

# Chapter 1

## The Impact of Strategic Practice Maturity on Arab States' Performance: Social Justice, Sustainable Development, and Democracy Perspectives

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter introduces the development of strategic management as a formal discipline and provides an overview of strategic management concepts, models, and best practices, highlighting the difference between strategic thinking, planning, and management. It then zooms into the current strategic practice in different Arab countries to formulate a reasonable understanding of the effectiveness of such practice in serving governments and organizations to achieve their national strategic goals and objectives. The study employs a mix of research and evaluation tools, derived from the literature and best practices, to assess the maturity levels of the adopted strategic practice by Arab states and examines its relationship to and impact on government performance, in particular that which is related to achieving social justice, sustainable development, and democracy. In conclusion, the outcome of the investigation is used to suggest solutions to drive improvement to the current strategic practice in the Arab world.*

### INTRODUCTION

Strategic Management has evolved as one of the important management disciplines that are progressively adopted by different Arab governments and organizations, in order to cope with major political upheavals and socio-economic challenges that have arisen over the past decades, in a swiftly changing environment. Neither the rich legacy of the Arab-Muslim civilization, and its important contribution to humanity, nor the colossal wealth of the oil producing gulf countries, or the common language, history, culture and religion, have translated into economic prosperity, political stability, or even to satisfying

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the basic aspirations of people for peace, security, liberty, social justice and democracy (Abu Ramadan & Borgonovi, 2016).

In a region that has constantly been the theatre for wars, extremism, violence, poverty and illiteracy for many decades, Arab states find their refuge in adopting different strategic practices for their survival and sustainability. Whilst the optimist observers may argue that such adoption of strategic management models and practice may have culminated in some tangible improvement in specific areas such as education and health, others suggest that some governments have drastically failed in more critical areas, pertaining to employment, human development, social justice, democracy and liberties. Nonetheless, there is a clear indicator of a general mode of dissatisfaction, among important sectors of society in different Arab countries, specifically public concerns about security and political corruption, unemployment and the economy, quality of education and health services, liberties and social justice among other things. Many observers suggest that issues such as that may have contributed the eruption of the Arab spring; “a wave of pro-democracy and social justice uprising and protests wave that took place in some of the Middle East and North African Arab countries starting in Tunisia in 2011, and swiftly moving to Egypt, Libya, Syria and Yemen” (ESCWA, 2015). Despite the fact that most of these protests were initially of legitimate and non-violent nature, they have transformed somehow to ugly forms of ferocity and violence that has contributed to major human suffering, through the savage killing, injuring and displacing of millions of innocent people, and which has resulted in a horrific destruction of the major cities and towns (Lynch, 2012).

The main objective of this chapter is to investigate and assess the effectiveness of different strategic management approaches and practices adopted by governments and organizations in the Arab world, to pinpoint gaps and weaknesses and suggest means for improvement.

## **BACKGROUND**

This section is of two parts; Part one, provides an overview of strategic management as a discipline, function and process, both conceptually and as best practice. The coverage has both theoretical and practitioner perspectives, through making reference to relevant studies in the literature, and attaining support of evidence from cases studies, in an attempt to familiarize the reader with the discipline, through its definitions, characteristics, concepts and models. Given the importance of strategic practice to both government and business organizations alike, attention is shifted to point-out the success factors and performance indicators associated with strategic management and its, derivatives, relatives and next of kin, the likes of strategic thinking, strategic planning, strategic depth, strategic choices and strategic decisions.

Part two of this section, introduces the reader to the modern Arab world, as regions and countries in the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century, highlighting their success and failures, and where they stand compared to other regions and countries in the globe politically, socially and economically.

The rationale behind the inclusion of part one and part two, in this order and this manner, is to set the context for investigating, reviewing and evaluating the effectiveness of strategic practice adopted by different Arab states to cope with the major challenges and problems that have been encountered over the past decades, and to look for evidence linking such successes and failures to the performance of these governments, and what this translates into as a rank in different global indicators.

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