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Strategic Communication and Barriers to Strategy Implementation

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Abstract— **This research work's core objective is to categorise and understand the barriers to strategic implementation, focusing, then, through an inquiry, in the most voted of them, to make a deeper analysis on one of the variables. To that end, this document begins with a literature review and begins to identify the importance that strategic communication has in the process of propagating a given individual idea or, in the terms that interests us most, within of an organization - whether ascending or descending, horizontal or vertical. In the organizational arena, business and communication are two inseparable issues.**

Then it is explained more deeply in what barriers to strategic implementation consists, in its variances of application and how it is immersed in the multiple possibilities that can cause the collapse of the plans orchestrated by the companies. In the end, as a theoretical complement, a questionnaire was designed for a relatively large number of people who were confronted with the topics under discussion throughout this article.

Keywords—Strategic Communication; Strategy Implementation;

I. Introduction

In a global, complex and dynamic environment, strategic implementation has fundamental importance for one company to gain competitive advantage over others and to be the leader of its industry platoon. Today, in times of worldwide competition, the critical success factors for an organization are challenged on a daily basis, which implies an adaptability and a constant need for change in the projects outlined. It is this bustling environment that forces companies to transform their strategies [1], through continuous innovation and adaptation [2].

It is interesting to look at the evolution, not only of this vector, but of all that make up Strategic Management, from the end of the Second World War to the technological days of today. Formulation, Implementation and Evaluation and Control are at the heart of what are interdependent processes with a very clear objective: to enable corporations to achieve the challenges proposed.

Strategic Communication appears as a bastion of one of the several ways to prepare a company for an ultra-competitive reality to accomplish its mission and objectives and where any detail can make a difference. The corporate world was not indifferent to the overwhelming changes that have occurred in the way we communicate over the last years - not only inside but also outside organizations. As communication has become more multidimensional and energetic, this vector could be appropriate to the successful implementation of a strategy implementation. However, companies face multiple fences to applicate their own planes, and communication, that could be one the keys to have a massive impact on the execution of new projects, can also be a huge barrier to it.

This leads us to the ultimate question: what is the role of strategic communication and what are the barriers to strategic implementation? And, most important, which one of the fences is sensed as the most harmful to the strategic implementation? The purpose of this paper is to develop a deeper understanding on these two subjects and to make an analysis on the role of the most voted barrier.

These are the questions that I humbly aim to reply. It is not my goal to be a moral guardian of this subject, but I believe this document is enough to try to make the reader have a deep thought about the theme and maybe dive into this topic in the future.

II. Literature Review

A. Strategic Communcation

The success or failure of a company is explained by its Strategic Management [3]. It is fascinating to look at the evolution of the concept and his methodology because it is a reflection on how fast the world can become different but also a fanciful excuse to some managerial failures. Since the 1950's, the constant shift led to a new search of concept and methods towards successful management [4], even the impact of managerial impatience and the lack of time to implement a complete strategy, especially in uncertain times, cannot be diminished [5]. With Environmental Scanning as a touchstone, Formulation, Implementation and Evaluation are the epicentre of the highly interdependent processes of Strategic Management that can allow the corporation to achieve their goals [6]. These three stages are essential to generate and develop new opportunities for the upcoming times [6]. However, having in consideration the very last steps of Strategic Management, from the literature review process, it is important to divide the analysis in two parts: the first one is focused more in Strategic Communication; and the second one, which is more profound, in the barriers to Strategy Implementation. Therefore, and before we dive into the strategic communication itself, it is imperative to look for the four main organizational challenges, designated by Daft [7], to continue our guideline:

- transformation to knowledge and information as the most important form of capital of the organization;
- increasing expectation of workers for significant work and opportunities for personal and professional growth;
- perspectives from the past normally do not provide a map to guide current organizations;

- managers who can and should design and conduct new responses to a radically new world;

Communication is a process of transmission and, in this matter, we can find two communicative dimensions. Tactical communication is the facts that happened and has an informative and basic function, which is a determining factor that is processed from the heart of the organizations; strategic communication, in which we will dwell, for its part, is the generator of (new) realities, creating contexts and has the function of co-ordinating the future of the enterprise [8].

Strategic Communication in its most pure framing is understood as the intentional use of communication by an organization to achieve its mission and goals. From administrative roles to personnel management or mere product and business promotions, their most distinctive functions can be broad and diversified and their main purpose is that communication is aligned with the goals of a company, group of artists or an individual person.

B. Barriers to Strategy Implementation

Strategic implementation, in today's complex world, has become one of the foundations of business strategies. In its broadest sense, is the process of ensuring that any strategy of a company is aggregated, assimilated and encompassed throughout the organization [9]. If formulating an idea is considered only the launch of all process [10] but a fundamental step, its implementation is at the same level – in the end, the two stages are two sides of the same coin [11]. An implementation that is not successful is equally a fundamental failure for the ones who formulated the whole development. This makes logic when the percentage of non-implemented elaborated strategies rounds 50% [12][13]

As an example, [14] shares an error that many companies, in the eagerness to reach a certain goal too quickly, commit to creating, within the organizational chart, new internal divisions, often well different from one another, to spread the risk of failure across various areas, which tends to create huge financial demands.

Development and implementation, when a new strategy is being prepared, should be both the target of a very special and precise attention [15]. Strategic failures are often justified by project application problems and companies have experienced some difficulties in implementing some of their plans [16]. Heracleous (2003)[17] emphasizes how costly can a failure be in the implementation of a determined strategy for a company, not just on fees but also regarding benefits that have been accumulated. In the end, we must have the capacity to consider that the ability of managers to implement an idea, a project or a strategy, in general, can be very well decisive for the future of an organization [18].

The importance of strategic decisions [15], as well as their implementation and effectiveness within a firm, must be at the top of managers' thought priorities [19]. Several companies spend 90% of their time on the formulation and only 10% in the application phase, instead of betting on a balanced and more efficient distribution around 50% for each side [20]. In a cooler analysis, perhaps this is why it should be considered normal that, as many researchers say, not only is there a lack of academic work on strategic implementation, but, as a result, there is also a surprising lack of knowledge about the topic [21][22][23]. Most of the literature on

strategic decisions focus purely on their development rather than concerns about project's implementation [24][25][26]

There are some factors likely to disrupt the implementation of a strategy, vectors such as culture, structure, people, communication, control and results of the organization [12]. An emphasized structure that identified culture, government, society, compliance with international norms and stiff competition as factors that affect the execution of a strategy [27]. Poor communication, unrealistic synergy expectations, structural problems, missing master plan, lack of top management commitment or unclear strategic fit. In the end, the option was to follow another author. – even if none of these ones, though, mentioned the change management, which tends to be critical in companies [11].

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main guideline of the research questions was:

H1 -What is the role of strategic communication and what are the barriers to strategic implementation?

H2 -Which one of the barriers is sensed as the most harmful to the strategic implementation?

The general objective of this study was to understand and to make a wide analysis on what are the barriers to strategy implementation, making a bridge with the whole strategic management process and as well as the role of the strategic communication.

In fact, there are several fences to implementing a strategy in a company. The realities among firms do not, of course, allow the analyses on this question to be standardized. Ideally, at this stage, the organizational logistics of this process should be fluid, but as mentioned in this document, on average, only 50% of enterprise projects reach this level.

For organizations, the challenge is tremendous because the activities related to implementation are more time-consuming than the formulation, involve more people, assume a complexity of deeper tasks and it needs continuous monitoring by the managers or board of director who lead this process. With such a high number of processes that are not implemented and with a completely unbalanced task division between the formulation phase and the implementation phase - authors speak of data ranging from 90% to the first and only 10% to the second - it cannot be considered strange that not only are there glaring shortcomings in the modus operandi of this methodology but, in connection with the academy's studies, there are so few dissertations on how to overcome the barriers.

Many authors, as it is stated in this document, identified and analysed different fences to implementation strategy. In this article, we opted for a slightly diverse approach, since, before deepening the problem of implementation, we approached themes such as strategic management process - where in addition to the phase under study, there is, before, the formulation, and then the evaluation and control - and strategic communication, where, through a poem by Allen Ginsberg, a journey began on the importance of this phenomenon and how the information and messages to be shared can reach the intended recipients.

A. Okumus' Framework

After a reflexion on strategic communication and its impact using Ginsberg's Howl as unusual basis, in order to analyse the barriers to strategic implementation, despite the fact that it has been worked in several ways by different authors, this study chose to be based on the framework presented [28]. In his paper 'Towards a Strategy Implementation Framework ', the professor at the University of Central Florida presents, prominently, key implementation variables that have been presented and identified, albeit not in the same way, by other authors regarding organizational variables [29], on strategic fit [30][31] that relapsed on the unsuccessful interaction between organizational components. There are four variables as being fundamental to a successful implementation [32]. After critical revisions to different frameworks have been made and have pointed out ten key variables mentioned by Okumus (2001)[28] such as Strategy Formulation; Environmental Uncertainty; Organizational Culture; Organizational Structure; Operational Planning; Communication; Resource Allocation; People; Control and Feedback and Outcome.

With the strategy implemented as originally planned, we get the outcome of the whole process. Results lead organizations to define and use indicators to gauge the quality of the services they produce and the results achieved [33]. Nutt (1998) [25] notes that positive or negative implementation practices have their final test at this point in the Organizational Framework. However, it is important to reflect that this may not be the ideal stage for an analysis of this type since it is more logical to make an assessment during the process and not after the strategic implementation [33]. With the use of the Organizational Minefield Framework as an anchor, implementation barriers were recognized. Barriers are the multiple factors that contribute to a strategic implementation process being blocked or prevented from continuing to evolve. These elements are an obstacle to development, making it much more difficult to achieve the objectives proposed by the organization. This constraint may be caused by sources internal or external to a company and justify the type of strategy, type of organization or other prevailing circumstances that can be avoided if the formulation and implementation process have the same focus attention [34]. Strategic implementation, which is essentially an internal administration activity, is a delicate and sensitive process. This relationship has as fuel the creation of a strong connection between the defined strategy, fruit of the organization, motivation and the process of creation of the workers, and the way the organization operates [35].

To validate the two hypotheses, mentioned previously, an Online Survey has been conducted [36]. This survey, developed with Google forms, was sent to a diversified sample (around 100 random companies selected from private internal sources from ISCTE in January of 2018), which lead to a large replied number with a snowball sampling and cross-sectional analysis. The advantage the possibility of random responses exists to solve more delicate problems [37]. However, it is important to note that this type of mechanism may have a problem in terms of reaching high biased standards if one wishes. It should be noted that, however, this article does not use the randomization capability that online surveys can have.

These two authors sustain peremptorily that there are two types of models in online surveys: quota sampling, which ensures the representativeness of the sample, and snowball sampling, which allows effective growth with no associated cost. Adding to this, the two types of research can be added: transversal, used to gather information about a specific population type, at a single point in time, and longitudinal, focused on gathering data during a given time period [38].

IV. FINDINGS

The purpose of this survey (replied by 91 persons), after a first part of the document dedicated to the concept and all the processes and steps of strategic management and the influence of strategic communication.

Q1 – How old are you?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Under 21	5.56%	5
21-30	51.11%	46
31-40	20.00%	18
41-50	11.11%	10
51-60	5.56%	5
>60	6.67%	6
TOTAL		90

Fig. 1. Question 1

Q2 – Where do you work?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Portugal	73.26%	63
Abroad	26.74%	23
TOTAL		86

Fig. 2. Question 2

Q3- What is your organization's background?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Architecture	2.20%	2
Automotive	2.20%	2
Consulting	26.37%	24
Electronics/Technology	4.40%	4
Engineering	26.37%	24
Retail	3.30%	3
Media	4.40%	4
Pharmaceuticals	4.40%	4
Telecommunications	3.30%	3
Financial Services	9.89%	9
Banking	9.89%	9
Other (please specify)	3.30%	3
TOTAL		91

Fig. 3. Question 3

Q4- What is the size of your company?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Micro/Nano (less than 10 people)	18.89%	17
Small/Medium (between less than 50 and 250 people)	45.56%	41
Big (over 250 people)	35.56%	32
TOTAL		90

Fig. 4. Question 4

Q5- How long have you worked at your organization?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Less than 6 months	9.89%	9
6 months to 1 year	9.89%	9
1 to 2 years	29.67%	27
3 to 5 years	37.36%	34
More than 5 years	13.19%	12
TOTAL		91

Fig. 5. Question 5

Q6- What is your job level?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Administrative	12.09%	11
Technician	23.08%	21
Intermediate Manager	43.96%	40
Top Manager	20.88%	19
TOTAL		91

Fig. 6. Question 6

Q7- If you had to choose between these options, how would you consider the communication style in your company?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Mechanical (hierarchical, bureaucratic, with prominence on rules)	59.34%	54
Organic (flexible organization with focus on people)	38.46%	35
None of the above	2.20%	2
TOTAL		91

Fig. 7. Question 7

Q8- Do you consider that your company has a good flow of communication between the highest level of management and the rest of employees?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	38.46%	35
No	61.54%	56
TOTAL		91

Fig. 8. Question 8

Q9- Do you consider that your company has difficulties in its strategic implementation?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	19.78%	18
No	20.88%	19
Sometimes	59.34%	54
TOTAL		91

Fig. 9. Question 9

Q10- Do you consider that your company has difficulties in its strategic implementation?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Strategy Formulation (the process of developing a strategy to achieve its defined goals)	2.20%	2
Organizational Structure (system used to define a hierarchy within an organization)	13.19%	12
Organizational Culture (values and behaviors of an organization)	3.30%	3
Communication (lack of communication between departments)	39.56%	36
Resource Allocation (lack of resources to implement a project)	20.88%	19
Control and Feedback (monitor and giving his thoughts about the work of the employees)	6.59%	6
People (Recruitment, Training and Incentives)	4.40%	4
Environmental Uncertainty (relationship between organization and its environment)	1.10%	1
Outcome (expected results of the initiated strategy)	3.30%	3
Operational Planning (process that predetermines the day to day activities of a business)	5.49%	5
Other (please specify)	0.00%	0
TOTAL		91

Fig. 10. Question 10

V. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE CONTRIBUTIONS

The communication link between employers and employees is still, in most cases, in the eyes of today, a little archaic. Communication is seen as a mere process of brainstorming, instead of fostering an information flow, capable of creating knowledge, stimulating dialogue, and helping to build a more dynamic and complete organizational reality. As communication is one of the first and foremost human linkages, it is no wonder that there are several studies that show that people with a high level of engagement and performance invariably have good relationships and more positive interactions with their managers and colleagues.

The results of this survey follow the focus of some studies on the relationship of companies with their employees and other stakeholders and the issue of communication as the main focus. The problem, of course, is deeper in large companies, whose dynamics, because of their size, making them much less flexible, so the flow of information is less or too long, given the distance that separates, in the real pyramid, the managers of most officials. In this way, since there is a clear and assumed but little-solved deficiency in the relationship between communication and organizations, it is understandable why this variable was the most voted as a barrier to strategic implementation. It should be noted that, for example, a better idea transmission can be the motto for something as important and common as defining the groups of works appropriate for the application of a given project. The key to communication is to align the values and principles outlined in your internal policy with the approaches to implementing the formulated plans.

Naturally, during this work, some difficulties and limitations arose during the process of the study that I proposed. First, despite the popularity of the subject in the academia and business community, there are not many works of literature about this topic.

Secondly, it is curious how the overwhelming majority of the few works on strategic implementation focus on their identification, but they do not deepen many of them. Here, in this conclusion, we tried to contribute a little more to the discussion of communication as an impediment to the realization of a project.

In this work, we have opted for the Organizational Framework originally made by Okumus, since it's the most balanced. Regarding the contribution for the area and for a future research, I believe that anyone who delves into the subject can, in the first instance, take another barrier and deepen their analysis, or, if they have the time to do so, make a very complete work and come to solutions to all communication barriers. For that, in my opinion, and although my survey has a respectable number of responses, I think I should proceed with a larger and more comprehensive questionnaire to have a more extensive study.

Finally, I think it could be very interesting to extend this discussion about barriers to other domains of strategic management because even if the fences are diverse and, apparently, less impacting, it would be a good complement to the topic discussed in this work.

All in all, there are several proven barriers to strategic implementation, with communication being more identified by people as the one that causes the most trouble to this process within a company.

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