

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUTSOURCING AND ORGANIZATIONAL AGILITY IN MAZANDARAN UNIVERSITY OF MEDICAL SCIENCES AND HEALTH SERVICES

ABSTRACT:

The present research aimed to investigate the relationship between outsourcing and organizational agility at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services. The authors of the current work used survey research method as well as a standardized outsourcing questionnaire tool and an agility questionnaire designed by Rahnavard and Seifolahi.

Five hundred and fifty two employees of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences comprised the statistical population of the research. Based on Karjesi and Morgan table, the sample size consisted of 226 people and the questionnaires were distributed among the sample population through systematic sampling.

The results of the research showed that there was a significant relationship between outsourcing and organizational agility of the employees of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. In addition, the relationship between different characteristics of outsourcing (customer orientation, strategic alignment, human resources, and internal processes) with organizational agility is proven; however, the financial perspective of outsourcing and organizational agility has not yet been proved. Finally, the results of the research demonstrated that an improvement in outsourcing can lead to a better organizational agility.

KEYWORDS: outsourcing, organizational agility, Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services.

INTRODUCTION

The start of the 21st century witnessed a tremendous change in market values and the needs of its customers. This caused modern organizations to encounter fast and inevitable changes in customers' attitudes.

Modern age has brought with it environmental uncertainty and fast-paced changes which on the one hand threaten the organization and on the other hand can be an opportunity for the it for gaining the upper hand in business activities (Jafarnezhad et al, 2013).

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From early 1990's, organizations came to this understanding that agility was an important solution for dynamic management and environmental changes; this could indeed be a strategy in enhancing the capabilities of productive companies in being competitive (McKenzie and Aitkin 2012).

In tumultuous markets, organizational agility is considered as the capacity in identifying and using opportunities before the rivals (Zingier and Owen, 2013). In fact, agility is the ability to survive in a competitive environment which is constantly changing (Oliveira et al, 2012).

Recent research done by McKenziesshowed that nine out of ten managers perceive organizational agility as an important and a necessary asset in a successful business. The results of the research showed that agility can result in an increase in income, and an increase in customer satisfaction, improvement and rise in speed (Sull, 2010).

In fact, organizational agility is based on the three principles of quality, speed, and expense and organizations should do their outmost to make the best use of the above three principles (Yarmohammadian et al, 2013).One of the methods used in improving quality, speed and expense and the subsequent organizational agility is through handing over some of the responsibilities of an organization to other companies which is called outsourcing.

As a matter of fact, in recent years, outsourcing has become an important tool in the improvement of the performance of many organizations and has thus drawn the attention of many managers to itself. Some organizations, in order to raise the quality of their services, have started using outsourcing. It seems that organizations, through outsourcing, can concentrate on more value-added activities and maximize their efficiency. It can, however, reduce innovation and control over different activities (Kremic at al, 2006). The results of some new research show that outsourcing can considerably facilitate the need of an organization in reaching agility (Kang, et al, 2012).

It is expected that by optimizing various activities in state universities, officials can have more time at their disposal for upgrading the quality of education and prepare the ground for a more dynamic learning environment. This can in return help the organizational agility of that particular institution. Therefore, the current research attempts to answer the question of whether there is any relationship between outsourcing and organizational agility at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

PRIMARY PURPOSE

Identifying and determining the relationship between outsourcing and organizational agility at Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services.

SECONDARY PURPOSES

- Identifying the financial aspect of outsourcing with organizational agility
- Identifying the relationship between customer-oriented outsourcing and organizational agility.
- Identifying the relationship between outer-environment aspect of outsourcing and organizational agility.
- Identifying the relationship between customer-oriented outsourcing and organizational agility.
- Identifying the relationship between outside environment aspect of outsourcing and organizational agility.
- Identifying the relationship between strategic alignment out-sourcing and organizational agility.

- Identifying the human resources aspect of outsourcing with organizational agility.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

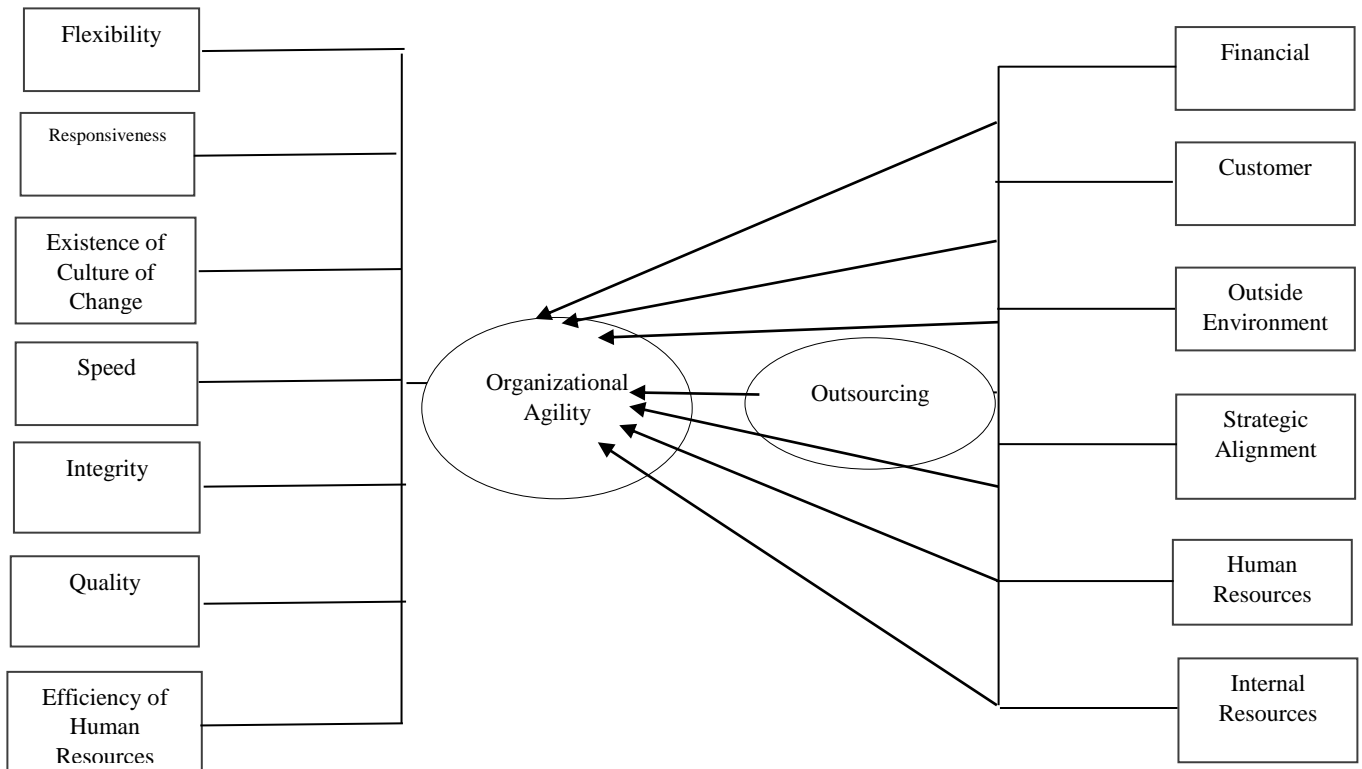
Primary research question is there a relationship between out-sourcing and organizational agility at the Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences?

SECONDARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- Is there a relationship between outsourcing and organizational agility?
- Is there a relationship between out-sourcing customer orientation and organizational agility?
- Is there a relationship between out-sourcing outside environments with organizational agility?
- Is there a relationship between strategic alignment aspect of outsourcing and organizational agility?
- Is there a relational between outsourcing human resources and organizational agility?
- Is there a relationship between outsourcing internal processes and organizational agility?

Conceptual Model of the Research

Based on theoretical principles, the conceptual model of this research consists of the following components:



Conceptual Model of the Research (Adopted from Sharifi and Zhung, 1999, Rahnavard and Seifolani, 2012)

In a systematic activity, some organizations implement a number of different measures in order to obtain optimal output such as performance improvement, and agility. Outsourcing, with the purpose of boosting performance, can logically lead to more agile organizations and therefore considering the theoretical framework of the research, two general variables have been investigated in this study.

In the first part of the study, the different aspects of outsourcing taken from the conceptual model of Rahnavard and Seifolahi (1390) are presented. The second part of the organizational agility model is based on Sharifi and Zhung's (1999) conceptual model. There is a relationship between these two variables. Based on this model, there is also a relationship between different aspects of outsourcing and organizational agility. This means that outsourcing and its components can lead to organizational agility.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE

DEFINITION OF AGILITY

Longman dictionary defines the word agility as ability to move quickly and easily and the ability to think very quickly and intelligently. It is also the capability of a company to quickly change or adopt in response to changes in the market. A high level of agility in an organization can help it to react wisely to the emergence of fresh competitors, new industry-changing technologies, or sudden changes in market conditions. If an organization can successfully tackle emergent occasions then it can be called agile (Azar and Pishdar 57:1390). Though there have been many different definitions of the word "agility", none contradict each other. All definitions given, one way or another, express the idea of speed and change in the business environment. Since agility is a relatively new topic in business courses, no one given definition exists. Both Sharif and Zhuns (1999) are of the opinion that agility is the ability of an organization in perceiving, feeling, and predicting changes in a working environment. Such an organization should have the ability to sense environmental changes and look at them as possibilities for growth and development. They also see agility as the capability in overcoming unpredictable challenges and confronting unprecedented threats in the work environment (Sharif and Zhung, 1999).

Maskell (2001) has defined agility as the ability in improving and growing in a continuous and unpredictable environment. And thus, organizations should not fear any changes in their business environment; they should instead use such changes as opportunities for achieving competitive advantages in a market environment (Maskell, 7:2001).

Vernadat believes that agility can be defined as close organizational alignment with changing work needs in order to gain a competitive edge in business dealings. In such an organization, the goals of the employees are aligned with the goals of the organization and have two aims that are coupled with giving a proper response to the changing needs of customers (Vernadat, 38:1999). Goldman(1995) believes that organizational agility can be defined as an organization's ability in reacting swiftly to the needs of the market and its customers.

Kidd (1994) believes that in order to operationalize agility paradigm, it should be conceived as a combination of numerous institutions with each having a special skill or capability for common activities. This way they are able to cooperate with each other and can respond in a timely manner to various customers.

An agile organization is one that can handle all business emergencies in a speedy and wise manner; it also has very high level of adoptability in reacting to unprecedented and unpredictable events and the market needs of its customers. In such a business, there will be processes and structures that facilitate speed, adaptability, and strength. It will also have a structure and a system that can show a strong spirit of competition.

Such definitions of agility are of an organization that is dynamic, adaptable, and growing. The tendency toward being dynamic is caused by the needs of the day. The conditions that make an organization agile today may not necessarily have the same impact at another time. One should not also forget that a market environment can have a serious effect on the agility needed. This changeability is mainly due to the fact that agility will not happen unless there is a movement toward adaptability and alignment. And last, agility is growth-based and utilizes the ability of an organization in understanding and restructuring strategies and also introducing new innovations and skills (Razi, 23:1387).

DEFINITION OF OUTSOURCING

A dictionary definition of the word outsourcing would define it as making profit through outside sources. This strategy happens when an organization no longer uses its internal resources to engage in a project in achieving its goals. Instead it makes use of an outside company (Mokhtari, 1392). Outsourcing is the provision of a certain type of service from one company to another (Alvani et al, (2009).

Outsourcing consists of the two words *out* and *sourcing*. In order to better understand the meaning of the word outsourcing, one needs to know the meaning of the word sourcing. *Sourcing* means the act of giving and giving the right of decision making to another person (Seyed Javadian: (2012). The following are some sample definitions of the word outsourcing:

According to Gibson (1996), outsourcing is the practice used by a company in transferring portions of its work to outside suppliers rather than doing it internally (Rahnavard and Seifolahi , 2012). Cohen and Young in their book *Beyond Outsourcing: Achieving Growth and Agility* see outsourcing as a vitally important asset in getting control of their sourcing decisions and making sure that their service relationships deliver long-term value and support business strategies. They also set an outsourcing that is in complete alignment with other strategies of the organization, especially strategies that lead to the improvement of human resources as the main condition for achieving success (Cohen and Young, 10-11:2005).

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

REVIEW OF LITERATURE IN IRAN

We could not find, in our review of literature, any research that could shed light on the relationship between outsourcing and agility. In the research background, however, each one of these variables is independently investigated.

Some of the research come in the following:

Mosazadeh et al (2014) carried out a research entitled “Identification and Prioritization of Hospitals Capable of Being Outsourced Based on Relevant Indexes”.

The outcome of the research showed that using outsourcing can result in an efficient management of resources and a rise of customer satisfaction. Since many hospital wards are potentially able to outsource many of their services and activities, it can be used as a means to measure the level of success by determining the specific indexes.

Madhooshi and Kohkan Moakher (2013) conducted a research in which they studied the effect of outsourcing strategy on the productivity of some branches of Eghtesad Novin banks. The result of the research showed that outsourcing had no significant effect on any productivity components. There have, however, been positive and significant relationships among the components of productivity. As a result, the use of outsourcing as a strategy had little effect and did not result in an increase in productivity among Eghtesad Novin banks of Mazandaran.

Nikpour and Berkem (2012) in a research entitled “Organizational Agility and the Model of an Agile Organization” attempted to conduct a research on the literature available and then list the needs for an agile organization, the characteristics of an agile organization, models of an agile organization, agility capabilities, ways of improving them, the tools and principles of designing an agile organization and the benefits of improving the agility of an organizational are dealt with.

Azar and Pishdar (2012) in a research entitled “Identifying and Measuring Organizational Agility” measured the level of organizational agility in three informatics companies by using a questionnaire. The results of the research showed that by upgrading the level of the supreme council of informatics, organizational agility level would not rise. It also appeared that these two issues are independent of each other. Additionally, it was determined that the existence of a series of factors such as the implementation of simple and fundamental changes as well as small changes could lead to a difference. And therefore, informatics organizations can, through raising their capabilities, improve their competitive edge in this industry. Ebrahimian Jolodar and Ebrahimian Jolodar (2012) in a research entitled “Organizational Agility; Organizational Responsiveness and Flexibility” showed that traditional organizations cannot give a timely response to the changes in the environment and to the needs of their customers.

This can endanger their survival at a later stage. In addition, a study and an analysis of other different sources showed that learning organizations as well as virtual organizations have the upper hand in adapting themselves with the environment around them and this way avoid being pushed off stage.

Hosseini Golafshani et al (2012) in a research entitled “Outsourcing Programs Effectiveness Level at Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch” concluded that outsourcing accelerated the speed of work being done, better control of activities, increase in the quality of the service provided, use of technical skills, liberation of capital, decrease in workforce and a better time management by the officials of the university. “An Investigation of the Relationship between Organizational Agility and Job Satisfaction of the Employees of Public Offices of the City of Kerman” is the title of a research done by Nikpour and Salajeghe (2011). It was a descriptive and correlational research which was carried out through survey method. The statistical population of the research was comprised of 1915 public employees of some state organizations in the city of Kerman in 2011. The research sampling was based on systematic classification and 322 people were selected as research samples. In order to analyze the data the inferential and descriptive method was used and the data collection instrument were researcher-made questionnaires for measuring organizational agility and job satisfaction. The research findings showed that there was a significant relationship between organizational agility and its sub-variables such as responsiveness, qualification, flexibility, and speed and job satisfaction. Mahmoudi Meimand et al (2011) in their research entitled “Study of the Use of Outsourcing Strategy on the Productivity of the Banking Industry; Case Study of Eghtesad Novin Banks of the Province of Mazandaran”. The researchers found out that there was not any significant relationship between outsourcing and the productivity components.

After studying the conceptual models of agility, Fathian (2011) in his research entitled “Introducing a Model for Agility in Organizations” proposed a model for boosting agility. He, then, studied it through the perspective of factor analysis method. The final model had such varied features as speed, responsiveness, flexibility, efficiency development, products and service improvement, and customer data enrichment.

Ghasemi in his research entitled “Identification and Analysis of Effective Factors on the Agility of the Employees of Melli Bank of Sanandaj” came to this conclusion that the employees of the bank enjoyed an optimal level of agility. The influencing factors in the agility of the employees of the

bank were a positive attitude toward change and new technologies and bank data systems, reaction to the changes in the environment and the attitudes of the customers and good relationship among the employees of the bank.

Rahnamay Roodposhti et al (2009) in a research entitled “Organizational Agility and the Role of Human Resources in Its Development” concluded that an agile organization is based on aligning technological information, employees, and working processes in a coherent and flexible system.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE OVERSEAS

Elinder and Jordahl investigated political preferences and public sector outsourcing in Swedish nurseries and primary schools. The result of the research showed that outsourcing models in above-mentioned places used Canadian models.

Al-ahmad and Al-oqailin their research entitled, Towards a Unified Model for Successful Implementation of Outsourcing and Reversibility of Information Systems tried to introduce a conceptual framework which can result in a successful outsourcing project. One of their main goals was to provide a conceptual framework that could help implement both reversibility and outsourcing successfully. In addition to the dangers associated with the process of outsourcing, many researchers concentrate on the outsourcing process after the relationship between the organization and the vendor is determined while the activities that are related to post-outsourcing and pre-sourcing are not taken into consideration or generally ignored. Another goal of the research was to integrate the outsourcing phase with pre-outsourcing and post-outsourcing phases.

Kang et al(2012) in a research entitled “The Role of Organizational Control in Outsourcing Practices: an Empirical Study” concluded that there was a significant relationship between outsourcing strategies, organizational control and the results of outsourcing performance. Their findings also suggested that for having a good outsourcing, output control and process control are suitable in creating appropriate outsourcing practices.

Lee and Choi in their study of the role of trust on IT outsourcing came to note that continuous trust could directly impact outsourcing benefits such as improved performance of outsourcing systems, improvement of services, increase in IT capabilities and accessibility to skilled personnel.

Lee and Kim in their research entitled “The Impact of Outsourcing Services on the Value of a Company” stated that outsourcing could generally lead to a positive value in a company. They, however, might influence differently the various layers of decision making in outsourcing.

Based on the research results of Lussier, the use of outsourcing methods would not only lead to reduction of job classes, deregulation and the hierarchy of superiors and inferiors, it could also have fruitful effect on the efficiency level and improve production and could help reduce costs through the use of timely monitoring.

Gewald and Dibbern(2009) studied the risks and benefits sensed by top managers as deterring factors in outsourcing business processes. The results of the research showed that the sensed risks and benefits could be good factors in predicting outsourcing concepts in business processes.

A study of outsourcing in non-clinical sectors of Taiwanese hospitals showed that most of the outsourcing happened in garbage collecting sector and the least amount of outsourcing happened in the upkeep of hospital instruments. In the clinical sector, most outsourced sectors were services related to hemodialysis and ambulance and the least outsourced sector was related to food, pharmacy, and nursing (Hsiao et al2009)

Bellenghi et al(2008) in their study revealed that more than 80 percent of American hospitals, according to US Association of Health Information outsourcing services, have outsourced the

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Agility would give an organization the strength for change; this would prepare the ground for the opportunities which are made available as a result of those changes. An agile organization is one which can change and adapt itself to the environmental changes through a triumphant strategy. The basis of an agile organization is in the integrity of its information system, technology, people, business processes and facilities. Such an organization can generally lead to the decrease of the production costs and the increase of the market share, the satisfaction of customer needs, the preparation for introducing a new product, the assessment and estimation of the activities which lack added value, and the increase of the organizational competition. Thus, an agile organization as the 21st century paradigm has a lot of supporters and has turned into a successful strategy in today's competitive markets that change rapidly with their customers' changing needs.

The present paper investigated the relationship between outsourcing and the organizational agility. The results indicated that outsourcing has an upward movement at the Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and Health Services. The organizational agility was found to be at a medium level at this university. The findings demonstrated that there was a significant relationship between different aspects of outsourcing (customer-orientation, internal processes, human resources, strategic alignment and outside environment) and the organizational agility. However, no meaningful relationship was found between the financial aspect of outsourcing and the organizational agility.

The results of the present study along with the findings reported by other researchers pinpoint the following conclusions. Outsourcing would lower the unnecessary workload of the organization; it would increase the possibility of service improvement in the key activities of the organization; it would improve the productivity and efficiency of the organization; it would help the employees to do their jobs with more flexibility and psychological tranquility and be more responsive to their activities; it would increase the organizational readiness for change; and finally it would increase organizational agility. Thus, any attempts for outsourcing the unimportant activities of an organization would result in the rise of organizational agility.

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