

Strategic Planning for Public Relations Section of Karaj Municipality

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ABSTRACT

Today, as the cities are developing and urban populations are increasing, various organizations, including private and state institutions, need to have an organized plan. It is a fundamental necessity for every organization. Every organization that seeks to improve its performance and to elevate the position of its employees should have a proper planning. Based on such a planning, organizations would be able to do their jobs properly in the society and to achieve their institutional objectives. Strategic planning is a tool by which these organizational objectives have somehow been achieved. Such a planning helps organizations to distinguish their positions and improve their ranks among other organizations. On the basis of strategic planning, organizations can manage their activities and direct them in the right path. In this field study, a strategic plan was designed for public relations of Karaj municipality. The aim was to examine the strategy employed by this organizational unit and also to find the extent to which the objectives have been achieved.

KEYWORDS: Strategic planning, Internal factors, External factors, SWOT matrix, Analysis, Quantitative strategic planning matrix

1. INTRODUCTION

Providing information, urban development, and improving cultural conditions of urban areas are major aims that are sought by every municipality as a state organization. Creating a calm and comfortable urban environment in which the daily affairs of citizens are conducted in the shortest time is one of the most important aims of every municipality.

By taking into account the internal and external factors and other factors that might have an impact on the performance of the organization (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats), strategic planning approach can equip municipalities to respond to the needs of citizens and to do their social responsibilities in the best manner. Based on this approach and the views of internal and external experts, we can define and delineate the role of an organization as a complex social entity and an intellectual system. In this way, the coefficients of consistency and inconsistency among these factors can be determined and ranked on the basis of their importance. These can be used in the process of decision-making as well as in examining organizational strategies.

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

As this research was a field study and no previous study had been conducted to examine strategic planning in this organization, it could be claimed that it was the first study in which strategic planning was tested in the municipality. The previous conducted studies had looked at this issue without taking into account all aspects. Therefore, their results could not offer a full and complete picture. This lack encouraged the researchers to conduct this study.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this field study, because there were no recorded reliable data, interview was used to collect the data. In the following sections, research questions, statistical population, and sample of the study are presented and defined. Then, research hypothesis is presented and procedures are explained.

3.1 Research questions

Today, large cities are becoming places in which diverse populations consisting of various cultures are living together. This has forced organizations to have stronger relationship with people. The participation of people in the process of solving urban problems is one of the most important criteria based on which the success of municipalities

can be judged. The participation of people in problems related to urban affairs can help the process of urban development and improve bureaucratic system. In this study, it was tried to find how strategic planning can help organizations to design a framework for future activities and to expand knowledge about proper ways of urban development and settlement. Optimal use of resources and organizational facilities by using modern technology was one the aims of the study. Designing a strategy for the organization makes the problems more understandable. Therefore, finding a proper solution is facilitated.

3.2 Statistical population

All employees of public relations of Karaj municipality with various positions in the organization were selected for the measurement of internal factors. The rest of statistical population consisted of a number of external experts in management. This group was employed to measure external factors.

3.3 Statistical sample

In order to select the members of statistical sample, several people were selected from each group. The aim was to obtain genuine results which were not affected greatly by non-consistent part of statistical population.

3.4 Research hypothesis

In this article, at first, SWOT factors are introduced. Then, based on the obtained results, strategic planning in the public relations of Karaj municipality is discussed in detail.

3.5 Procedures

This study consisted of four stages:

3.5.1 Starting stage: Defining the mission and designing the declaration of the duties of organization

Pahlevanian (2006: 68)[2] says that mission of every organization shows the philosophy and the reason behind the existence of the organization. In other words, it defines the identity of the organization.

The declaration of the duties of Karaj municipalities:

With belief in almighty God, the municipality of Karaj will do its best to protect public interests and religious values. It is honored to serve people of Karaj (little Iran) and to secure their satisfaction. We believe that citizens are the real owners of the city; therefore, their presence in the activities of municipality is one of the indications of public's participation. We believe that citizens are the best supervisors and the best advisors who can help the employees of municipality to serve the people and to improve the bureaucratic system. Producing knowledge and offering better ways of urban settlement and urban planning can help us to achieve our objectives. We are a bridge between people and urban managers. We commit ourselves to serve the citizens to end of our lives. Our employees are the most important resource and the most valuable part of our organization. Creating motivation in the organization and paying attention to the needs of employees is one of the duties of the organization. We have always been one the pioneers of using modern technologies. A citizen who is a questioner and a mayor who is a responsible person are our ultimate goals.

3.5.2 Input stage: analyzing environmental and internal conditions of the organization

In examining the external factors, opportunities and threats facing the organizations are identified. In this way, the managers can employ proper strategies in order to use opportunities and to reduce threats [1] (Aliahmadi et al, 2003: 231). The process of investigating internal factors and comparing them with external factors gives the employees the chance to examine their positions within the organization and to do their duties in a better manner[5] (Watson & Rainer, 2011: 54).

Table 1. The matrix of evaluating external factors of public relations of Karaj municipalities

External factors which have priority	Coefficient of significance	Rank	Final score
Opportunities			
Opportunity 1: Using the experiences of other mega-cities	0.082	4	0.328
Opportunity 2: The geographical position of Karaj as a main connection and its position as a gateway for transferring information	0.053	4	0.212
Opportunity 3: Using touristic sites of Karaj as a tool for attracting investments	0.047	3	0.141
Opportunity 4: The diversity of tribes and cultures in Karaj	0.050	4	0.200
Opportunity 5: Signing memorandum of understanding between the organization and scientific societies	0.066	3	0.198
Opportunity 6: Easy access to the capital	0.062	4	0.248
Opportunity 7: Using the international connections	0.050	4	0.200
Opportunity 8: Transaction with various urban areas	0.044	3	0.132
Opportunity 9: The presence and participation of non-governmental organizations	0.044	3	0.132

Opportunity 10: Using the high capacities of production units and industrial towns in the suburbs of Karaj for building specialized and branding exhibitions	0.046	3	0.138
Threats			
Threat 1: Not using the presence and participation of people	0.040	1	0.040
Threat 2: A sense of non-belongingness among citizens	0.052	1	0.052
Threat 3: Lack of strong communication with people	0.032	1	0.032
Threat 4: Lack of knowledge about the organization among people	0.038	1	0.038
Threat 5: Lack of sufficient budget	0.076	1	0.076
Threat 6: Misunderstanding about public relations of organization regarding security issues, duties, taxes, etc	0.066	1	0.066
Threat 7: Lack of coordination among public relation units of city districts with central public relation	0.034	2	0.068
Threat 8: Misunderstanding about the true position of public relation among citizens	0.054	1	0.054
Threat 9: Citizen's negligence toward the news of municipality	0.037	2	0.074
Threat 10: Executive limitations as a result of political obstacles	0.027	2	0.054
Total of opportunities and threats	1		2.473

Table 2. The matrix of evaluating internal factors of public relations of Karaj municipalities

	Relative coefficient	Rank	Final score
Strengths			
Strength 1: Integrating the data of urban management	0.064	3	0.192
Strength 2: Employing experts and experienced people in the organization	0.064	3	0.192
Strength 3: Holding educational courses for personnel and managers on the basis of organizational needs	0.040	3	0.120
Strength 4: Production and presentation of specialized knowledge	0.062	4	0.248
Strength 5: Creating a campaign for public relations of urban branding	0.050	4	0.200
Strength 6: Showing the value of public relation and presenting an applied programming model	0.046	4	0.184
Strength 7: Communication through modern social networks (Viber, line, etc)	0.036	3	0.108
Strength 8: Strategic management in the organization	0.042	3	0.126
Strength 9: Using modern science and technology in urban management	0.074	4	0.296
Strength 10: Inter-organizational communication through SMS	0.030	3	0.090
Weaknesses			
Weakness 1: Lack of education in subjects related to public relation	0.077	1	0.077
Weakness 2: Lack of offering motivation and encouragement in public relation relative to its high significance	0.058	1	0.058
Weakness 3: Lack of an organized planning that includes duties and future plans	0.040	2	0.080
Weakness 4: Delay in decision-making as a result of high bureaucratic works	0.044	2	0.088
Weakness 5: Lack of offering periodic of feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses of organization	0.042	2	0.084
Weakness 6: Lack of proper education for citizens	0.038	2	0.076
Weakness 7: Lack of coordination among units and their programs	0.050	2	0.100
Weakness 8: Non-systematic and biased payment of the salaries and extra-salaries of the employees	0.041	2	0.082
Weakness 9: Traditional views of high ranking managers	0.060	2	0.120
Weakness 10: Lack of a systemic view within the organization	0.042	1	0.042
Total of strengths and weaknesses	1		2.563

3.5.3 The comparison stage

In this stage, the internal and external factors are compared by SWOT matrix as well as internal and external matrices in order to identify those strategies which are suitable for the organization and can be adapted to internal and external factors [3] (Forouzandeh et al, 2013: 259).

In the process of analysis by SWOT matrix, internal and external factors are examined in order to identify opportunities, threats, strengths, and weaknesses of the organization in future. In this way, more suitable planning and strategies can be employed. SWOT matrix is one of the most important tools by which internal and external factors can be compared. Using these data and based on the main strategies, managers can adopt various possible strategies [4] (Wehrich, 2002: 62).

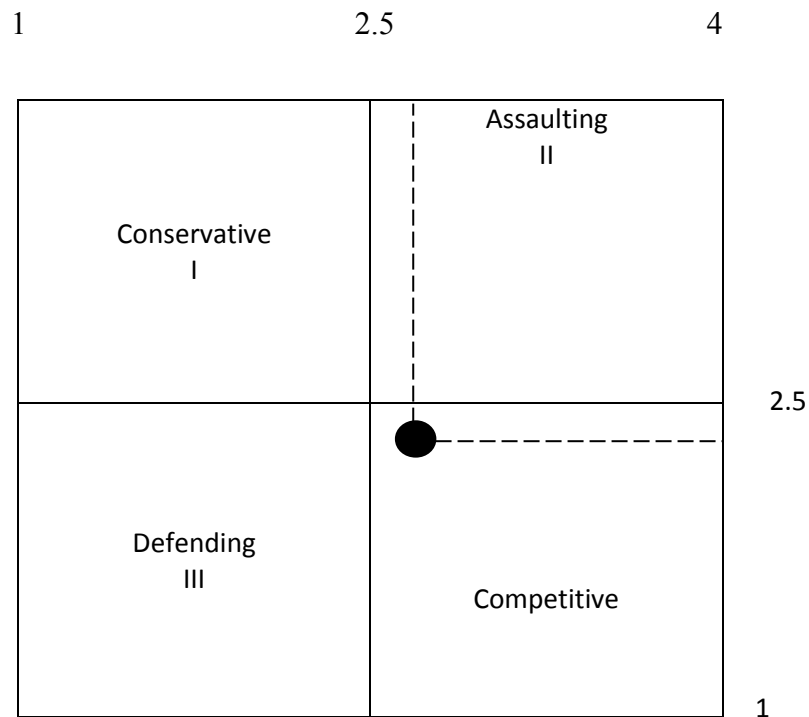
Table 3. SWOT matrix of public relations of Karaj municipality

		Strengths- S	Weaknesses- W
IFE		Strength 1: Integrating the data of urban management Strength 2: Employing experts and experienced people in the organization Strength 3: Holding educational courses for personnel and managers on the basis of organizational needs Strength 4: Production and presentation of specialized knowledge Strength 5: Creating a campaign for public relations of urban branding Strength 6: Showing the value of public relation and presenting an applied programming model Strength 7: Communication through modern social networks (Viber, line, etc)	Weakness 1: Lack of education in subjects related to public relation Weakness 2: Lack of offering motivation and encouragement in public relation relative to its high significance Weakness 3: Lack of an organized planning that includes duties and future plans Weakness 4: Delay in decision-making as a result of high bureaucratic works Weakness 5: Lack of offering periodic of feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses of organization Weakness 6: Lack of proper education for citizens Weakness 7: Lack of coordination among units and their programs Weakness 8: Non-systematic and biased payment of the salaries and extra-salaries of the employees Weakness 9: Traditional views of high ranking managers Weakness 10: Lack of a systemic view within the organization
	EFE	Strength 8: Strategic management in the organization Strength 9: Using modern science and technology in urban management Strength 10: Inter-organizational communication through SMS	
Opportunities- O		SO strategies	WO strategies
Opportunity 1: Using the experiences of other mega-cities Opportunity 2: The geographical position of Karaj as a main connection and its position as a gateway for transferring information Opportunity 3: Using touristic sites of Karaj as a tool for attracting investments Opportunity 4: The diversity of tribes and cultures in Karaj Opportunity 5: Signing memorandum of understanding between the organization and scientific societies Opportunity 6: Easy access to the capital Opportunity 7: Using the international connections Opportunity 8: Transaction with various urban areas Opportunity 9: The presence and participation of non-governmental organizations Opportunity 10: Using the high capacities of production units and industrial towns in the suburbs of Karaj for building specialized and branding exhibitions		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The participation of private sector in advertisements • Using the potentials of population diversity in the process of decision-making on urban issues • Data integration through cooperation with various urban area • Creating diversity in the knowledge by incorporating international subjects • Development of information transfer as a results of special geographical position (nearness to the capital) • Using the knowledge of scientific societies in order to specialize news bases 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the experiences of mega-cities in order to define the mission and duties of the organization • Communication with various urban sectors in order to make up for the lack of a systemic view • Employing the knowledge and experiences of scientific societies in order to receive feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses of the organization • Responding to the educational needs of citizens by employing leading experts
Threats- T		ST strategies	WT strategies

Threat 1: Not using the presence and participation of people	● Optimal use of data integration in order to enhance people's participation	● Improving citizens' knowledge by educating them in various urban fields
Threat 2: A sense of non-belongingness among citizens	● Using social networks in order to enhance citizens' participation and to receive feedback	● Collecting citizens' views about the performance of public relation sector and receiving feedback for each district
Threat 3: Lack of strong communication with people	● Employing the thinking of strategic management in order to correct misconceptions about public relations	● Allocating sufficient budget in order to conduct an organized plan
Threat 4: Lack of knowledge about the organization among people	● Employing branding programs in order to create a sense of need to the news of municipality	● Building connecting channels between central public relation and districts' public relations in order to improve coordination and decentralization
Threat 5: Lack of sufficient budget		
Threat 6: Misunderstanding about public relations of organization regarding security issues, duties, taxes, etc		
Threat 7: Lack of coordination among public relation units of city districts with central public relation		
Threat 8: Misunderstanding about the true position of public relation among citizens		
Threat 9: Citizen's negligence toward the news of municipality		
Threat 10: Executive limitations as a result of political obstacles		

In the four-square internal and external matrix, based on the scores of the organization in the evaluation matrices of internal external factors, the position of the organization is determined. Squares I, II, III, and IV indicate the adoption of conservative, assaulting, defending, and competitive strategies respectively [3] (Forouzandeh et al, 2013: 139-263).

Table 4. Four-square internal and external matrix of public relations of Karaj municipality
Final score of evaluation matrix of internal factors



3.5.4 Decision-making stage

In this stage, various strategies identified in the comparison stage are evaluated by quantitative strategic planning matrix (QSPM) and their relative attraction is determined. Managers and strategy planners of the organization rank the strategies on the basis of their relative attraction. Finally, the best organizational strategy is chosen [3] (Forouzandeh et al, 2013: 263).

Table 5. The matrix of quantitative strategic planning of the public relations of municipality of Karaj

	Coefficient of significance	Various applicable strategies									
		Strategy 1: Optimal use of data integration in order to boost public participation		Strategy 2: Employing strategic thinking in order to change the misconceptions about public relations		Strategy 3: Employing social networks in order to boost public participation and receiving feedback		Strategy 4: Employing branding programs in order to create a sense of need to news of municipality		Strategy 5: Providing information for citizens by using modern technologies	
		Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score
Strength 1: Integrating the data of urban management	0.064	4	0.256	3	0.192	3	0.192	4	0.256	4	0.256
Strength 2: Employing experts and experienced people in the organization	0.064	3	0.192	3	0.192	3	0.192	2	0.128	3	0.192
Strength 3: Holding educational courses for personnel and managers on the basis of organizational needs	0.04	3	0.12	3	0.12	3	0.12	2	0.08	3	0.12
Strength 4: Production and presentation of specialized knowledge	0.062	3	0.248	3	0.186	4	0.248	3	0.186	3	0.186
Strength 5: Creating a campaign for public relations of urban branding	0.05	4	0.2	4	0.2	3	0.15	3	0.15	4	0.2
Strength 6: Showing the value of public relation and presenting an applied programming model	0.046	3	0.138	4	0.184	4	0.184	3	0.138	3	0.138
Strength 7: Communication through modern social networks (Viber, line, etc)	0.036	3	0.108	3	0.108	3	0.108	4	0.144	4	0.144
Strength 8: Strategic management in the organization	0.042	3	0.126	3	0.126	3	0.126	3	0.126	3	0.126
Strength 9: Using modern science and technology in urban management	0.074	4	0.296	3	0.222	3	0.222	3	0.222	4	0.296
Strength 10: Inter-organizational communication through SMS	0.03	3	0.09	3	0.09	4	0.12	2	0.06	1	0.03

	Coefficient of significance	Various applicable strategies									
		Strategy 1: Optimal use of data integration in order to boost public participation		Strategy 2: Employing strategic thinking in order to change the misconceptions about public relations		Strategy 3: Employing social networks in order to boost public participation and receiving feedback		Strategy 4: Employing branding programs in order to create a sense of need of news of municipality		Strategy 5: Providing information for citizens by using modern technologies	
		Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score
Opportunity 1: Using the experiences of other mega-cities	0.082	3	0.264	2	0.164	3	0.264	3	0.264	4	0.328
Opportunity 2: The geographical position of Karaj as a main connection and its position as a gateway for transferring information	0.053	3	0.159	3	0.159	3	0.159	3	0.159	3	0.159
Opportunity 3: Using touristic sites of Karaj as a tool for attracting investments	0.047	3	0.141	2	0.094	4	0.188	2	0.1	2	0.094
Opportunity 4: The diversity of tribes and cultures in Karaj	0.05	3	0.15	1	0.05	3	0.15	2	0.1	3	0.15
Opportunity 5: Signing memorandum of understanding between the organization and scientific societies	0.066	1	0.066	2	0.132	3	0.198	3	0.198	3	0.198
Opportunity 6: Easy access to the capital	0.062	3	0.186	2	0.124	2	0.124	3	0.186	3	0.186
Opportunity 7: Using the international connections	0.05	3	0.15	3	0.15	3	0.15	2	0.1	3	0.15
Opportunity 8: Transaction with various urban areas	0.044	3	0.132	3	0.132	2	0.088	3	0.132	3	0.132
Opportunity 9: The presence and participation of non-governmental organizations	0.044	3	0.132	3	0.132	4	0.176	3	0.132	4	0.176
Opportunity 10: Using the high capacities of production units and industrial towns in the suburbs of Karaj for building specialized and branding exhibitions	0.046	3	0.138	3	0.138	4	0.184	4	0.184	3	0.138

	Various applicable strategies										
	Coefficient of significance	Strategy 1: Optimal use of data integration in order to boost public participation		Strategy 2: Employing strategic thinking in order to change the misconceptions about public relations		Strategy 3: Employing social networks in order to boost public participation and receiving feedback		Strategy 4: Employing branding programs in order to create a sense of need to news of municipality		Strategy 5: Providing information for citizens by using modern technologies	
		Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score
Weakness 1: Lack of education in subjects related to public relation	0.077	3	0.231	3	0.231	3	0.231	3	0.231	4	0.308
Weakness 2: Lack of offering motivation and encouragement in public relation relative to its high significance	0.058	2	0.116	1	0.058	2	0.116	3	0.174	1	0.058
Weakness 3: Lack of an organized planning that includes duties and future plans	0.04	4	0.16	3	0.12	3	0.12	3	0.12	3	0.12
Weakness 4: Delay in decision-making as a result of high bureaucratic works	0.044	3	0.132	3	0.132	2	0.088	3	0.132	3	0.132
Weakness 5: Lack of offering periodic of feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses of organization	0.042	2	0.082	3	0.126	3	0.126	3	0.126	1	0.042
Weakness 6: Lack of proper education for citizens	0.038	3	0.114	4	0.152	3	0.114	3	0.114	4	0.152
Weakness 7: Lack of coordination among units and their programs	0.05	3	0.15	2	0.1	3	0.15	2	0.1	3	0.15

Weakness 8: Non-systematic and biased payment of the salaries and extra-salaries of the employees	0.041	3	0.123	3	0.123	2	0.082	3	0.123	2	0.082
Weakness 9: Traditional views of high ranking managers	0.06	3	0.18	3	0.18	2	0.12	3	0.18	2	0.12
Weakness 10: Lack of a systemic view within the organization	0.042	3	0.126	3	0.126	4	0.168	3	0.126	3	0.126
Various applicable strategies											
Coefficient of significance	Strategy 1: Optimal use of data integration in order to boost public participation		Strategy 2: Employing strategic thinking in order to change the misconceptions about public relations		Strategy 3: Employing social networks in order to boost public participation and receiving feedback		Strategy 4: Employing branding programs in order to create a sense of need to news of municipality		Strategy 5: Providing information for citizens by using modern technologies		
	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	Attraction coefficient	Total score	
Threat 1: Not using the presence and participation of people	0.04	4	0.16	3	0.12	4	0.16	4	0.16	3	0.12
Threat 2: A sense of non-belongingness among citizens	0.052	3	0.156	1	0.052	2	0.104	3	0.156	3	0.156
Threat 3: Lack of strong communication with people	0.032	3	0.096	3	0.096	4	0.128	3	0.096	4	0.128
Threat 4: Lack of knowledge about the organization among people	0.038	3	0.114	3	0.114	3	0.114	1	0.038	2	0.076
Threat 5: Lack of sufficient budget	0.076	4	0.304	4	0.304	3	0.228	3	0.228	3	0.228

Threat 6: Misunderstanding about public relations of organization in issues related to security, duties, taxes, etc.	0.066	3	0.198	4	0.264	4	0.264	3	0.198	3	0.198
Threat 7: Lack of coordination among public relation units of city districts with central public relation	0.034	3	0.102	3	0.102	3	0.102	4	0.136	3	0.102
Threat 8: Misunderstanding about the true position of public relation among citizens	0.054	4	0.162	3	0.162	2	0.108	2	0.108	3	0.162
Threat 9: Citizen's negligence toward the news of municipality	0.037	4	0.148	3	0.111	3	0.111	2	0.074	3	0.111
Threat 10: Executive limitations as a result of political obstacles	0.027	3	0.081	2	0.054	3	0.081	3	0.081	3	0.081
Total	-	-	6.209	-	5.522	-	6.04	-	5.728	-	6.051

4. Conclusions

The obtained results have been presented in table 6.

Table 6. The ranking of strategies of public relations section of Karaj municipality

Ranking	Strategy	Obtained score
1	Optimal use of data integration in order to enhance people's participation	6.209
2	Giving information related to the urban services to the citizens by modern technologies	6.051
3	Using social networks in order to enhance citizens' participation and to receive feedback	6.040
4	Employing branding programs in order to create a sense of need to the news of municipality	5.728
5	Employing the thinking of strategic management in order to correct misconceptions about public relations	5.522

As can be seen in the above table, the strategies of public relation section of Karaj municipality have been ranked in a hierarchy consisting of five positions.

5. Suggestions for future research

- Conducting periodic studies in order to examine the continuous changes in urban environments
- Reducing weaknesses and strengthening strong points within the organization

- Analyzing the environment in order to seize opportunities and to avoid threats

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