Strategy and management in not-for profit organizations: a comparison of excellent organizations: MSF and OSF

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this research is to figure out how to create an effective excellence strategy in not-for-profit organizations. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. This study examines MSF (Medicines Sans Frontières, Geneva, Switzerland) and OSF (Opera San Francesco dei Poveri, Milan, Italy). Both service organizations help people who have medical problems or are in difficult situations. The findings describe important critical success factors for implementing an excellent strategy.

L'obiettivo di questa ricerca è capire come creare una strategia di eccellenza efficace nelle organizzazioni no-profit. Lo studio utilizza metodi quantitativi e qualitativi. Questo studio prende in esame MSF (Medicines Sans Frontières, Geneva, Switzerland) e OSF (Opera San Francesco dei Poveri, Milan, Italy). Entrambe le organizzazioni di servizio aiutano le persone che hanno problemi di salute o si trovano in situazioni difficili. I risultati descrivono importanti fattori critici di successo per l'attuazione di una strategia di eccellenza.

1 – Introduction

Non-profit organizations play a crucial role in society (Al-Tabbaa *et al.* 2013, Anheier 2005, Kotler 1982, Dees *et al.* 2001, 2002; Pilotti 2011, 2017, 2019; Riva 2007, Arauz and Suzuka,2004; Ciasullo and Troisi 2013; Ciasullo 2017; Ciasullo et al, 2017; Bhuiyan and Alam 2005; Calisir *et al.* 2001; Mella 2014, 2018, 2021; Preite.2000, 2007, 2011a, 2011b 2014). Using the benchmarking methodology, this study will investigate the unique experiences of these two non-profit organizations (Gummesson 2002, 2008; Baccarani and Golinelli 2011; Riva and Pilotti 2019; Casadesus and Karapetrovic 2005; Mahadevappa and Kotreshwar 2004; Rao et.al. 1997; Gazzola et Colombo, 2014; Gazzola et Mella 2003, 2006, 2017; Gazzola *et al.* (2020); Russell 2000; Ruzevicius *et al.* 2004; Schenkel 2004;

Tarimoradi *et al.* 2014; Tsekouras *et al.* 2002; Wang and Feng 2012; Wayhan, *et al.* 2002; Mella 1997, 2012, 2015; De Matteis and Preite 2016).

The following is the outline of the paper: the second section discusses the theoretical review, the third section analyses the methodological elements, the fourth and fifth sections describe the cases, then there is a section on the findings, and the final section includes the conclusion.

2 – Theoretical background and research questions

2.1 – *Theoretical background*

A lot of important studies have investigated the significance of not-for-profit (Anheier, 2005, Barenblat, 2018, Barthélémy and Slitine 2011; Quéinnet and Igalens 2004; Atkinson and Waterhouse 1977; Dees and Waterhouse 2001, 2002; Anheier, 2005; Barenblat, 2018, Barthélémy and Slitine 2011; Quéinnet and Igalens 2004; Atkinson and Waterhouse 1977; Dees *et al.* 2001 and 2021). The Table 1 describes some relevant studies on the topics.

Tab. 1 – Literature on the topic of the research on not-for profit organization (Source: our elaboration)

Author(s)	Theoretical Perspective	Methodology	Main Findings	Context	Sample
Kaplan and Norton. (2001)	Balanced scorecard for not-for-profit	Case study	Important in not-for-profit of quality and balanced scorecard	International	Single case
Palumbo et al. (2021)	Digitalization not-for-profit	Serial mediation models	Important of soft TQM practice	Italy	(N=126) not-for-profit (ecomuseum)
Soysa et al. (2016)	Performance measure in not-for-profit	Questionnaire (22 questions) Balanced scorecard EFQM Model	A set of indicators to measure (nine dimension	Australian and New Zealand	9 not-forprofit health sectors
Huda (1995)	Service quality management in not-for-profit	Case study (Britain) questionnaire	Importance of TQM and staff ability to understand the needs	British organization	6 not-for-profit
Chen and Shiau (2006)	Balanced scorecard and strategic map (BSC) in not-for-profit	Case study	Importance of vision and strategic maps; importance of not financial indicator	Taiwan	N/A
Fryer et al. (2007)	Critical success factors for continuous improvement	Literature reviewer	Important factors for service and public organization	N/A	N/A
Ciasullo and Troisi (2012)	Importance of Ethics and value system	Interview Annual reports, field observation	Importance of innovation and eco-sustainability	Campania, South Italy	Single case study

For not-for-profit organizations, TQM, European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) is an example of a quality award model (EFQM model, the Deming Prize, MBNQA model, or Baldrige Excellence Criteria). The EFQM model can be used to evaluate strategy and performance by focusing on how to do the right things for better results.

The global model for data analysis is centered on the EFQM Model, which is based on the following principles: understanding of the established cause-and-effect relationships, understanding how their key results compare to similar organizations, developing a set of key performance indicators and related outcomes, setting clear targets for key results, segmenting results to understand the performance of specific areas of the organization.

Communication, according to Chen and Popvich (2003), is made up of three primary components: people, procedures, and culture. According to Schmitt (2000), understanding how customers feel is crucial for communication. Almotairi (2009) talks about the main factors that make communication successful and how important it is to use an integrated framework to look at the communication strategy and process. He also talks about how important it is to control several important factors (see Table 2).

Tab. 2 – Main differences between profit and not-for-profit organizations (Source: elaboration from Chad *et al.* 2015)

Characteristics	*For profit*	*Not-for-profit*
Objective	profit motive	social benefit
Focus	immediate customer satisfaction	long term society
Organization culture	resource rich expenditure seen an investment	resource poor expenditure seen as a cost
Constituency	costumer	multiple: clients, customers & donors
Market place	competitive	collaboration
Performance measurement	sales, roi, dividends, market share	client served, client satisfaction, repeat donor
Exchange	money	often free, sometimes token contribution, sometime free o
Senior management	business and management degree qualified	traditional based on wealth industry experience
Employees	paid	volunteers and paid
Revenue	sales	government, free of service, donations, fundraising
Accountability	shareholders	board of direction, stakeholders
Governance	paid board of direction	voluntary board of direction
Product	physical goods and service	physical goods, service including emotional and informational support
Product demand	typically, non-large fluctuation	possible large flotation (e.s. disaster relief)

Asorwoe (2017) points out how communication is critical. Wang and Feng (2012) investigate the most important communication success variables. They must be able to understand the relationship between resources, capabilities, and performance in various customer interactions and relationships. Payne and Frow (2005) examine and build a worldwide model to comprehend the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and CRM framework, emphasizing the importance of a strategic planning process, value generation, multi-channel process, and performance assessment.

2.2 – *The research questions*

We focus on two major streams of literature about non-profit excellence, and it appears that quality and communication are critical components (Calisir *et al.* 2001; Casadesus and Karapetrovic 2005; Mahadevappa and Kotreshwar 2004; Rao et.al. 1997; Ruzevicius *et al.* 2004; Schenkel 2004; Tarimoradi *et al.* 2014; Tsekouras *et al.* 2002; Wang and Feng 2012; Wayhan, *et al.* 2002) The research is, however, fragmented and partial with certain limitations, and some mechanisms must be understood. As a result, the following research question will be explored in this paper:

> **RQ1**: *When comparing MSF with OSF, what is the best way to achieve excellence in non-profits?*

Consequently, only a few research have investigated the key success variables. For these reasons, we formulate the following inquiry:

> **RQ2**: *What are the most important critical success factors (FCS) for non-profit service excellence?*

3 – Methodology

3.1 – *The reasons of the choice of MSF (Medicines Sans Frontières, or Doctors Without Borders) and OSF (Opera San Francesco dei Poveri)*

MSF is regarded as a model of excellence; in fact, it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1999 for its capacity to address major medical emergencies. In 2019, OSF (Opera San Francesco dei Poveri) was also awarded the Premio Leonardo for outstanding achievement. Both service organizations are dedicated to assisting those who are dealing with medical issues or who are in challenging circumstances.

3.2 – *The methodology based on triangulation techniques*

This study employs the logic of grounded theory to build a case study methodology (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, Mella 2012; Eisenhardt 1989). The case study method was chosen because it allows the company's major strategic advancements to be highlighted. Using a triangulation technique, we collect primary data and information by contacting and interviewing experts in many domains (documentary data, interviews, and direct observation).

3.3 – *The secondary data*

Documents, such as the public balance sheet, are also scrutinized (see Table 3)

Tab. 3 – Secondary data used in this research (Source: our elaboration)

Secondary data about MSF	1) Financial Annual Reports 2009-2020 *(Source: Msf)* 2) International Activity Annual Reports 2009-2020 *(Source: Msf)* 3) Italia Report MSF 2020 *(Source: Msf)* 4) Logistique MSF *(Source: Msf)*
Secondary data about OSF	1) Bilancio Sociale (Social Report) 2018 *(Source OSF)* 2) Introdution of the Mayor of Milan to Bilancio Sociale *(Source OSF)* 3) Housing First. Una Storia Che Cambia Le Storie (A Story That Changes Stories) *(SourcePadgett Et Al. 2019)*

In terms of primary data, we gather MSF facts and information, as well as the company's performance, through interaction and discussion with managers to better comprehend the strategy's evolution (Edelman and Singer 2015).

3.4 – *Qualitative analysis*

The interview protocol (see Table 4) allows for a narrowing of the research topic. The semi-structured interviews allow the primary concerns to be investigated. The phone or in-person interviews lasted between 40 and 60 minutes.

Tab. 4 – Main issues covered during the interviews (Source: our elaboration)

MAIN QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTION
RQ1: *When comparing MSF with OSF, what is the best way to achieve excellence in nonprofits?*	What is the rationale behind the strategy? What are the main priorities? What are the achieved benefits? How is evaluated? How are strategy and process improvement used? How are strategies applied? Why? How will the sequence continue in the future?
RQ2: *What are the most important critical success factors (FCS) for non-profit service excellence?*	What are the reasons for the problems? Why are the main limitations? How is it to improve the situation? What will happen in the future? How the situation can be changed? How is the system of control organized during the time?

3.5 – *Quantitative analysis using Likert's scale*

We collect more precise data using a questionnaire (see Table 5) that uses a 5-point Likert scale based on the Balanced Scorecard concept for not-for-profit organizations (Kaplan and Norton. 2001, Soysa *et al.* 2016; Chen and Shiau 2006, Riva 2007).

Tab. 5 – Questionnaire (5 points Likert scale) (Source: our elaboration)

	[1] Unacceptable	[2] Almost Acceptable	[3] Acceptable	[4] Good	[5] Excellent
A) STRATEGY					
Q1. Vision					
Q2. Mission					
Q3. Objective for the long run					
B) FINANCIAL PERSPECTIVE					
Q4. Funding source					
Q5. Cost of the service					
Q6. General and overhead cost					
C) CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE					
Q7. Donor satisfaction and experience					
Q8. Volunteer satisfaction and experience					
Q9. Clientele (user of service) satisfaction and experience					
D) PROCESS PERSPECTIVE					
Q10 Quality					
Q11 New volunteer and donors					
Q12 Throughput and cost					
E) LEARNING AND GROWTH PERSPECTIVE					
Q13 Innovation					
Q14 Motivation					
Q15 Training					

The sample of respondents is described in Table 6.

Tab. 6 – Profile of the respondents (N=10) (Source: our elaboration**)**

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE	
Nationality	100% Italian
Average age	46,2 years
Sex	53% Male 47% Female
Average year of education (-Middle school 8; -High school 13; -University 18; -Doctoral program 21	Average 16,2 years
PROFESSIONAL CHARACTERISTIC	
Experience in years	average 14,2 years
The sector of experience	100% tertiary sector

We examine *concept validity* (multiple sources of data), *internal and external validity* (interview methodology), and *reliability* to verify that these investigations are valid and dependable (by using a database to collect data). As additional data sources, reports, and public papers were employed.

4 – The strategy in MSF (Medicines Sans Frontières, or Doctors Without Borders)

MSF is a non-profit organization (see Figure 1) that works to help those in need all around the world. Its headquarters are in Ginevra, Switzerland, and it was created on December 22, 1971. Communication is a crucial instrument for the company's strategy, according to the firm. Its principal goal is to provide unbiased medical care to people in over 70 countries who are afflicted by conflict, diseases, natural disasters, or lack of access to health care.

MSF employs an integrated set of communication methods to strengthen the communication of its Corporate Social Responsibility strategy and to establish several measures to carry out its goal. This company has created a CSR strategy based on a set of fundamental values. OSF, on the other hand, is headquartered in Milan and does not have a global presence. Between MSF and OSF, we can detect several key similarities and differences.

Improving stakeholder commitment is critical for MSF and OSF (Freeman 1984; Reichled 2006, Riva 2011, Mella 2012). MSE's cost structure is broken down into several section. The analysis of MSF's CRS strategy demonstrates how crucial stakeholder relationships are (Edelman and Singer 2015), and how the system of values can be seen as an imperative characterizing the culture by the entire company. (According to the 2018 MSF International Activity Report.). MSF has raised more than $400 million per year to support our organization's financial needs. Data collecting is a necessary and vital step in getting to know and manage your clients. In this non-profit organization, the Marketing Development Department is crucial.

MSF's Marketing Team is in charge of implementing integrated marketing initiatives, such as prospect, renewal, and cultivation campaigns, and it employs all available communication channels to maximize revenue and raise awareness of MSF's work.

Following the identification of the data that must be collected in the integrated database (Kotler 1972, 2014; Nonaka 1994; Edelman and Singer 2015). As a result, the emphasis is on determining appropriate services to match consumers wants and expectations.

Fig. 1 – The activity of MSF in Mozambique (Source Vatican News**)**

5 – The strategy in OSF (Opera San Francesco dei Poveri)

The first Capuchin friars entered the monastery in Milano in 1878, and this is when the Opera San Francesco dei Poveri (OSF) was founded. Poverty, both material and spiritual, has always been met with practical solutions and charitable gestures (see Figure 2)

The OSF is set up in such a way that it can provide a wide range of activities (see Table 8). Its primary focus is medical treatment, with the goal of providing global assistance to the disadvantaged. The organization is founded on a set of ideas and a cultural philosophy based on the thought of the Friars Minor Capuchins.

The organization employs site communication based on the activity's true description and internal structure. Performance tracking systems, web page analytics, and landing pages are all used in the development of the website

It's critical to communicate with volunteers through social media. Controlling and attempting to grow virtual community communication is critical.

Fig. 2 – A center of OSF in Milano (Source OSF)

6 – Discussion and managerial implication

6.1 – *Benchmarking the organizations*

The data from the questionnaire (analyzed with SPSS software) allows the two non-profit organizations to be compared (see Figure 3).
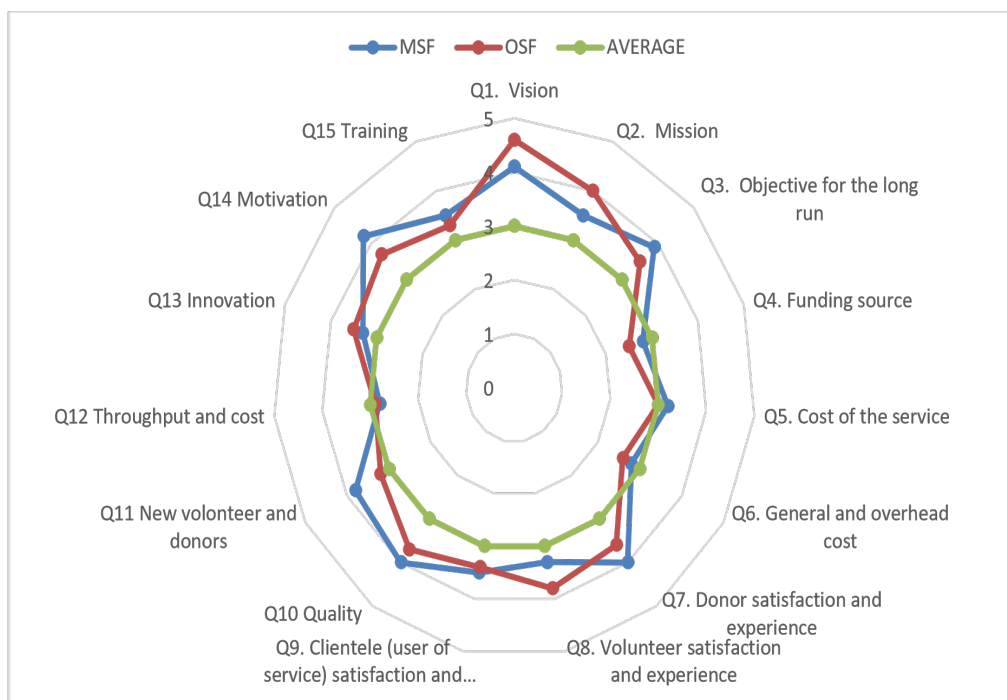

Fig. 3 – Benchmarking the result of the organization (Source: our elaboration)

The organization's goal and mission, as well as motivation and quality, are its main points of strength; nevertheless, the difficulty of the costs and funding source are its main points of weakness. The goal is to continually enhance quality and service while also increasing stakeholder satisfaction (Edelman and Singer 2015) with some differences (see Table 7) based on Likert's scale. MSF and OSF employ relational marketing techniques (Gummesson 2002, 2008).

Tab. 7 – Benchmarking Comparison of MSF and OSF (Likert scale) (Source: our elaboration)

EFQM MODEL FACTORS	MSF	OSF
ENABLES		
Leadership	****	*****
People	***	****
Strategy	****	****
Partnerships & Resources	***	***
Processes, Products, and Services	****	****
RESULTS		
People Results	****	****
Customer Results	***	****
Society Results	****	****
Key Performance Results	**	***
	5 POINTS LIKERT SCALE: Unacceptable (1) (*) Almost Acceptable (2) (**) Acceptable (3) (***) Good (4) (****) Excellent (5) (*****)	

6.2 – *The importance of mission, vision and communication*

MSF's Marketing Team is in charge of implementing integrated marketing initiatives such as prospect, renewal, and cultivation campaigns, and it employs all available communication channels to maximize revenue and raise awareness of MSF's work.

MSF employs an integrated set of communication methods to strengthen the communication of its Corporate Social Responsibility strategy and to establish several measures to carry out its goal. This company has created a CSR strategy based on a set of fundamental values. OSF, on the other hand, is headquartered in Milan and does not have a global presence. Between MSF and OSF, we can detect several key similarities and differences.

MSF has raised more than $400 million per year to support our organization's financial needs. Data collecting is a necessary and vital step in getting to know and manage your clients. In this non-profit organization, the Marketing Development Department is crucial.

Following the identification of the data that must be collected in the integrated database (Kotler 1972, 2014; Nonaka 1994; Edelman and Singer 2015).

As a result, the emphasis is on determining appropriate services to match consumers' wants and expectations.

6.3 – *The importance of volunteers and stakeholder commitment*

OSF and MSF would not exist without volunteers. It has many regular volunteers that help the permanent personnel and team. The purpose of the communication strategy is to find new members. In the organization, volunteers fill a variety of roles. The volunteers work for a period at MSF, learning how the organization works, before moving on to more difficult missions (MSF International Activity Report 2018).

MSF has sparked a virtual community; the website is the organization's primary means of providing information, as well as facilitating communication and funding. The webpage is divided into several sections and explains the MSF's mission and activities in each country (Africa, America, Asia & Pacific, Europe & Central Asia, Middle East, and North Africa). MSF is developing a multi-channel contact center based on individualized communication logic (MSF International Activity Report 2018). (see Figure 4)
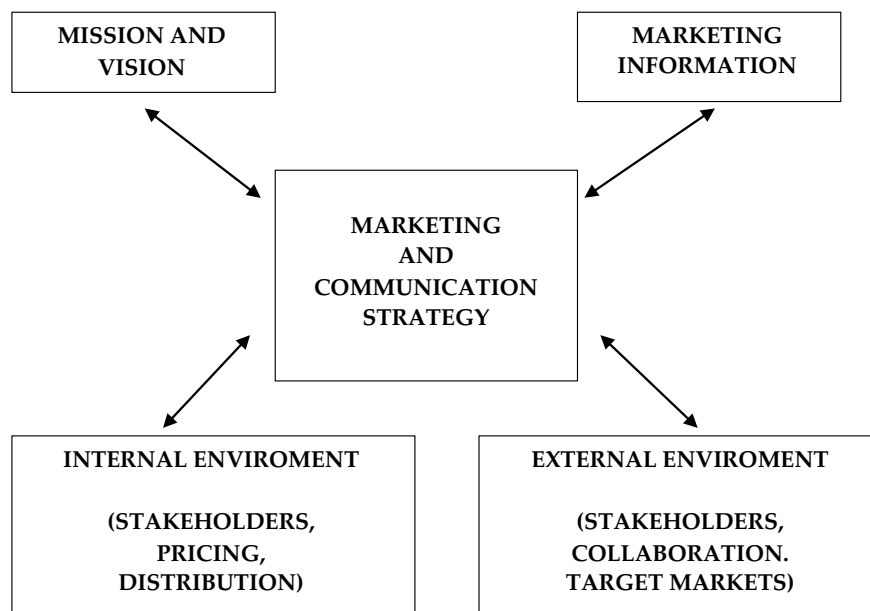
Fig. 4 – Vision and mission and communication in a not-for-profit organization (source elaboration from Wickham 2015)

Improving stakeholder commitment is critical for OSF and MSF (Freeman 1984; Reichled 2006, Riva 2011, Mella 2012). MSE's cost structure is broken down into several section. The analysis of MSF's CRS strategy demonstrates how crucial stakeholder relationships are (Edelman and Singer 2015), and how the system of values can be seen as an imperative in characterizing the culture of the entire company. (According to the 2018 MSF International Activity Report.)

7 – Conclusions

7.1 – *The differences of the organizations MSF and OSF*

MSF and OSF are both models of excellence; both non-profit service organizations are dedicated to supporting persons who are coping with medical challenges or in difficult conditions. In response to the

FIRST QUESTION: *"When comparing MSF with OSF, what is the best way to achieve excellence in non-profits? "*, we discovered:

A-FIRST: based on a series of processes, the findings demonstrate the differences between these two organizations (see Table 8)

Tab. 8 – Benchmarking main differences between the strategy in MSF and OSF (based on Likert's Scale 1-5) (Source: our elaboration)

N°	OBJECTIVES	MSF	OSF
1	Strategy based on a community of voluntaries	***	****
2	Organization based on an international dimension	****	*
2	Culture-based on spirituality value	**	****
3	Medical focus	*****	**
5	Motivation volunteers	****	***
6	Focus on digital communication	****	****
7	Strategy for finding new members	***	***
8	Mobile apps	****	****
9	Strategy marketing by social media	***	**
10	Creation of storyboard	****	****
		5 POINTS LIKERT SCALE: see Table 7	

B-SECOND: MSF and OSF employ a collection of tools for CSR and communication in order to boost stakeholder satisfaction by establishing a virtual community (Edelman and Singer 2015). Customer satisfaction strategy in MSE and OSF is in keeping with the missions of the organizations, allowing for a new type of relational marketing and collaborative contact with all stakeholders (Gummesson 2002, 2008; Baccarani and Golinelli 2011).

A clear description of CRS's value system principle: a) trust and respect, b) honesty, c) accountability, d) empowerment, and e) transparency is essential. The importance of having an integrated communication system that includes a website, e-mail communication, and a multi-channel contact center that allows you to communicate with all stakeholders. Stakeholder interaction enables the CRS mission to be communicated (Asorwoe 2017; Dees *et al.* 2002; Gummesson 2002, 2008; Mella, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2021; Al-Tabbaa et al 2013; Edelman and Singer 2015; Pilotti 2019; Riva 2007; Baccarani and Golinelli 2011; Ciasullo et al, 2017; Arauz and Suzuka, 2004; Bhuiyan and Alam 2005; Casadesus and Karapetrovic 2005; Mahadevappa and Kotreshwar 2004; De Matteis and Preite 2016; Preite 2011b)

7.2 – *The primary critical success factors (FCS) for a non-profit organization*

In response to the

SECOND QUESTION: *"What are the primary critical success factors (FCS) for a non-profit organization? "*, we discovered:

A-First: MSF and OSF place a strong emphasis on using social media to engage with stakeholders and to explain the value system (Facebook, YouTube). CSR communication is crucial (Ringov, 2017), and it is built on: a database-driven focus on new digital communication technologies; ii) multichannel marketing; and iii) intelligent website organization. It is important to considerate different dimensions-based philosophy of employees first and integrates four dimensions: a) learning and growth, internal processes, customer satisfaction, financial (see Figure 5)
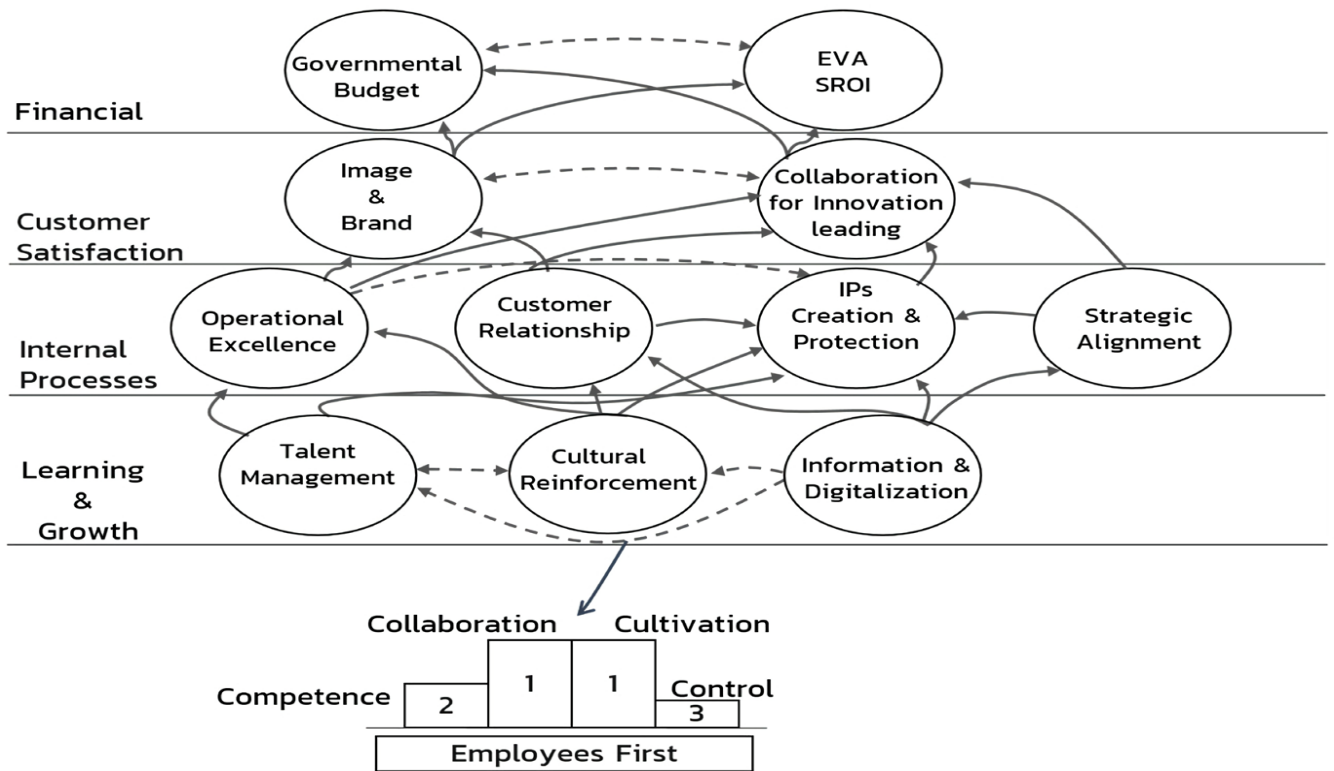
Fig. 5 – Critical success factors in a not-for-profit organization (source elaboration from Sujitjorn and Lertsuksombat,2019)

B-Second: the plan relies heavily on communication integrity and the process of recruiting a large number of volunteers. It can benefit from a big number of regular volunteers who assist the full-time employees. Monitoring the quality of management and the quality of services can be used to assess the NPOs (not-for-profit organizations).

The second question's answers are in line with previous research (Gummesson 2002, 2008; Dees *et al.* 2001; Pilotti 2019; Pilotti and Riva 2019; Mella 1997, 2012, 2014, 2018, 2021; Ciasullo and Troisi 2013; Ciasullo 2017; Ruzevicius *et al.* 2004; Schenkel 2004; Tarimoradi *et al.* 2014; Tsekouras *et al.* 2002; De Matteis and Preite 2016; Preite 2011a; Wang and Feng 2012; Gazzola et Mella 2003, 2006, 2017; Wayh *et al.* 2002).

Only a few cases will be examined in this study. Other cases of success and their impact in various contexts, as well as the relationship between strategy and sustainability, should be investigated in future research.

Further research can analyze the other not-for-profit organizations. To summarize, MSF and OSF's philosophy is founded on a strong relationship and value system that aims to improve stakeholder satisfaction (integrity, accountability, respect, trust).

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