

A Middle Management Perspective on Strategy Implementation

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Abstract

Twelve middle managers and three management consultants were interviewed in this qualitative phenomenological study to explore their views on the organizational dynamics of strategy implementation. Data covered the critical factors influencing strategy implementation, the contribution of middle managers on strategy implementation, and the challenges associated with the implementation process.

Problem

Little information is available regarding middle managers' views on the dynamics of strategy implementation and the challenges associated with implementing organizational strategies. Since middle managers play important roles in the implementation of organizational strategies, it is important to explore their views in order to build a better understanding of the organizational factors influencing strategy implementation.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore organizational factors influencing strategy implementation, including the contribution of middle managers on strategy implementation, and the challenges associated with the execution process

Relevant Literature

Research in strategy implementation (Gottschalk, & Gudmundsen, 2010; Neilson, Martin, & Powers, 2008; Schaap, 2006).

Middle managers and strategic practices (Huy, 2011; Mair, & Thurner, 2008; Mantere, 2008; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008).

Challenges in strategy implementation (Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009; Hrebiniak, 2006; Pryor, Anderson, Toombs, & Humphreys, 2007).

Activity theory (Blackler, & Regan, 2009; Engestrom, 2001; Jarratt, & Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2010; Jarzabkowski, & Balogun, 2009).

Strategy as practice (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski, & Spee, 2009; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Whittington, 2006).

Research Questions

Primary question: How do middle managers view the dynamics of strategy implementation?

1. How can organizations facilitate the translation of strategic intentions into managerial action?
2. How do middle managers contribute to strategy implementation?
3. What are the key challenges associated with strategy implementation?

Procedures

Data were collected using **semistructured in-depth email interviews** with a self-selected sample of 12 **middle managers** and 3 **management consultants** from **the United States**. These professionals accepted participation in the study by responding to invitations posted on the online professional network, LinkedIn.

Data Analysis

Smith et al.'s (2009) **interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA)** method was used to analyze the 15 interview transcripts.

The interview transcripts were read several times to gain insight and achieve familiarity with the data. Key words, sentences, and phrases were analyzed.

Emerging themes from the exploratory codes were developed and connections between them were noted. Similar themes were grouped together to form clusters of related themes and a list of emerging themes was produced.

Direct quotes from participants were used to support each theme.

Findings

Critical factors for successfully implementing organizational strategies:

- Participative management style
- Effective internal communication
- Strategic alignment

Key barriers to strategy implementation:

- Ineffective management of change
- Poor communication
- Lack of execution-supportive culture

Limitations

Potential participants who were not members of LinkedIn might have provided valuable insights to the study. The participants may not have been a good geographical mix or representative of the United States population.

Conclusions

The views of middle managers on common organizational factors influencing strategy implementation, including the challenges associated with the implementation process and the contribution of middle managers' strategic efforts were described.

Exploring middle managers' views on strategy implementation is important for generating a better understanding of organizational factors and challenges associated with strategy implementation. Such increased understanding could enhance organizational capabilities in implementing strategic initiatives.

Social Change Implications

Organizational leaders of all types constantly strive to develop and implement strategies. Businesses develop strategies in search of stakeholder value and growth; governments develop strategies to maintain sustainable development and achieve efficiency; schools and universities develop strategies to enhance the quality of education offered to their students; and hospitals develop strategies to offer better health services to their patients. Strategy is significant and has a real impact on individuals, their families, organizations, and society.

The findings presented in this study promote social change by highlighting issues relevant to the implementation of organizational strategies. A solid financial performance of individual companies contributes to the total economic state of the private sector, which is essential in creating jobs and reducing unemployment. A higher employment rate has fundamental positive consequences on societal economics, prosperity, and security, thereby contributing to positive social change.