

Identifying and Ranking Organizational Strategies for Overcoming Crisis in the Cement Industry Using the Balanced Scorecard Approach and AHP Method

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ABSTRACT:

The present study aims to "identify and rank organizational strategies for overcoming crises using the Balanced Scorecard approach and AHP method." This research is applied in nature, and it is descriptive-survey in terms of data collection. The statistical population of this research consists of experts and managers from five cement factories, selected through a non-probability sampling method. Accordingly, five questionnaires were distributed based on the sample size. For data analysis, Expert Choice software and Excel were used. The results indicate that the four strategies of Japanese companies, human resource management, cost leadership, reduction, partnership, divestiture, and bankruptcy, are prioritized from first to seventh, and they can aid in the resolution of the crisis in the cement industry.

Keywords: *Organizational Strategy, Crisis, Cement Industry, Balanced Scorecard, Analytic Hierarchy Process.*

INTRODUCTION:

A crisis represents a systemic disruption characterized by abrupt alterations in one or multiple variable system components. The manifestation's intensity correlates directly with crisis-amplifying or mitigating factors, existing management methodologies, and ultimately, containment strategies. Within organizational discourse, crisis signifies a contextually specific condition that substantially complicates decisive interventions during precise temporal intervals (Armstrong, 2019). Strategy is the overall path or method chosen by senior managers to guide the organization toward its main objectives; this choice plays a determining role in the organization's fate. It can also define the organization's essential objectives and the means to achieve them. A strategy determines the factors critical for success (Ansari et al., 2011). According to Schendel and Hofer (1979), strategy provides direct signals to the organization that enable it to meet its goals while responding to environmental opportunities and threats (Sharifi-Kloei, 1997). The strategy of an organization discusses its overall direction of movement. Importantly, whether the organization is small, produces only one type of product, or is a large multinational corporation carries weight. An organization's strategy includes decisions related to the flow of financial and other resources to production lines and business units and vice versa (Badakhshani, 2010).

The cement industry is considered one of the essential industries in the country. Currently, over 70 cement factories are operating with a total production capacity of approximately 88 million tons of cement. The largest cement factories in the country include Abyek Cement, Tehran Cement, and Sepahan Cement. Next to China, India, and the United States are the largest cement producers in the world, with Iran ranking eleventh. The total domestic consumption and exports of cement and clinker in 2017 amounted to only about 61 million tons. The gap between established production capacity and the available market volume has created a significant overcapacity in the cement industry, which is one of the primary reasons for the financial crisis faced by this industry in recent years. The development of the cement industry, according to the strategic program of the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade, occurred without consideration of the current economic realities of the country. Forecasts indicate that the production capacity of 93 million tons of cement will be achieved by 2021, further deepening the current crisis. Therefore, the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade needs to revisit the strategic program for the cement industry (Hosseini, 2006).

Currently, several significant problems and crises in the cement industry can be highlighted. The impact of the economic recession has diminished the private sector's willingness to invest in construction, and decreasing profit margins in investment have led to

reduced supply from the private construction sector (Bryson, 2019). The decline in government oil revenues, due to heightened oil sanctions, has reduced government capital expenditure allocations. This has subsequently led to decreased government construction spending and demand for cement (Rezai Ghahraman, 2011). Statistics regarding Iran's export share in the cement market of neighboring countries indicate that, although Iran has managed to access these markets and secure a negligible share, particularly in countries like Afghanistan and Syria, even with favorable political relations, Iran's export share in these areas remains minimal due to the misalignment between political and commercial relations (Mohammad Sirous, 1997). The presence of intermediaries in the supply and demand cycle of the country's cement market, coupled with significant overcapacity and financial difficulties faced by producers, has created conditions that allow intermediaries to purchase cement in bulk at very low prices, to the extent that the selling prices of some cement companies are up to 50 percent below agreed. The country's cement industry is facing various structural challenges due to the policy missteps of the Ministry of Industry, Mines, and Trade. Among the most significant challenges are overproduction capacity resulting from the indiscriminate issuance of permits for constructing cement plants beyond the country's needs, lack of economic justification for exports, and a government-mandated pricing system for this product. These two factors have created uncertainties regarding the industry's development perspective. Therefore, the objective of the present study is to identify and rank organizational strategies for overcoming crises in the cement industry using the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS:

Crises in the Iranian Cement Industry:

Unfortunately, the economic recession in the country has severely impacted the cement industry, and there is little hope for a change in this situation. The cement industry is capital-intensive, requiring significant investment in its machinery. If these machines do not operate efficiently, the cement factory will undoubtedly face losses (Zanganeh, 1995). All industries are directly dependent on the economic dimensions and performance of the country, and statistics indicate that in recent years, the industry's growth has been much faster than economic growth. Nowadays, the country faces a significant increase in the production of many consumer and capital goods, paired with a lack of demand. The cement industry has also experienced a dramatic decline in domestic demand due to the recession in the construction sector. Currently, the size of the country's markets is similar to that of the years 2002 and 2003, whereas the existing supply is twice that of those years.

The cement industry in the country is currently operating at approximately half of its nominal

capacity, primarily due to the ongoing stagnation in the construction sector (Zandieh, 1996). In the 1990s, contrary to forecasts, we experienced an economic downturn accompanied by severe international sanctions, which heavily impacted the housing and construction industries, leading to a marked decline in these sectors. Presently, less than 20 percent of the infrastructure budget is allocated to projects, and the number of issued permits has plummeted to below 20 percent compared to the early 1990s, representing a significant setback for the once-thriving cement industry (Ang, 2000). Today, cement manufacturers find themselves struggling for survival rather than pursuing profitability, often lacking the financial resources necessary for modernization. The cement industry plays a vital role as a catalyst for various sectors, including transportation and construction, with cement accounting for 26 percent of total freight transportation in Iran (Boyne, 2004).

Organizational Strategies for Overcoming Crisis:

Based on the literature review, the following strategies are proposed for overcoming the crisis in the cement industry:

1. **Partnership Strategy:** In this approach, newly established companies can benefit from numerous advantages. These advantages include private ownership, strong relationships among owners, and advantages stemming from public companies, such as the right to issue new stocks as a source of funding. Sometimes, a private partnership can make unique use of the company's privileges; that is, they have private ownership while also being publicly owned, leading to synergy between the two organizations. The partners may utilize local management in foreign countries, thus mitigating the risks associated with sending inexperienced managers internationally, while also protecting themselves from the potential hostility or animosity of local employees. Furthermore, this situation can manifest at the national level, where organizations with various subsidiaries in different provinces can benefit from a partnership strategy with other similar companies in that region and local managers. This approach creates an optimal scenario when the competencies and outstanding characteristics of two competing firms can merge. However, these characteristics must complement each other rather than merely be similar (Chang, 2007).

2. **Reduction Strategy:** This strategy comes into play when an organization possesses a distinct characteristic but has not seen success. In situations where an organization is in a particularly vulnerable competitive position, where inefficiency, low profitability, low employee morale, and pressure from shareholders for improved performance lead to organizational paralysis, it may be advisable to implement a reduction strategy. If an organization faces resource shortages due to external factors or internal issues, and strategic managers have been unable to resolve these challenges over several years, a reduction in operational scale

may be warranted. Additionally, alternative solutions may include replacing current senior managers with more qualified individuals and exploring other exit strategies when organizational growth has driven it to the brink of reduction (Lilien, 2010).

3. Divestiture Strategy: This strategy is applicable when an organization has employed a reduction strategy but has been unable to achieve its corrective objectives. It becomes necessary when one section of the company requires significant resources, or when a division is deemed responsible for the overall poor performance of the company. Should one part of the organization become misaligned with the rest, creating a disjointed entity, this may arise due to competing markets, customers, managers, employees, values, or mutual needs. If a company urgently needs a substantial amount of cash and cannot quickly secure it from other sources, divesting certain sections becomes a necessity (Zineldin, 2005).

4. Bankruptcy Strategy: This strategy is relevant when an organization simultaneously employs both reduction and divestiture strategies. When the only remaining option for a company is to declare bankruptcy, liquidation, in an orderly and planned manner, can generate significant cash from selling off company assets. The company may legally declare bankruptcy and subsequently sell off portions of the business to secure the necessary capital. This course of action occurs when shareholders believe that selling off assets will minimize their losses to the greatest extent possible (Fapuhunda, 2012).

5. Cost Leadership Strategy: Minimizing costs in areas such as research and development, services, personnel, sales employees, advertising, etc., enables a pioneering company to price their products lower while still achieving desirable profits. Furthermore, the company can attain profitability even amidst intense competition. A strong market share implies that the company has greater bargaining power with its suppliers (raw material vendors, etc.) since it can purchase in large quantities (Hambrick, 1983).

6. Human Resource Management Strategy: The human resource management strategy aims to establish maximum coordination and alignment between employees and the organization. This strategy addresses whether the company or business unit should hire a large number of low-skilled employees who receive minimal wages, perform repetitive tasks, and often leave work shortly after starting (similar to the strategy employed by fast-food restaurants like McDonald's), or whether it should select skilled employees who demand higher salaries, have undergone extensive training, and can contribute effectively to their workgroups.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The present study employs a descriptive-analytical approach and is applied in nature, utilizing a survey method for data collection. The statistical population for this study consists of experts and managers from five cement factories, selected through a non-

probability sampling method. Accordingly, five questionnaires were distributed in line with the sample size. The primary data for the study were collected through field methods, utilizing both questionnaires and interviews.

Exploratory interviews were conducted with the managers of the cement factories. During these interviews, the following questions were posed to assess the strategies implemented by the factories to navigate crises in recent years. The responses were subsequently compared with the existing literature, and experts helped identify strategies for overcoming the crisis. The interview questions are as follows:

Question 1: What impact has the current crisis in the cement industry had on your factory?

Question 2: What actions and strategies have you implemented to overcome the crisis?

The general conclusion from the interviews revealed that, during times of crisis, customers' purchasing power diminishes, leading to a decrease in demand and an increase in inventory, resulting in sales challenges for companies. Interviewed managers stated that in such situations, they employ strategies such as reducing costs, enhancing product quality, differentiating products, and entering new markets. Additionally, securing loans, creating working capital, and receiving government support play crucial roles in the survival of the companies in these circumstances.

This study utilizes a single type of questionnaire, which, after its design and feedback from the experts, underwent several stages and final adjustments before the final versions were distributed. The first section of the questionnaire contains questions relating to the importance of the four dimensions of the Balanced Scorecard in overcoming the crisis in the cement industry, as well as the importance of their sub-dimensions. This section included pairwise comparisons to determine the priority level of the four dimensions and their sub-dimensions concerning each other. The second section of the questionnaire aims to prioritize the proposed strategies according to the indicators for overcoming the crisis in the cement industry. The experts and professionals from the factories were asked to rate each strategy.

Since the expert questionnaire is based on pairwise comparisons of all elements, the likelihood of any variable being overlooked is negligible. Thus, because all criteria are considered in this assessment, and the designer cannot impose a specific bias during the questionnaire design, the pairwise comparison questionnaires possess inherent validity.

As the questionnaire compares and assesses all criteria pairwise, the maximum possible questions are posed to the respondents in an optimal structure. Since all criteria are taken into account in this assessment and the designer cannot impose a specific direction in the design of the questions, there is no need for reliability testing.

To weigh the four dimensions of the crisis in the cement industry and their sub-dimensions, as well as to

conduct a comparative evaluation among strategies, the Expert Choice software was utilized.

Research Findings:

The questionnaires for this research were distributed among five managers from cement factories, and all managers responded to the provided questionnaires. The characteristics of these respondents are presented in Table 1.

Tab. 1: Demographic information of the interviewees

	Gender	Education	Field of activity	Duration of employment (years)
1	Male	Master's degree	Mechanical manager	20
2	Male	Bachelor's degree	Sales manager	19
3	Male	Bachelor's degree	Production manager	28
4	Male	Bachelor's degree	Production manager	15
5	Male	Master's degree	CEO	22

In the first step, the main criteria were identified using the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach, which includes the financial aspect, the customer aspect, the internal processes aspect, and the learning and growth aspect. For each of these criteria, sub-criteria were defined, resulting in a total of ten sub-criteria. The criteria and research sub-criteria are detailed in Table 2.

Tab. 2: Relevant main indicators and sub-criteria

Sign	Main criteria	Sub-criteria	Sign
C1	Financial aspect	Competitive price	S11
		Profit-making increase	S12
C2	Customer aspect	Product quality	S21
		Transportation	S22
C3	Internal operations aspect	Operation management	S31
		Creative processes	S32
		Social-legal processes	S33
C4	Growth and learning aspect	Organizational capital	S41
		Human capital	S42
		Information capital	S43

In this study, the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) technique was employed to determine the weights of the criteria and indicators of the model. The overall pattern of criteria and sub-criteria was illustrated using AHP in Fig. 1.

The inconsistency ratio of the comparisons made based on the financial, customer, internal processes, and growth and learning criteria was found to be 0.00. In all these instances, the inconsistency ratio was less than 0.1, allowing for confidence in the results. Now that the consistency of the comparisons has been confirmed, the priority vector for each of the pairwise comparison matrices will be calculated. The geometric mean technique was used to aggregate the views and to calculate the final weights of the criteria. The pairwise comparison matrix resulting from the aggregation of expert opinions is presented in Table 3.

Tab. 3: Summary of experts' views.

	c1-c2	c1-c3	c1-c4	c2-c3	c2-c4	c3-c4	
Expert No.1	1.33	1.00	1.60	0.75	1.20	1.60	
Expert No.2	1.80	1.13	2.25	0.63	1.25	2.00	
Expert No.3	1.60	1.00	2.67	0.63	1.67	2.67	
Expert No.4	1.40	0.88	2.33	0.63	1.67	2.67	
Expert No.5	1.33	0.89	2.00	0.67	1.50	2.25	
Geometric mean	1.48	0.97	2.13	0.69	1.44	2.20	1

Tab. 4: Prioritization of the main criteria

	c1	c2	c3	c4	Geometric mean	Eigenvector
C1	1	1.483	0.974	2.139	1.326	0.316
C2	0.674	1	0.657	1.443	0.894	0.213
C3	1.027	1.523	1	2.197	1.362	0.324
C4	0.467	0.693	0.455	1	0.620	0.148
						4.201

According to the derived priority vector, the internal processes criteria hold the highest normalized weight of 0.324. The financial criterion, with a normalized weight of 0.316, ranks second, while the customer criterion, with a normalized weight of 0.213, ranks third. The knowledge, growth, and learning dimension, with a normalized weight of 0.148, is ranked fourth.

Priorities with respect to:
best strategy



Fig.1: Prioritization of the main criteria

The inconsistency ratio of the comparisons made was found to be 0.00, which is less than 0.1, thus providing confidence in the conducted comparisons.

Comparison and Prioritization of Sub-Criteria:

Tab. 5: Prioritization of the financial sub-criteria

Financial	S11	S12	Geometric mean	Eigenvector
S11	1.00 0	0.86 0	0.927	0.462
S12	1.16 3	1.00 0	1.078	0.538
			2.006	1.000

Based on the derived priority vector, increasing profitability, with a weight of 0.538, holds greater priority than competitive pricing. Since a comparison has been made, there is no need to calculate the inconsistency ratio (Tab. 5).

Tab. 6: Prioritization of the customer sub-criteria

Customer	S21	S22	Geometric mean	Eigenvector
S21	1	1.23 2	1.110	0.552
S22	0.81 2	1	0.901	0.448
			2.011	1

According to the derived priority vector, product quality, with a normalized weight of 0.552, has a higher priority than transportation. Again, since a comparison has been made, there is no need to calculate the inconsistency ratio (Tab. 6).

Tab. 7: Prioritization of the internal processes sub-criteria

Internal processes	S31	S32	S33	Geometric mean	Eigenvector
S31	1	2.2 03	1.3 59	1.441	0.457
S32	0.4 54	1	0.6 17	0.654	0.207
S33	0.7 36	1.6 21	1	1.061	0.336
				3.156	1.000

The Pairwise Comparisons of Options based on Sub-criteria:

The present study aims to select the best strategy for overcoming the crisis in the cement industry. To this end, seven strategies have been identified, labeled as ST. These seven strategies have been subjected to pairwise comparisons based on each of the sub-criteria. The final prioritization of strategies was determined using the Expert Choice software (Fig. 2).

Synthesis: Summary

Synthesis with respect to:
best strategy
Overall inconsistency = .00



Fig. 2: Final prioritization of strategies with the AHP technique, Expert Choice output

Consequently, the prioritized strategies are as follows:

- 1) The four strategies of Japanese companies
- 2) Human resource management strategy
- 3) Cost leadership strategy
- 4) Reduction strategy
- 5) Partnership strategy
- 6) Divestiture strategy
- 7) Bankruptcy strategy

The obtained weights for each of the main criteria and each of the strategies, using these criteria and weights, are displayed in the conceptual model of the research in Fig. 3.

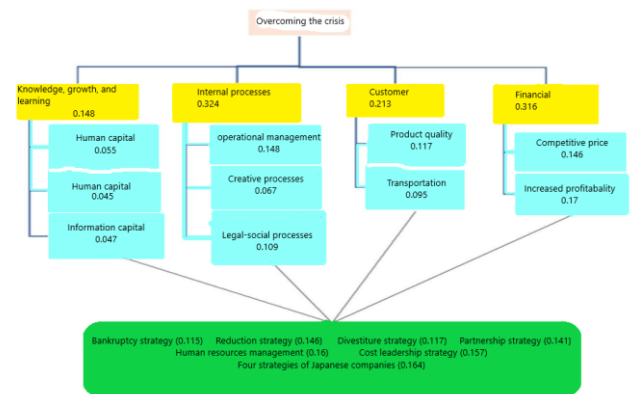


Fig. 3: Research model alongside the weights

CONCLUSION:

The primary objective of this research was to identify and rank organizational strategies for overcoming crises in the cement industry using the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) approach and the Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) method. According to the BSC framework, the effective criteria for navigating the crisis in the cement industry are financial aspects, customer aspects, internal process aspects, and learning and growth aspects. Following exploratory interviews with experts, the sub-criteria were determined. The importance of each of the effective criteria in selecting suitable strategies for overcoming the crisis in the cement industry was established, with the following normalized weights: the internal process dimension (0.324), the financial dimension (0.316), the customer dimension (0.213), and the growth and learning dimension (0.148).

The best strategy for exiting the crisis in the cement industry, based on these criteria and their respective importance, is portrayed in Fig. 3. The four strategies

of Japanese companies, with a normalized weight of 0.164, are deemed the most significant, while the bankruptcy strategy, with a weight of 0.115, is viewed as the least favorable option.

The body of studies reviewed indicates that researchers such as Lynch (2003), Kotler (2004), Chen (1992), Miller et al. (1990), Percy (1970), Percy et al. (1993), Zelany (1982), and Kaplan (1996) have predominantly focused on identifying and analyzing organizational strategies in times of recession and economic crisis. However, the present study specifically identifies effective criteria for overcoming crises in the cement industry and prioritizes organizational strategies based on these criteria using the AHP method.

In comparison to the aforementioned studies, this research addresses the limitations of previous investigations by considering effective criteria for overcoming crises and providing a comprehensive model for factories to select optimal strategies during crises. While past research primarily focused on reviewing strategies in conditions of economic downturn, this study not only identifies strategies for recession scenarios but also prioritizes them. The AHP technique applied here is capable of simultaneously considering both quantitative and qualitative criteria, thus reflecting more accurate results despite the interrelationships between the criteria. Additionally, this study utilized fuzzy AHP, which leverages fuzzy concepts to express verbal evaluations in natural language, allowing experts to provide more nuanced and precise analyses on the research topic. This research has identified effective criteria for overcoming crises in the cement industry and provided a model for evaluating and selecting strategies, thereby enhancing its comprehensiveness. Companies seeking to adopt criteria for selecting strategies in crises can benefit from the model proposed in this study.

The identified strategies for overcoming crises in the cement industry include: The four strategies of Japanese companies, Human resource management strategy, Cost leadership strategy, Reduction strategy, Partnership strategy, Divestiture strategy, and Bankruptcy strategy. Furthermore, the effective criteria for mitigating crises in the cement industry are ranked as follows: internal processes, financial processes, customer processes, and learning and growth processes.

It is important to exercise caution when generalizing the findings of this study to other organizations and institutions, as the study population consisted of experts from cement factories. Additionally, the limited number of the research population and the relatively small sample size also require cautious interpretation of these results.

Managers are advised that, to successfully navigate crises, they should initially focus on enhancing quality and reducing costs to gain the necessary commercial credibility. Subsequently, they should identify new market opportunities to increase sales. Furthermore, collaborating with suppliers of spare parts and banks

may enable them to reduce product prices while maintaining quality and offering flexible payment options.

Given that the human resource management strategy was ranked second, it is recommended that factories implement strategies to reduce the number of employees and wages, thereby decreasing labor costs. Furthermore, they can utilize contractual workers for overall and annual repairs. Since the cost leadership strategy ranked third, it is suggested that factories focus on minimizing costs in areas such as research and development, services, and advertising to improve financial status and profitability. The reduction strategy, ranked fourth, is aimed at generating liquidity during times of significant cash shortages. Therefore, it is recommended that struggling companies offload any underutilized assets while simultaneously improving operational efficiency and asset deployment.

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