

The Link between Strategic Sense-Making and Performance in Dubai Public Sector

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Abstract : Strategic management as an organizational practice was adopted by the public sector in the New Public Management (NPM) era that began in most parts of the world in the 1980s. Strategy as a new public management concept was subscribed by governments in both developed and developing world, as they were persuaded that clearly defined vision, mission and goals, as well as programs and projects - aligned with the goals - could potentially help achieve government vision at the national level and organizational goals at the service-delivery level. The advocates for strategic management in the public sector saw an inherent link between strategy and performance, claiming that the implementation of organizational strategy has an effect on the overall performance of an organization. Arguably, many government entities that have failed in enhancing team and individual performance had poorly-designed strategy or weak strategy implementation. Another key argument about low-level performance is linked with lack of strategic sense-making and orientation by middle managers in particular. Scholars maintain that employees at all levels need to understand strategic management plan in order to facilitate its implementation. Therefore, involving employees (particularly the middle managers) from the beginning potentially helps an organization avoid the drop in performance, and on the contrary would increase their commitment. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is well known for adopting public sector reform strategies and tools since the 1990s. This observation is contextually pertinent in the case of the Government of Dubai, which has provided a Strategy Execution Guide to all of its entities to achieve high level strategic success in service delivery. The Dubai public sector also adopts road maps for e-Government, Smart Dubai, Expo 2020, investment, environment, education, health and other sectors. Evidently, some of these strategies are bringing tangible (e.g. Smart Dubai transformation) results in a transformational manner. However, the amount of academic research and literature on the strategy process vis-à-vis staff performance in the Government of Dubai is limited. In this backdrop, this study examines how individual performance of public sector employees in Dubai is linked with their sense-making, engagement and orientation with strategy development and implementation processes. Based on a theoretical framework, this study will undertake a sample-based questionnaire survey amongst middle managers in Dubai public sector to (a) measure the level of engagement of middle managers in strategy development and implementation processes as perceived by them; (b) observe the organizational landscape in which role expectations are placed on middle managers; and (c) examine the impact of employee engagement in strategy development process and the conditions for role expectations on individual performance. The paper is expected to provide new insights on the interface between strategic sense-making and performance in order to contribute a better understanding of the current culture/practices of staff engagement in strategic management in the public sector of Dubai.

Keywords : employee performance, government of Dubai, middle managers, strategic sense-making

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