

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT MODELLING FOR EVALUATION OF MANAGEMENT AWARENESS

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Abstract

As the environment becomes increasingly dynamic, strategic management becomes more and more important, especially for service organizations in developing contexts. This paper attempts to evaluate the applicability of systems-based strategic management model in a major telecommunication organization (Sudatel) in Sudan. The paper concludes that using a system approach will enable the organization to think strategically and systematically about the overall changes it might need and desire, without compromising those day-to-day operational activities.

Keywords: Strategic management, systems thinking, modelling, quality service.

Öz

İşletmelerde Yönetimsel Farkındalığın Değerlendirilmesine Yönelik Stratejik Yönetim Modeli

İşletme çevresinin oldukça dinamik bir yapıya sahip olmasına bağlı olarak stratejik yönetim olgusunun, özellikle hizmet işletmelerinde gittikçe artan bir şekilde önemli konuma geldiğini söylemek mümkündür. Bu çalışma, Sudan'ın ana telekomünikasyon şirketinde (Sudatel), sistem kaynaklı stratejik yönetim modelinin uygulanabilirliğini değerlendirmeye yöneliktir. Çalışma sonucunda, sistem yaklaşımını kullanan bir organizasyonun, günlük faaliyetlerinden ödün vermeden, gereksinim duyduğu ve arzu ettiği tüm değişiklikler hakkında stratejik ve sistematik olarak düşünme yeteneği kazanabileceği tespit edilmiştir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Stratejik yönetim, sistem yaklaşımı, modelleme, hizmet kalitesi.

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INTRODUCTION

The one that becomes more and more important for service organizations is to become total quality organizations and to reap the benefits thereof. This is vital for the further improvement of service organizations. The application of tools and techniques for service delivery improvements by the Sudan Telecom Company (Sudatel) would be a response to public demands for better service quality. This will lead to an improvement of service sector's ability to effectively solve problems and provides a model for altering managerial practices within this vital sector in developing contexts.

In order to have total quality service sector, organizations need to integrate management development, leadership, customer awareness, quality improvement & control, and organizational development in their strategic approach. They need to embrace and constantly seek amendment and improvement rather than reactively responding and managing it when it occurs. It requires that the top management of service sector organizations is absolutely clear in the way they express and put out their strategic expectations. It is also important that they have systems or models to ensure that activities are carried out to specific standards, and are right the first time when they are carried out. The systems or models must be aimed at error prevention rather than error detection. Thus outputs, rather than inputs or activities, are measured.

In this framework, the application of a sound strategic management modelling within the service sector now become more important than ever for Sudanese organizations within this particular sector.

This paper attempts to evaluate the applicability of systems thinking approach in a major telecommunication organization (Sudatel) in Sudan, and it aims to develop a strategic management model for evaluation of management awareness. The study firstly provides background regarding the Sudatel and exploration of management approaches. In order to obtain the data, SWOT analysis is carried out, and then organization limitations and possible solutions are explored during strategic planning workshop in the organization. Next, the model using a systems thinking approach is conceptualized and developed.

1. BACKGROUND

The history of telecommunication in Sudan dates back to 1859 when the city of Sawakin that lies by the Red Sea was connected by a sea-cable that made telegraph communication possible during British rule in Sudan (1898-1956). Telecommunication continued to develop and a separate government

department known as the Post and Telegraph Department took over the telecommunication business in Sudan in 1971. The department was modernized by the introduction of microwave and satellite systems during 1971-1978. In 1978 the department was developed into a separate entity called the Sudan Telecommunication Public Corporation (STPC). The former (STPC) tended towards being a hyper-bureaucracy, with a rigid hierarchical structure, operating as a closed social system where change was not the order of the day. Decision-making was highly centralized and top-down resulting in communication time-delays. As a consequence, grass roots members often did not know what decisions were made and consequently what to do or not to do. Swift decision making, in order to adapt to fluid environment, was almost non-existent. As a result the government took a further step by introducing another change in the institutional form of STPC, from a corporation owned entirely by the government, to a public limited company owned partly by the government, in 1993. The government used the well-known term "privatization" to describe the change. Telecommunication was privatized following Sudan's Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) launched in early 1990 by the new military government, which seized power in a coup in June 1989. The privatization policy is the cornerstone of the Three-year Economic Salvation Program 'TYESP' (1990-1993) and the Ten-year National Comprehensive Strategy 'TYNCS' (1992-2002). These new changes in institutional form resulted in the newly established Sudatel with big challenges about community/ customers' satisfaction and future survival. The establishment of the Sudatel might also, as Bourgeois *et al* (1999: 17-18) pointed out, challenge the managerial thinking contained in the difference of managers' mental models that can influence their strategic decision-making and the actions the organization (Sudatel) takes. It is worth mentioning here that the newly established Sudatel recruited a considerable number of the former STPC's managers.

Bourgeois *et al* (1999: 17) and Senge (1999: 8) define mental models as the deeply inherent assumptions, understandings or representations of the phenomena that influence how we understand the world and how we respond to it. Mental models tell us what is and is not important to us, what we like and do not like what we should and should not notice. Mental models include our understanding of how things work and what we expect to happen next. When we encounter something novel, our minds quickly construct new mental models to help us understand this new phenomenon. Therefore managers' mental models of the situations they encounter determine whether a particular strategic issue or situation will be noticed and observed, how it will be interpreted and understood, and how they as managers should respond to the situation.

Accordingly could it be important for the Sudatel to understand that managers might have different mental models and this situation might explain why some managers notice important organizational issues while other managers do not, why some managers correctly interpret these issues while others do not, and why some managers respond appropriately to issues while others do not. As a result, the linkages among organizational environments, managerial thinking, and strategic decision-making are keys to understanding performance differences across the organization and how service delivery excellence is developed.

2. METHOD USED FOR OBTAINING DATA

The data is obtained during a three-day strategic planning workshop conducted for senior management in the Sudatel Head Office in Khartoum, 2005.

In order to establish a foundation for strategic planning the participants were involved in a process of environmental scanning through conducting an assessment of internal strengths and weaknesses of the organization and external environmental opportunities and threats for the organization (SWOT analysis), a central activity of the strategic planning process. The first phase involved the identification and assessment of external environmental threats and opportunities. Participants were asked to identify factors/trends in the external environment with a profound impact on the organization. The initial identification of the opportunities and threats is elicited without regard to the neither seriousness nor immediacy of the threat or opportunity for the organization. After identifying opportunities and threats, the participants were then asked to assess the elements with regard to the potential impact of the element on the organization (high, medium, low) and the time frame within which this element will impact (immediately, short-term, mid-term) on the organization. These external environments were defined as political, economic, social, technological and other.

Upon completion of this first phase, the workshop participants were then asked to identify present strengths and weaknesses of the organization for addressing the previously identified opportunities and threats. This phase involved an analysis of organizational resources, the product/service of the organization, a client analysis, structure analysis and an analysis of the organizational culture. The organizational resource analysis included a number of sub-components including an identification and assessment of human resource capacities in the organization. Following the SWOT analysis,

participants were then asked to identify organizational limitations, and propose possible solutions for implementing the strategic plan.

3. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF MODEL

Strategic management does not exist in a vacuum; it has both influences on, and is influenced by the culture of the organization, its structure and the people it employs. How the Sudatel wants its members to perform is driven by the organizational strategy. How they actually perform depends on systems, control mechanisms, and the climate of the organization. A strategic management modelling can get all these aspects in harmony, and ensure that the strategy the Sudatel is following is appropriate. One of the good reasons given for subjecting an organization to a strategic management model is that it is the only satisfactory way of coming to terms with a changing world. Events in the environment in which the organization operates have a direct effect on the success or failure of that organization. Strategic management seeks, as one of its aims, to relate the organization to its environment, and to identify in advance the threats and opportunities which environmental change brings. At the outset, the unique character of each organization should be stressed.

According to Nadler (1982: 4) it is important to mention, “Models are not in themselves reality, but they represent the reality of those who have developed them”. He continued by stating that models are constructed daily. He further postulates that we as humans would not be able to cope without designing models in order to assist us in resolving problems.

According to Bailey (1996: 322) a model is a copy, replica or analogy that differs from the original in some way. This difference may be only in size, such as the model ship that is accurate and seaworthy in every detail, except that it is small enough to fit into a bottle. Other models may be full size or over size, but may not be complete in every detail, but include only those features of the original that are necessary for the modeler’s purpose. He further pointed out that when a researcher makes use of a model in social sciences, it mainly consists of a description of a social phenomenon, abstracting or a theoretical description of the main features of the phenomenon without attempting to explain it or predict anything from the description.

According to De Vos *et al* (2002: 38) “the goal in social science models is not necessarily to include all features of the system being modelled, but only those necessary for research purposes. Frequently, not all the important features can be adequately modelled because of complexity or lack of information, and the researcher must be content with an incomplete model, a skeletal model or a model with some of the variables or components represented by question marks”.

Kerlinger (1986: 167-168) perceives a model as an abstract or conceptual outline spell out hypothesized relations in a collection of data. Doing research is, in effect, setting up models of what "reality" is supposed to be and then testing the models against empirical or observed data. The model springs from a theory.

Mouton (2001: 177) argues that models occur when the researcher use inductive and deductive strategies for discovering in order to explain particular phenomena. The explanatory function is usually attributed to theories. He postulates that inductive modes of reasoning are manifested in statistical model building. The researcher constructs a model to fit certain empirical data. He further pointed out that a variation on inductive reasoning is analogical reasoning where the researcher constructs a model of a phenomenon based on its similarities to another phenomenon. Deductive reasoning on the other hand is much more formal. The researcher formulates a series of hypotheses or axioms and this is believed to be the truth. From these hypotheses, further theoretical propositions are deductively derived. The researcher follows this procedure until a comprehensive series of theoretical propositions have been developed that ultimately be tested against empirical data. He further argues that science cannot make progress without theories and models. It is through the construction of theories and models that researchers attempt to explain phenomena in the world.

A model merely agrees in broad outline with the phenomenon of which it is a model. Certain characteristics of the phenomenon, irrelevant for the model are conveniently excluded, while the most obvious aspects are emphasized. The value of this simplification is that it draws the attention of the researcher to specific themes. It is this guiding function of models that is referred to as the heuristic function, where "heuristic" means serving to guide, discover or reveal (De Vos *et al*, 2002: 38). The model is, therefore, used to suggest new areas of research because certain relationships and dimensions are emphasized to an unusual degree.

De Vos *et al* (2002: 38) pointed out that most models in social work were subsequently derived from this example. They conceptualized the prototypal process as follows:

- *Investigation:*

1. Collecting data (from the client, the client's family and sources outside the family group).

- *Diagnosis:*

2. Drawing inferences there from.
3. Interpreting their meaning.
4. Shaping a treatment plan.

- *Treatment:*

5. Implementing the treatment plan.
6. Evaluating the result.

According to Nadler (1982: 5) the following are some questions that can be asked by researchers in order to assist them to construct an integrated model.

- What is its purpose?
- For which kinds of learning (that is, travel mode) is appropriate?
- Does it tell (Sudatel's Executive Team) what to look for?
- Does it help to (Sudatel's Executive Team) anticipate what will be found?
- Does it provide alternatives?

The researcher does understand the fact that the model will not do the work for the Sudatel. However it will enable the Sudatel top management to understand the process or situation with which they are concerned in this situation: The compilation of an integrated strategic management model for the Sudatel. According to Nadler (1982: 5) models have many benefits such as:

- Explain various aspects of human behaviour and interaction.
- Integrate what is known through research and observation.
- Simplify complex human processes.
- Guide observations.

It is important to note that as with any attempt to take a complex process and reduce it to a one-dimensional representation, something can be lost. The usefulness of the model depends upon the researcher's own understanding of the reality for which the model is designed.

According to Shani & Lau (1996: 101) and Senge (1999: 7) organizations are regarded as an open system also known as a "living" system and therefore are expected to interact with their environment. There is a two-way flow of influence between an open system and the environment. Thus, the Sudatel is influenced and influence its environment through a process of interdependency.

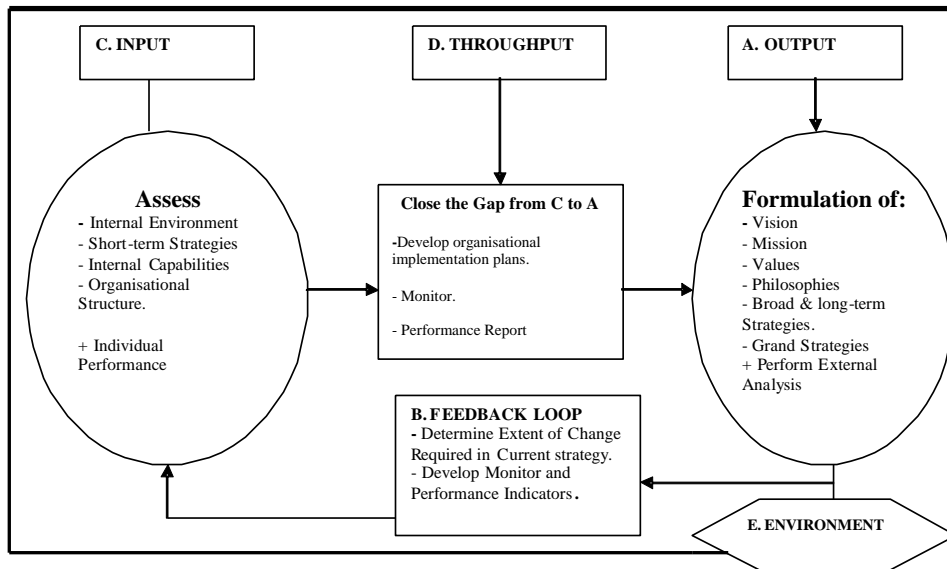
According to Haines (2000: 29) the reason behind reinventing the way the organization do its day-to-day operations is that it might want to exercise better control over achieving the organization's vision. Hence the Sudatel might want to be proactive ensuring that the organization fulfills its desired mission and performance outcomes. He further pointed out in order for an organization (Sudatel) to do this, it needs to practice what he calls "backward" (or systems) thinking.

The Sudatel needs to start with their "Ideal Future Vision" in mind, and then needs to think backwards, where the organization is right now. From here they have to determine how to bridge the gap between their current state of operations and that vision they want to achieve. Haines (2000: 34) and Senge (1999: 12) point out that many organizations applied a traditional analytic approach to planning. The organization start with today's problems, breaking them up into separate parts, analyzing and resolving one area at a time, then moving on to the next area. However, systems thinking practice the exact opposite of this analytic approach. Systems thinking studies the organization as a whole in its interaction with its environment. Then, it works backwards to understand how each part of that whole works in relation to, and supportive of, the entire system's objectives. Only then the core strategies can be formulated.

According to Robbins & Decenzo (2001: 383) and Haines (2000: 42-43) organizations apply an issue-by-issue analytical solution to a systems problem. It cannot work and will be difficult to lead and manage organizations in an ever-changing world. According to Gibson *et al* (1994: 34-37) change that occurs in one part or set of parts of the organization such as the Sudatel affects all other parts of the organization and will directly or indirectly affect the overall organization.

The following is a model that explains the systems theory to strategic management. It shows that the Sudatel is a system that is made up of a set of components that need to work together for the overall realization of organizational objectives.

Figure-1: A Strategic Management Model as adapted from Haines (2000: 39) and David (2001: 12-14)



4. STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT MODELLING

In this section, the proposed strategic management model to overcome strategic management challenges through the application of an open systems model will be described.

4.1. Phase A: Output

"Where does the Sudatel want to be?" This is where it needs to embark on replacing the traditional analytic approach with output thinking. It is actually the starting point for putting framework of their systems into place by focusing on the outcomes they desire for the organization, envisioning the future as if it were current, and then working backward to their mission that includes the broad statements about the Sudatel's organizational purpose, philosophy, values and objectives.

Strategy formulation must guide the Sudatel top management team (consisting of the Sudatel general manager, head of departments and branch managers) to define the “*business*” the Sudatel is in, the outcomes it seeks, and the measures it will use to attain those outcomes. The strategy formulation process is set in motion by top management firstly to define the organization’s mission. Secondly, the purpose of organization is also defined to reflect the values of a wide variety of stakeholders. Since the Sudatel’s social responsibility is a critical consideration for the organization’s top management, the mission and value statement must express how it intends to enhance it.

Top management must also assess and take into account the major factors in the external environment in order to anticipate and take advantage of future organizational conditions or situations. It needs to evaluate its organizational strengths and opportunities in order to be proactive (using the SWOT/TOWS analysis). Top management uses such profiles to target service delivery excellence areas they can emphasize, and service delivery improvement areas they should correct or minimize. Long-term objectives must also be set by top management and they need to specify the performance indicators. These objectives need to provide a basis for direction and evaluation within the organization. They also need to state the generic and grand strategies that the Sudatel will implement to achieve long-term objectives. The Sudatel’s current mission includes the broad statements about its purpose, philosophy, objectives and goals. Certainly, having a well-focused mission and clear objectives must be of imperative importance to top management. If the Sudatel is clear about its mission, operational objectives flow directly from it.

Joyce (1999: 22) pointed out that defining the desired outcome of the organization is the most critical element of the mission statement because of the measuring of organizational performance. Without this, it will be difficult to see how the Sudatel mission statement can be used as a basis for performance planning. Mission statements are a general feature of service sector organizations, and may be seen as the starting point of a strategic analysis. Mission statements should be written in a way that will help the process of strategy formulation.

In order to become a high-performance service organization top management must invest more time in defining and implementing their core values. The formation and observance of core organizational values has many productive outcomes such as to provide stability for members. When members share organizational values, they might feel more committed and loyal, identify more strongly with important organizational issues, and display willingness to “*get the job done*”.

According to Haines (2000: 122) top management must keep in mind that they must meet the following six criteria when they develop their organization's core values.

- Is it a collective belief organization-wide and is it simple and clear?
- Does it determine the standards of acceptable work behaviour?
- Will the community know and care if this is not followed?
- Is it a value that will endure consistently over time?
- Are there practices, rituals or other well-known organizational traditions to support its existence?
- Is it crystallized and driven by the top management level?

4.2. Phase B: Feedback Loop

The question that must be posed during this phase is whether the organization and as such Sudatel will know when it has accomplished its vision (Haines, 2000: 122).

It is of imperative importance for Sudatel to ensure concrete feedback. It also needs to outline outcomes and performance indicators. Top management need to make sure that set outcomes and performance indicators are properly communicated organization-wide in order to be able to measure whether the implementation of their core strategies is progressing effectively or not. Top management need to determine the success of the performance outcomes on a year-to-year basis. This is an ongoing process whereby the managers on the different organizational management levels monitor whether the organization is on course or not and what needs to be done to get the organization on course before it is too late. The Sudatel needs to deliver service excellence and as such is required to evaluate whether the set strategies and objectives were achieved by the respective branches within the different geographical areas. Feedback needs to be given to the managers to indicate if they were successful or not in achieving the set objectives and strategies, and what action needs to be taken if they were not successful.

According to Wright *et al* (1998: 261) the strategic control and evaluation process from top management's perspective consists of several steps namely:

- First, top management must decide what elements of the environment and organization need to be monitored, evaluated, and controlled.

- Then, standards must be established with which the actual performance of the organization can be compared. These first two steps will be strongly influenced by the Sudatel's mission and objectives, which direct the managers' attention to certain organizational and environmental elements, and attention to the relative importance of specific standards.
- Next, managers at different organizational levels and branches must measure or evaluate actual performance of the organization.

These evaluations will generally be both quantitative and qualitative, for example "what do the community/customers say about its service?" The performance evaluations will then be compared with the previously established standards. If performance is in line with the standards or exceeds them, then no corrective action is necessary. When performance exceeds standards, management should consider whether the standards are appropriate and whether they should be increased.

However, if performance drops below the standards, then management must take remedial action. The focus of strategic control is both internal and external. It is important for the Sudatel to remember that not one element can be examined in isolation, because it is top management's role to align strategically the internal operations of the organization with its external environment. In fact, strategic control can be visualized as a "negotiation" (feedback) the ongoing interactions between environmental variables and the Sudatel's internal departments. Relying upon quantitative and qualitative performance measures, top management uses strategic control to keep the organization's internal dimensions aligned with the external environment.

4.3. Phase C: Input

This refers to the organization's internal environment where an internal audit needs to be performed in order to determine the organizations strengths and weaknesses. The question that must be posed during this phase is whether the organization (Sudatel) is currently in line with its identified strategies or not?

This is the phase in which it gathers and assimilates information about the organizational design, budgets, behaviour change, the organizational culture, managerial performances, operational performances, research and development as well as performance of its management information systems. As a result the organization (Sudatel) will be able to identify its organizational profile that reflects its internal conditions and capabilities. The assimilation of information across departments in this phase creates an opportunity for the organization (Sudatel) to improve its process of communication in the organization. Performing an internal audit requires that the organization (Sudatel) needs to design key performance measures consisting of both its strengths and weaknesses in order to close the gap between the organization's current state and its desired state (Thompson & Strickland, 1998: 105; Hussey, 1995: 137-139; Craig & Grand, 1995: 55-56; Pearce & Robinson, 2003: 126).

The performance guidelines for measuring organizational progress must also be communicated to different branches in order to assist in the development of a high performance and customer-focused organization. Key performance measures are the quantifiable outcome measurements of its vision, mission and values on a year-by-year basis, ensuring continual improvement towards achieving the ideal future vision.

The real value of establishing key performance measures for the Sudatel is that it can use them to determine its strengths, weaknesses, and appropriate corrective actions in order to get the organization back on track. Otherwise, it runs the risk of becoming an unfocused organization with no mechanisms for feedback.

In order to balance long- and short-term strategies Haines (2000: 138) pointed out that organizations in general have a minimum of four key areas that must be measured and tracked in order to create an outcome-based measuring system. To pay attention to these areas might also be of some value to Sudatel.

- Worker performance and attitude (employee satisfaction).
- Key operational indicators that represent the leverage points in the organization.
- Customer satisfaction.
- Key budget indicators that show organization's financial viability.

4.4. Phase D: Throughput

In this phase Sudatel needs to ask how it could get to its perceived future from where it's currently. Most Sudatel managers are trained in operational decision-making, but not strategic management. This has the effect that operational management is mainly concerned with short-term and commonly routines, day-to-day managerial issues. Strategic management on the other hand means managing complexity in ambiguous longer-term, non-routine contexts, with issues that may influence the whole organization and are fundamental to the survival of the organization.

Operational management is normally concerned with operational specific tasks, any one of which is unlikely to endanger the organization's future. Strategic management is concerned with positioning the organization in the context of a changing environment and the expectations of the customers, the very antithesis of operational management.

The data obtained at the strategic management workshop indicates that most of the executive team members are operationally trained managers. They are then expected to change into becoming strategic managers due to their promotion and new positions without having acquired any further training in strategic management. Thus senior managers may often find it difficult in making the transition from the operational to the strategic mode, and seeking security, revert to their former operational perspectives.

The strategic management model as presented by the researcher could assist these managers in that it will give them a methodology to follow in order to achieve and understand their strategic objectives.

To ensure that the objectives set by top management will be achieved, the strategy must be translated into carefully implemented action steps. This means that:

- The strategy must be translated into guidelines for the daily activities of the organization's members.

- The strategy must be reflected in the way the Sudatel organizes its services and must also be reflected in its values, beliefs, and service delivery.

In implementing of the strategy, the Sudatel managers at the different organizational levels must monitor and direct performance outcomes as specified by the performance indicators and adjust to change.

The organizational strategies must now be initiated by the different branch managers with their executive management teams in the respective branches in the following four interrelated steps:

- Creation of clear, specific, measurable, achievable and time bound short-term objectives and action plans.
- Development of specific operational focused tactics and strategies that will create service delivery excellence.
- Empowerment of operating personnel through policies that guide decisions as well as the provisioning of the necessary financial, fiscal and human resources for operationalising the strategies.
- Implementation of an effective performance and reward system.

The short-term objectives and operational plans of the Sudatel guide implementation through the conversion of long-term objectives set by head office into short-term operations and objectives.

The branch managers of the Sudatel with their respective management teams translate the organizational strategies by means of operational plans into operational performance procedures that could build service delivery improvement.

Those performance procedures need to be supported by the necessary policies that empower operational members through the defining guidelines (Comprehensive National Strategy) in order to make decisions. The Sudatel also needs to remember that proper performance and reward systems need to be in place in order to reward outstanding service delivery.

At this point the Sudatel's systems framework will include detailed considerations on how to implement and manage change throughout the organization. It needs to integrate its current change management system into an organization-wide system and put its plans into performance monitoring, reporting, and adjusting where necessary.

4.5. Phase E: Environment

The environment is changing and the Sudatel needs to take this into account by analyzing the opportunities and threats posed by the environment towards the Sudatel as an organization. It needs to analyze options by matching its resources with the expectations of the external environment. Thus phases E and A become parallel processes. As the environment of the Sudatel becomes increasingly dynamic, strategic management becomes more and more important.

Following this model, it indicates that strategic management for the Sudatel involves planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating its strategy-related decisions and actions as well as to give sound feedback on whether its organizational objective were achieved or not. The Sudatel managers must bring these elements into coherent alignment when applying strategic management (Moore, 1995: 71).

CONCLUSION

This paper focused on the development of a schematic strategic management model. The model represents a systems thinking approach, the Sudatel's strategic management and development comprise of its entire system that defines the organization. Using a systems thinking approach in its formulation, implementation and evaluation enables it to think strategically and systematically about the overall changes it might need and desire, without compromising those day-to-day operational activities.

The systems thinking model is based on the theory that a system is, in essence, circular. Using a systems thinking approach in its strategic management, therefore, provides the Sudatel with a circular implementing structure that can evolve, with continuously improving, self-checking and learning capabilities.

In systems thinking the Sudatel does no longer have to be concerned if the organization cannot be constantly observant, watching over each and every step of the implementation process on a day-to-day basis. If the Sudatel followed the systems-based strategic management model correctly, it could have a system of monitored activities in place, with ongoing, positive checks and balances.

The model can also serve as a managerial checklist i.e. do managers know how to develop a vision? If not they could be trained. So the systematic following of the model can assist to check if managers are able to formulate in sequence the different activities as proposed by the model.

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