

A MODEL OF STRATEGIC THINKING: ISLAMIC AND IRANIAN PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This research is trying to explore elements of strategic thinking from Islamic – Iranian point of views. Design/Methodology/Approach -The research method is qualitative. The main instruments of data and information collection are planned interview and library method. There was no sampling in this research. The researcher selected 17 elites (experts) familiar with the strategic management and strategic thinking. Findings - The study has found elements of strategic thinking are: Insight and foresight (Proactive), Analytical ability, Systems thinking, Creativity, Learning, Goal oriented Vision and Familiarity with modern science. Research limitations/implications -There are some limitations evident in this research. First, the researcher is from academic institute, so is not so familiar with Islamic literature. It means, if there is any deficiency in the literature is due to the low knowledge of the researcher. Second, although the sample size was sufficient, a larger sample may have provided better results.

Keywords: Strategic thinking, Strategic management, Model, Creative thinking, Systems thinking, Islam, Iran.

Contribution / Originality

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the elements and model of strategic thinking from Islamic and Iranian points of view. So, it paves the road for other researches to investigate the equivalent factors in other cultures and other religions.

1. INTRODUCTION

Managers should always think about strategic issues. Strategic issues are typically ambiguous and may be defined in multiple ways "(Eton, 2005), so it needs strategic insight. Camillus (1996) classifies strategic insights as creative mechanisms that aid in the understanding of the inner nature of the problem. Now the question is: what are the elements of strategic thinking? What is the most appropriate model in a given situation? To contribute to the current literature, the researcher is trying to find the elements and model of strategic thinking from Islamic-Iranian points of view. In the following, after review of literature related to definitions,

elements and models of strategic thinking, the Islamic literature and Iranian elites point of view will be presented; and at the final stage, the elements or factors of strategic thinking and accompanied model from Islamic-Iranian points of view will be presented.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of strategic thinking in the past years was explored a lot. Extensive researches were conducted to identify the nature of the subject. As a result, strategic thinking was introduced as one of two major functions of high performance managers. The journey in the strategic thinking literature was challenging and confusing. Ambiguity, controversy and lack of agreement can be seen in the field of strategic management (Mintzberg, 1981) and it gets more complicated when it comes to more recent term- strategic thinking. In this part of research we try to define strategic thinking using diverse opinions and expressions of strategy scientists.

2.1. What is Strategic Thinking?

In definition of strategic thinking the most obvious thing is the diversity of approaches. Hence, in this section we are trying to make a list of suggestions about the concept. Although the concept of strategic thinking has been in the literature for over a quarter of a century, the term is often used interchangeably with other aspects related to the development of organizational direction such as “strategy”, “strategic management” and “strategic planning” (Bonn, 2001); (Liedtka, 1998). For Ralph (Stacey, 1992), strategic thinking is “. . . using analogies and qualitative similarities to develop creative new ideas . . . (and) designing actions on the basis of new learning.”

This differs from strategic planning which focuses on following preprogrammed rules. Steven Stumpf defines strategic thinking as "identifying different ways for people to attain their chosen objectives and determining what actions are needed to get them into the position they want to be in" (Stumpf, 1989). Peters defines strategic thinking as a method for finding a vision and obtaining "perpetual invigoration" for that vision. In 1994 Mintzberg stated that “strategic planning is not strategic thinking” (p. 107) and suggested a clear distinction between strategic thinking and strategic planning. In other place he states: many practitioners and theorists have wrongly assumed that strategic planning, strategic thinking and strategy making are all synonymous, at least in best practice (Mintzberg, 1994). Mintzberg (1994), emphasizes that strategic thinking is not merely “alternative nomenclature for everything falling under the umbrella of strategic management”. It is a particular *way* of thinking with specific and clearly discernible characteristics. Heracleous (1998) believes that strategic thinking and strategic planning are interrelated in a dialectical process, where both are necessary for effective strategic management, and each mode on its own is necessary but not sufficient

Considering all divergent views and opinions about strategic thinking and perceiving the importance of the concept, table 1 includes some of the definitions of strategic thinking.

Table-1.Definitions of strategic thinking

Acur and Englyst (2006)	Major attributes of strategic thinking: 1. Awareness about industry and rivals; 2. Understanding strengths and opportunities; 3. Awareness about strategic problems of organization; 4. Considering strategic priorities of top manager; and 5. Decision making by making use of flexible and effective processes (Acur and Englyst, 2006)
Bonn (2005)	Emphasizing on process approach, using cognitive concepts, ability in finding different solutions for specific problems, interaction among strategies at different levels and between different units of organizations, understanding the dynamics of internal and external environment, understanding the situation of organizations within bigger systems, visualizing future goals and most advantageous future, knowing new competitive areas, capability of integrating different ideas into a new and fresh idea (Monnavarian et al., 2011).
Graetz (2002)	Attributes such as finding different solutions for the problems simultaneously and considering external opportunities (Monnavarian et al., 2011).
Collins et al. (2000)	Considering necessary strategic and operational issues for designing appropriate organizational structure (Monnavarian et al., 2011).
Liedtka (1998)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strategic thinking reflects a system or holistic view that appreciates how the different parts of the organization influence and impinge on each other as well as their different environments. 2. Strategic thinking embodies a focus on intent. In contrast with the traditional strategic planning approach that focuses on creating a “fit” between existing resources and emerging opportunities, strategic intentionally creates a substantial “misfit” between these. 3. Strategic thinking involves thinking in time. Strategic thinkers understand the interconnectivity of past, present and future. 4. Fourth, it is hypothesis driven. Hypothesis generating and testing is central to strategic thinking activities. By asking the creative question “What if?” followed by the critical question “If ... then ...?” strategic thinking spans the analytic-intuitive dichotomy that Mintzberg refers to in his definition of thinking as synthesis and planning as analysis. 5. Strategic thinking invokes the capacity to be intelligently opportunistic, to recognize and take advantage of newly emerging opportunities (Monnavarian et al., 2011).
Wilson (1994)	This continuing search for improvement has profoundly changed the character of strategic planning so that it is now more appropriate to refer to it as strategic management or strategic thinking (Monnavarian et al., 2011)
Graetz (2002)	Graetz's model holds that the role of strategic thinking is "to seek innovation and imagine new and very different futures that may lead the company to redefine its core strategies and even its industry"
Napier and Albert (1990)	Referring to system thinking, thinking about long-term profits rather than short-term benefits, identifying repetitive patterns in the events, choosing a person responsible for strategic thinking, making use of past events to predict future, using past knowledge to prepare appropriate model for decision making (Monnavarian et al., 2011).
Stumpf (1989)	Strategic thinking is about knowing different methods people choose to achieve their goals and determine the activities necessary to accomplish the goal
Stacey (1992)	strategic thinking is “. . . using analogies and qualitative similarities to develop creative new ideas . . . (and) designing actions on the basis of new learning
Mintzberg (1994)	Strategic thinking, on the other hand, is a synthesizing process utilizing intuition and creativity whose outcome is “an integrated perspective of the enterprise.
Goldsmith (1996)	Strategic thinking is ability to learn from environment, while having an open minded, which s one of the characteristics of good management

2.2. Models of Strategic Thinking

There are different models of strategic thinking, each of them are based on special processes or elements. Since strategic thinking is based on descriptive paradigm, so the models do not include routines, methodology and rules of prescriptive paradigm, and instead, the emphasis is on the nature of strategic thinking. Some of the models are shown in table 2.

Table-2. Models of strategic thinking in current literature

Model	Author	Description
Six-step process	Zabriskie and Huellmantel (1991)	A sequential, well-defined six-step process to enable strategic thinking: Visualize what they [Managers] want their organizations to become are able to reposition their resources to compete in tomorrow's markets, assess their risk, revenues, and costs of the strategy alternative s available to them, think about and identify the questions they want the strategic plan to answer , and think logically and systematically about the planning.
Based on cognitive mapping	(Eden, 1990)	Describes a strategic thinking process based on cognitive mapping. It has been described as a way of linking strategy formulation and strategy implementation and the ability to effectively integrate and utilize the information that does exist.
Hybrid strategic thinking model	Kilroy and McKinley (1997)	This model includes 3 stages of information and probabilities, development of strategic business alternatives and analysis and evaluation.
Model of the Elements of Strategic Thinking	Liedtka (1998)	Defines strategic thinking as a particular way of thinking, with very specific and clearly identifiable characteristics. Five elements of strategic thinking are: systems thinking, intent focus, intelligent opportunism, thinking in time and hypothesis driven
The model of strategy innovation	Hamel (1998)	In this model, innovation is the base of strategic thinking which includes five preconditions: new voices, new discourses, new enthusiasm, new attitudes and new experiences
Future alternatives model	Williamson (1999)	This model includes four steps as: to discover implicit limitations, creation of processes, optimizing the basket of alternatives and the combination of planning and opportunism
Two-level model	Bonn (2001)	Bonn introduces strategic thinking at two levels: individual level and organizational level. At individual level, 3 elements of general understanding of organization and its environment, creativity and vision and at organizational level, continuous strategic discourses among top-level teams and making use of creativity and innovation potential are emphasized
Critical success Factors (CSF) – based model	Kaufman et al. (2003)	<p><i>CSF 1:</i> Move out of your comfort zone—today's paradigms—and use new and wider boundaries for thinking, planning, doing, evaluating, and continuous improvement.</p> <p><i>CSF 2:</i> Differentiate between ends (what) and means (how).</p> <p><i>CSF 3:</i> Use all three levels of planning and results (Mega/Outcomes; Macro/Outputs; Micro/Products).</p> <p><i>CSF 4:</i> Prepare all objectives—including the Ideal Vision and mission—to include precise statements of both where you are headed, as well as the criteria for measuring when you have arrived. Develop “Smarter” Objectives.</p> <p><i>CSF 5:</i> Use an Ideal Vision (what kind of world, in measurable performance terms, we want for tomorrow's child) as the underlying basis for planning and continuous improvement.</p> <p><i>CSF 6:</i> Defining “need” as a gap in results (not as insufficient levels of resources, means, or methods).</p>
Muti-level strategic thinking	Bonn (2005)	Bonn developed his model presented in 2001, and added group level to individual and organizational levels. At individual level elements such as systems thinking, creativity and vision, at organizational level such elements as middle manager participation, organizational structure

	dynamics, and indicators of long-term performance , and at group level elements of job diversification, functional and communicational conflicts have been emphasized
Five order of strategic thinking model of Ghafarian and Kiani (2010)	The model includes five orders to have strategic thinking: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emphasize on learning from environment, more than receiving information 2. Emphasize more on discovering unanswered needs, rather than on responding to explicit needs 3. More than middle-level goals, look for final goals 4. More than emphasis on capability building for production, focus on increasing your capability for competition 5. In moving towards the goals, more than speed think about the best way.

2.3. Elements of Strategic Thinking

Based on analysis of the literature on strategic thinking, elements extracted from current literature are as follows:

Cognitive mapping (Eden, 1990; Zabriskie and Huellmantel, 1991), Creativity (Bonn, 2001; Bonn, 2005), Goal oriented (Zabriskie and Huellmantel, 1991; Kilroy and McKinley, 1997; Lashkar Boloki, 2010) Vision for the future (Bonn, 2001; Kaufman *et al.*, 2003; Bonn, 2005; Wootton and Horne, 2010), Wholistic (Harper, 1991; Bonn, 2001), System thinking (Liedtka, 1998; Bonn, 2005), Long-term attitude (Ghafarian and Kiani, 2010), Logical reasoning (Kilroy and McKinley, 1997), intuition (Kilroy and McKinley, 1997), Focus on the goal (Liedtka, 1998; Lashkar Boloki, 2010), Improvement by hypothesis (Kilroy and McKinley, 1997; Liedtka, 1998; Lashkar Boloki, 2010), Think in time (Liedtka, 1998; Lashkar Boloki, 2010), Intelligent opportunism (Liedtka, 1998; Williamson, 1999), Continuous learning (Hamel, 1998; Ghafarian and Kiani, 2010), Effective communication (Hamel, 1998; Bonn, 2001; Wootton and Horne, 2010), Thinking diversely (Ghafarian and Kiani, 2010), Forecasting ability (Kaufman *et al.*, 2003; Wootton and Horne, 2010), Curiosity and discovery (Williamson, 1999), Creating alternatives (Williamson, 1999; Lashkar Boloki, 2010; Wootton and Horne, 2010), Capability building Ghafarian and Kiani (2010), Williamson (1999), Analytical capability (Harper, 1991), Intuition (Kilroy and McKinley, 1997).

3. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

In the following, the questions of research, instruments and sample and data collection is discussed.

3.1. The Questions of Research

The research is performed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the elements of strategic thinking from Islamic – Iranian points of view;
2. How is the order of elements of strategic thinking from Islamic – Iranian points of view;
3. How is the model of strategic thinking from Islamic – Iranian points of view.

3.2. Population, Sample and Data Collection

There was no sampling in this research. The researcher selected 17 elites (experts) familiar with the strategic management and strategic thinking. The group of experts consisted of 17 persons, 11 of them from academic institutions and 6 from other organizations. Again 4 of them have Master degree, and 13 had PhD degree.

Participants were informed of the main objective of the study, and also were presented with a written definition of keywords to build shared concept. They were encouraged to sincerely respond to the questions and were assured of absolute anonymity and confidentiality.

The main instruments of data and information collection are: literature review and interview.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Thinking from Islamic Point of View

In this section, the importance and meanings of thinking from Islamic point of view will be discussed and its elements will be extract from two different sources: Quran and Islamic *fiqh* rules (Islamic jurisprudence)

4.1.1. Importance and Meaning of Thinking

Islam lays much stress on the point that man should pay full attention to the basic role of correct thinking and knowledge in his life and that he should realize that his salvation depends on them. In this respect the Qur'an says: *"Give good tidings to our servants who hear advice (and reflect carefully on it) and follow the best thereof. Such are those whom Allah has guided. They are the people of understanding"*. (Sura al-Zumar, 39:17 - 18).

In many other verses the Qur'an has repeatedly addressed - *'the men of understanding'*, *'the people who think'*, *'the people who understand'* and *'the people who remember'* and it wants the wise, the sensible and the thoughtful to think correctly and not to fall into the pitfalls situated on the path of intellect.

Islam requires man to put his ever- increasing intellectual and creative power into action, to bring about necessary changes in his natural and social environments and to create new useful things so that he may become more equipped to ensure a better and decent life for himself as well as for other human beings and should not submit straightaway to the existing realities. Hence, in the eyes of Islam, man is required to incline towards his goal rather than to the existing realities.

Islam has never asked you to stop thinking, but asked you to use your mind in looking at this universe. *Allah* (S.W.T.) said in *surat* Younos, (verse 101), what can be translated as, "Say: Behold all that is in the havens and on the earth." And *Allah* (S.W.T.) said in *surat* Ath-Thariyat, (verse & and 21), what can be translated as, "On the earth are signs for those of assured faith, as also in your own selves: will you not then see." Islam encourages critical thinking instead of just permitting it. At scores of places in the Holy *Qur'an*, the Almighty has exhorted man to think

about the signs that are spread around him and that testify to the greatness of Allah. The Holy *Qur'an* reads: None will grasp the message but men of intellect? (2:269)

Most certainly the worst of animals in Allah's sight are the deaf, the dumb who do not use their brains. (8:22). Elements of thinking from Islamic point of view are shown in Table 3.

Table-3.Elements of thinking from Islamic point of view*

Element	Source	Element	Source (Name of Sourah and number of verses)
Using logical reasoning	Mohammad (PBOH), other religious leaders*	Ability to analyze the issues and events	Albaghara (219), Alearaf (184), Younis (24), Alrom (8), Saba (46), Alzamr (42), Alhashr (21), Alnesa (82), Ebrahim (25), Alnahl (17), Almoamen (80),
Thinking about future	Mohammad (PBOH), other religious leaders	Capability to forecast the consequences of the events	Albaghara (219), Alearaf (184), Alrom (8), Hood (24)
Lesson drawing	other religious leaders	Mental cognition	Albaghara (266), Alaraf (174), Younis (240), Hood (24), Ebrahim (25)
Consultation with experts	other religious leaders	Discovering the relation among phenomenon	Ale Omran (191), Younis (24), Alraad (3), Alnahl (11), Alrom (21)
Good listening	other religious leaders	Understanding the inside of phenomenon	Ale Omran (191), Younis (24), Alnahl (11), Alrom (21)
Good seeing	other religious leaders	Capability to recognize and judge	AlAnam (50), Alaraf (184), Alrom (8), Saba (46), Hood (24), AlHajj (46), Almoamen (80)
Critical thinking	other religious leaders	Learning from scholars and knowledgeable people	Alnahl (44)
Continuous learning	other religious leaders	Considering the signs	Ale Omran (191), Alraad (3), Alnahl (11), Alrom (8), Alnahl (69), Alrom (21), Aljaeia (13), AlHajj (46)
Intuition and insight	other religious leaders	Focus on issues	Younis (24), Alrad (3), Alrom (8)
Discovering the relations between phenomenon	other religious leaders	Good seeing	Albaghara (171), Hood (24), Alhag (46)
Environmental analysis	other religious leaders	Good listening	Saba (46), Albaghara (171), Hood (24), Alhaj (46)
Mental cognition	other religious leaders	Consultation with experts	Albaghara (219), Ale Omran (118)
Ability to analyze the issues	other religious leaders	Lesson-drawing from past	Yousef (109)
Learning from experiences	other religious leaders	Environmental analysis	Younis (24), Alrad (3), Alnahl (11), Alrom (8), Aljaeia (13), Alhaj (46)
Recognition of internal factors	other religious leaders	Learning from environment	Younis (24), Alrad (3), Alnahl (11), Al Nahl (69), Alrom (8), Alhaj (46), Almoamen (80)
Being Up to date about the science	other religious leaders	Intuition and insight	AlAnam (50), Younis (24), Alrom (8), Hood (24), Alhaj (46)

*Due to some differences between different groups of Muslims, the name of the religious leaders is not mentioned, to prevent any conflict

Adopted from: Mirakhori et al., 2014.

4.2. Synthesis of Elements of Thinking from Islamic Point of View

To sum up the information summarized in Tables 3, the list was given to elites and asked them to tell us about the final elements of thinking, based on Islam. The final elements, in regard to thinking are as follows:

Analytical capability, Thinking about future, Mental cognition, Environmental analysis, Recognition of internal factors, Continuous learning, Considering the signs, Focus on issues, Considering mortality of rules governing the world, Good seeing, Good listening, Consultation with experts, Making use of intuition and insight, Understanding the distinctions and differences(Critical thinking), Learning from experiences, Being Up to date about the science.

4.3. Thinking from Iranian Elites Point of View

The researchers asked some Iranian professors and knowledgeable people (refer to research methodology section), to determine thinking elements based on Iranian culture and the present situation of the country. Table 4 includes the final elements or factors of thinking from Iranian elites points of view.

Table-4. Elements of thinking from Iranian elites points of view

Elements	Mean	Mode	Frequency					Quartile
			5	4	3	2	1	
Familiarity with modern science	4.66	5	13	4	0	0	0	(4-5-5)
Awareness about different cultures	4.55	5	11	6	0	0	0	(4-5)
Insight and foresight	4.55	5	8	8	1	0	0	(4.75-5)
Learning from experiences	4	4	11	5	1	0	0	(4-4)
Being conscientious	4.11	4	8	6	3	0	0	(3-5)
Continuous Learning	4.44	5	12	5	0	0	0	(3-5)
attention to the past, present and future	4.66	5	6	7	3	1	0	(4-5)
Environment (internal and external) analysis	4.22	4	11	6	0	0	0	(4-5)
Logical Reasoning	4.77	5	10	5	2	0	0	(4-5)
Diversified mind pattern	3.55	3	9	6	2	0	0	(4-5)
Discovering the relation between phenomenon	4.11	4	8	7	2	0	0	(4-4)
Holistic approach	4.11	4	9	8	3	0	0	(4-4)
Having vision	3.92	4	8	6	3	0	0	(4-5)
Creativity	3.77	3	7	8	2	0	0	(3-5)
Thinking based on action	4.77	5	12	4	1	0	0	(4-5)
Futuristic approach	3.77	4	9	6	2	0	0	(3-4)
Proactive	3.66	4	10	4	2	1	0	(3-4)
Opposition with status quo	3.72	4	10	5	2	0	0	(3-4)

4.4. Elements of Strategic Thinking Based on Islamic-Iranian Model

Based on 19 element of strategic thinking extracted of current literature, 17 elements of thinking from Islamic point of view and 18 elements of thinking from Iranian elites point of view, the final elements of strategic thinking from Islamic-Iranian points of view, based on selected elites are summarized in Table 5.

Table-5. Elements of strategic thinking from Islamic-Iranian points of view

No	Element	Mean	Quartile
1	Creativity	4.26	(4-4)
2	Goal oriented Vision	4.35	(4-5)
3	Systems thinking	4.23	(4-5)
4	Insight and foresight (Proactive)	3.99	(4-4)
5	Learning (Continuously and from experience)	4.15	(4-5)
6	Familiarity with modern science	3.98	(4-5)
7	Analytical ability	4.22	(3.75-5)

4.5. Prioritizing the Elements of Strategic Thinking

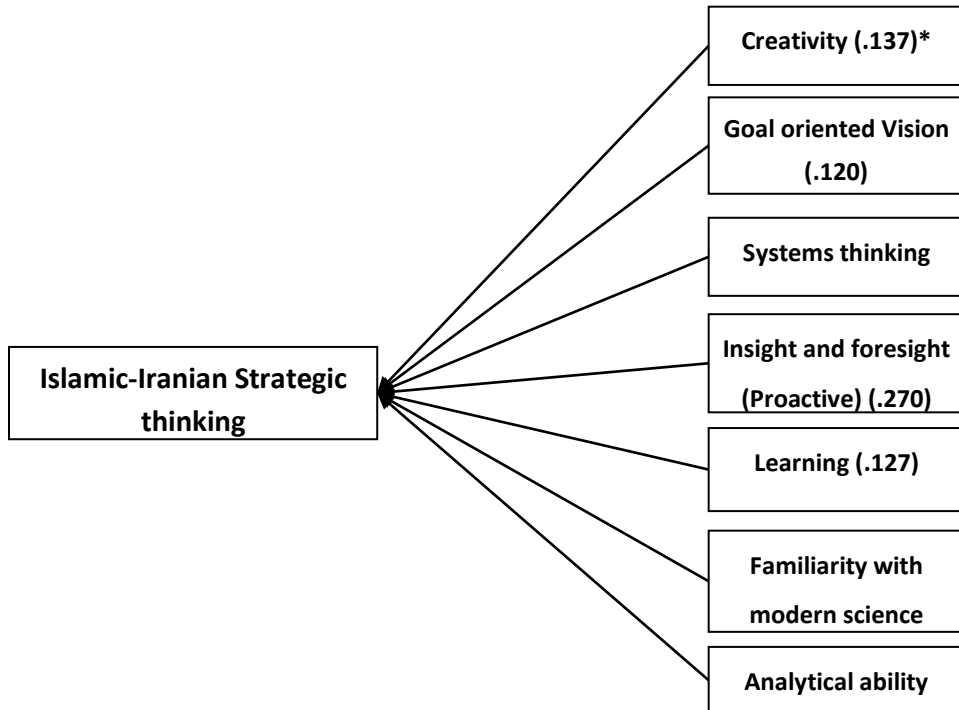
To prioritize the elements of strategic thinking based on Islamic – Iranian points of view, dual comparison is applied. In this section, we asked the elites to determine the importance of each element in two by two method. After entering the data and calculation the weight of each factor, we created the dual comparison matrix, shown in table 6.

Table-6. Dual comparison matrix

Dual comparison matrix	Creativity	Goal oriented Vision	Systems thinking	Insight foresight (Proactive)	anLearning	Familiarity with moderability science	Analytical
Creativity	1	1.49	1.29	1.88	1.59	1.07	1.77
Goal oriented Vision	.67	1	1.14	1.62	1.44	.78	1.89
Systems thinking	1.44	.87	1	.94	1.17	.79	1.11
Insight foresight (Proactive)	.93	.38	1.61	1	.84	.68	1.21
Learning	.61	.42	1.12	1.92	1	.53	.87
Familiarity with modern science	.63	.69	.85	1.19	1.03	1	.95
Analytical ability	1.67	1.32	.88	.97	1.23	1.01	1
Total	5.35	5.17	7.89	8.52	7.30	5.46	7.80

After creating the non-scaled dual comparison matrix, the order of the elements of strategic thinking, based on Islamic – Iranian point of view is presented in figure 1.

Figure-1. Model of Islamic-Iranian Strategic thinking¹



1. Numbers indicate the importance weight of each element

5. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this study, Initially, definitions of strategic thinking were analyzed; then models and elements (factors) of strategic thinking, based on current literature were presented. Elements of thinking from Islamic and Iranian points of view were extracted separately and then synthesized. Finally, the model of strategic thinking based on above information, which is based on Islamic-Iranian points of view is developed.

The study reveals that, by considering Islamic-Iranian approach, the main elements of strategic thinking (with several sub-elements) are as follows: Insight and foresight (Proactive), Analytical ability, Systems thinking, Creativity, Learning, Goal oriented Vision, Familiarity with modern science.

The comparison of findings with current literature is not indicating any meaningful difference between the elements presented by other researches (current literature).

However, it is mostly observed that, managerial cognition, especially in developing economies, has been noticeably disregarded in the field of strategic research even though strategic thinking is an integral part of strategic decision making and the strategic management process. The limited attention that has been focused on strategic thinking has been concerned with external variables and also internal variables that affect the strategic thinking process and its application. Also in Islamic approach, thinking is emphasized, and this is the same in other

cultures, however, it is not considered by most of the managers, and they prefer daily thinking rather than thinking for long – term, with a vision and through application of insight and foresight.

This study was exploratory in nature because strategic thinking model, based on a certain culture (in this study it means Islamic-Iranian culture and approach) has not been discussed in depth in any previous literature to date, much less measured and evaluated. This study essentially built the foundations for a conceptual framework evolving around the vitally important concept of strategic thinking.

6. LIMITATIONS

There are some limitations evident in this research. First, the researcher is from academic institute, so is not so familiar with Islamic literature. It means, if there is any deficiency in the literature is due to the low knowledge of the researcher. Second, although the sample size was sufficient, a larger sample may have provided better results. The next limitation of this study was that the variables employed in this research were only measured through one method. Therefore, the validity of the measures could not be examined through the multi-trait-multi-method analysis.

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