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The role of internal communication in addressing employees' emotions in
strategy implementation

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ABSTRACT

A strategy is an integral part of any organization. Without a working strategy, there is no possibility for a company to grow. The employees of an organization are at the core of the business. They are the people who eventually implement and execute the chosen strategy. Therefore, any relevant information about the changes is beneficial for the employees. Implementing strategy in businesses is vital, but in many cases, the implementation fails. The reasons for failure can be almost anything, however, the most common reasons are communication, employees, management, and culture.

In this case study, the purpose is to gain an in-depth understanding of internal communication in a multinational corporation during the strategy implementation process. The guiding theories in this research are strategically aligned behavior, signaling theory, and introductory framework of strategy implementation effectiveness by Tawse and Tabesh. This study explores individuals' perceptions of various information and how emotions are associated in the context of strategy implementation and change.

This study was done as a case study, with the support of secondary data. Qualitative data has been chosen to analyze why people behave in a certain way, and in total 6 participants were chosen to be interviewed. This study is abductive research, meaning that the findings are drawn from both theoretical and empirical phenomena.

Based on the study findings, employees actively seek information about changes through various channels during the time of change. The results of this research align with existing theory, highlighting a crucial discovery: employees prioritize being informed about different changes during the strategy implementation process, and require support on how to handle change. Internal communication plays a vital role in managing emotions during the change, because without relevant information, employees tend to show resistance to change. However, the insights from this research highlight the necessity for information to be directly relevant to employees' daily tasks. Especially, employees seek clarity about their roles and responsibilities during changes and also emphasize the importance of knowing who is involved and what actions are required.

KEYWORDS: Strategy, Strategy implementation, emotions, internal communication, OIT, Signaling theory

VAASAN YLIOPISTO**Johtamisen akateeminen yksikkö**

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Tiivistelmä:

Strategia on olennainen osa jokaista organisaatiota. Ilman toimivaa strategiaa yrityksellä ei ole mahdollisuutta kasvaa. Organisaation työntekijät ovat liiketoiminnan ytimessä. He ovat niitä, jotka lopulta toimeenpanevat valitun strategian. Siksi on tärkeää, että muutoksista viestitään työntekijöille oikein. Strategian toteuttaminen yrityksissä on elintärkeää, mutta monissa tapauksissa toteutus epäonnistuu. Epäonnistumisen yleisimpiä syitä ovat viestintä, työntekijät, johtaminen ja kulttuuri.

Tässä tapaustutkimuksessa tavoitteena on saada syvälinen ymmärrys siitä, kuinka sisäinen viestintä voi auttaa tunteiden käsittelemisessä strategian jalkauttamisen aikana monikansallisessa yrityksessä. Tätä tutkimusta ohjaavat strategisesti kohdistetun käyttäytymisen teoria sekä signaalointiteoria. Lisäksi Tawsen ja Tabeshin strategian toteuttamisen tehokkuuden johdantokohdasta hyödynnetään antamaan tärkeitä suuntaviivoja tälle tutkimukselle. Tämä tutkimus keskittyy yksilöiden käsitykseen yrityksen sisäisestä viestinnästä ja tunteiden yhdistämisestä strategian toteuttamiseen muutoksen yhteydessä.

Tämä tutkimus tehtiin tapaustutkimuksena toissijaisen datan tuella. Tutkimukseen valittiin laadullinen tapaustutkimus, koska sen avulla voidaan selvittää miksi ihmiset käyttäytyvät tietyllä tavalla. Tutkimuksen tulokset saatiin selville haastatteleamalla yhteensä kuutta osallistujaa. Tämä tutkimus on abduktiivinen tutkimus, mikä tarkoittaa, että havainnot perustuvat sekä teoreettisiin että empiirisiin ilmiöihin.

Tutkimuksen tulokset viittaavat siihen, että työntekijät hakevat aktiivisesti tietoa eri kanavista muutoksen aikana. Tämän tutkimuksen tulokset ovat linjassa jo olemassa olevan teorian kanssa, mikä korostaa ratkaisevaa löydöstä: työntekijät haluavat saada relevanttia tietoa muutoksista strategian toteutusprosessin aikana ja tarvitsevat tukea muutoksen käsittelyyn. Sisäisellä viestinnällä on keskeinen rooli tunteiden hallinnassa muutoksen aikana, sillä epätietoisuus ja epärelevantti tieto lisää vastarintaa muutoksessa. Tämän tutkimuksen johtopäätökset viittaavat siihen, että tiedon, jonka työntekijä saa, on oltava olennaisesti linkitettyinä päivittäisiin työtehtäviin. Työntekijät hakevat erityisesti selkeyttä rooleihin ja vastuualueisiin muutosten aikana. Vastaukset korostavat, että työntekijät haluavat tietää kuka osallistuu strategian jalkauttamiseen ja mitä toimenpiteitä vaaditaan, jotta strategian toimeenpano onnistuu.

AVAINSANAT: Strategia, strategian implementointi, viestintä, tunteet

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1 Introduction

Change is constant. From the perspective of an organizational development, a change can be defined as Weick & Quinn (1999, p. 363) referred to Porras and Robertson (1992) “a set of behavioral science-based theories, values, strategies, and techniques that aimed at the planned change of the organizational work setting for the purpose of enhancing individual development and improving organizational performance, through the alteration of organizational members on-the-job behaviors.” Change has always been treated as exceptional rather than natural (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p.1). However, why are some changes success stories and others fail? How do we skilfully manage and implement strategic change? In order to create a successful organization, it is important to ensure a working strategy and vision.

To put strategy into work, it needs careful implementation process. Strategy implementation can be defined as “turning strategy into action” (Thompson et al, 2013; Hill & Jones, 2013). Many managers know very well how to formulate a strategy, but they lack the know-how of how to implement it (Hrebiniak, 2006; de Oliveira, Carneiro & Esteves, 2019). This is because successful formulation does not automatically mean successful implementation (Ochanda, 2005, p. 1). When a company starts to “implement”, it reflects the way of how organization wishes to be. Therefore, if the implementation requires a shift from the organization's current state to where organization wants to be, it requires change. It requires changing something and implementing new ways of doing. As Weick & Quinn (1999, p. 381) stated, change starts with failures to adapt.

In strategy implementation, the process of communicating, interpreting, and enacting strategic plans are the most challenging tasks for managers (Šilenskytė, Kohtamäki & Dhanaraj, 2022, p. 277; Weiser, Jarzabkowski & Laamanen, 2020, p. 984). Further, the strategy implementation process itself is a difficult task for many, but even harder it becomes when organization is implementing a strategic shift or a strategic change. It takes a lot of resources, planning and commitment to act under the change in comparison to the implementation of a strategy that has been present in the organization for some

time. Therefore, it is crucial to understand that strategy implementation is even more difficult under change than in a normal setting.

Strategy implementation under change is particularly difficult because of emotions. According to Huy (2011, p.1388) emotions have an impact on one's behavior and therefore will influence one's performance in organizational settings. Employees do have a big impact on strategy and its implementation process because they are the ones putting the strategy into action in their daily work. In addition, radical changes like strategy change, change negotiations or mergers and acquisitions raise collective emotions among employees (Huy, 2012, p.240). Emotions are visible in our everyday life and people react differently to different actions. How do we handle emotions during the implementation of radical change?

It is already difficult to achieve strategically aligned actions of employees within the company (Van Riel, Berens, & Dijkstra, 2009, p. 1197) however, under the strategy changes, achieving such alignment is likely to be very difficult, especially under the effects of emotions. Internal communication can help with handling employees' emotions during strategy change (Huy, 2011, p. 242). Internal communication can be defined as Vercic et al. (2012, p. 225) stated "all forms of communication within the organization".

This research will focus on the effects of Internal communication on handling employee emotions during the time of strategy implementation under change. Previous research show that there is not that much previous research about this topic which makes this research even more important.

This research is done as a case study with a case company. This company (called **Company X**) renewed its strategy at the beginning of the year 2022, then later, renewed again in August 2023. As a part of strategy implementation process, Company X started change negotiations in November 2023. To bear this in mind, the role of internal communication and emotions are at the core of this research.

1.1 Background of the Study

The importance of strategy is in the core of any business. However, the rising number of strategy implementations fails and effective tools for strategy implementation are unknown (Scott, Cavana, & Cameron, 2015, p. 1023). According to Šilenskytė & Smale (2021, p. 515) strategy implementation (SI) has been theorized about from different perspectives. Based on the taxonomy of SI in the MNC context (Šilenskytė & Smale, 2021, p. 515) different perspectives of theorizing suggest various factors that influence strategy implementation. For example, communication, organizational structure, organizational members, and systems and practices has an impact.

O-level theories suggests that the SI process can be accomplished with well-established structures, systems, and organizational processes (Šilenskytė & Smale, 2021, p. 515). On the other hand, the I-level suggest that behaviours and consensus are the most crucial parts of the strategy implementation process. Whereas A-level theories state that the strategy implementation process emerges from the interplay of the management systems and people interpretations (Šilenskytė & Smale, 2021, p. 515). Different individuals in an organization are affected by both macro-level and/or individual-level factors. In addition, macro-level factors are for example communication about strategy whereas individual-level factors are age, gender, or nationality (Šilenskytė, 2020, p. 71). According to Šilenskytė (2020, p. 72) A-level theorization is thought to be the best way to understand and explain different management related problems in organizations. The two latter perspectives acknowledge that employee interpretations and emotions are very important part of the strategy implementation process.

Previous studies show that internal communication plays a role during strategy implementation (Chaimankong & Prasertsakul, 2019, p. 104). However, Vercic et al. (2012, p. 223) found that the biggest issue within the field of internal communication is the lack of independence as a separate field. Internal communication is seen as a part of communication but not as a domain itself. This study focuses on internal communication during strategy implementation.

Besides, this research tries to identify how employees feel about internal communication and what kind of information is accurate when it comes to changes in an organization. Previous research (Miettinen, L., 2021; Huy, Q., 2011) shed light to the research of emotions and strategy implementation. However, Miettinen (2021) focuses on her study on the negative emotions during the strategy implementation process, whereas Huy (2011) focuses on top management and how they approach strategy implementation and how group-focus emotions arise. Another study by Ylisirniö (2023) investigates the emotional intelligence within strategy implementation. However, the author focuses on the top management perspective. Therefore, the research gap in the literature remains and is important to be addressed. There is no previous research of how internal communication can help with employees' emotions during the time of change. And especially, there is no study that is done from a manager perspective.

1.2 Delimitations of the Study

In this section, the delimitations of the study are outlined to clarify the scope of the research. This study primarily focuses on internal communication during strategy implementation and does not encompass change management. The decision to exclude change management is made to maintain a specific focus on the role of communication and emotions during strategy implementation.

The decision to concentrate only to internal communications and emotions within multinational companies during strategy implementation is informed by the need for a focused and manageable research scope. This selection is done by the desire to gain a comprehensive understanding of the communication dynamics in this specific context, rather than a broader exploration of other issues.

In summary, the intent is to provide a specific, in-depth analysis of internal communication in the strategy implementation process and how emotions are linked to these.

1.3 Structure of the Study

This study is divided into six main chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to this study. The chapter will open the background, tell the limitations and the importance of this research is presented. Chapter 2 will present research questions and objectives will follow. This study is divided into one main research question and three sub-questions that are aligned with the main research question. Chapter 3 further explains the literature review. The literature review is divided into three main sections. The first section is a deep dive into the world of strategy. The second part concentrates the emotions and how emotions are aligned to the change. The last part is an overview of internal communication and its dimensions. Chapter 4 introduces the methodology and justifies the choices. Also, the case of this study is presented. Chapter 5 represents the findings whereas chapter 6 will focus on the conclusion. At the end of this study, I (the author) will give suggestions for future research. After the main sections, the appendices and references are listed.



Figure 1. Structure of the study

2 Research Question and Objectives

The aim of this study is to understand how internal communication can help in terms of handling employee emotions during strategy implementation. Every change is different and different tools and ways to communicate are important. A new strategy requires new ways of thinking, new ideas and new processes in the organization. No organization can implement a strategy without everyone participating. In strategy implementation many aspects play an important role, however, internal communication has a crucial role in the success of implementation.

The main research question is: *How internal communication can help handle employee emotions to support strategy implementation at the time of change?*

In order to answer the research question extensively, the research question is supported and addressed by the following sub-objectives:

- 1) to clarify the role of communication in a multinational company in strategy implementation.
- 2) to understand how people perceive different messages in various forms in MNC.
- 3) to identify how employees feel about internal communication in the context of strategy implementation.
- 4) To explore the role of internal communication when handling employee emotions when implementing strategic change.

Besides the main research question and three sub-objectives, this research aims to give objective view to the role of internal communication in organizations.

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of internal communication in a multinational corporation. Besides, this research investigates how people perceive different information and how they feel about it particularly in the context of strategy implementation.

3 Literature review

This literature review will guide the reader through different aspects of strategy, strategy implementation, emotions during a change and lastly, communication. Later two theories are presented and linked to the research question. Organizational information theory and signaling theory are the main drivers. Later in this chapter, all information and theories are wrapped together as a concluding framework.

Before jumping into the chapter, it is vital to understand that strategy implementation in MNC context is an under-researched area (Šilenskytė, 2020, p. 22). Many articles and research introduced strategy implementation but lack the MNC context. Therefore, different points of strategy implementation are presented below.

3.1 Strategy

Strategy is defined as a set of coordinated actions that are designed to lead to competitive advantage (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2005, p. 4). As Henry Mintzberg (1987) stated, a strategy is needed because it sets the direction of an organization. Without a strategy, an organization cannot be successful. However, without a strategy, an organization is just a set of individuals doing their own work rather than working toward a common goal (Mintzberg, 1987).

The main point in strategy formulation is that the selected strategy will differentiate the organization from its competitors (Mintzberg, 1987). The vision, strategy, and purpose are the reasons why an organization exists. In order to gain a competitive advantage with a strategy, solid execution is vital. Munive-Hernandez et al. (2004) described strategy through four different stages. Stage one is a phase where the organization sets strategic goals and objectives. The second stage is the strategy formulation, the third stage is for strategy implementation and finally, stage four is for strategy evaluation (Munive-Hernandez et al., 2004). Many previous studies indicate that the strategy implementation

itself is more important than the strategy because without sufficient implementation, it will result in losses in the organization (Chaimankong & Prasertsakul, 2019, p. 104).

The role of strategy varies between organizations. Some organizations might hide their strategy from their employees and some organizations make their strategy very visible to others. When the visibility of a strategy is unclear, it might affect to the commitment and interest of employees. It is easier to be interested in the strategy if one knows it and knows how to benefit from that in daily work (Chaimankong & Prasertsakul, 2019).

In some point, a new strategy requires a lot of resources. Besides, it requires new ways of doing things, new processes, and new ideas. If the upcoming changes are not communicated effectively to the employees, it might raise resistance to the change (Chirwa and Boikanyo, 2022). For an organization to implement strategy successfully, the strategy needs to be communicated throughout the organization, to all employees. Lack of communication and poor communication are the most critical barriers to strategy implementation (Chirwa and Boikanyo, 2022).

3.2 Strategy Formation and Implementation

Strategy formation and implementation are both important processes. In order to succeed in both, it requires a lot of research, patience, and knowledge. There is no point in a new strategy if the implementation fails. Implementation phase is a big obstacle for many organizations. In addition, strategy formation and implementation are difficult to apply in MNC context because many studies have very different view on strategy (Šilen-skytė, 2020, p. 22).

According to Mantere (2008), strategy formation unfolds through a multitude of participants and actors. The process involves crafting and executing a strategy, encompassing both operational and executive aspects. When the strategy formulation is done well, the strategy implementation is easier. However, strategy implementation can be defined in several ways. The most convenient way to describe it is “the nature of putting strategy

into action.” (Thompson et al, 2013; Hill & Jones, 2013). Or as Noble (1999, p.120) stated, a strategy implementation is “the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of strategic plans”. In this research, both definitions are in use because in my opinion, together they wrap up the meaning of strategy implementation.

Strategy implementation process starts with strategy formulation and ends when the organization accepts it and starts applying it in practice (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985, p. 257). In addition, a strategy implementation can be defined via three different core elements: conceptualizing strategy, enacting strategy, and coordinating strategic action (Weiser, Jarzabkowski, Laamanen, 2020, p. 973). Weiser et al (2020, p. 973-974) continued that conceptualizing strategy involves all the activities used to re-evaluate an organization’s strategic direction, including the strategy formation and strategy implementation. Enacting strategy, on the other hand, is described as the patterns and actions that are made in order to be in line with people’s actions (Weiser et al, 2020, p. 974). Lastly, coordinating strategy is defined as actions that are made for common goals and tasks to achieve collective action among people (Weiser et al, 2020, p. 974).

According to Šilenskytė & Smale (2021, p. 515) the representative factors that influence strategy implementation are mainly communication, organizational structure, organizational members, strategic plans, and systems and practices. Many other studies similarly indicate that the key issues in strategy implementation are leadership, communication, organizational culture and staff, and organizational structure just to mention a few (Chaimankong & Prasertsakul, 2019, p. 107; Noble, 1999; Alexander, 1985; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000). Therefore, communication is recognized as a very important factor for strategy implementation in multiple studies.

Tawse and Tabesh (2020) came up with an introductory framework of strategy implementation effectiveness. The framework is built with three different dimensions 1. managerial actions, 2. conditions and 3. dynamic managerial capabilities. The first dimension “*managerial actions*” refers to the actions that support strategy implementation. On the

other hand, managerial actions are also referred as “a tool “that involves different activities such as various forms of communication (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 6). The importance of communication lies on the assumption that the communication is not only top down, but also bottom up and across the whole organization. Managerial actions can be divided into two: structural managerial actions and interpersonal managerial actions (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 6). Structural managerial actions are factors such as policies, systems, communication, and control that influence the strategy implementation process. However, interpersonal managerial actions are factors that are more personal and more supportive (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 5). These can be for example formal and informal interactions that has an impact on feelings and actions. The most important interpersonal managerial action is communication; however, communication is also the biggest barrier to strategy implementation and one of the key actors to influence of the effectiveness of strategy implementation (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 5).

According to Tawse and Tabesh (2020, p.5) when an organization use top-down communication to communicate about its strategy and goals, it will improve the understanding of strategy among employees. This will have positive impact on the implementation process. Together, managerial, and interpersonal managerial actions can promote the effective communication between functions within organization (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p.5). When an organization has an open and safe environment to the employees, it can positively affect the effectiveness of strategy implementation (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 5). Therefore, open internal communication can be seen as a glue between the organization and its employees. When the goals are understood similarly between all employees, it is easy to improve the effectiveness of strategy implementation.

The “*conditions*” refers to the effectiveness of strategy implementation (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 5). Under the factors related to strategy implementation effectiveness, three conditions emerged: *competence*, *commitment*, and *coordination* (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 5). Competence refers to the knowledge, skills, and ability to execute a task that is related to strategy. Moreover, commitment refers to the commitment to

one's tasks to support strategic goals (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 6). Coordination, on the other hand, refers to motivational factors and productivity of tasks, however, coordination focuses on making sure that the actions are in sync.

Dynamic managerial capabilities refer to the firm's ability to "reconfigure" the competencies internally (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 7). However, according to Tawse and Tabesh (2020, p.7) dynamic managerial capabilities "helps to explain the relationship between the quality of managerial decisions, strategic change, and organizational performance".

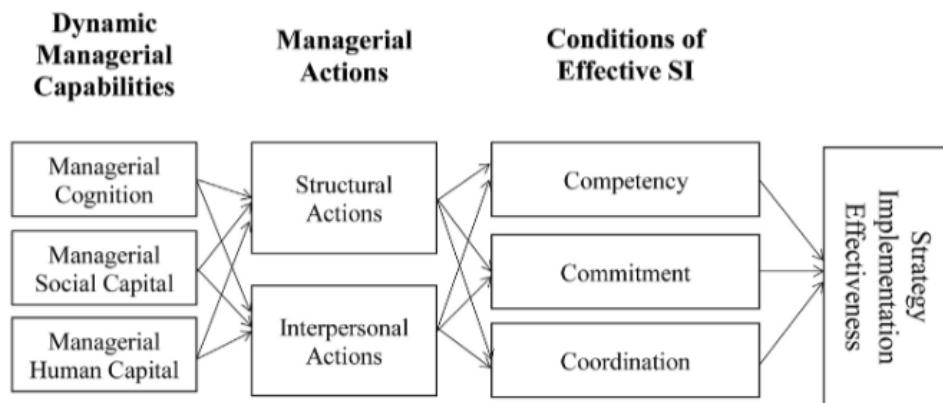


Figure 2: introductory framework of strategy implementation effectiveness (Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 5).

Figure 2 represents the relationship between the three dimensions and the actors that influence those. These results are in-line with Noble's (1999) research. As stated, strategy formation and implementation play a crucial role in the organization's success. However, there are many factors influencing to the effectiveness of strategy implementation. When implementing a new strategy, there will always be challenges and barriers to overcome. In terms of success, the strategy implementation is critical. Without a goal and plan, no organization can implement a strategy. Chaimankong and Prasertsakul (2019, p. 104) stated that strategic management affects the overall performance of a firm and sets the direction for its future.



Figure 3. Key issues in strategy implementation (Chaimankong & Prasertsakul, 2019, p. 107; Noble, 1999).

According to Chaimankong and Prasertsakul (2019) the key issues in strategy implementation are leadership, communication, organizational culture, staff, and organizational structure. Furthermore, a study conducted by Anyango (2007, p. 44) indicate that the key issues in strategy implementation especially in MNC context are inadequate communication of the strategy to employees, time, and organizational structure. These results are in-line with each other within the field of SI in the MNC context.

Besides, the factors mentioned above, one issue in strategy implementation is the lack of follow-up and support (Chaimankong & Prasertsakul, 2019, p. 109). Further, management is responsible for the follow-up. Therefore, leadership has a crucial influence on the success of implementation (Ochanda, 2005, p. 15). It is safe to say that managing change well is one of the key players to success. Besides, employees have big impact on strategy, because they are one of the biggest factors that might show resistance to change. Resistance to change is most often visible when the employees are not introduced well enough to the new strategy. When the probability of not understanding the new strategy is high, the higher the possibility of resistance is.

As stated, communication is one of the *key* challenges in strategy implementation. The reason is that communication is complex. Communication is everything that happens between two parties; therefore, it is important to understand that it can be verbal or non-verbal (Chirwa and Boikanyo, 2022, p. 3).

In conclusion, strategy implementation is not an easy task. It requires a lot of resources and commitment to implement. However, implementation in change is even more difficult because it brings negative emotions among employees.

3.3 Emotions during strategy implementation process

Emotions are important part of strategy implementation process because studies have shown that emotions can influence the quality of thinking and therefore has straight impact on one's behavior (Huy, 2011, p. 1388). When behavior is affected by different factors, it will influence one's performance in organizational settings. Previous experimental studies show that collective behavior is stronger in group-focus settings (Huy, 2011, p. 1389; Huy, 2012, p.242) than individual emotions. According to Huy (2011, p. 1390) individuals who identify with their group strongly, are more likely to experience emotions according to others in the same group. Group-focus emotions are connected to social identity (Huy, 2012, p.242). Social identity refers to "the socially shared understanding of what it means to be a group member, and this typically includes stereotypes of in- and out-groups in relation to each other as well as appreciations of the relative status of those groups" (Huy, 2012, p. 1390). However, individuals see themselves as a part of a group and each of these memberships to different groups are driven by social identity (i.e., using the same language will increase the feeling of belongingness). In addition, social identity can be linked to a group setting (Huy, 2012, p. 1390). Group social identity is often shaped by two underlying psychological processes: self-categorization and self-enhancement. Huy (2011, p. 242) stated that self-categorization minimizes in-group differences whereas it maximizes intergroup differences. On the other hand, self-enhancement refers to basic needs that people must achieve and maintain in order to have a positive sense of self (Huy, 2011, p. 242). When an individual value social identity, it can elicit positive emotions and vice versa.

Many radical changes in organizational settings like strategy change, change negotiations, mergers and acquisitions raise different emotions among large groups of people (Huy,

2012, p. 240). These events are likely to raise similar, collective emotions within the group. Collective emotions refer to an experience where all group members experience the same emotions (Huy, 2012, p.242). However, people perceive emotions differently and some experience emotions stronger than others. According to Kanitz et al, (2022, p. 684) excessive changes in an organization can influence employee's receptiveness. Radical changes and strategic events are unlikely to affect everyone in the organization in the same way. In a case where not everyone is influenced in the same way, the variety of collective emotions might be diverse (Huy, 2012, p.243). It is natural that collective emotions can emerge due to different reasons.

Collective emotions can be divided into four different causes; first, similar interpretations, experiences or organizational culture can shape the emotions that arise (Huy, 2012, p. 244). Second, a social identity. The employees who strongly link themselves to the organization are likely to experience the emotions similarly as others in the same situation. Third, organizational culture shapes the emotions of employees and contributes to the emotions experienced. Fourth, emotional contagion has a huge role. People tend to reflect others' feelings and emotions and then act as the emotions received (Huy, 2012, p. 245).

3.3.1 Strategically Aligned Behavior (SAB)

Strategically aligned behavior (SAB) is defined as an employee action that is aligned with the company's strategy (Van Riel, Berens, & Dijkstra, 2009, p. 1197). SAB is especially visible when a company goes through a strategy implementation process and different managerial efforts are needed. Van Riel et al. (2009, p. 1198) divided SAB into two managerial categories: interpersonal behavior and initiating specific projects. However, this research is looking at SAB from a different angle, from non-management employees' point of view. There, SAB can be seen in two different employee behaviors that are divided into 1. task performance or in-role behavior and 2. contextual performance or organizational citizenship behavior (Van Riel et al., 2009, p. 1198). Van Riel et al. (2009, p.1198) referred LePine et al. (2002) and stated that task performance refers to

“activities that either supported or directly contributed to the transformation of the organization’s inputs or outputs, while contextual performance refers to activities that supported the social and psychological context in which the organization’s technical core was embedded”. The main point in SAB is one’s realization of the strategy.

The key indicator between behavior and performance in a work setting is motivation. Motivation, on the other hand, is linked to the tasks assigned to the employee (Van Riel et al., 2009, p. 1200). Managers can promote motivation with communication. Previous studies indicate that communication climate influences employee motivation. Communication climate can be defined via three dimensions; openness and trust in communication, perceived participation in decision making, and supportiveness (Van Riel et al., 2009, p.1202). Smidts et al. (2001) stated that if communication is somehow stimulating to the receiver, it will increase employee identification with the organization. Van Riel et al. (2009, p. 1202) continued that this feeling occurs because “openness, participation, and supportiveness” increase the feeling of belongingness, and give a sense of feeling that the management recognizes the members of the organization. When the belongingness to the organization is higher, it will increase the employee efforts towards the implementation process of a strategy (Van Riel et al., 2009, p. 1202). On the negative side, when the employees are not connected to the organization, it will most likely decrease employee motivation and commitment.

As mentioned, emotions play a huge role in terms of employee motivation and commitment to the organization. People tend to act as others around when difficult times come. Internal communication could be one of the solutions to help people with their emotions in the strategy implementation during the change. This is why this literature review is going to introduce different aspects of internal communication.

3.4 Internal Communication

As mentioned, one of the key challenges in strategy implementation is communication and more precisely *internal communication*. Communication and implementation share

a lot of similar characteristics. Implementation means communicating the strategy where communication is the key factor between the leaders and employees. Communication is a process with three actors: sender, channel, and receiver (Connelly et al., 2011). The role of internal communication is vital, and it is not only up to the communication department to share information, but rather the whole organization. Open communication and dialogue are key players for understanding a strategy.

Internal communication plays a crucial role in a company's strategy and vision. In addition, effective communication is one important factor in organizational success (Ruck & Welch, 2012, p. 294). Every organization is different, and it is up to the decision-makers which channels to use for internal communication. When selecting the channels, it is essential to recognize that the channel affects the credibility of a message. Therefore, it is important to choose the channel according to the message. Chirwa and Boikanyo (2022, p.3) stated that it is important to ensure that the information in organizations is communicated in three different ways: horizontally, upwards, and downwards. To ensure effective communication, it requires management-level communication, however, also bottom-up communication (Chirwa and Boikanyo, 2022, p. 3; Tawse and Tabesh, 2020, p. 6). Furthermore, effective internal communication within an organization builds strong connections between employees which leads to better teamwork across the organization.

Research done by Peng and Littlejohn (2001) emphasizes that effective communication is one of the key elements for effective strategy implementation. Besides, Alexander (1985) points out that the word "*communication*" is mentioned more often than any other word when talking about successful strategy implementation. There are several factors affecting the effectiveness of communication. For example, speed, credibility, flexibility, and also, the channel has a role in the effectiveness of communication (Chirwa and Boikanyo, 2022, p.3). In addition, the formality of the message and whether it is external or internal has an effect. Kalla (2006, p. 24) stated that effective internal communication is simply linked to better knowledge sharing. This is connected to

competitive advantage, which is one of the main elements of strategy. As stated before, the main point in strategy implementation is to gain a competitive advantage against others in the same field. Since the field of business is complex and competitive, there is a need for internal communication (Kalla, 2006, p. 25).

According to Kalla (2006, p. 27) internal communication has different domains in it. It can be divided into business communication, management communication, corporate communication, and organizational communication. All these four domains have a different meaning to different target groups (Kalla, 2006, p. 28).

3.4.1 Formal and Informal Communication

Communication can be divided into formal and informal communication. Formal communication covers all information shared e.g., on the company's intranet, in a weekly newsletter, and in emails from the top management. Informal communication, on the other hand, includes everything else. Informal communication is a casual way of communicating e.g., aisle conversations or Teams messages. Besides, informal communication includes everything from facial expressions to nonverbal communication. Nonetheless, according to Gomez & Dailey (2017, p.1) formal communication is defined as "goal-oriented, explicitly stated, function-related communication that flows through the hierarchy, follows prescribed norms, and transcends time and space."

If MNC have chosen to use a certain language as a corporate language, it might lead to less communication and less knowledge sharing (Lonsmann, 2017, p. 102). However, coherent use of language is important in organizations. The lack of language skills by employees leads to exclusion from different activities inside the organization, but also, decreases informal communication across the organization (Lonsmann, 2017, p. 104). Different forms of communication aim to different outcomes. Piekkari, Welch and Welch (1999, p. 421) highlighted the importance of horizontal communication as a control and coordinate mechanism in MNCs. In order to control and coordinate, communication flows are essential (Piekkari et al., 1999, p. 425). Flows are essential because they help

to coordinate rapidly and flexibly changing conditions. However, it is not an easy task because the amount of information flow is huge, the channels are extensive and informal and formal communication channels are involved. The MNC context in information is complex, thus, it forgets the key element of the communication process: language (Piekkari et al., 1999, p. 425). In many MNC organizations the corporate language is English. In a Finnish context, this means that many employees use their second language at their workplaces.

Piekkari et al. (1999) raised an interesting point about language. They divided language into three perspectives 1. as a barrier, 2. as a facilitator, and 3. as a source of power. Research about cross-cultural communication identified a negative effect of limited language skills and referred the barrier as such: "...perhaps no other element of international business is so often noted as a barrier to effective communication across cultures than differences in language." However, we can state that in fact, the language is one of the barriers to effective communication. In addition, language barriers are one of the main reasons why employees lack building relationships with each other in a social setting.

When taking into consideration the communication flows between employees, the required language skills can be a powerful facilitator for some (Piekkari et al., 1999, p. 430). This is especially for employees who use personal relationships as a communication channel (Piekkari et al., 1999, p. 430). On the other hand, language can be seen as a source of power. This is visible especially in a context when one holds a unique language skills and benefits from that. Communication affects patterns and information flows across an organization. However, it also influences the management's ability to control employees' activities in MNCs (Piekkari et al., 1999, p. 433).

3.5 Strategic Internal Communication

Strategic internal communication is primarily concerned with the relationship between the organization and its employees (Hume & Leonard, 2014, p. 3). Two-way

communication is necessary to achieve common goals. However, strategic internal communication is built with various components. As Hume & Leonard (2014, p. 3) studied, first, internal communication should have a clear purpose for its stakeholders. Second, internal communication ensures that all stakeholders are incorporated into the strategy formulation and implementation. Third, all employees related to communications need to have a knowledge of the internal communication strategy in order to fulfil it. And lastly, the content of internal communication should be aligned with the organization's strategic intent (Hume & Leonard, 2014, p.3).

As Nwachukwu et al. (2018, p. 149) stated, a strategy formulation includes "the collection of data and continuous exchange of information". Besides "formulating effective strategy is the key to improving firm performance (Nwachukwu et al., 2018, p. 149). To conclude, it is a fact that effective strategy formulation requires the exchange of information, in other words, a strong internal communication.

3.6 Organizational Information Theory

An organization's communication can be seen through organizational information theory (OIT). OIT was first developed by Karl Weick, and the theory refers to "the process of collecting, using, and managing information" (Ali et al., 2015, p. 4). The approach is linked to the information management method; however, studies show that it refers better to organizational communication. OIT includes three dimensions; information environment, information equivocality, and communication flow (Ali et al., 2015, p. 4). Understanding the message is seen as important as the exchange of information (Ali et al., 2015, p.4). In other words, OIT theory addresses the connections between networks, groups, and individuals of an organization. In communication, the parties of the information play an important role.

3.6.1 Information environment

We, as human beings, must cope with different stimuli every day. Besides, we register the stimuli and either react to them or let them go. Karl Weick's organizational information theory suggests that the information environment "is a core concept to understand how organizations are formed and information processed" (Ali et al., 2015, p.5). The stimuli can be linked to the information environment.

3.6.2 Information equivocality

Information equivocality can be understood as different forms of received information (Ali et al., 2015, p. 5). All received information should be "decoded" and "examined". It is up to the receiver whether the information is comprehensible or not (Ali et al., p.5).

3.6.3 Communication flow

Organizational information theory suggests that the cycle of communication is built upon three steps; act, response, and adjustment (Ali et al., p. 5). The cycle of communication refers to a series of hierarchies, series, norms, patterns, and roles (Ali et al., p.5).

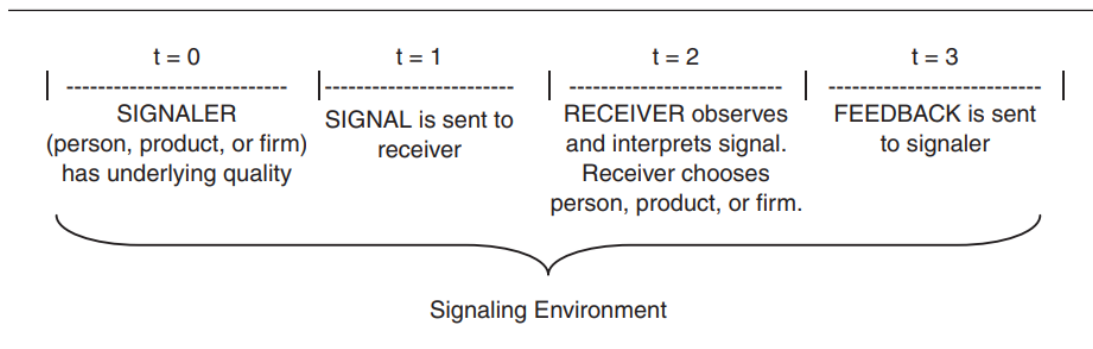
Organizational information theory has been selected because it focuses on how internal and external environments are understood in terms of communication. The way one perceives the message is important in internal communication. Nonetheless, according to Piekkari et al. (1999) the communication flow within MNC can serve as a facilitator for some. On the contrary, the use of language in MNCs is significantly influenced by the information environment and its flow.

3.7 Signaling Theory

It is in human nature to make decisions based on existing information. People react to stimuli and then choose whether to respond or not. This kind of situation can be

between two parties e.g., between individuals and organizations. Signaling theory is used when we want to examine and describe behaviors between two parties.

Signaling theory consists of two perspectives: information asymmetry and signaling theory (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel, 2011, p. 41). Information asymmetries arise when two parties have different information due to the fact that the other one is holding the information and the other would benefit from that particular information and potentially would make better decisions if they had access to the information (Connelly et al., 2011, p.42). Information asymmetry is especially high when there is 1. information about quality and 2. information about intent. In the initial scenario, the importance of information asymmetry arises when one lacks awareness of the attributes of another party. In the subsequent scenario, information asymmetry plays a role when one party is worried about the behavioral intentions of the other (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 42).



Note: t = time.

Figure 4. The main actors in signaling theory (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 44).

Figure 4. shows the main elements of a signaling theory. The main actors are the signaler and receiver, but also the signal itself plays an important role. From left to right, on the left there is the signaler who in most cases is the executive or manager (Connelly et al., 2011, p.44). Mainly the signaler has information regarding the organization or its employees that is not available to the public. This kind of information can be either positive or negative. In other words, the “secret” information that the signaler holds will give a huge advantage to the holder about the underlying quality of the individual or

organization. In addition, when the signaler has the intention to share information with outsiders, they need to decide how to do it. The focus of signaling theory is to be able to share information that is positive. By doing so, the organization itself can try to emphasize positive organizational attributes. However, information asymmetry is always there when one is communicating signals to outsiders. This might result in unintended consequences. In other words, to negative signals. Signals are grouped into two main characteristics. The first is *signal observability*, which refers to the ability to notice the signal (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 45). Secondly, *the signal cost* refers to the “theory of cost signaling” (Connelly et al., 2011, p.45).

The third factor is the receiver. Receivers are actors who are outsiders to the information and who would like to receive the information. For the signal to take place, the signaler should benefit from the receiver. However, the signaling should always have a strategic effort. If signaling is done repetitively to the receiver, it might increase the effectiveness of a signal especially if there are different signals used to inform the same message (Connelly et al., 2011, p.54). The last actor in the signaling theory is *feedback*. This is easily defined as the effectiveness of the signal, meaning that the receivers send feedback back to signalers (Connelly et al., 2011, p. 55). The assumption is that the information flows in both directions, from the receiver to the signaler and vice versa.

Signaling theory plays a key role in this research and its connection to internal communication since the main factor in this theory is to be able to share information that is positive. In addition, the theory is used for describing behaviors between parties. In strategy implementation, the biggest challenge is in fact internal communication which is based on the information shared. There is no previous research about signaling theory in MNC context. However, signaling theory can be applied to many different contexts e.g., in marketing, anthropology or economics (Connelly et al., 2011, p.63).

In conclusion, internal communication and especially how employees respond to it in strategy implementation during the time of change is an interesting research topic to investigate. This research is investigating that specific topic empirically.

3.8 Concluding Framework

The theoretical framework of this thesis consists of three main factors, which are strategy, emotions, and communication. Besides, the MNC context is visible in every factor.

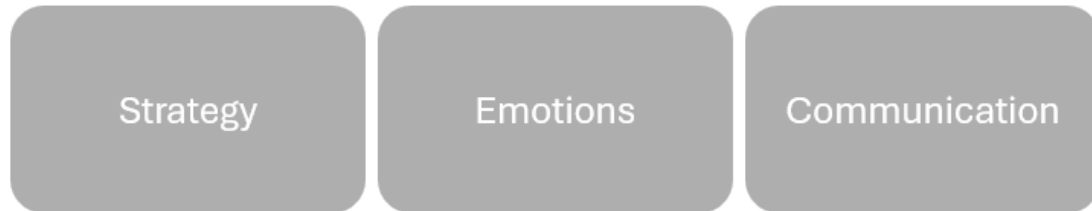


Figure 5. The main factors in this thesis

Strategy and its implementation

Strategy is the main driver in this thesis, meaning that strategy process is used as a guiding framework. The strategy process includes four stages. The first stage is the phase where organizational goals and objectives are set. Second, strategy is formulated and thirdly, the organization turns the strategy into action and starts to implement it. The last stage includes the evaluation and follow-up of the chosen strategy (Munive-Hernandez et al., 2004). Strategy can be defined as a “set of coordinated actions that are designed to lead to competitive advantage” (Hitt et al., 2005, p. 4). Based on the theoretical framework, both, strategy formation and implementation are important processes.

An organization requires a well-defined strategy for a couple of reasons. Firstly, it provides a clear direction and focus, ensuring that all members are aligned towards common goals and objectives. This focus aims in prioritizing tasks and resources, ensuring that efforts are concentrated on activities contributing to the overall vision and mission.

Moreover, a strategy is crucial for gaining a competitive advantage in the market. It helps in identifying the organization's unique strengths and capabilities, as well as potential opportunities and threats in the external environment. By leveraging these insights, the organization can position itself effectively against competitors and differentiate its offerings to attract customers.

In today's dynamic business environment, organizations face constant changes and uncertainties. A strategy provides a framework for anticipating and responding to these changes effectively. It enables the organization to be proactive, allowing for timely adjustments to market trends, technological advancements, and competitive pressures.

Furthermore, a clear strategy fosters alignment and coherence across different functions and levels within the organization. It ensures that everyone understands their roles and responsibilities in contributing to the overall strategic objectives. This alignment enhances coordination, collaboration, and synergy, leading to improved performance and outcomes.

In summary, a strategy is essential for providing direction, gaining competitive advantage, optimizing resource allocation, adapting to change, fostering organizational alignment, and enabling measurement and evaluation of performance. It serves as a roadmap for achieving long-term success and sustainability in a dynamic and competitive business environment.

Emotions

The second element in this research is the emotions. Big changes in personal life or in a working life can cause different kinds of emotions. It is said that emotions play a big part in everyone's life. Emotions do have a straight impact on behavior and when behavior is affected by different external or internal factors, it most likely effects on one's performance. However, people tend to act similarly in a group setting and when the employees act in an aligned way with the company's strategy, they show strong strategically aligned behavior (SAB). When the belongingness is high, people tend to show collective emotions. Emotions are presented in this research because internal communication can be one of the solutions to help people with their emotions.

Communication

Third and the last element is communication. Implementing a strategy effectively requires two-way communication. Internal communication should be seen as a key factor in the strategy implementation process and its success because it reflects the company's vision and direction. However, the channels for internal communication play a crucial role when receiving a message. The theoretical framework suggests that the information environment and the communication flow are the main drivers when understanding and receiving messages. Besides, signaling theory suggests different aspects of behaviors between parties. Since the biggest challenge in the SI process is internal communication, the information shared is crucial.

Since internal communication is understood differently in different settings, it is important to highlight. Internal communication can be seen as a process within an organization to help the management communicate about the changes. However, there is no clear theory in this logic. Piekkari et al., (1999) raised an interesting viewpoint about MNCs and their language. Language can be seen as a facilitator, a barrier or as a source of power (Piekkari et al., 1999). Therefore, the chosen company language plays an important part when receiving different messages.

4 Methodology

The purpose of this study is to give the reader an extensive package of information about internal communication in strategy implementation. In this chapter, the chosen methodology is introduced. First, research strategies and approaches are identified and introduced. That is followed by the data collection, the case, and the interviews. In the last part of this chapter, the author will talk about the ethics of this study and more precisely anonymity, confidentiality, validity, and reliability.

4.1 Research Paradigm

When conducting research, the most important question is “Why research?” (Holde & Lynch, 2004, p. 2). There are many reasons for research but most importantly the method is the guiding factor. In many cases, the researcher has chosen to do either qualitative or quantitative research or a combination of both. According to Kothari (2004, p. 2), the purpose of doing research is to find applicable answers through the “application of scientific procedures”. Each research has its own purpose and vision; however, the main aim is to investigate a dilemma and to find the actual truth behind it. To find something that has not yet been discovered. But what makes people undertake research? According to Kothari (2004, p. 2), the motivation behind every research is one’s personal reasons e.g., intentions to get a degree, face challenges, or desire to serve the community.

According to Collis & Hussey (2014), the research paradigm can be divided into two main divisions: positivism and interpretivism. In order to adapt to either one of the divisions, a researcher needs to make assumptions about social reality. That will set the base for the whole research framework. Positivism refers to reality that is “independent” of us and in most cases, this is verified by scientific testing and empirical findings. On the other hand, interpretivism refers to assumptions about social phenomena that is shaped by the author’s personal belief and perceptions (Collis & Hussey, 2014). To effectively serve this study, an interpretive approach will be adopted. The reasoning behind the chosen

research method is the fact that the purpose of this study is to understand behaviors, reasons, and ways of thinking.

4.2 Research Strategy and Approach

Research can be conducted in several ways. Pratt (2017, p. 856) suggested that qualitative research should be either an inductive, deductive, or abductive. The inductive approach refers to assumptions that are drawn from an existing theory, whereas the deductive approach is based on a pre-existing theory (Jahn, 2011, p. 751). On the other hand, abductive approach is based on existing theory, but also gives the author the possibility to discover something new (Hurley, Dietrich, and Rundle-Thiele, 2021 p. 68). In order to answer the research question, this thesis has adopted an exploratory research design and abductive approach. Erickson (2017, p. 14) stated that an exploratory research design is appropriate when the answers from the interviews are unpredictable or unexpected.

Kothari (2004, p. 3) stated that qualitative research is relevant when investigating human behaviors or motivations. Applying this research method allows the researcher to analyze why people behave in a certain way.

4.3 Data Collection

This research is done by using a case company. The data is collected via one-on-one interviews, a more precisely qualitative research method is applied. The primary source of data collection is, therefore, the interviews. Primary data means (Bachiochi and Weiner, 2004, p.176) data that someone has already gathered and collected for a certain research purpose. A case study is commonly used when a research question aims to answer questions like “how” and “why” (Yin, 2009, p. 16). In this research, a case study is relevant to answer the specific research question of “how” in a specific organization. In many cases, a mixed data collection method can be used, however, only qualitative

research method is applied in this research since qualitative research is about interpretations.

The purpose of this research is to find out if internal communication played a crucial role in company X during its strategy change in the middle of the year 2022. The intent is to analyse what kind of communication would have been needed during strategy change and did everyone perceived the communication in the same way.

4.3.1 The Case: Company X

This research is based on interviews that are done in a case company, as a case study. As stated by Yin (2009, p.15) “case studies are generalized to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes. In this sense, the case study, does not present a “sample” and in doing a case study, the goal of the research will be to expand and generalize theories.” The case selection process started with the idea of a thesis and topic, and then contacting the potential company. After receiving the green light for this research proposal, emails back and forth, according to the anonymity, GDPR, and publicity of a master’s thesis were sent.

The chosen company (called **Company X** in this research) operates in an education sector and is based in Finland. However, the company operates internationally and has office in the Asian Pacific area too. Company X experienced strategy change in the beginning of the year 2022. Back then, the management and especially the CEO changed. It was a time of change and renewal. The strategy 1.0 was introduced to the employees in a dialogue setting where the staff was gathered to hear the company-related news once a month. Company X is still using these once-a-month meetings to inform the staff about the latest news.

In the beginning of the year 2023 the Company X’s management started to re-think the current strategy. Furthermore, it is vital to note that the current field which the Company X is operating is under continuous changes without forgetting the situation in the

economy. There are other external factors that are affecting the field negatively too, e.g., the Russian war. Note that the Russians were one of the populations that brought in revenue to Company X. Just before the summer of 2023, the management introduced a completely new strategy to the employees. This strategy is called strategy 2.0. Because of the new strategy, there were changes in the leadership team, team formation, and job duties. Also, the company structure was renewed. The strategy 2.0 was implemented after the summer, in August 2023. As a part of a strategy implementation process, unfortunately, Company X started change negotiations in November 2023.

4.3.2 Sampling approach

According to Said Pace (2021, p.3), a sample is a subset of a population. There are two main sampling methods: probability sampling and non-probability sampling (Kothari, 2004, p.59-60). The type of research usually determines the sampling technique. Probability sampling is appropriate when the goal is to obtain a random sample, ensuring that each population member has an equal chance of selection (Kothari, 2004, p.60). On the other hand, nonprobability sampling is used when the objective is to select a non-random sample, particularly in qualitative research contexts. Acharya et al. (2013, p.330) characterize non-probability sampling as method where the probability of subject selection is unknown, potentially leading to selection bias in the study.

This study applied a "purposive/convenience approach," a commonly used method when selecting a sample based on the principle of "being in the right place at the right time" (Acharya et al., 2013, p.332). According to Tyrer & Heyman (2016, p.58), convenience sampling is also suitable when the primary mode of contacting individuals is through email, which was the chosen method for this study. The decision to use convenience sampling was driven by the criterion that the selected sample should encompass a long enough work career in the same company, allowing for diversity to a certain extent. In addition, all participants were connected to each other with a common project work. Besides, the participants were selected based on their work title. All participants interviewed hold "manager" title/role without team leader responsibilities. Additionally,

since the choice of interviewees was partly influenced by those responding “yes” to the interview invitation, “convenience sampling” (primarily “availability” and “opportunity”) can be considered integral to the approach (Vehovar, Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016, p.329). As stated, since the company operates in two countries, Finland and Singapore, the culture and interpretations might differ between participants.

The sample for this study comprised 6 employees from the same company, all were selected through a systematic process. In the company there are in total 125 employees. Out of the 6 employees contacted, everyone responded positively and were chosen to participate in the interviews. To make this process easy for the chosen participants, the interview guideline and interview questions were sent before the actual interview took place.

4.3.3 Interviews

The data is collected via semi-structured interviews. As Yin (2009, p. 89) stated “the most important source of case study information is the interviews.” The interviews are used as a primary data collection method in this research. Since this research is a case study, it is the most convenient to include interviews as a primary source of data collection because this research aims to understand human affairs and behaviours (Yin, 2014, p.113). In addition, interviews are classified as a part of a qualitative research method. Qualitative research aims to answer the question “how” rather than “why”. Furthermore, qualitative research focuses on understanding certain issues and meanings without numeric analysis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015, p.5).

Interviews can be done in many ways, however, this research used semi-structured thematic interviews, meaning that the interviews were guided by specific themes and questions. Additionally, the interviews were guided by open-ended questions where the respondents got the chance to lead the conversation with his/her answers. To carry the interview successfully to the end, it requires two specific tasks; listening carefully and to locate certain points that come up during the interview that I can easily return later (Galletta, Cross and William, 2013, p. 77).

The interviews were conducted in English because the corporate language is English. Since the case company is operating internationally, in Finland and Asian pacific area, it was interesting to know how employees perceived the communication before, during, and after the strategy change. Did the language play a role? What kind of role did the emotions play? The interviews were held both face to face and online, depending on the location of the participant.

All participants were firstly contacted face to face (or online). After receiving green light to the participation to the interviews, emails back and forth were sent. The author made sure that all participants joined the official interview session well prepared. First, the interview guideline and questions were sent before the interviews. This allowed the participants to prepare their answers, emotions, and reactions. Before the interview started, the author explained the main topic of the research, key aspects, and the purpose of the interview. The interviews took in total 265 minutes 31 seconds. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

Name	Position	Meeting	Duration (Min)
Participant #1	Manager	MS Teams	40 min 28 esc
Participant #2	Manager	Face to face	30 min 20 sec
Participant #3	Manager	MS Teams	41 min 27 sec
Participant #4	Manager	MS Teams	50 min 1 sec
Participant #5	Manager	Face to face	55 min 46 sec
Participant #6	Manager	Face to face	48 min

Table 1: Interviews

4.3.4 Interview Questions

While the research design has been selected, the choice of interview structure depends on the specific objectives of each study, whether it be structured, unstructured, or semi-structured (Harrell & Bradley, 2009, p. 26-27). In the context of this study, a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix 1) was developed, and the interviews were conducted. Prior to the interviews, participants were introduced to the interview questions in order to gain in-depth answers from the interview. To adhere to rules and regulations, a concept of GDPR was introduced to all interview participants. This ensured that each participant had understood fully their rights and the methods of data storage and collection.

The interviews aimed to gather comprehensive insights about strategy formation, implementation, emotions, and internal communication. The approach involved a semi-guided interview structure with foundational questions, allowing for exploration of new directions and angles. The interview guide included numerous open-ended questions designed to provide an in-depth understanding of the subject. The questions were organized from "small questions," to "big questions" exploring topics such as emotions and strategy formation. The complete list of questions can be found in Appendix 1.

4.4 Data Analysis

The research interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed by using content analysis. This research was analysed by using abductive method. Abductive reasoning establishes theory-related connections but is not directly grounded in existing theory.

However, this study was partially analysed by using Gioia method. In order to deliver a high-quality qualitative analysis, the Gioia (2012, p.18) method was applied to utilize the gathered data. The Gioia method is described as "a systematic approach to new concept development based on grounded theory articulation" (Gioia et al., 2012, p.15). The main factor in Gioia methodology is that the major assumptions are based on the philosophy

of science (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p. 2). Gioia method is used when the concepts are divided systematically into 1st-order and 2nd-order understandings. Creating such a data structure not only allows researchers to present findings from various angles but also provides a means to substantiate any conclusions drawn (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p. 2). Finally, the Gioia methodology operates under the premise that aim of discovery-oriented research is to produce credible, justifiable (abductive) explanations for the occurrence of an organizational phenomenon. The underlying belief is that demonstrating the evidence supporting a conclusion is crucial (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p.3). According to Magnani & Gioia (2023) the 1st-order analysis should follow informant terms. Generating 2nd-order themes and dimensions is a process where 1st order concepts are sorted, reduced and aggregated. The last step in Gioia methodology involves constructing a grounded theory model. This model aims to illustrate the significant relationship among the emerging concepts that explain the phenomena under investigation (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p. 3). In a conclusion, Gioia methodology process can be seen as shifting from an "inductive" to a type of "abductive" research. The abductive steps involve creative process where the researcher draws inferences by merging theory and data to generate fresh theoretical perspectives (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p. 3).

This study's data structure is illustrated in Figure 6: "Data analysis," which was formulated based on the Gioia (2012) method table. By using the collected data from the interviews held, 1st-order concepts, 2nd-order themes, and aggregate dimensions were identified in order to find clear and practical interpretations of the data.

1st-order analysis is done by identifying codes that were drawn from the interviews. The chosen codes were clear words or sentences that the participants have mentioned. In order to make these codes to be relevant, the chosen codes were words and sentences that has significance to the study and the research questions. 2nd-order concepts were developed based on the 1st-order concepts and as Gioia et al. (2012) suggested.

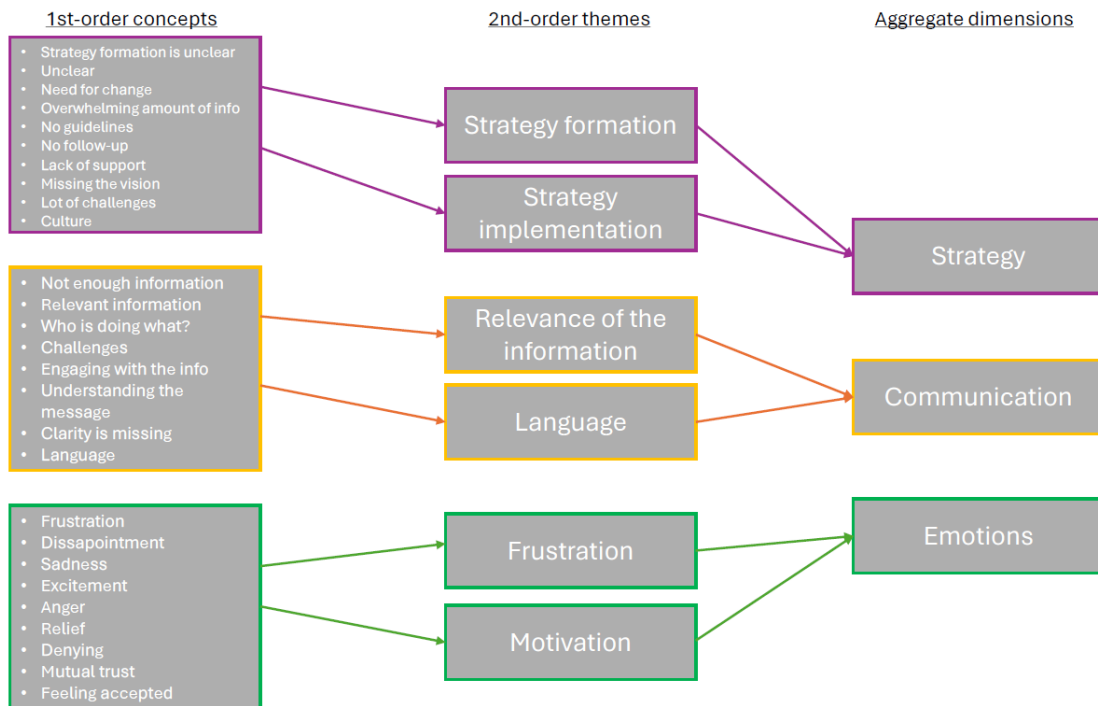


Figure 6: Data analysis

4.5 Quality of the research design

In order to conduct research that follows the code of conduct, the author made sure that the GDPR was followed, and that all participants were kept anonymous during the process.

4.5.1 Anonymity and Confidentiality

In order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality in this research, participants were introduced to a GDPR consent prior to the interviews. It was crucial to communicate the terms and conditions, outlining their rights and explaining how data would be stored. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any point without providing a specific reason. In terms of preserving anonymity and confidentiality, all names were kept confidential, and the collected data remained within the authors' knowledge. Following Bell & Bryman's (2007, p.69) definition, confidentiality involves safeguarding the information shared by participants. All gathered information was treated with confidentiality and shared exclusively only to the author.

4.5.2 Credibility

According to Shenton (2004, p.3), credibility is vital for establishing trustworthiness. It involves portraying the study accurately (Shenton, 2004, p.3) and ensuring the accuracy of the data utilized (Cope, 2014). A qualitative study achieves credibility when participants share and acknowledge similar experiences. The initial step towards building trustworthiness was taken by gathering from reputable, valuable, and comprehensive sources in previous literature. The author of this research ensured that participants volunteered and provided as genuine and truthful responses as possible.

4.5.3 Validity and reliability

The quality of the research can be seen through four tests. These tests are *construct validity*, *internal validity*, *external validity*, and *reliability* (Yin, 2009, p. 34). In a case study, these four tests are equally important and should be applied throughout the conduct of a case study. Next, the author will explain more in detail what these four tests means in practice. Construct validity refers to the establishment of correct operational measures in order for the chosen concepts to be studied (Yin, 2009, p. 34). The most important step when choosing the construct validity is to select specific types of changes. In addition, to demonstrate that the selected measures do reflect the changes that have been selected (Yin, 2009, p. 35-36).

Yin (2009, p.36) continued that internal validity, on the other hand, refers to establishing a causal relationship between parties, basically, determining whether event x affected/led to event y. In a case study research, concern about internal validity is connected to making inferences. Furthermore, a case study involves inference when the chosen event cannot be observed (Yin, 2009, p. 36). Internal validity is for explanatory or causal studies only, excluding descriptive and exploratory studies. External validity deals with “the problem of knowing whether a study’s findings are generalizable beyond the immediate case study” (Yin, 2009, p. 37). Therefore, external validity is seen as the biggest problem in case studies. The theory (Yin, 2009, p.37) says that since case study

focuses on a chosen “individuals” it cannot be generalized to the whole population. As stated, case study relies on analytical generalization.

Last but not least, the reliability of the research plays an important role when thinking about the results of research. Reliability refers to the data collection procedures and if the study can be repeated with the same results (Yin, 2009, p.37). Yin stated that “the goal of reliability is to minimize the errors and biases in a study” (2009, p.39).

In a conclusion, these four tests can be considered when judging the quality of research. These four tests are all valid when judging a single case study and therefore important to keep in mind. When taking into account the nature of a case studies, all studies have a different rationale. The main point in this case study is to capture circumstances or common conditions in commonplace situations. Also called, representative or typical case. The lessons and results from this research are assumed to be informative about the experiences that have occurred among the employees.

5 Findings

This chapter presents the findings from both, the semi-structured interviews and case study. The data analysis showed the three dimensions this research is based. These dimensions are strategy, communication, and emotions, and they are presented with the help of relevant citations from the interviews. The findings include a deep analysis from the interviews and secondary data. The findings highlighted the strategy, its formation and implementation process, internal communication during strategy, emotions and how employees handle tricky situations like change negotiations. Following this analysis, a summary of the interviews is presented.

5.1 Strategy formation and implementation

Company X started to change its strategy in 2023. The information about the upcoming changes was shared right before the summer of 2023 in a company meeting where all employees were present. This meeting was arranged by the management and all information regarding strategy were shared. The information included data from previous years' sales, upcoming savings and a drawn picture of the new strategy, vision and mission. After the meeting, all information was made available on the company's intranet.

In the interviews, the participants were asked about the strategy change. The question was following "Do you know why Company X did its strategy change?". The answers highlighted the unknown factor, meaning that the employees were not sure why the Company X did those changes.

Reasons to strategy change

Participant #1 "I was not 100% sure why this company did its strategy change. However, I knew that things need to change."

Participant #4 "I did quite a lot of research on my own of the sector we operate. This helped me to understand more why the strategy change happened. However,

I do not think that we got enough information about all the changes that are going to happen.”

Participant #5 “I have no idea why this organization changed its direction and strategy. However, I was aware of it because there was information and communication about it.”

According to the interviews, the employees were not aware of the upcoming changes and why those changes are mandatory. Participant #4 said that they have done research on their own in order to understand the environment and ongoing changes.

Strategy formation and parties involved.

The strategy formation is done with several actors and resources. At its core, strategy formation encompasses the development, implementation, and evaluation of plans and actions aimed at achieving the organization's goals and objectives.

The participants highlighted that they were not sure who was responsible for the strategy formation, however, there were a lot of guesses that the management team had something to do with it. The interview answers emphasized the desire to involve manager level employees to the strategy formation process. Collaboration and communication among different parties are essential for effective strategy formation, the answers highlighted. Open dialogue and open sharing of information are important when a new strategy takes place. Overall, strategy formation involves a diverse range of parties both within and outside the organization, each contributing valuable insights, expertise, and perspectives to the process.

The participants were asked about the strategy formation and if they knew who had been involved in the strategy formation process. The answers were as follows:

Participant #6 "I know the basics of the strategy formulation process. Besides the external factors that needed to change, we also changed a lot internally. I think that this needed to happen in order to find a new direction for the company... The management and external stakeholders were the primary parties in the formulation process, I guess. However, we did not get any clear information of who is taking part in the formulation, but I know for sure that none of the employees were part of this process".

Participant #1 "I think that the chief executive officer was the one who wanted to make the changes. However, of course, external stakeholders and board members also took part in this process."

Participant #3 "At least our CEO and leadership team took part of the formation."

Participant #4 "I assume that the leadership team took part in the formation process, however, it could be interesting and transparent to let everyone know who is behind the new strategy."

The answers were in-line with each other. The participants knew the basics of strategy formation, and how a new strategy could be formulated. However, all participants lack the information of "who" is taking part of the formulation.

Strategy implementation

As stated, a strategy implementation process requires a lot of resources. Besides, the most common issues within the strategy implementation process are the leadership, communication, organization culture and the staff itself.

The participants were introduced to the questions related to strategy implementation and the interviewer asked if they received information about the strategy and how to implement the strategy in one's daily work. The answers were as follows:

Participant #5 "There has been an overwhelming amount of information about the changes. The information that was shared was more "go go go" information that told us that we "need" to do this and this and this to get there. However, I think the most confusing part was to understand "who" is going to do and what. That information was left out."

Participant #2 "We did get a lot of information about the upcoming changes and changes that are happening at the moment. However, it sounded like "someone" had done something, but we did not actually know who was the "someone". There were no guidelines how to implement the strategy in my work."

Participant #3 "We did get information about the changes; however, it was more up to me to find the relevant information from SharePoint [the official channel of all information within the company]."

Participant #6 "There was information about the strategy and implementation, however, no one ever did any follow-up if we [employees] are really implementing the strategy in our daily work."

The implementation of a strategy often involves several challenges that can hinder its successful execution. One significant challenge is communication, as ineffective communication channels or barriers can lead to misunderstandings, conflicting priorities, and a lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities among employees. Additionally, organizational culture plays a crucial role, and resistance to change or conflicting cultural norms may impede the adoption of new strategies.

According to the interviews, there was in fact a lot of information about the changes, however, the information was not relevant in some instances. The participants

highlighted that there are too many blind spots regarding the implementation process. The biggest concern was “who” was going to do and what.

Questions related to the implementation process were asked together. The questions highlighted the topics of challenges, improvement, and success factors in the SI process. Most of the participants repeated the word “communication” when they were asked to tell the biggest challenges with the strategy implementation within company X.

Challenges in the SI process and what could be improved?

“Communication” “Culture” “Lack of support” “Belongingness in the work culture” “Not enough communication” “We are missing the vision”.

Participant #1 “Since there has been more than one strategy change, I would say that the communication has improved.”

Participant #3 “One of the challenges is that we did not get enough information on how to put the strategy into our daily work. We are missing the concrete actions.”

Participant #4 “The biggest challenge with the strategy implementation is the employee motivation. We have quite a lot of employees who are resistant to the change... Also, I’m not sure if all employees are aware of our direction and the strategy itself.”

The strategy implementation process has seen notable successes, particularly in the improvement of organizational culture. Over time, there has been a noticeable enhancement in the organizational culture, as indicated by feedback from employees. Moreover, the strategic decision to renew both leadership and employees has yielded positive outcomes. Employees are eager and motivated to drive change, contributing to a more dynamic and agile workforce.

The answers to this question vary between participants. Participant #4 stated that they are not sure if all employees are aware of the strategy, whereas participant #3 stated that “we are missing the concrete actions”. This difference can be because these two participants have different backgrounds in the company, and the location of an interviewee might have an impact on the understanding of a strategy.

As a result of these answers, the organizational culture is evolving for the better, said most of the participants. Employees recognize the positive changes taking place within the company, and there is a collective effort towards fostering a more collaborative, inclusive, and supportive work environment.

The participants were asked that was successful in the strategy implementation process and the answers were as follows:

What was successful in the SI process?

Participant #2 “The organizational culture has improved during the time”.

Participant #5 “I really like the idea that the company wants to renew itself and go forward. We do have a motivation to move forward, but now we just need to start doing.”

Participant #6 “I think that renewing both, the leadership and employees is good for the company. Now we have people who are eager to go forward and motivated to make a change.”

Participant #3 “The culture is changing little by little for the better.”

According to the interviews, the employees are positive towards the changes. The organizational culture is changing, and employees are happy about it. The reason behind

the happiness is that employees feel better connected to the work community when the culture is somehow okay.

Besides, the participants were asked to describe how they felt about the information and communication from the company side and if they got enough information about the strategy.

Participant #1 "I think there was information about the changes, however, they [the changes] did not applied to me [or my team] and that is the reason why I wasn't too interested in the information. Overall, there was too little information on "why" and "how" the changes are happening."

Participant #3 "The information [about the changes] from the company side was vague for me. And many times, the information was too much on a company level."

Participant #6 "The clarity of the information was missing."

As stated in the interviews, the information that Company X shared with its employees were vague. Most of the participants felt that the clarity of the information was missing, and it was not clear enough who is executing and what. One significant note here is that the location of the participant did not play a role when thinking about the information received from the company side. All participants highlighted that in fact, there was information about the changes, however, the information was somehow irrelevant.

The key indicator between behavior and performance in a work setting is motivation. The interviewer asked what motivates the participants to take part in strategy implementation process and the answers highlighted the importance of organization's "direction". If the direction is clear, the employees are more motivated to participate in the strategy implementation process.

“Direction” “Organization culture”

“Open communication about things”

“Overall, the direction of the company. If I know it, it motivates me in my daily work.”

“Direction, for sure”

According to the interviews, the participants were motivated to go forward. There was a mutual understanding that the most important part of the strategy implementation is in fact the direction of the company. Employees do want to know where the company is going.

5.2 Internal Communication

The strategy was formulated and then communicated to the employees in various ways and channels. Official information about the strategy can be found on the company’s intranet (SharePoint). At a company level, the employees can find all relevant information regarding the changes in English. The participants were asked if they find English as an “appropriate” language, and do they think that everyone within the organization understands the information received when it is in English.

Participant #3 “I believe that our company benefits from the official language (English) because now we all have an equal chance to understand the information. However, I do not believe that everyone in the organization understands the message when it is in English. “

Participant #4 “I do not think that people engage with the information at the same level as they would if the information were in Finnish. However, it is only fair to have English as a corporate language because we do have staff that do not speak Finnish at all.”

Participant #5 “To be honest, I do not think that everyone understands the information in English. As a native Finnish speaker, it would be great to get all the information also in Finnish.”

Participant #6 "I'm really happy that the company language is English! In my opinion, we are all on the same level when it comes to receiving information and that is fair. I also think that people who do not speak any Finnish, feel more included when the language is the same for everyone."

The answers about the language vary a lot, however, some participants highlighted the language as one of the barriers to information sharing. This was especially visible in Asian office participants. On the other hand, some participants stated that the company will benefit from the English language. The answers contradict each other since there is no clarification if the language is a barrier or not.

The participants were asked to tell what kind of information is valuable to them and from what channels they would like to receive the information regarding the changes.

Participant #3 "I would rather get too much information than no information at all."

Participant #4 "Information about our direction, goals and vision."

Participant #6 "Everything. There cannot be too much information."

Based on the interviews, all participants highlighted the importance of relevant information. Besides, the participants stated that they would like to have information from multiple channels at the same time, because not all follow the same channels.

Channels

"SharePoint" "Even email would be beneficial" "Weekly newsletters"
"Intranet" "HowSpace".

The most common channel the participants are following is the company's intranet regardless of their location. Most of the participants stated that they follow intranet daily. However, many highlighted the fact that the older generation might not follow intranet daily. Rather, they follow email. This is why it would be beneficial to get the information from multiple channels.

5.3 Emotions

During the strategy implementation process, emotions can run high as individuals experience different kind of changes taking place within the organization. When participants were asked about their feelings regarding the ongoing changes and what would aid their adjustment, a range of emotions surfaced.

Some participants expressed feelings of confusion, frustration, disappointment, and even sadness. These emotions likely arise from the uncertainty and disruption caused by the changes, as individuals navigate unfamiliar territories. On the other hand, some participants admitted to feeling a mix of excitement and insecurity.

Furthermore, emotions such as frustration, sadness, and anger were seen among participants. These emotions likely arise from the challenges and obstacles faced during the implementation process, as well as feelings of loss or dissatisfaction with the current situation. Overall, the strategy implementation process is often accompanied by a roller-coaster of emotions, ranging from confusion and frustration to excitement and insecurity.

The participants were asked how they felt about the ongoing changes and what would help them to adjust the ongoing changes. The answers were as follows:

Participant #1 "I feel confused, frustrated, disappointed and sad."

Participant #4 "Excited, but at the same time insecure."

Participant #3 "Frustration, sadness and anger, just to mention a few."

Participant #5 "I was expecting to feel relief after everything, however, I'm still in a "mood" where I feel sadness, and frustration."

What helps you to adjust to the changes?

The participants highlight the multifaceted nature of coping mechanisms during times of change. While interpersonal communication and social support emerge as crucial factors, the passage of time and engagement in new experiences also play significant roles in facilitating adaptation. These insights underscore the importance of fostering a supportive and communicative environment within organizations to aid employees in navigating transitions successfully. Additionally, providing opportunities for personal and professional growth can empower individuals to embrace change and thrive in dynamic environments.

Participant #1 "People and talking. I'm the kind of person that I want to say out loud my feelings. That helps me to process everything."

Participant #2 "Time will heal. However, I find it valuable that I have colleagues that I can talk with."

Participant #4 "Trying new things. I need new projects or tasks to adjust to the changes."

The participants were asked to evaluate how other people in their work community think about the changes and what kind of emotions these changes arise. The answers shed light on the diverse range of emotions and perspectives within the work community regarding the changes. While some individuals may embrace the changes with empathy and optimism, others may struggle with denial or uncertainty. Fostering open communication, empathy, and a sense of collective solidarity can help the community navigate

these emotional dynamics effectively and emerge stronger and more resilient in the face of change.

Participant #6 "For sure there are a LOT of emotions. Sadness, disappointment, and anger. However, all these emotions are valid, and I think that this will make us even closer as a community."

Participant #1 "There is a sense of denying in the community."

Participant #3 "I think that the feelings are quite mutual. We are all having the same feelings and emotions."

The interviews indicate that the employees of Company X were aware of their co-workers' emotions. Participant #3 even stated that the emotions and feelings were mutual within the work community. Interestingly, participant #5 expressed surprise at their continued feelings of sadness and frustration, despite expecting to feel relief after the changes.

Lastly, the participants were asked to describe what things make them feel included in their work community. The answers highlighted the words "*trust*" and "*common goals*".

"Mutual trust"

"Feeling that I'm accepted"

"Common goals".

Participant #2 "To have something in common. E.g. work project, same challenges in the workplace or anything."

Participant #5 "People. I like my colleagues and without them, this workplace would not be the same. If we trust each other, anything is possible."

The participants highlighted the importance of trust, mutual acceptance, and shared goals in order to feel included in the work community. Building strong relationships, having open communication, and working towards common objectives and goals, are essential factors in creating a supportive and inclusive work environment. The participants highlighted that co-workers and shared feelings are the realest aspects of the work environment and most of the participants would trust a colleague.

In conclusion, every company needs a well-defined strategy. The participants highlighted the fact that a strategy itself is the most important part of a company. Besides, common goals and vision are of high importance. All employees would like to be informed accordingly about the company's vision, mission and focus. A strategy is something that ties up the employees together in a company. It sets a direction and focus for doing.

However, the implementation of a strategy often includes challenges, particularly in the areas of communication, organizational culture, and employee support. Participants in this study highlighted the importance of effective communication channels and clear guidelines for implementing the strategy in their daily work. Additionally, building trust and fostering a supportive work environment were identified as key factors in overcoming resistance to change and promoting employee engagement.

Despite these challenges, the strategy implementation process has seen notable successes, particularly in the improvement of organizational culture. Participants highlighted positive changes in the culture, indicating a shift towards a more collaborative and inclusive work environment. Renewing both leadership and employees has yielded positive outcomes, with individuals feeling motivated and eager to drive change. Overall, the answers indicate that employees are frustrated to the received information. However, talking and trusting a colleague has shed light to the future.

The emotions were in most cases mutual between employees. Most of the participants highlighted the word "frustration" when it comes to the feelings towards the changes.

However, the feeling of belongingness and trusting to a colleague will help adjusting the changes.

6 Conclusion

Since strategies tend to fail more often during the implementation phase rather than during the planning stage, it is crucial for organizations to figure out the best way to put a strategy into action. In this research, three main themes stood out more than others, forming the backbone of the analysis. The goal of this thesis was to shed light on strategy implementation process, emotions during changes and different forms of communication.

The international aspect of this research was covered by interviewing manager-level employees from different backgrounds. Since Company X operates in Finland and in Asian Pacific area, both offices (and chosen employees) were included in this study. The answers of the participants vary depending on the culture and mother language. However, this study does not specify participants based on their location.

The primary objective of this research is to address the central research question: “How can internal communication be utilized to manage employee emotions and support strategy implementation during times of change?” Besides, four sub-objectives were formulated in order to answer the main research question extensively. These sub-objectives were: clarifying the role of communication in strategy implementation within a multinational company, understanding how individuals interpret different messages conveyed through various communication channels within a multinational corporation, investigating employees' perceptions of internal communication within the context of strategy implementation and, exploring the significance of internal communication in managing employee emotions during the implementation of strategic changes.

In this chapter, the results of this research are concluded. Besides, the main dimensions of the data are covered. The results and analysis will be compared and contrasted with the existing literature review. Additionally, recommendations for future research will be provided based on the findings of this study.

6.1 Discussion

Previous research suggests that communication is seen as one of the biggest challenges in the strategy implementation process. On the other hand, when communication is effective and easily understandable, it can be the leading factor to organizational success (Ruck and Welch, 2012, p. 294).

6.1.1 Strategy formation and implementation

In order to stay competitive, an organization needs to renew its operations. A strategy sets a direction to the organization (Mintzberg, 1987). As the theoretical framework indicates, the role of strategy varies between organizations and some organizations decide to hide their strategy from the employees while others not. When it is time to change the strategy, there is in many cases a reason for it. However, the answers of this research indicate that the participants were not sure of the reasons for strategy change.

The literature review suggests that the strategy formation and implementation are both important processes (Chaimankong & Prasertsakul, 2019). The introductory framework of strategy implementation effectiveness by Tawse and Tabesh (2021) identified managerial actions, conditions, and dynamic managerial capabilities as three key dimensions. These three dimensions are related to the interview questions in this thesis. In order to successfully implement a strategy, it is crucial that the structural factors align with the strategy and that the company is ready to execute the chosen strategy (Tawse and Tabesh, 2021), which requires effective communication and strong leadership. Tawse and Tabesh's framework indicates the importance of communication from various perspectives and in order to effectively succeed in strategy implementation, communication is vital.

Like every process, the strategy implementation process has its challenges too. The literature indicates (Šilenskytė & Smale, 2021, p. 515; Noble, 1999; Alexander, 1985; Chaimankong and Prasertsakul, 2019) that several key factors influence the strategy

implementation process negatively. These are communication, leadership, organizational culture, and the employees. However, in MNC context the main issue is inadequate communication of the strategy to the employees (Anyango, 2007, p.44) which is in-line with the analysis of this thesis. The biggest challenge during this strategy implementation process is in fact the internal communication.

6.1.2 Internal Communication

The literature (Piekkari et al., 1999) suggested that language can be divided into three different categories 1. language as a barrier, 2. language as a facilitator, 3. language as a source of power. The results show that the employees of Company x feel that the language is a barrier when it comes to communication. Piekkari et al. (1999) stated that language is one of the key barriers to effective communication. However, two-way communication is necessary in order to achieve common goals. It is up to both, the employees and the organization to share communication and information. Understanding the message is as important as the exchange of information (Ali et al., 2015, p.4). The results show that the information environment and communication flow play a role when understanding and reacting to a message. The participants would rather get too much information than no information at all. In addition, the content of the information is crucial. Organizational information theory (OIT) refers to the process where an individual collects, use, and manage information. The results are in-line with OIT theory and indicates that the connection between the organization and its employees is important in order to send, receive and handle different information.

However, based on the signaling theory the environment of the message is vital. The results indicate that people were not satisfied with the received information. There was no "good" news from the company side. Signaling theory focuses on the information that is positive and the connection between parties, in addition, the theory suggests that the biggest challenge is communication which is based on the information shared. Therefore, it is vital that the information shared is relevant and somehow motivating to the employees.

What theory does not emphasize, but what was discussed in the interviews is the fact that there was communication about the strategy within the company, however, many found it too vague or even un-relevant. It is seen from the answers that the accountability was not communicated enough from the company side. The employees were left by their own and they were not sure who is doing and what. All participants highlighted that employee responsibilities and their expected contributions were not communicated and how to implement the new strategy in daily work. In addition, when basic information was not communicated, emotions exploded not because of change or lack of internal communication but because the employees did not know who to ask.

6.1.3 Emotions during strategy implementation

When employees face difficult times in their job, emotions can influence the quality of thinking and behavior (Huy, 2011, p. 1388). However, people tend to act in the same way as their colleagues. Strategically Aligned Behavior (SAB) is characterized by an employee's actions that align with the company's strategy, as defined by Van Riel, Berens, & Dijkstra (2009, p. 1197). SAB becomes particularly evident during a company's strategy implementation process. This highlights the complexity of emotions involved in the adjustment process and underscores the importance of acknowledging and addressing these emotions effectively.

Employees express a genuine appreciation for the company's proactive stance towards innovation and growth. This forward-thinking approach has instilled a renewed sense of motivation and purpose among employees, creating a conducive environment for change and development. Van Riel et al. (2009) stated that the key indicator between behavior and performance is motivation. And motivation is something that the results indicated strongly.

To answer the main research question "how internal communication can help handle employee emotions to support strategy implementation at the time of change?" in

summary, the results are in line with the theory in many ways and the most important finding in this research is the fact that the employees want to know about the changes and to be supported on how to handle change. This perspective is completely new and the key finding in this research. Internal communication can help employees' emotions by providing relevant information in multiple channels. By providing rather too much information than not enough information, any company can ensure that everyone in the company understands the ongoing changes, what is expected from them and why the changes are happening. Without relevant information, employees tend to show resistance to change.

6.2 Limitations

Based on the nature of this research, no hypothesis was made beforehand. On the other hand, research questions and theory were the guiding principles in this research. One limitation of this research is the approach that is limited to only one company and one case. Meaning that this research focuses on one company and its employees and their viewpoints. As mentioned above, the results cannot be generalized to a larger extent, however they can be generalized to a theory. These results are based on Company X's culture, employees and their experiences, and the overall organizational culture in that company. However, these results can be used as guiding principles in future research on similar cases because this study enriches the understanding of individual experiences and their interpretations of the firm's attempts when implementing a strategy and communicating it.

Additionally, another limitation for this research was the chosen employees to the interviews. It was the author's decision to close off the management because of the situation in the company during this research. The interviews were held to the manager level employees who have not been involved to the strategy formation process. Therefore, these results and answers from the employees represented the general employee level of the company. In addition, the interviews were held at the time of change negotiations, which gave an extra spice to the interviews. The general frustration, sadness and anger from

the situation were present during the interviews and these feelings reflected to the answers in a certain way. During this research there was no chance to get a deeper view of managerial intentions, as they were not interviewed because of the change negotiation situation. All participants acted in a way that can be seen straight from the SAB theory. Meaning that the interviews were in line (in terms of the emotions) with each other because of the change negotiations.

Lastly, there is not that much research about this particular topic which made finding relevant articles hard. However, there is a decent number of articles and research about strategy formation, strategy implementation, and communications in various forms and emotions, however, there is no research where all these will collide and be mixed together.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

As stated at the beginning of this research, there is no research about strategy implementation and emotions. And even less there is research about this context in an MNC. Often, research focuses on different viewpoints of strategy implementation and how different roles can affect on the strategy implementation process.

For future research it would be interesting to investigate the role of different departments in strategy implementation process. How different functions in a MNC's acts in a time of change? Or what benefits strategy implementation can bring to different functions. These kinds of studies would be interesting in terms of support functions in a company for example in a marketing department point of view. How marketing team can benefit from a strategy implementation and how does it affect on that team's performance.

Another suggestion for future research is a comparison between two companies that have experienced a similar event. As stated above, this research cannot be generalized

because this was done only to one company with one case. In order to conduct research that compares this to another company, it is crucial to find a company that has experienced the same (or similar) events around the same time as this one. Comparison between the two companies would be interesting in the sense that there would be an extraordinary amount of data to explore.

One significant suggestion for future research would be to study different management styles during the time of change. Here, one could take either the leadership team under investigation or the manager level. The topic could be narrowed down to a certain industry e.g. IT, freight, or consulting. Last, but not least, suggestion is the fact that this research could have been narrowed down to only emotions or internal communication during change negotiations or at the times of change. By narrowing down the topic, the research would be more specific and in-depth. Especially, from emotions point of view would be interesting to know how much emotions affect the decisions made within the company in time of change.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guideline and questions

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of internal communication in a multinational company. Besides, this research is investigating how people perceive different information.

Consent

You are being invited to take part in a master's thesis interview. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information beforehand.

Duration

The duration of this master's thesis study is approximately five months and the data that is gathered during this time range will be used as a part of the "findings" and "conclusion" in this study. All material gathered will be deleted after the thesis is completely done.

It is up to you to decide whether to participate or not. If you decide to participate, in this information sheet I will ask for permission and consent to do this interview. All information gathered during the time of this research will be kept anonymous and confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any ensuring reports or publications.

Warm up- questions:

1. What is your background and relationship with Company X?
2. Which language do you use at work and what is the company's official language?
How do you feel about it?

Questions related to strategy formulation and implementation:

1. Are you aware of why Company X did its strategy change in 2022?

2. Do you know how was the new strategy formulated, and who took part in the strategy planning process?
3. To what extent did you (the employees) get information about the strategy and its implementation?
 - a. How do you feel about that? Do you think that you received enough information?
4. Has the strategy been opened to all employees and what channels have been used to ensure enough information about the changes?
 - a. In which language you can find the information?
 - b. Is the chosen language appropriate and do you think that everyone understood the information received?
5. Have you been communicated with how to implement the new strategy in your everyday work?
 - a. Did the new strategy change your role? How?
 - b. Has your role been explained to you and your team?
6. What motivates you to participate in implementing the strategy?

Questions related to communication:

7. What are the biggest challenges of strategy implementation in Company X?
8. What could have been improved during the implementation process?
9. What was successful in the implementation process?
10. What kind of information about the strategy is valuable to you in your opinion?
 - a. From what channel you would like to receive information and why?
11. Who is responsible for the internal communication about the strategy and strategy implementation in Company X? (what department)

Questions related to emotions:

12. How do you feel about the ongoing changes?
 - a. In your opinion, what would help you to adjust to the changes?

13. What do you think other people in your work community think about the ongoing changes?

a. What kind of emotions do these changes arise?

14. Could you describe what things make you feel included in your work community?

Ending questions:

15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?