

Strategic Management Practices in the Public Sector: A literature review – Descriptive

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Abstract

Purpose – this paper critically reviews the empirical studies that have been conducted to concentrate on the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategies within public sector organizations.

Design/ methodology/approach- For the purpose of academic literature review of the topic, descriptive critical review method was applied, where most of the related academic journal papers since 2000 have been considered and later on carefully selected from the most notable academic and scholarly Journal's publication in the Strategic Management through searching the scholarly databases engines.

Findings- Findings of this literature review have shown that still most of the public sector organizations struggling to copy and adopt the practices and models from the private sectors in their agenda. Nevertheless, while it comes to research on Strategic Management practices in the public sector, very few studies have been conducted in this domain.

Research limitation/implications- this literature review has been conducted to critically summarize a limited number of the key journal papers since 2000, not beyond that.

Practical implication- This study declared the importance of strategic management practices for all public sector organizations and distinguished them as a crucial tool in the public sector to advance and reach successfully to their set objectives.

Originality- these findings of this paper excavate different views on SM in the public sector and underline some missing parts in this domain to be addressed.

Keywords

Strategy,
Strategic
Management,
Public Sector.

1. Introduction

The term **Strategy** is originally the combination of two Greek words, Stratos means the army and ago means to lead, and in general means, the leading and guidance come from the high rank of a military division. It has been claimed that the use of **Strategy** goes back to at least 400 years B.C (Jezak, 1990).

The online business dictionary [1] defines **Strategy** as a method or a plan to achieve a goal or to find a solution to a problem that has been chosen to bring the desired future.

Nevertheless, the **Strategy** is being practiced by the people, it is defined as something that organizations do (Mintzberg, 1994). Also earlier to this Mintzberg, defined **Strategy** in the sphere of position, perspective, plan, ploy, and pattern has known as Mintzberg's Five "P"s (Mintzberg, 1987; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Rumelt argued that **Strategy** is not just about planning, visioning, leadership, or motivation but rational action. He backs up his argument by introducing the term bad strategy versus good strategy (Rumelt, 2011).

Strategy use by the public and as well as the private sector. **Strategy in the public sector** is not just a tool to compete but more broadly a means to provide public services by a public agency or a network (Boyne & Walker, 2004).

Mulgan defines that, **Public Strategy** is the systematic use of public resources and power, by public institutions to achieve the public goals that consider the strategy at the level of the political economy, strategy at the geopolitics or strategy at the level of public service systems (Mulgan, 2009).

While recently, John Bryson and Bert George, define **Public Strategy** as a concrete approach to align the aspiration and the capabilities of a public institution to achieve their set goal, and how well they align the aspiration and capabilities could be

significantly different. On the other hand, John Bryson and Bert George define **Public Strategic Planning** as an approach for strategy formulation that covers both issues related to external and internal analysis and ways to tackle these issues to eventually come up with a vision for the future of the public sector (John & Bert, 2020).

Bryson also emphasizes that **strategic planning in the public sector** gives the big picture that guides the organization, what it does, and why it does, and Strategic planning is wider than programming, budgeting, or operating within the organization. This definition ascertains strategic planning as an approach to **Strategizing** in the public sector (Bryson, 1995). Refer back to the definition of strategy provided by John Bryson and Bert George, **strategizing** replies to main confusions regarding strategy in the public sector, first that strategy is about something to do rather than just having it and also strategy is typically longer-term, which distinguish and present planning aligned with the implementation. (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl & Vaara, 2015).

Streib and Poister declared that **Strategic Planning** initially used in the private sector during 1950, even it was considered the solution for every problem during 1960-1970 in the private sector and after 1980, it got the attention of the public Sector that afterward adopted broadly by Public Management whereas after the emergence of New Public Management it's almost considered a must for every public institution (Streib & Poister, 1990; David, 2007).

In the **Public Strategic Management** literature, the terms and the concept of strategic planning and strategic management are often used interchangeably by scholars. But generally, Strategic Planning is referred to as the formulation stage of the strategy while Strategic Management covers the formulation, implementation, and evaluation stages of the strategy. (David & Forest F, 2017).

Besides, Dr. Fred R. David the famous author of notable strategic management books[2] defines **Strategic Management** generally as the art and

science that help institutions to achieve their objectives by formulating, implementing, and evaluating cross-functional decisions.

The above definition is mostly applicable to the private sectors while **Strategic Management in the public sector** is the application of strategic thinking to lead the organization to the big picture[3]and help the organization to adapt to change by formulating the organization's mission taking into account the external factors, developing a competitive strategy to achieve its mission and creating an organizational structure to manage resources effectively for carrying out its competitive strategy (Alan, Richard, Mason & Karl, 1982).

Furthermore, Scholars are agreed that **Strategic Management both in Private and Public sectors** is broadly trying to provide answers for the key questions of where the organization is, where the organization wants to go, how the

organization get there and finally how the organization makes sure that reaches to the desired destination (David & Forest, 2017; Hoglund, 2015; Thomas & David, 2012; Witcher & Chau, 2011; Charles & Gareth, 2010; David, 2007; Alan, 2003; Harold, 2001; Denise,2000;).

Besides this, a contemporary definition of **Public Strategic Management** is provided by Ferlie and Ongaro, who argued that Strategic Management is the strategizing approach of public organizations by incorporating the strategies formulation, strategies implementation, and continuous strategic learning that not only helps the public organization to achieve their key objectives but also creates public value (Ferlie & Ongaro, 2015).

The mentioned topics can be summarized as key concepts that need to be considered while studying strategic management practices in the public sector (*see Figure 1*).



Figure 1. The concepts and their relation to be considered while studying strategic management practices in the public sector

2. Review Method

There have been different studies conducted in the context of Strategic Management Practices in the Public Sector by various scholars, through using different methods and approaches in several intervention areas since 1985. For the purpose of academic literature review of the topic, most of the related academic journal papers since 2000 have been considered and later on carefully selected from the most notable academic and

scholarly Journal’s publication in the Strategic Management through searching the scholarly databases engines.

2.1. Literature review matrix

While analyzing the selected paper from 2018-2010, besides critically summarizing the key findings, all key aspects of the selected paper have been presented as a literature review matrix (*See Table*).

Table I : Literature review matrix for some of the selected, exclusively relevant papers on Strategic Management practices in the public sector 2010 – 2018.

Author (Year)	Topic/ Title of the paper	Type of Research	Source of Data	Research Tools	Research Methodology
Linda, et.al (2018)	Strategic Management in the public sector: How tools enable and constrain strategy making.	A qualitative approach / the Case study approach	Swedish Transport Administration (STA)	-Interviews -The STA website -The strategic plan & balanced Scorecards -PowerPoint for the workshop	-Interviews -Workshops -A document study of formal management
Aithal, P.S. (2018)	Strategic Management Research in India: Contribution of Top Business Schools during the Last 5 Years	A Critical Study	-research publication data of various top business schools of India as published by NIRF Ranking of Govt. of India.	-websites of the management institutions -Google scholar search facility for 2014 - 2018	Document review of official public data
Leskaj, E. (2017)	The challenges faced by the strategic management of public organizations.	-secondary research/ extensive literature search & - primary research/ empiric study	-the existing literature, -In the empiric study administrators of 48 public organizations	The questionnaire	Survey

Hakan, . (2016)	Strategic Planning in the public sector: the case of the Turkish Ministry of Interior	A qualitative study based on a case-study design with a single-case focus	-MoI departments data and their responses record for the interviews	The questionnaire	- Documentary Data -Semi-structured Interviews
Age, J. (2015)	Strategic Management Thinking and Practice in the Public Sector: A Strategic Planning for All Seasons	-Case study -Observation	-Analysis of 35, SM of 29 various Norwegian public sectors - Observations of a strategy reformulation process in the Norwegian Mapping Authority - Interviews with 7 master's degree students in same domain	- Master student assignments on the selected topic - Master theses were written by seven students on strategic management issues in 2013	- Convenience sampling -Interviews
Christoph, et.al (2015)	Strategic management in the public sector: a rational, political or, collaborative approach.	-Case study -intervention research-type	Departmental Fire and Rescue Service of France	-Presentation - the decision-making tool for the case study	-exploratory and descriptive approach
Richard, M. W. (2013)	Strategic Management and Performance in Public Organizations: Findings from the Miles and Snow Framework.	-Case study - a mixture of qualitative and quantitative	- The US-based public organizations - secondary sources of data on the research topic	- Miles and Snow framework	-multiple regression equations - structural equation models
Basel, S. (2011)	Evaluating the effectiveness of Strategic Planning within the Middle Eastern public sector	- A quantitative approach for survey-based research	-Dubai public sector' - secondary sources of data on the research topic	- survey questionnaire	-Survey

Murat, Ö. (2010)	An application of Strategic Management to the public sector: what accounts for reinventing government strategies across the United States?	-Hypothesis testing with one dependent variable and nine independent variables	- Administrators, heads or directors of 93 types of agencies in the 50 states. -The Book of the States, and State Rankings.	- Survey questionnaire -Government websites -The state book for revenue recordings	- a mailed survey - The ordinary least squared (OLS) multiple regression method
Hassan, et.al (2010)	Strategic Management in the Public Sector: Reflections on Its Applicability to Iranian Public Organizations	A case study with a mixture of quantitative and qualitative approaches	- Responses of Top managers of 70 public organizations in Iran	- a structured questionnaire - Likert scale in ordinal form	- Binominal test - Friedman Test -t-test

3. Findings

Many public SM scholars' and practitioners' stating that the incorporating of strategic management from the private sector into the public sector is a difficult task, as private sector theories are always influenced by the competitive advantage, profit, external and internal factors while it's not suitable for SM in the public sector which is to focus on output-oriented, internal efficiency and Management by Objective. (Elbanna, Rhys & Pollanen 2016; Weiss, 2016; Hansen & Ferlie, 2016; Ferlie & Ongaro, 2015; Höglund, 2015; Poister, 2010; Diefenbach, 2009; Lane & Wallis, 2009; Lapsley, 2008; Bevan & Hood 2006; Hood & Peters, 2004; Ferlie, 1996; Smith, 1995).

At the same time, there are different theories and existing resources addressing SM in the public sector (*See Figure 3*), that can be summarized in studying approaches for the Public Strategic Planning such as Harvard Policy Model (Bryson, 2018; Innes & Booher, 2018; Gray & Purdy, 2018; Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Poister, Edwards, & Pasha, 2013; Bingham, Nabatchi, & O'Leary, 2005; Nutt & Backoff, 1992; Bower, Bartlett, Christensen, & Pearson, 1991; Andrews,

1980)., Strategic negotiations (Pettigrew, 1973; Allison, 1971)., logical incrementalism (Huxham & Vangen, 2005)., Strategic issues management (Ackermann & Eden, 2011; Bryson, Cunningham & Lokkesmoe, 2002; Nutt and Backoff, 1992)., Stakeholder management (Ackermann & Eden, 2011; Gomes, Liddle & Gomes. R, 2010; Walker, Andrews, Boyne, Meier & O'Toole, 2010; Freeman, 1984)., Strategic planning as a framework for innovation (Ansell & Torfing, 2014; Osborne & Brown, 2012; Bason, 2014;.), Competitive forces analyses (Bryson, 2018; Höglund, Caicedo, Mårtensson & Svårdsten, 2018; Hansen & Ferlie, 2016; Favoreu, Carassus, Gardey, & Maurel, 2015; Porter, 1998)., and Portfolio (John Bryson & Bert George, 2020).

Also, Approaches for Public Strategic Management such as integrated units of management approach (Poister, Aristigueta, & Hall, 2015; Van Dooren, 2015)., Strategic issues management approach (Behn, 1988)., Contract approach (Sandfort & Moulton, 2015)., Collaboration approach (Emerson & Nabatchi, 2015; Klijn, Steijn, & Edelenbos, 2010; Huxham & Vangen, 2005)., Portfolio management approach (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015; Milward & Provan, 2003)., Goal or benchmark approach

(Bryson & Schively, 2017)., And Hybrid approaches (John Bryson and Bert George, 2020; Bryson & Edwards, 2017).

As well as, current models for SM in the Public Sector such as Bryson's model (Bryson, 2011, p. 43-47), Mulgan's model (Mulgan, 2009, p. 75-

114) and Agility model (Maatta, 2011; Doz & Koonen, 2008).

And finally, the schools of thought on Strategy in the Public Sector such as Design, learning, cultural, political power, and environment schools (Kaplan & Norton, 2008; Collier, Fishwick & Jhonsen, 2001; Reich, 1988).

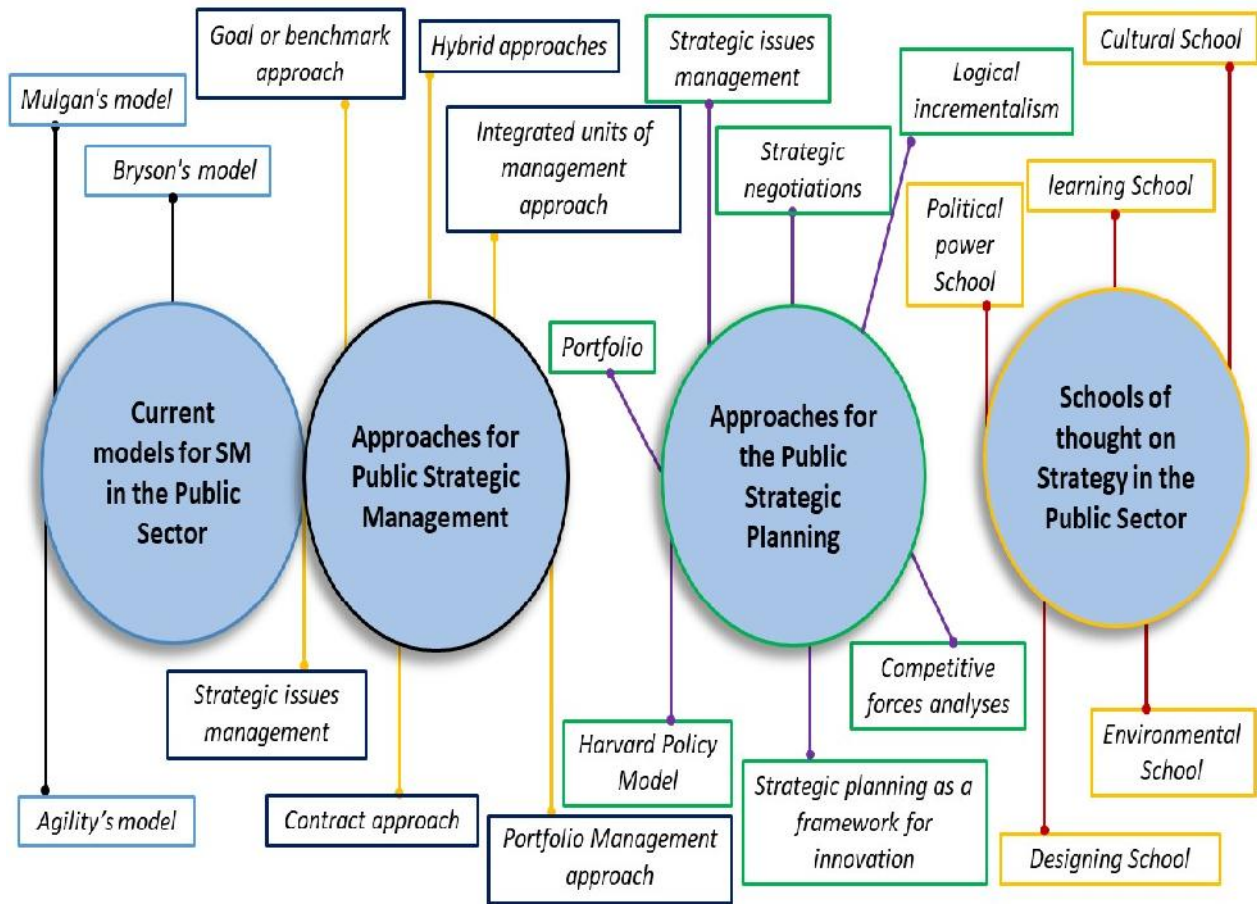


Figure 3. Conceptual framework for different theories and existing resources addressing SM in the public sector

4. Summary of key findings

John, & Bert have presented and criticized strategy, strategizing, strategic planning, and strategic management as key elements of SM in the public sector recently in 2020 and for addressing organizational challenges and achieving the important goals, these elements recommended being useful. They have suggested that although strategic planning and SM both separately have their standard approaches in

practice, strategic management and strategic planning are seemed to be characteristically hybrid. And also, they agreed with (George, 2019; Bryson,2018 & Poister,2010) that the research in SM and Strategic planning should be conducted in the sphere of which SM and Strategic planning approaches are applicable in which situation, how it should be applied, and why the specific approach been selected among other sets of approaches.

When applying SM in practice in the public sector using any tools, there are several specific and unique traits that create tensions and strains that need to be addressed (Jarzabkowski, Lê, & Ven 2013; Williams & Lewis 2008; Jarzabkowski & Sillince 2007; Jarzabkowski & Fenton 2006). Linda et al., have studied these tensions broadly in 2018 and raised awareness of specific tensions that potentially enable or constrain SM practice in the Public Sector. They have remarked that it makes the strategizing process difficult if the operational plan is made in a short-term manner and has been emphasized that the holistic perspective should always be preferred compared to just more focusing on tools. And finally, they suggested that being proactive in the context of strategy work and the use of tools in the Public Sector is essential rather than being reactive.

In addition to the above studies, Aithal has studied critically the journal publications in Strategic Management and the contribution of top Indian Business schools from 2013 to 2018. He found that there is a lack of engorgement and accountability maintenance for faculties to contribute in terms of research and publications and suggested that strict policies should be adopted to address this issue.

Furthermore, Ahmad and Fce have pointed out strategies implementation, leadership style, and organizational structure human resource management, information, and control systems as key issues and cases to be considered in strategic management practices in their study conducted in 2018. Also, they claimed that this is SM which gives the organization success over their foes.

Similarly, Leskaj has studied the challenges faced by the SM of public organizations in 2017 and for addressing these challenges has summarized specific suggestions such as the recruitment and promotion of competent and motivated employees, investment in information technology systems, simplifying the financial structures, and most importantly the public organization like many existences private sectors should be citizen-oriented not just govern-oriented.

Likewise, Hakan has contributed to the SM body of knowledge by conducting an in-depth case study in 2016, at the ministerial level. He has tried to study the issues and trials related to SM practices, specifically while applying the strategic planning by doing empirical evidence and theorized and emphasizing the variety of factors and mechanisms at the ministry level. He also argued strategic planning fails and becomes ineffective in the public sector when there are strategy practitioners with weak deploying preparation, poor analytical, problem-solving, and low social practice skills whiten the organizations.

Earlier to the mentioned studies Age has studied Strategic Management thinking and practice in the public sector in 2015 and raised three main issues to be addressed. The first issue he argued is the reason why the schools of thought such as the design school, the environmental school, the planning school, the positioning or power school, the cognitive school, the learning school, and the environmental school, are derived from non-public organizations could be adopted and relevant to SM in public sector organizations. The second issue raised is that although planning is dominant in the public sector, the organizational environment due to contexts, tasks, tiers, technologies, structures is unstable which leads to a paradox. That is why good and bad strategies have been differentiated. And the third issue discussed is that contrary to SM practices in the private sector, strategy practitioners in the public sector based on their experience and rationalism use and combine tools and practices from two or more schools of thought as one strategic management package instead of being restricted to just one school of thought theories and practices.

At the same time Lind and Fredrik, are conducted one of the notable studies of SM in practice in 2015, by paying attention to how really strategic management developed and practiced in the public sector, how to identify the challenges as well to suggesting approaches to tackle these challenges. They argued that when the public sector wants to implement SM, they become intensively centralized that is why new public

management emerged and become focal to consider this issue. Furthermore, the findings of this study suggested that financial concerns are not the main essence of strategy but direction, goals, and purpose are the most important bottlenecks that need to be considered in the public sector while practicing SM.

Additionally, Christophe, F, David, and Christophe, have argued in their published article named in 2015, that there is no standard approach in SM practice in the public sector but practices that are the combination and outcome of rational, political, participatory logics and decision-making processes. They tried to study, analyze and characterize the nature of the strategic process comparatively to approaches that exist in the literature and claimed that because of external validity and absence of generalized observations it is not possible to suggest a standard model out of a single study.

Furthermore, Richard has studied SM in the public sector by using the findings from the miles and snow framework in 2013. He argues that findings and practices of SM are drawn from local government as well as limited data and geographic location which are mostly from the US and UK that have not fully been tested and examined the effects of performance and the potential for unobserved effects on Strategy. He claimed this gap could be addressed by extension to test these effects by the miles and snow framework.

Likewise, Basel has studied SM practices in the Middle Eastern public sector in 2011 and pointed out specific findings that include the top management are the essential actors for the successful practice of strategic planning. The public organizations in the Middle Eastern mostly use SWOT and Benchmarking analysis tools while they encourage using various strategic planning tools. His study also found the mission and vision should be communicated to all stakeholders and considered all barriers, more time should be spent in strategy implementation rather than strategy formulation, organizational characteristics should be considered and finally,

SM should be practiced in all small and large public institutions.

Strategy, as well as a modern understanding of SM, must be communicated through the organization to build support and create ownership at the general and tactical levels. There are tools such as multistep, goal-oriented approach, logical incrementalism, the strategic triangle, stakeholder mapping, strategy maps, and the adaptive matrix of Schedler and Siegel for public sector managers to communicate strategy and SM communication (Schedler & Siegel, 2005; Kaplan & Norton 2004; Alford, 2001; Scholes, 1989). But Luke and Jonathan have argued in 2010, that these tools are inadequate and more practical tools should be introduced, following this, they introduced tactical mapping as a modern planning tool for SM communication and strategy implementation. And they claimed that when successful tactics emerged it will carry synergies, adapt structure, processes, and competencies that might be helpful in strategy implementation in the public sector.

Prior to this Murat, in his article in 2010 has tried to understand the reason why the public sector fails in implementing the SM at the macro level. He introduced the paradox where SM is most needed in the public sector is less likely to work and most likely to work where it is least needed, in broader context public sectors should work on creating capacity for successful SM practices, nevertheless specific features of public sectors and implications of the rule of law should be carefully considered. Later on, he remarked shared power in the different levels of government, political environment, and public managers with less sovereignty and control as three main reasons to adopt SM in the public sector.

Meanwhile, Hassan et al., in 2010 have studied comprehensively the application of Strategic Management in the Iran Public Sector and its reflections. They also support the idea of not applying recklessly the private sector techniques and approaches in the public sector without modifications as there is a major difference

between contexts of the public sector and the private sector. Political factors affect public organizations more than other countries and they emphasized that this is the main reason where long-term planning faces problems although the implementation of SM is more related to these long-term views and plans. They pointed out the lack of alignment between meta-policy and macro levels and considered public value as focal points in SM application in the public sector.

Earlier to all studies mentioned above Theodore and Gregory are the scholars that have conducted one of an earlier study focused on Strategic Management concepts, models, and processes in the Public Sector. Although earlier to this Peter and James are the prominent scholars who have studied comparatively the SM in public and private sectors in 1985.

5. Future research opportunities

Very few studies have been conducted to address the tools needed to be used in strategic management practices, especially when it comes to the public sector only Linda et al., in 2018, Hansen Rosenberg in 2011, and Williams and Lewis in 2008 have tried to address this gap.

Further, this social mechanism in which strategic planning and strategic management apply, need to be understood and studies should be conducted to make sure how social mechanisms may pave the way for SM practices.

Moreover, the public sector can be a formal organization or not a formal organization, there is no research conducted to study the usefulness of strategic planning and SM, to public sectors that are not formal organizations. And how strategic management practices can help these organizations in strategic thinking, networks, cooperation, adoptions and communication remains unanswered yet.

Add to this, the organization's competencies, capabilities, and aspirations can affect the performance antecedents, processes, and outcomes. There is a need for researchers to study

and link this fact in the public sector while practicing strategic management.

After rapid changes and technology exploration in the 21st century, the role of Information and Communications Technologies as facilitators of SM practices should not be neglected and need to study.

Furthermore, there is a need to study and analyze the influence of key players taking into account the multi-stakeholder strategic networks while practicing SM.

Linking the organizational performance and SM practices have been addressed well in western countries but still not addressed within Asian countries especially Middle Eastern and Central Asian countries contexts.

Finally, a study and research are needed to address which approaches and in which content needed to be adopted in certain situations and specific public sectors and how a mixture of SM practices in the public sector in different aspects will work.

Concluding to this all researches and researchers in the field of Strategic Management and Strategic Planning in the public sectors have been attempted to address and close some gaps while opening and addressing other gaps to be addressed into new areas in the public sector SM practices literature.

In sum, while considerable studies have been conducted to know much about Strategic Planning and Strategic Management practices in the public sector, still there is much unknown to be extracted from what is known on this important topic and field of study, and future scholars, strategists, and practitioners of SM in the public sectors should be motivated and supported to pursue studies considering different contexts on this broad topic. Additionally, pointing the extensively use of strategic planning and strategic management practices in the public sector and more insight and enlighten on what approaches exactly works under the specific circumstances and to which

extent it will be useful for a public institution to endorse the SM practices for moving forward to the public purposes.

6. Conclusion

This paper aimed to present a review of the literature between 2010 and 2020 on the empirical studies that have focused on the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategies within public sectors, which is, in general, the review of the papers on strategic management practices in the public sectors in the context of developed and developing economies.

The findings revealed that most of the public sectors struggling to copy and adopt the practices and models of the private sector in this agenda. Nevertheless, very few studies have been conducted in this period (i.e., 2010-2020) to research SM practices in the public sector.

The findings of this literature review revealed and conceptualized that there are three current models for strategic management in the public sector, and there are five main schools of thought on strategy in the public sector which are learning, political power, cultural, environmental, and design schools. Furthermore, there are more than seven approaches for public strategic planning such as logical incrementalism, strategic negotiations, portfolio, strategic issues management, Harvard policy model, competitive forces analyses, and strategic planning as a framework for innovation. Additionally, there are six approaches for public strategic management which are the goal or benchmark, hybrid, integrated units of management, strategic issues management, contract and portfolio management approaches.

The findings of the present review after critically analyzing the selected paper, most of papers supports the idea of not applying recklessly the private sector techniques and approaches in the public sector without modifications as there is a major difference between contexts of the public sector and the private sector taking into account the political, cultural and social prospects.

Selecting a list of 15 most related papers among the several published paper in the sphere of SM practices in the public sector is the limitation of this literature review.

Despite these limitations, the review of existing literature and remarking future research opportunities are expected to contribute to the development of future research on strategic management practices in the public sector.

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