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THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC AWARENESS IN STRATEGY FORMULATION: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><i>Article history:</i> Received: 2024-06-21 Received in revised for: 2024-07-07 Accepted: 2024-07-08 Available online</p> <hr/> <p><i>Keywords:</i> Strategic consciousness, Strategic awareness, Business Management, Strategic Management, Dimensions of Strategic Awareness <i>JEL Code:</i> L10, M10, M30</p>	<p><i>Strategic awareness is widely viewed by most researchers as a specialized system that organizations embrace to gain a thorough understanding of their internal and external surroundings, assess their internal standing, and anticipate future conditions. Additionally, strategic awareness enables the organization to reach its objectives through strategic and organizational conduct, making it a contemporary area of focus.</i></p> <p><i>The purpose of this article is to collect bibliographic information about strategic awareness for future articles. In the article strategic awareness is treated the main topic and different theoretical literatures were included for clarification what is strategic awareness.</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Taking into consideration its importance in recognizing the internal and external environment, strategic awareness, with its different dimensions, identifies its strengths and weaknesses, capture the opportunities arising from these variables, identify threats and work to avoid them.

Strategic awareness is crucial for the organization's success, as it significantly impacts achieving exceptional performance. Leaders have the opportunity to gain insights and share experiences with peers globally, contributing to their learning and growth.

Organizations aim to utilize strategic awareness to create business opportunities and minimize the impact of environmental uncertainty. This involves enhancing their competitive position and adapting to various environmental factors to effectively manage the environment, capitalize on opportunities, and mitigate potential threats.

The company's capacity to acquire crucial information, anticipate shifts, and enhance decision-making by utilizing management information systems, is boosted by strategic awareness. This aids in making well-informed decisions and mitigating the uncertainties and challenges posed by tough competition in local and international markets. The primary objective is to assess, examine, and understand the current standings of competitors, along with their strategies and actions.

In the face of increased competition, achieving economic globalization has become a key strategic objective. As a result, the organization must keep pace with global advancements in order to effectively serve its customers by offering high-quality products at competitive prices that fulfill their requirements. Staying updated on these developments involves understanding all facets and occurrences in both the internal and external environments, and staying abreast of technological advancements, particularly in information and communication technologies, that bring about innovations in the marketing industry and influence changes in consumer preferences.

WHAT IS STRATEGIC AWARENESS?

There are many definitions of strategic awareness in the literature, some define it as a necessary ability to have administrative leadership, which requires the broadening of leaders' perceptions, the needed skill appropriate to the development and use of a package of activities, strategy understanding or mechanisms (Ibrahim and Al-Nuaimi, 2020:100).

The term "strategic awareness" emerged in 1980s and was developed as a top management term that takes into account all members of the organization, also it takes into account the role of external and internal factors (Alabdaly and Almayali, 2021:488). From the beginning strategic awareness focused on individuals and the strategic priorities of key persons. It has been presented as a concept expressing the degree of awareness (Hambrick, 1981:263), but the organizational level was the main focus to use it because of its effective strategy implementation and the assumptions that organizational managers have a well and general understanding or awareness in organization's current strategies (Davis et al, 2012:322). That is why, strategic awareness is a topic that requires to be improved and developed over time for the organizations to be able to monitor the data they receive from the environment and as the consequence to use in goal setting (Alabdaly and Almayali, 2021:489).

Fehr and Huck (2013) conducted a comparison between rationality and its relation to the topic and determined that it is inferior to rationality (Fehr and Huck, 2013). They stated that topics demonstrate strategic awareness when they are perceived as part of a game, meaning that managers must realize that strategizing involves considering the actions of others. It is important to note that grasping the rules does not automatically imply strategic awareness (Al-Badayneh, 2021:47). Essentially, individuals can outline the potential outcomes of various actions, but they may not fully comprehend that effective gameplay requires taking into account the decisions of others. Eccles and colleagues (2007) defined strategic awareness as the managerial procedure of evaluating the organization's internal and current resources, as well as their capabilities, and understanding the perception of all regulations and directives (Eccles et al., 2007).

The definition of strategic awareness varies among researchers and authors. According to Thompson (1995), it refers to managers' method of gathering information about the organization's current status, potential for change, and all internal and external environmental

factors. Conversely, strategic awareness has also been described as a capability. Cognitive empowerment enables organizations to develop a distinct vision and a framework built on questioning, research, value transformation, and enhanced mental capacity (Halis et al., 2010:160).

Bowman (2017) in his article "The Magic of Strategic Awareness," identified strategic awareness as the process of creating access to non-analytical data and integrating internal knowledge into the strategic decision-making process.

Aytar, on the other hand, identified strategic awareness as the level of consciousness that must be understood in order to effectively research the stages of the strategic management process (Aytar, 2019:3484), and based on the above, researchers say that strategic awareness is the degree of awareness of the organization about the contingencies in the environment, and that decision makers can research any problems that may emerge in the future. They saw it as the ability to foresee the impact of a change, and to take required measures with a set of skills (Reflection, Reframing, Systems Thinking, Orientation Learning).

Successful strategy implementation relies on the premise that all organizational members share a clear and unified understanding of the organization's existing strategies (Al-Badayneh, 2021:48).

Conversely, Gibb and Scott defined strategic awareness as the capability to assess the overall impact of any change (Gibb and Scott, 1985). This involves not only understanding the immediate effects of new developments but also considering their long-term consequences. For instance, one might explore a new market opportunity by examining its impact on existing resources and determining the necessary adjustments or acquisitions. However, further analysis would involve predicting what might happen if this new market line becomes extremely successful. Would it necessitate a new factory? How would this be managed? Are there individuals within the organization capable of handling this? How would the business owner's influence affect the management resources and the manager's lifestyle? How would this impact other ongoing ideas?

We can see in the literature that some researchers associate strategic awareness with strategic intention. Tughba stated that strategic awareness expresses the general strategic intention regarding the mission, the purpose, targets, fundamental processes, system, and organizational culture that will facilitate the achievement of goals. (Tughba, 2019).

Seifoori defined strategic awareness as the decision maker's ability to be thoroughly informed about all aspects of the organization and its external environment. This includes the ability to avoid risks, seize opportunities, and possess knowledge and experience regarding the internal environment and understanding the organization's existing human resources (Seifoori, 2020: 116).

Thompson and Martin (2022) provided a definition of strategic awareness, highlighting its importance in identifying the organization's strategic position and relative success. This involves gaining insight into the organization's operations, its competitive relationships, understanding the external environment, and acknowledging the necessity for change (Al-Mohammadi and Al-Dulaimi, 2022).

According to other scholars, strategic awareness is closely linked to environmental factors. Kazem et al. (2022) characterized strategic awareness as the degree of openness, a methodical

comprehension of the environment, awareness of prevailing conditions, and understanding how to dynamically compete to fulfill its requirements (Kazem et al., 2022:54).

Ward and Haase approached strategic awareness as a process, viewing it as the application of consciousness to maintain an ever-increasing moment-by-moment awareness of thoughts, feelings, experiences, and reality (Ward and Haase, 2016:433).

Some researchers, such as Young (2019), have linked strategic awareness with leadership and the necessary skills. Young evaluated strategic awareness as crucial for skilled decision-making among leaders, enabling them to discern emerging options in complex environments and mitigate inherent risks (Young, 2019).

Pencarelli et al. (2009) and other researchers have emphasized the importance of strategic awareness as a crucial skill in the decision-making process of small businesses, particularly in assisting entrepreneurs with strategy formulation and determining the most effective approach to implementing strategies (Pencarelli et al., 2009).

According to some authors, strategic awareness is defined as the organizational capability to effectively utilize resources and leverage existing infrastructure, such as information systems and strategic information systems. It also encompasses the organization's ability to thoroughly scan the environment to address hyper-competition (Al Haraisa, 2022:44).

Özdaşlı and Kandemir (2016:131) defined strategic awareness as the awareness of environmental factors' impacts and possessing knowledge regarding competition, development, and transformation.

Tashgit et al. (2023) highlighted the importance of strategic awareness in influencing strategic agility, deeming it essential for creating competitive strategies that can adeptly address environmental influences.

DIMENSIONS OF STRATEGIC AWARENESS

Strategic awareness is characterized as a framework that empowers strategic leaders to reassess fundamental competition and unique advantages through deliberation. It involves understanding how to identify alternative strategies in response to competitors' strategies, how to leverage them, and how to strategically think about these issues (Shishko, 2010). Due to its critical role in achieving organizational goals, strategic awareness is widely recognized by researchers as essential to measure and study through various research approaches. In their studies, Hambrick (1981), Pisapia et al. (2005), Halis et al. (2010), Turkay et al. (2012), and Yıldız (2019) have shown that strategic awareness includes aspects like introspection, changing perspectives, holistic thinking, and goal-oriented learning.

Reflection: Reflection involves the ability to synthesize logical and rational thought, drawing on perceptions, experiences, and information to assess past events and formulate intuitive principles for guiding future actions (Pisapia et al., 2005). This cognitive process includes understanding the reasons behind successful decisions by employing double-loop or reflective learning, incorporating feedback from knowledge and past experiences. Strategically aware managers establish a framework that enables them to visualize and comprehend a range of challenges, adapting by linking disparate elements and generating alternative responses (Dhir et al., 2018). Even in situations where managers lack complete information, reasoned decision-making facilitates the identification of optimal actions and predictions (Pisapia et al., 2009).

Reframing(R): The term describes the capacity to switch focus between various viewpoints, frameworks, and mental models in order to create fresh insights and choices for taking action (Pisapia et al., 2005). It entails the process of restructuring or reinterpreting organizational tactics in times of crisis or transformation. Leaders can abandon outdated ideas and envision new functions (Lahtinen, 2020). By broadening their outlook and improving their ability to act, leaders become better equipped to grasp opportunities and challenges, devise alternative action plans, and adeptly navigate the increasingly uncertain business landscape characterized by unprecedented and unexpected changes (Mukherjee et al., 2020).

Systems Thinking (ST): The concept of systems thinking goes beyond focusing on individual actors, events, and underlying structures to comprehend the patterns, forces, properties, and internal relationships that influence systems (Bonn, 2005: 338). It stresses the importance of a comprehensive understanding of systems, including their behavior and evolution over time, as well as the feedback mechanisms that propel these changes. This method is essential for grasping organizational dynamics, administrative processes, and their interconnections, and for uncovering practical insights (Halis et al., 2010: 162).

Learning Orientation (LO): According to Argyris (1976), learning is crucial for enhancing decision-making effectiveness within organizations. The absence of standardized learning processes leads to undetected or uncorrected errors, resulting in organizational inefficiency due to a lack of shared knowledge or its development among members (Martinez et al., 2020). There are three commonly associated values with a learning orientation:

- **Commitment to Learning:** This refers to the organization's emphasis on the value of learning and its commitment to understanding the causes and effects of its actions (Aloulou, 2018).
- **Open-Mindedness:** The above viewpoint enables departments to go beyond their current perspectives, resulting in not just ongoing enhancements but also a more profound comprehension of their purpose and influence (Kazem et al., 2022).
- **Shared Vision:** Shared vision measures the extent to which an organization develops and maintains a universally understood organizational focus. It enhances motivation and purpose among organizational members, providing them with a clear sense of direction and purpose. Without a shared vision, individuals are typically less motivated to engage in learning and collective efforts (Özşahin et al., 2011).

According to Kazem et al. (2022:54), departments within organizations may possess specific capabilities that enable them to anticipate future directions and effectively adapt to changing environments, thereby promoting prosperity and sustainability. This capability hinges on organized departments' awareness of aligning with these changes. Elements crucial to departmental awareness in this context include:

- *Expanded awareness:* Expanded awareness refers to the ongoing experiences that enable managers to adapt their decision-making, responses, and learning capabilities in order to navigate competitive processes and achieve favorable outcomes (Ward and Haase, 2016; Mehmood et al., 2023). The above viewpoint enables departments to go beyond their current perspectives, resulting in not just ongoing enhancements but also a more profound comprehension of their purpose and influence (Kazem et al., 2022).

- *Filtering and sensory perception:* The methods by which different parts of organizations interpret events are influenced by their expectations and perceptions of real issues (Kazem et al., 2022). Senior management's high level of consciousness within organizations reflects their ability to process and filter situations as they are perceived, shaped by filters that influence their behavior, thoughts, and interactions with new experiences.
- *Awareness:* The idea of being aware, which is connected to consciousness, is commonly known as mental management, combining scientific and artistic elements. It incorporates management theories that help in shaping strategies to exert influence on others and comprehend how external experiences affect them (Ward, 2016:383).
- *Human experience:* The knowledge, thought processes, and perspectives collected in an organization change as time passes (Ward, Haase, 2016:4). These components represent the organization's gathered knowledge, its cognitive processes, and its obtained points of view, all of which influence its decision-making and behaviors (Steiner, 1996:27).

The four dimensions of strategic elements, as mentioned by most researchers, are internal strategic consciousness, external strategic consciousness, current strategic consciousness, and forward-looking strategic consciousness (Pencarelli, et al. 2009), (Thompson and Martine 2010). Other studies also support the validity of these dimensions.

- *Internal strategic awareness:* According to Pencarelli et al. (2009), internal strategic consciousness involves the awareness of internal resources and expertise within the corporate system and their potential to be transformed into a competitive advantage over competitors. Resources encompass all assets, capabilities, organizational processes, and information controlled by a company that facilitate the implementation of strategies aimed at enhancing efficiency and effectiveness. These resources are viewed as fundamental sources of competitive advantage (Barney, 2000).
- *External strategic awareness:* It encompasses the competitive, social, political, and economic characteristics of the context, which significantly influence the strategic actions of enterprises (Savelli, Splendiani, 2009). This awareness of the environment is crucial for understanding and navigating the external factors that impact organizational strategies.
- *Current strategic awareness:* Refers to the ability of entrepreneurs to comprehend their current market position (where they stand) (Pencarelli et al., 2009). This understanding is essential for strategic decision-making and planning within the competitive landscape.
- *Forward-looking strategic awareness:* Meaning where you aim to be in the future or tomorrow (Thompson and Martine, 2010). This refers to the strategic vision and goals that entrepreneurs or organizations set to achieve in the coming days, months, or years.

Other researchers, such as Ibrahim and Al-Nuaimi (2020), categorized the dimensions of strategic awareness into 4 groups. These are typically outlined as follows:

A - Strategic Diagnosis

Diagnosis can be defined as "a set of behaviors aimed at identifying defects and addressing them to achieve specific goals." Al-Hashemi (2006) described diagnosis as "an operational mechanism involving the analysis of both internal and external environmental variables" (Al-Hawary and Al-Hamwan, 2017: 278). It involves "the ability to discern the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats within the organization's external environment" (Al-Hashemi, 2006: 58).

B - Strategic evaluation

It refers to the process of "evaluating and analyzing alternative courses of action, articulating futuristic concepts, and reformulating them in a manner that is comprehensible and easily communicable to managers within the organization." This involves questioning aspects of the implementation process and assessing the reliability and competence of leaders (Ibrahim and Al-Nuaimi, 2020:103).

C- Understanding

This refers to "the capacity to absorb and comprehend information and effectively disseminate it to followers, thereby enhancing their ability and influence to adapt to rapidly changing environmental conditions." Understanding the leadership of all internal and external environmental variables entails a comprehensive awareness of environmental changes. In essence, it involves leveraging opportunities and mitigating threats by assimilating new and current information and data, and integrating them for use in future environmental change scenarios. This process aids in comprehending strategies, goals, vision, and mission of the organization (Fragouli, 2016: 81).

D- Reaction

This means "being aware of all external events, including challenges in the external environment, and responding to challenges that have arisen in previous years" (Gitsham, 2012:4). It refers to "a series of decisions and actions aimed at formulating and implementing long-term plans designed to achieve organizational goals and align with the environment." Rapid responsiveness reflects strategic flexibility in mobilizing resources to adapt to environmental changes (Hunitie, 2018: 324).

THE IMPORTANCE OF STRATEGIC AWARENESS

The rapid development and increasing openness in the business landscape have intensified competition among organizations striving for maximum success and distinction. As these organizations embrace modern methods, effective management and continuity have become paramount. However, the contemporary business environment also faces numerous threats and challenges that jeopardize competitiveness, leading to inconvenience and complexity for businesses. Addressing these challenges requires effective programs that guide organizations in creating strategies to secure their competitive edge.

Organizations are seeking new and unconventional approaches to strengthen their competitive position and secure the longevity and success of their business. This involves exploring their environment, leveraging necessary tools to enhance their knowledge resources, navigating through changes and advancements, and continuously improving their operational methods and systems. Understanding their distinctiveness and competitive advantage has thus become increasingly crucial, prompting organizations to stay informed about developments and innovations within and around their operational sphere (Al-Mohammadi and Al-Dulaimi, 2022:8169).

Strategic awareness plays a pivotal role in enhancing an organization's competitive performance by mitigating risks that hinder goal achievement. The concept creates an environment that is favorable for creativity, allowing organizations to take advantage of advancements in technology. By effectively adapting to these advancements, organizations can

use them to tackle survival challenges and attain strategic success. Strategic awareness thus represents a modern concept with substantial potential and numerous possibilities for organizational advancement.

Many researchers have emphasized the significance and influence of strategic awareness on organizational performance. According to Hambrick (1978), strategic awareness can positively impact organizational performance, a viewpoint supported by scholars such as Andrews (1971) and Bourgeois (1978). Conversely, strategic awareness can also have negative implications, as noted by researchers like Quinn (1977) and Mintzberg (1978). These perspectives highlight the dual nature of strategic awareness, illustrating its potential to either enhance or hinder organizational outcomes depending on how it is applied and managed.

Pencarelli et al. (2009) mentions the importance of strategic awareness as follows:

- Internal and external awareness are crucial for achieving strategic goals as they serve as the bridge between a decision maker's vision and their intuitive understanding of the organization's environment.
- Decision makers can use strategic awareness to assess the consistency and validity of their decisions, particularly when there are gaps in organizational planning.
- The determination of strategic goals is facilitated by strategic awareness in decision making.
- Strategic decision-making is significantly influenced by strategic awareness.

According to Dyczkowska and Dyczkowski (2012), a high level of employee empowerment combined with strategic awareness enhances employee motivation and commitment to organizational strategy.

Fehr and Huck (2014) highlighted that strategic awareness can provide substantial benefits across various aspects of life. For instance, in retail financial markets, consumers' lack of understanding of advisors' financial incentives can lead to significant harm (Inderst and Ottaviani, 2012; Chater, Huck, and Inderst, 2010).

As previously mentioned, strategic awareness influences both the external and internal environments of an organization, impacting its performance and market position significantly. It serves as a motivational factor for improving employee behavior, driving them to perform at their best to achieve organizational goals.

CONCLUSION

Strategic awareness refers to the capacity of the organizational decision-maker to have complete awareness of all aspects related to the organization and its external surroundings, allowing them to mitigate risks and capitalize on opportunities. This includes comprehending the internal environment, which involves having information and knowledge about the human resources of the organization. Thus, strategic awareness is a comprehensive concept that covers all elements and departments of the organization to achieve its goals.

It is evident that action inputs, such as those outlined in the program, can significantly influence this process. Generally, consulting and offering proactive training and educational recommendations can foster strategic awareness, particularly when the focus is directed exclusively toward the specific development issues of the owner-manager.

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