

Reviewing the barriers to the implementation of the strategic plans from the perspective of hospital managers in Jahrom

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Abstract

Introduction: We have to consider organizational dimensions, which show the specific characteristics of the organization, to know an organization. In spite of the importance of strategic planning and its critical effect on reaching organizational goals, managers sometimes face serious problems in implementation of strategic decisions. The purpose of this study was to determine the barriers to implementation of the strategic plan from the standpoint of managers of educational hospitals of Jahrom University of Science.

Materials and Methods: This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in hospitals of Medical Sciences of Jahrom in 2017. The population was 62 managers, internal managers, quality improvement and nursing offices, and executives of the strategic plan of hospitals with sampling done in census. The questionnaire used in this research was developed using similar literature and studies, and based on John M. Bryson's view with four barriers - key human, process, structural, and institutional - in implementation of the strategic plan. The face and content validity of this questionnaire had been tested in the study by Ameriun et al. Data analysis was done using inferential tests such as Pearson correlation coefficient and descriptive statistics through SPSS21.

Results: In the human barriers sphere, the most important barrier from managers' viewpoints was inadequate training of the staff to implement the strategic plan (3.64 ± 1.14). Concerning process factors, the most important barrier according to the managers was the lack of adequate supervision of a domestic supervisor system on the progress of activities (3.64 ± 0.98). In the area of structural factors, the lack of financial resources for implementation of the strategic plan (3.65 ± 1.18) was identified as the most important barrier according to the managers. Concerning institutional factors, the lack of motivation among senior managers (3.58 ± 1.03) was the most important barrier in the implementation of strategy in managers' view.

Conclusion: According to the managers of hospitals in Jahrom, process factors were the most important barriers in implementation of strategic organizational programs. These results reveal the greater importance of monitoring a domestic observer system to better address these barriers.

Key words: strategic plan, barriers, managers, educational hospitals.

Introduction

To know an organization, we need to consider those dimensions of it that express the specific characteristics of that organization (1). Organizational dimensions are divided into two categories: structural and content. Structural dimensions show the internal characteristics of an organization. Those called the organizational structure provide a base for measuring and comparing organizations (2). Hall believes that the organizational structure has three main tasks: helping produce organizational output to achieve the organization's goals and minimizing the effect of individual variations on the organization. The effect of individual variation on the organization is minimized and is an area where organizational decisions are made and power is applied (3). Three structural dimensions can be considered for organizations, which represent the specific characteristics of the organization: complexity, formality and focus (4). On the other hand, there are some factors that affect the organizational structure and its dimensions. Among these factors, strategy, size, environment, and technology can be cited. One of the most important factors is the strategy. The strategy is in fact a kind of internal integration. The nature of strategy development is linking a company with those around it (5). The main element of the organization's strategy is to achieve its goals and how it is structured. An appropriate structure does not guarantee success, but increases the chances of an organizational success. Besides identification and defining a strategy through the influence of authority and responsibility, the organization's structure can facilitate or prevent the implementation of the strategy (6). Bryson analyzes strategic planning models and analyzes the conditions for their use in the public and non-profit sectors, and in the end it provides self-management that can be applied in the public and non-profit sectors. This model includes a continuous process in accordance with the scheduling and repeatability definition that has begun before the adoption of any decision and continues after that decision. Among the characteristics of this process is that the results of each stage can be used for the elaboration or completion of the earlier stages (7): 1) Initial agreement, 2) stakeholder analysis, 3) determination of organization duties, 4) mission of the organization, 5) knowing the organization's environment, 6) determination of strategic issues, 7) identification of the strategy, 8) describing the projects and measures, 9) organizational vision, and 10) annual operational plans. The ever-increasing complexity of highly variable activities and environment have exposed the managers to so much trouble that their slightest neglect of the issues and environment surrounding them will result in irrecoverable outcomes, which has made the managers of these organizations understand that the traditional way cannot solve their problems anymore (8). Despite the importance of strategic planning and its critical impact on the goals of the organization, managers sometimes face serious difficulties in implementing and running strategic decisions (9). Hospitals are among the organizations whose managers' success depends on formulating strategic planning (10). Strategic planning in hospitals alone does not imply the success of the hospital,

and the development of strategies alone cannot encourage hospital managers to achieve their goals, and unless these strategies are implemented, there will be no effect on success and achievement goals, which is improving the quality of patient care (11). In the study by Han et al., the constraints of financial resources, managers' constraints and difficulties, an inflexible corporate culture, inefficient organizational structure and so on are among the obstacles to the implementation of a strategic plan (12). The results of Barnes' study suggest that the problems faced by the executives in implementing strategic plans are lack of superordinate's support in implementing the program, inadequate labor, and unmotivated labor (13). Strategic plans in hospitals will not be implemented on their own, and hospital managers who want to use strategic planning for breakthroughs have barriers to strategic planning and implementation (14). In the status quo, given the competitive environment among health service provider systems, it is essential that hospital managers pay more attention to implementing strategic decisions. Although in recent years, the Ministry of Health has paid a lot of attention to strategic planning and implementation of hospitals' accreditation standards, studies have shown not much research on identifying the main factors of failure of strategic decisions in Iranian hospitals. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the viewpoints of managers to identify the barriers of the implementation of a strategic plan developed in hospitals, so that its results can help better manage strategic planning in hospitals.

Methods

This descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted in 1396 in educational and therapeutic hospitals in Jahrom. The total number of samples was 62 executives, internal managers, quality improvement and nursing offices, and executives of the strategic plan of hospitals. Sampling was done by census. The inclusion criteria were having at least one year history of managing a hospital, management, quality improvement and nursing offices. Exclusion criteria were lack of completion of the questionnaire and lack of consent for participation in the study. The tools used in this research were developed using similar literature and studies, and based on John M. Bryson's view with four barriers - key human, process, structural, and institutional - in implementation of the strategic plan. The face and content validity of this questionnaire had been tested in the study by Ameriun et al. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: the first part was demographic information, and the second part consisted of 4 areas: human factors (8 questions), process factors (7 questions), structural factors (11 questions) and institutional factors (6 questions). Each item was rated based on a 5-option Likert scale. Scores 1 to 5 - totally agree to totally disagree - were assigned to score the responses. The questionnaire was distributed by the researcher in the presence of managers with ethical considerations, the purpose of the research was explained to the participants, and they completed the questionnaire anonymously, and were ensured of the confidentiality of their information.

Results

Fifty one managers of hospitals in Jahrom participated in the study. Their mean age was 39.21 ± 5.89 and 58.8% were females with the rest male; 86.3% were officially employed; work experience of 72.5% of them was over 12 years; 37.8% of them were supervisors and 45.9% were internal managers. The results of analysis of the barriers to the implementation of the strategic plan in Table 1 showed that from the perspective of the managers of the hospitals in Jahrom, process factors had highest rate (33.20 ± 8.09) as the main obstacle to implementing the strategic plan in the hospitals of Jahrom.

Table 1: Mean score of strategic program areas

Area	Total score
Human Factors	26.3 ± 16.50
Process factors	33.20 ± 8.09
Structural factors	26.2 ± 14.88
Institutional factors	26.50 ± 6.48

In human factors, the most important barrier from managers' viewpoint was inadequate training of staff to implement the strategic plan (3.64 ± 1.14). In the area of process factors, the most important barrier from managers' viewpoint was the lack of adequate supervision of a domestic supervisor system on the progress of activities (3.64 ± 0.98). In the area of structural factors, the lack of financial resources for implementation of the strategic plan (3.65 ± 1.18) was identified as the most important barrier from managers' viewpoint. In the area of institutional factors, lack of motivation among senior managers (3.58 ± 1.03) for the implementation of strategy was the most important barrier from managers' viewpoint (Table 2 - next page).

The results of t-test in Table 3 showed no significant relationship between gender and score of the factors of the implementation of the strategic plan (p -value > 0.05).

Table 3: The relationship between gender and strategic implementation factors

	Gender		p-value
	Male	Female	
	Standard deviation \pm mean	Standard deviation \pm mean	
Human Factors	27.05 ± 7.55	25.80 ± 5.73	0.0505
Process factors	34.38 ± 8.72	32.37 ± 7.67	0.387
Structural factors	20.05 ± 5.60	20.41 ± 4.39	0.797
Institutional factors	27.76 ± 7.08	25.59 ± 5.96	0.245

The results of the Spearman test in Table 3 shows no significant relationships between age and work experience with the factors of the implementation of the strategic plan (p -value > 0.05).

Table 4: The relationship between age, work history, relationships and strategic implementation factors

		Human Factors	Process factors	Structural factors	Institutional factors
Age	r	0.259	0.237	0.282	0.208
	p-value	0.102	0.135	0.077	0.198
Work history	r	0.161	0.146	0.242	0.236
	p-value	0.260	0.306	0.091	0.098

Table 2: Obstacles to implementation of the strategic plan

	The items in question	Standard deviation ± mean
Human factors	Lack of experience for managers to implement a strategic plan	3.39±1.04
	Lack of staff knowledge and skills about implementing the strategic plan	3.49±1.08
	Lack of enough management and leadership by department administrators	3.40±1.03
	Internal disagreement between managers at different levels of the hospital	2.96±1.08
	Lack of human resources to implement the strategic plan	3.25±1.12
	Reduction in the level of interest of senior hospital managers after the program is developed	3.25±1.06
	Lack of management skills of senior managers	3.51±0.95
	Inadequate training of staff to implement the strategic plan	3.64±1.14
Process factors	Unclear responsibilities of individuals in implementing strategies	3.16±1.22
	Not having a plan to perform activities related to the implementation of the program	3.20±0.98
	The poor participation of responsible units in implementing the strategic plan	3.44±1.05
	The weak formulation of the strategic plan: ambiguity, generalization and incorrect foundation	3.41±0.98
	Mismatch of the written programs with hospital structure	3.29±1.15
	The creation of internal chaos due to the lack of attention of managers to the implementation of the strategic plan	3.63±1.13
	Time-consuming nature of the implementation of a strategic plan reduces the motivation of managers.	3.25±1.16
	Insufficient oversight of an internal oversight system, on the progress of activities	3.64±0.98
	The lack of coordination between the activities of the various units of the hospital	3.37±0.92
	The development of a strategy plan was based solely on obtaining a hospital accreditation score and managers do not pay attention to its implementation.	3.49±1.21
Structural factors	Poor understanding and employees' lack of familiarity with the concepts of strategy implementation	3.58±1.05
	Disproportionate incentive system and compensation for employees' implementation of the strategies	3.56±0.87
	Lack of sufficient authority for executives to implement a strategic plan	3.24±1.0
	Continuous change of directors (power changes) in the hospital	3.64±1.07
	Lack of financial resources to implement the strategic plan	3.65±1.18
	Due to the activity of rival hospitals, the diversion of managers' attention from strategy implementation	3.36±1.07
Institutional factors	Inefficient structure and ambiguity in the division of tasks for the implementation of the strategic plan	3.40±0.99
	Impact of uncontrollable factors in the external environment of the hospital, in the absence of the program	3.47±0.97
	The attachment of managers to past strategies and the desire to maintain the status quo	3.33±1.09
	Resisting change by managers	3.40±1.23
	Resisting change by employees	3.45±0.96
	Lack of commitment among staff to implement the strategy	3.33±1.11
	Managers' hardships often cause them to think about their own business or personal income instead of loyalty to the hospital.	3.31±1.21
	Lack of motivation among senior executives to implement the strategy	3.58±1.03

Discussion

Strategic planning is a process for identifying the future direction of the organization, which involves setting targets and then defining different strategies for achieving them (16). As organizations, hospitals need a strategic plan to show the future routes of the hospitals (17). The results showed that process factors are the most important and main barriers in the implementation of management strategy plans from the viewpoint of hospital managers. From among these factors insufficient monitoring of a domestic supervisor was the greatest barrier to these activities with the highest score. In the study by Jooste, the lack of precise knowledge and awareness of employees about their mission in implementing programs and the lack of communicating strategy plans to organizations were introduced as the most important barriers (18). In Koseoglu et al., among the major obstacles to the implementation of strategic plans were the lack of effective role of administrators in formulating and lack of unanimity among decision-makers at the time of programming, lack of proper communication in the organization, lack of coordination, lack of adequate information system and uncertainty, and unknown executive regulatory policies (19). The results of the study by Ford-Eickhoff showed that the current processes of hospitals do not provide managers with the ability to achieve strategic decisions. If programs are related to work processes, the job descriptions of employees and units, the success rates in their implementation will be higher (20). The second barrier to the implementation of the strategic plans was institutional factors, from the point of view of managers, with lack of motivation among top executives to implement the appropriate strategy as the most important factor in this area. In the study of Hamorzade et al., the increase in payroll was the reason for 90.9% motivation increase among hospital managers (21). Moreover, in his study, Safe stated that a person who has an incentive for development tends to do his job well and evaluate it (22). Thus, according to the study by Delgoshaei, there are managers who have remained in the organization for many years with only organizational coercion as the factor to make them remain. Hence, such managers suffer reluctance and non-commitment, posing problems for the organization in achieving predetermined goals (23). These results show that the strategic plans should be evaluated and developed to increase the motivation and commitment of the managers in their activities. The third effective factor in lack of managers' access to their strategic plans was human factors, where the most important barrier was insufficient training of staff to implement strategic plans, according to managers. The presence of human resources has been proven to be the most expensive and most valuable asset and resource of organizations in the operating chain of the organizations. Organizations with significant achievements have focused on this topic (24). In their study, Kaplan and Norton called management non-commitment as one of the main obstacles to implementing strategic plans (25). Moreover, Cater and Puco identified poor leadership as the most important barrier to implementing strategic plans (26). Hung et al. have identified limitations in financial resources,

managers' constraints and difficulties, an intangible organizational culture, inefficient organizational structure, poor understanding of weak strategies, and weak links in the organization as barriers to implementing a strategic plan (27). Furthermore, Murphy and Hanchett introduced the conflict between the priorities of top managers and the lack of group work in the organization as a problem of strategic plans. To avoid this problem, senior executives need to focus on some important actions and goals and clearly define communications and priorities (28). In the present study, the last factor mentioned as a barrier to strategic programs was structural factors. In structural factors, the lack of financial resources for implementation of the strategic plan was identified as the most important barrier according to the managers. In fact, the structural dimensions state the internal characteristics of an organization. They are called organizational structure and base on which organizations can be measured and compared (29). Zaribaf and Bayrami stated that most of the managers of the organization have scheduling, energy and a lot of money to formulate a strategy, but do not provide enough input for its proper implementation (30). Brenes, Mena & Molina also showed that organizational structure and design are important because they involve decisions on allocating resources for different units and activities in the business ecosystem (31). Piers and Robinson introduced the organizational structure as the most important priority highlighted in implementation of strategic plans developed by the organization and indicated that there should be coordination between structure and strategy (32). However, most of these studies have stated structural factors as the most important barrier to the implementation of strategic plans, which was inconsistent with the results of this study, which could reflect different organizational conditions in each hospital.

Conclusion

Finally, the results of the study, indicating the managers' barriers to implementation of strategic programs, showed that these strategic barriers were different in different hospitals according to their organizational status. According to the managers participating in this study, these factors were procedural, institutional and structural factors, respectively. Therefore, by identification of these factors with open mindedness, managers can have better foresight on implementation of strategic plans.

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