Strategic Priorities Cascading and Contextualizing Practices at Different Tiers of Oromia Regional State: Context and Consistency Analysis

Dereje Olani[1]

Abstract

Nowadays, organizations face a fast changing and threatening environment that comes from demand for new policies, national and global economic forces, demographic, socio-cultural, and technological changes. These giant forces inevitably require organizations to be serious in thinking about their orientation, decisions, and actions. The objective of the current study was to examine the practice of strategic priority cascading focusing on context and consistency analysis. Specifically, context sensitivity, consistency of cascading practice, participation of stakeholders, capacity of planners, and factors affecting the practice of strategic priority cascading in the different tiers. Descriptive research design and mixed research approach were used. The population of the study was the selected public sectors ranging from Oromia Regional State to the Wereda level including Kebele. Both probabilistic and purposive sampling techniques were used based on the nature of the data and relevancy of the information. Questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussion and document analysis were used to collect data. The finding of the study shows that there was moderate level of context sensitivity of the strategic priority cascading and poor level of consistency. In addition, the result of the study shows that the relevant stakeholders' participation was inadequate demanding improvement such as stablishing strong framework that maintains active participation. Furthermore, capacity building practice pertaining to the strategic priority cascading was low demanding any concerning body. The finding also indicates that a range of factors and challenges could affect the strategic priority cascading in the different tiers of the government. It was concluded that the strategic priority cascading practice in the different tiers was not adequately context sensitive and less consistent with the specific and unique characteristics of the study area. Recommendations were given based on the critical issues perceived in the result.

Key terms: Context, Consistency Strategy, Strategic Priority, Cascading, Plan, Tiers

1. Introduction

Nowadays, organizations face a fast changing and threatening environment that come from demand for new policies, national and global economic forces, demographic changes, socio-cultural, and technological changes (Salavati et al., 2017). These giant forces inevitably require organizations to be serious in thinking about their orientation, decisions and actions. Organizations are expected to develop capacity that in turn enables them to manage the

[1] Researcher, Ethiopian Civil Service University, email: email: der4jeolani@gmail.com

momentum of the organizations through what is collectively called strategic management. This leads to better organizational performance and survival (Dubik, 2012; Ramírez et al., 2011). Dionisio (2017) stated that strategic management has three elements: strategic thinking, strategic planning, and managing strategic momentum. Dionisio (2017) proposes that activities in all elements affect each other.

Outstanding scholars in the area argue that strategic thinking encompasses both thinking and acting within a given set of philosophies and assumptions. Dubik (2012) divides strategic thinking into two styles: strategy as an intelligent machine and strategy as creative imagination. The first style related to predictive and the second one is a creative approach (Ramírez et al., 2011). The intrinsic meaning of predictive approach indicates the upper tiers of governing bodies/government are expected to care for future and capable of recognizing the critical forces that shape the course of action of the future and related outcomes, on the one hand (Ramírez et al., 2011). The creative approach, on the other hand, involves key people in creating a context specific and coherent strategy in line with the upper strategy as well as the planning tools to make it happen effectively.

Most of the time, lower tiers of governing bodies such as zonal and lower tiers have faced critical interrelated problems such as poor and inadequate revenue base, shortage of competent staff skilled in public service delivery; lack of experience in decentralized governance and context specific policy framework (Mehret 1998 and Fanta 1999). From this statement, it is possible to suspect that the lower tiers suffer more from contextualizing the broad and general strategy on the top tier to their unique conditions and context.

As strategic priority cascading is related to goal-setting, establishing targets and devising specific strategies to attain them. In addition, solving context specific problems, creative discovery of hidden, but potentially viable, embracing change and creativity in decision-making is fundamental for organizational performance and survival (Card, 2015). In addition, context specific strategy priority cascading is related to understanding the future and being ready to make decisions for the future and related to intelligent opportunism which is further related to the idea of openness to new experience that results in allowing people to take advantage of alternative strategies in their context (Bonn, 1992; Nuntamanop & Igel, 2012). This helps to respond to a rapidly changing environment and public demand, which is addressing the issue of contextualization. Strategic priority cascading is all about addressing contextual issues (problem) of an organization or a given environment without compromising alignment (uniformity) of the major components devised from the upper tier/structure.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to examine the state of strategic priority cascading, emphasizing contextualization and consistency of strategy; assessing stakeholders' participation in planning process. Exploring and determining the influencing factors of strategy priority cascading practice in East Shewa Zone of Oromia Regional State public sectors.

2 Statement of the Problem

As citizens' expectations for various service projects have risen, so too has awareness of community needs among planners and strategy designers. The issue now becomes, how do we create and develop a context specific projects that are broadly supported and meet a range of needs within a given organizational, social or environmental context? The context sensitive strategic cascading approach is an answer to that question (Alshehhi, 2018). With this approach, interdisciplinary teams work with public and agency stakeholders to tailor strategy to the setting and unique features of a given scenario. The goal of contextualizing strategic priority cascading

is to deliver a program of projects that is responsive to the unique character of the communities it serves. This supports sustainability of the project service (Nuntamanop & Igel, 2012).

Nowadays, organizations are focusing on measuring results and calculating yields on their efforts. Efforts of administrators today are to control institutional endeavors which are essential and generally aligned with current best practices (Salavati et al., 2017; Kalali et al., 2015). Strategic planning, encompassing such activities as planning, performance measurement, program budgeting, and the like, have proven to be very useful for organizational effectiveness. The strategic planning should be developed with consultation and participation of important stakeholders. The participation of stakeholders helps to intrinsically understand the major and specific assumptions and philosophies of the strategy. In contrast, failure to actively participate in the strategy development can impede context specific realities in implementation (Salamzadeh, et al., 2015; Alshehhi, 2018). This further, may, adversely affects consistency of strategy cascading, creating gap among the different tiers.

Scholars tried to identify challenges causing strategic priority cascading in a given area. For instance, Ding & Dai (2018) and Nuntamanop & Igel (2012) identify that failure in systematic thinking, failure in motive organizational culture, targeting failure in organization, failure to access to accurate and timely information and to convert strategic planning into strategic objectives, vague strategic targets key performance indicators and difficulty in implementing workplace friendly ethics within organizational and environmental context. Salamzadeh, et al., (2015) stress that failure to see beyond routine and immediate consequences result in problem of strategic thinking. The problem can be poor strategic priority cascading. Similarly, Alshehhi (2018) propose that unless leadership is committed and capacitated being strategic thinker is a mere wish.

The basic argument here is that failure in strategic priority cascading and poor contextualization practice leads to inadequate implementation of the strategic planning and difficulty in operationalizing the broader strategy to the lower tier's context. Review of the literature indicates that the challenge could be arisen from lack of skills, inadequate participation in planning and strategy preparation, inadequate organizational assessment and environmental scanning (Nuntamanop & Igel, 2012). Strategic thinkers are good at setting goals and priorities as well as contextualizing and establishing smart, coherent and logical strategy.

What triggers this study is that there have been little studies and literature on the strategic priority cascading, particularly in the study area. With this gap, this study intends to contribute to the body of knowledge by appraising the practice of strategic priority cascading with emphasis on context and consistency analysis, stakeholder participation and identification of major challenges of strategic priority cascading in the study area. The objectives of the are a) to examine to what extent the strategy cascading is context specific at different Tiers of ORS Public Sectors; b) to examine to what extent the strategy priorities cascading is consistent across different Tiers of ORS Public Sectors; c) to assess the status of stakeholders' participation in development of the strategic planning and cascading; and d) to identify the major factors affecting effective strategic priorities cascading practices at different Tiers of ORS Public Sectors.

3. Related Literature Review

3.1 Theoretical Perspectives

Scholars in education realm define contextualization as the process of debating, determining and agreeing upon the meaning of a central framework in a given local situation (context). It is about

customizing a strategy for the context of a given setting or region in order to make the content of a strategy appropriate and meaningful to the reality in that given location (INEE, 2013).

Literature indicates that the use of contextualization of content is supported by three principles. The first principle is prior knowledge which assumes a contextualized content can activate workers' prior knowledge and promote more effective problem solving (Diniso, 2017). The second principle, promoting conceptual change, assumes contextualization of content in interactive engagement activities that motivates workers with a concept's relevance can improve implementation. For the third principle, promoting metacognition, contextualization of content helps workers reflect on their organization's unique characteristics to bridge ideas from a familiar concrete context of an abstract concept so they can recognize their own personal relationship to these concepts (Rigdeley, 2015).

The application of strategy is a purposeful and multidirectional change process aimed at putting a particular strategy (plan) into practice that can influence a multi-level implementation system. The implementation is purposeful to the extent that the process is assumed to alter performance according to certain policy goals; it is multidirectional as it can be inflected by performers at different levels (Kalial, 2015). It is multidirectional because it can be inflected by performers at different points; it is contextualized in that organizations and societal shocks and trends, i.e. in culture, demography, politics and economy, influence the implementation system and the manner in which a phenomenon affects the overall strategy institutionalization (Okoli & Onah, 2003;Ikelegbe, 2006; Vienne and Pont, 2017). Therefore, contextualization of strategy priority cascading is the process and strategy that allows implementers to effectively implement an intended policy.

3.2. Capacity of Implementers

Capacity refers to the abilities, skills, understandings, attitudes, values, relationships, behaviors, motivations, resources and conditions that enable individuals, organizations, networks/sectors and broader social systems to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time.

3.3 The Drive to Strategy Priority Cascading

Efforts to improve policy making and cascading have varied in scale and focus, and have frequently overlapped or seemed to merge with one another (Yorks & Nicolaides, 2012). Yet it is possible to identify four areas of focus sustaining this activity of strategy making and cascading: process, quality, structure and politics.

Process aspect has mainly taken the form of 'policy cycles', which present the process as a logical flow between discrete phases, so that the defining of objectives precedes and informs the appraisal of options, and so on. *Quality* aspect focuses on strategy developing bodies' characteristics and what qualities they should possess, such as being innovative, forward-looking and joined up; aligned. *Structure* perspective assesses to what extent the institutional arrangements support better strategy making and cascading. There are attempts to create institutional bases for strategy making, such as the growing use of 'flexible strategy pools' in departments. *Politics* aspect is the way in which political aims and desires contribute to strategy cascading. Harold Lasswell famously defined politics as *"who gets what, when, and how"*.

3.4 Context Sensitive Strategy Design and Cascading

Context sensitivity is a simple idea–taking the surroundings into consideration when making planning or infrastructure decisions. This represents a shift over traditional approaches which were all about "function" to an approach that balances the focused project purpose with community values and assets. Successful context sensitive processes both facilitate citizen participation throughout the process and allow greater design flexibility in the final product.

Context sensitivity processes integrate community objectives and values relating to compatibility, livability and walkability, sense of place, environmental impacts and justice, and historic preservation (CMAP, 2008). According to CMAP (2008) a context specific strategy priority cascading should be founded on assumptions that every project has a context, solutions should be tailored to the context, its processes seek consensus, its approaches are multidisciplinary and collaborative as well as its projects and methods are time-tested and proven, and revolve around the people directly affected by the project. According to California University Performance Appraisal Planning of 2016-2017 Guide development of context specific plans and strategies should fulfill SMART Principle:

Specific: This answers the question "Can you contextually define the steps to reach the goal?" **Measurable:** Answers the question "How will you show improvement?" within the specific circumstances? **Achievable**: Is this something you have control over given the unique characteristics of your organization or level? **Relevant**: Does it relate to the issue at hand? This perspective deals with consistency of a plan with the issue under scrutiny or implementation. **Time-based**: Appropriate time frame should be established given the circumstances. Here flexibility in relation to priority and context is also important.

3.5 Scorecard Strategic Cascading and Alignment Approach for Consistency

Aligning an organization's shared vision of the future with the work employees do on a day-to-day basis is accomplished by cascading the balanced scorecard. Alignment is one of the key reasons organizations develop balanced scorecard systems. Through alignment comes strategic focus on results and accomplishments. An effective cascading effort is designed to achieve consistency as the following: Firstly, align strategic objectives for the organization's primary operating and support units to the organization's high-level vision, mission, and strategy. Secondly, align employee objectives and the work people do on a day-to-day basis to the organization's operating and support unit strategy. Thirdly, focus individual effort on results and accomplishments. Cascading is most effective when organizations focus and align around strategic objectives rather than on activities, initiatives, or projects. By aligning around objectives, an organization can better focus efforts on long-term results and accomplishments, instead of just short-term milestones and task completion (Kaplan and Norton, 1992).

3.6 Hindrances of Context Specific Strategic (CSS) Priority Cascading

It is important to meet challenges head on and address them up front. American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials & Federal Highway Administration (2007) identified the following as major challenges of CSS. *Internal Resistance to Change*: Managers can help team members understand how their skills relate to job skills required for context sensitive strategy approaches, provide a rationale for change that is meaningful to each team member's work, and align performance goals. *Inflexible Design Standards*: Design standards may

sometimes be applied rigidly to avoid liability or simply because it is the "way designs are typically done." Owner/agency liability can be managed when context sensitive solutions are well reasoned and comprehensively documented. To implement CSS approaches, opportunities can be provided for design staff to learn from other design practitioners. This helps designers explore strategies for overcoming barriers to flexible application of design standards and help identify design exception policies that can be applied flexibly. Lack of Stakeholder Trust: The CSS process can require new relationships between regulatory agencies and other stakeholders. If there is resistance to shifting to collaborative relationships from traditional regulatory relationships, training is important to develop CSS skills.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The design of the study was descriptive. Using the descriptive statistics, the researcher described the practice of strategic priority cascading, explored and identified the major obstacles of strategic priority cascading in the study area.

4.2 Research Approach

Mixed research approach was employed. Using the qualitative and quantitative data, the researcher tried to have a more comprehensive understanding.

4.3 Population of the study

The statistical population of this research consists of different tiers of East Showa (Its Zonal Town Adama) zone, Oromia Regional State Public Sectors up to Kebele structure.

4.4 Sampling and Sample Frame

So as to reach target group for this study, the researcher purposively selected the representative sectors at regional, zonal, woreda and Kebele level. These sectors are agriculture, civil service, administration, education, health, urban development, women, children and youth. These sectors were selected based on grounds such as supervisory role, relatedness to development and cross cutting issues. From these sectors, individual respondents were considered based on their education level, exposure to activities related to planning, managing, supervising and ability to act at expert level (starting from diploma level).

4.5 Sample Size Determination and Sampling Techniques

To estimate sample size the researcher considered judgmental type of sample size determination. This was because strategy and related issue could be more understood by individuals, teams and groups who had experience and adequate exposure. Probabilistic and non-probabilistic sampling techniques (purposive) were used to select individual respondents based on their level of experience (exposure), position and influence, nature of work.

Accordingly, two weredas, namely: Adama Wereda and Adami Tullu Gidu Kombolcha, were purposively selected because of their proximity to the road and their fair distance from the regional policymakers' influence. Furthermore, two Kebeles from each Wereda (from the two)

were purposively selected based on their size of representativeness and reasonable distance from the center of the Wereda.

Individual respondents for in-depth interviews and FGDs were selected based on their experience, supervisory role and nature of their activities (e.g related to teaching, planning, managing) from the Kebeles similar to the upper tiers. In this case, one DA, one health extension/nurse, one school principal and one Kebele manager were purposively selected from the sampled Kebeles as these groups were also expected at least to know closely about strategic planning in their respective sector line. Totally, 16 interviews respondents from the 4 Kebeles were selected. Thus, stratification, simple random and purposive sampling techniques were the dominant techniques.

The total samples were 420 and 20 respondents per sector from regional, zonal and woreda level for filling questionnaires. However thee response rate was 378/420 or 90%. For interviews, 76 participants (at regional, zonal, woreda and Kebele level) and 4 FGDs each having 10 members (at each tier from region to woreda) was selected based on their positions, experiences and profession.

4.6. Data Collection Tools

Structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, FGDs and documentary analysis were used to collect the required data. The questionnaires were used to collect data on the participants' perception on the level of contextualization and consistency, participation of stakeholders and barriers of strategic priority cascading practice. In order to measure the indices in the questionnaire, the summated scale of 5-points were used. The in-depth interviews were used to capture and investigate information with explanations and rationales of such strategy priority cascading. Documentary analysis was conducted so as to examine the contents, context, consistency and sensitivity to specific attributes of an organization or a given level. The documents mainly include: planning (strategic and operational at the different tiers of the selected sectors).

4.7 Reliability and Validity Tests

Once the questionnaires prepared, they were distributed among the sampled organizations' employees stratified based on their academic status, experiences and position and necessary modifications were made based on their comments. Cronbach's alpha was applied to check the reliability of the questionnaire. An alpha above 0.7 was considered. The reliability of qualitative data was approved by use of triangulation method. These help to validate the dependability and consistency of the data with quantitative aspect. Validity was checked with consultation of experts, and examining in view to theoretical frameworks.

4.8 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics with use of SPSS version 25 Software.
In addition, important and significant qualitative data that were gathered through in-depth interviews, FGD and from secondary data were categorized and coded thematically the manner it matches the arrangement of the specific research objectives. The presentation of quantitative findings made precede the presentation of qualitative findings. This was made consistent

throughout the study. Triangulation method was used to synthesize findings from quantitative and qualitative aspect.

5. Result and Interpretation

5.2. The State of Context Sensitivity of the Strategic Priority Cascading in the Different Tiers of ORS Public Sectors

In order to measure the context specificity of the strategic priority cascading practice in the study area, the researcher used SMART principle. The mean value obtained on specificity dimension was 3.09. This value indicates that the contextually specificity of strategic priority cascading practice was on the moderate level. The interviewees' response and FGD also confirmed the same response.

Table 5.1: Composite Descriptive Results on Context sensitivity

	Mean		SD
Specificity	3.09	.043	.845
Measurable	2.78	.037	.723
Achievable	3.17	.043	.836
Relevant	3.13	.042	.835
Time-based	2.79	.036	.713
Composite Context	**2.99**	**0.04**	**0.455**
Valid N (list-wise)			

   Source: Own survey, 2021

The mean score obtained on the measurability dimension was 2.78 with standard deviation of 0.723. This indicates that the measurability of the plan including its contents, the goals and objectives designed in the strategic plan was below the expected average value (at least 3.00). However, this insignificant mean value could be harmful because difficulty of measurability may lead to difficulty in assessing the status of implementation, the rate of decision making and increase conflict between the evaluator and the implementers. In addition, the inadequacy of measurability of the strategic plan could call for the excessive variation for evaluation and monitoring. The interview subjects also reflected that most of the time attention was not given to the consequences resulted from poor predictions in the planning process.

   The researcher used achievability dimension of achievability in order to assess degree to which the strategic planning is context sensitive vertically across different tiers of the Oromia Regional State especially in east Showa Zone. In this regard, the mean value obtained on this dimension shows that the achievability of the plan was on the moderate level with mean of 3.17 and standard deviation of 0.836. However, this moderate level could not enable to achieve the higher possible implementation outcome. The qualitative data obtained also supports the finding obtained from the quantitative aspect.

The relevancy dimension measures to what extent the strategic plan including all its components were important and able to address the context specific issue/problem. In all aspects considered in this study, the result indicates the moderate level (i.e. mean of 3.13 & stand dev. of 0.835).

The mean score obtained on time specificity of strategic cascading practice was 2.79, with standard deviation of 0.713. The result indicates that the mean value obtained for this dimension was less timely framed and less timely relevant. This may provide the message that the strategic plan cascading across the tiers suffers from time specificity which may further leave the implementation to the chance rather than planned. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews and FGD indicate that the time estimation was simply confirmatory to the upper framework rather than contextualizing to context specific reality.

Response from interviews and FGD shows that the principles used to assess the context-sensitivity of the strategic priority planning was not adequate. They referred this problem to different challenges such as incompetency, data management, poor time management, poor commitment, organizational culture that did not encourage organizational knowledge management and learning. Looking closely at the some of the strategic plan document shows that the items listed under the major activities was simply similar implying difficulty to define an activity within the context of the organization and the environment.

5.3 The State of Consistency of Strategic Priority Cascading Vertically Across Different Tiers of the Public Sectors

Table 5.2: Consistency across Different Tiers

Variables	Mean	SD
Follows a pattern of cycle which presents the process as a logical flow between discrete phases, so that the defining of objectives precedes and informs the appraisal of options, and so on in the organization.	2.78	.499
Align strategic objectives for the organization's primary operating and support units to the organization's high-level vision, mission, and strategy.	3.34	.498
Align employee objectives and the work people do on a day-to-day basis to the organization's operating and support unit strategy.	2.76	.599
Focus individual effort on results and accomplishments.	2.58	.532
The organization focuses and aligns around strategic objectives rather than on activities, initiatives, or projects.	2.87	.320
Politics-The plan is designed and developed the way in which political aims and desires contribute to strategy cascading [i.e. The plan clarifies who gets what, when, and how in a similar manner]	2.66	.423
Composite value	2.54	.236
Valid N (list-wise)		

Source: Own survey, 2021

The result obtained on this dimension indicates that the process in which the cascading and the development of strategic plan were practiced was less logical. In this case, it means that there was illogical flow between discrete phases. In addition, the flows were poor between different tiers. The mean score obtained was 2.78 with standard deviation of .499. This result indicates that the way the objectives were cascaded to the lower tiers were not allowing coherence and coordination. Facing difficulty in such coherence could lead to fragmentation of cascading. The issue here is related to answering "*are we fragmenting or cascading?*" In relation to this, the

result indicates that the cascading was less able to allow appraisal of outcome in a consistent manner.

As the response from interviewees and FGDs participants indicate, the consistency of cascading the strategic priority was problematic. In this context, as they expressed, it seems fragmentation. They linked this fragmentation to employees' lack of skills. The mean score obtained regarding the alignment of strategic objectives for the organization's primary operating and support units to the organization's high-level vision, mission, and strategy was 3.34 with standard deviation of.498. This implies that there was relatively better alignment of strategic objectives around organization's primary operating and support units to the organization's high-level vision, mission, and strategy.

The mean score obtained regarding the alignment of employee objectives and the work people do on a day-to-day basis to the organization's operating and support unit strategy was 2.76 with standard deviation of .599. This mean value implies that the alignment was not showing adequate consistency. The mean score obtained on 'focus individual effort on results and accomplishments' obtained was 2.58 with standard deviation .532. This shows that the organizations did not adequately align individual level cascading practice which might have impeded flexibility, encouraging rigidity.

The mean score obtained of response on 'planning is designed and developed the way in which political aims and desires contribute to strategy cascading [i.e., the plan clarifies who gets what, when, and how in a similar manner] was 2.66 with standard deviation of.423. This state may result in irrationality to decide in cascading practice and inclusion of irrelevant.

Participation of stakeholders was assessed in order to understand the status of the inclusion of different perspectives. It is assumed that participation of different stakeholders helps to contribute to the context specificity and consistency of strategic planning and cascading along the different tiers. In this case, the participation of the lower units improves the inclusion of context reality that will make the strategic plan able to address the same (context reality or problem). The participation of lower units, parallel units and supporting stakeholders significantly helps to build effective strategic plan and facilitates the implementation. It facilitates the implementation; because, the stakeholders knows the intention and the philosophies of the plan and the specific strategies how to cascade and implement the strategic priority.

5.4. Stakeholders' Participation in the Development of the Strategic Priority Planning and Cascading

The mean score obtained on 'participation of lower tiers' was 2.64 with standard deviation of 0.807. This mean value indicates that the participation of the lower tiers while preparing and cascading the strategic priority was low and below the minimum expected mean value (i.e.3.00) and far less than the highest expected mean value 5.00. This low participation of the lower tiers might have affected the context specificity and consistency of strategic priority cascading in the study area.

The response on 'participation of horizontally across tiers' obtained mean score of 2.96 with standard deviation of .667. This mean score indicates that the participation of parallel units was better than the vertical one, but still it was inadequate and approaches to moderate level.

Table 5.3: Descriptive Values on Participation of Stakeholders

Variables/Dimension	Mean	SD
Participation of Lower Tiers	2.64	.807
Participation horizontally Across Tiers	2.96	.667
Participation with supporting stakeholders	2.70	.645
Composite value for Participation with different stakeholders	**2.76**	**.706**
Valid N (list-wise)		

   Source: Own survey, 2021

The mean value obtained in the 'participation of supporting stakeholders' was 2.70 with standard deviation of 0.645.This finding indicates that it was below the minimum mean value. The supporting stakeholders are those who can and are willing to assist in strategic priority planning and cascading practice because of their specific and relevant technical knowhow as well due to their authoritative position.

   The composite descriptive result of the participation of different stakeholders in the strategic priority cascading was mean score of 2.70 which was less than the expected mean average. This might have exposed the effectiveness of the cascading process and practices to lower level. Interviews and focus group discussions result also show

5.5. Barriers of Effective Strategic Priorities Cascading Practices at Different Tiers of ORS

The result in the below Table 5.4 indicates that the majority of the respondents replied that limited research analysis and evaluation, lack of attention to strategic thinking, poor data management and poor time management significantly influenced the practice of priority cascading in the region. This implies that giving attention to these challenges may help to attain some acceptable and effective level of strategic priority cascading.

Table 5.4: Response on Factors Affecting Strategic Priority Cascading

Variables	Significantly		Moderately		Insignificantly		SD
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	
Internal Resistance to change	53	14.0	190	50.3	135	35.7	.671
Inflexible Design Standards	95	25.1	197	52.1	86	22.8	.692
Lack of Stakeholder Trust	109	28.8	192	50.8	77	20.4	.697
Limited knowledge base	118	31.2	169	44.7	91	24.1	.741
Limited Research analysis and evaluation	170	45.0	165	43.7	43	11.4	.668
Lack of access to recent/current information	32	8.5	168	44.1	178	47.1	.633
Lack of attention to strategic thinking	184	48.7	168	44.4	26	6.9	.610
Political Influence	77	20.4	202	53.4	99	26.2	.680
Poor data management	158	41.8	152	40.2	68	18.0	.736
Poor Communication	107	28.3	178	47.1	93	24.6	.727
Lack of ability to use technology	79	20.9	110	29.1	189	50.0	.703
Lack of Technology	97	25.7	203	53.7	78	20.6	.679
Lack of participation of different stakeholders	124	32.8	180	47.6	74	19.6	.712
Poor Time Management	161	42.6	161	42.6	56	14.8	.705
Poor Motivation/Reward	154	40.7	170	45.0	54	14.3	.673

   Source: Own survey, 2021

On the other hand internal resistance to change, inflexible design standards, lack of stakeholder trust, limited knowledge base (inadequate in-depth knowledge and technical know-how), political influence, poor communication, lack of ability to use technology, lack of technology, lack of participation of different stakeholders, poor time management, poor motivation/reward moderately affect strategic priority cascading in the different tiers of the study area. Furthermore, as the result in the above Table 5.4 indicates, challenges such as inadequate access to recent/current information and inability to use technology adversely affected the strategic priority cascading in the tiers of the government in the study area. The majority of the respondents believe that most of the challenges at least moderately affect the strategic priority cascading practice in the different tiers of the government in the study area. In-depth-interviews and FGDs also supported the idea that the above mentioned challenges were significantly affecting the strategic priority cascading practice in the study area. Critical review of the plan document indicates there was poor contextualization (rigidity and did not allow flexibility). The conceptuality is highly required especially at the lower tier. As the interviews made with Wereda level experienced civil servants reflected, the nature of training provided was simply the broader concept and steps rather than on how to customize the planning to a specific circumstances of an office or environment.

6. Conclusion

The result of the study implies that the strategic priority cascading practice in the different tiers of the ORS, especially in the study area (East Shewa zone) was moderate level of context sensitive. However, this moderate level was not enabling the public sector address their respective contextual reality. Therefore, the SMART principle was not adequately implemented in the strategic priority cascading among the different tiers of the study area. The study result on the consistency of the strategic priority cascading implies that the cascading was sometimes merely fragmented, not adequately consistent across tiers vertically, and sometimes the lower tier took the upper tier's context without modification. The in-depth interviews and FGDs response indicated that there was no significant consistency problem, but context problem. The participation of stakeholders did not adequately enable the different tiers which imply the happening of ecological fallacies. The result can be concluded that limited research analysis and evaluation, lack of attention to strategic thinking, poor data management and poor time management significantly affected the level of context sensitivity and consistency. On the other hand internal resistance to change, inflexible design standards, lack of stakeholder trust, limited knowledge base (inadequate in-depth knowledge and technical know-how, political influence, poor communication, inadequate ability to use technology, lack of technology, lack of participation of different stakeholders, poor time management, poor motivation/reward moderately affected strategic priority cascading practice in the different tiers of the study area. Furthermore, inadequate access to recent/current information and inability to use technology affected the strategic priority cascading practice in the different tiers of the government insignificantly. Therefore, there was gap (problem) with strategic priority cascading practice as it was less context-specific and less consistent.

7. Recommendations

- It is better to design strong framework that can guide the strategic priority cascading practice so that it is possible to evaluate the practice against the framework.

- A more flexible and responsive integrated context specific indicator set needs to be developed to comply better with the local emerging issues. This necessitates a longer term strategic approach.
- The participation of stakeholders should be guided and given attention so that different point of views will be entertained. Hence, team work is important.
- The capacity building activities are helpful to create competent planners and nourish skills to make effective planning and strategic priority cascading practice. Therefore, leaders are required pay attention.
- It is always important to identify different challenges that may affect strategic priority cascading in different tiers, because at each stage as it goes down from the top, the reality matters. Thus, it requires creativity to customize to specific context.
- Knowledge management and learning organization initiatives are important to develop strategically oriented behavior.
- Expanding research and development culture in the organizations so that capacity to identify, analyze and understanding the reality in a given context is addressed well.

Acknowledgement

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