Information Management and Business Review (ISSN 2220-3796)
Vol. 9, No. 3, pp. 47-60, June 2017

# Strategic Management Practices: An Investigation of Public Sector Organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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**Abstract:** Several authors argued that strategic planning is limited and not producing the needed outcomes. In today's increasingly challenging environment, it is argued that public sector organizations are expected to shift from traditional strategic planning to the strategic management approach in order to achieve their desired outcomes. Previous research has focused almost upon developed, and not on developing countries, for instance, the Kingdom of Bahrain. This study will be the first of its kind to focus on strategic management practices based on the new strategy of Bahrain for 2030. Using quantitative survey method, this paper aims to explore the progress of the transition from strategic planning to the strategic management approach in the public sector of Bahrain, and then the paper explores the elements that are related to successful strategic management approach in these organizations. The findings reveal that the progress in the transition from strategic planning to a strategic management approach in most of the organizations surveyed was limited. However, some of the organizations were found to be at the start of such a transition and this may be a good sign. Additionally, the findings reported many leading edge elements that are closely related to this transition.

**Keywords:** *Strategic Planning, Strategic management, Leadership, Public Sector, Bahrain*

## 1. Introduction

Over than three decades, there has been a sustained interest from both academics and professionals in strategic planning in the public sector (Auka and Chepngeno, 2016; Stockwell and Casey, 2016). Strategic planning can be seen in the public sector in the form of noteworthy management innovations which benefit from a highly structured, future-oriented management technique imported from the best practices of the private sector (Aldehayyat and Al Khattab, 2013; Hendrick, 2003). However, the value of strategic planning and its use by the public sector in particular has been questioned by several authors (Borrozine and Rodrigues, 2016; Joyce, 2015; Lynch, 2015). Other critical authors argue that the strategic planning process is limited, too costly, time consuming and not necessarily capable of producing strategies that create the needed outcomes (Mintzberg, 2007; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Ofori and Atiogbe, 2012; Poister, 2010, 2013). In today's increasingly challenging environment, it is argued that public sector organizations are expected to shift from traditional strategic planning to the strategic management approach (Bianchi and Salvatore, 2015; Chaola et al., 2015; Poister, 2010). Strategic management is considered the most critical and fundamental process by which organizations may achieve their desired outcomes; however, very few governmental organizations have developed a fully-fledged and comprehensive strategic management process that seriously integrates all the management processes and major functions for advancing the strategic agenda (Plant, 2009; Poister, 2010; Stockwell and Casey, 2016).

**Study Objectives and Questions**: It is clear from the literature (Aldehayyat and Al Khattab, 2013; Dougherty, 2016; Elbanna, 2013) that that previous strategic management research has focused almost exclusively upon developed countries such as the USA and the UK, as well as some emerging economies such as China, and not on developing countries in the Arab world, for instance, the Kingdom of Bahrain. This gap in the knowledge provides the justification for the present study. This study will be the first of its kind as it is one of the first studies to focus on the public sector strategic management practices based on the new strategy of Bahrain for 2030. It is also important to note that the main objectives of the study proposed here is to explore the progress of the transition from strategic planning to the strategic management approach in the public sector of Bahrain, and then the paper explores the elements that are related to successful strategic management approach in these organizations. Moreover, the present research primary intended contribution is to help address the sparseness of empirical evidence on strategic management, so as to increase the ability of strategic planners to formulate, implement and evaluate better strategic plans in the future. Drawing upon the general literature of strategic management, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

***Question 1:*** *To what extent were public sector organizations broadening their strategic planning efforts into a strategic management approach?*
***Question 2:*** *What elements are related to the transition from strategic planning to strategic management?*

With respect to the generalizability issue, Brouthers et al. (2000) said that several scholars have suggested that managerial attitudes, values, behaviors, and efficacy differ across national cultures, thus organizational information need to be gathered and interpreted differently. And since the sample populations in the present research are mostly middle managers coming from the same national culture and country, hence, the produced findings of researched governmental organizations might be generalized to other governmental organizations in Bahrain.

## 2. Literature Review

**Planning and Strategic Management: the Theoretical Debate:** It is worth noting that many studies (Hendrick, 2003; Janaki et al., 2012; Kabir, 2007) report that strategic planning started in the private sector with descriptive analyses of strategies and the formulation of strategies and their environment. It is also worth noting that for more than 30 years, strategic planning was introduced in the public sector with more emphasis on local government organizations (Elbanna, 2013; Nurmandi and Purnomo, 2011). Additionally, according to Nurmandi and Purnomo (2011), the strategic planning process in the public sector has evolved over the past few years on the basis of approaches developed by such authors as Bryson (1995), Nutt and Backoff (1992), and Koteen (1989). These approaches chiefly assess internal strengths and weaknesses, analyze external opportunities and challenges, clarify missions and values, vision development, the development of strategic goals and objectives, the development and evaluation of alternative strategies and the creation of action plans. Public sector organizations aim to help nations to meet their objectives, solve their problems and improve the quality of people's lives. The obligation of public sector organizations, which serves as a general guide for their actions, is to promote citizens' interests and values. It is worth noting that public value is created through producing policies, projects and programs, services and infrastructures at a reasonable cost. However, there is little consensus on ways for public sector organizations to produce these things or how they might succeed (Shahin, 2011; Kerlinová and Tomášková, 2014).

Joyce (2015) claimed that the public sector needs to adopt effective strategies to achieve its strategic and operational objectives. He added that decision makers are expected to put more effort into the preparation of plans and strategies that would enable public sector organizations to choose strategic alternatives for coping with today' dynamic changes in the environment. Moreover, Joyce claimed that top management is also expected to collect and update data on a regular basis and to work to formulate effective strategies. Joyce also argued that public sector organizations play an important role in the development process in the community, thus attention and work are called for to improve their organizational performance by using modern management methods, including strategic management, to achieve their goals and to properly adapt to change. Strategic management, according to Joyce, is considered a tool for determining the direction of an organization and its long-term objectives through the formulation of strategies that help its goals and objectives to be attained. With this in mind, the theoretical debate in terms of strategic planning and strategic management may be set out as follows. Strategic planning helps organizations to think carefully and systemically in achieving objectives; to develop effective strategies, proper decision-making processes, better performance, clear goals, increase satisfaction among employees; to effectively anticipate future problems and opportunities, and how to link vision to reality ( Borrozine and Rodrigues, 2016; Dougherty, 2016; Porter, 2008). Strategic planning defined in Bouhali (2015: 74) as;
*"A road map to lead an organization from where it is now to where it would like to be in five or ten years".*

In terms of strategic management, several authors ( Agwu and Awele, 2015; Meyer, 2016; Yongjin, 2013) considered strategic management as the most critical and fundamental process for public sector organizations in achieving their desired outcomes. *Strategic management* defined by David (2011: 6) as;
*"The art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions that enable an organization to achieve its objectives".*

There is a vigorous theoretical debate in the literature about the relationship between strategic planning and strategic management, since it seems that the two terms have at times been used interchangeably (Jelenc, 2009; Kabir, 2007). Strategic planning, to distinguish it, is concerned with formulating strategy and with the future direction of the organization (Hacker et al., 2001; Poister, 2010). The purpose of strategic planning in the long term is to regularly enhance and promote strategic thinking, acting and learning (Poister, 2010). Strategic planning encourages people to think of the consequences, analyze objectives, objectively assess values and priorities and identify needed actions, by such means ensuring organizational effectiveness and vitality which add value in the public mind (Bryson, 2014). Strategic management, however, is considered an earlier stage of determining the organization's mission and goals within its own external and internal context (Bryson, 2014). Strategic management contains the process of creating strategic plans and the activities needed to achieve defined goals and objectives (Hacker et al., 2001). The main aim of strategic management is to further the goals of an organization in three stages, namely, strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation (Agwu and Awele, 2015; Qamar et al., 2013; Ofori and Atiogbe, 2012). Kabir (2007) argued that strategic planning and strategic management are not the same, as strategic planning is considered one of the important elements of strategic management, beside strategic formulation and strategic implementation. Strategic formulation precedes strategic planning and strategic planning precedes strategic implementation; however, strategic planning and strategic implementation may overlap and this may lead to debate and confusion. Moreover, strategic planning is considered a key aspect of strategic management that ensures the integration of the organizational goals, policies and actions, thus developing a range of strategies that help organizations to re-align their future direction (Bryson et al., 2014; Poister, 2010). The next decade according to several authors (Plant, 2009; Poister, 2010) requires governments to shift from traditional strategic planning to the strategic management approach. Moreover, strategic management according to those others requires skilled and powerful leadership to ensure a proper fit between the organization and its internal and external environment. Strategic management needs an intensive, collective, and continuous involvement of public leaders, thus, public sector organizations will be more citizen focused, decentralized, collaborative and results-oriented (Plant, 2009; Poister, 2010).

**Overview of the Kingdom of Bahrain and its Public Sector:** Bahrain, a name which means "Two Seas", is a Muslim country, and has been ruled as a constitutional monarchy by the Sunni ruler, Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa, since 2002. The total population of Bahrain is 1.4 million. Arabic is the primary language, and the Bahraini Dinar is the major currency. Bahrain is 717 sq km in area and its capital is Manama. Bahrain was one of the first states to discover oil in the Gulf. As Shown in Figure 1, Bahrain pioneered oil production in the Middle East in 1932 and established the initial framework for the petroleum industry mainly in the Gulf region (Oxford Business Group, 2016). Even so, Bahrain has never reached the oil production level enjoyed by Kuwait or Saudi Arabia (United Nations 2016). According to the Arab World Competitiveness Report 2013 published by the World Economic Forum and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the Kingdom of Bahrain over the last decade has conducted economic and social reforms. Because of the highly competitive environment regionally and globally and the declining oil reserves, however, the government of Bahrain is about to face many challenges (Azmi, 2013; Oxford Business Group, 2016). Nowadays, the Government of Bahrain is aiming to gradually shift its focus to generating sound and forward-looking policies in critical areas, such as the economy and finance, health care, education, the environment, security and social justice. It aims also to enlarge its international experience by reducing costs, increasing the quality of public service by outsourcing certain non-core government tasks, building strong strategic operations and implementation-focused capabilities, actively seeking partnerships with the private sector, establishing effective and efficient regulations, reducing the dependence on oil revenues, and forging world-class infrastructure links to the global. The country Bahrain now finds itself at a defining moment when its future prosperity depends on whether it can change significantly on many levels in order to keep pace with the world (Azmi, 2013; BBC News, 2015; Oxford Business Group, 2016).

**Figure (1): Bahrain Map – Source: World Atlas**




## 3. Methodology

This study is based on a descriptive design adopting the survey method in a form of cross-sectional research as more appropriate strategy comparison with other research strategies because it would help the researcher to examine the relationships between the variables and to suggest and produce a model of these relationships (Saunders et al., 2009; Yin, 2008). In this study, **270** questionnaires were collected from **32** governmental organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The sample population in this research came from low and high-ranking officials in governmental organizations in Bahrain. The range of officials included top management, departmental managers, lower level employees, and internal experts. Probability sampling was used in the quantitative data collection with a questionnaire as the survey instrument. In this research, the quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software. The researcher followed all the necessary ethical procedures and processes to protect respondents' private information and responses.

## 4. Findings and Discussion

It should be noted that descriptive statistics were adopted to analyze the data by calculating the mean and standard deviation for each survey item; correlation analysis was used to explore the strategic management elements that were likely to be related to the transition from strategic planning to strategic management approach. The finding and discussion section is divided into two parts: part one exploring the transition from strategic planning to strategic management approach, and part two is exploring the related elements to the transition. The two parts are discussed below.

**Part one: Transition to Strategic Management Approach**

This part one seeks to discuss and answer the first study question:

***Question 1:*** *To what extent were public sector organizations broadening their strategic planning efforts into a strategic management approach?*

In order to answer the above study question one, the findings of the three stages of strategic management will be discussed as follows.

**Strategic Plan formulation stage:** Based on the findings of the strategic plan formulation stage in the current study, it should be reported that the achievement level of proper strategic plan formulation within the organizations under scrutiny is 36.71%, as shown in below Table 1.

**Table 1: Proper Strategic Planning Development**

| No | Factor | Achievement (%) | Level |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Developing Clear Organizational Vision | 54.44% | |
| 2 | Developing Clear Organizational Mission | 59.26% | |
| 3 | Developing Clear Organizational Values | 50% | |
| 4 | Lower-ranking staff Involvement | 28.14% | |
| 5 | Internal Consultants' Involvement | 23.33% | |
| 6 | External Consultants' Involvement | 38.50% | |
| 7 | External Stakeholder Involvement | 16.29% | |
| 8 | Private Sector Involvement | 50% | |
| 9 | Developing Clear Strategic Objectives | 44% | |
| 10 | Developing Clear Operational Objectives | 45% | |
| 11 | Developing Clear Performance Indicators | 42.22% | |
| 12 | Prioritizing Performance Indicators | 28.14% | |
| 13 | Structured Process Formulation | 28.51% | |
| 14 | Developing Units' Operational Plans | 41.12% | |
| 15 | Aligning Fixed Budget to Operational Objectives | 34.08% | |
| 16 | Developing New Income Generation Plans | 20% | |
| 17 | Securing Financial Resources | 27.74% | |
| 18 | Allocating needed Resources | 29.62% | |
| 19 | Providing Adequate Technology | 37.04% | |
| | **Average** | **36.71%** | |

It is clear from these above findings about the strategic plan development stage that the participants in the present research did not fully agree that the strategic plan formulation process benefited their organization. It is also clear that part of these organizations lacked a clear vision, mission statement and values. Moreover, the internal and external stakeholders were not or partially involved in developing the strategic vision of the organizations under research. Within those organizations, there was also a weak prioritization planning to be linked with the vision. Additionally, the researched organizations have developed a weak alignment between departmental operational plans and the strategic plan and have not properly secured the needed financial and technological resources for its strategic planning process. It is worth noting that having a clear organizational vision means having a clear picture of the organization in the future that would help employees to see where the organization is heading (Joyce, 2015). Clear vision serves as a focal point to all employees that include the activities to be pursued and the capabilities to be developed. Sharing clear vision throughout all units of the organization would create enthusiasm, emotions and excitement among employees and inspire them to be engaged effectively in the strategic planning process. Moreover, a clear mission statement would identify the organizational purpose in order to satisfy the current and potential needs in the organization's core competencies and capabilities (Poister, 2013). If the researched organizations do not have a clear mission, the employees do not properly focus on the nature and purpose of the organization. Top management also finds it difficult to guide day-to-day operations. Additionally, the values and the beliefs that guide the organization are considered the foundation for attaining its goals and objectives. As an essential part as strategic development, clear organizational values help top management to influence the behavior and the attitude of the staff and enhance the organization's reputation.

It is worth saying that successful strategic management approaches require all the components in the process as an integrated system to be reviewed in a comprehensive and holistic strategic management framework based on developing a strategic vision involving internal and external audiences (Plant, 2009). It is also

important to reflect that little trouble is generally taken in governmental organizations in Bahrain to ensure the participation of lower ranking employees at the level of overall strategic management, least of all at the plan formulation stage. This omission lowers the employees' understanding of business and does little to ensure their commitment, ownership or willingness to attain the organization's goals and objectives, thus, failing to improve the working environment and to secure good implementation in practice. It is also important to say that having unclear strategic and operational objectives and unclear performance indicators with unclear prioritized performance indicators, will lead employees to work on all objectives and initiatives without understanding which ones are the most important to senior management (Poister, 2010). With the above findings in mind, this will result in all objectives being covered in part, but in the completion of none.

It is also worth noting that budgeting is central to organizational operations since each department and unit in the organization must submit its operational plan for approval, including its annual financial budget (Kabir, 2007). Moreover, it seems from the findings that top management has no clear plan to reflect changing strategic priorities. This creates a gap between the strategic management process and the allocation of financial resources through the budgeting process. It may be said that a proper join between the strategic management process and budgeting would improve the organization's effectiveness and move the organization closer to fulfilling its strategic and operational objectives. Additionally, the findings show that top management was not securing enough technological resources to enhance its internal and external communications. As a result, top management would have difficulty in measuring and assessing individuals and organizational performance. It would also face some challenges in evaluating the feasibility of proposed strategies. It is important to keep in mind that tracking the progress of the implementation of strategic and operational objectives over time through adequate technology and reporting would ensure that the needed resources were in place to achieve these objectives.

**Strategic Plan Implementation Stage:** Based on the findings of the strategic plan implementation stage, it should be noted that the average achievement level of proper strategic planning implementation within the organizations under scrutiny is 28.38 %, as shown in below Table 2.

**Table 2: Proper Strategic planning Implementation**

| No | Factor | Achievement Level (%) | No | Factor | Achievement Level (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Internal Communication | 28.50% | **16** | Middle Management Support | 27.74% |
| **2** | Cooperation between Groups | 20.74% | **17** | Rewards Systems | 33.34% |
| **3** | Cooperation between Departments | 36.67% | **18** | Organizational Structure | 21.11% |
| **4** | Internally Cascading Strategic Plan | 23.34% | **19** | Strategic Objectives Implementation | 20% |
| **5** | Cooperation with Key Stakeholders | 50.37% | **20** | Operational Objectives Implementation | 26.29% |
| **6** | External Communication with Public | 38.52% | **21** | Enough Staff for Implementation | 25.55% |
| **7** | Adequate Strategic Planning Training | 18.89% | **22** | Competition between Activities | 24.44% |
| **8** | Middle Management Skills | 26.66% | **23** | Time given for Implementation | 23.70% |
| **9** | Lower-ranking staff Knowledge | 15.92% | **24** | Control over Implementation | 18.52% |
| **10** | Lower-ranking staff's Duties | 21.48% | **25** | Lower-ranking staff's Commitment to Objectives | 29.63% |
| **11** | Understanding Strategic Planning | 24.41% | **26** | Lower-ranking staff Commitment to Vision | 28.89% |
| **12** | Integration | 34.08% | **27** | Middle Management Commitment to Vision | 37.78% |
| **13** | Vision Alignment | 30.40% | **28** | Top Management Commitment to Vision | 41.11% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **14** | Decision Making Linkage | 29.63% | **29** | Results Oriented Top Management | 40.37% |
| **15** | Top Management Support | 24.82% | | | |
| | **Average** | | | | **28.38%** |

Based on the above findings of the strategic implementation stage in the researched organizations, it is worth noting that successful strategic plan implementation involves designing an appropriate organizational structure, ensuring that the right divisional and functional managers are supported by the right backgrounds and skills (Poister, 2010). To ensure a proper strategy implementation process, organizations are recommended to analyze their organizational structure, organizational culture, power and conflicts. Moreover, successful implementation requires managers to have the right policies, allocate the needed resources and receive up-to-date information that facilitates learning. In addition, effective communication is one of the most important items in that examined which items are responsible for the successful implementation of strategic plans. These are the items that should properly explain the duties, tasks and new responsibilities devolving on employees (Plant, 2006). Communication and understanding shared by all employees is a crucial aspect of the process of strategy implementation; hence, top management expected to ensure that all the information concerning strategic plans is at the disposal of all the employees (Plant, 2009). Moreover, governmental organizations need to focus on ways of improving their ability and on the methods they have to adopt to successfully implement new initiatives, services and strategies at both the business unit and corporate level (Ofori and Atiogbe, 2012).

To attain the targeted strategic objectives, the entire staffs of an organization are expected to be involved. Therefore, for the successful implementation of strategies, the lower level managers and non-management employees need to be adequately informed of the facts and issues regarding the implementation of strategies. Otherwise, a lack of consensus on the information affects several management levels and this creates barriers to the successful implementing of the strategic plan. Moreover, while strategy formulation is relatively easy, strategy implementation throughout an organization is more difficult (Poister, 2010). Although organizations may have formulated the best strategic plans, they may fail to achieve the desired outcomes because of improper strategy implementation. Thus, poor strategy implementation might be blamed for a number of strategic problems and failures, a fact which is confirmed in the findings of the quantitative analysis of most of the investigated governmental organizations in Bahrain currently under study.

**Strategic Plan Evaluation Stage:** The findings of the strategic planning evaluation stage as shown in below Table 3 reported that the average achievement level of proper strategic planning evaluation within the organizations under scrutiny is 26.83%.

**Table 3: Proper Strategic Planning Evaluation**

| No | Factor | Achievement Level (%) |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Linking Strategic Planning with Performance Management | 20% |
| 2 | Reviewing Performance Data | 25.19% |
| 3 | Monitoring Organizational Performance | 25.07% |
| 4 | Monitoring External and Internal Trends | 24.47% |
| 5 | Linking Implementation with Individuals' Performance | 24.08% |
| 6 | Sharing Organizational Performance with the Public | 15.55% |
| 7 | Frequent Strategic Planning Evaluation | 18.15% |
| 8 | Lower Level Staff Evaluation | 28.51% |
| 9 | Middle Management Evaluation | 28.52% |
| 10 | Solid Reporting System | 27.78% |
| 11 | Current Services Important | 57.78% |
| | **Average** | **26.83%** |

Regarding to the strategic plan evaluation stage, it seems from the findings that top managers in these organizations were not properly helping employees to provide a definition of service excellence and not adequately setting suitable indicators that would quantify whether their organizations have fulfilled this

strategic objective. The findings also suggest that top management was not properly encouraging feedback mechanisms that would capture information from the front-line employees of the service divisions closest to the client in order to measure progress and improvement. The increasing pressure on governments to deliver high quality services with limited resources requires these organizations to establish an adequate performance measurement system, so as to ensure a solid link between the higher-level decision making and the operational service providers (Poister, 2010). Moreover, front-line employees have to play a critical role in this performance measurement system by being properly involved in developing performance measures for their service delivery process.

To anticipate future challenges and to work effectively in uncertain situations in the coming decade, public sector organizations need to shift their performance measurement process to something more comprehensive (Plant, 2006; Poister, 2010). To ensure this, public sector organizations are required to link strategic planning more closely with performance management processes, to improve decision making and performance as a most important purpose of measurement and to report on their performance. Moreover, for performance management to be effective and to improve performance, public organizations need to use the information produced by the measurement system and link it to the centralized performance systems at the levels of both managers and employees. Additionally, the top management of public organizations needs to set and negotiate the desired targets and results for employees in their performance appraisal systems. More generally, top managers are expected to review the performance data on a regular basis and develop plans as needed for corrective actions. At the same time, public sector organizations need to develop their strategic plans on the basis of the generated performance information that helps to measure and report progress toward the strategic goals and objectives and to consistently communicate performance information to a wide range of external stakeholders. Thus, if their performance management is to be meaningful, public sector organizations are recommended to consider the performance management process at all the levels of an organization's level as the rule and not the exception and to ensure ongoing improvement in the performance of public programs (Poister, 2010). This is not found in most of Bahrain's public sector organizations surveyed in the present research.

It is important to note that, based on the above findings of the present study, the transition process from traditional strategic planning to strategic management approach within the organizations under scrutiny is limited in all strategic management stages; strategic development, strategic implementation and strategic evaluation. While strategic management is considered the most critical and fundamental process by which public sector organizations may achieve their desired outcomes, most of the public sector organizations in Bahrain in the present research are not considered among the governmental organizations that have developed a fully-fledged strategic management process that properly integrates all the management processes and major functions for advancing the strategic agenda. Most of these governmental organizations are in addition not fully concerned to develop an effective capacity for the strategic management approach.

However, the limited transition that has been observed may be a good sign that some of the governmental organizations under review are beginning to shift from traditional strategic planning practices to the strategic management approach. It is important that public sector organizations need to address the critical task of shifting from strategic planning to a view of strategic management. This task consists of clarifying strategy and translating a broad vision into more operational terms; elaborating strategies in greater detail; assessing the implications of strategic mandates; revising budgets; and developing a control system with standard operating procedures. The transition from strategic planning to the concept of strategic management is essential if governmental organizations are to focus on the most appropriate objectives and to manage effectively to attain their objectives. Moreover, shifting to strategic management requires strong leadership to surmount bureaucratic and cultural barriers and guide public sector organizations in a purposeful direction to the future. Such strong leadership involves personal commitment from managers, to act as organizational entrepreneurs, make a dynamic fit between the organization and its environment, manage performance effectively, welcome opportunities to manage for change and more importantly contribute to strategic development and implementation as the normal way of doing business in their sector. With this in mind, one of the findings of the present research was that most of the participants did not consider the top managers of their organizations to be role models of strong and inspired leadership. Most participants believed that the members of their top management team were not using strategic planning to drive their decision-making

process and they did not welcome the chance to report their own performance. In addition, most participants believed that their top management was not modifying organizational structure, organizational culture, or human resources regulations to support the implementation of the current strategic planning. In other words, most participants believed that their top management was not playing an important role to ensure that strategy was translated into action.

Strategic management approach enables top management to identify and monitor suitable performance measures to ensure the proper implementation of strategic initiatives and proper achievement of strategic goals and objectives. Then they recommended assessing the performance data frequently to make modifications and to keep implementation on the desired track. They asked also to align budgets with strategic priorities and allocate resources to fund new strategic initiatives. However, most of the top managers in governmental organizations in Bahrain in the present research did none of these things. Additionally, those top managers were not linking the implementation of organizational goals and objectives with performance appraisal of individuals and did not reward them in proportion to their contributions to advancing the strategy as far as possible. These top managers were not promoting the vision of their organizations or cascading the strategic plan internally to ensure proper commitment throughout the organization. Furthermore, most of the top managers were not committed to managing for results in order to shift their organizations from strategic planning to strategic management. The top managers of their organization, according to most participants, were not ensuring that each unit within the organization had its own strategic plan within the framework of the organization's overall strategic agenda. Neither was top managers insisting that action plans for implementing strategic initiatives should be developed to ensure that they were fulfilled to the end. Top management needs a separate strategy to drive decisions and actions in order to advance the strategic planning process more effectively. Top management need to monitor the internal and external environment and gather information from a range of sources, sensing how values might be changed to ensure effective strategic management.

Additionally, top management is believed to continuously monitor external trends as well as internal performance and then revise strategy if needed. Shifting from strategic planning to strategic management requires more collaboration with key external stakeholders to gather their valuable input. External stakeholders need to be invited to join the strategic planning development process so as to gain their support when moving strategic plans forward and to ensure that the results of strategic planning reflect its own substantive objectives as far as possible. Thus, top management need to buy in external stakeholders to ensure that the results of strategic planning reflect their organization's own substantive objectives as well as they can. Moreover, top management advised to assess and accommodate their organizational opponents to minimize their threats to the strategic planning implementation. Additionally, top managers in public sector organizations need to update strategic plans and advance present priorities more effectively in order to survive in a changing and accelerating situation that might lead the organization to refocus its entire mission, move in new directions and substantially modify priorities. But in most of the governmental organizations investigated in Bahrain they do not do this. This is to the first study question; that, in the present study, the progress of the transition by most public sector organizations in Bahrain, from traditional strategic planning to strategic management approach level is limited.

**Part two: Elements Related to Strategic Management Approach**

This part two considers the second study question:
***Question 2:*** *What elements are related to the transition from strategic planning to strategic management?*
Strategic management aims to ensure that strategy is effectively implemented and continually encourages strategic thinking, learning and action. Based on that, management levers such as operational budgets and other management and administrative mechanisms, need to work hard to implement strategic initiatives, to advance the strategic agenda of the organization and to move it deliberately to the future (Plant, 2009; Poister, 2010). In this case, since a transition from strategic planning to the approach of strategic management is essential for governmental organizations if they are to focus on the most appropriate objectives and to manage effectively to achieve these objectives (Poister, 2010), this part two discusses in some detail the strength of the relationship between the proper implementation of strategic and operational objectives and the other important strategic planning variables that help to achieve those objectives properly.

It is hoped thus to discuss those variables that are closely related to the transition from strategic planning to strategic management. Such leading edge variables might help governmental organizations to strive for the more comprehensive strategic management approach. It should be noted that these variables need not necessarily be interpreted as the most fundamental requirements of an effective transition from strategic planning to strategic management, they should rather be viewed as leading edge elements that help the successful path to attaining the strategic and operational objectives of the government's strategic plan, leading governmental organizations to successfully shift from traditional strategic planning to this preferable approach.

Generally speaking, based on the findings of the present research, most of the participants put the following variables at the top of their list for the successful transition from traditional strategic planning to the strategic management approach, although they appreciate other related variables. As shown in below Table 4, the variables that are closely related to this transition are inspired and strong leadership, commitment to vision among the top management, links between the top management decisions and vision, top management commitment to managing for results, top management support, middle management commitment to vision, proper middle management skills, integration between processes, structures, resources and people, cooperation between formulation and implementation groups, adequate training for strategic planning, understanding the planning process and proper implementation and linking strategic planning with performance management. It is particularly worth noting that these variables are expected to increase the satisfaction level in the governmental organizations under scrutiny. This is because linking top management decisions to strategic planning and providing the needed support from inspired and strong leaders to governmental staffs will secure producing positive outcomes and long-term growth; and sustain competitive advantage. Moreover, strategic implementation to be effective and to increase the satisfaction level, leaders need to ensure that governmental staffs are using planning manuals and have the needed strategic planning knowledge and skills before and during the implementations stage.

Additionally, to implement organizational objectives, especially operational ones and also to enhance the satisfaction level, leaders are expected to ensure having adequate cooperation and coordination between formulation and implementation groups as an effective tool to strategic management. The satisfaction level would be also enhanced factors when leaders review the organizational performance continuously to ensure providing the needed resources and making the right corrections to achieve the agreed outcomes of the plan. Moreover, linking implementation with performance management will provide employees clear idea regarding their duties and responsibilities, hence, having clear idea about their role in the implementation of the organizational objectives. This will lead to fare rewards and compensation that will enhance staffs' motivation and commitment. However, and as shown in Table 4, the findings indicated that there is a very weak negative relation between gender and both strategic and operational objectives. This reflects the fact that the organizations in question provide equal opportunities and roles in achieving organizational objectives for their male and female employees. The findings also make it clear that there is a very weak negative relation between organizational size and the strategic and operational objectives. This reflects the fact that the implementation of organizational objectives is independent of the size of the organization. This finding on the one hand contradicts the literature; many authors have argued that larger organizations plan more than smaller ones do because they have more resources and more capacity to recognize environmental change; thus, they are more likely to achieve their organizational objectives. On the other hand, this finding is supported in the literature, since smaller organizations with smaller staff tend to have a more effective process of internal communication and greater opportunity to involve their employees in the development of their strategic and operational objectives, thus increasing their commitment to achieving these objectives.

The findings moreover show that there is a very weak negative relation between managerial level and working experience of both strategic and operational objectives. This is true only if the researched organizations make greater efforts to develop and train the staff to engage in strategic planning development, implementation and evaluation. This is also true if these organizations enhance the communication and cooperation between staff, teams and department. It might be assumed from this finding that the participants in the present research would provide the needed efforts to achieve the strategic and operational objectives if they were equipped with sufficient strategic planning knowledge and skills, despite their lack of experience and whatever their positions in the organizational hierarchy. Moreover, the findings interestingly reported

that there is a weak positive relation between both strategic and operational objectives and the importance of strategic planning by middle management and lower-ranking staff. This finding contradicts the argument that the more the employees appreciate the strategic planning, the more their loyalty and buy-in to implementing the plan. However, it seems from the findings that the participants in the present research would effectively participate in attaining the strategic and operational objectives despite their own low importance in strategic planning. This result may be due to personal factors such as self appraisal, or cultural factors such as patriotism. Whatever the source, this result may open a window to future researchers interested in studying this surprising phenomenon.

**Table 4: Related Variables to Strategic Management**

| No | Variable | Proper Strategic Objectives Implementation | | Proper Operational Objectives Implementation | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Pearson Correlation | p-value Sig. (2-tailed) | Pearson Correlation | p-value Sig. (2-tailed) |
| 1 | Inspired and Strong Leadership | .545** | .000 | .513** | .000 |
| 2 | Top management commitment to vision | .555** | .000 | .537** | .000 |
| 3 | Top management decisions linked with Vision | .595** | .000 | .570** | .000 |
| 4 | Top management is committed for managing for results | .592** | .000 | .571** | .000 |
| 5 | Top Management Support | .569** | .000 | .562** | .000 |
| 6 | Middle management commitment to vision | .577** | .000 | .612** | .000 |
| 7 | Proper Middle Management Skills | .576** | .000 | .551** | .000 |
| 8 | integration between processes, structures, resources and people | .555** | .000 | .517** | .000 |
| 9 | Effective Cooperation between Groups | .557** | .000 | .518** | .000 |
| 10 | Adequate Strategic Planning Training | .583** | .000 | .509** | .000 |
| 11 | Understanding Strategic Planning Process | .597** | .000 | .556** | .000 |
| 12 | Linking Strategic Planning with Performance Management | .566** | .000 | .537** | .000 |
| 13 | Gender | -.065** | .000 | -.102** | .000 |
| 14 | Organization Size | -.080** | .198 | -.078** | .200 |
| 15 | Managerial Level | -.083** | .000 | -.084** | .000 |
| 16 | Working Experience | -.071** | .000 | -.020** | .000 |
| 17 | Importance of Strategic Planning by middle management | .284** | .000 | .287** | .000 |
| 18 | Importance of Strategic Planning by lower-ranking staff | .236** | .000 | .243** | .000 |
| 19 | Internal consultants involvement | .405** | .000 | .344** | .000 |
| 20 | External consultants involvement | .350** | .000 | .372** | .000 |
| 21 | Private sector involvement | .334** | .000 | .311** | .000 |
| 22 | External public involvement | .243** | .000 | .263** | .000 |
| 23 | Enough Staff for Implementation | .289** | .000 | .241** | .000 |
| 24 | Lower-ranking staff Commitment to vision | .279** | .000 | .264** | .000 |
| 25 | Adequate financial resources | .283** | .000 | .252** | .000 |
| 26 | Adequate reward systems | .162** | .000 | .174** | .000 |

The findings also reported that there is a weak positive relation between both strategic and operational objectives and variables such as the involvement of internal and external consultants, the private sector and the external public in effective external communication. Although these variables were appreciated in the literature as successful variables for implementing organizational objectives, it could be argued that the participants in the present research feel that these variables are not as important as other variables, such as top and middle management support, adequate training and adequate performance management systems. It could also be argued that participants prefer not to have highly involved external stakeholders, so as to reduce their influence and control over the implementation. This view is also supported by several authors in the literature, who recommend not involving the external public, or partially involving it in the processes of strategic planning and implementation. The findings moreover suggest that there is a weak positive relation between both strategic and operational objectives and variables such as enough staff for implementation and lower-ranking staff' being committed to vision. Although these variables were addressed in the literature as important drivers for the successful implementation of objectives, it can be assumed that participants were not addressing them as top requirements; other variables such as lower-ranking staff' involvement in formulating objectives and lower-ranking staff' commitment to achieving those objectives seemed more important. If this is the case, top management would meet with resistance from lower-ranking staff to the achievement of organizational objectives, if they were not fully aware of the vision or not involved in developing it. Moreover, it seems from the findings that participants would effectively try to fulfill the organizational objectives even there were not enough of them to do so adequately. This result might reflect the fact that participants have no problem working under intense pressure. It is worth saying that top management need to consider this as one of the key success factors in implementing strategic management decisions.

Interestingly, the findings additionally reported that there is a weak positive relation between both strategic and operational objectives and the availability of adequate financial resources. Securing fixed budget for each activity and imitative would help organizations to properly fulfill their strategic and operational objectives. This is found in the literature, for budgeting is considered a cornerstone of the successful implementation of strategic management. However, it can be assumed from the findings that participants were not considering the availability of financial resources as a serious challenge and they are committed to achieving objectives even with limited financial resources. More interestingly, the findings also reported that there is a very weak positive relation between both strategic and operational objectives and the availability of adequate reward systems. It is worth noting that, as confirmed in the literature, developing an adequate reward system would enhance the motivation and loyalty of employees to successfully achieve both the strategic and the operational objectives of their organization. Nonetheless, it seems from the findings that most participants in the current research would provide the requisite efforts to achieve their objectives even under weak reward systems. Such a result might be due to cultural or personal motives and also suggests a worthwhile avenue for future research.

## 5. Conclusion

If public sector organizations want success in the coming decade, they will have to anticipate new challenges and problems, effectively respond to them, think strategically and manage for results. The next decade requires public sector organizations to shift from traditional strategic planning to more strategic management approach. The present study revealed that the average amount of progress in the transition from strategic planning to strategic management approach in most of the organizations surveyed was limited, in that most of the top managers were not committed to managing for results, and they played no critical role in shifting their organizations from strategic planning to strategic management. However, some of the organizations were found to be at the start of such a transition and this may be a good sign. The present study reported that many strategic planning variables are closely related to this transition. Such variables should be viewed as leading edge elements that help to successfully implement the strategic and operational objectives of governmental strategic planning, thus helping these organizations to successfully apply the strategic management approach. To complete this move, it would be interesting in future research to study the transition from performance measurement to performance management, and to study the integration of strategy and performance management in public sector organizations. This paper claims to be innovative because in the literature so far, no study has been conducted in the field of strategic management public sector in Bahrain based on the new

strategy of Bahrain for 2030. Moreover, the present paper primary intended contribution is to help address the sparseness of empirical evidence on strategic planning and management, so as to increase the ability of strategic planners to formulate and implement better strategic plans in the future.

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