

# Making Alignment between Organizational Elements in the Light of Strategic Reference Points and Its Relation with Organizational Performance

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**Abstract**—There are numerous approaches about the reaction to the changing world. All of these approaches are meaningful only if guarantee the alignment in the organization as a fundamental principle. Researches about successful organizations showed that alignment has been considered in such organizations as a determined principle. The current research aims to investigate the role of alignment of organizational elements in improving the organizational performance. In the current research, the secondary data for Social Security Organization model was used to measure organizational performance and strategic reference point theory was used to measure the degree of alignment of four elements as strategy, culture, structure and human resources. The findings of the research indicate that there is a strong alignment between above mentioned organizational elements and there is a positive correlation between alignment and organizational performance.

**Index Terms**— Making Alignment, Organizational Elements, Strategic Reference Points, Organizational Performance, Human Resource Management

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Today, the role of alignment of organizational elements for improving the organizational performance is highly interested for scientists and researchers [6]. Alignment is defined as the cohesion between two or more organizational dimensions for improving the performance [18] [19]. However, in spite of knowing about the importance of alignment, there have been limited researches about the dynamics of alignment. It should be noted that if organizational strategy changes in respond to the environment, it is necessary to coordinate other organizational elements so that alignment of those remains constant. Alignment has been previously represented for various dimensions of an organization. Melnyk et al. [17] focused on alignment relating the compatibility of strategic goals and operational plans and believed that alignment is a key parameter for compatibility of various layers in planning process. Kyobe [15] studied about alignment in information technology and believed that alignment is a process in which, selecting for gaining, improving, and applying information technology should be compatible with business goals, organizational factors, and external environment. Alignment has been considered both from content and process points of view. For example, Henderson and Venkatraman [13] invited a model for alignment process in which, alignment is based on business strategy, information technology strategy, organizational processes and infrastructures, and information technol-

ogy processes and infrastructures in an organization. Alignment between business strategy and information systems strategy has been investigated as the subject of "strategic alignment" [3] [13]. Alignment between business strategy and structure is entitled as "business alignment" and between information systems strategy and structure is entitled as "information systems strategy" in the literature. Sabherwal et al. [23] categorized alignments in five groups: (1) Organizational alignment; (2) Strategic alignment; (3) Structural alignment; (4) Information system alignment; (5) Intra dimensional alignment. However, due to increasingly importance of alignment and its critical role in success of organizations, there have been numerous studies about this variable and its role and effect on surviving and success of organization [11] [12] [14]. The current paper aims to find favorite alignment between organizational elements such as strategy, structure, culture, technology and so on and to evaluate the role of alignment in improving the organizational performance based on strategic reference point theory [1-90].

## 2 ALIGNMENT BASED ON STRATEGIC REFERENCE POINT THEORY

As previously mentioned, alignment is adjusting one thing in relation to another thing. Therefore, the main issue of management is aligning between various levels of strategy and the environment of organization and coordinating of various elements of organization [5]. Based on various alignment and configuration theories of organizations, the effectiveness of structural and strategic factors are high when there is an alignment between these factors [8]. Compatibility between content and structural variables is the main issue considered

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in the literature of this field. For instance, compatibility between organizational strategy and human resources strategy has been investigated by Armstrong [1] while Robbins [22] investigated the compatibility of strategy and structure, Saf-fold [24] studied the compatibility between strategy and culture, Palthe and Kossek [21] studied the compatibility between culture and strategy of human resources, and Lincoln et al. [16] investigated the compatibility of culture and structure. Achieving to a fundamental framework that allows judging about alignment of organizational elements is the most important thing for compatibility between various elements of organization. It seems that strategic reference point matrix is a framework that can be appropriate. In fact, reference point is an assumptive criterion in the mind of manager and used to evaluate the position of manager or organization. Fiegenbaum and Thomas (1988) defined strategic reference points as goals and or criteria which used by managers for evaluating their selections and for alarming to other critical people of the organization or for determining organizational preferences in order to make strategic decisions. Although Fiegenbaum et al. [10] recommended to use a 3D matrix (external, internal and time) for explaining strategic reference points, it should be noted that 2D models are more popular due to their simplicity and controlling the environment as strategic reference points is common in most typologies in the level of organization. Therefore, corresponding species define alignment of organizational elements.

### 3 CORRESPONDING TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS

By selecting the environment and control as strategic reference points, various types of organizational elements can be identified and aligned. Hence, each corresponding quarter in typology of organizational elements show the highest degree of alignment. To more understand of this issue, it is necessary to consider various types of organizational elements represented by experts in two dimensions of environment and control. Miles and Snow typology divided organizational strategies into four different groups as futuristic, defensive, analyzer and reactive [20]. Four structural types introduced by Daft [4] which show the reflection of environment and control on structure. Denison [7] established organizational culture types in a 2D matrix consist of control and environment (internal and external). Regarding two basic issues of attention to internal and external work market (environment) and control (of product or process), Bamberger and Meshulam [2] extracted a matrix to show four types of human resources strategy as contractive, secondary, committed and paternal. So, considering two dimensions of environment and control, corresponding types of organizational strategy, culture, structure, and human resources strategy can be used for measuring alignment. Moreover, the correlation of degree of alignment of elements and organizational performances can be studied.

### 4 ALIGNMENT OF ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS

If environment and control are considered as two strategic

reference points for evaluating alignment of organizational elements, alignment should be defined as corresponding types. For instance, in quarter of focus on internal environment and low control, organizational strategy type is reactive which is aligned with corresponding types, namely involving culture, organic structure, committed strategy of human resources. Therefore, it is possible to predict four different situations for each organizational element with 1 - 1 correspondence which shows appropriate alignment between those four elements.

When focus in on internal environment and control is low, it is necessary for organization to select reactive strategy and the corresponding culture with this type of strategy is involving culture which mentioned in Denison model. In addition, organizational structure and its corresponding human resources strategy are organic structure and committed human resources strategy which represented by Daft and Bamberger. Although alignment definition means that identified types for organizational elements (organizational strategy; organizational structure; organizational culture; and organizational human resources) are located in one of the corresponding quarters of strategic reference points matrix, the degree of alignment can only be evaluated based on the adjacency of points to each other [4].

## 5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary and secondary questions of the current research are:

#### (a) Primary question:

If there is a relationship between organizational elements and organizational performance?

#### (b) Secondary questions:

1. What are the performance levels of Iranian government operational units, banks and insurances?
2. What are the dominant organizational strategy, organizational structure, organizational culture, and organizational human resources in Iranian government operational units, banks and insurances?
3. What is the level of organizational alignment regarding the control and environment reference points?

## 6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The current research is a descriptive research from cognitive point of view while it is an applied research from results point of view. The aim of the current research understands about the degree of alignment between variables of organizational strategy, organizational structure, organizational culture, and organizational human resources and their relationships with organizational performance in Iranian economic units such as ministries, government institutes, banks and insurances. Since chief administrators lead their organizations based on strategic reference points in their minds, they were selected as statistical population of the current research and questionnaires were responded by them. It should be noted that due to limited statistical volume (29 government organizations), all counting method was used in replace of sampling. In the current research, performance evaluation indices of Social Securi-

ty Organization (general and specific indices) were used for measuring the variable of performance. General indices define enablers while specific indices indicate results. General indices are strategic management, human resources management, structure (configuration, rules and regulations), improving systems and working methods; applying official technologies, rule of law, citizen-oriented, understanding of demands and assuring about compatibility of service quality with demands and expectations of stakeholders. Specific indices are: (1) Realization of critical policies and general directions of development plans; (2) Realization of quantitative goals of development plan; (3) Performance of organizations regarding the promised plans of president and ministers at the time of election by people and congress; (4) Success in performing development plans based on quality, speed and cost; and (5) Realization of critical policies and missions of government (special missions). In addition, typology of organizational elements was evaluated by researcher-made questionnaire based on Miles and Snow, Denison, Daft, and Bamberger models. In other words, each variable (organizational strategy, organizational structure, organizational culture, and organizational human resources) was evaluated in terms of focus on environment (internal and external) and degree of control (process or product) and the dominant type of each organizational element was identified based on coordination (environment and control) in matrix of strategic reference points. Among 203 questionnaires that sent to 29 organizations, 156 questionnaires were completed by chief administrators and sent back which indicates 5 questionnaires, in average, for each organization. It should be noted that test reduction from 203 down to 156 is does not break all counting method since analysis unit of the research is organization not individual. For evaluating content validity of questionnaire, in addition to theoretical foundations, the comments of under tested people were used in elementary investigation stage. Reliability of questionnaire was measured by Cronbach's alpha as 0.94, 0.85, 0.83 and 0.82 for organizational strategy, organizational structure, organizational culture, and organizational human resources, respectively.

## 7 RESEARCH ACHIEVEMENTS

Responding to the questions of research is dependent on determining the organizational performance level, typology of organizational elements, determining alignment degree for organizational elements, and explaining the relationship between alignment and performance as following:

## 8 ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

In first question test (What are the performance levels of Iranian government operational units, banks and insurance), it is not possible to merely rely upon financial indices since non-proficiency nature of some organizations demands applying non-financial scales. So, to respond that question, the results of last performance evaluation of operational organizations based on indices of ninth Social Security Organization in 2006 are used. However, for banks and insurance companies, finan-

cial indices are considered. In other words, the relative efficiency of banks and insurance companies in the fields of investment structure, return and growth are calculated. These indices are combined to find final financial efficiency as the final index of relative efficiency of banks and insurance companies.

It can be said that among 29 organizations, 21 organizations (72%) have high performance and 7 organizations (28%) have medium performance. meanwhile, among non-proficiency organizations, Tax organization have the best performance (0.94) and Railway Company of I.R.I have the worst performance (0.53). among banks and insurance companies, ASIA insurance company have the best financial performance (0.96) and MASKAN bank have the worst (0.45).

## 9 TYPOLOGY OF ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS

In responding to second question (What are the dominant organizational strategy, organizational structure, organizational culture, and organizational human resources in Iranian government operational units, banks and insurances?), coordination (environment, control) of each organizational element is firstly calculated and then, their location in matrix of strategy reference points are determined. It should be noted that each axis (environment and control) make a continuum that reference points explain the quality of considered issue from manager point of view by locating on it.

18 organizations have futuristic (researcher) strategy and 11 organizations have analyzer strategy. It shows that from chief administrators' point of views, the strategic focus of organization is on external environment and majority of the organizations (18) are emphasized on more flexibility and less control while 11 organizations, in spite of more emphasis on external environment, are emphasized on more control in organization. It can be seen that mechanical structure is applied in 18 organizations while organic structure is applied in 7 organizations. Two organizations have very mechanical structure typology and two others have organic structure typology. Considering cultural typology, it can be said that adjusting culture is followed by 22 organizations which in agreement with strategic typology introduced in 18 organizations (futuristic). Five organizations follow mission cultural typology, one organization follows involving cultural typology and another one follows stability and compatibility cultural typology. Considering human resources strategies, contractive strategy is applied in 13 organizations and secondary strategy is applied in 12 organizations. Only two organizations apply parental strategy and two other apply committed strategy. It should be noted that contractive and secondary strategies are emphasized on external environment but from flexibility point of view, contractive typology is focused on product not process. So, it can be said that this type of strategy prepare more freedom and flexibility for its human resources while secondary strategy, in

addition to focus on external environment, is emphasized on working process and hence, it can be concluded that it follows more serious control than contractive strategy.

## 10 DEGREE OF ALIGNMENT FOR ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENTS

Responding to third question (What is the level of organizational alignment regarding the control and environment reference points?) is dependent on measuring the degree of alignment for organizational elements. As previously noted, although locating organizational element typologies in one of the four quarters of matrix indicate their alignment, it should be noted that adjacency or fitting of these points show the highest degree of alignment. In the current research, degree of alignment is determined by measuring adjacency of organizational elements in matrix of strategic points.

As can be seen, organizational strategy, organizational structure and human resources strategies are adjacent to each other and organizational culture is away. However, their discrepancy is not very large. As can be seen, 22 organizations (76%) have very high alignment, 6 organizations (21%) have high alignment and only one organization have medium alignment. Meanwhile, it can be said that human resources and structure due to short term effects on performance of organization are highly interested and these common effects leads to a similar approach in the minds of managers.

## 11 CORRELATION OF ALIGNMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Although alignment of organizational elements lead to organizational cohesion and it is expected that lead to improve the performance of organization, our findings through independency test (using technique  $\chi^2$ ) between alignment and performance shows weak correlation between these two variables ( $r = 0.36$ ).

## 12 CONCLUSION

Although 2D alignment between organizational elements has been interested in literature, multi-dimensional alignment among strategy, structure, culture and human resources variables has not been widely studied in past. In the current research, alignment was measured by strategic reference points' matrix. The results indicate that there is a strong alignment between organizational elements in considered organizations. So, it is expected that organizational performance can be improved by increasing the alignment. It seems that the structure and human resources strategy are appropriately bonded to each other due to daily applications. However, strategy and culture types are away in matrix of points due to their mental nature. As the performance of organizations is evaluated

based on secondary data for Social Security Organization model, evaluation error should not be ignored in this model. The results of this evaluation is not in agreement with general conditions of the country and hence, the results can be more real if reviewing evaluation indices and separating identification method from individual preferences and limitations. The current research shows the importance of alignment in organizations. So, it suggests that the importance of alignment explain for managers to support their attitude towards this issue. Further, policy makers and supervisors must pay attention to these issues in organizations and consider the skill of manager to align organizational elements as a positive mark to hire the manager. Moreover, it seems that alignment between elements of administrative system can play a key role in increasing the productivity of government organizations. Therefore, it recommends that policy makers and development planners consider improving the productivity induced by alignment of administrative system elements in compilation of rules related to administrative system and government management.

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