Strategy Implementation Barriers as Resource Weaknesses at Foreign and Indigenous firms

ABSTRACT

The resource-based view has largely overlooked the issues of strategy implementation barriers and the distinctive contrast between foreign and indigenous firms. This paper addresses this gap by adopting the complementary-gains approach for a critical investigation of distinctive implementation barriers as resource weaknesses in foreign multinationals and indigenous firms. The findings from a qualitative analysis reveal significant heterogeneity in implementation resources weaknesses between the foreign multinationals and indigenous firms. These resource weaknesses are evaluated in the context of different firm types for their distinctive portfolios, separability, and appropriation consequences in strategy implementation. Clearly, firm type is a good context to understand the nature of heterogeneity in implementation resources weaknesses. Structural heavy resource weakness portfolios are more separable, more visible, yet the indigenous firms struggle with due to resources value assessment. Interpersonal process heavy resource weakness portfolios are more inseparable, less visible and originate from meso-level political manoeuvrings. The indigenous firms appear to face more factor management challenges, whereas the multinational firms face more context management challenges due to their implementation resource weaknesses. This has important implications for future international comparative implementation research. The study offers management implications for managing heterogeneous implementation resource weaknesses in different firm contexts.

Key words: Strategy implementation, Multinationals, Indigenous, RBV, Barriers, Weaknesses

INTRODUCTION

The resource-based view (RBV) does not provide much insight into the nature and consequences of strategy implementation (Foss, 2011; Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010). The RBV has overlooked strategy implementation as a theoretical convenience (Barney, 2001a). Similarly, there is limited empirical research on resource weaknesses in different firm contexts (Sirmon et al., 2010; Arend, 2008). Strategy implementation has generally received less research attention in comparison to strategy formulation and the contrast between foreign and indigenous firms has been overlooked (Chebat, 1999; Noble, 1999; Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst, 2006; Li et al., 2010). Foreign subsidiaries differ from indigenous firms because of the need to act as multinational while also being locally responsive (White III, Hemphill, Joplin, and Marsh, 2014; Kostova and Roth, 2002). This paper addresses the gap by a critical investigation of the nature of distinctive implementation barriers as resource weaknesses in different firm types - foreign multinationals and indigenous firms.

There is big potential for theoretical development by adopting the complementary gains thinking from applying the resource-based lens to strategy process issues (Shanley and Peteraf, 2006). This study applied the concepts of resource weakness for empirical analysis of underlying distinctions in implementation barriers at foreign multinationals and indigenous firms (Simon et al., 2010; Nutt, 2007; Arend, 2004; Alashloo et al, 2004; Heide et al., 2002). The Resource-based View (RBV) has increasingly gained significance but with little attention to resource weaknesses in strategic processes (Sirmon et al., 2010; Barney 2001a; Newbert 2007; Peng 2004). Consequently, the resource-based issues in strategy implementation failures need an in-depth analysis.

Additionally, there have been repeated calls for more RBV informed research in emerging economies (Meyer et al., 2009; Meyer and Peng, 2004). The volume of strategy implementation research in emerging economies is even smaller, as most literature is derived from the research in developed countries (Miller, Wilson and Hickson, 2004; Okumus and Roper, 1999). This lack of comparative research into distinctive implementation resource weaknesses of foreign and indigenous firms is an important research opportunity in emerging economies.

There is no reported study on strategy implementation barriers amongst firms in Pakistan. This adds to an increasing imbalance of management research in India and China versus that in Pakistan (Khilji, 2002). Pakistan is one of the traditional emerging economies with low institutional and infrastructure development along with China, India and Bangladesh in the

South Asian region (Hoskisson et al., 2012). India and China have received much strategy research attention, whereas Pakistan remains under researched with regards to strategy issues (Hoskisson et al., 2000; Pruthi et al., 2003; Peng, 2004; Khilji, 1999). Pakistani managers have significant differences in managerial values as compared to managers from Turkey, UAE, India, Israel and Egypt (Khilji et al., 2010; Ralston et al., 2012). Low institutional and infrastructure development means that firms in Pakistan need to rely heavily on internal resources for strategic success making this study even more relevant.

This study thus contributes by a critical evaluation of the nature of strategy implementation barriers as resource weaknesses in foreign multinationals (MNCs) and indigenous firms in an emerging economy. We have two boundary conditions to guide this research. One is the focus on implementation failures as research focus, and second two firm types – foreign MNCs and indigenous firms as the research settings in an emerging economy context of Pakistan. The critical qualitative analysis revealed interesting heterogeneity in resource weaknesses in the foreign multinationals and indigenous firms in an emerging economy - Pakistan. The emerging economy situation presented a unique context but implementation barriers emerged as relevant to firm's internal resource weaknesses and inability to implement an appropriate strategic response. There are important implications for strategy implementation research in search of resource weakness heterogeneity and managerial implementation practice in other emerging economies.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Much of the empirical implementation literature deals with either barriers or success factors related to strategy implementation. Noble (1999a) and Li et al. (2010) discussed diverse structural and interpersonal-processual issues related to implementation success. The structural issues of implementation include organizational structure, strategy content, control, and incentive mechanisms (Hrebiniak, 2005). Similarly, the interpersonal-processual issues emphasize problems in leadership (Nutt, 1983), poor managerial decisions (Nutt, 1999), consensus (Dooley et al., 2000), strategy communication across the organization (Rapert et al., 2002; Hambrick and Cannella, 1989), and operational management and resources allocation (Cespedes, 1991).

A critical review of the extant literature on implementation barriers reveals that structural and interpersonal - processual barriers both exist; *however it remains unclear as to which of those barrier types are more relevant to different firm types*. Implementation barriers research focuses on problems associated with successful implementation, identifying the potential barriers and suggesting solutions to overcome them (Shah, 2005; Heide et al., 2002). Implementation is viewed as a difficult, challenging and operational level phenomenon with barriers management being the key solution. However, much research is needed to develop an agreeable body of strategy implementation (Shah, 2005). There is a gap to conduct theoretically informed research on implementation issues and resource weakness arguments (Sirmon et al., 2010) provide a useful lens to analyse implementation barriers and their competitive implications in different firm types.

Alexander (1985) identified implementation barriers of lack of employee capabilities, poor communication of strategy, exceeding the planned time, and unclear identification of tasks and responsibilities. Jauch and Glueck (1988) found that lack of sufficient executive time given to the implementation of a strategic decision also acts as a major barrier. The allocation of resources, financial and human, has a bearing on the implementation and a lack of resources can hamper the implementation efforts (Olsen et al., 1992). McDonald (1992) identified lack of chief executive's support, lack of line manager's support, and lack of functional integration with the rest of organization as barriers to the implementation of marketing strategies. Eisenstat (1993) found that lack of coordination, lack of employee capabilities, and insufficient leadership provided by line managers acted as major barriers to implementation.

Al-Ghamdi (1998) identified that fifteen out of twenty two barriers mentioned in Alexander's (1985) work, are mentioned repeatedly in the literature. Al-Ghamdi's (1998) survey revealed that ten main barriers were most common in the UK, such as the distraction away from implementation, exceeding planned time for implementation, lack of planning for implementation problem management, and poor information systems for implementation monitoring. Dibb and Simkin (1999) found that some of the barriers identified by Mcdonald (1992) still exist in the UK firms, whereas others like hostility to planning have become obsolete. Beer and Eisenstat (2000) found top-down management style, unclear strategy and

conflicting priorities, ineffective senior management team, poor vertical communication, poor inter-functional coordination, and inadequate leadership skills at lower levels of organization.

Strategy implementation barriers in emerging economies

International business literature addressed the implementation barriers from either a country centred or industry specific perspective. Surprisingly, insufficient contextualization and less attention to multinational versus indigenous competition (Poulis et al., 2012) has led to an oversight to compare implementation barriers in different firm types in international markets. Similar to the trend in developed countries, most strategy research in emerging countries remains concentrated on strategy formulation as compared to implementation (Haley and Haley, 2006). Substantial conceptual and empirical developments are needed to further the strategic barriers dialogue appreciating the differences in Central and Eastern European (Meyer and Peng, 2005), Latin American (Fleury and Fleury, 2000), and Asian economies (Meyer, 2007).

Interestingly, individual economies show different directions of economic developments and more attention is needed for empirical research in different countries for deeper understanding of competitive contexts in strategic processes (Poulis et al., 2012). Heide et al.'s (2002) case study in a Norwegian ferry-cruise company revealed that communication barriers were the key problems during implementation of strategic decisions. They emphasized that organizational factors act as barriers during implementation, thus implicitly reflected on the predominantly internalized nature of strategy implementation. This internalized reflection of implementation barriers hints towards potential in using the RBV lens for analyzing implementation barriers.

Most research on implementation barriers in emerging economies has focussed on implementation of functional strategies and not on firm types. Ammar and Zain's (2002) mail survey in Indonesia revealed eleven barriers to Total Quality Management (TQM) implementation at the local manufacturing firms. They found that the issues related to top management, human resources, information systems, financial resources, training and organizational culture were similar to the ones mentioned in the TQM literature derived from developed economies. Alashloo et al. (2004) conducted a questionnaire survey among respondents in the Iranian Higher Education (HE) sector. They categorised implementation barriers into four categories namely planning consequences, organizational, managerial and

individual issues. Alashloo et al. found that the lack of exact planning and unsuitable training system were the most important barriers in Iranian HE, similar to the findings of Al-Ghamdi (1998) and Alexander (1985). They, however, concluded that barriers like less perceived status of academics and its impact on strategy implementation are peculiar to the Iranian HE context. Table – 1 presents an overview of key strategy implementation barriers in the extant literature:

Table – 1: Overview of key strategy implementation barrier issues in the extant literature

Author (s) - Year	Research Context	Key barriers and issues
Alexander (1985)	Broad – implementation of strategic decision; US firms	lack of employee capabilities, poor communication of strategy, exceeding the planned time, and unclear identification of tasks
Jauch and Glueck (1988)	Broad – implementation of strategic decision	lack of sufficient executive time for implementation
Olsen et al. (1992)	Implementation in Hospitality industry	lack of resources, Insufficient resources allocation
Leonard – Barton (1992)	Leading International US firms - New product and process development implementation	Core rigidities in values, management systems, technical systems, knowledge and skills
McDonald (1992)	Marketing plans Implementation	lack of chief executive's support, lack of line manager's support, lack of functional integration
Eisenstat (1993)	Broad – implementation of strategic decision	lack of coordination, lack of employee capabilities, insufficient line manager leadership
Al-Ghamdi (1998)	Broad – implementation of strategic decision; UK	Distraction away from implementation, exceeding planned time, lack of implementation planning, and poor information systems
Dibb and Simkin (1999)	Marketing plans Implementation, UK	Same as McDonald (1992) except that hostility to planning no longer exist amongst the UK firms

Heide et al. (2002)	Norwegian ferry-cruise company	Organizational factors act as barriers; communication barriers as key problems
Ammar and Zain (2002)	Local Indonesian manufacturing firms - developing economy, Total Quality Management	Similar to developed economies, top management, human skills, organizational culture as main barriers
Alashloo et al. (2004)	Iranian HE sector - developing economy	Lack of exact planning, Unsuitable training system, less perceived status of academics
Shah (2005)	Cross-section of Indian firms - emerging economy	Eleven out of twenty two barriers from strategy implementation literature relevant to Indian firms; inadequate management skills, ill-defined key implementation tasks, lack of employee commitment
Kaufmann and Becker (2005)	Foreign multinationals in Brazil - Emerging economy, Balanced Scorecard implementation	Lack of commitment, Adverse support from consultants, Lack of top management support, Insufficient alignment of strategy, objectives and structure,
Hrebiniak (2005)	Broad – implementation of strategic decision	Lack of ownership of plans, lack of buy-in, insufficient financial resources
Zeng et al. (2007)	ISO 9001 implementation in China – emerging economy	Lack of commitment from the certifying bodies, Absence of a proper legal framework
Salaheldin and Eid (2007)	World class manufacturing in Egyptian firms – developing economy	Poor planning, Lack of adequate knowledge
Huy (2011)	Chinese managers - emerging economy	Inattention to social-emotional and cognitive issues
Gonzalez- Torre et al. 2010	Spanish Automotive industry – Developed economy, reverse logistics implementation	Lack of coordination in managing internal barriers and external pressures, imbalanced perceptions of managers

Shah's (2005) survey revealed that Indian managers perceive eleven issues as obstacles to strategy implementation out of the twenty two identified in the literature and from initial discussions with some managers. These included issues such as inadequate management skills, ill-defined key implementation tasks, and lack of employee commitment. Zeng et al. (2007) identified lack of commitment from the certifying bodies and an absence of a proper legal framework as the barriers to implementation of ISO 9001 system in China. Salaheldin and Eid, (2007) found that poor planning and lack of adequate knowledge acted as major barriers to implement world class manufacturing in Egyptian firms. Similarly, Kaufmann and Becker (2005) looked at barriers to Balanced Scorecards (BSC) implementation among foreign multinationals in Brazil. They found the lack of commitment, adverse support from consultants, lack of top management support, insufficient alignment of strategy, objectives and structure and lack of completeness as major barriers. This is consistent with the research on difficulties in BSC implementation (Voelpel et al., 2006). Huy (2011) emphasized inattention to social-emotional and cognitive issues leads to implementation failures in Chinese managers.

Relevant knowledge gaps in implementation barriers research

Overall, there are some relevant knowledge gaps emerging from the literature on strategy implementation barriers. First, surprisingly there is a dearth of empirical comparison of barriers to strategy implementation at multinational subsidiaries and indigenous firms. Multinationals are competing in international markets at an increasingly fast pace and use different mechanisms for competitive gains (Park and Ghauri, 2011). Poulis et al. (2012) argued that empirical research is needed to understand how multinational and local firms compete and access resources to overcome resource limitations. Foreign and domestic firms have been compared for other strategic issues but not for implementation barriers (Varum and Rocha, 2011; Poulis et al., 2012; Wignaraja; 2006; Rasiah and Gachino, 2005; Singh, 2007). Following the critical review of literature, there is a need to explore and compare the implementation barriers among multinationals and indigenous firms. This will enable fine-grained analysis of the contextual, firm type differences in resource weaknesses in strategy implementation performance. This will identify resource management needs peculiar to different firm types and also attend to recent calls for research into microfoundations – underlying sources - of strategic processes in international contexts (Park and Harris, 2014).

Second, previous studies only focussed broadly on firms within a single country, thus leaving a theoretical gap for a comparative analysis of indigenous and multinational firms in an emerging economy context. The comparison of barriers to successful implementation among foreign and indigenous firm remains unexplored in an emerging economy, particularly in Pakistan. This presents itself as a knowledge gap in the light of Wright et al.'s (2005) recommendation to review existing theories derived from developed economies based on emerging economies' evidence. There is need for exploration of the implementation barriers issues distinctive to multinational or indigenous firms competing in emerging economies. The strategic behaviours of both domestic and foreign firms hold importance for strategy researchers; even more so in emerging economies.

Third, the existing implementation barriers literature searched for different barriers without utilizing major strategy theories like the Resource-based view (RBV). This led to an inattention to theoretically informed evaluation of implementation barriers, their development over time and strategic performance implications of these barriers in different firm types. This highlights the need to consider competitive disadvantages resulting from implementation failures (West III and DeCastro, 2001). The implementation barriers related to institutional factors in emerging economies are few (Zeng et al., 2007). It is apparent that the majority of

implementation barriers identified in the literature are related to firm factors in line with the tenets of the Resource-based View (RBV) (for example, Alashloo et al., 2004; Salaheldin and Eid, 2007). For an example, implementation research on foreign subsidiaries in emerging economies needs to consider the competitive pressures faced by subsidiaries in those economies (Mohdzain and Ward, 2007). It is, therefore, of great research interest to explore the resource heterogeneity in strategy implementation barriers between local and multinational firms.

Against this backdrop, the key contribution of this study is to explore and compare the strategy implementation barriers as resource weaknesses faced by the foreign multinational and indigenous firms in Pakistan from a Resource-based View. The distinctions in resource weaknesses and their underlying microfoundations are established reflecting the firm type issues in an emerging economy context. This addresses calls for more attention to strategy implementation in the RBV research (Kraaijenbrink et al., 2010; Barney, 2011), comparison of strategic issues in multinational versus indigenous firms (Poulis et al., 2012) and resource weakness and performance implications (Sirmon et al., 2010; West III and DeCastro, 2000).

Resource weakness - theoretical relevance to implementation barriers

Inadequate attention has been given in the RBV to factors impeding competitive advantages (Arend, 2004). The conventional RBV literature, like most of the strategy literature, is concerned with identifying heterogeneous resources for competitive advantage and superior firm performance (Priem and Butler, 2002; Winter, 2003; Sirmon et al., 2007). These distinctive resources, however cannot lead to competitive advantage in case of unsuccessful strategy implementation. The role of heterogeneous resources and resource weaknesses in strategy implementation process remains normative and without empirical support. Barney (2001a, 2011) emphasized the failure of the RBV researchers in addressing implementation issues and the need for empirical research of resource-based issues in strategy implementation. A relatively small body of the RBV literature substantively ponders over the issue of competitive disadvantage and resource weaknesses (Leonard-Barton, 1992; West III and DeCastro, 2001). The table 2 presents an overview of the theoretical issues of resource weakness:

Table 2 – An overview of resource weakness issues

Scholar (s)	***Key issue (s) of resource weaknesses***
Sleznick (1957)	Distinctive inadequacies – bundles of unique resources

Wernerfelt (1984)	Weaknesses semi permanently tied to firms
Leonard-Barton (1992)	Core Rigidities - traditional core capabilities inhibiting innovation; the flip side of core capabilities
Montgomery (1995)	Dark side of resources – need to explore performance impact of resource liabilities
West III and DeCastro (2001)	Distinctive resource weaknesses and their characteristics – valuable, rare, costly, resource weaknesses can be separate from resource strengths or be inseparable
Powell (2001)	Less number of weaknesses lead to superior performance
Arend (2004, 2008)	Strategic liabilities and their absolute characteristics
Sirmon, Hitt, Arregle, Campbell (2010)	Interplay effects of capability strengths and weaknesses

West III and DeCastro (2001: 420) remarked that 'The inability to leverage and extend a particular set of resources, or the possession of the wrong kinds of resources, could be important in the erosion of existing advantage and in the inability to gain advantage'. Powell (2001) and Arend (2004) concurred with West III and DeCastro (2001) that the idea of resource weaknesses is ideally suited to explore the firm-specific barriers in different firm contexts. Resource weaknesses are costly to the firms, and supply restricted to firm contexts in different industries (Arend, 2004). The responsibility of distinctive liabilities and weaknesses cannot be passed on to broader industry or other macro-level institutions (West III and DeCastro, 2001). Arend (2004) argued that the economic non-transferability of resource weaknesses is due to path dependency, and immobility. Similarly, such weaknesses cannot be passed on to other firms in resource markets. Sirmon et al. (2010: 1388) argued 'A comparative lens allows for a more fine-grained differentiation among rivals' capabilities'. Sirmon et al. also emphasized that future researchers should include firms in research sample for resource weaknesses from both, manufacturing and service sectors.

This is important in exploring firm-specific behaviours in dynamic economies like emerging economies and how firm behaviours may originate differently in a variety of firm contexts. The implementation barriers lead to unsuccessful implementation and it is important to explore these barriers and their contribution to competitive disadvantages. Resource weaknesses are appropriated by firms and thus resulting competitive disadvantages could not be sold to other firms or firm types (Arend, 2004). Bellak (2004) mentioned that comparison of domestic firms and with foreign multinationals in emerging economies is important due to their different management behaviours and processes. It is invaluable to critically analyse the implementation

barriers as resource weakness and compare the distinctive implementation weaknesses and their underlying sources at foreign and indigenous firm in an emerging, dynamic economy. It is also important to improve managerial practice at different firm types so managers could improve competitive weaknesses with deeper understanding of contextual idiosyncrasies.

The separable or inseparable nature of resource weaknesses is an important theoretical dimension for analysis (West III and DeCastro, 2001). It is possible for some resource weaknesses to develop as weaknesses but some weaknesses may evolve from inefficient use of some resources or overuse of resources beyond valuable gains (Arend 2008). It appears from the strategy implementation barriers literature that structural barriers appear more separate conceptually from the obvious resource strengths of firms. However, the interpersonal type of barriers seem more embedded in managerial behaviours and organizational processes (Langley, 2007). It is usually difficult to separate the behaviours and processes that negatively affect the organizational performance in the short run. It is thus important to critically investigate the nature of resource weaknesses in different firm types to understand their competitive consequences.

RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study adopted an exploratory, inductive theory building approach (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010) to identify the distinctive barriers at different firm types in Pakistan. It was considered important to capture the subjective reality from the opinions of senior managers on implementation barrier issues at the foreign and indigenous firms. Qualitative research strategy was used to explore implementation barriers (Silverman, 1998; Okumus, 2001, Heide et al, 2002). Pakistan was selected as the research location, due to a lack of strategy implementation research in Pakistan and being an emerging South Asian economy. The firm was used as the unit of analysis and medium-to-large manufacturing and service firms were preferred due to their higher complexity and organizational development levels (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

Overall eighteen firms with good market standings were contacted through snowballing and personal referencing techniques, and ten firms agreed to provide respondent access (Bryman and Bell, 2003). The sampled firms operated in a broad cross-section of major manufacturing and service sectors in Pakistan (Pharmaceutical, Commercial Banking, Stationery, Textile, Retail Distribution, Baby Care and Food Products). An interview guide was developed with open-ended questions to establish details of implementation process and firm's context (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008; Miles and Huberman, 1994). A series of semi-structured, in-depth

interviews were conducted with senior managers as key informants on strategy implementation issues (Haley and Haley, 2006). Those executives were considered as key informants due to their previously recognised role in strategy implementation and the understanding of firm's strategy and performance (Olson et al., 2005; Guth and Mcmillan, 1986). Table – 2 presents an overview of the researched firms:

Table – 2: Overview of the researched firms

S. no.	Firm type	Industry	Firm's size	Duration of operations	Respondents
1	Indigenous	Textile Yarn	Large	30 years	2 – senior managers (1 top and 1 middle management)
2	Indigenous	Food Products	Large	25 years	1 – top management
3	Indigenous	Stationery	Large	40 years	3 – (1 top and 2 middle management)
4	Indigenous	Baby Products	Medium	20 years	1 – middle management
5	Indigenous	Pharmaceuticals	Medium	17 years	1 – middle management
6	Indigenous	Terry products - Textiles	Large	35 years	1 – top management
7	Foreign	Commercial banking	Large	22 years	3– (2 top and 1 middle management)
8	Foreign	Distribution	Large	21 years	3 – (middle management)
9	Foreign	Islamic Banking	Medium	20 years	3 – (1 top and 2 middle management)
10	Foreign	Pharmaceuticals	Large	40 years	2– (1 top and 1 middle management)

The data confidentiality and respondent anonymity was guaranteed to ensure valid responses (Perry, 1998; Patton, 1992). A rigorous comparative thematic analysis was conducted as per the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006). A six-step process was adopted for thematic analysis: Familiarisation with the data, generating initial codes, theme searching, reviewing of themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting. It was a long and recursive process

involving movement across steps as the analysis of transcribed interview data progressed in detail (Ely et al., 1997; Bird, 2005). The coding was data-driven and the relevant data excerpts were coded into brief descriptors of fewer words after a line-by-line reading of interview transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998). Intercoder reliability was ensured as an experienced qualitative researcher acted as second coder. After several runs among coders, an 85% agreement was achieved for codes and their meanings (Isabella, 1990).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The comparison of the foreign and indigenous firms revealed significant heterogeneity in implementation barriers within these firm types. This heterogeneity counters the idea of generic implementation barriers prevalent in the extant implementation literature. This challenges the idea of generic bucket lists of implementation barriers (for example, Alexander, 1985; Hrebiniak, 2006) and foreign versus indigenous firms emerged as a good research context to explore heterogeneity in implementation barriers.

Distinctive implementation resource weaknesses

The presence of distinctive resource weaknesses revealed that the underlying sources and nature of implementation barriers differ at the foreign and indigenous firms in Pakistan. These resource weaknesses showed that neither the indigenous firms nor foreign multinationals are completely protected from implementation resources weaknesses in an emerging economy. The indigenous firms clearly face more implementation barriers; however, this did not result in the foreign firms being necessarily superior to the indigenous firms. Overall, ten broad implementation barrier groups emerged from the data and showed the underlying differences in resource weaknesses amongst the foreign multinational and indigenous firms as presented in the Table – 3.

Table – 3: Distinctive Strategy Implementation Barriers – Indigenous versus Multinational firms

Themes of implementation barriers	Indigenous firms	Multinational firms
Resources Management	***Resources Availability*** Overreliance on experienced HR Limited access to new professional HR Low financial equity ***Resources allocation*** Insufficient resources allocation Ad-hoc Approvals	***Resources Availability*** Limited access to head office funds ***Resources allocation*** Inter office politics Power groups
Top Management	• Implementation micromanagement • Partner disagreement • Legacy perceptions	• Interoffice politics • Insufficient trust of local managers
Strategic Reasoning	• Top-management driven • Insufficient managerial understanding	• Insufficient localisation • Insufficient organisational consensus
Organisational Structure	• Lack of job clarity • Poor Inter-functional co-ordination • Insufficient implementer authority • Lack of succession planning	Multinational reporting pressures
Organisational systems	• Inefficient organisational systems • Legacy HR systems • Insufficient infrastructure investment • Insufficient procedural and policies documentation	Insufficient procedural standardisation
Performance Management	• Unclear performance – rewards linkage • Top management's preferences • Insufficient implementation rewards	• Lack of distributive justice • Ineffective head-office monitoring
Middle Management	• Insufficient involvement in strategizing • Insufficient strategic conviction	• Insufficient implementation consensus • Managerial resistance • Power groups
Human resource practices	• Insufficient career planning • Insufficient retention of key managers • Insufficient empowerment	• Extended Inter-office conflicts • Poor conflict management
Realistic Planning	• Whimsical planning • Over assessment of implementation potential • Insufficient contingency planning • Unrealistic time frames	• Insufficient consideration of implementation requirements • Insufficient implementer involvement • Insufficient localisation assessment
Head office management (HO)	------ -	• Poor international knowledge sharing • Overreliance on local top management • Insufficient subsidiary authority • Decision and approval delays - at HO level

These barrier groups reveal the existence of, structural and interpersonal - processual barriers to successful implementation. Some barrier groups comprised of structural issues only, like

resources management, organizational structure, and organizational systems. Other barrier groups like strategic reasoning, top management, performance management, realistic planning, and human resource practices have a mix of structural as well as interpersonal - processual barriers. It also emerged from the data that the indigenous firms in Pakistan face more structural barriers, whereas the foreign firms mostly face interpersonal - processual barriers. One barrier group of head office management related implementation barriers emerged as unique to the foreign multinationals in Pakistan.

Nature of implementation resource weaknesses

These distinctive issues reflect resource weaknesses of structural, interpersonal and processual nature. The heterogeneity clearly showed that these weaknesses lead to costly implementation problems and reflected the contextual situation of the foreign multinationals and indigenous firms in Pakistan. These costly situations were appropriated by the researched firms in their distinct contexts, similar to West III and DeCastro (2000) and Arend's (2004) conceptual arguments. The foreign firms appropriated competitive losses more from interpersonal and processual implementation problems as compared to the indigenous firms. For example, interoffice politics, inability in resource acquisition from international head office and insufficient strategy localisation led to competitive losses in market share, employee loyalty, and limited subsidiary growth. This reflects contextual-relevance of implementation resource weaknesses and the complex nature of competitive loss appropriation in different firm types.

For example, ineffective international head office monitoring allowed subsidiary level power groups to thrive in the foreign firms. This situation was compounded due to insufficient localization and inadequate access to funds from the head offices. It also emerged from the data competitive losses do not become evident easily and it is *'fairly easy to ignore'* implementation problems that are interpersonal-processual in nature. On the other hand structural weaknesses were somewhat easier to identify but needed more resource commitments for improvements. The structural implementation barrier appeared as *'fairly resource consuming and time taking'.*

The *resource management* barriers faced by the indigenous Pakistani firms include lack of access to professional and highly qualified managers. The foreign and indigenous firms face different *resource acquisition* problems. Some managers in local firms revealed that the topmanagement centred style of management is an obstacle in attracting and retaining professional managers. Those professional managers want higher levels of authority in comparison to the ones given in actual practice at the indigenous firms:

'Well... I am sure it's down to over involvement of top management in how we planned to come up with new material for our American customer. Also the expectations of top management from staff and assessment of the situation inside firm was not realistic.' (Manager, indigenous textile firm)

Another recurrent barrier for the indigenous firms is *the lack of enough financial resources* to pursue aggressive investment. The indigenous firms have poor access to external funding sources due to poor market credibility for loan payments and the desire to control ownership. These poor management skills in the indigenous Pakistani firms were similar to other emerging countries like India and Indonesia (Shah, 2005; Ammar and Zain, 2002). The foreign multinationals faced problems in acquiring major investments from their corporate head offices at crucial times. For example, a Middle Eastern bank could not implement its branch expansion strategy in Pakistan due to insufficient funding from its head office. The managers attributed this largely to the inability of its local top management to effectively communicate with the head office management.

Similarly, the indigenous firms face distinct *resource allocation* weaknesses as compared to the foreign multinationals. The indigenous firms suffer from insufficient resource allocation due to major focus on satisfying the top management's preferences instead of strategy's implementation requirements. Insufficient resources allocation based on top-management's preferences, and not implementation requirements acted as a major barrier to strategy implementation at the indigenous firms. This is similar to the findings of Heide et al. (2002), Alashloo et al. (2004) and Shah (2005) but unique to the indigenous firms.

Major problems in resources allocation at the foreign multinationals emerged due to *subsidiary level interoffice politics* and power. The foreign firms struggled to manage politics and power groups resulting in significant barrier to strategy implementation (Noble, 1999; Heide et al., 2002; Alashloo et al., 2004). This revealed the need for strong performance management culture and effective complaint reporting systems at the foreign subsidiaries to minimise the impact of interoffice politics. One senior manager at a foreign pharmaceutical firm said:

'It depends on the CEO and his 'own people'; this should change and there should be justice in terms of resources allocation and approvals.'

The indigenous Pakistani firms also lack a strong culture of strategy dialogue and strategy development primarily involved top management comprised of business partners - mostly family members. This top-down management style is a major barrier to successful strategy implementation (Beer and Eisenstat, 2000) as middle managers are rarely engaged in strategy formulation and thus lack conviction and consensus to implement many strategic decisions. In contrast, the multinational firms have a robust strategy dialogue involving middle managers at subsidiary level but implementation problems emerged when international head office tried to implement strategic initiatives *without localising* according to the Pakistani business context.

For an example, a North American commercial bank failed to implement its strategy for mid – large sized corporate clients due to the higher documentation requirements for financial loans as set out by the international head office leadership. Pakistani corporate banking clients are not accustomed to wait long for loan approvals and high documentation. This supports Fryxell et al.'s (2004) findings in China that localising strategic initiatives is an important element in strategy implementation by multinational firms. Clearly, some of the multinational firms in Pakistan suffered from this weakness and subsidiary level top management was unable to get approvals for localization arrangements.

Top management's whimsical planning based on gut-feel without market research and data, poor understanding of implementation requirements and firm's implementation potential, the lack of contingency planning, and setting up unrealistic time frames for implementation are prevalent implementation weaknesses amongst the indigenous firms. Middle managers perceive unrealistic time frames as an attempt to pressurize by their top managements. The attempts by the middle managers to ask for realistic time lines and identification of possible problems were perceived negatively by their top management and therefore managers always had to work under pressure. The multinational firms reported the existence of unrealistic planning as well such as the lack of implementation requirement's consideration by the strategy formulators, and the lack of implementers' involvement in strategy dialogue. However, those multinationals that allowed localisation based on implementers' feedback have been able to implement their strategies successfully. A leading pharmaceutical company allowed formulating and implementing a localised strategy of Generic branded medicine to cater to Pakistani market. Now a significant percentage of firm's revenue comes from that business area.

The head office related implementation barriers at the foreign multinationals included insufficient knowledge sharing from international experiences, overreliance on subsidiary top

management, insufficient authority at subsidiary level, and the delays in decisions and approvals by head office at crucial times. Interestingly, procedural justice at head office level was not identified as a barrier amongst multinationals operating in Pakistan in contrast to the findings of Kim and Mauborgne (1991). The Middle Eastern bank and the European pharmaceutical firm struggled in implementing expansion based growth initiatives due to limited authority and delays in timely decisions by their international head offices.

Overall, the table – 4 presents the broader synthesis of the distinctions in the implementation resource weaknesses at the foreign MNCs and indigenous firms in Pakistan:

Table – 4: Broader synthesis of distinctions in implementation resource weaknesses- Foreign MNCs vs. Indigenous firms

	Foreign MNCs	**Indigenous firms**
Nature of resource weakness portfolio	Interpersonal – processual heavy weaknesses	Structural heavy
Separability of weaknesses from resource strengths	Difficult to separate Highly embedded in processes and managerial behaviours	Somewhat easier to separate Visible inefficiencies
Competitive loss appropriation	Gradual appropriation due to managerial conflicts	Consistent appropriation due to fixed losses
Causal ambiguity for Implementation failures and competitive inefficiency	Highly ambiguous Difficult to identify as cause of implementation failures competitive inefficiency	Less ambiguous Relatively easier to identify as cause of implementation failures and inefficiency

KEY IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH & CONCLUSION

It is clear from the preceding discussion that the portfolios of implementation related resource weakness differ among different firm types in an emerging economy – foreign multinationals and indigenous. These resource weakness portfolios set out the challenges faced by foreign multinationals and indigenous firms in successfully implementing their strategies. It is also evident that resource weaknesses could arise from both, structural and interpersonal-processual dimensions of strategy implementation. The findings raise questions for studies like Poulis et al. (2012), who attempted to explore resource access issues amongst indigenous firms competing with foreign firms. The research findings of this study emphasize the need to understand the implementation context of both foreign and indigenous firms to understand the

resource weaknesses and then explore their distinctive resource access patterns. These findings contribute by identifying the nature and sources of heterogeneity in resource weaknesses among different firm types (Sirmon et al., 2010).

This complexity in implementation resource weaknesses necessitates a more holistic approach to strategy implementation and ensuring firms develop resources in all dimensions of the organisation. Heterogeneous resource combinations play an important role in creating competitive advantages (Helfat and Peteraf, 2009; Baker and Nelson, 2005). The findings of this research strongly highlight that similarly, in contrast, strategy implementation resource weaknesses exist in heterogeneous, distinctive combinations. Firm type – foreign multinational or indigenous, emerge as a good contextual indicator of heterogeneity in resource weakness that lead to unsuccessful strategy implementation. These distinctive resource weakness combinations pose idiosyncratic restrictions for strategy implementation practices in different firm types. These restrictions are evident from distinctive resource weaknesses in strategic reasoning, middle management, resources management at foreign multinational and indigenous firms in an emerging economy. These distinctive resource weaknesses influence different paths of resources accumulation and resource acquisitions in foreign multinational and indigenous firms in an emerging economy.

The findings from this study have significant implications for future strategy implementation research in other emerging economies. First, a composite view of indigenous and multinational firms on strategic issues is seriously misleading. The studies focussing on strategy implementation barriers need to analyse foreign multinational and indigenous firms separately for better understanding of the implementation processes in different firm types (Noble, 1999a). Second, the firm-resources specific barriers have been identified with differences in multinational and local firms. This shows that the RBV is a robust theoretical lens for implementation barriers research with potential to integrate the divergent streams of structural and interpersonal-processual research in strategy implementation literature and advance the field.

Third, this study highlights major differences in the implementation barriers among local and multinational firms competing in an emerging economy – Pakistan. The findings of this study are of exploratory nature and more studies are needed to form a definitive view of these exploratory finding in other emerging economies. Similar comparative research is specially recommended in countries like India, Bangladesh and Srilanka and transition economies like Estonia, Poland, and Hungary. This will extend the implementation research agenda in emerging countries and further the development of strategy implementation as a major area of strategy research. Finally, indigenous firms in Pakistan need to improve their resource competitiveness particularly in terms of strategic reasoning, middle management, performance management, organisational systems and realistic planning for successful strategy implementation. Likewise, multinationals need to improve attention to manage interoffice politics, subsidiary-level authority and effective implementation monitoring.

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