Strategic Decision-Making and Implementation in Public Organizations in the Gulf Cooperation Council: The Role of Procedural Rationality

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Abstract

Based on Herbert Simon's conceptualization of bounded rationality, this study develops and tests an integrative model of the strategic decision-making process (SDMP) and outcomes in public organizations. The model integrates different SDMP dimensions—procedural rationality, intuition, participation, and constructive politics—and examines their impacts on the successful implementation of strategic decisions. Additionally, it analyzes the influence of implementation on the overall outcomes of strategic decisions. The model was tested with multi-source data on 170 strategic decisions collected from senior executives working in 38 public organizations in Qatar—a context in which studies on decision-making are rare. With the exception of intuition, this study shows a positive impact of all SDMP dimensions on the successful implementation and outcomes of strategic decisions. Successful implementation fully mediates the relationships between procedural rationality, participation, and constructive politics and the outcomes of strategic decision.

Keywords: Decision-making, rationality, participation, intuition, implementation, Qatar.

Evidence for Practice

- The study shows how managers decide on strategic issues for public organizations.
- There is a positive relationship between procedural rationality, participation, and constructive politics and the successful implementation of strategic decisions.
- Public managers can influence the success of strategic decisions by establishing formal processes to ensure all relevant information is collected and analyzed and that people with experience and diverse perspectives participate in decision-making.
- Developing effective implementation processes is necessary for improving the outcomes of strategic decisions in public organizations.

For many public managers, making strategic decisions and overseeing their successful implementation is a key responsibility (Ferlie and Ongaro 2015; Kelman, Sanders, and Pandit 2015). However, the strategic decision-making process (SDMP), content, and outcomes within public organizations remain unclear and underexamined (Bozeman and Pandey 2004; George and Desmidt 2018; Rainey, Ronquillo, and Avellaneda 2010). Herbert Simon's seminal book *Administrative Behavior* is considered a main reference for the study of decision-making processes in administrative organizations (Simon 1997[1947]). Having the first two chapters of the book published as articles in *Public Administration Review* (Simon 1944; 1946), Simon noted that "human behavior is intendedly rational but only boundedly so" (1997, 88). He proposed the term "bounded rationality" (1957, 198) and criticized perfect rationality, arguing that it is a non-realistic concept because of our limited cognitive ability to rationalize a given issue or task and the availability of limited information. Consequently, successful decisions tend to "satisfice" (an amalgamation of the words satisfy and suffice) and be "good enough" rather than optimal (Hall 2021; Simon 1957). Simon (1997) also argued that decisions are not based only on rationality; other dimensions, such as intuition, participation, and political behavior, may also be relevant in organizations when making decisions. His contributions to behavioral science illuminate the gap between how public managers should behave and how they actually do, and thus, move beyond traditional perfect rationality in decision making (Battaglio et al. 2019; Bertelli and Riccucci 2021; Hong 2020).

Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret (1976, 246) defined strategic decisions as "important, in terms of the actions taken, the resources committed, or the precedents set." Strategic decisions have also been described as unstructured, abnormal, and complicated (Schwenk 1988) and as important, unusual, and comprehensive (Hickson et al. 1986). To gain a better understanding of bounded rationality and its role in SDMPs, several authors have recommended developing integrative models that combine various SDMP dimensions and outcomes (e.g., Elbanna,

Andrews, and Pollanen 2016). Thus, this study develops an integrative model of strategic decision-making to examine the impact of four exogenous constructs on the successful implementation of a strategic decision and on strategic decision quality. Due to the important role of stakeholders for public organizations (Bryson 2004), we also analyze the moderating role of stakeholder uncertainty in the relationship between the successful implementation of a strategic decision and strategic decision quality.

Our research embodies a top-down notion of strategy that aligns decisions toward a common goal (Andrews, Beynon, and Genc 2017) and makes a theoretical and practical contribution by showing how public managers can improve the quality of their strategic decisions (Dean and Sharfman 1996). We analyze whether their SDMP can improve the successful implementation of the strategic decision and whether a focus on procedural rationality, intuition, participation, or constructive politics yields better decision quality or outcomes. For the purposes of this study, decision quality is defined as "the extent to which the decision attained its intended objectives" (Shepherd et al. 2021, 126).

There are three main research gaps that inspired our study and contributed to the development of the research model and its identified set of variables. First, the need to integrate different perspectives of the SDMP, so as to provide a better understanding of this process and its outcomes in public institutions. This point is important, given the concerns about applying the findings of SDMP research from private sector firms without an empirical investigation and validation, into the public sector, because there are critical differences between the two sectors (Rainey, Ronquillo, and Avellaneda 2010) that influence the SDMP. Moreover, our proposed model integrates both synoptic and incremental perspectives in SDMP research (Shepherd 2014). The synoptic perspective—represented by the dimension of procedural rationality—emphasizes the rational-analytic aspects of the decision process (Pfiffner 1960), whereas the

incremental perspective—represented by the dimensions of intuition, participation, and constructive politics—views the decision process from an incremental-political aspect (Lindblom 1959). Combining both synoptic and incremental-political perspectives in one research model is an important contribution, particularly to the public sector decision-making literature, given the lack of such models. Our study analyzes the extent to which these four exogenous constructs influence the quality of strategic decisions and whether the successful implementation of strategic decisions mediates the relationship between them and strategic decision quality.

Second, although decision success is widely perceived as a function of both decision-making and implementation (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973; Winter 2012), very little research has examined the role of the actual implementation of strategic decisions (George 2020). To fill this gap, we integrate the factors associated with both decision-making and implementation into a single model, given the potentially significant impact of implementation on strategic decision success (e.g., Andrews et al. 2011; Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2016). Thus, we incorporate the successful implementation of decisions into the study model by examining its relationship with several dimensions of decision making, along with its impact on decision quality.

The third research gap relates to the lack of understanding of the SDMP in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. This council was established in 1981 as a regional, economic, and political union consisting of six Arab countries: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The majority of existing SDMP studies were conducted in Western countries (Andrews, Beynon, and Genc 2017). Moreover, Elbanna (2010) argued that certain dimensions of the SDMP are specific to the context, i.e., to the broader cultural and political-administrative environment. Consequently, SDMP models developed for the Western

context cannot be directly applied to the GCC region without undertaking relevant empirical research to contextualize them. Given the high rate of economic growth in the GCC region and its increasing importance in world affairs, this is a significant research gap that merits further study.

In the following sections, we first develop our integrative SDMP model and study hypotheses. Thereafter, we describe the collection and analysis of the multi-source data on 170 strategic decisions made by senior executives in 38 public organizations in Qatar, and the study results. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the study before concluding with the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

Theory and Hypotheses Development

The study model, shown in figure 1, posits that the four dimensions of the SDMP have a direct impact on the successful implementation of strategic decisions, which, in turn, is expected to influence strategic decision quality directly and indirectly. These four dimensions integrate synoptic (procedural rationality) and incremental (intuition, participation, and constructive politics) perspectives in SDMP research that have been considered particularly relevant for decision-making, both in the seminal work by Herbert Simon (1993, 1997) and in the more recent strategic decision-making literature (e.g., Dean and Sharfman 1996; Elbanna and Child 2007; Shepherd et al. 2020). Our research model analyzes the mediating role of decision implementation, which has been largely overlooked in previous research on strategic decision-making. We also study the moderating effects of stakeholder uncertainty on the relationship between the successful implementation of a strategic decision and strategic decision quality, which is particularly relevant for public organizations.

[Figure 1 here]

Procedural Rationality

In general, there are two opposing concepts of rationality: perfect and bounded. Perfect rationality is rooted in normative theory and relies on the classical conceptions of economics, which requires using full logic and considering all facts and possible alternatives to select the best option (Pfiffner 1960). Simon (1957, 198) coined the term "bounded rationality," arguing that decision-makers are not omniscient and that limited human cognitive capacities and knowledge make it impossible to apply perfect rationality. Therefore, organizations should use their limited resources when making strategic decisions to achieve satisfactory results instead of optimal results. Simon noted that "a theory of bounded rationality is necessarily a theory of procedural rationality" (1997, 19) and that "behavior is procedurally rational when it is the outcome of appropriate deliberation" (1976, 67). In this study, we follow Dean and Sharfman's definition of procedural rationality as "the extent to which the decision process involves the collection of information relevant to the decision, and the reliance upon analysis of this information in making the choice" (1993, 589).

Many empirical studies have supported the positive influence of rationality on the SDMP (Pollanen et al. 2017). For example, research has widely reported a positive impact of rationality on several measures of organizational outcomes, such as decision effectiveness (Dean and Sharfman 1996), decision legitimacy (Gordon, Kornberger, and Clegg 2009), decision quality (Shepherd 2014), and organizational effectiveness (Jones, Jacobs, and Spijker 1992). However, there is a lack of research on the role of rationality in the implementation of strategic decisions (Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2016).

Procedural rationality, as a representation of the synoptic perspective of decision-making (Elbanna 2010), can be expected to have a positive effect on strategy implementation. Establishing formal and explicit processes that ensure that evidence-based practices (Jennings

and Hall 2012) are followed, all pertinent information is gathered, and relevant analytical tools are employed systematically to thoroughly examine this information facilitates a deeper understanding of the issues and helps evaluating available alternatives when making strategic decisions (George 2020). These mechanisms create a comprehensive and information-rich decision-making environment (George and Desmidt 2018), allow to anticipate potential problems, and avoid that they become evident only at the implementation stage. The systematic use of analytical and evaluative techniques compensates for individuals' cognitive limitations and facilitates the coordination of activities and maintenance of commitment to strategic goals in case of environmental change during implementation (Andrews, Beynon, and Genc 2017). As decision-makers gain a clearer understanding of the reasons behind strategic decisions that are products of rational analysis, they are more likely to be committed to their implementation (Floyd and Wooldridge 1992), which positively influences the chances of implementation success (Shepherd 2014).

A focus on using relevant information and evidence when making decisions is important for both theory and practice (Hall and Van Ryzin 2019). Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2016) and Shepherd (2014) provided empirical support for the positive role of a formal approach to strategic decision-making in the successful implementation of decisions in both public and private organizations. Hence, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 1: Procedural rationality is positively related to the successful implementation of strategic decisions.

Intuition

Khatri and Ng stated that "a theory of strategic decision making has to take into account both rational and intuitive processes" (2000, 58). For example, Andersen (2010) found that intuition is the most frequently used decision-making style by public managers. Simon (1997)

emphasized the important role of intuition in decision-making and described intuition as non-conscious pattern recognition. Similarly, Hodgkinson et al. (2009) considered intuition as the sum of experiences saved in one's memory in the form of information that shapes recognition and feeling of right and wrong. They noted that intuition means "'knowing' but without knowing why" (279).

There are contradictory findings about the relationship between the use of intuition and both decisional and organizational outcomes. For example, some studies have found a positive role of intuition in the SDMP with regard to speed and when limited precedent exists (Shirley and Langan-Fox 1996). However, the majority of studies show that intuition has negative implications for different outcomes of strategic decisions (Shepherd 2014). Hence, in this study, we argue for a negative relationship between intuition and the success of strategic decision implementation. For example, several studies suggest that intuition is more likely to have a negative impact on public service performance (e.g., Andrews et al. 2011).

A negative relationship between intuition and successful implementation of strategic decisions can be expected because managers may become impatient with the process of collecting requisite information and conducting relevant analyses. Thus, they may be tempted to decide quickly, without conscious deliberation, based on intuitive heuristics, disregarding relevant facts and contrary opinions, ignoring practical realities, and following their inspiration when it is inappropriate (Andersen 2010; Battaglio et al. 2019). In such situations, intuitive judgments are more likely to produce unforeseen problems at the implementation stage. Furthermore, while intuition can be useful for creative decisions, it has much less merit when applied to detailed processes, such as those required for the implementation of strategic decisions in the public sector. Such cases entail careful analysis of multiple internal and external constituencies,

and intuitive decision processes may lead to critical implementation issues being overlooked (Shepherd 2014). Based on these reasons, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2: Intuition is negatively related to the successful implementation of strategic decisions.

Participation

The third exogenous construct in our model is participation. Participation in making strategic decisions can be seen as the extent to which relevant people in the organization are involved in the process of making these decisions. Simon stated that the "participation of many organization members in the strategic planning process is the surest way of securing the dissemination of ideas that is the basis for implementation" (1993, 139).

Participation should have a positive effect on the successful implementation of strategic decisions because it involves employees with sufficient information and "knowledge of the particular circumstances of time and place" (Hayek 1945, 524) and diverse perspectives that are essential to make high-quality decisions (Ashmos, Duchon, and McDaniel 1998). Involving those charged with implementing decisions in the decision-making process allows the incorporation of their expectations (George and Desmidt 2018) and helps them to understand the rationale behind the strategic decisions (Floyd and Wooldridge 1990). Participation provides opportunities for attaining their consensus, increasing their commitment, and for developing a sense of ownership (Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2016; Wolf and Floyd 2017). A high level of participation is also an important mechanism for increasing organizational adaptability to deal with unpredictable and uncertain situations in the external environment during the implementation process (Bryson et al. 2013). Participation in decision-making can also demonstrate the objectivity of decisions to a multitude of accountability

forums (Aleksovska, Schillemans, and Grimmelikhuijsen 2021) and increase equity in public services (Cepiku and Mastrodascio 2021).

Many empirical studies show that participation in decision-making has a positive impact on organizational outcomes in public organizations. For example, participation relates positively to job satisfaction (Kim 2002; Wright and Kim 2004), patients' experience (Veronesi, Kirkpatrick, and Altanlar 2015), quality of patient care (Liu et al. 2015), and organizational commitment (Miao et al. 2013). Nutt (1999) examined 317 strategic decisions from different sectors and found that managers in public sector organizations were more successful when experts participated in the decision-making process. Similarly, in the Canadian public-sector context, Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2016) reported that participation has a significant impact on the success of strategy implementation. Hence:

Hypothesis 3: Participation is positively related to the successful implementation of strategic decisions.

Constructive Politics

As strategic decisions are highly consequential, a core assumption in decision theory is that groups of people involved in strategic decision-making engage in political behavior to further their competing interests and preferences (Dean and Sharfman 1993, 1996). Political behavior occurs outside the established procedures and consists of, for example, forming coalitions and engaging in offline lobbying to influence the existing power structure (e.g., Allison 1971; Shepherd et al. 2020). Accordingly, it is important to analyze the behavioral aspects of public management and pay greater attention to the psychology and interests of public managers (Grimmelikhuijsen et al. 2017; Simon 1997). Following Elbanna (2018, 618), we adopt a neutral definition of political behavior as "intentional forms of behavior associated with the use of power and influence in order to serve the own interests of decision-makers or these of

the organization." This definition shows that there are two aspects of political behavior—constructive and destructive—based on who reaps the benefits of engaging in politics (Fedor et al. 2008). Whereas initial research emphasized the destructive aspect of political behavior that favor personal objectives (e.g., Dean and Sharfman 1996), more recent research has focused on the constructive aspects of political behavior that are pursued to further organizational objectives (e.g., Eldor 2017; Shepherd et al. 2020).

We argue that constructive politics can positively contribute to the successful implementation of strategic decisions in different ways. For example, it may challenge the status quo and assumptions of the most powerful decision-makers, assure that multiple perspectives and aspects of the implementation problems are examined, and align different perceptions about the environmental context (Fedor et al. 2008). As constructive politics targets serving organizational interests, it is more likely to help public managers consider a broad array of options and promote desirable changes for the effective implementation of strategic decisions, even if it opposes the interests of other decision-makers (Shepherd 2014). Constructive politics may also help overcome decision biases, such as groupthink, and reconcile opposing views and frictions (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 2009).

Empirically, Eldor (2017) found that employees who perceive their environment as more political, engage in knowledge sharing and are more creative, proactive, and adaptive, which may lead to more creative strategic decisions. In a study of 200 organizations, constructive politics was found to have a positive effect on different decision outcomes, such as success and speed (Elbanna 2018). Based on the above discussion, we argue as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Constructive politics is positively related to the successful implementation of strategic decisions.

Implementation and Strategic Decision Quality

The quality of strategic decisions, as a measure of decision success, is one of the most frequently used constructs in SDMP literature (George and Desmidt 2018). It reflects how decision-makers assess the overall quality of relevant issues pertaining to a strategic decision and its effects on organizational performance (Amason 1996; George and Desmidt 2018).

Strategic decision implementation is defined as an intervention by management to align organizational actions with the objectives of strategic decisions (Floyd and Wooldridge 1992), as a process of converting strategic choices into an operating plan (Elbanna 2010), and as a series of interventions and acts of control and monitoring with respect to desired ends (Hrebiniak and Joyce 1984). Although strategic decision-making will only enhance organizational performance if it has been successfully implemented, implementation has received far less attention and has been described as a black box (Nutt 1998).

Good formulation of strategic decisions alone is not a guarantee of success unless it has been implemented effectively (Winter 2012). Hambrick and Cannella stated that "without successful implementation, a strategy is but a fantasy" (1989, 278) and Bryson (2018) noted the importance of developing effective implementation processes for strategic decisions in public organizations. This suggests that strategic decisions are unlikely to be successful without effective implementation, and that SDMP characteristics influence strategic decision quality both directly and indirectly through implementation success (Shepherd 2014).

Winter (2012) emphasized the critical importance of implementation, as evidenced in three generations of implementation studies. For example, for inter-organizational policy implementation, O'Toole and Montjoy (1984) suggested that policy-makers should pay more attention to the implementation stage to successfully execute their policy and satisfy the key actors. Empirically, Shepherd (2014) found that implementation success mediates the

relationship between one important dimension of strategic decision-making (procedural rationality) and strategic decision quality. Therefore:

Hypothesis 5: Successful implementation of strategic decisions is positively related to strategic decision quality.

Hypothesis 6: Successful implementation of strategic decisions mediates the relationship between (a) rationality, (b) intuition, (c) participation, and (d) constructive politics and strategic decision quality.

The Role of Stakeholder Uncertainty

An increasing number of studies have examined the moderating impact of the external environment on SDMP and outcome linkages (Goll and Rasheed 1997). For public organizations, the dimension of the external environment that plays a particularly critical role is stakeholder uncertainty (Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2016).

Stakeholders can be defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives" (Freeman 1984, 46). Strategic decisions in public sector organizations involve several stakeholders (Bryson 2004), who are a major source of uncertainty. This uncertainty may encompass issues such as: who are the relevant stakeholders; what are their preferences; how they could influence a decision; and how organizations could consider their preferences and possible actions. Public organizations need to cooperate and collaborate with stakeholders to achieve their organizational goals (Bryson 2018). More specifically, as the work context of public organizations has a critical impact on their processes and outcomes, they need to engage closely with all those who have a stake in the process of strategic decision implementation to effectively execute these decisions. In this regard, the

impact of stakeholders on the outcomes of strategic decisions may vary, depending on the degree of uncertainty surrounding them (Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2016).

Examining the moderating role of environmental uncertainty in general, and that of stakeholder uncertainty in particular, is a common theme in the strategic decision-making literature (e.g., Shepherd 2014). The basic premise of this role is that the uncertainty inherent in the decision environment can be mitigated by decision processes, such as the use of formal analysis and participative decision approaches. Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2016), for example, examined data from more than 150 public sector organizations and found that stakeholder uncertainty strengthened the relationship between formal strategic planning and success of strategy implementation. Based on these findings, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7*:* Stakeholder uncertainty moderates the relationship between the successful implementation of a strategic decision and strategic decision quality.

Methodology

Research Setting

The GCC countries are located in the Middle East and consist of six Arab nations that possess many similarities, such as Islam and the Arabic language, which shape the norms and values of their citizens (Galanou and Farrag 2015). Economically, the GCC countries depend mainly on their oil production and have recently faced the double impact of COVID-19 and low oil prices (International Monetary Fund 2020). As GCC's cultural and economic factors are different from those in Western countries, the SDMP can also be expected to be different.

Qatar, the context of this study, bid successfully to host the 2022 Football World Cup in 2010, in addition to several mega sports events, such as the 2030 Asian Games. Consequently, during the last decade, it has focused on developing its infrastructure and public services, which has

led to many strategic decisions having been made, and implemented, in the Qatari public sector, such as the construction of massive stadiums, motorways, the first railways, and modernizing cities in preparation for the events. This makes the Qatari context important and worthy of investigating public decision-making.

Sample and Procedures

Following extensive prior research (e.g., Dean and Sharfman 1996; Simon 1997), we use strategic decisions as the unit of analysis. The investigated strategic decisions were selected based on four criteria (Elbanna 2010). First, the decision had to be described by both the organization and the researcher as "strategic" (Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret 1976). Second, the decision must have been made during the last three years to minimize memory errors. During this period, the situation of many strategic decisions in Qatar was relatively unprecedented due to the country's blockade by its neighbors and low oil prices. Third, the respondent must have been involved in making the chosen strategic decision. Fourth, the strategic decision must have already been implemented, and its overall outcome must have been clear at the time of data collection.

To reduce common method variance, we avoided the collection of information about the independent and dependent variables from the same source (Andersen, Heinesen, and Pedersen 2016; Jakobsen and Jensen 2015). Following the recommendations of George and Pandey (2017), we ensured a multi-informant research design with independent data sources (Schwarz, Eva, and Newman 2020). For each of the 170 strategic decisions in our sample, we used two different sets of surveys with different types of respondents (Favero and Bullock 2014; Meier and O'Toole 2013). The first informant rated the explanatory variables and the second informant rated the dependent variable, strategic decision quality (Shepherd et al. 2020). To avoid the IKEA effect (Norton, Mochon, and Ariely 2012)—a type of effort justification bias

(Festinger 1957) that leads people to overvalue the fruits of their own labor—we required that the second informant worked for the same public organization as the first informant but was not directly involved in the implementation of the strategic decision. To encourage valid responses, both the first and second informants were assured that participation was voluntary and that their responses would be treated confidentially.

We used the following process to develop our questionnaire: a draft questionnaire in English was designed, which was then reviewed by four academics. Its final version was translated into Arabic, and the translation was reviewed by multilingual academic experts. An Arabic version was then administered to 17 Qatari public managers, who suggested several amendments.

Our targeted population was limited to public organizations in Qatar. All respondents were senior executives working in 38 public sector organizations. Surveys were distributed using two techniques: paper-based and online. We distributed 800 surveys and collected 270 responses, yielding a response rate of 34%. A total of 59 surveys were excluded for different reasons, such as incomplete information or not dealing with decisions that were strategic. A total of 41 surveys were excluded because we were not able to collect responses from a second informant. Data from the second informant were collected eight months after the original data collection to ensure that the quality of the strategic decision could be properly assessed. For the second informant, the response rate was 42%. We performed t-tests to compare the means of all independent variables (procedural rationality, intuition, participation, and constructive politics) and did not find any statistically significant differences between the 170 strategic decisions that were rated by a second informant and the 41 strategic decisions for which we could not identify a second informant. In all, 170 strategic decisions were used in the analysis. 78.8% of the respondents were male, more than 70% were older than 40 years, 58.1% had worked in their current organization for more than 10 years, and nearly 90% received at least

a bachelor's degree. Descriptive information about the respondents and characteristics of the strategic decisions are shown in table 1.

[Table 1 here]

Measures

All questions in the survey represent scales adopted or adapted from articles published in top academic journals. Unless stated otherwise, the first informant rated the measures. Appendix 1 shows the full text of all the scales and their sources.

Procedural rationality was measured using the five-item scale developed by Dean and Sharfman (1993). A sample item includes: "Decision making members extensively analyzed the relevant information before making this decision." The composite reliability (CR) for this scale was 0.84.

Intuition was measured with a six-item scale based on Dayan and Elbanna (2011) and Khatri and Ng (2000). These items represented both the main concepts of intuition, knowing and sensing. A sample item representing knowing is: "The participants in making this decision relied on personal judgment." A sample item representing sensing is: "On many occasions, the decision-making members did not have enough information and had to make this decision based on a 'gut feeling'." The CR for the scale was 0.91.

Participation was measured using the five-item scale developed by Segars, Grover, and Teng (1998). A sample item includes: "Our process for making this decision includes numerous participants." The CR for this scale was 0.85.

Constructive politics was measured using a four-item scale, following Elbanna (2018). A sample item is: "To make this decision, the decision-makers used their power to defend their …," where 1 represents personal objectives and 5 represents organizational objectives. A high

score represents constructive politics and a low score represents destructive politics. The CR for the scale was 0.92.

Implementation success was measured using seven items derived from Noble and Mokwa (1999) and Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2016). A sample item is: "The implementation of this decision was generally considered a great success in my organization." The CR for this scale was 0.88.

Strategic decision quality was measured using the three-item scale created by Amason (1996). A sample item includes: "The quality of this decision given its effect on organizational performance was …." This measure was assessed by a second informant. The CR for the scale was 0.84.

Stakeholder uncertainty was measured using the three-item scale created by Miller and Dröge (1986). A sample item is: "Our organization had to frequently change its services and practices to keep up with stakeholders' expectations." The CR for the scale was 0.86.

We controlled for the effects of three important variables from the SDMP literature: organizational identification, centralization, and organization size. *Organizational identification* was measured using three items derived from Mael and Ashforth (1992). A sample item is: "We are very interested in what others think about our organization" (CR=0.79). *Centralization* was measured using the five-item scale developed by Aiken and Hage (1966). A sample item includes: "There can be little action taken until a supervisor approves a decision" (CR=0.84). *Organization size* was operationalized using a single item: the number of full-time employees working for the organization at the time of making the strategic decision, following prior research (e.g., Elbanna 2010).

The perceptual operationalization of decision processes and outcomes used in our study is the norm in strategic decision-making research (Amason 1996; Dean and Sharfman 1996; Elbanna 2010; Hickson et al. 1986; Shepherd et al. 2020). This is because in cases where, for example, only poor alternatives are available, an objective measure of the decision quality does not allow to determine whether decision-makers selected the best possible alternative given the circumstances (Amason 1996). Identification of objective data is a problem particularly pronounced in emerging economies, such as the GCC, which do not have a history of collecting reliable and up-to-date public sector data. However, we collected objective data about the organization size of 21 of the participating 38 public organizations and assessed the reliability agreement with the subjective information provided by the first informants. For the reliability agreement of organization size, the average measure of the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC) range is 0.89, which indicates a significant agreement between both objective and subjective data. In addition, we have remedied the limitations of the data through various methods.

To decrease the possibility of common method bias, we used a *full collinearity assessment approach* (Kock 2015; see appendix 1). We analyzed the *test-retest reliability* of our measures by collecting surveys from seven respondents on two different occasions separated by at least two weeks (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff 2012), and the *interrater reliability* agreement of four cases by collecting data from two different respondents participating in making the same decision. For the test-retest reliability check, the average ICC measures ranged between 0.69 and 0.8, and all cases were significant at the 1% level, indicating a moderate to good degree of stability of our measures (Weir 2005). For the interrater reliability check, the average measures of the ICC ranged between 0.56 and 0.7, and all cases were significant at the 1% level, which indicates a moderate level of interrater reliability (Weir 2005).

Results

We employed partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), using Smart-PLS 3, to analyze our estimated model. PLS-SEM is an appropriate method to explore our new research context and handle our complex model with less need for a larger sample size to reach a statistical power (Hair et al. 2016).

Measurement Model Evaluation

We followed Chin's (2010) approach to report the measurement model PLS-SEM results. First, we evaluated the convergent validity by considering the average variance extracted (AVE) of individual items. All AVE values of our constructs were above the threshold of 0.5. This indicates that, on average, more than half of the variance of the indicators is explained by its constructs. Second, we evaluated the internal consistency reliability using the CR measure. All our constructs' CRs ranged between 0.79 and 0.92, which is higher than the suggested threshold (0.70) (see appendix 1 for detailed results). Third, we evaluated the discriminant validity to distinguish each construct from others, using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (see table 2) and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations (see table 3). All constructs meet the conditions of both tests, which suggests the uniqueness of our constructs.

[Table 2 here]

[Table 3 here]

Structural Model and Hypotheses Testing

Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlations of the study variables. We assessed collinearity using the variance inflation factor (VIF). VIF values above 5 are considered to be critical levels of collinearity. All VIF values (in appendix 1) are below 3.37, suggesting uncritical levels of collinearity between each set of predictor variables, indicating that the model is free from common method bias.

[Table 4 here]

We followed Hair et al. (2016) to assess the structural model in PLS by examining the path coefficients, t-statistics, coefficient of determination, effect size, and predictive relevance of the model (see figure 2). We assessed the path coefficient (β) using the least-squares method. T-statistics were estimated using a bootstrapping procedure with 3,000 subsamples. In figure 2, the R^2 of successful implementation of strategic decisions and strategic decision quality are 0.32 and 0.20, respectively, representing an acceptable amount of variance in the implementation success and quality of strategic decisions explained by all the exogenous constructs linked to it. We examined the effect size (f^2), which indicates the effect of each exogenous construct on its linked endogenous constructs, following Cohen (1992). In our model, participation had the largest effect size value on the implementation success of strategic decisions (0.07), followed by procedural rationality (0.05), and constructive politics (0.04); and implementation success had the largest f^2 on strategic decision quality (0.10). Finally, using the blindfolding procedure, we assessed the Stone-Geisser (Q^2) value to indicate the model's out-of-sample predictive power for each endogenous construct. Q^2 values of implementation success and strategic decision quality are 0.14 and 0.07, respectively, demonstrating the model's predictive relevance.

[Figure 2 here]

As shown in figure 2, we found support for hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 5. However, hypothesis 2 was not supported, as the relationship between intuition and implementation success was not significant. The β coefficients for hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 5 are positive (0.21, 0.23, 0.17, and 0.35, respectively). As shown in figure 2, the relationships of hypotheses 1, 3, and 5 are significant at the 1% level and hypothesis 4 is significant at the 5% level.

For the mediation test, we used the bootstrapping method following the recommendations of Preacher and Hayes (2008). This method begins by calculating the significance of the indirect effect and ends with testing the direct effect between exogenous and endogenous constructs (without moderator). We found that the successful implementation of strategic decisions fully mediates the relationships between procedural rationality, participation, and constructive politics and strategic decision quality; however, the mediation effect of implementation success on intuition and strategic decision quality was insignificant (see table 5).

[Table 5 here]

For the moderation test, we followed the two-stage approach recommended by Hair et al. (2016). We found that stakeholder uncertainty strengthens the positive relationship between implementation success and strategic decision quality (see figure 3). However, a bootstrapping procedure with the recommended 3,000 subsamples showed that the interaction term's effect on strategic decision quality was not significant. Hence, hypothesis 7 is not supported.

[Figure 3 here]

Discussion

Based on multi-source data of 170 strategic decisions taken in public sector organizations in Qatar, our findings contribute to SDMP knowledge by designing and testing an integrative model of the SDMP. The model (1) integrates different dimensions of the decision process, (2) examines their impact on the underexplored variable of decision implementation, and (3) analyzes how the latter influences decision quality as well as the moderating role of stakeholder uncertainty. This study makes several theoretical and practical contributions that enrich our understanding of the implementation of strategic decisions and point to the variables that may influence its success in public service organizations.

Our results support strategic planning in public service organizations (George, Walker, and Monster 2019), as formal decision-making methods, such as procedural rationality, are more likely to lead to the effective implementation of strategic decisions. Consistent with Simon's bounded rationality theory that decisions cannot be made by procuring all the information but only by collecting the relevant and available information, this research found that procedural rationality influences implementation success. Our study shows the importance of "appropriate deliberation" (Simon 1976, 67) and of establishing a process that assures that relevant information is collected and analyzed before a decision is reached. These findings are consistent with those of Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen (2016) in Canadian public organizations and indicate that a rational approach to strategic decisions enhances implementation success irrespective of the different context in the GCC. In addition, the positive impact of rationality on decision outcomes has been confirmed across different types of organizations, including public sector organizations, in various locations, including Belgium (George and Desmidt 2018), Egypt (Elbanna 2010), South Korea (Im and Lee 2012), the UK (Walker et al. 2010), and the US (e.g., Dean and Sharfman 1996).

Surprisingly, our study found that intuition has no relationship with implementation success and the latter does not mediate the relationship between intuition and the quality of strategic decisions. These findings do not support hypotheses 2 and 6b and conflict with the results of related research (e.g., Khatri and Ng 2000). This could be because of different study designs. For example, the inclusion of other SDMP dimensions in our study model is a possible explanation for the result discrepancy. Similar to related research, which shows a lack of significant role of intuition on decision outcomes (e.g., Shepherd 2014), when excluding other dimensions of the SDMP from the analysis, intuition in our study showed a significant negative relationship with implementation success ($\beta = -0.31$, p-value = 0.00). Therefore, we can argue that our integrative model of SDMP dimensions minimizes the possibility of an inflated

interpretation of intuition when it is used alone in a study model. In other words, certain dimensions of the SDMP, such as rationality, participation, and constructive politics, may have a far stronger influence on decision outcomes than intuitive processes.

Our study also shows that broad-based participation by different people in the SDMP, for example, line- and middle managers, staff, and specialists, is necessary for implementation success. The fact that participation influences strategic decision quality and outcomes is another not context-specific finding of our study, which is consistent with previous research evidence in other settings. This shows how participation leads to several benefits for organizations, including the success of decision implementation (e.g., Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2016; Floyd and Wooldridge 1992; Hrebiniak and Joyce 1984). Although Qatar is a country characterized by high power distance, that is, power is distributed unequally, centralization of decision-making is common and needs no justification, and subordinates expect to be told what to do (Galanou and Farrag 2015; Hofstede 2001), our findings demonstrate the benefits of involving multiple participants in decision-making. This result suggests that public organizations in Qatar and elsewhere should strive to develop work environments that foster participation and empower their employees. This is particularly important in the context of Qatar's nationalization or "Qatarization" policy agenda where the development of senior managers and leaders is considered a priority for the Qatar National Vision 2030, which aims to transform the country into an advanced and knowledge-based economy (Babar 2015). Hence, leadership development programs could, for example, include training sessions for developing the participative leadership style of Qatari managers in public organizations (Miao et al. 2013).

Unexpectedly, the study did not show a moderating impact of stakeholder uncertainty on the relationship between successful implementation and decision quality. This finding may be due

to the national context of the study: an Arab country, where managers are habituated to living with a high level of uncertainty and hence tend to discount it when making important decisions (Elbanna 2010). For example, the unexpected and long GCC crisis during 2017-2020—among many other crises in the GCC region over the last three decades, such as the three Gulf wars—reveals this fact and explains how public managers in Qatar and the region appear to take stakeholder uncertainty for granted when deciding on strategic issues. Hence, compared to research in other settings (e.g., Elbanna, Andrews, and Pollanen 2016; Shepherd 2014), on the role of stakeholder uncertainty, our study shows context-specific findings, which requires researchers to further explore the moderating role of stakeholder uncertainty in different environments to assure external validity.

Although our sample reflects the entire public sector in Qatar (38 institutions), there are limitations regarding its generalizability outside the GCC. In the context of Qatar, government decision-making lies with the Emir, who is assisted by the Council of Ministers to make policy decisions across various public services, such as health, education, and transport. Therefore, there may be limited autonomy even at the senior executive levels that we surveyed, which could discourage strategic decision-makers from discussing and evaluating the impact of their decisions or seeking alternative views from peers. Hence, we encourage future researchers to study the relationships found in other contexts.

We also recommend future research to include other factors that could accentuate the relationship between SDMP and implementation success, such as the availability of resources and organizational past performance. While we employed several procedural remedies and collected data on the independent and dependent variables from different sources, we cannot fully rule out the existence of common method variance (George and Pandey 2017). Therefore, we suggest that future studies adopt longitudinal or experimental designs, use multiple

informants per strategic decision, and calculate the item means across the informants to avoid the influence of idiosyncratic views (Dean and Sharfman 1996).

Managers can adopt varying combinations of rational and incremental decision styles. Few studies have systematically examined such complex relationships (Andrews, Beynon, and Genc 2017) and future research needs to address this research gap by exploring the simultaneous use of alternative decision-making and implementation styles and their impact on decision outcomes. An important avenue for further research is to transcend top-down notions of strategy and integrate other theoretical angles relevant to strategic decision-making (Ferlie and Ongaro 2015; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, and Lampel 2009). Finally, we would like to emphasize that we defined strategic decision quality as the extent to which a decision reached its objective (e.g., Shepherd et al. 2021), whereas some researchers consider it as an antecedent of strategy implementation. We hope that future research will develop a more consistent terminology that avoids any potential for confusion.

Conclusion

More than three decades ago, Nobel laureate Herbert Simon suggested that organizations should focus on their decision processes in addition to their actions. Based on Simon's concept of the limits to rationality—first advocated in his pathbreaking book *Administrative Behavior*—and a review of recent public administration literature, our study examined an integrative model of SDMP. This is the first study on strategic decision-making in the public sector within the GCC region, permitting a test of the wider validity of findings derived from the SDMP research conducted mainly in an Anglo-Saxon context. The analysis of 170 strategic decisions shows that public managers can improve the quality of their strategic decisions by focusing their attention on a few SDMP dimensions. Our research demonstrates the important roles of well-established SDMP dimensions, such as procedural rationality and participation,

in the successful implementation of strategic decisions and shows the relevance of a relatively new SDMP dimension in the decision-making domain: constructive politics. The results also provide empirical evidence for the importance of developing effective implementation processes to improve the quality of strategic decisions. These are important contributions considering that most of the related arguments in the public sector literature have been examined at the strategic planning level (e.g., George, Walker, and Monster 2019; Poister and Streib 2005) compared to ours, at the strategic decision level. We hope that our findings will stimulate further research aimed at identifying how public managers can make better decisions.

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Table 1. Decision, Organization and Respondent Characteristics

Decision characteristics	Percentage	Respondent characteristics	Percentage
Decision time		Gender	
First half of 2020	34.7%	Male	78.8%
2019	24.6%	Female	21.2%
2018	18.6%	*Total*	*100%*
Second half of 2017	22.2%	Nationality	
Total	*100%*	Qatari	74.5%
Decision type		Non-Qatari	25.5%
Administrative structure	29.8%	*Total*	*100%*
E-services	19.9%	Education Level	
Financial	9.9%	Ph.D.	10.5%
Equipment and tools	6.6%	Master	20.3%
Community events	6.0%	Bachelor	58.7%
COVID-19 crisis	16.6%	Diploma or High school	10.5%
Others	11.3%	*Total*	*100%*
Total	*100%*	Age	
Organization characteristics	Percentage	less than 40	29.4%
Sector		40-49	43.5%
Ministry	23.7%	50 or above	27.1%
Municipality	18.4%	*Total*	100%
Public authority	15.8%	Tenure	
Health care	13.2%	3 years or less	13.2%
Education	7.9%	4 to 9 years	28.7%
Others	21.1%	10 years or over	58.1%
Total	*100%*	*Total*	*100%*
Organization size			
Less than 500	30.5%		
500 to 4999	48.5%		
5000 and more	21.0%		
Total	*100%*		

Table 2. Verification of Discriminant Validity with Fornell-Larcker Criterion

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Centralization	**0.76**										
2	Constructive Politics	-0.14	**0.87**									
3	Implementation Success	-0.22	0.34	**0.71**								
4	Intuition	0.20	-0.43	-0.37	**0.82**							
5	Moderating Effect	-0.06	0.05	0.14	-0.05	1.00						
6	Organizational Identification	0.12	-0.02	-0.19	0.21	-0.17	**0.76**					
7	Participation	-0.18	0.16	0.39	-0.15	0.19	-0.14	**0.76**				
8	Rationality	-0.07	0.25	0.38	-0.40	0.10	0.05	0.34	**0.80**			
9	Strategic Decision Quality	-0.14	0.09	0.39	-0.21	0.10	-0.08	0.09	0.14	**0.80**		
10	Size	0.11	-0.03	-0.02	-0.06	0.01	-0.09	-0.03	0.08	0.00	1.00	
11	Stakeholder Uncertainty	0.24	-0.12	-0.21	0.16	0.16	0.01	-0.04	-0.05	-0.26	0.07	**0.82**

Note: Bold figures on diagonal represent square roots of AVE for reflective latent variables; evaluation of discriminant validity does not apply for single item variable, e.g., organization size.

Table 3. Verification of Discriminant Validity with Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT)

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1	Centralization											
2	Constructive Politics	0.13										
3	Implementation Success	0.27	0.39									
4	Intuition	0.20	0.47	0.42								
5	Moderating Effect	0.06	0.07	0.15	0.07							
6	Organizational Identification	0.20	0.15	0.25	0.34	0.23						
7	Participation	0.22	0.18	0.42	0.19	0.22	0.22					
8	Rationality	0.14	0.31	0.49	0.49	0.12	0.12	0.43				
9	Strategic Decision Quality	0.18	0.11	0.49	0.25	0.12	0.16	0.11	0.19			
10	Size	0.10	0.03	0.07	0.06	0.01	0.16	0.05	0.10	0.06		
11	Stakeholder Uncertainty	0.28	0.16	0.25	0.21	0.19	0.09	0.18	0.11	0.25	0.11	

Note: Discriminant validity established between two constructs when HTMT value is below 0.85.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics and Pearson Correlations among the Study Variables

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1	Rationality	4.33	0.54	1.00									
2	Intuition	2.27	0.83	-0.39**	1.00								
3	Participation	3.91	0.70	0.31**	-0.10	1.00							
4	Constructive Politics	4.43	0.67	0.24**	-0.42**	0.13	1.00						
5	Implementation Success	4.00	0.54	0.29**	-0.41**	0.22**	0.40**	1.00					
6	Strategic Decision Quality	3.62	0.72	0.19*	-0.04	0.05	0.12	0.25**	1.00				
7	Stakeholder Uncertainty	2.91	0.88	-0.08	0.17*	-0.03	-0.13	-.25**	-0.02	1.00			
8	Centralization	3.22	0.87	-0.07	0.15	-0.13	-0.10	-.26**	0.05	0.22**	1.00		
9	Organizational Identification	4.32	0.50	0.22**	0.00	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.02	0.11	1.00	
10	Organization Size	7.16	1.55	0.08	-0.05	-0.05	-0.03	-0.05	0.03	0.09	0.09	-0.06	1.00

Note: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Evaluation of Mediation Relationships

Effect	Exogenous	Mediator	Endogenous	Indirect effect test (Confidence intervals)		Move to the next test	Direct effect test (Confidence intervals)		Decision
				2.50%	97.50%		2.50%	97.50%	
Indirect	Rationality	Implementation Success	Strategic Decision Quality	0.02	0.15	Yes			Full Mediation
Direct	Rationality		Strategic Decision Quality				-0.13	0.24	
Indirect	Intuition	Implementation Success	Strategic Decision Quality	-0.14	0	No			No Mediation
Direct	Intuition		Strategic Decision Quality						
Indirect	Participation	Implementation Success	Strategic Decision Quality	0.02	0.18	Yes			Full Mediation
Direct	Participation		Strategic Decision Quality				-0.17	0.20	
Indirect	Constructive Politics	Implementation Success	Strategic Decision Quality	0.01	0.15	Yes			Full Mediation
Direct	Constructive Politics		Strategic Decision Quality				-0.2	0.15	

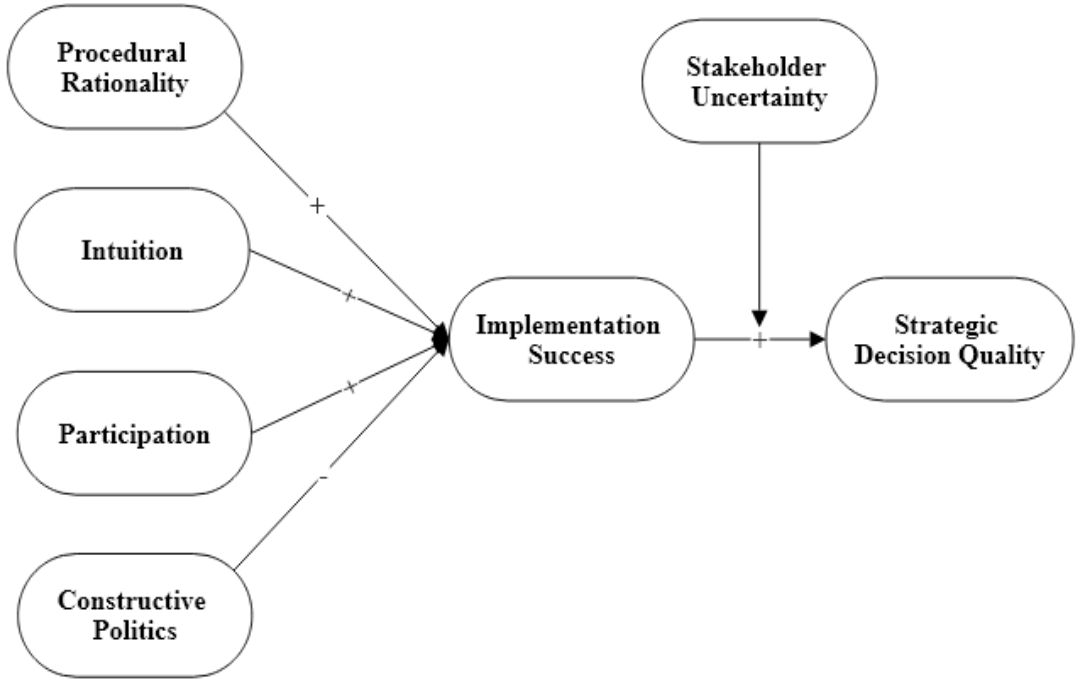
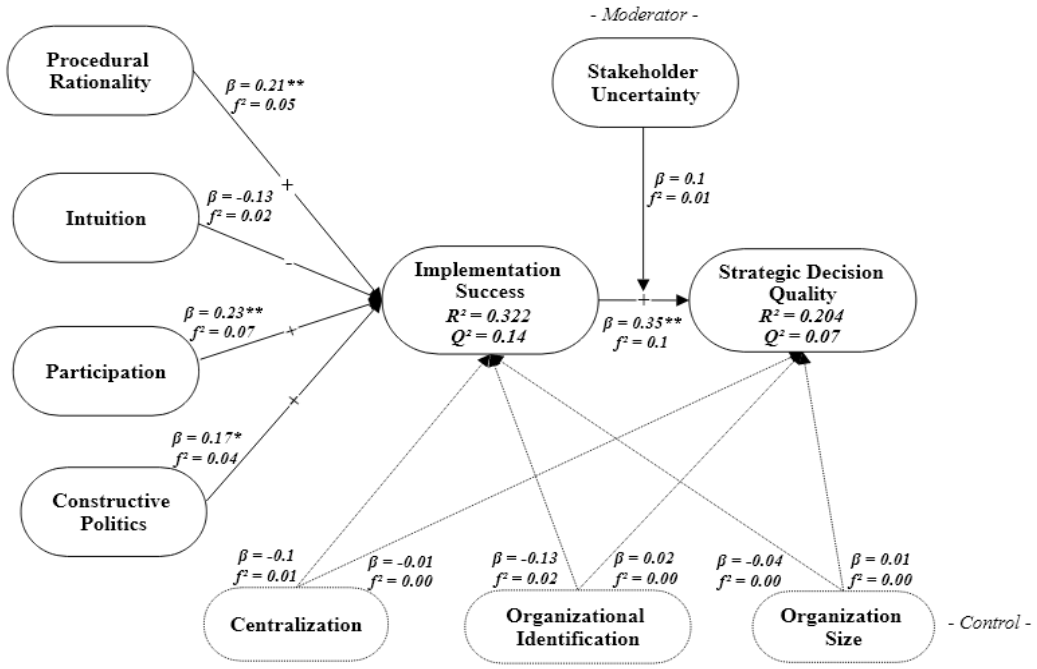


Figure 1. Hypothesized Model



*Note: β - path coefficient, f² - effect size, R² - coefficient of determination, Q² - Stone-Geisser's Q² value, **p<.01, *p<.05*

Figure 2. Path Model and Results

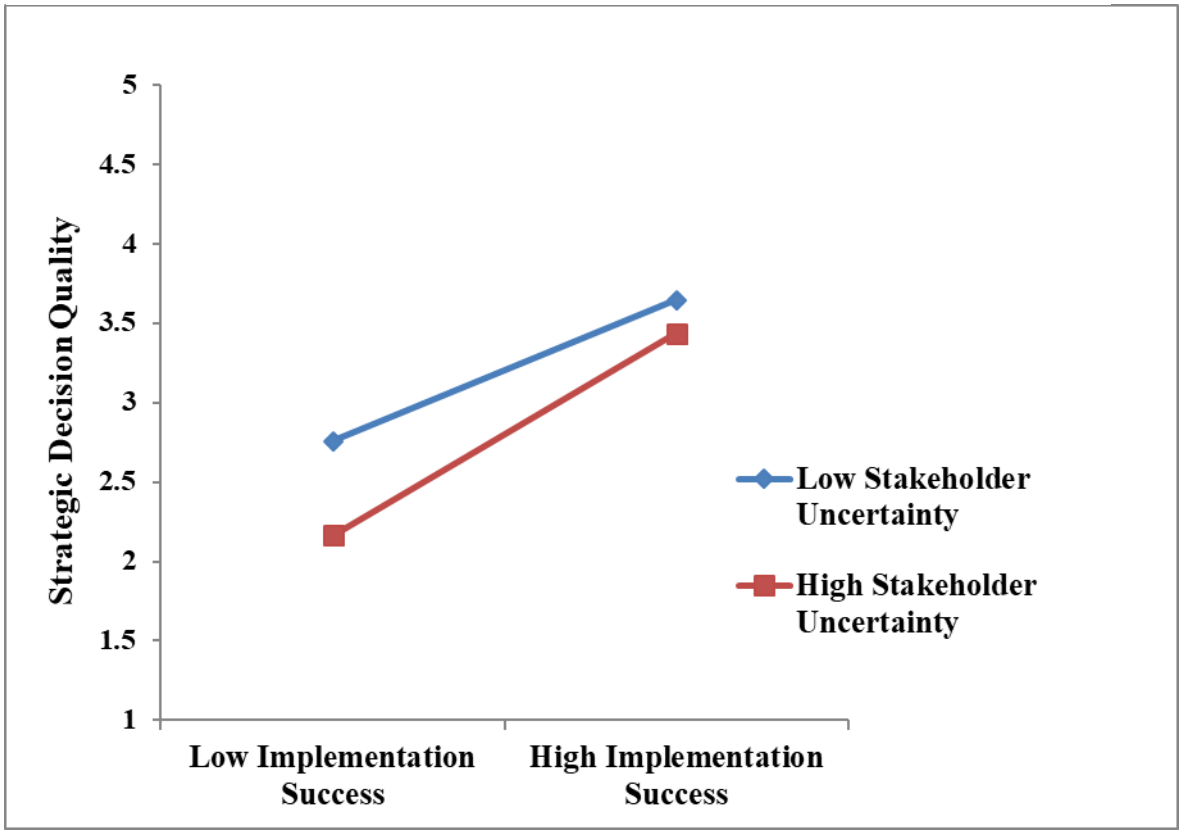


Figure 3. Moderation Effects

Appendix 1. Table of Indicator Description and Model Evaluation

Latent variable	Source	Indicator	Description	Factor loading	Composite reliability	AVE	Discriminant validity	VIF
Procedural Rationality	Dean and Sharfman (1993)	RAT_1	Decision making members extensively looked for information in making this decision.	0.82	0.84	0.64	Yes	1.76
		RAT_2	Decision making members extensively analyzed the relevant information before making this decision.	0.84				1.84
		RAT_3	The quantitative analytic techniques were important in making this decision.	0.74				1.19
Intuition	Dayan and Elbanna (2011)	INT_1	The participants in making this decision relied on personal judgment.	0.82	0.91	0.68	Yes	2.05
		INT_2	On many occasions, the decision making members did not have enough information and had to make this decision based on a "gut feeling".	0.85				2.17
		INT_3	The decision making members trusted their hunches when making this decision.	0.88				2.63
		INT_4	The decision making members had put more emphasis on feelings than data when making this decision.	0.81				2.17
		INT_5	The intuition of decision making members turn out to have been right all along.	0.76				1.93
Participation	Segars, Grover, and Teng (1998)	PAR_1	Our process for making this decision includes numerous participants	0.69	0.85	0.58	Yes	1.45
		PAR_2	Line managers and staff are somehow involved in the process of making this decision	0.77				1.59
		PAR_3	The participation of specialists in the process of making this decision was high	0.87				1.51
		PAR_4	The level of participation in making this decision by diverse interests in our organization was high	0.71				1.51

Constructive Politics	Elbanna (2018)		(1 = personal objectives, 5 = organizational objectives)					
		POL_1	To make this decision, the decision-makers used their power to defend their …	0.88	0.92	0.75	Yes	2.46
		POL_2	To make this decision, the decision-makers used bargaining to defend their …	0.88				2.39
		POL_3	To make this decision, the decision-makers formed alliances with each other to enhance their …	0.84				2.31
		POL_4	The decision-makers controlled meetings related to this decision, (e.g., the meeting agenda, its date and time), to defend their …	0.87				2.58
Implementation Success	Noble and Mokwa (1999) and Elbanna, Thanos, and Colak (2014)	IMP_1	This decision was an example of an effective implementation of strategic decision	0.70	0.88	0.51	Yes	1.85
		IMP_2	The implementation of this decision was considered a success in my area.	0.80				2.54
		IMP_3	The implementation of this decision was generally considered a great success in my organization.	0.77				2.18
		IMP_4	The implementation of this decision was satisfactory to those involved in, or affected by it.	0.76				2.01
		IMP_5	Our organization properly implemented this decision.	0.77				2.45
		IMP_6	Each implementation task in this decision was completed well.	0.65				1.89
		IMP_7	The organization's efforts to implement this decision was disappointing (reverse item)	0.49				1.15
Strategic Decision Quality	Amason (1996)	QUA_1	The quality of this decision relative to its original intent was …	0.84	0.84	0.64	Yes	1.39
		QUA_2	The quality of this decision given its effect on organization performance was …	0.81				1.47

		QUA_3	The overall quality of this decision was …	0.75				1.42
Stakeholder Uncertainty	Miller and Dröge (1986)	STA_1	Our stakeholders' preferences were fairly hard to forecast.	0.73	0.86	0.66	Yes	3.21
		STA_2	Actions of our stakeholders were quite hard to predict.	0.81				3.37
		STA_3	Our organization had to frequently change its services and practices to keep up with stakeholders' expectations.	0.90				1.30
Organizational Identification	Mael and Ashforth (1992)	OI_1	When someone criticizes our organization, we feel like a personal insult.	0.82	0.79	0.57	Yes	1.32
		OI_2	When someone praises our organization, it feels like a personal compliment.	0.53				1.16
		OI_3	If a story in the media criticized our organization, we would feel embarrassed.	0.87				1.40
Centralization	Aiken and Hage (1966)	CEN_1	There can be little action taken until a supervisor approves a decision	0.76	0.84	0.57	Yes	1.22
		CEN_2	Even small matters must be referred to someone higher up for approval	0.87				1.88
		CEN_3	Employees must ask their supervisors before doing almost anything	0.72				2.22
		CEN_4	Any decision employees make must have their bosses' approval	0.66				1.77