

Development of an Integrated Perspective on Strategy Implementation

Som Sekhar Bhattacharyya

Strategy initiatives consisted of two major components namely Strategy Planning (SP) and Strategy Implementation (SI). Good firm performance can be achieved because of both good SP and SI. Extant literature has been rich in the advocacy of the need for good SI. However, an integrated perspective on SI has been missing. In this work, the author, based upon contributions from a varied base of extant literature in strategic management (especially on resource based view, dynamic capabilities, industrial organization perspective and stakeholder theory, amongst others) arrived at an integrated perspective on SI. This was carried out through theoretical argumentations by the author based upon the extant theoretical assumptions, axioms and assertions.

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Introduction

Thoughts on strategy has been as old as human thoughts on business are (Freedman, 2015). It often stemmed from military perspectives where the overwhelming notion was about winning (Kay, McKiernan, Faulkner & Campbell, 2003). In business parlance, strategic management has been deliberating upon the mechanisms towards attainment of Competitive Advantage (CA) (Barney & Hesterly, 2009). CA could be achieved upon two contexts namely, organizational (Miles, Snow, Meyer & Coleman Jr, 1978; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990) or economic (Williamson, 1991; Hansen & Wernerfelt, 1989). The Resource Based View (RBV) theorists had advocated that possession of valuable, rare, in-imitable and non-substitutable resources and capabilities led to CA (Barney, 2001). Such resources and capabilities possessed by firms helped them to secure a higher level of customers Willingness To Pay (WTP) (Hanemann, 1991; Wertenbroch & Skiera, 2002) relative to the associated Opportunity Cost (OC) incurred by them (Buchanan, 1991; Spiller, 2011). The former is grounded in the organizational perspective the latter being the economic

perspective (Hansen & Wernerfelt, 1989). This is in turn based upon the industrial organization perspective (Rumelt, 1991). The work of Porter (1980;1985) had deliberated that CA could be achieved better by three generic strategies namely a firm being the lowest cost producer (thus offering the lowest cost to customers), by charging higher price to customers (because of differentiation) or by focusing on a niche segment in product and services offerings made by the firm. Porter (1980; 1985) had also talked about the concept of dual advantage (that is achieving both low cost as well as differentiation simultaneously). It was Mauborgne & Kim (2005) who anchored this extant literature as Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS). Thus, firm strategy ultimately led to superior firm performance and apart from the classing measures of performance (emphasizing financial and economic perspectives) like stock price appreciation (for listed firms) profit by sales ratio appreciation and such others (Snow & Hrebiniak, 1980; Richard, Devinney, Yip & Johnson, 2009). There were more holistic performance evaluation measures developed (Steers, 1975; Maltz, Shenhar & Reilly, 2003). These were by Kalpan and Norton (1996; 2001a; 2001b; 2006) and they evaluated firm performance in terms of market superiority, financial gains, organizational processes and learning. One could argue that strategy planning led to superior firm performance however, there was an existential element in between namely Strategy Implementation (SI) (Hrebiniak, 2006; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000). SI deliberated upon the mechanism and process constructed to convert the strategic plans

into activities and finally the proper execution of these action initiatives into superior firm performance (Noble, 1999; Atkinson, 2006; Neilson, Martin & Powers, 2008; Higgins, 2005). One could note the equation:

$$\text{Firm Performance} = \text{Strategy Planning (SP)} \times \text{Strategy Implementation (SI)}$$

One must remember that performance was multiplication of SP and SI. If there was poor SI, then performance suffered irrespective of the strength of the robust SP (Miller, 1997; Higgins, 2005). Strategy planning has been increasingly becoming dynamic (Dibrell, Down & Bull, 2007; Andersen, 2004), yet strategy implementation had always been real time (Govindarajan, 1988). Thus, strategy implementation became challenging as SP had been classically static relative to SI (MacLennan, 2010; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004).

Importance of Broad & Industry Environment in SP & SI

Inbetween the journey from SP to SI, many change factors played roles. These are like broad environmental (Bourgeois III, 1980; Miller & Friesen, 1983) and industry levers (Rumelt, 1991). Broad environmental levers consisted of technological changes, macro- economic, regulatory changes and change in customer preferences (Miller & Friesen, 1983; Bourgeois III, 1980; Ho, 2014). Industry analysis entails Porter's five force factors including bargaining power changes and new entry (Porter, 2008). All these changes transpired over a pe-

riod of time as t these levers changed value sometimes at breakneck speed but sometimes at snail's pace. When these

levers altered fast it became imperative that firm SI adapted quickly. This has been depicted in Fig.1.

Fig. 1 Environmental & Industry Levers

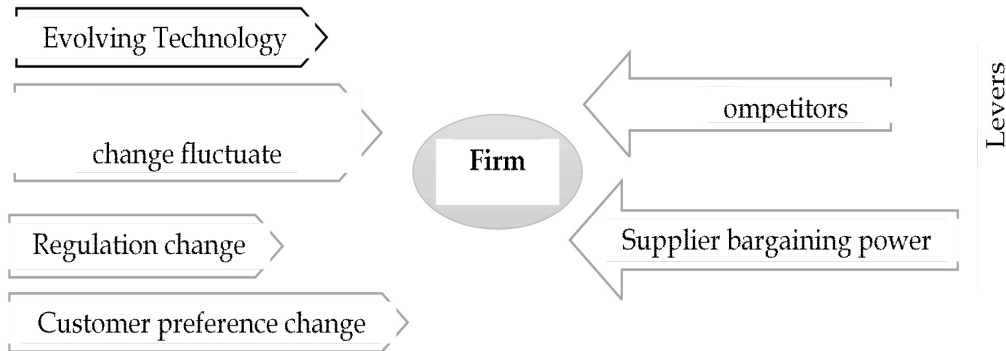
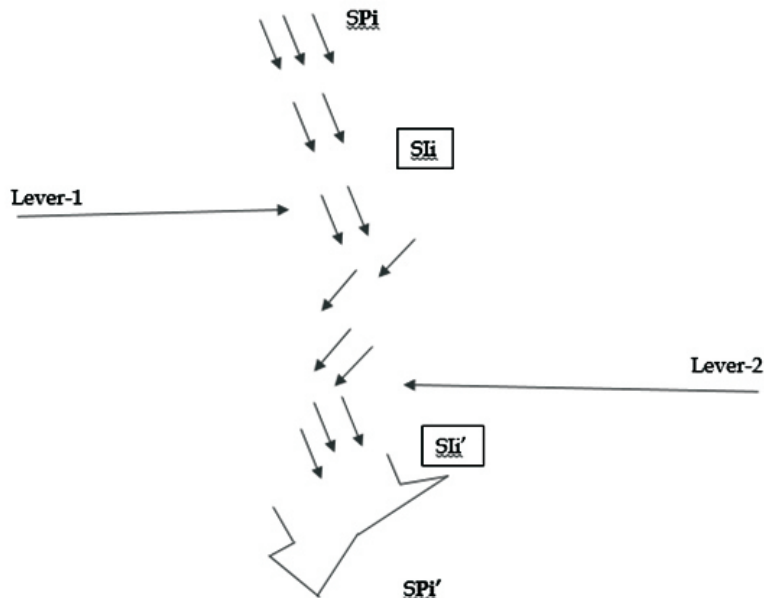


Fig. 2 depicts the grand plan of strategy SP as being made up of small units of strategy Pi and it got affected by the

business environmental levers as discussed and depicted in Fig.1 (Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984; Hitt, Ireland & Stadter, 1982).

Fig. 2 Strategic Planning & Strategic Implementation Responding to Levers



New Paradigm on SP & SI

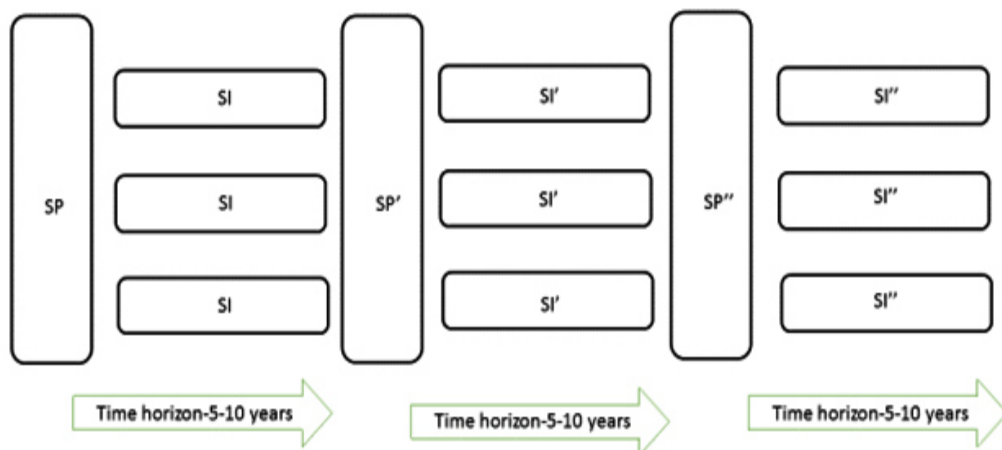
As mentioned earlier, in classical SM literature SP and SI were two separate functions with SP preceding SI but in the present-day world SP and SI needed to be moving in tandem (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992). This was because in a dynamic world the environmental and industrial levers act continuously, and this entailed that SP adjusted continuously (Andersen, 2004), which in turn also required that SI also altered and adapted

In a dynamic world the environmental and industrial levers act continuously, and this entailed that SP adjusted continuously.

continuously (Noble, 1999). It was important to note that the levers (environmental and industrial) both mediated and moderated the stages between SP and SI (Dibrell, Down & Bull, 2007). SP necessitated that SI created a set of initiatives that are carried out over a period of time (Noble, 1999; Andersen, 2004). One must note that SP initiatives were undertaken as a plan, as a rational intended course of action prior to roll out of SI interventions (Andersen, 2000). SI interventions and initiatives in turn were composed of a set of activities (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2005). The classical model of SP and SI has been depicted in Fig. 3.

The new perspective on SP and SI has been depicted in Fig. 4.

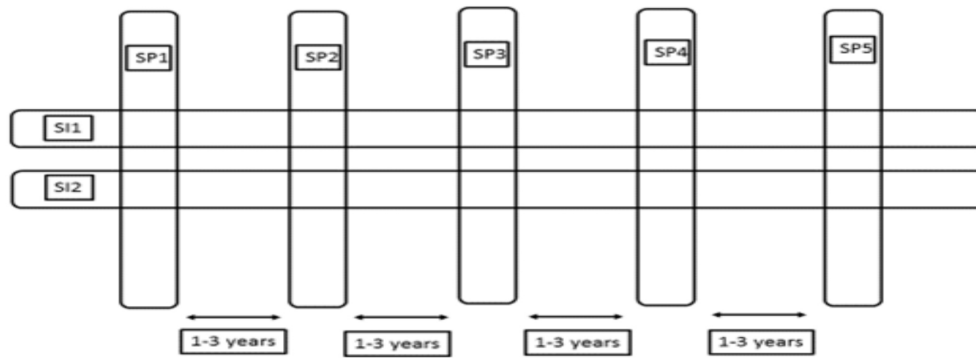
Fig. 3 Classical Sp & SI Paradigm



As mentioned, in the past firms undertook SP as an event towards planning for the next 5-7-10 years. Post defining SP, the firm management would roll out SI (Fig. 3) while in the present-day con-

text as indicated in Fig. 4, SP and SI are simultaneous interwoven actions. For SP to be a successful, culture has been the glue that cohesively motivated and ushered employees to work toward the set

Fig. 4 Modern SP & SI Paradigm



objectives through an array of SI initiatives (Barney, 1986; Smircich, 1983). Thus, increasingly strategic management has been seen as process or tapestry interwoven with SP and SI (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). The more a firm management was connected to its customer, supplier, and kept abreast with technological and regulatory realities the faster the firm was able to make an adjustment (Ramaswamy, 2009a; 2009b). This was even true for social community interactions (Bhattacharyya, 2010; 2012). The faster SP_i changed to SP_i' the faster SI could be adjusted to SI_i'. Thus, it was important for firms to monitor these levers (Simons, 1994). The stimuli coming from the lever had to be captured and converted into information that could be used for decision making and course correction (Lyles & Thomas, 1988). Often these stimuli had non-linear repercussion. Thus, there would be a requirement of pace injection from information to action transforming from SP to SI. The second major challenge in SI was organizational culture (Barney, 1986; Smircich, 1983). Coffman & Sorensen, (2013) Inayatullah (2015) wrote that culture ate strategy for

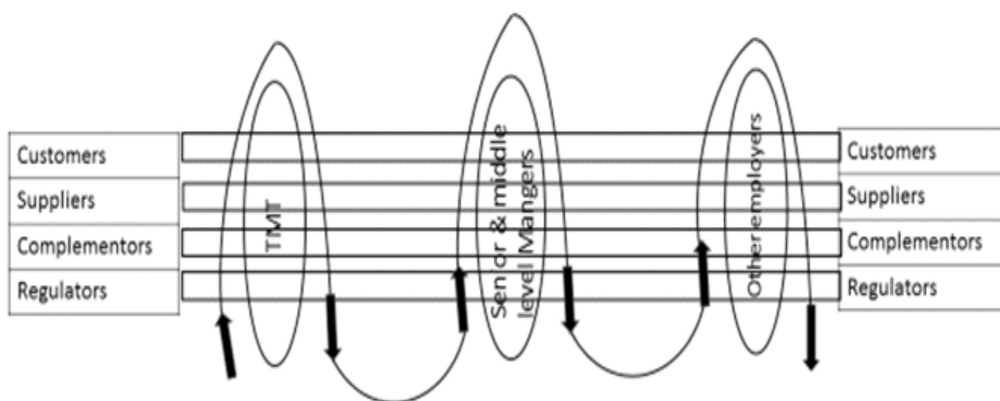
Culture has been the key element in the success of mission and vision.

breakfast. One could argue that breakfast was more suitable than lunch with SI as culture for SI was so important time till lunch was too much. All firm activities were carried out finally by human resource (Wright, McMahan & McWilliams, 1994). Organizations achieved superior performance when employees of a firm were motivated, conducive organizational culture prevailed, employee commitment to perform was high (Becker & Gerhart, 1996; Delaney & Huselid, 1996). Culture has been the key element in success of mission and vision. Firm goals did not materialize if sense of mission (Campbell & Yeung, 1991; Campbell, 1989) was absent or the strategic intent (Hamel & Prahalad, 2005; Mantere, & Sillince, 2007) was lacking (Pearce II, 1982; Baetz & Bart, 1996). Thus, for good SP to translate into superior firm performance, cultural synchronization must enable SI. Thus, SI required that strategy been seen as

a series of solenoid interactions. In these interactions a firm strategy team not only interacted with internal stakeholder (other departmental and functional managers and front-line staff) but also with external stakeholders (like customers, suppliers, regulators and such others)

(Ramaswamy, 2009a; 2009b). This has been specially so for emerging economies like India (Bhattacharyya & Shaik, 2009). This would help a firm to make quick SP adjustments so that SI was not far from reality. This has been depicted in Fig. 5.

Fig. 5 Solenoid of SI



A solenoid was conceptualized for the organization because it represent an entangled interaction of strategy team with internal and external stakeholders (Bhattacharyya, 2019). These interactions could be brief or detailed, informal to formal or are in groups or in one to one basis. Sull, (2007) and Sull Homkes & Sull (2015) had talked about this strategy a work in progress.

Factors for Successful SI

To implement strategy, it has been a key that whatever was the SP (depicted by Mission to Vision statements) it must be communicated clearly to the employees (sometimes even to customers to suppliers) so as to be in the process for creating or co-creating value

(Ramaswamy, 2009a; 2009b). The works of Steyn (2004) and Foreman & Argenti (2005) had indicated that the planned strategy needed to be communicated to the relevant stakeholders properly. The communication needed to be crystal clear and such that the recipients should be able to visualize the planned strategy (Foreman & Argenti, 2005). Thus, the first tent was that planned strategy should be brief and simple (Mauborgne & Kim, 2005). The moment strategy planned became voluminous and complex it could not be communicated easily and this in turn would

The planned strategy needed to be communicated to the relevant stakeholders properly.

make comprehension of strategy difficult for most stakeholders and its translation into practice challenging (Steyn, 2004; Mauborgne & Kim, 2005). Organizational culture as mentioned has been of paramount importance for a firm (Barney, 1986; Smircich, 1983). Further, more than Mission & Vision statements, a sense of Mission was important (Campbell & Yeung, 1991; Campbell, 1989). Employees' individual commitment (especially the leaders') towards the organization has been another critical element for good strategy implementation (Rashid, Sambasivan & Johari, 2003; Kohtamäki, Kraus, Mäkelä & Rönkkö, 2012). Organizational commitment (O'Driscoll & Randall, 1999) can be enhanced by giving employees voice and empowerment regarding what they do (Wilkinson & Fay, 2011; Honold, 1997; Menon, 2001). Since, employees are doing task for an organization it becomes important that they are allowed to be creative and contributing. The author argued that SP was more like potential energy which has been based upon the strength of the firms' balance sheet whereas SI has been like kinetic energy. The action which translated the potential energy into work and got reflected in the profit and loss account. SI was thus reflective of true state of affairs of a firm. As a metaphor, like wheels moved a vehicle similar are SI and SP. The author has thus conceptualized strategy implementation as a wheel. Thus, it would be important to comprehend conceptually the axel rods of the wheel that would move the SI wheel to translate SP into superior organizational performance. These have been shown in Table 1.

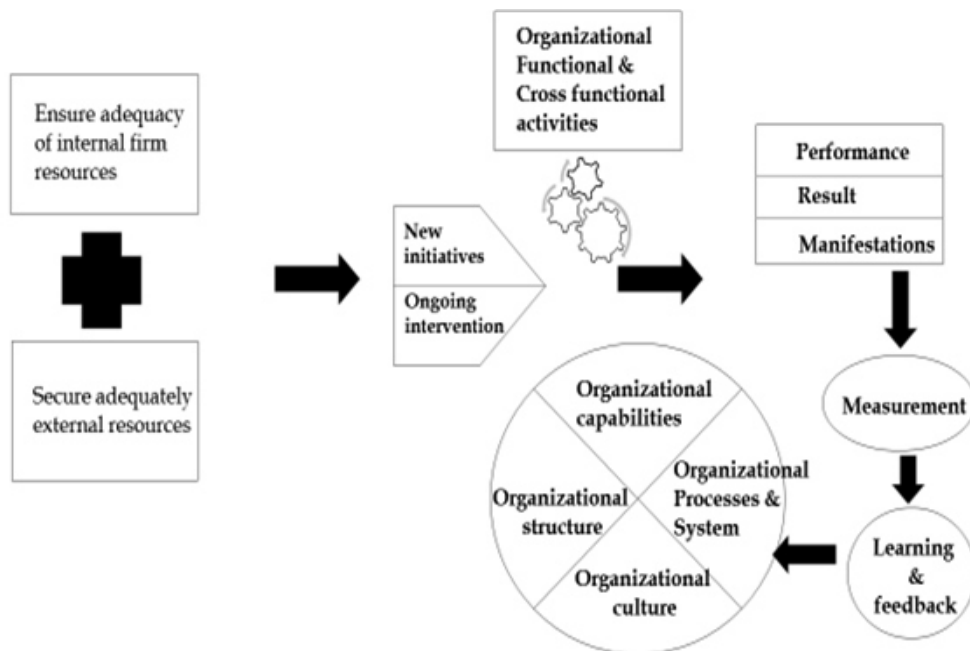
Table-1 –Drivers of Strategy Implementation

S. No	Remarks
1	Culture
2	Sense of mission & ownership
3	Strategic intent
4	TMT leadership drive
5	Open and healthy communication
6	Mapping of actionable processes
7	Clearly specifying short- & long-term wins
8	Rewarding & correcting
9	Learning & feedback
10	Distributed leadership

Fig. 6 provided an integrated view on SI.

To undertake any SP initiative resources are required. Any firm might possess the resources internally or might need to secure it from other firms or suppliers. To implement SP successfully, a firm would initiate new measures or would undertake interventions for the extant initiatives. For successful SI, firm management must ensure that there would be adequate supply of internal firm resources or the external resources are secured adequately. The resources serve as inputs for the SI initiatives or interventions. The SI interventions and initiatives are to be rolled out by firm activities. These firm activities could be functional or cross functional. Function activities could be specific to functions like marketing, finance, research & development, human resources, technology management, operations, supply chain management and such others. Cross functional activities would consist of two or more functions' involvement for an activity. Organizations deployed capabilities

Fig. 6 Integrated Strategy Implementation Perspective



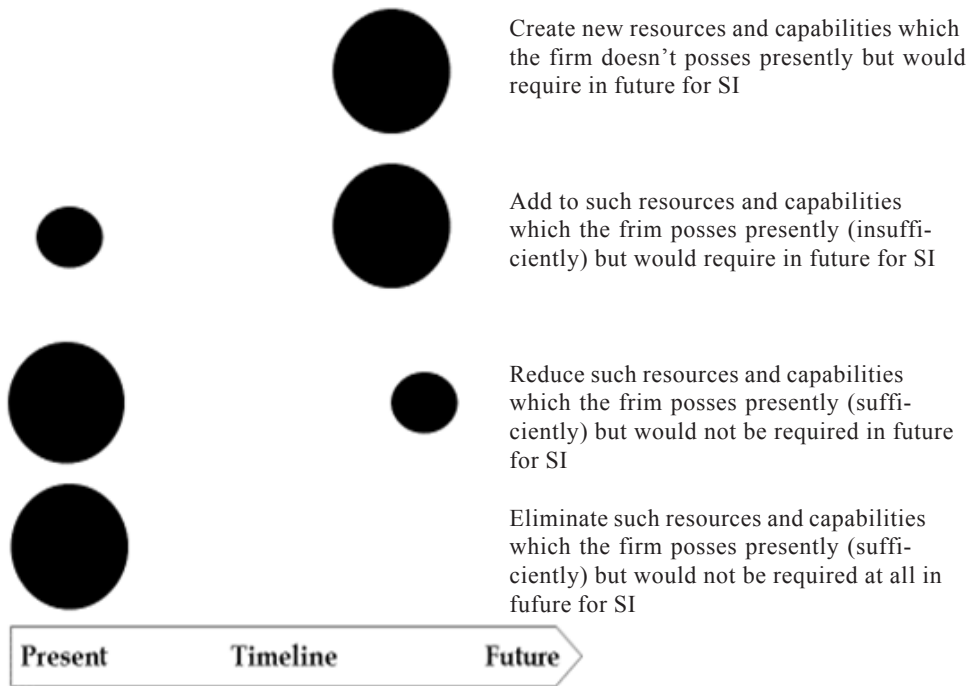
to carry out the activities. Organizational structure and process systems defined how actually organizational capabilities would be deployed to perform organizational activities. It is important to note that given the dynamics of business and environmental levers, a firm has to alter its basket of resources and capabilities. The resources and capabilities that the firm does not possess presently but would require in future need to be created, the resources and capabilities that the firm possessed currently and would also require it in future have to be maintained,

Given the dynamics of business and environmental levers, a firm has to alter its basket of resources and capabilities.

the resources and capabilities that the firm has but would not require in future have to be reduced and finally, and most importantly, the resources and capabilities the firm possessed currently but wouldn't require in future need to be completely done away with. This is based upon the tenets of dynamic capabilities thinking (Winter, 2003; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Teece, Pisano & Shuen, 1997). This has been depicted in Fig. 7.

Organizational structure entailed the reporting structure of teams and between teams (for CFTs) (McDonough III, 2000). Organization structure also entailed how the communication protocols to be followed (Child, 1972). Organization structure also delineated the duties and responsibilities of each teams and its

Fig. 7 Dynamics of Firm Resources and Capacities and SI



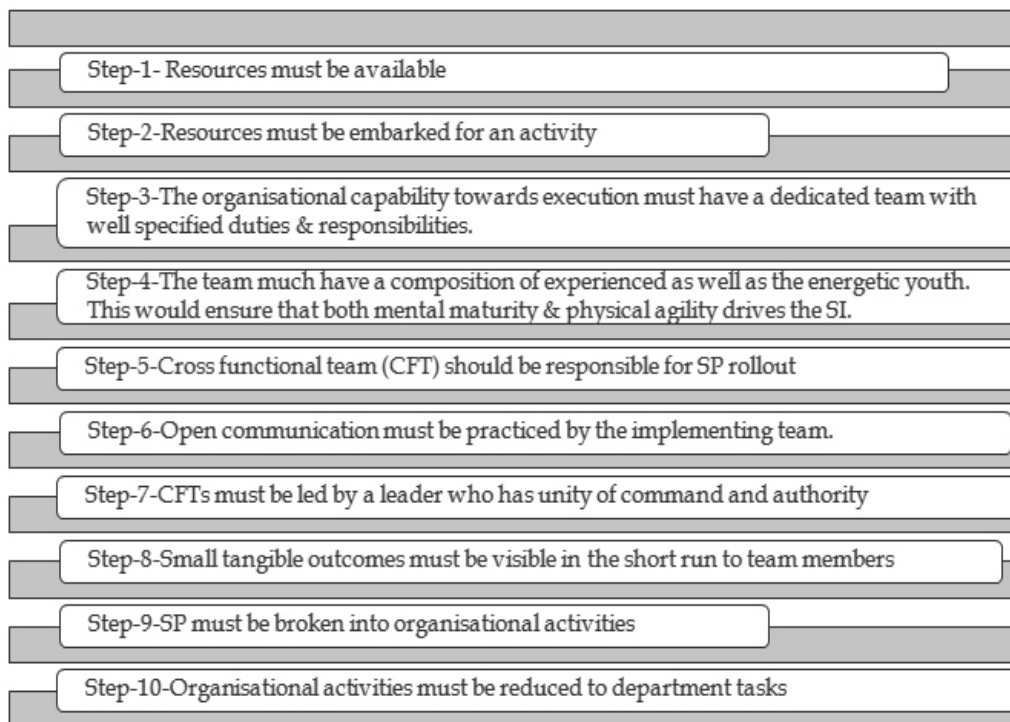
members from different organizational functions. (Dalton et al., 1980). The systems and producers involved were indicative of the method of engagement of organizational capabilities for undertaking the organizational activities (Singh, 2013; D'aveni, 1995; Bhatti, 2011). Organizational culture is the soft underbelly consisting of the values, ethos and behavioral standards of an organization (D'aveni, 1995; Bhatti, 2011; Singh, 2013). Together, organizational capabilities, structure, process and culture moved the activity wheel towards manifestations and results (Dalton et al., 1980; Singh, 2013). Any organization would measure the results and performances (Kaplan & Norton, 2001a; 2001b; 2006). Organiza-

tional learning mechanisms should be built in its processes to learn for the deviations from the prescribed and expected (Popper & Lipshitz, 2000). In other words, the failures and successes of SI factors needed to be documented, analyzed and incorporated in the next SI interventions for success. Thus, Fig. 6 presented the entire gamut of SI.

Conclusion

To conclude the author, based upon the deliberations in the earlier sections, developed a flow chart for successful SI. This has been depicted in Fig. 8.

Fig. 8 Flow Chart for Successful Strategy Implementation



Any manager responsible for management of SI would be required to follow the steps one by one in some contexts in sequential series and in certain others in parallel. However, following steps alone would not be sufficient for successful SI. It's important to know the prescription of the dos and don'ts in management practice like Smith (2006) advocated on change management, Willars, (1999) on business model, Dennis (2005) on leadership succession planning, Ransley, (1994) on R&D benchmarking and other such studies. Taking a cue from the works of Smith (2006), Willars, (1999), Dennison (2005), Ransley, (1994), the author thus presented the dos and don'ts of strategy implementation in Table 2.

Any manager who has been involved in SI should take cues from Table 2. Organization development practitioners should focus on developing such enabling conditions that the do's could be easily achieved and the obstacles that could hamper proper strategy implementation could be removed. SI has been a very vast field of study (from a theoretical perspective) as well as a complex field of practice. The author in this article first discussed how different types of levers (both environmental and industrial) continuously altered the business landscape in which a firm operated. It was then pointed out, given this context, how SI & SP had to be process oriented as well as concurrently pursued incrementally. The author then, through the solenoid of

Table 2 Dos & Don'ts of Successful Strategy Implementation

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a strategic intent • Create a sense of mission • Develop a conducive organizational culture • Promote open communication • Create organization wide knowledge management & learning facilities for knowledge creation and sharing during implementation especially • Create a dedicated team for SI • Provide adequate organizational resource secure extra organizational resource • Earmark resources for a project on implementation • SI initiatives must be clearly delineated into well-defined activities. • Remove fear of failure • Reduce inhibitions barriers to communicate • Reduce the culture of office politics which are not creative • Reduce ambiguity of responsibility & duties • Reduce uncertainties of resources earmarking • Reduce deploying only inexperienced team members in the implementation unit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't keep only long-term goals • Don't have a SI team that only involves members from one function • Don't keep open schedule for work & task activities • Don't keep the time schedule of completion of implementation • Don't shield the SI team from the external stakeholders like customers, suppliers, complementing firms and regulators. • Don't measure success of SI only through one perspective like only financial or only team spirit.

SI, conceptualized how there should be interaction between internal and external stakeholders for proper SI. Finally, the author based upon figures 6 and 8 and Table 2 provided a perspective regarding successful SI. It answered questions regarding what were the recommended action points and what steps should be avoided for unsuccessful SI. Theoretically, this article adds on to the literature on SI, given the context of an emerging economy like India.

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