



Strategic Management Practices Adopted By Rural Development Sector Of Afghanistan (Strategic Plan Evaluation And Shifting To Strategic Management Model)

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Abstract.

This study declared the importance of the transition from the classic strategic planning process to strategic management practices approach for the progress of the Rural development sector of Afghanistan public sector organizations and distinguished the strategic management model as a crucial tool for the public sector to reach effectively and the requirement to ensure an effective strategic plan evaluation mechanism within the public sector for the purpose to successfully obtaining the organizational strategic and operational objectives. This is the first descriptive study at doctoral level research to focus on studying SM practices in Afghanistan's public sector so far, addressing all three stages of the strategic management approach by adopting both qualitative and quantitative methods and applying inferential and descriptive statistics. Also, this study will be the first to focus on the strategic management practices in the rural development sector, keeping in mind the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, 2021-2025 as well as the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) strategic plan for 2017-2021. This research will contribute to new knowledge in the field of strategic management addressing the strategic plan evaluation mechanism and strategic management model, as well as will increase the competency of strategists, policymakers, and practitioners to ensure more effective and better strategic plan evaluation in the future.

Keywords: Strategy, Strategic Management, Strategic Plan, Evaluation, Public Sector

1. Introduction

In today's increasingly challenging and agile environment, it is most critical for the public sector to shift from classic strategic planning to an effective strategic management model,

in order to advance and reach successfully to the set objectives and achieved effectively the organizational goals and desired outcomes, it required to ensure an effective strategic plan evaluation mechanism within the public sector.

Due to New Public Management reform and the need for agile changes, Strategic Management has become distinguished and noteworthy in the context of any public sector institution (Weiss, 2016; Hansen, 2011). And to shift from classic strategic planning model to strategic management model, there are needed Leadership Elements that have been considered in this study.

Scholars are agreed that Strategic Management both in the Private and Public sectors is broadly trying to provide answers for the following key questions:

- 1: Where the organization is?
- 2: Where the organization wants to go?
- 3: How the organization gets there?
- 4: How the organization makes sure that reaches the desired destination?

Addressing above mentioned questions, in the public sector effective leadership is essential, as well as to answer above mentioned questions 3&4, the public sector must ensure an effective strategic plan evaluation mechanism. (David & Forest, 2017; Hoglund, 2015; Thomas & David, 2012; Witcher & Chau, 2011; Charles & Gareth, 2010; David, 2007; Alan, 2003; Harold, 2001; Denise, 2000).

The main objective of this research is to study Strategic Management Practices adopted by the Public Sector of Rural Development in Afghanistan. More, precisely this research has the following detailed four objectives:

1. To explore the strategic plan evaluation practices by MRRD, and critically analyze the effectiveness of these practices by MRRD for the progress of the Rural development sector of Afghanistan.
2. To critically analyze the Leadership Elements needed for shifting to the Strategic Management model for the progress of the Rural development sector of Afghanistan.

Also, the researcher within this study wants to test the following hypothesis:

H0: There is not much influence of employees' education level and years of experience on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD.

1.1 MRRD Background Information

According to the National Statistics and Information Authority, report on the estimated population of Afghanistan (2020-2021), the total population of the country in 2020-2021 is estimated to be about 32.9 million persons of which around 71% (23.4 million) live in rural areas. Afghanistan's human development indicator is ranked 169th

under low HDI among the 189 countries. Besides insecurity the big challenges country has been facing is poverty, according to World Bank overview, the basic needs poverty rate was 55 percent at the time of the last household survey (2016/17) and have got worsened after the COVID-19 pandemic which has been stated by the World Bank that the poverty rate in Afghanistan is about to increase up to 72 percent in 2020, and after the international withdraws from Afghanistan and recent changes of fallen of government under the Taliban regime, as reported by the UNDP the statistics show terrible increasing of the poverty line to impact more than 90% of the population. Therefore, addressing the first goal of the SDGs Agenda 2030, the Afghan rural development sector's vision is to reduce poverty across the country.

Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) was developed in 2008 to provide an overall strategy in three main sections (i.e., security, government, and social & economic development), followed by eight specific pillars and some cross-cutting issues, where the sixth pillar have been introduced agriculture and rural development sector. Within the framework of ANDS, Agriculture & Rural Development Sector Strategy (2008-2013) was developed jointly by the Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) and the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD).

Afterward, MRRD has developed a strategic plan for the year (2017-2021) consisting of six main strategic areas. The Rural development sector of Afghanistan was supposed to revise its strategies at the end of December 2021 in the context of Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF II) 2021 to 2025, but due to recent changes and collapse of the government, emerged of the new government under Taliban regime has impacted this process and not revised yet.

2. Research Methodology

This research is based on a descriptive design, and in this study cross-sectional data is used, while the research addresses the perceptions of respondents, knowing the fact that the perceptions of respondents may differ from what occurs in practice.

This research adopts structured interviews at an exploratory stage to sense the key issues in the strategic management practices of the public sector in Afghanistan before using a questionnaire to collect descriptive data.

The targeted population sample comprised top management, middle management, and first-line management officials, as well as the lower-ranking employees, from the rural development sector in Afghanistan, headquartered in the capital (Kabul). And the study aims to trace strategic management practices in the Rural development sector since 2010.

In total at the response rate of 90%, 230 questionnaires were distributed and, 205 questionnaires were returned, while 189 (80% male, 20% female) questionnaires were usable, nevertheless in some of these questionnaires, few questions were left blank or unanswered while bearing in mind the Elbanna,2009 statement that in such situation we

can use the sample mean as a replacement, the return questionnaires were considered usable.

In this research, the quantitative data from the questionnaire is analyzed using SPSS software and the qualitative data from interviews is analyzed using MAXQDA. The researcher has followed all the necessary ethical procedures and processes to protect respondents' private and confidential information and responses.

In terms of quantitative data collection, the researcher has adopted a probability sampling technique, by using the standard random sampling (SRD) method to guarantee an equal probability of having any of the population as a participant.

At the same time, non-probability sampling is adopted for the qualitative data collection using structured interviews as the qualitative research instrument.

3. Findings and Discussion

It is worth noting that to analyze the data, both inferential and descriptive statistics were adopted in this study.

To address the first objective of the research, part one explores the strategic plan evaluation practices by MRRD, and critically analyzes the effectiveness of these practices by MRRD for the progress of the Rural development sector of Afghanistan. and to address the second objective of the research part two and part three critically analyze the respondents' satisfaction and perception of the importance of the strategic management approach and the Leadership Elements needed for shifting to the Strategic Management model for the progress of the Rural development sector of Afghanistan, followed by the testing of the hypothesis.

3.1. Strategic Plan Evaluation within MRRD

Considering the variables related to the strategic plan evaluation stage, and based on the study findings related to this stage, the findings of the research as shown in Tab.1, reported that the achievement and/or applying level of proper strategic plan evaluation within the MRRD under scrutiny is 61.85%.

Table 1: Proper Strategic Plan Evaluation within MRRD

No	Variable	Applying Level
1	links the implementation with performance	43.40%
2	monitoring performance measures	61.40%
3	monitoring trends and internal performance	54.20%

4	reviewing performance data on a regular basis	63.80%
5	communicating performance information	63.80%
6	linking performance with the processes	55.40%
7	having a solid reporting system	65.40%
8	improving current services	65.20%
9	applying the same strategic planning process	76.80%
10	the evaluation of middle managers	75.90%
11	the evaluation of lower staffs	75.40%
12	having a proper strategic planning evaluation	54.10%
13	developing proper benchmark for SP	49.20%
	Average	61.85%

Source: Data analysis output - SPSS

To ensure an effective strategic plan evaluation system within the public sector, it's crucial to adopt an effective performance management process. The findings of the research related to performance management process at the rural development sector of Afghanistan reported that according to the employee's perception Partially the MRRD top management struggled to link the implementation of organizational objectives with individual performance appraisals, while most of the respondents were agreed on performance measures monitoring by the top management to ensure the proper implementation of strategic plan within the MRRD. Moreover, the findings of the research revealed that almost half of the respondents were agreed that top management monitors continuously external trends and internal performance and review regularly the performance data

At the same time, the findings of the research showed that MRRD has tried to ensure the regular communication of performance information to a wide range of external stakeholders and linking closely the strategic planning process with the performance management processes at all organizational levels.

This is in a situation where the top managers declared that reviewing regularly performance data for making decisions and taking corrective action to improve organizational performance within the MRRD has been a regular process within the

ministry on monthly basis, meanwhile, programs are always welcomed to share their problem, concern and possible recommendation in order to improve the performance of the program and considering the overall MRRD, while some of them still believed that due to right information decision making is subject to happen, so performance review was just not real in Afghanistan including the MRRD, but right now they are trying to adopt this in large extend.

Furthermore, as indicated in Tab.1, the findings of the research reported lack of a solid reporting system using sufficient technology, and improving services is a major part of strategic plan endeavors within some departments of the MRRD.

Besides, the finding of the research revealed that mostly the evaluation of middle managers and the lower-ranking employees are based largely on their contribution to the successful accomplishment of the strategic plan within the MRRD. While most of the respondents were stated that MRRD applies the same strategic planning process as other public sector does.

3.2. Satisfaction and Importance of the strategic management practices at the Rural development sector of Afghanistan

The findings of the research stated that a remarkable portion of the respondents was not satisfied with the current model used for strategic management practices within the MRRD.

As effective strategic management practices are crucial for any public sector to successfully reach its strategic and operational objectives. Considering the importance of strategic management in the Rural development sector of Afghanistan, MRRD has endorsed these practices, therefore the findings of the research revealed that

MRRD has tried to endorse its own model for strategic planning within some departments, and develop an annual action plan for effective strategic plan implementation within most departments followed by a periodic report. Meanwhile, the findings of the research indicated that according to the respondents most of the top management, middle management, and lower-ranking employees see strategic planning as critical to an MRRD's success.

3.3. Leadership Elements needed for shifting to Strategic Management Model at the Rural development sector of Afghanistan

Within the public sector, for shifting from a classic strategic plan approach to a strategic management model there are leadership elements that should be considered, the elements are could be summarized such as top managers as role models, top management's decisions, top management performance's evaluation, top management considering organizational structure, top management considering human resource management, and top management considering organizational culture.

The findings of the research related to these leadership elements reported that a remarkable portion of the respondents was not agreed that within the MRRD the top managers have set good role models of strong and inspired leadership, as well as using strategic planning to drive the decision-making process. Likewise, the findings of the research revealed that within the MRRD the top managers are struggling to report on their performance, as well as the top managers are struggling to bring some changes in organizational structure and human resource practices, and modify organizational culture in terms of supporting the strategic plan within the MRRD.

According to Plant 2009 and Poister 2010, nowadays it is essential for public organizations to shift from the classic strategic planning approach to the strategic management approach if they want to achieve their desired objectives and want to be successful in the future.

Therefore, it is required to assess under scrutiny the relationship of variables associated with strategic planning evaluation and the leadership elements, with the proper implementation of strategic and operational objectives within the MRRD. For the purpose to explore correlation in between the variables to be considered while adopting better strategic management practices and putting their endeavors into transiting from classical approach to the strategic management approach for the progress of the Rural development sector of Afghanistan.

The findings of the research on strategic plan evaluation practices within the MRRD as shown in Tab.2, reported that there is a weak and moderate positive Pearson correlation between most of the variable's correlation between the variables and the proper strategic and operational objectives implementation, even the findings showed a strong positive Pearson correlation between the variable developing proper benchmark for strategic planning and the proper operational objectives implementation. While no negative correlation among the variables associated with the strategic plan formulation within the MRRD is reported.

Table 2: Strategic Plan Evaluation Correlation

No	Variable	Proper Strategic Objectives Implementation		Proper Operational Objectives Implementation	
		Pearson Correlat	p - value	Pearson Correlatio	p - value Sig.
1	links the implementation with performance	.294	.000	.261	.000

2	monitoring performance measures	.299	.000	.348	.000
3	monitoring trends and internal performance	.273	.000	.324	.000
4	reviewing performance data on a regular basis	.318	.000	.320	.000
5	communicating performance information	.198	.000	.112	.000
6	linking performance with the processes	.368	.000	.439	.000
7	having a solid reporting system	.272	.000	.157	.000
8	improving current services	.216	.000	.201	.000
9	applying the same strategic planning process	.248	.000	.400	.000
10	the evaluation of middle managers	.280	.000	.434	.000
11	the evaluation of lower staffs	.266	.000	.308	.000
12	having a proper strategic planning evaluation	.127	.000	.218	.000
13	developing proper benchmark for SP	.056	.000	.086	.000

Source: Data analysis output - SPSS

Likewise, the findings of the research on Leadership Elements needed for shifting to Strategic Management Model at the Rural development sector of Afghanistan within the MRRD as shown in Tab.3, reported that there a weak and moderate positive Pearson correlation between the variables and the proper strategic and operational objectives implementation. While no negative correlation among the variables associated with the leadership elements within the MRRD is reported.

Table 3: Leadership Elements Correlation

No	Variable	Proper Strategic Objectives Implementation	Proper Operational Objectives Implementation
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		Pearson Correlat	p - value	Pearson Correlatio	p - value Sig.
1	Set good role models by the top management	.495	.000	.532	.000
2	Driving the decision-making processes	.509	.000	.414	.000
3	Top management reporting on their performances	.209	.000	.269	.000
4	Changes in organizational structure to support the strategic plan by the top management.	.408	.000	.328	.000
5	Changes in human resource practices to support the strategic plan by the top management	.354	.000	.295	.000
6	Modifying organizational culture	.342	.000	.388	.000

Source: Data analysis output - SPSS

3.4. Testing Hypothesis

H0: There is not much influence of employees' education level and years of experience on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD.

H1: There is much influence of employees' education level and years of experience on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD.

Following the inferential statistics general concepts and rules, since there are two independent variables (i.e., employee's years of experiences and employees' level of education), a two-way ANOVA test is applicable and the final result as an output of the Test of Between-Subjects Effects table shown that Years of experiences and combined of Education level and Years of experiences play no significant role on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD, but Education level (p-value 0.34), is playing a significant role on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD.

This means alternative hypothesis accepted, so there is much influence of employees' education level on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD. And one step further, as a result of post-hoc through TUKEY method, since p-values comparing for all education level shows high, means all education levels whether 12th graduate, bachelor level and/or master level of education have much influence on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD.

4. Conclusion

The achievement and/or applying level of proper strategic plan formulation within the MRRD under scrutiny was 61.85%. The findings of the research revealed that the MRRD top management struggled to ensure an effective performance management process in the rural development sector of Afghanistan, nevertheless, MRRD applies the same strategic planning process as other public sector does.

MRRD has tried to endorse its own model for strategic planning within some departments, and develop an annual action plan for effective strategic plan implementation within most departments followed by a periodic report. And most of the top management, middle management, and lower-ranking employees see strategic planning as critical to an MRRD's success.

Furthermore, the findings of the research reported that there is a weak and moderate positive Pearson correlation between most of the variable's correlation between the variables and the proper strategic and operational objectives implementation, even the findings showed a strong positive Pearson correlation between the variable developing proper benchmark for strategic planning and the proper operational objectives implementation. Likewise, the findings of the research on Leadership Elements needed for shifting to Strategic Management Model at the Rural development sector of Afghanistan within the MRRD reported that there a weak and moderate positive Pearson correlation between the variables and the proper strategic and operational objectives implementation. While no negative correlation among the variables associated with the strategic planning evaluation and leadership elements within the MRRD is reported.

And finally, within the study, there was enough evidence to support that there is much influence of employees' education levels (12th graduate, bachelor, and master level) on having proper control over the strategic plan implementation within MRRD.

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