Experiences of Managers of Hospitals of Jahrom University of Medical Sciences on Obstacles of Implementing the Strategic Plan in 2017

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ABSTRACT

Background: Strategic planning and its vital impact on achieving the organization goals, sometimes managers face serious obstacles and problems in implementing the strategic decisions. The aim of this study was to investigate the experiences of managers of hospitals of Jahrom University of Medical Sciences on obstacles of implementing strategic plans in 2017.

Methods: this qualitative study was conducted using a Hermeneutics approach which was accomplished through semi-structured interview with 8 hospital managers and those who had a main role in strategic planning and were selected with purposeful sampling method. Data was collected till reaching data saturation.

Results: 80 codes were extracted by data analysis and finally 4 main themes, 12 classes and 26 subcategories were obtained. Themes include: managerial inefficient structure, inefficient human resources, inappropriate infrastructure and inefficient policies.

Conclusion: Findings of the present study will provide a better perception of obstacles, opportunities and finally strategies of promoting this plan due to experiences of managers and other involving factors. Obstacles and factors of failure of strategic decisions in the hospitals should be fully known so that during implementation of strategic management process, the desired results are obtained with providence and better management or changing approaches.

Key words: strategic plan, obstacles, managers, Jahrom University of Medical Sciences, hospital

INTRODUCTION

For knowing the organization, we need to notice the dimensions of the organization which indicate the organization special features. Organizational dimensions are divided into two groups: structural and content. Structural dimensions indicate internal features of an organization. They are called organizational structure which gives a basis by which the organizations could be measured and compared with each other. Hall believes that the organizational structure has three main duties: helping in production of the organization output for achieving the organization objectives, minimize the impact of individual varieties on the organization and create as arena where the organizational decisions are made and power is applied. Three structural dimensions could be considered for the organization which indicates special features of the organization: complexity, formality and concentration. Among these factors, we may point to strategy, size, environment and technology. One of the most important factors is strategic factors. Strategy, in fact, is a kind of internal integrity. The main part of the organization strategy for achieving goals is related to the organization structure. An appropriate structure doesn't guarantee success but increases the chance of success of the organization. Besides specifying and defining strategy through penetration of authority and liability, the organization structure may facilitate the strategy implementation or prevent from it. Bryson has investigated the models of strategic planning and analyzed
the conditions of applying them in public and non-profit sectors and finally provides an approach which is applicable in public and non-profit sectors. This model includes a continuous process according to definition of planning and repeatability which begins before making any decision and continues after its implementation. Among characteristics of this process is that the results obtained from one stage could be used in revising or completing the stages before it. 1- Primary agreement, 2- stakeholders' analysis, 3- determining the organization duties, 4- the organization mission, 5- explanation of plans and measurements, 9- the organization perspective, 10- one-year operational plan. Increasing complexity of activities and changing environments have faced managers with such difficulties that their least neglect to their surrounding issues and environment will lead to irreversible consequences and this has caused managers to find out that traditional planning won't be able to solve their problems. Despite significance of strategic planning and its vital impact in achieving the organization goals, sometimes managers face serious problems in implementing strategic decisions.

Hospitals are among the organizations where codifying a strategic planning is required for success of their managers. Strategic planning in hospitals along with not warranty the hospital success and codifying strategies alone couldn't encourage managers in achieving their objectives and till these strategies are not implemented, they won't have any impact on success and achieving its goal which is improving the quality of patients care. In the study of Hang et.al restriction of financial resources, limitations and troubles of managers, inflexible organizational culture, inefficient organizational structure and so on are among obstacles of implementing a strategic plan. The results of Brance study show that problems encountered by managers in implementing strategic plans include lack of support of senior authorities in implementing the plan, insufficient human resources and their lack of motivation. Strategic plan in hospitals won't be implemented by itself and hospital managers who want to use strategic planning for achieving success, have some obstacles for implementing it. In present conditions, with presence of competitive space among the systems providing healthcare services, it is required that hospital managers pay more attention to implementing the strategic decisions. Though in recent years, Ministry of Health in hospitals accreditation standards, has paid much attention to strategic planning and implementing it, but studies show that few studies have been implemented for identifying main factors of failure of strategic decisions in Iran hospitals, so the aim of this study is that by investigating managers experiences, obstacles of implementing codified strategic plan in hospitals are identified so that managers could help better management of strategic planning in hospitals.

METHODS

This qualitative study was conducted using hermeneutic approach. The statistical population in this study includes directors, internal managers, quality improvement and nursing offices. Purposeful sampling continues (sampling in qualitative studies, till data reach saturation, that is during data analysis and the relation between categories new codes are extracted) and was conducted on people who had experience in participating strategic plan and writing strategic plans. Participants in this study include 2 hospital managers, 1 hospital head, 2 managers responsible of quality improvement, 1 matron, 1 manager responsible for supervision on treatment and 1 training supervisor (3 women and 5 men). After getting permission of authorities of hospital affiliated to Jahrom University of Medical Sciences (Peimanieh & Motahari) and by informing managers, directors, quality improvement authorities and supervisors and those who wished to participate in the study, they were invited through invitations including the study objective and request of participating in the study and request from participants for stating a time for doing interview. After determining the time, the scholar asked participants to study the consent form and sign it if they tend. Data collecting tool was interview and recording the participants' voice using reporting type recorder. The interviews were performed in time and place convenient for participants. Before interview, its primary guideline was prepared, and it helped the researcher for posing more questions for investigating the considered domain. Interview started by establishing relation and attracting trust of participants. At first, a question, like what is your opinion about strategic planning? was posed, then other questions will be asked based on interview guideline and participants response. Also, based on requirement, questions like could you explain more or what is your purpose may be used. At the end of interview participants were asked to express any explanation remained. Finally, after appreciation, they talked about possibility of next interviews. Interviews may be conducted in one or several turns regarding time and mood of participants, obtained information and participants' tendency. Time of each interview ranges between 30-45 minutes based on conditions and mood of participants. Interviews were recorded with permission of participants and then were written on paper. For information validity, data extraction and coding was performed by researcher and his colleagues separately. Each copy was read several times so that a sense of total content is obtained. Then important statements were put in bracket and coded. After that two researchers extracted statements and compared codes to reach agreement and then the results obtained were investigated by university expert professors. For reliability of data, besides making contact with study participants, the extracted codes were declared, and their views were noticed. Data analysis was performed using 7-stage method.

RESULTS

in the present study, totally 8 persons participated including hospital managers and directors, internal managers, quality improvement and nursing offices so that all had experience of working in strategic planning. In analyzing the interviews 80 codes were obtained that after omitting repeated and similar codes, 4 main themes included 12 categories and 24 subcategories which are shown in table 1

Main themes include: managerial inefficient structure, inefficient human resources, inappropriate infrastructures and inefficient policies

Managerial inefficient structure
Managerial inefficient structure is the first theme of this study. This theme includes categories of instability of informed managers, lack of systematic thought and insignificance of the plan.

Instability of managers
Most participants state that authorities' instability in their position and change of their rank causes any of them to be
informed of implementing the plan. As a result, when manager of the hospital are nor informed of the plan, the plan won't be implemented well.

Table 1. Main and secondary themes obtained in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subcategories</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fast change of management types</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instability of authorities in their position</td>
<td>Managers lack of stability</td>
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<td>Non-operation of plans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive and sufficient information</td>
<td>Lack of systemic thought</td>
<td>Managerial inefficient structure</td>
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<tr>
<td>Insignificance of plans</td>
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<td>Lack of ergogeneity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of previous plan</td>
<td>Insignificance of plan</td>
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<td>Not taking plans serious</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of skilled expert</td>
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<td>Untrained people</td>
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<td>Change of management</td>
<td>Lack of specialty</td>
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<td>Personnel motivation</td>
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Participant number 5 in this field state that the main problem is fast change of management types. By fast change of managers people are involved who has had any role in preparing strategic plans or are not inform of them or even doesn’t know what the strategic plan is. Especially in healthcare system and in hospitals where medical specialists become manager who are not aware of anything and don’t enter these affairs. Participant 7 in this regard says that in previous period, that we designed the strategic plan, authorities were involved and planned who were informed but unfortunately, they frequently change. We don’t have stability in the organization.

Lack of systematic thought
Participants state that people in the organization should have enough information of the strategic plan and also regular sessions should be held so that finally it is specified that which sections have been implemented and which haven’t.

Participant 5 in this regard told that unfortunately, for next years with change of the hospital manager, the individuals replaced who were not so aware of the issue and this issue didn’t progressed so much so that the plan predicted needs annual sessions to be held and an assessment should be implemented to see if during recent years which have passed from the plan life which sections have been implemented and which haven’t and what was the reason of these implementations and non-implementations to be able to proceed the plan which requires restoration every year.

Participant 6 states that when you come from bottom to top, you will surely find problems and the senior people should say this is our plan and the rest adjust the plans based the senior plans, not that the subordinates adjust the plan and seniors just confirm and this is among goals of the university too.

Lack of commitment and responsibility
Participants state that strategic plan was not endogenous, and authorities don’t take this plan seriously.

Participant 4 told in this regard that strategic plan was not an endogenous plan that is managers don’t have previous planning and don’t take it seriously.

Lack of safety of designing
Participants state that strategic plan was not endogenous, and authorities don’t take this plan seriously.

Participant 5 states that for performance improvement of strategic plan is the most important work that changing of managers is generally reduced and people who give opinion in the strategic plan are not expert individuals or those who have responsibility. Participant 8 states that in my opinion which are in strategic planning, are not in related academic degree which is one of reasons of insignificance of this theme in view of managers and another reason is training of personnel and key authorities and centers who don’t mind this section.

Lack of safety of designing
Participants believed that strategic plan is not implemented correctly and there is no supervision on it.

Participant 1: I think I declared that strategic planning is not implemented correctly, and it doesn’t remain stable.

Participant 6: when it is written, it is not administrative and there is no supervisor. There is no one to say this is our plan and the rest adjust the plans based the senior plans, not that the subordinates adjust the plan and seniors just confirm and this is among goals of the university too.

Plan insignificance
Participants state that strategic plan was not endogenous, and authorities don’t take this plan seriously.

Participant 4 told in this regard that strategic plan was not an endogenous plan that is managers don’t have previous planning and don’t take it seriously.

Lack of specialty
Some participants believe that experts don’t give opinion in this respect or are people not trained.

Participant 5 states that for performance improvement of strategic plan is the most important work that changing of managers is generally reduced and people who give opinion in the strategic plan are not expert individuals or those who have responsibility. Participant 8 states that in my opinion which are in strategic planning, are not in related academic degree which is one of reasons of insignificance of this theme in view of managers and another reason is training of personnel and key authorities and centers who don’t mind this section.

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Participant 1: I think I declared that strategic planning is not implemented correctly, and it doesn’t remain stable.

Participant 6: when it is written, it is not administrative and there is no supervisor. There is no one to say this was done or not and it was in 6-month plan or two-year one, these doesn't exist, it is in paper form and most people don’t have a general view, what happens if people don’t have enough information and general view in planning that strategic plan could change the organization.

Lack of sufficient monitoring
Among other cases introduced by participants is that suitable monitoring plan doesn’t exist.
Participant 5 said that: authorities, managers and hospital directors should be completely aware and ask me as a radiology manager that strategic plan framework we have written how much has been implemented? Have you been successful?

Sufficient budget

One of obstacles of implementing strategic plan was insufficient budget. Most participants stated that implementing this plan required sufficient budget so that the plan to be implemented.

Participant 5 states that some plans require as great cost. For example, in strategic plan of our previous revision I always thought that we could establish the chemotherapy department, but we really didn’t have enough budgets, Jahrom really need this department and our hospital has many grounds physically, we need the budget, no one accepts. But tanks God, the next year a benefactor was found and said I give the budget and you establish the chemotherapy section. Now the chemotherapy department was among our strategic plans which is implementing. Another thing is that if force and credit is not supplied, some plans are not implemented. It is required that senior organizations of medical sciences university and Ministry of Health supply them so that we can achieve the goals we have planned for them since 5 years ago.

Inefficient policies

Inefficient policies were the fourth theme of this study. This theme includes categories of acceptability, gap between theory and practice, selecting shortcuts in measurement and noticing documentation.

Lack of acceptability

Most participants state that lack of experience in management and planning, their being time consuming, difficulty of scheduling and lack of quality in the plan are among obstacles of implementing strategic plan. Intangibility of consequences reduced the plan acceptability.

Participant 2 stated that most of colleagues are treatment personnel and don’t have experience of management and planning. In the first stage, they were not informed of the strategic plan, so they didn’t feel any commitment. Besides that, due to being time consuming is not so acceptable.

Participant 3: we may not reach the determined goals in specified time. Some threats may be opportunity and some opportunity may be threats. Difficulty of secluding based on priorities may reduce their acceptability. Participant 4 stated that I saw this that there is no special priority for managers and as I said, they seek scores and ranks declared for them by higher levels and content and quality of work hasn’t been so important.

Gap between theory and practice

Participants say that among obstacles of strategic plan is non-implementation of plans, fast change of the organization instructions and plans boycotting.

Participant 2 says that losing the main goals in hierarchy of goals and regulations is important. Participant 6: authorities say it should remain in the paper and may be the instruction of the organization change very soon, maybe it is the reason that strategic planning couldn’t be used. Frequently, new instructions are sent from the ministry, so the plans are boycotted.

Selecting shortcuts in measurement

Some participants say that plan should move in a specified framework. If not so, it is not patient, and it moves away from the main objective and select shortcuts.

One of participants said that the organization should first have a strategic plan, not that it believes in words and writing that a plan exist and it should move in a framework, if it agrees that such a plan exist and moves in its margins, it will surely be successful, when a shortcut is selected, the main plan is lost. Participant 7 says that it takes a lot of time, an organization may not be patient and it like to reach goals soon and it get hurried and select a shortcut, when it does so, it won't reach its goals.

Attention to documentation

Obstacles of noticing documentation stated by participants mainly included the plan being forgotten by the managers, not giving agenda and not implementing plans. It seems that attention to authorities and its indicators and providing documents of consequences and traces of implementing the plan have been more noticed.

Participant 4 says that usually, documentations of strategic planning though written by managers may be forgotten and is not in agenda as files and records in electronic and physical drawer. Participant 5 states that it is not implemented and if it is implemented, it is not according to plans. If we write it should be implemented in that date, in the strategic plan they are not implemented and remain in paper.

DISCUSSION

Data analysis has shown that in the present study instability of authorities in their position and change of their rank causes transience of managers in their position. In the study of Soleimanian, existence of capable human resources seems necessary for preserving stability of the organizations and increasing their efficiency. For this reason, empowerment of human forces causes more efficiency that this shows that people should have sufficient time for implementing their plans. Lack of systemic thought as a factor which causes inefficient managerial structure was another result of the study, so that participants stated that people who are in the organization should have enough information of strategic plans and also regular sessions should be held so finally it is specified that which parts of strategic plan have been implemented and which not. In the study of Kas Oghlo et.al among major factors of implementing strategic plans have been mentioned as lack of sufficient information system, non-consensus among decision makers during codification, lack of appropriate relations in the organization, lack of appropriate coordination and lack of effective role during codification. In the Joe Seteh study, two factors of lack of accurate recognition and personnel awareness of their responsibilities in implementing plans and lack of accurate impartment of strategic plans to the organization have been introduced as the most important obstacles of implementing the plans. The last obstacle about managerial inefficient structure was insignificance of plans, so that participants claimed that strategic plans were not endogenous and authorities didn’t take this serious. From viewpoint of Alexander, the main factor which causes failure of strategic plans is lack of a suitable plan or framework for guiding managers or employees who are involved in strategic plan. Also, Akhavan in his study states that strategic plan should be coordinate with organizational plan and structure. Mojibi et.al stated that for success in implementing strategic plans there should be a coordination and proportion between guideline plans and organizational structures. The second them of qualitative data included inefficient human resources with two categories. Categories of this theme include lack of
specialty and commitment and responsibility of managers. Latif et al. in his study, has mentioned managerial commitment of senior managers as one of important obstacles in implementing strategic planning. Also, Cater & Puco have introduced weak leadership as the most important obstacle in implementing strategic plans. Delgoshae has introduced reluctance and non-commitment of managers as organizational constraint in keeping them as an important obstacle in implementing strategic plans. In the study of Doaei increasing their knowledge, skill and abilities to an acceptable level causes effective performing of duties. Nemati in his study has shown the role of financial and non-financial rewards in increasing motivation and access of more ability on behalf of his duties. Also, Fulmer in his study has shown that management of human resources plays an important role in effective implementation of strategic plans. As a result, having a motivational reward system will have a positive impact on strategic implementation. Lack of sufficient specialty and training and also enough responsibility were mentioned by some participants about obstacles of implementing strategic plan. The third theme was inappropriate infrastructure which includes categories of lack of safety in designing, lack of suitable monitoring and insufficient budget. One of results of Brance study was regarding non-implementation of strategic planning was related to lack of support of seniors in implementing plans. Farajpour & Nouronesa in their study important mentioned factors of strategies failure as insufficient resources, limitation of budget and time and activities which didn’t have strategic priority but had designated a great part of resources to themselves. In the study of Hang et al., limitation in financial resources, difficulties and restriction of managers and inefficient organizational structure are mentioned as obstacles of implementing strategic plans. Also, Rahimnia et al. in their study has mentioned inappropriate structure and inappropriate designation of resources, lack of suitable control system and weak and incomplete relation as factors of failure in implementing strategic plans. Brenes, Mena & Molina showed that organizational plan and structure are important since they include decisions relating to resources designation for various units and activities in business ecosystem. As a result, the need for a supervisor who can monitor financial management of strategic plans is felt. Inefficient infrastructures were the fourth theme of this study. This theme included categories of lack of acceptability, gap between theory and practice, selecting shortcuts in measurement and noticing documentation. About lack of acceptability of most participants mentioned lack of experience in management and planning, being time-consuming, difficulty of scheduling and lack of quality in plans as obstacles of implementing strategic plans. Ford-Eickhoff results indicate that present hospital processes don’t give the ability of access to guideline decisions to managers. If a plan are related to working processes, description of personnel duties and unites, the rate of success of their implementation will be more. In the study of Dean and Gosttscaik implementing the strategy is usually more complex and time-consuming than strategic management section, while strategy formulation has been known in the first degree as a mental and creative action which includes analysis and synthesis. This time consumption indicates lack of complete awareness of managers about strategic plans. Also, Herbiniak argues that strategy formulation is difficult but making strategy and implementing it is more difficult which has similar results with this study. In the category of gap between theory and practice, participants stated that fast change of the organization instructions and boycotting of plans is among factors preventing strategic plans implementation. Zaribaf & Bayrami in their study stated that most managers of the organizations take a great deal of energy and money for forming a strategy, but they don’t provide sufficient input for their correct implementation. As a result, these plans are not implemented. Cascella considers three main reasons for planning in the organization including: 1- lack of suitable relation in the organization level, 2- incorrect resources, 3- insufficient practical measurements in implementing managerial plans which are consistent with this study since plans are not accurately implemented. In selecting shortcuts for implementing plans, some participants stated that non-movement in specified framework, lack of patience and hurrying causes moving away from main objectives. Alexander in his study that many managers and leaders of the organizations disagree with models of implementing strategic plans, bewilderment of variety and elements mass and models process are considered effective in implementing strategic plans that it seems that this bewilderment and hurrying are the main reasons of failure in planning. About obstacles of noticing documentations, participants mentioned factors like forgetting plan by managers and lack of agenda in implementing plans. One of obstacles of strategic plans implementation in Joasteh study has been mentioned as lack of transfer of strategic plans to employees that this shows failure of managers in correct impartment of plans.

CONCLUSION

Findings of the present study due to experiences of managers and other factors involved in implementing strategic plan will provide a better perception of obstacles, opportunities and finally strategies of promoting this plan implementation which should be aware of obstacles and factors of failure of strategic decisions in hospitals so that in the time of implementing strategic management process could achieve optimal results with provide and better management or change of approaches.

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