous progression to attain organizational growth. To be successful is to have the skill to set a strategy that would drive the desired outcome. The prevailing global competition has also encouraged organizations to execute developed strategies to intentionally succeed in an ever-changing environment. It behooves managers to integrate daily activities by utilizing scarce resources within the organization to meet its vision (Momanyi et al., 2018).

In addition, an organization can benefit from strategic planning when functional roles become integrated and scarce resources are utilized to meet the set targets. In planning, it is essential to know that decisions are not in a vacuum because they affect stakeholders, such as employees, competitors, customers, suppliers, and investors. Some firms invest in experts and resources in planning strategies, but have little knowledge of how to make them work (implementation) to attain success (Nderitu et al., 2021). However, the success of the planned strategies depends on their execution. Therefore, strategy implementation is an articulated set of actions that involves making decisions or choices to fulfill the desired strategy. Thus, the failure of strategy implementation becomes a cost to the organization, hindering its progress. The question is, “How relevant are planned strategies that usually end up on shelves without successful implementation?” According to Twum (2021), firms’success or failure is determined by the choice of strategies that drive operations. Effectiveness is the management’s ability to formulate strategies to align the organizational mission, vision, and values (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021) in planning and purposefully executing plans to achieve success. When set strategies (plans) are executed, they address the inefficiencies that cause low productivity.

Leadership and Strategy Implementation

Effective implementation is a significant element of successful organizational performance. According to Purwanto et al. (2021), indulging in strategic initiatives is an essential leadership skill that allows for organizational change by integrating people and resources to achieve success. However, in management studies, it has been ascertained that managerial work focuses more on strategy formulation while neglecting the implementation phase, which persistently contributes to the high failure of strategy implementation (de Baat Doelman et al., 2021). Similarly, Suifan, Abdallah, and Al Janini (2018) postulate that the role of leadership is determining goals and formulating relevant strategies to guide work processes, which leads to enhancing performance in this competitive era. Even though strategic implementation is more complex, it determines the survival of an organization, whether it would excel or perish (Nderitu et al., 2021; Mugambi, 2017), depending on its position in the competitive environment. Consequently, the prevailing business environment requires management's ability to implement new strategies to influence performance and stay competitive. Thus, success is achieved when leaders make deliberate efforts to convert strategic plans into actions that strengthen their strategic positions through implementation (Soeprapto, 2021).

Similarly, the strategy implementation practice determines whether the organization's mission and vision are aligned with the set strategies. It does not matter how brilliant a strategy is; the success of its implementation is the ultimate goal. Josephine and Kimencu (2021) claimed that the most innovative strategy becomes useless, especially when it does not address the transformation of performance efficiency. Consequently, the survival of an organization depends on having strategic leaders revolve in a fast-challenging environment to thrive amidst turbulence (Twum, 2021). Thus, there is a need to enhance managerial performance to achieve strategic implementation and drive a competitive edge. Kihara, Bwisa, and Kihoro (2016) aver that successful strategy implementation determines productivity and not just having a good strategy. Similarly, implementing planned strategies ensures a competitive advantage (Kihara, 2017). However, considering the high failure rate of strategy implementation, more attention should be paid to developing models to educate leaders on achieving successful implementation to provide solutions in strategic management (Waller et al., 2019; Muteti, 2017).

In addition, many scholars have emphasized the crucial role of strategy implementation in overcoming organizational failure outcomes (Baerz et al., 2021; Alsharif, Peters, & Dixon, 2020; Kabui, 2018; Abass et al., 2017). In addition, a study by Cândido and Santos (2015) confirms that the failure rate of implementation is approximately 90 percent, with very few successes. This range is highly outrageous, which can be attributed to several factors, such as a lack of implementation processes and expertise. Studies reporting strategy implementation guidelines and models are limited, and training programs that encourage managers to overcome this problem are left unturned. Unfortunately, some leaders mistaken strategic planning as a critical indicator of success, ignoring the implementation that brings about the desired change. This has necessitated a shift from the comfort zone of strategy formulation to acquiring the skill of developing actions to drive success when implementing the planned strategies. Also, the 9'S' implementation model shows significant factors for effective strategy implementation as it portrays a lively process of engagements to empower strategic change.

Strategy Implementation Model

The achievement and sustainability of business organizations are a significant concern worldwide (Dey et al., 2021); thus, there is a critical need to make an assiduous effort to improve performance and competitive edge. According to some scholars, strategy implementation models have become paramount for managerial decisions, actions, and performance (Vigfússon et al., 2021; Waller et al., 2019; Muteti, 2017; Allio, 2005). In addition, strategy implementation models can improve the coordination of functions to enhance performance in a firm's strategic direction. In inference, having a model to support successful implementation is a surety for achieving competitiveness in the business environment (Baroto et al., 2014). Consequently, implementation models are meant to provide an operational guide (putting strategies into action to drive performance) to accomplish the set targets (AlQershi, 2021; Kahwaji et al., 2020; Kunagornpitak et al., 2019).

In 1982, Steven McKinsey introduced the 7'S' model on strategy implementation encompassing factors such as structure, strategy, systems, shared values, skills, staff, and style. Practitioners and academics have extensively used this model to analyze the performance of many organizations. However, some critics have indicated that McKinsey's model is static, arguing that it makes business fitness predictable and accessible to a competitor. In addition, some believe that it relies on internal factors and processes that may be unfavorable in situations where external factors influence the organization. Furthermore, it aids in identifying lapses in implementation rather than providing specific guidance on solving implementation barriers for effective operations. Finally, the 7'S' model does not establish actionable strategies to improve managerial practices to ensure the expected change to stay competitive. model seeks to rejuvenate leaders' creativity and intellectual abilities to achieve transformational changes, as required by the corporate vision. Table 1 below displays the details of the 7S's and 8S's models from previous authors on factors of strategy implementation and introduces the birth of the "Nine "S" model of Strategy Execution as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

McKinsey 7S (1982)	Higgins 8S (2005)	***Proposed 9S (2022)***
1. Structure	1. Structure	*1. Structure*
2. System	2. System	*2. System*
3. Strategy	3. Strategy	*3. Strategy*
4. Staff	4. Staff	***4. Supply chain***
5. Skills	**5. Resources**	*5. Style*
6. Style	6. Style	***6. Set targets.***
7. Shared values	7. Shared values	*7. Shared values*
	8. Strategic performance	***8. Synergy***
		***9.** Strategic performance*

These lapses necessitated Higgins's review of the model to improve it for better outcomes.

In 2005, Higgins reviewed 7'S' and introduced the 8'S' model, which sought to align the effectiveness of cross-functional groups with factors such as structure, systems, strategy, shared values, resources, staff, style, and strategic performance by expansion to reflect how to improve performance across the functional units on successful execution of strategy and to transform the image of the organization (Bhatti, 2011). The 8'S model enables top management to approve, monitor, and evaluate how cross-functional units execute set strategies. However, similar to McKinsey's model, the 8'S' model also focuses on internal factors and lacks detailed strategic direction on how management can achieve successful implementation.

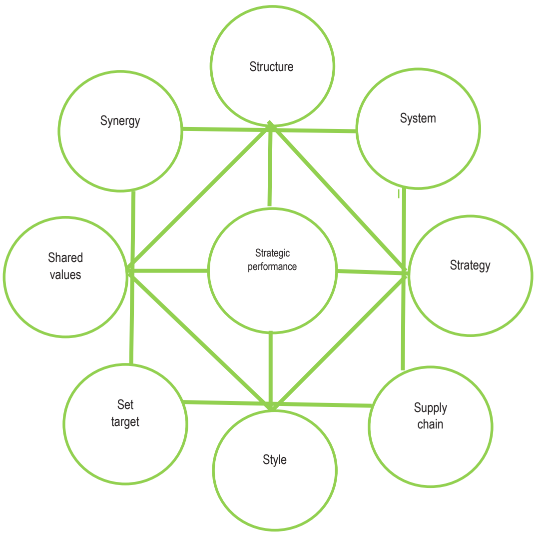
Notwithstanding, there is a need to modify the models mentioned above by introducing factors such as *supply chain, set targets, and synergy* that would enhance managerial performance in every organization. Therefore, the 9'S' implementation

Review of Strategy Implementation Model

The 9'S' model is a revision of Higgin's 8 'S's model, which reviewed the original McKinsey 7'S's model. The 9'S' model proposes the deletion of resources and staff from the Higgins model in place of the supply chain, since those two are elements of the supply chain and add on set targets and synergy as a vital component in ensuring successful strategy implementation. Thus, the introduction of these new factors–supply chain, set targets, and synergy–will improve strategic direction and participation to achieve smooth operation (Dey et al., 2021; Bell & Sherlock, 2020; Morseletto, 2020; Schatzer & Kim, 2018). In addition, these new elements can be extended to the external environment to maintain optimum performance and competitiveness. Further, the proposed 9'S' model would prompt leaders to have comprehensive knowledge of how to properly coordinate daily activities to gain successful outcomes amidst everyday competition.

Figure 1

9'S' Implementation Model



Source: Author's construct

Description of the 9'S' Implementation Model

This 9'S' model considers both internal and external factors that would promote participation among the organization's stakeholders to drive the implementation of set plans. It focuses on providing solutions to processes among functional units to improve performance.

1. Structure. The structure depicts how functional activities, such as division, coordination, and supervision, are directed to ensure the achievement of organizational aims. Organizational structure affects routine decisions and actions that drive strategy implementation to improve performance.

2. Systems. Harmonization of daily activities, processes, and procedures by employees in an organization. It borders achieving set strategies through interrelation activities of functional units through planning, controlling, and information sharing to coordinate work and enhance performance.

3. Strategy. An organization's designated plan of action to achieve short-term or long-term goals, despite the prevailing environmental uncertainty. A well-implemented strategy helps management accomplish its mandate of achieving the organization's mission and vision.

4. Supply chain. A network of processes within organizations, including staff, skills, suppliers, activities, information, resources, raw materials, and logistics that work jointly to create unique satisfaction for consumers of a product or service.

5. Style. This is the style of leadership, specific behavior of leaders when managing the organization. In providing managerial functions, style choice affects the implementation of a set strategy.

6. Set targets. Strategy accomplishment is realized by setting targets (goals) and providing operational directions to meet these requirements. Setting work targets drives management and employee performance to ensure a high level of competitive advantage. It provides feedback that measures success or failure of work done, detailing the effort emitted on work output and outcome.

7. Shared value. Developing and implementing shared values is vital for every organization. It is an essential element that influences employee behavior when acting on behalf of the organization. Shared values form part of the organization's mission, and when positively enforced, they help in strategy implementation, since the success of the firm is a shared interest.

8. Synergy. The principle of teamwork promotes collective performance over individual performance. It embodies the collaborative efforts of organizational structures and systems to ensure the accomplishment of set strategies within cross-disciplinary groups to ascertain strategy implementation.

9. Strategic performance. Is the method of improving performance measurement, monitoring and evaluation, and access to feedback to achieve organizational objectives. It is a management practice

that uses a balanced scorecard approach to determine success by matching employee performance to profitability, focusing on internal processes, capacity, and customer satisfaction.

Implications of the Model

Organizations should be strategy-oriented to deal with the increasing competition in the business environment. Consequently, organizations become successful because of their strategies that promote satisfaction and competitive advantage. This model drives continuous improvement and ensures collaborative efforts for proper strategy formulation and implementation. Similarly, it is important to establish that people have endless needs that must be understood and motivated to achieve high performance. Thus, the effective management of resources sustains the synergy needed to accomplish the set targets to gain a competitive advantage for the organization. Every aspect of management significantly influences work to create the desired change, considering the structure, system, strategy, supply chain, and leadership style. Setting targets directs employees toward shared values to support strategy and integrates an organization's processes to ensure efficiency that will guarantee success.

Even though the McKinsey 7S and Higgins 8S models have contributed tremendously to organizational performance, the 9S model adds up to its efficiency in management practices to influence organizational complexities. The current trend in managerial practice is to become solution-givers through models designed to improve performance. This necessitated the development of three additional elements to foster the accomplishment of strategies. The elements introduced that differ from the McKinsey and Higgins models are *supply chain, set targets, and synergy*. These three factors are representative of ensuring managerial performance that drives competitive advantage, as elaborated below.

Supply chain. The supply chain is critical in influencing business outcomes. It refers to the effective coordination of teams that oversee the operational processes from beginning to end, which is necessary for success. When businesses have a more robust supply chain, managers can accurately forecast resources to meet consumer demand and improve satisfaction. In addition, the supply chain makes it much easier to outsource and procure the logistics required to support strategy implementation. Consequently, the effective coordination of the supply chain enhances productivity to boost the financial status of the organization and its competitive advantage (Saragih et al., 2020). The findings of a study conducted by Bell and Sherlock (2020) indicated that four organizational factors (people orientation, process orientation, information technology, and external environment) are associated with the supply chain in every organization. Properly integrating these factors within the supply chain promotes and improves managerial competency, accomplishing the desired outcome in terms of the organization's performance.

Set targets. Employees' performance can best be evaluated when targets are set to drive performance. It is critical to ensure quality outcomes for all stakeholders to obtain good results from producing goods and providing services for competitive advantage. Setting targets is relevant to managerial practices such as planning, monitoring, and evaluation to achieve strategy implementation (Maas, 2018). A study conducted by Morseletto (2020) revealed that setting targets for work promotes stakeholders' commitment to unity of purpose and good governance practices that support the implementation of strategies.

Synergy. This reflects the progress of work among teams, which increases employee motivation, commitment, and satisfaction. Synergy encourages a sense of belonging within the organization and ensures collaborative action to improve outcomes. The consistency of operational activities creates competitiveness when the functions have internal and external synergy. This is purposeful for creating organizational change when a set strategy is implemented. Supriadi (2020) stated that synergy is the integration of individuals, activities, and units within an organization to achieve a common goal. Schatzer and Kim (2018) also claimed that synergy in an organization promotes the continuous harmonization of teams, work processes, effective communication, clear responsibilities, and supervision that would enhance performance.

The Leadership Role: Implementing the 9S Model

Getting work done requires technical know-how (skills) to direct employees to perform as expected to create change. However, executing strategic plans is difficult owing to their complex nature (Kalyal et al., 2020). Therefore, contemporary leaders should be inspired, empowered, and motivated to support the organization's vision. In addition, accomplishing set goals is an overreliance on strategy implementation models to ascertain organizational success (Ali & Anwar, 2021). Further, leaders must resource functional units to create synergy that interacts with the environment to accomplish long-term goals (Kaburu & Simba, 2020). According to Yousaf and Majid (2018), attaining success represents how an organization achieves its goals in a turbulent environment. Hence, there is a need to adapt to specific guidelines (models) to ensure the smooth transition of formulated strategies (planning) to successful implementation to achieve desired outcomes (Al Shobaki & Abu-Naser, 2017). Finally, the working environment should promote the best organizational culture for all stakeholders for easy implementation.

Conclusion

The McKinsey 7S and Higgins 8S models have been supportive of managerial practice over the years; however, to date, the challenges of strategy implementation still exist (Vigfússon et al., 2021; Kalyal et al., 2020; Candido & Santo, 2015). In practice, even though most leaders have hands-on planning, achieving implementation has always been difficult, thereby contributing to the high rate of strategy failure (Vigfússon et al., 2021; Twum, 2021). Consequently, as the business environment changes, leaders should make the right decisions and take the right actions to enhance their performance (Kaburu & Simba, 2020; Keney, 2020). Thus, the 9S model builds upon earlier models developed by McKinsey and Higgins to support successful implementation and create the necessary change to stay competitive.

In addition, the 9S model has a strong relationship with internal and external factors that influence the implementation of strategic goals within an organization. Thus, the collaborative process ensures a bridge between the internal and external environments to remain competitive. Additionally, management efficiency is displayed through the accomplishment of organizational goals; hence, there is a need to put in place a robust system that strengthens the organizational structure and builds synergy across the supply chain to encourage shared values to achieve the set targets, which will lead to strategic performance.

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