Leadership, Strategic Planning, Organizational Perf`ormance and Innovation: A Case of Dubai/ UAE Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

The idea that the Dubai Government via its public sector institutions can and needs manage itself strategically, in a similar manner to any well-performing private sector organisation, has been translated into practically across government departments and authorities. This study is intended as contribution to knowledge production that will also fill a gap in literature on the salient and fundamental factors that enabled Dubai's post-colonial state to be become agile, innovative and responsive to the growing size and scope of activities undertaken by Dubai and by extension the UAE's public sector institutions. On the basis of documentary analysis and observation, the conclusion has been arrived that a multiplicity of factors and initiatives such as strategic planning, innovation and technological advancement, leveraging of political leadership and hiring the finest minds from the global pool of transnational bureaucrats with the view to transfer skills and efficiently run public institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The emirate of Dubai is one of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), most visible and important cities. Ali Alyousuf (2008) and Henderson (2007) started its development journey as a sleepy fishing and pearl diving township which, over the years had survived off the bounty of the sea. At that time, Dubai had a modest economy and population, but a determined mind-set and a clear vision to achieve international excellence and become a city of global standing.

In recent years, a burgeoning literature has emerged articulating the sea change has occurred not only in emirate's economy, but also on the modernization of the UAE and Dubai in particular public sector. Similar to other post-colonial public bureaucracy, the UAE and 'Dubai in particular public administration was struggling to cope with the fast changing socio-economic environment' (Makharita, 2005:2-3). Thus, the gargantuan task has been undertaken to effect strategic and pervasive public sector management (PSM) reform in the emirate by the Government of Dubai. This gigantic task has resulted in paradigmatic shift which is concerned primarily, not exclusively with improving public sector results, but also changing the way the government interfaces with both internal and external stakeholders. Substantial resources have been expended to develop and implement an extensive strategic planning architecture to guide the emirate's public sector evolution based on the socio-economic developmental objectives as encapsulated in Dubai Strategic Plan 2015 and Vision 2021 and the UAE's Vision 2021.

Thus, the overarching purpose of this article is to interrogate the intertwining drivers of change in governance and the use of strategic planning as the quintessential management orthodoxy tool in Dubai's public institutions. The pervasive use of strategic planning by Dubai's Government and other attendant departments and authorities in spite of its perceived shortcomings is still believed to appropriate and can assists both political leaders and public sector institutions to make good decisions, operate more effectively and efficiently.

The paper is organized in six thematic sections as follows: the first part includes some general aspects of what is the public sector and the need for possible reforms; the second section is meant to shed some light on strategic planning process in Dubai's public sector; the third thematic section highlights some predictors of organisational performance, the forth segment interrogates the nexus between strategic planning and organisational performance; the fifth segment analyses some enabling public sector reform factors and the last section concludes the study.

Contextualizing the Public Sector and the issues underpinning its reform

By the way of introduction to this section I will attempt to construct a definition of the term public sector. Conceptually, the public sector should be viewed from a systems approach to mean the structural, functional and political legitimacy to implement the policy objectives of a particular government. Generally speaking the Dubai's public sector is organised into two main entities: (a) the public service and (b) non-ministerial government entities – parasternal agencies; together they form the Emirate's public sector. Essentially, a country's public sector is the machinery of government through which its national policy and developmental objectives are fulfilled. Through established structures, the allocation of functions and funds and with the direction of government policy and regulations the business of government is conducted thus providing for the establishment and management of an apolitical public service that is efficient and effective in serving the Government. To summarize, Lane (2000) writes that fundamentally the public sector is a set of institutions that coordinate the interests of different groups ask in various ways for public activities of different kinds.

In terms of its holistic and fundamental functions according to the World Bank (2012:18):

…the public sector is responsible for some less tangible but equally critical outcomes. It must encourage both fiscal and institutional sustainability. It must provide systems and processes that enable governments to manage public revenues, expenditures and debt ensuring that they remain within agreed fiscal aggregates.

The institutions of any public sector must also manage the allocation of fiscal, administrative and functional authorities across levels of government in a way that ensures cooperative and constructive engagement between them. The public sector must also work with and support accountability and governance mechanisms to ensure that they provide transparency through credible arms-length oversight as noted by the World Bank (2012).

Figure 1: Public Sector Organizations and Functions
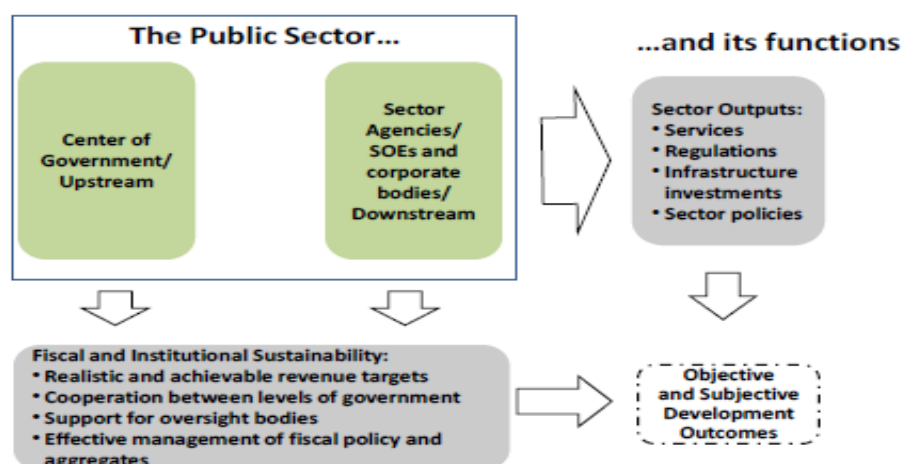
In figure one schematic above, it maps the constituent elements of a typical public sector. The World Bank (2012:1-2) highlights that for example that globally most public sectors comprise of (a) '…upstream core ministries and central agencies, and (b) downstream bodies including sector ministries, and non-executive state institutions.' Public administrator scholars have elevated the Department of Finance in any government as an upstream and include core ministry given that is positioned at the centre of any government similarly, any office(s) that supports governmental activities that span different government ministries and departments. On the contrary downstream ministries include science and technology, health, agriculture and education; which are classified as such because these ministries and supporting agencies, execute the domestic policy direction of a government. In essence the bureaucracy plays an important role in the implementation of public policy. In order to support, and give impetus to Dubai's Strategic Plans (DSP) 2015 and Vision 2021 and the country's broader socio-economic objectives; the UAE government has invested significantly in improving services to increase citizens' satisfaction.

Drivers for public governance reform in the MENA region and in Dubai's in post-colonial state in particular are as follows:

- In an OECD (2010) Report, it was noted that while the motivations for initiating public sector reform in the MENA region are as diverse, as the region's itself is diverse. Notwithstanding the diversity of the region, there is one thing one that is common to the majority leaders interviewed for this report, and is the governments' desire to accelerate economic growth and this has the main driver for their country's public sector reform.
- As for Makharita (2005) a compelling reason propelling public sector modernisation had to with the tardiness of the public bureaucracy to to respond external environmental changes in the economy; the pervasiveness of traditional ways of doing things, limited freedom of action by senior staffers, an outdated approach to decision-making and an organizational culture of "rule" rather than "service" underpinned the UAE's public sector.
- The continued and sustainable growth, of Dubai post-oil economy could not have happened without the support of a public secotr that is modernised, efficient and effective, people-centered and service oriented.
- If one where to closely examine changes made within the last three decades fundamentals public sector reform; one would conclude that the UAE Government and Dubai in particular has radically transformed the public sector both at the federal and local levels of government. Such changes in part are propelled by the need to be responsiveness to the needs of the country's population, through the implementation of global best practices, and management tools such as strategic planning in the Emirate's public administration for the delivery of government services, in a most cost-effective and efficient manner. The list above is not exhausted, but some of the most fundamental factors have been discussed.

Strategic Planning Process in Dubai Public Sector

When strategic planning arrived on the scene in the mid-1960s, corporate leaders embraced it as "the one best way" to devise and implement strategies that would enhance the competitiveness (Mintzberg, 2007: 107). It should be noted that a key feature that has characterised the orthodox approach to strategic planning is premised on the formulation and implementation of plans or activities in a sequential manner. These emergent plans are referred to as strategies. A strategy is the context of management is a futuristic framework setting out a roadmap and the desired long term aims and objectives regardless of managerial changes within an institution. Whilst, Bryson (2011) highlights that strategic planning is a set of concepts, procedures and tools that organizations use when determining their overall strategic direction and the resources required to achieve strategic objectives.

In the sheikdom of Dubai, strategic planning is about highlighting where the emirate is, where the city wants to be, and how will the city get there with the pre-requisite provision of financial and other resources.

The Government of Dubai strategic planning guide highlights that the city's planning framework that four new Sector Committees have been established to support the Executive Council (EC), each responsible for a major area of Government business. These committees will develop sector plans which set out series of objectives for:

- Economy and Trade
- Social Development
- Safety, Security and Justice
- Infrastructure, Land and Environment (Government of Dubai, 2006: 17).

Strategic planning in the UAE and Dubai is informed by a number of matrixes, including policy agenda such as Dubai Strategic Plan (DSP) 2015 and Vision 2021 and other nom-financial objectives. These set out the overall strategic macro socio-economic aims, mission, vision and values of the Government of Dubai. The DSPs by structural design require heightened inter--sectoral action and effectiveness. DSPs are projected to be generally overcalled every two years whilst Department/Authority Plans will be refreshed annually.

At a micro-level within the public sector, there are 3-5 inter-sector strategic plans for each core Government Department/Authority and semi-government entities in Dubai. These strategic plans contain strategic aims, missions and objectives for departments/authorities targets, in relation to the achievement of each of the objectives, and the programmes of work needed to deliver them. For example, some the city's essential government institutions, such as the DEWA, Roads and Transport Authority, DTCM, Dubai's Economic Development Department, Dubai's Economic Council have all embraced and embarked on an elaborate process of strategic planning. Pertinent to the process of strategic planning are the use of SWOT Analysis, Balanced Scorecard, PESTLE Analysis and scenario planning as management tools to facilitate process. It is also imperative to note that many of Dubai's public sector institutions have established planning units. For example, the Strategic Planning and Operations at the Dubai Economic Council, whose main aim is to draft and enhance the strategic planning of the secretariat, including create an enhanced business environment. Organizations from both the private and public sector are increasingly embracing the practice of strategic planning in anticipation that this would translate to improved performance. Thus, the question which naturally arises is whether or not there is a nexus or a positive correlation between strategic planning and organisational performance, a full response is beyond the scope of this paper is only dealt with to limited degree below.

Organization Performance

This concept can be found in a myriad of management books, conference papers and academic literature, however notwithstanding it almost omnipresence, Gavrea et al. (2011:286-287) have noted that organizational performance is difficult to define, because of its many meanings. For this reason, there isn't a universally accepted definition of this concept.' If were to go back to the 1950s according to Georgopoulos & Tannenbaum, (1957: 535)

'Organizational performance was defined as the extent to which organizations, viewed as a social system fulfilled their objectives.' During the epochs of the 1960s and 1970s, Yuchtman and Seashore (1967:379) highlighted how 'organizations have begun to explore new ways to evaluate their performance so performance was defined as an organization's ability to exploit its environment for accessing and using the limited resources.' Gavrea et al. (2011:286-287) annotates that '…80s and 90s were marked by the realization that the identification of organizational objectives is more complex than initially considered. Managers began to understand that an organization is successful if it accomplishes its goals (effectiveness) using a minimum of resources (efficiency).'

As for Griffins (2006) organizational performance can be described as an organization's ability to acquire and utilize its scarce resources and valuables as expeditiously as possible in the pursuit of its operations goals. Okyere- Kwaye (:23) in unravelling the organizational performance offers a different perspective by noting that 'organisational performance is viewed in three senses—namely the past, the present and the future, in other words performance can be referring to something to something completed, or something happening now, or activities that prepares for new needs.' Organizations tend to identify a multiplicity of indicators or predictors of performance/s such as financial (such as profitability) and non-financial data. While performance for private sector organisations, refers to how well an organization achieves its market-oriented goals and its financial goals (Yamin et al., 1999), in the public sector, performance is based on how quickly and effectively a government department can respond to the needs of its citizens. It is suffice to say that there is a typology of variables such as strategic planning, leadership, innovation and development, quality of human resources in the public sector that will help to overall performance of government departments and authorities.

The Nexus between Strategic Planning and Performance

It is a well-established notion globally that private sector organizations that have holistically embraced strategic planning in all its manifestations including effective strategic planning, tend achieve better performance as opposed to those that do not embrace strategic management. Notwithstanding such conventional thinking, this research as it applies to Dubai conjures up the following questions, in attempt to indicate discern how can strategic planning had enhance organizational performance within Dubai's expanding public sector. From the observation and documentation analysis it is my suggestion that effective strategies must integrate answers to three questions: what public value will be created by the strategic planning; does Dubai's post-colonial state have the operational capacity which is required to implement the Sheikhdom's multi-faceted strategic planning framework?

Internationally, an empirical study conducted by Askarany and Yazdifar (2012), who investigated the diffusion of six proposed strategic management tools through the lens of organizational change theory, examined the relationship between the adoption of these techniques and organizational performance in both manufacturing and non-manufacturing organizations in New Zealand. The findings suggest a significant association between the diffusion of these relatively new strategic planning tools and organizational performance.

Kanji and Sa (2007) pointed out that the first condition to enhance performance and achieve organizational excellence is to develop and implement a performance measurement system. Traditionally, financial indicators have been used to measured organizational performance, however in recent years a body of literature is pointing to the insufficiency of such a narrow yardstick.

Previous research provides support for all possible relationships: a positive relationship (Andrews et al., 2011; Sarason & Tegarden, 2003); a negative relationship (Fredrickson & Mitchell, 1984); no relationship (Robinson & Pearce, 1983); and complex relationship (Fredrickson & Mitchell, 1984; Poister et al., 2013). It is the view of Greenley (1994) that there are empirical studies whose findings indicate that evidence has produced mixed results. According to Van der Waldt and Du Toit (1997:286), strategic planning is already been used successfully in many public institutions on the basis that the process has been adapted for the unique context of the public sector. In summary, public ought to develop and enforce a standardized and transparent performance management framework that rewards and recognizes performance by precisely.

Enabling Factors of Public Sector Reform

Leadership and change

Leaders have a fundamental role to play in leading change and is continuously challenging the status quo (Kin et al., 2014). Effective leadership is crucial for introducing change successfully and such change needs to be managed well through proper planning, organising and control. Change is primarily about leadership since the leader strives to create or generate change through the interaction of the leader/s and followers (Kin et al., 2014). But if Fealy et al. (2011) are to be believed, then leadership must viewed as a complex social process that emerges from the collective capacity of staff members that can assume leadership roles and responsibilities in an organisation. Within the public sector transformational leadership is vitally important 21st century state of public governance.

Contemporary Emirati and locally based expatriate leader in Dubai's public entities tends to be both collegiate and collaborative, these are transformational exigencies and characteristics of good governance. For example, Sheikh Mohammed the leader of Dubai and Vice-President of the UAE embodies energetic and successful leadership. He is known to be type of leader who has made promises and keeps them; he insists on excellence and achieves nothing less, given that he can be tough on those who fail to live up to the public service standards he sets (Al-Habtoor 2012: Gulf Newspaper). Implicitly, or inadvertently transformational leadership has been imposed as one of the central means of improving Dubai's public governance.

Essentially, the leader of Dubai is using his transformational leadership style to be one of the drivers to inspire holistic public sector reform, not only in Dubai but across the Arab world. Transformational leadership as described by Bass and Avolio (1993) is made up of five key components: idealised attributes, idealised influence behaviour, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individual consideration. The Dubai leader unlike any other leader in the Arab world possesses and demonstrates sociological leadership features identified above by Bass and Avolio. He is idealised, trusted, seen as a role model by his Emirati people, and critically he able imbue a sense invincibility within his government and the attendant departments and authorities as it relates to achieving his visions of the future.

At an organisational level, judicious political leadership has been cascaded down through an architecture of strategic planning, and which is fully embraced by all of Dubai's public bureaucracy. The effectiveness of political leadership in changing trajectory of traditional public sector management is reflected in delivery of service which is not based of 'perceived social standing of the individual as measured by class or racial characteristics' (Hutton 2008:3). Kotter aptly summarises that 'only through leadership can one truly develop and nurture culture that is adaptive to change' (1998:166) that emerged in recent years in Dubai's public sector. Raham and Said (2015) put it most appropriately by highlighting the UAE's political leadership has demonstrated how state leadership can make a difference in public management performance and economic growth.

Public Sector Innovation

Over the last two decades some of the most enduring questions that have emerged for all forms and tiers governments globally; is how to set and streamline national development priorities, how respond to nimbly to demands of citizens, how to incorporate and incorporate technology within the public sector, and create sea change in outdated organizational culture. In other words, re-creating a public sector that is customer – citizens centric. In this context, what should governments focus on prioritizing and getting right? Borins (2002) in his article Leadership and innovation in the Public Sector makes an important point, in noting that public management innovation has become a subject of considerable academic interest. Biygautane and May (2015:75) observed that 'technological advancement in Dubai and UAE in general has facilitated the modernisation of the Emirates public administration. This stoutly contradicts the conventional belief that public sector innovation is a virtual oxymoron. In an attempt at creating an eco-system of innovation and promoting a culture of excellence in the Dubai's public administration/sector:

…Government entities heeded the sheikhdom's leaders' call to enhance their public processes for citizens through the Star Rating Program, which uses private-sector standards for the quality of service delivery and private-sector approaches to identify problems ((Buhumaid, Constantin, and Schubert 2016: May).

The paradoxical implication of this initiative is that a sea change has taken place in the inflexible and tardy bureaucratic organizational culture that undergirds the structure of the UAE's and in particular Dubai's public sector institutions. The words of Valle (1999) has been heeded it seems who highlighted in general that for public sector organisations to survive in the future, the focus of the public sector leader must be towards developing adaptive and innovative. A number of digital initiatives have been implemented at both the national and local levels of government aim at digitizing government functions. For example, at the federal level, the UAE government has invested significant sourcing in introducing the following:

…electronic voting machines, offering a refillable debit card to facilitate the payment of government fees, and creating a government award for the best technology-driven service solutions. Whilst at the emirate or local level the Dubai Police, in the safety-and-security category, developed a solution that allows citizens to pay fines, report crimes and traffic accidents, and check on the status of applications, among other services.

In Dubai and the UAE the pervasive use of social media in government entities and departments is one the true paradoxes of 21st century use of technology. Social media has entered mainstream government departments and it usage has been elevated to becoming an essential tool in promoting citizen-engagement with the government and as a strategic medium of communication. Biygautane and May (2015:88) have observed that all 'Dubai's government 46 entities have social media accounts, with the Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) for example urging its external stakeholders to publish their complaints through the RTA's Twitter and Facebook accounts. This, it is said will allow the RTA to become more responsive to the public and more effective in handling their queries and issues.' Performance out is central to Dubai's multifaceted approach to public governance and management and this is reflected in the UAE's (including Dubai) improvement in the Global Innovation Index (GII) with the country ranking 36th in 2014, two places up from its 38th placing in 2013. All these initiatives work in tandem with Dubai's overarching strategic planning framework aimed at increasing citizen satisfaction and simultaneously to break down government vertical silos and unifying different entities on a common e-government platform.

It is impertinent to note that irrespective of the successes in reinventing Dubai's public sector, there are a number of inherent and systemic challenges that are encountered. One such challenge is highlighted by Buhumaid, Constantin, and Schubert (2016: May) who noted that public sector leadership in the United Arab Emirates like many other countries in the Arabian Gulf States, face the challenge of delivering government services to the country's demographics. The UAE's population includes a cocktail of nationalities, with the often-transient non-local population accounting for about 88 percent of its total. Given this diversity and mobility, the government must deliver services that are on par with the best offerings from around the world and that are also easy to navigate and understand, even for the newest residents. This just one of the many challenges faced by the senior manager and political players in Dubai's public administration.

6.3 Lack of Politicisation of Public Sector

The pursuit of a policy framework that engenders a new way of delivering services to the general population and interacting with citizens by the government of the UAE is not hindered by a universal public administration problem of deep seated politicization of the public bureaucracy by political parties. The socio-political epistemology of the UAE and the GCC states has been characterised by Peterson as monarchies with dirigiste governments; with the ruling families occupy the upper echelons of these regimes' (2006:9). This lack of political pluralism has served the citizenry and the public administration in particular in good stead. As a result the absence of party political difference/s, influence or politicisation of the public sector has allowed the government's public sector policy agenda as articulated in various strategic planning (formation and implementation) processes to take effect in all of the UAE's almost four hundred departments, entities, corporations and semi-government structures, with undue delays. Senior public administrators in the UAE with "high visibility quotient" do not have to be insulated from undue political interference or the pervasive politicisation of the public administration.

This is dissimilar to what prevails presently in the Republic of South Africa, and Etzioni-Halevy makes point that 'the bureaucracy purports to advance the common welfare, but under the cloak of universality but it actually furthers its own. Its apparent idealism is but a cloak for its own materialist ends' (2013:10). The politicised bureaucracy model in vogue in South Africa obliges the public sector or civil service to be under political control, and thus public servants (in senior positions) have become ultra-responsive their political masters (Rhodes et al 2009). This is because as Mafunisa (2003:8) writes '…political party structures impose administrative decisions on administrators. The model also implies that rewards and appointments are made on the basis of blind allegiance to the ruling party by public servants, and not on the basis of the merit system.' This does not exist in Dubai and the other GCC states, due in part to what Afshin Molavo, writing for the International Newsweek, highlights that the state apparatus in Dubai and elsewhere in the region '….are not sinecures for tea-sipping bureaucrats, they attract top talent' (Molvao 2007). Dubai and is able to higher some of the finest minds from into the global pool of transnational bureaucratic class to occupy senior positions and or act consultants to the public sector. This structurally prevents a scenario as described by Mafunisa (2003:88) as the mandate by some elected office-bearers to control the public service; which blurs the distinction between politics and administration and between party and state.'

Public governance in Dubai is the epitome of predictable, visionary, and innovative policymaking that is guided by a strategic planning framework that encapsulates or is driven by the government's socio-economic development known as Dubai's Strategic Plan or the Federal Government's vision 2021 national agenda. This is ably supported by a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos and one that is constantly re-inventing itself through a process of technological and managerial innovations. This is fundamentally important for entities to achieve the organisational performance targeted by government departments and authorities own strategic planning frameworks. In essence the application of private sector driven management tools and the lack of politicisation of Dubai's public sector has not led to clientelism, corruption and the erosion technical knowledge, skills and accountability (Soko, 2015: April 07).

Conclusion

Today, the imagery one is likely to conjure up about Dubai, in addition to being a city excessive consumption, but it is also a place where the ultra-modern public bureaucracy works for the benefit of the populace. The building of a modern public sector anywhere in the world requires resources, strategic planning, vision and strong leadership. These are fundamental pre-requisite in public sector institutions, if they are to effectively deal with the changing demands in a changing contemporary environment. We have seen from earlier discussion in the paper that strategic planning has been embraced by the UAE's public sector entities as an important vehicle that can be used to lead and sustain effective organization performance. Similarly, there are a number of vitally important non-management tools such as the lack of politicisation of the public sector and e-government platforms that have acted as an enabler in the transformation of Dubai's post-colonial state. On that premise, the objective of this research paper some insight has been provided on the correlation between

the strategic management and organizational performance in the UAE's public sector; within certain contextual predictors that assist in providing a better a citizen-centric public sector. .

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