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THE FORMATION OF STRATEGY

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ABSTRACT: *The formation of strategy has been described to stem from detailed rational-planning, the theory of planned strategy suggest that strategy always originates from formal plans and specific intentions, designed and articulated by the firm's central leadership, supported by official controls in order to ensure a predictable or a controllable business environment. This paper review the submissions of leading critics who have categorised strategy into three (3), intended, emergent and realised strategies. Intended strategy is created at top management level, emergent strategy points to the decisions that emanate from the intricate processes in the firm and realised strategy is the actual strategy which is implemented, and only partly associated with the intended strategy from top management. Thus, as a result of global competition, organisations are forced to make dynamic decisions in order to strategically realign themselves within the business environment. The break-through of IKEA and WAL-MART were discoursed. These two organisations have become sensations around the world, however the intended strategy was not the major reason for their huge success. Arguments presented suggest that strategy is developed through adaptation, as well as adjustment to varied conditions. Therefore, the paper concluded that: since strategy is a process which involves continuous adaptation and adjustment to the changing environment, then it is unrealistic for it to be detailed and follow a rational process.*

KEYWORDS: Strategy, Rational-Planning, Intended Strategy, Realised Strategy, Emergent Strategy, Global Competition, Strategically Realign.

INTRODUCTION

Kiechel (2010) points out that judging from hundreds of thousands of management books on the subject, 'the strategy'; it is a topic of great interest to firms. Even so, the significance of strategy in its average meaning goes beyond business; for instance, a health institution requires a working strategy in order to fight an epidemic, and a central bank must have an effective strategy so as to deal with a financial crisis. According to Van den Steen (2013), a functional definition as regards what strategy does should capture the idea that strategy is the basis of a potentially adaptive and flexible planned course of action; and that it should provide each decision maker with necessary guidance to ensure consistency across a variety of decisions, both at a point in time or over time. This fits with the definition of the strategy put forth by Mintzberg (1987a), that is, a plan of action intended to attain a long-term aim. However, Hofer and Schendel (1978) and Akhter (2015) conceptualise strategy as the matching of the competencies of an organisation with the risks, changes, as well as opportunities brought about by internal or external environmental changes. Considering that there are a variety of changes that organisations will face during their lifetime (Naghibi and Baban, 2011), a strategy cannot always develop from detailed rational planning. For instance, at times, firms have to deal with internal problems such as human resource crisis, or external issues such as advancement in technology. For that reason, strategic changes are likely to affect top to the bottom of the organisations in general (Naghibi and Baban, 2011). This is supported by Hofer and Schendel's

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(1978) definition of strategic change, that is, alterations in the contents of the strategy of a company as outlined by its resource distributions, scope, synergy and competitive advantages. In other words, strategic change involves various means of changing a firm's vision, as well as objectives so as to realise greater success (Hofer and Schendel, 1978). However, several firms fail to implement their strategy and the plan correctly and adequately. Accordingly, this paper uses relevant theories, concepts, as well as examples to critically discuss the statement: 'Strategy should only ever develop from detailed rational planning'.

STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC THINKING

Gavetti and Levinthal (2004), claimed that the significance of strategy, together with strategic thinking has risen considerably as a result of competitive advancements in the global marketplace. As such, managers are not expected to make strategic decisions without having a thorough knowledge of the firm's internal weaknesses and strengths, as well as external threats and opportunities (Cummings and Daellenbach, 2009). In addition, Whipp (2015) points out that given the intensity of global competition, there is mounting pressure on managers to know what their strategic goals and objectives are, as well as what measures they should carry out in order to achieve them. This is because, in the present-day highly competitive business environment, right decisions are able to improve a firm's competitive position, together with the growth potential, whereas wrong decisions threaten the survival of the business (Grant, 2016). The proposition that strategy need to only ever stem from comprehensive rational planning is backed by Teece's (2010) general theory of strategy, that is, the theory of planned strategies, which alludes to the fact that strategy always originates from formal plans and specific intentions designed and articulated by the firm's central leadership, supported by official controls in order to ensure a predictable or a controllable business environment.

However, Henry Mintzberg, one of the leading critics of rational approaches to designing strategy differentiates intended, emergent and realised strategies (Ibrahim, 2015; Rumelt, 2012; Whittington, 2012). To be specific, intended strategy alludes to strategy, as that which is envisioned by a firm's top management team. Accordingly, intended strategy, as alleged by Liedtka (2000) and Ibrahim (2015), is less an outcome of rational deliberation and more a product of compromise, bargaining and negotiation amongst the several people, as well as groups participating in the process. However, according to Mintzberg (1985), a realised strategy, that is, the actual strategy which is effected, is only partly associated with that which was intended. On the other side, emergent strategy points to the decisions that emanate from the intricate processes in which individual managers in a firm define as the intended strategy and adapt it to the shifting external conditions (Ibrahim, 2015; Rumelt, 2012; Whittington, 2012). Therefore, as viewed through Mintzberg (1987a) and Kim and Mauborgne (2004), not only is rational and detailed approach an imprecise account as regards how strategies should be developed, it is a deficient manner of formulating a strategy. To support the above-mentioned point, Tichy (1983) and Whitley (1990) point out that success in dynamic situations calls for a strategic realignment which is likely to be fuelled by changes in technical, political, human resource, economic or cultural systems. In addition, Huff (2001) states that a variety of business researchers are convinced that innovative firms are those that have strategies which are in general, attributed to changing needs of consumers, shifting skills and schemes of competitors, and the unpredictable attitude of the community. Therefore, the idea that strategy must only ever emanate from detailed rational planning is far contrary to the intricacies of

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operating a firm on a daily basis, and as such, is one of the greatest fallacies of established strategic management (Cummings, 2007; Hoskisson *et al.*, 1999; Mintzberg, 1994b).

De Wit and Meyer (2010) and Chaffee (1985) insist that most strategy analysis concepts encourage the perspective that strategy is the outcome of managers in various firms engaging in deliberate, detailed and rational analysis. However, according to Christensen and Overdorf (2000), strategy has been proved to also develop through adaptation to a variety of circumstances. In line with the above-mentioned point, Akhter (2015) presents the case of Wal-Mart to show how the formulation of market-relevant strategies, together with the detailed understanding of the market are crucial for attaining success. To be precise, when Wal-Mart began operations in Arkansas 1962, its strategy was aimed at price-conscious consumer segments, providing them with an assortment of name-brand products and services at huge discounts, in a scheme dubbed the EDLP (everyday low prices) (Walton, 2012). Moreover, the firm set up own warehouses, invested heavily in information technology and purchased stock in large quantities, and hence, always kept store shelves fully stocked. Accordingly, Wal-Mart carried out these activities in order to gain a cost advantage. As a result, Wal-Mart's strategy to focus on retailing, as well as being determined to improve financial and marketing metrics is working globally, and as such, became the largest retailer in the entire world (Akhter, 2015). However, according to Walton (2012), the winning strategy of Wal-Mart which is established on large store formats, employee motivation, small-town locations and hub-and-spoke distribution was not as a result of grand design but stemmed from a sequence of 'historical business accidents'.

Thus, Rezvani, Dehkordi and Shamsollahi (2012), Liedtka (2000) and Slack (2015) emphasise that businesses across the globe are operating in an environment characterised with the speed of change, and as such, in order to make profits, they are being forced to implement strategic changes, and also to adjust, as well as adapt to the new business conditions. Accordingly, as noted by Murray and Grimsley (1994), if strategy happens to be a process which involves constant adaptation to changing circumstances and conditions, then it is hard for it to be detailed and follow a rational process. Besides, adapting to the changes in the environment (either internal or external to the firm) is one of the crucial aspects of strategic planning (Langley, 1988; McKiernan, 1997; Mintzberg, 1994a). As a case in point, Daunfeldt *et al.,* (2017) point out that IKEA, the Swedish furniture store which currently has more than three hundred and fifty company-owned stores in fifty-two nations across the globe and a work force of more than one hundred and sixty-five individuals, has a business model which is established on a set of mutually reinforcing practices that enable the company to achieve a hybrid strategy of attaining low cost, while at the same time maintaining a clear point of differentiation. In addition, Nagabhushan, Vasudha and Venkatesh (2006) state that at the centre of the success of IKEA is a value scheme that has hardly changed since its inception. Even so, Daunfeldt *et al.*, (2017) claim that IKEA's existing business model developed from a series of accidental, unforeseen and unexpected events over a number of years. Also, Jonsson and Foss (2011) assert that while the international growth strategy of IKEA has always been harnessed for steady, cautious, organic growth, this has not been a smooth process at all times. For instance, the company was forced to rethink and redesign most of its goods when it spread its business to the market of the United States of America in the 1980s (Moon, 2004). For that reason, it is apparent that IKEA's entrepreneurial engagement from the beginning did not develop from detailed rational planning nor through clearly defined plans, goals, objectives and positions but instead, developed as a design of adaptive responses to a sequence of unexpected and unforeseen events (Johansson, 2013). Furthermore, Nagabhushan, *et al.*, (2006) and Moon (2004) point out that the unique

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combination of the vision of the founder of IKEA, that is, Kamprad, together with the firm's organisational culture he established, made it possible for the company to capitalise on a variety of 'lucky breaks' in order to set up a global brand and a matchless business model which IKEA operates in all its stores around the world.

Therefore, Cummings (2007) states that the developing approaches to the formulation of strategy allow adaptation, as well as learning via constant relations between strategy making and strategy execution. In this process, the strategy is continuously being revised and adjusted in light of experience. Thus, as viewed through Gavetti and Levinthal (2004), it is unrealistic to hold on to the view that strategy should need to arise from detailed rational planning. This is because practically, the formulation of strategy almost usually includes the amalgamation of decentralised adaptation and centrally driven rational design (Mintzberg, 1987b). All the same, Lewins' change model is one of the well-known strategic change management tools, which offers a general structure that monitors a variety of thoughts concerning the change in an organisation. To be specific, Lewins' change model consists of three phases namely unfreezing, changing, and refreezing. Lewin (1947) explains that unfreezing refers to when individuals agree to the change, which is perceived as necessary in order to deal with the prevailing circumstances that are seen as inadequate. Changing denotes the realignment of traditional work norms with the intention of meeting new needs, whereas refreezing points to insisting that the necessary changes are completed, and as such, the new manners of behaving have become stabilised (Lewin, 1947). Therefore, taking into consideration the fact that Lewins' change model is famous and widely used by a variety of organisations across the entire world, it is evident that numerous firms are confronted with disruptive processes and circumstances that are forcing businesses to adapt to the industry changes, so as to continue being competitive and not to lose out completely. For that reason, it is clear that strategy does not at all times develop from detailed rational planning (Lonsdale, 2016).

Furthermore, since Henry Mintzberg's early contributions to the subject of strategy, a huge amount of literature on the planned change theory has developed, and these include strategies to triumph over resistance to change in organisations, together with those related to the process of establishing change in various firms (Bennis, Benne, and Chin, 1969). However, Kumar (2016) alleges that the challenge for the present-day's managers in various organisations around the world is applying, as well as incorporating effective management of change into the overall organisational strategy, which is likely to be altered at any moment, depending on various circumstances, both inside and outside of the firm. This is because effective management of strategic change is crucial for firms since it determines whether a company will remain competitive in the long term. Hence, given that businesses must handle the necessary strategic changes with speed and effectiveness (Arnaboldi and Azzone, 2005), and that changes can occur in an organisation at any moment, it is evident that strategy does not always develop from detailed rational planning. On the other side, Chamberlin (1933) together with his contemporaries, for instance, Robinson (1933) argue that competition in a variety of industries usually takes place between businesses with dissimilar, though possibly overlapping, characteristics, as well as resources. A number of these asset and resource differences might permit certain companies to put into effect strategies that change the structure of an industry in manners that uniquely profit these firms. As such, heterogeneity has the capacity to represent a crucial source of competitive advantage for businesses (Demsetz, 1973; Barney, 1986). Accordingly, Chamberlin (1933) mentions that some of the major differences between companies that are capable of leading to differences in the performance of businesses include technical know-how, brand awareness, effective strategic change management, and the

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capability of managers in a firm to work together effectively. However, according to Rezvani, *et al.*, (2012), the management of strategic change is a complex matter and numerous firms are facing difficulties regarding the best way to handle it. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned points reveal that it is impracticable for a strategy to only ever develop from detailed rational planning.

Baldwin, Cave and Lodge (2012) and Liedtka (2000), maintained that the design aspect of strategy consists of a variety of organisational procedures through which strategy can be discussed, deliberated and decided. To be specific, in larger firms, these processes could comprise board meetings, as well as a formalised method of strategic planning, which may be complemented with more comprehensive participative events or functions, for instance, strategy workshops (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). Accordingly, a strategy can be continuously enacted via decisions that are put forth by members of the firm, including the middle management labour force. As a result, the decentralised, bottom-up strategy emergence might, in the end, result in a more formalised strategy making (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). As an illustration, to explain the above-stated points, the historic decision by Intel to forsake memory chips and focus on microprocessors was prompted by incremental decisions which were taken by plant managers, as well as business unit managers that were afterwards endorsed and introduced by top management into strategy (Burgelman and Grove, 1996). Similarly, the successful entry of Honda into the United States of America motorcycle market presented a central battlefield between individuals who regarded the development of strategy as chiefly a rational, systematic procedure of considered and detailed planning, and persons who viewed strategy as developing from an intricate organisational decision-making process (Pascale, 1984).

All the same, the Boston Consulting Group applauded Honda Company for its determined quest for a global strategy based on taking advantage of economies of scale, as well as learning to prove indisputable cost leadership (Boston Consulting Group, 1975). However, according to Pascale (1984), following interviews with the managers of Honda, in charge of the United States of America market entry, revealed a different narrative. That is, the random and unsystematic entry into the US market had lacked a clear plan and had little analysis. Therefore, as viewed through Mintzberg (1987c), wonderful as Honda's strategy may seem to appear, the managers of the company made just about every imaginable mistake until the United States of America market opened up to the firm. Fittingly, this Honda story agrees with Grant's (2003) proposition that strategic planning usually combines emergence and design in a process he calls 'planned emergence'. However, the balance between emergence and design relies greatly on the predictability, as well as the stability of the business environment of the company (Grant, 2003). Therefore, as the business environment turns out to be less predictable and ever more turbulent, so is strategy formulation, a process which is continuously becoming less concerned with guidelines, including specific decisions (Gavetti, Levinthal and Rivkin, 2005; Mintzberg, 1985); and hence, the strategy does not entirely emerge from detailed rational planning.

Nonetheless, Barney (1986) alleges that amongst strategic practitioners, as well as theorists, the significance of joining Chamberlinian analyses of company individuality with 10 analyses of industry structure when to decide on strategies is broadly approved. In addition, the extensively applied WOTS-UP analysis (weakness, opportunities, threats, and strengths underlying planning), as well as SWOT analysis to strategic management are some of the examples of a combination of different conceptions of competition (Thompson and Strickland, 1980; Weihrich, 1982). Moreover, even those strategy theorists, as well as strategic

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practitioners who concentrate almost entirely on industry structure as regards strategic choice agree to the fact that the analysis of a company's unique assets and skills has the capability to play a crucial role in the formulation of strategy. To back this point, Porter (1980), argues that companies across the globe are likely to each possess unique strengths, as well as weaknesses when it comes to handling industry structure, which has the potential to change gradually after a while. Additionally, Porter (1980) insists that understanding the structure of the industry should be strategic analysis' starting point. Furthermore, Barney (1986) states that the idea of a strategic group also has been proved to have significant effects, as well as meaning within a Chamberlinian model. In other words, even though Chamberlin starts with the supposition that companies always control, as well as manage distinctive assortments of assets, resources, together with capabilities, he also observes that these assortments are likely to intersect, and hence, some businesses might choose to follow similar strategies (Barney, 1986). According to Caves and Porter (1977), companies that have such overlapping abilities, as well as similar strategies can be regarded as strategic groups. Therefore, for Chamberlin, organisations hardly ever benefit from a state of clear monopoly whereby they exclusively manage a set of valued assets.

Similarly, Baldwin, *et al.*, (2012) and De Wit and Meyer (2010) state that the four vital components of an effective strategy are reorganised into two groups namely the environment of the industry, and company, with strategy creating a connection between the two. Moreover, Gavetti, *et al.*, (2005) pointed out that an organisation represents three sets of the elements namely values, goals and objectives (that is, consistent and simple long-term goals and objectives), the needed capabilities, as well as resources (that is, objective appraisal of the firm's resources) and systems and structure (that is, effectual implementation). On the other side, the environment of the industry (that is, deep understanding or thorough knowledge of the competitive environment) stands for the core of the external environment of the company, and is defined by the relationships or networks of the firm (Gavetti, *et al.*, 2005). Accordingly, all the above-mentioned elements are critical in the development of strategy. However, given that they are not static but can change or be altered at any moment, it shows clearly that strategy does not always develop from detailed rational planning. Besides, as stated by Rezvani, *et al.*, (2012), structure, together with control systems are the most vital aspects of strategy. Accordingly, it has been discovered that most of the time top managers in various firms are likely to adjust strategy even though assumptions and performance may stay the same as before (Pfeifer, Schmitt, and Voigt, 2005).

CONCLUSION

Furthermore, it has been noted that there are some suggestions that strategy needs to only ever stem from comprehensive rational planning. However, it has also been argued that strategy has been demonstrated to develop through adaptation, as well as adjustment to varied conditions. In addition, it has also been shown that firms around the world operating in an environment characterised with the speed of change, and in order to be competitive and make profits, these businesses are being forced to implement strategic changes. Therefore, given that strategy is a process which involves continuous adaptation and adjustment to the changing environment, then it is unrealistic for it to be detailed and follow a rational process. Besides, not only is the rational and detailed approach to strategy formulation an inaccurate and unclear account regarding how strategy needs to be developed, it is a defective and poor manner of establishing a strategy. Also, as discussed, a variety of business scholars are persuaded that innovative

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corporations are those that have strategies which are generally attributed to shifting needs of consumers, ever-changing schemes of rivals, and the unpredictable attitude of the society. Hence, as the business environment becomes less predictable and ever more turbulent, so is strategy making. In addition, it has been argued that strategy is less as a result of rational deliberation and more a product of compromise, bargaining and negotiation among a variety of individuals. Therefore, the argument that strategy must only ever develop from a detailed rational planning conflicts with the complexities of operating a business on a daily basis, and hence, it can be described as a huge misconceptions of conventional strategic management.

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