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## Developing internal communication of the strategy

Siiri Uotila

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Leading Business Transformations

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<b>Author(s)</b> Siiri Uotila	
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<p>Main objective of the thesis is to bring strategy closer to everyday life in the study organization. There is executed survey in the organization to find out how strategy is guiding work in the sales teams at the moment.</p> <p>The conceptual framework of this thesis is created by studying relevant literature in the field of strategy, internal communication, strategy communication and strategy implementation.</p> <p>The survey is implemented as mixed research as the survey has quantitative questions and open questions as a qualitative part. Applied research approach is action study. Concrete development ideas are given based on the findings in the survey.</p> <p>Findings show that there is most improving in the area of internal communication of the strategy. There are suggested development actions for top management and managerial level. Development ideas for top management are: using several communication channels, adding dialogue, memorable strategy message and accessible information. Developing idea for managerial level is to start using balanced scorecard as a communication tool. Due to organizational changes, lack of resources and researcher's maternity leave there is no possibility to implement these development ideas in the organization.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Strategy communication, Internal communication, Strategy in practice, Strategy implementation	

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# 1 Introduction

Strategy is one of the most used terms in business life but this thesis focuses on what is its' role in everyday life of employees. Strategy is a wide term that includes lot of different actions with different approaches. There is lot of talk about strategy but often strategy is disconnected in practise level in organizations. Employees are the ones who execute the strategy and their understanding of the strategy's content is essential to successfully implement strategy. Strategy sets a common direction to the employees' of the organization and if it's not understood execution is deficient. Strategy guides what to do and in the other hand what not to do. However good strategy itself is not enough if it's not known among employees. Clear strategy makes it easier to communicate and understand in practise. (Hämäläinen, Maula & Suominen 2016, 65-67.)

Communication is evident part of organization. It is tied to all of the functions and communication happens despite stimulating it or not. Internal communication can't be separated from the strategy's implementation. Participating to formulating strategy employees start to commit to the strategy from the start. Strategy communication is most efficient when there is lot of repetition and used different communication channels. Leaders and managers have a crucial role in the internal communication of the strategy. Strategy communication includes different parts that have different goals: strategy's content, supporting execution and strategy process. Essential for employees to understand strategy is dialogue and possibility to discuss about strategic objectives. Most importantly to ensure successful communication using different ways and channels helps to employees to commit to the strategy and execute it in their everyday work.

Commission organization of this thesis is Finnish company that produces products and services. Its' market area is Nordic and it works in B2B market. It has an over 75 year history in Finland in it has been strong in its' market. Nowadays competition is getting tighter due to new competitors outside of Finland and renewal is evident. Commission company has asked to keep survey's material unidentified and confidential.

This thesis is divided into four parts. After description to objectives there is first part about the theoretical background to strategy and communication. Second part is survey and after that analyses of the survey. And thirdly there are development suggestions to the issues rise in the survey.

## **2 Objectives**

The key idea behind the thesis is that companies whose employees know strategy well are the most profitable ones. Employees are the ones who execute the strategy so it is crucial to get them to understand core of the strategy. Communication is one of the key factors making this to happen. Goal is to give concrete ideas for activities to develop communication of the strategy.

### **2.1 Expected outcomes**

Starting point for this thesis was to find out how well strategy is known and directing work at the moment in the sales organization. Main objective of this thesis is to bring strategy closer to everyday life in the case organization. This is done by suggesting development ideas for the challenges that rise in the survey.

### **2.2 Research questions**

Research questions of this thesis are:

R1: How strategy guides work in the sales organization at the moment?

R2: How to develop communication of the strategy more effective?

First research question was set already beginning of the thesis project together with the commission company and survey aims to answer to R1. To R2 I aim to answer based on the survey results and literature review.

### **2.3 Scope**

Scope of the survey is shown in the picture 1. Focus is on internal communication of the strategy while implementing strategy. Content of the strategy or evaluating strategy's excellence is outside of the scope. Only sales teams are included to narrow down results and rest of the organization is outside of the scope.



Picture 1. Scope of the thesis.

Sales teams are the first link to the customer so it is crucial to know how well they know strategy. Survey was executed in summer 2019 as there was new strategy on going and the starting point was important to know so that it can be developed in the future and during new strategy's implementation.

### 3 Strategy in practise level

#### 3.1 Strategy

Contemporary, corporate strategy has been studied and defined for decades and by several. Strategy as a word is one of most used terms in the business life but still it is not always clear what it actually means. Quite often strategy is used for long term plan that defines the direction of the organization as well as in which environment business is done (Hämäläinen et al. 2016.) Successful strategy answers to the question 'where do we want to go?' as well as 'how do we get there?' (Valpola, Kvist, Heimonen, Niutanen, Lillkäll, Masalin, Kalin 2010, 51.)

Strategy is often explained as a long-term direction and scope of the organization. Strategy guides what to do and where to go and in the other hand also what not to do and where not to go. (Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin & Regnér 2014, 3.)

'Competitive strategy is about being different. It means deliberately choosing a different set of activities to deliver a unique mix of value.' (Porter, 1996.) When talking about strategy it needs to be clear that in what kind of market environment the organization is. To understand strategy you have to know the organization's relationship with the environment (Clegg, Pitelis, Schweitzer & Whittle 2020, 22.)

According to Johnson, Whittington, Scholes, Angwin & Regnér (2014) there are three elements in the strategy definition:

1. The long term - which emphasizes the longer time frame
2. Strategic direction- which is defined often according the objectives
3. Organization – involves complex relationships and different kind of people

It is as important to know what not to do in what comes to strategy. According to Hämäläinen, Maula & Suominen (2016) there are reviewed six questions that every leader of digital era should go through when processing organization's options and position in the market.

1. To what concentrate?
2. To lead or follow the customer?
3. To compete or cooperate with the opponent?
4. To decentralise or risk?
5. To differentiate or integrate?
6. To delegate or lead yourself?

These questions are created to concentrate nowadays choices in fast-paced digital environment. First question is not easy one as it would be easier to continue as before but when the environment is changing so rapidly there needs to be done decisions weather to stop some activities and find some new but unknown. Second question is relevant in every organization during digital era. It's choosing between proactively offering new products and services to customers and reactively waiting that customers ask for something new. Both options have risks for profitability as proactive approach might be less profitable first but bring new customers and possibilities in the future and in the other hand reactive might be more profitable for a while but eventually company is not fulfilling customer's new needs. Third issue is for contemporary companies it might seem that there are smaller rivals appearing all the time. In this kind of situation it is essential to consider should the company attack against them or to collaborate. Fourth question helps to decide in unpredictable environment how widely it is wise to spread. For example developing new services might require so many resources that it takes too much time and still fail but then again too wide offering might lead to a situation where none of the projects get enough attention. Fifth issue is that when creating new business it might be difficult for big and 'old' companies. In that kind of situation it helps to create spin-off inside of the company. But when the new business is created by the spin-off the culture and ways of working might be too different from the original company that it leads to two separate companies. Sixth question is direct question for the leaders. It discusses that who has the responsibility of new or development in the organizations. Often new things are so important that it requires management team or CEO's attention. But in the other hand it might be that they don't have enough resources or knowledge to do it so there is appointed person specialized to the change process. However business critical projects should be always on top management's mind. (Hämäläinen et al. 2016, 81-84.)

### **3.2 Strategy in practise**

In real life, strategy is seldom so easy to predict and see in the every-day life. In practise strategy includes set of activities and decisions, others conscious but some not. For example, company Kodak, decided not to give up printed pictures and that resulted as a bankrupt. They didn't predict changing market environment right. This example shows that strategy is more a basis for creative improvisation than a science of inevitable pattern. (Clegg et al. 2020, 26.)

Even though there is lot of talk about strategy in business life the strategy work in practise is struggling. Often strategy is still nowadays something that only top management talks



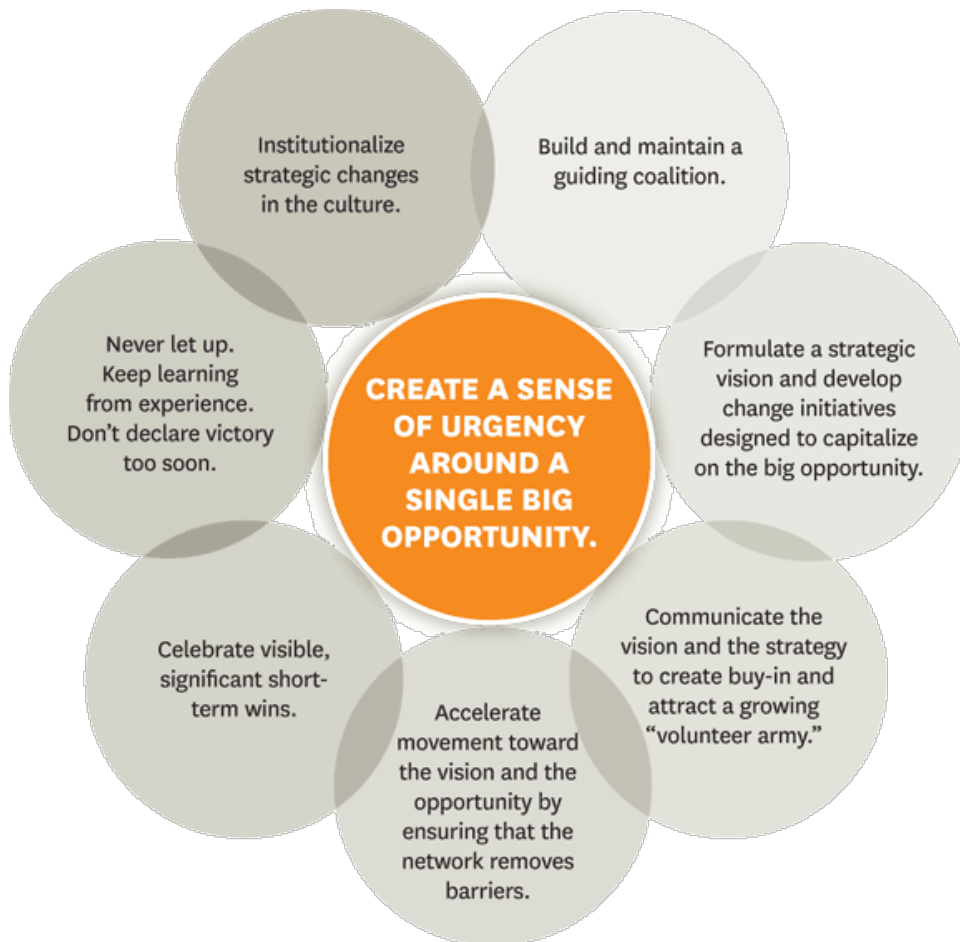
about. Nowadays strategy work is not only planning and then executing strategy but more of an agile process that changes and evolves such as the situation requires. According to Maarika Maury's study only 13% of the executive level of Finnish companies can put into words the company's strategy. Mid-management only eight per cent and employees two per cent could do the same. There were 150 companies from different industries in the study. In general Finnish companies have documented their strategies well but if staff doesn't understand it the impact will be low. Maury's study shows that strategy's role varies in the different levels of the organization. (Hämäläinen et al. 2016, 66-67.)

Strategy work in the organizations have faces new kind of challenges during past years. Before the focus was in the planning and analysing strategies but nowadays it is seen that at least as important is to understand people both customers' and staff's experiences. Customer and customer's experience is in the focus point. Organization's renewals should bring more value to customers otherwise it's not worth it. (Hämäläinen et al. 2016, 66-67.)

Strategy evolves from plans to real life when employees, customers and other stakeholders experience it (Hämäläinen et al. 2016.). You can say that strategy work requires people management and communication is critical part of that. (Johnson et al. 2014, 7.) Realization of the strategy depends on how much it can be seen in the everyday life at the organization. People are the ones who execute the strategy. When strategy is part of the weekdays it works in practise. (Valpola et al. 2010, 57.) Quite often strategy is an abstract concept that makes it difficult to translate into practice or communicate. When it is clear what strategy is and what it isn't organization's staff is targeted to the same way. (Mankins & Steele 2011.)

World and market environments are changing all the time that requires that the strategy is evolving constantly too. As the changes are very quick the rhythm of strategy work changes and also the organization's culture is even more important. Strategy is done more in shorter cycles and learning from mistakes is emphasized. Strategy is seen in the organizations as principles how to do things and how to apply it in different occasions. This requires strategic thinking from everyone in every level in the organization. Quite often this demands change in the organization culture to make it happen. (Hämäläinen et al. 67.)

There are things that need to be changed to achieve new potential for organization. Kotter's eight accelerators are steps for organization to obtain new possibilities and can be applied for strategy process. These steps are in line with Kotter's theory for change management. It can be stated that strategy is always about change too.



Picture 2. Eight accelerators. (Kotter 2014.)

First point of Eight Accelerators is creating a sense of urgency. When there is sense of urgency created among the organization not only in the management but in every team staff is thinking about the common goal. Urgency is not about issues of today's but about the strategic threats and possibilities. Second point of the Eight Accelerators is building and evolving a guiding coalition. In the coalition there are those people who want the strategic change and who are committed to achieve it. This group of people is change agents who also have the connections, skills and needed information to be dynamic. Coalition should consist of individuals from every level and different silos. Third point is forming a change vision and strategic initiatives. There should be clear vision that is aligned with the strategic possibility and strategic initiatives should support this vision. Fourth accelerator is enlisting a volunteer army. This means that guiding coalition and others who have already bought the new direction start to communicate about the change and other individuals start wanting to help. Fifth part of the Accelerators is enabling action by removing barriers. People who are motivated to do the change are making actions in every level and in every team towards strategically important issues and removing barriers. Sixth point is generating (and celebrating) short-term wins. This means that there

should be celebration in the network when something strategically big or small is achieved. It is also important to show that they are celebrated as it has a huge psychological power. Seventh tip is to sustain acceleration. This point keeps the whole system going. It is essential to have smaller initiatives which still are useful in strategic sense and by winning those it has an impact in the bigger picture too. Eight point is instituting change. This is all about getting change to the culture of the organization. When changes are done more it is likely to get that spirit to the processes, systems and behavior of the organization. (Kotter 2014, 28-34.)

All the eight Accelerators are heading to align energy towards Big Opportunity. Even though there would be urgency created if there is not set direction it doesn't achieve anything. Accelerators on their own don't create a new strategy. They should be aligned with a common goal. Goal at this theory is Big Opportunity. Well performing companies have possibilities in their future to grow and prosper. Although when there is change in the market environment the threats and challenges are seen more likely. But always when there is change there are possibilities. All the eight Accelerators are built around this opportunity. (Kotter 2014, 28-34.)

Strategy execution is set of actions and decision made everyday by the staff members according the information they have. Even though there would be a great strategy and mind blowing product consistent execution is what keeps the organization successful. (Neilson, Martin & Powers 2011.)

### **3.3 Staff as a strategy executor**

Execution of a strategy requires excitement from the employees and in the other hand making strategy more linked to everyday life. When people are excited, they are also committed and will do things initiatively. Strategy is executed when employees see the linkage to their work. Elements for strategy execution can be seen in the figure below. (Valpola et al. 2010, 51.)



Picture 3. Elements of strategy execution. (Valpola et al. 2010, 51.)

Around these core elements there are parts of implementation that makes strategy seen in the everyday life such as chosen projects, leading performance, people as a force of change and employees & know-how. Traditionally strategy has been decided centralised by few and strategy will be then poured to rest if the organization. Afterwards there is emphasis on interaction and dialogue. This means that strategy shouldn't be finalized but give space to shaping and improvements according to discussions and dialogue. Still it doesn't mean that strategy shouldn't be stated somehow but give space for changes and development. (Valpola et al. 2010, 51.)

Managers and team leads have essential role in the strategy's implementation phase. They are the ones who guide teams in their daily work and eventually have an influence on the everyday duties. Tasks and actions should be according to strategy. Manager must have lots of different kind of abilities to help team members to realise strategy in practise. Strategy processes are always also change process so manager must be able to lead change. (Valpola et al. 2010, 52.) It can be stated that managers have lot of activities in their desks and sometimes they don't have time to think strategic questions. Also managers' work relies highly on numbers and strategic decisions rarely have factual data behind it. Many managers feel uncomfortable making strategic decisions without having enough information. However strategy is not only analytical issue but includes human factors and because of that strategy remains uncertain in some extent. (Tovstiga 2013, 9-12.)

People commit best when they are involved and participated. When planning strategy's implementation, it is useful to think how to get different parts of the organization to participate. Level and extent of the contribution depends on the organization's culture. In the organizations that culture is already supporting participating usually commitment to the strategy is on high level too. (Valpola et al. 2010, 51-52.)

Sense of community has a positive impact on the commitment too. An idea can have totally new meanings when it is shared with others. Communication can create great conditions to commit. (Juholin 2017, 25.)

Culture of accomplishment is fulfilled when employees, strategy and operative actions are linked as whole. This kind of culture requires discipline actions. When leader's actions and created systems to management are aligned everyone know what they are expected and how their performance is measured. Operation is clear, easy to understand and transparent. Communicating and planning of the strategy are leader's task but additionally also strategy's execution. Leading execution requires active participation to get things done through employees. (Valpola et al. 2010, 51-55.)

According to Kaplan and Norton successful execution of the strategy requires that employees are committed personally to the strategy and its' goals. Adaption for the staff happens in three stages:

1. Introduction to the strategy
2. Employees' personal goals and incentives linking to the strategy
3. Training programs according to the strategy so that everyone has needed information and skills to implement strategy

(Kaplan & Norton 2009, 168.)

### **3.4 Strategy communication**

Strategy doesn't open to everyone by reading it in intranet or having a Powerpoint presentation about the subject. Strategy doesn't evolve in the practise level just as announcing it. Strategy is so remarkable thing in the company's core that it requires thinking and discussions. (Juholin, 2009, 113.)

Strategy communication is divided into three different parts (figure 4): communication that supports execution of the strategy, communication of the strategy process and communication of the content of the strategy. In this thesis all of these parts are being considered but focus is on the communication of strategy's content and communication that supports execution.

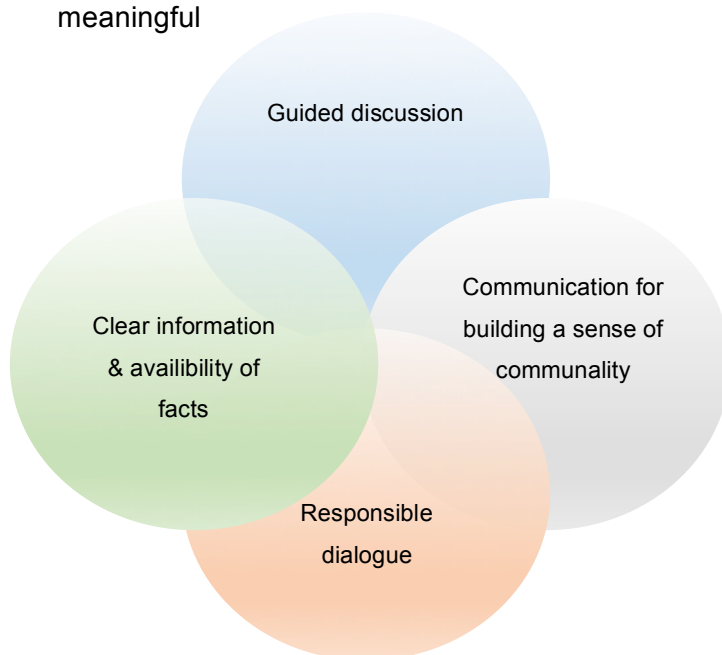


Picture 4. Strategy communication's different parts. (Hämäläinen & Maula 2004, 28.)

Core idea of internal communication is that work is flowing, employees are well-being and that the community is succeeding. Communication's nature is that it is present all the time in the organization and it can't be separated. There are several factors that it is based on: interaction between organization's members, communication with stakeholders and functional communication infrastructure. (Juholin 2017, 12-13)

There are four dimensions when viewed strategic communication in work community:

- guided discussion so that strategy is truly understood and working accordingly is possible
- clear information and availability of facts so that knowledge can be shared
- building of communality so that commitment is possible
- responsible dialogue so that it is possible to have an influence and work feels meaningful



Picture 5. Dimensions of strategic communication. (Juholin 2009, 121.)

From the perspective of strategy communication the dimension 'guided discussion' is the most meaningful. Big issues in the work place require discussions that are planned, prepared and listening participants. Guided discussion can take a place in workshops or group discussions. There can be used also facilitators who helps participants create solutions themselves which also helps participants then to commit to the solutions. Rare strategy is nearly perfect when it is invented. (Juholin 2009, 121.)

When discussed and thought together new ideas arise and different views come up. It is essential that those who execute strategy are heard and taken into consideration. Only then participants have a feeling that they have an impact and that they are meaningful for the work community. Guided discussion is in the core of leading strategy. It can be argued that the phrase 'Organization has a strategy' is misleading as the employees do the strategy in the everyday life. (Juholin 2009, 121-123.)



Picture 6. Different channels of internal communication. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 109-111.)

It is crucial to use multiply channels in the internal communication. Not any of the channels is alone enough. Official one-way communication channel such as intranet is

good starting point but is only one of the channels. One-way communication rarely supports individual's own thinking and through that understanding. Quite often internal strategy communication is thought as an action that is done in the end of the strategy change process. But when staff is participating to strategy process already in the early phase to create the strategy it works efficient communication channel too. Employees are more likely to commit to the strategy and they have time to understand the message. In addition there is needed communication in later phases too. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 109-111.)

In the communication it is essential to remember systematic approach and lot of repetition. Different kinds of communication styles are needed to get the message through the organization. In the figure there is gathered different communication channels and participation is in the core of all of them. Digital channel such as Yammer is effective way to capture people from different teams and this way replace for example emailing. Meetings and trainings are excellent places to discuss about the key topics. It is important for top management to meet employees and discuss. This can be done visiting workstations and taking part to work itself. In addition to top management's important role as a communicator it is beneficial to recognize other key roles in the organization and give them a role as a change agent and use that as a communication channel. Sometimes message from a colleague is easier to receive than from top management. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 111-114.)

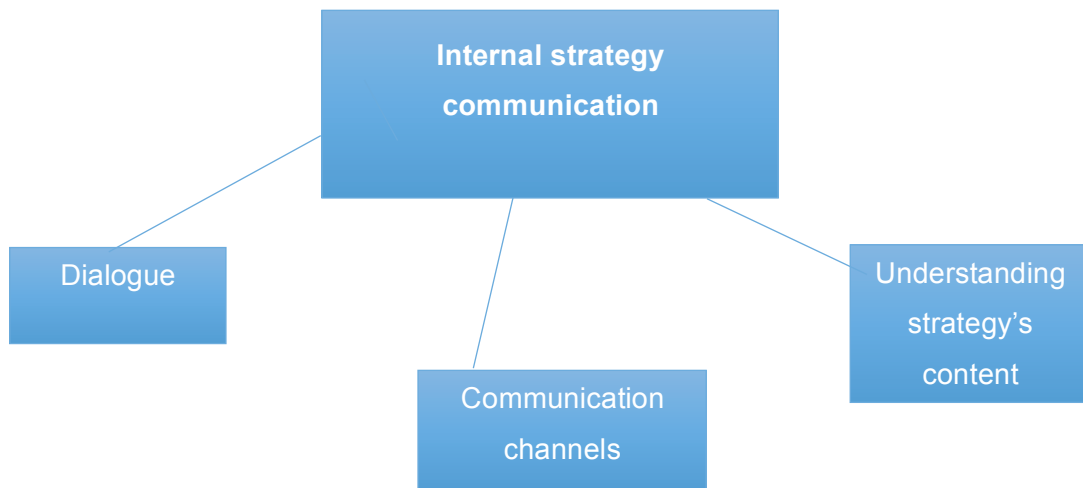
Strategy's implementation is often also a change process. Strategy is new and it needs to be established in the organization. In change process communication has critical role for success. In unsuccessful change projects it is often reported that communication has failed. It is important to give information in an early phase about coming change. If formal information is lacking from the top management it easily leads to rumours that can affect to speculation and stress. This starts the change process negatively. Even though the information to give wouldn't be finalized it is better to communicate it than not communicate anything at all. (Düren 2016.)

### **3.5 Framework**

Conceptual framework of this thesis concentrates on strategy's execution and communication of strategy. Both strategy and communication are huge as a concept and there are several approaches to focus on. In this thesis focus is on strategy's implementation and specially role of internal strategy communication as a part of the successful execution.



Picture below demonstrates conceptual framework. Internal communication while strategy is implemented is in the core of the framework. Terms that are linked to the internal strategy communication are in the focus and are repeated in this thesis. Dialogue and discussion are essential when communicating strategy. Different and wide range of communication channels repeats strategy and helps everyone to remember strategy message. Understanding strategy's content is one of the goals for internal strategy communication.



Picture 7. Conceptual framework.

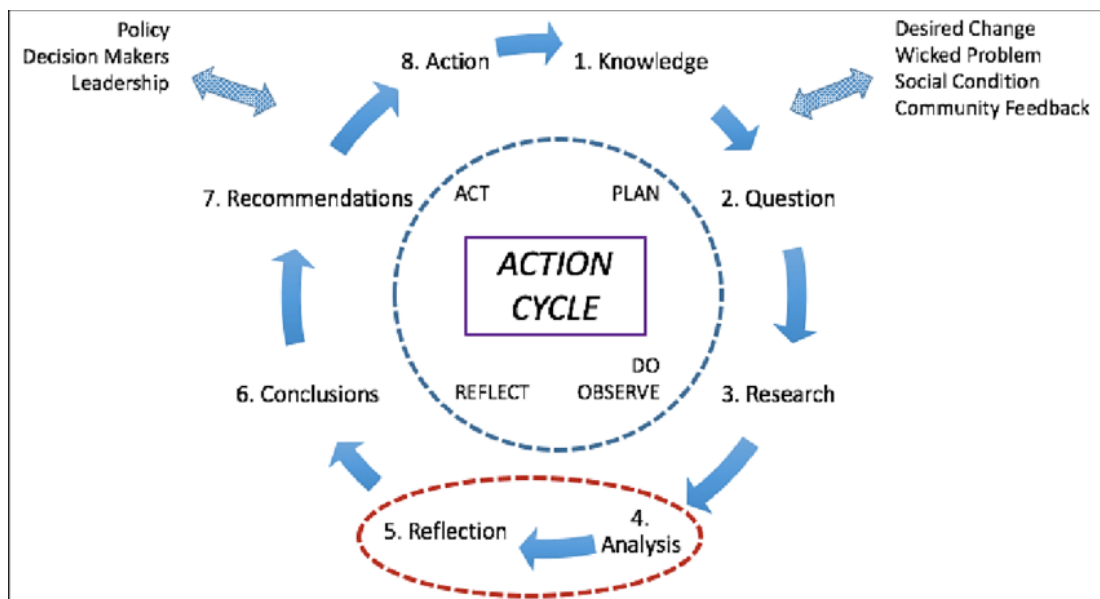
## 4 Methods

In this chapter there is presented the overview of the research approach and data collection process. Findings and analyses of the study are reviewed in the chapter 5.

### 4.1 Research strategy

The goal of this research was to investigate the current situation and find issues to improve. Based on the results there are suggested actions to develop. Applied research approach in this research is action study.

Action research is suitable approach when there is aimed for improvement and change for the current situation. It is characteristics that action study is mix of practise and theory. In the action study there is strongly present learning and aim is to change current ways of acting. (Puusa, Juuti, & Aaltio 2020, 17.) Action research can be applied when research includes issues considering people and there is needed to have better way for procedures (Bell & Waters 2014, 10.) Action research aims to investigate current reality and goal is to change. Fundamentally target is to create actions for problems or issues that needs to be changed, often they are social procedures. Crucial is that research is proceeding as a process and combining research and practise. In action research action is everything, the research object, instrument for the research and the goal. (Jyrkämä, J. Toimintatutkimus.)



Picture 8. Action research process. (Researchgate.net)

Action research is often used in organizations when aiming for understanding processes, creating development ideas and taking them into action (Puusa et al 2020, 17.) This

research had a goal to understand current situation, create development suggestions and offer action points for the future so characteristics of action research are fulfilled. Action research is not only investigating how things are at the moment but especially how things should be (Ojasalo, Moilanen & Ritalahti 2015, 61.) And this is exactly what this thesis is aiming in the commission organization.

The main research question is 'How strategy guides work in sales organization at the moment?' As the research proceeded there raised additional research question 'How to develop communication of the strategy more effective so that strategy would be closer to everyday life?'

## **4.2 Data collection**

Quantitative research answers to questions what, where, how much and how often. Quantitative research's characteristics are numerically big take and it aims to describe phenomena according the numerical data. Qualitative research answers to questions why, how and what kind of. Take is concise and discretionary. It aims to understand the phenomena according soft knowledge. Research approach can be quantitative or qualitative and in some cases one approach can complete another. Quantitative approach often explains the current situation but it doesn't necessary explain reasons behind the situation. Qualitative in the other hand helps to figure specifically reasons behind the phenomena and behaviour. (Heikkilä 2014, 15-16.)

The survey was executed as mixed research as the survey has quantitative questions and open questions as a qualitative part. Survey was executed in August 2020. It was sent to 72 members of the sales organization. Survey had 11 multiply questions and 5 open questions. 27 answers were received and respond rate was 37,5 per cent. Survey was only in Finnish due to it was pointed to sales organization in Finland. Survey was done as an online using Google Forms and was completely anonymous. The questions and answers to multiply questions can be found in appendix 1. Answers to open questions can be found from the researcher. Question and answers in the chapter 5 have been translated from Finnish to English with my best abilities.

In this research survey has been used both quantitative and qualitative approaches. First part of multiply questions aims to figure out if the strategy is well known and used in the organization. Goal of the second part's open questions is to explore how well strategy is known and used in everyday life. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are completing one another to get as comprehensive picture as possible.






Survey is planned poll and it is efficient way to gather information when there are many respondents. Online survey's features make it very efficient: no need for interviewers and answers can be received quickly. In the other hand survey has a big possibility for misunderstandings and accuracy of the answers can be questionable. In the survey there is possibility to ask delicate questions but longer questionnaires eliminate responds. (Heikkilä 2014, 19.)

Survey was done in the middle of Covid-19 pandemic. During summer 2020 due to economic crisis there were layoffs in the study organization that affects to the respond rate as well as ongoing holiday season. Survey was still done during that time because new strategy process was already ongoing and the current situation wanted to investigate before implementation of the new strategy started.

## 5 Analyses of questionnaire ‘How strategy guides work in sales organization?’

In this chapter there are reviewed findings of the survey. Questions are listed here in the order they were presented in the survey. In the analyses questions are grouped by two topics. Two main topics are strategy and communication.

All the questions were compulsory. All the respondents are working in the sales. There are respondents from every level of the organization, sales leaders, team leads and employees and every answer is equal. In the multiply questions there were used Likert scale. Respondents had five options to choose from that suit them best:

I totally disagree	
I disagree	
I can't say	
I agree	
I totally agree	

Multiply questions are:

1. I know our company's strategy.
2. I'm committed to execute the strategy.
3. I'm excited about our strategy.
4. Our strategy guides my daily work.
5. My work is meaningful part of strategy's implementation.
6. I know what kind of actions I need to do to execute strategy.
7. There is open discussion about the strategy in our company.
8. Strategy is communicated internally in our organization.
9. Strategy is communicated to our customers.

10. I miss more information and discussion about the strategy.

11. I need additional information about our strategy to execute it in my work.

After 11 multiply questions there are six open questions. Open questions are:

12. Where do you get information about our strategy?

13. In which context you discuss about the strategy?

14. What things guide you in when you are making decisions? And how?

15. How strategy is seen in your work?

16. How do you execute our strategy in your work?

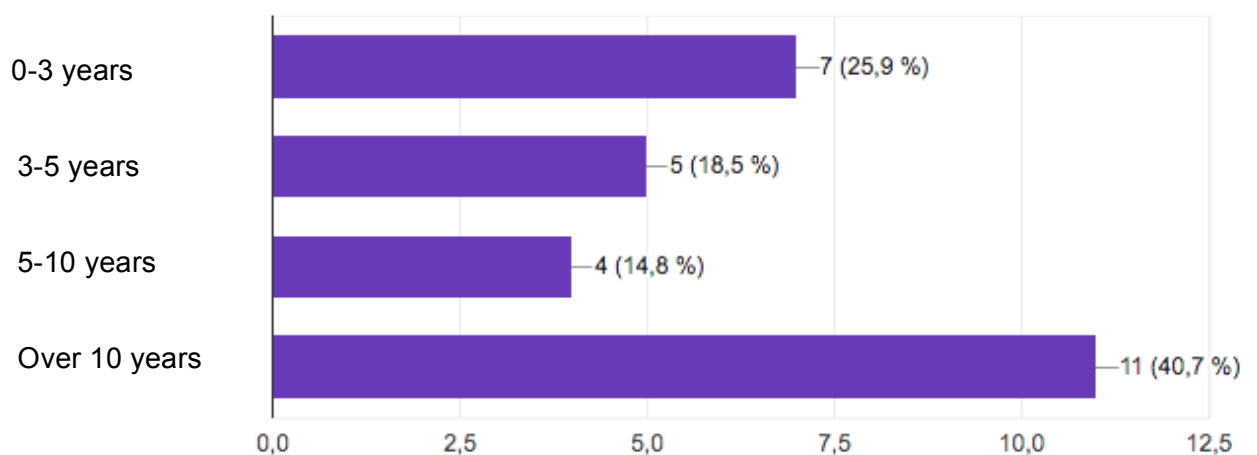
17. Describe our company's strategy your own words.

In the end of the survey there are two background questions:

18. How many years you have been serving in the company?

19. In which team you are working in?

Results for the background question 18 can be found below:



Picture 9. How long respondents have been working in the company? N=27

## 5.1 Knowledge of strategy's content

Questions 1-6 are about strategy's content, how well it is known and how it is seen in the everyday work. First claim was 'I know our company's strategy' where total 74,1 per cent either totally agreed or agreed. In the other hand to open question where it was asked to explain company's strategy own words there were variant answers. There are several answers where there is referred to company's values. There are also several answers where there is a wide explanation about the current strategy's actions. It can be stated that there are lot of different views in the sales organization and not everyone is aware what strategy is over all and what is company's strategy. There were also lot of different choices of words and only one exact strategy statement as it is officially stated. Here are some direct quotes from the answers that have been translated with best abilities:

'Maybe increasing profitability'

'Volume with good margins'

'Better learning and working environments by offering lifecycle services'

'Values'

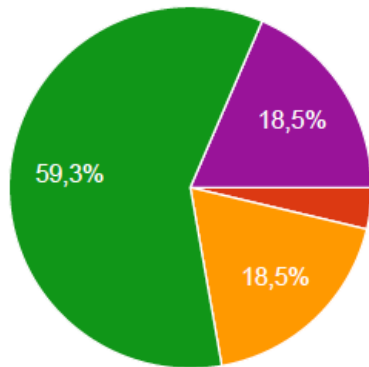
'Offering customer as comprehensive services as possible to create better office premises and getting the best out of it.'

'Offering wide range of services? There is no strategy actually'

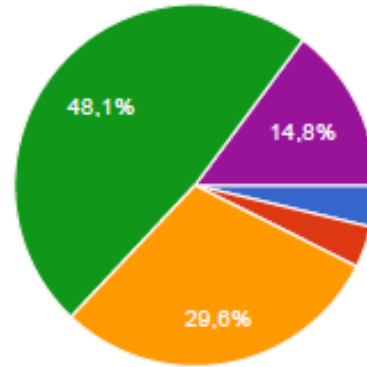
When strategy is sealed to a form that is easy to remember it also helps implementing the strategy. Crystal clear strategy message gives a framework for everyday work. (Valpola et al. 2010, 24.) According to research done in Finland only two per cent of employees, eight per cent of middle management and 13 per cent of leaders can say company's strategy as it is officially stated (<https://www.uwasa.fi/fi/news/maury>). Surveys have showed that it is easy to choose an option that respondent knows what is the strategy but when asked to explain it the answers struggles. (Sull, Homkes & Sull, 2015.) This phenomena can be seen in this questionnaire as well.

Second claim is 'I'm committed to the strategy's execution' and 78,3 per cent of respondents totally agrees or agrees. All of the respondents who have been working in the company 10 years or more are committed to the strategy's implementation. Based on that those who have been working longer in the company are generally more committed to

the strategy and its' execution. Third claim is 'I'm enthusiastic about the strategy' and to that 29,6 per cent have answered 'can't say' and 7,5 per cent either totally disagrees or disagrees. In this claim there is more dispersion than earlier two claims



Picture 10. Claim 2: I'm committed to the strategy's execution.



Picture 11. Claim 3: I'm enthusiastic about the strategy.

Respondents are more committed to the strategy than enthusiastic about it. Being enthusiastic about strategy helps usually to commit. When staff is participating to strategy process they commit to it more often than without participation. Participation generates discussion and enthusiasm as well. (Valpola et al. 2010, 56.)

Fourth claim is 'Our strategy guides my daily work'. One third has chosen 'I can't say' option and 18,5 per cent either totally disagrees or disagrees. 48,1 per cent totally agrees or disagrees. Open question 'What things guide you in your decision making? And how?' is linked to this claim.

'Customer's interest guides always my decision making'

'Sales targets, I always try to get deal done'

'At the moment tenders guide my work to be price centered'

'In decision making I'm guided by profitability and my own thought how strategy is executed in daily choices (services, long-term vs short-term, from customers relationship to partnerships). Unfortunately current market situation, our organization culture, way we work and how staff is being guided to prioritize are against actions that are important to strategy execution.'



## 'Profitability and margins'

It is essential to understand that strategy execution happens in individual level even though strategy would be decided on an organizational level. (Kenny, 2019.) It can be stated that in the claim 'Our strategy guides my daily work' and open question 'What things guide you in your decision making?' there are other things too that guides daily work besides strategy. Goals that have been asset for sales repeat in several answers. Goals are different from strategy. Strategy is a clear set of activities and choices what not to do as goals are often fact targets and aiming to them requires a strategy. (Vermeulen, 2017.)

Next claim 'My work is meaningful part of strategy's implementation.' has got 22,2 percent totally agreeing and 59,5 percent agreeing which is a great result. However as for the claim 'Our strategy guides my daily work' over half of the respondents either 'can't say' or are disagreeing gives an outlook that it isn't necessary clear what kind of activities are according to the strategy or that daily work consists of things that are not experienced according to the strategy. Still work is seen meaningful part of strategy's execution.

Open question 'How strategy is seen in your work?' opens this contradiction more.

'Only little'

'In the discussions with customers'

'It is so wide (strategy) that it can be seen everywhere'

'Little. Now there is lot of reactive work. Because of holidays and layoffs we are just prioritizing and trying to survive'

'I discuss with customers about better learning and working environments entirely.'

There were several answers that strategy isn't seen in daily work or that it seen everywhere all the time just because strategy is so wide and not narrowing down the activities. Also there were answers that give a view that strategy is confused to sales targets or company's values.

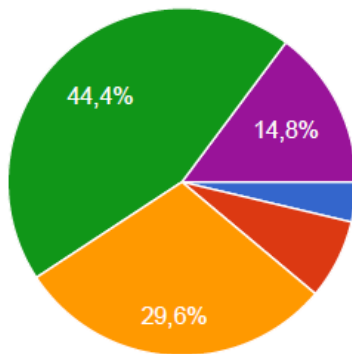
'Effort to constant extra selling'

'Working together, teamwork and cheering others'

'Obeying certain rules, we can together achieve our goals'

According to these results it seems that work itself is seen meaningful but it isn't necessary clear if it's tasks are according to the strategy or not.

Last claim about strategy part is 'I know what kind of actions I need to do to execute strategy' where 59,2 percent either totally agrees or agrees but in the other hand 29,6 percent can't say and rest 11,2 disagrees. There are many 'Can't say'-answers that raised a question if the respondents really don't know what actions they should do according to the strategy or they didn't understand the question fully. However the result is that over half know what kind of actions should be done to execute strategy.



Picture 12. Claim 6: I know what kind of actions I need to do execute strategy.

Open question 'How do you execute our strategy in your work'? is linked to claim 6.

'I'm trying to serve our customers as well as possible'

'Selling services'

'If my whole day doesn't go to different problem solving tasks I try to bring strategy to the customer discussions'

'I try to do my work as well and as quick as possible'

'Strategy guides my work in the background'

'Offering to the customer widely our products and services'

In the open answers repeats that the customer is in the center and attempt to work as effectively as possible. These are both good targets but it's unclear if the strategy is guiding these actions or even if the strategy is clear to the respondents.

## 5.2 Communication

Claims 7-11 are about communication of the strategy both internal and external.

First claim 'There is open discussion about strategy in our company' has a clear result. Biggest part 44,5 per cent are disagreeing or totally disagreeing. In addition 14,8 per cent can't say. Open question 'In which context you discuss about the strategy?' digs deeper to these results. Here some of the answers freely translated to English:

'Sometimes with my supervisor'

'Always with the customer'

'I don't discuss about it, should be more discussion'

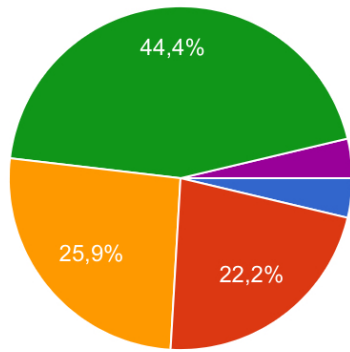
'None as I don't know our strategy'

'In customer meetings'

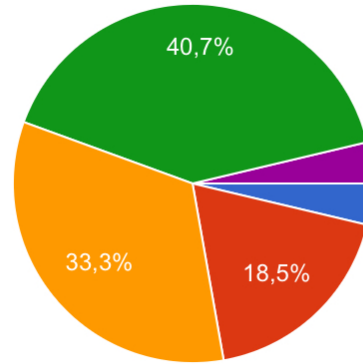
'With my colleagues'

To transfer strategy from theory to daily activities there needs to be discussion and dialogue. When there are situations to discuss about the strategy together it creates confidence for individuals to execute strategy. (Valpola et al. 2010, 85.)

Next two claims are linked together and results are parallel. Strategy is communicated internally in our company and strategy is communicated to our customers. Respondents are divided to half into those who agree that strategy is communicated both internally and externally and to those who can't say or disagree. In these questions it is essential to understand that there are respondents from every level of the organization, sales leaders, team leads and employees. Typically sales leaders are working more with the strategy than employees and so also discussing more about the strategy (Sull et al. 2015.)



Picture 13. Claim 8: Strategy is communicated internally in our organization.



Picture 14. Claim 9: Strategy is communicated to our customers.

Next claim is 'I miss more discussion and information about our strategy' where result is clear as 70 per cent totally agrees or agrees. Respondents are concerted also in the last claim 'I need more information about our strategy to execute it in my work' where 74 per cent are totally agreeing and agreeing. According to these answers more communication about strategy is missed. Also the last open question 'Where do you get information about our strategy?' continues same results.

'My manager'

'Intranet'

'I don't know'

'I can't find anywhere'

'Top management and staff meetings'

'It would be good to know where...'

There were several 'I don't know' answers but also several answers that repeated intranet and managers. Combining the results from the claims 'I miss more discussion and information about our strategy' and 'I need more information about our strategy to execute it in my work' and where to get the information it still gives an outlook that there is not enough information and discussion about strategy in the channels where people get the information. In other words there are information and discussion partners available but there is not enough discussion and information. Having several communication channels for discussions about strategy creates more discussion. When there are different places and situations where strategy reoccurs it evidentially increases touch points and discussion. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 123.)

### **5.3 Key points**

Key findings of this survey are: strategy is not linked to daily work, strategy is not seen enough everyday and engagement is high to the strategy but knowledge of the strategy's content varies a lot.

This kind of survey was done in the organization for the first time so results are essential to become aware what is the level of strategy knowledge and strategy's communication now. By knowing the starting point it is possible to evolve to become more efficient organization.

It can be stated that strategy's importance is well acknowledged. Engagement to the strategy is high too. However the knowledge of the strategy's content varies between teams and individuals. As everyone in this survey are working in the sales teams and are the first link to the customer it would be essential to know strategy by heart. There was also confusion what are strategy, values and sales targets and that they are not a same thing even though all of them important. Strategy's link to daily life seems to fumble as work tasks were disconnected from strategy and strategy wasn't clearly seen in everyday life.

Development is needed the most in the communication part. There is a need to have more information about strategy's content and also more communication on strategy. It is essential to understand too that not only one-way communication is enough. Strategy should be understood which might require lot more repetition and dialogue as just for knowing as written what organization's strategy is. The amount of emails sent about the strategy doesn't necessary increase the understanding of the strategy. According to the survey commitment to the strategy's execution is high but when asked to tell in own words what the strategy is answers varies. This gives an outlook that commitment is high to the company or to the work rather than strategy itself. Strategy is not fully understood and not seen in the daily work enough throughout sales organization.

### **5.4 Validity and reliability**

Validity of the quantitative research means that the research has measured what it was meant to measure. Respondents should understand the questions similar way than researcher has thought so that the answers bring results for the wanted question. (Vilkka 2021, 153.)

Reliability of the quantitative research means how accurate the results are. In other words if the same research would be repeated the results would be the same. It is important to

understand that research is always tight to the time and place so the research can't be generalised. Reliability of the qualitative research is trickier to estimate than quantitative. However qualitative research is reliable when the research object and analysed material are compatible. Also there shouldn't be any unnecessary or random factors affecting to the research. In this research both quantitative and qualitative approached were implemented. (Vilkka 2021, 153-156.)

As a researched I estimate that this research is valid as the survey gives answers to the questions that were set and questions have been understood as they have been thought. This research is also reliable when considering both quantitative and qualitative parts. However in the quantitative part for some multiple questions 'I can't say'- option is quite high thought. That leaves some questions open: respondent doesn't want to answer to the questions or respondent doesn't know what the question means. Also in the qualitative part there are some questions that have answers that are quite parallel. For example answers to questions: 'How do you execute strategy in your daily work?' and 'How strategy is seen in your work?' have similar answers.

Afterwards it is easy to say that I would do some things differently now. I would change some of the questions asked in the survey after analysing the results. There should have been more and more specific questions about internal communication of the strategy. In addition to the question 'Where do you get information about strategy?' it would have been informative to ask 'Where would you want to get information about the strategy' and 'What ways you would like to get to know strategy so that you can execute it in your work?' These questions would have been interesting to have answers considering the research question 2: How to develop communication of the strategy more effective?

## 6 Developing internal communication of the strategy

In this chapter I will discuss about the development ideas to the main issue that rose in the survey. I will give ideas how to bring strategy closer to everyday life with concrete examples for more efficient communication. I have divided the development ideas to two areas: developing communication of top management and developing communication of managerial level.

### 6.1 Developing ideas for top management

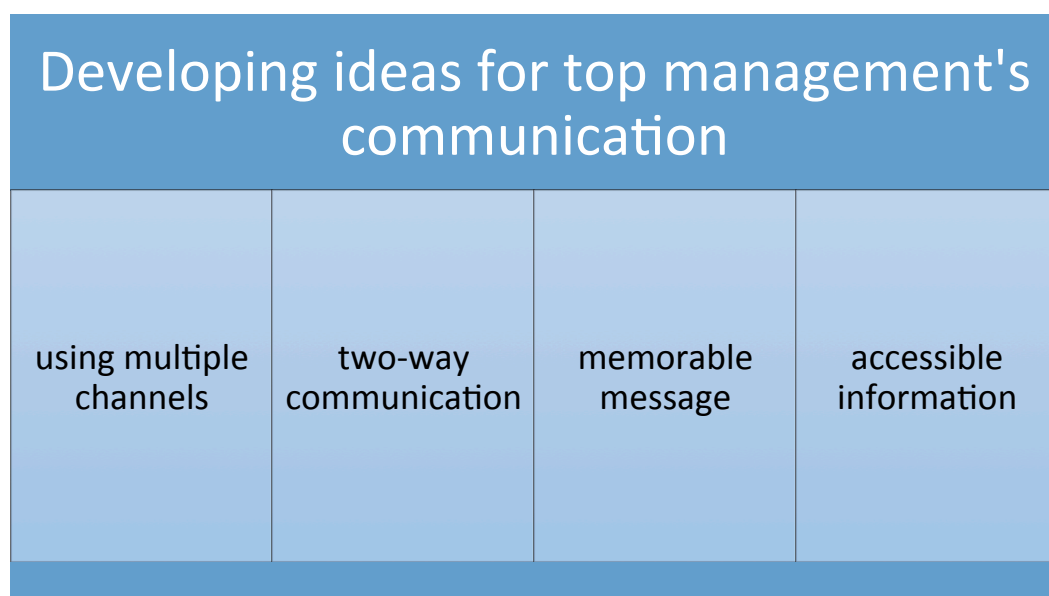
In this survey there were several results that show lack of communication about strategy. Strategy communication requires communication through many different channels. Communication is more efficient when there are used several channels. Top management's different communication channels are in figure. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 110-126.)



Picture 14. Top management's communication channels. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 110.)

Physical presence has its' limits in organization with several offices. But with digital communication top management can communicate equally and simultaneously to every one in the organization. Even though the message seems to be clear in top management it doesn't mean that everyone else knows or remembers it. That's why repetition is important when communicating something new. Strategy processes are always change processes too. Managing change communication requires systematic approach. Staff training and staff surveys are excellent opportunities to repeat strategy message and bring the topic up. Both occasions are arranged regularly so repetition of the strategy comes naturally. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 110-126.)

In the survey there were several answers that respondents were not speaking about strategy and were missing more discussion about the strategy. In change processes as implementing new strategy two-way communication creates mutual understanding. Understanding helps to remember. Top management is essential to create occasions to listen and ask questions from the staff. Conversations help employees to engage and to understand. Digital communication tools such as Yammer makes conversations easy to have even without physical presence. (Korhonen & Bergman 2019, 122-124.) As important as using different channels is to use different ways of communication such as spoken, written, pictures and symbols to reinforce the message. (Keller & Schaninger 2020.)



Picture 15. Development ideas for top management's communication.

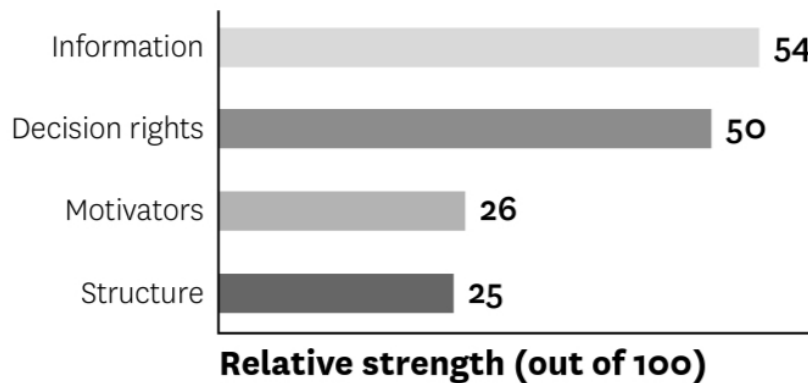
Last tip for more efficient strategy communication is creating strategy message that is easy to remember. In the article 'How do we manage change journey?' has quoted great encapsulation from Willie Walsh:



“The simpler the message, the easier it is to deliver. The simpler the message, the more likely it is to be consistent. The simpler the message, the easier it is to control and manage the communication.”

Additionally to simple one sentence it is crucial to have visual pictures to reinforce the message. Once again there is possibility to repeat strategy in different ways so that it resonates in as many employees as possible (Keller & Schaninger 2020.) Even though the message should be simple the meaning shouldn't be simple. The reason why organization exists, purpose, should be visible in the strategy message. It helps employees to link their everyday tasks to the company when the message is clear, deep and relevant. (Everse 2011.)

According to survey that had respondents from 1000 companies in 50 different countries the fact that affects most to successful strategy execution is information flow. Information flow includes lot of different aspects but ensuring that everyone has rights to essential information is one of them. Figure below is from the article 'The secrets to successful strategy execution' and it shows which aspects affect to the strategy execution most. (Neilson, Martin & Powers 2011.)



Picture 16. Aspects that affect most to the strategy's execution. (Neilson, Martin & Powers 2011.)

One thing that rose in the survey was that respondents didn't know where to find information about strategy. It is essential to everyone in the organization to know where to find information and strategy should be available to everyone. Simply a page in intranet with visual effects and possibility to discuss would help tackling this issue.

## 6.2 Developing ideas for managerial level

All the actions in the organization should be aligned to organization's strategy. Manager has an important role helping team to realise and understand strategy in practise. Picture below reflects that the strategy is organization's map that sets the direction but managers should fit goals according the strategy and coach their team so that the performances and strategic objectives are in same direction.

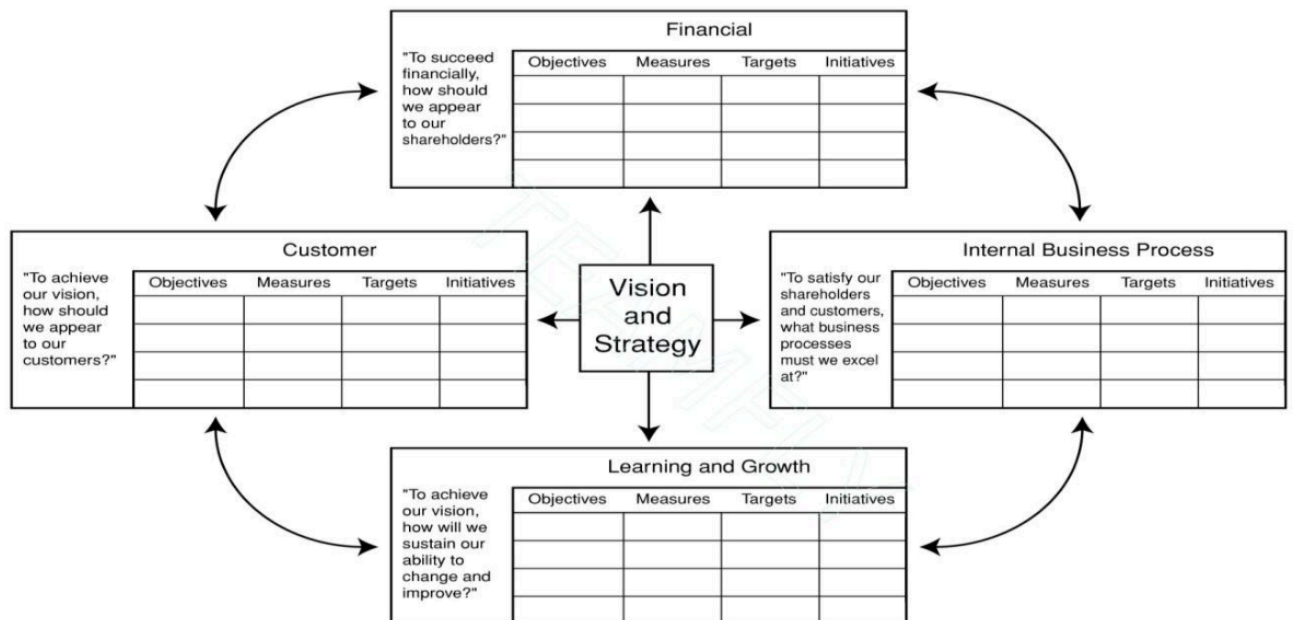


Picture 17. Strategic approach to performance management. (Valpola et al. 2011, 132.)

Every mid-manager has a crucial and rather challenging role to help team members to realize strategy. This is time-consuming and inquires a lot of discussion and dialogue with team members separately as well as team as a whole. In the other hand the goal of this coaching approach is that every team member would be able to make decisions on their own. This way manager's role is more coaching and leading people rather than managing things. (Valpola et al. 2011, 131-135.) Next there is introduced one tool to help managers to discuss about the strategy in their teams and bring strategy closer to daily work.

### 6.3 Balanced scorecard as strategy communication tool

To support communication and bringing strategy closer to everyone's daily work balanced scorecard is a concrete tool. It helps to translate strategy into actions in daily work. One of its' advantage is that it functions as an internal communication tool in personal level, bringing strategy to every employees work. It also gives possibility to management measure and discuss about strategic objectives on personal level with each employee. (Quesado, Guzmán, Rodrigues, 2017.)



Picture 18. Balanced Scorecard framework by Kaplan&Norton.

Balanced scorecard is popular tool in strategic management and its' key idea is to transfer strategy to operative actions based on measuring and action plans. Strategy needs to be divided into four different approaches when using balanced scorecard: financial, internal business process, learning & growth and customer. Under each approach there are four sectors to think through: strategic objectives, key measurements, targets and initiatives. Already going through these approaches and sectors helps organization to get to know strategy better in practise. Using balanced scorecard in every team brings strategy closer to everyone's daily work and gives concrete actions how the common goal stays in mind. (Vuorinen 2013, 56-57.)

Benefits of using balanced scorecard are for example communication with employees about everyone's individual contribution, clarify strategy to employees by concrete action and work as an internal communication tool. (Quesado et al. 2017.) All these would help

the case organization to bring strategy closer to daily life of employees as well as strengthen internal communication. As stated before it is important in internal communication to use different channels and balanced scorecard provides one channel and one possibility more to discuss about strategy.

#### 6.4 Starting implementing development ideas

In order to bringing strategy closer to daily lives in study organization I have created plan to implementing the development ideas. In the table below there is a plan for how to start implementing actions that were introduced earlier in this chapter. Ideas are in an order of priority so the first idea should be the first to execute. Priority is evaluated considering the impact and resources needed. For example the first development idea is easy to implement but it has a big impact. In the second column there is listed shortly how to start implementing the idea. In the third column there are mentioned methods that can be applied in the process.

<b>Development idea in the priority order</b>	<b>How to start</b>	<b>Methods</b>
Accessible information	Creating own intranet page for strategy where is also visual material to enrich the message	Making sure that everyone knows where to find information about strategy: managers informing in the weekly meetings + new post in the intranet
Memorable message	To refine the strategy message to be so clear and simple that it is easier to remember. Adding more visual material about strategy to help remembering.	Brainstorm for top management, workshop for managers to clear the message.
Using multiply channels	Systematically listing different communication channels in the organization and adding communication about the	Workshop for top management on how to add discussion and communication in the existing

	strategy in them.	communication channels and having new channels for strategy communication
Two-way communication	Having time for listening and having dialogues with the staff	Creating occasions between top management and staff to discuss about the strategy. Top management's strong presence in the daily activities helps open discussion.
Balanced scorecard	Managers have to adopt deep understanding of the strategy and the usage of balanced scorecard before starting to use it in their own teams.	Workshop for managers and team leads where to learn together how to use balanced scorecard.

Table 1. Implementation plan of the development ideas.

## 7 Conclusion

The goal of this thesis was to bring strategy closer to daily activities of employees. The starting point was to investigate current situation how well strategy guides work in sales organization in the commission company. There was new strategy process starting in the company and this kind of information was essential to have for the execution phase. The idea was to create development ideas based on the survey's results.

First research question was 'How strategy guides work in the sales organization at the moment?' To that question I searched answer from the survey. This kind of survey wasn't done ever before in the company and there wasn't information how employees experience strategy in their daily lives. Survey's results showed that strategy wasn't clearly seen in daily life and that the knowledge of the strategy's content varied in sales teams. It was clear that there weren't enough internal communication channels for strategy discussion.

The survey's results showed that there was most to develop in the knowledge of the strategy's content and there was a big need for more efficient internal communication of the strategy. In the results repeated the need for more discussion about the strategy as well as consciousness where to find information about the strategy. Also the knowledge of the strategy's content varied a lot among the sales organization. Strategy processes are always also change processes and communication has a critical role in the successful change (Düren 2016.)

Based on the challenges rose in the survey there was additional research question created: How to develop communication of the strategy more effective? To this question I searched answer from the literature and based on literature review I gave concrete development ideas. Development ideas focused on what kind of actions ought to be done to have more effective internal communication and in consequence bring strategy closer to employees' daily lives. Ideas were divided into two approaches: for top management and for managerial level.

Development ideas for top management were to: use multiply communication channels, add two-way communication, reshape strategy message to more memorable and ensure that information is accessible to everyone. Talking about strategy is evident for top management but for the employees it might seem distant. To bringing strategy more to daily activities it requires repetition. Repetition can be created using several different communication channels so that strategy can be seen everywhere. Using multiply communication channels such as physical and digital presence, staff meetings, trainings

and surveys brings strategy more visible. (Valpola et al. 2011; Korhonen & Bergman 2019.)

Development idea for managerial level is to start using balanced scorecard as a communication tool. Balanced scorecard is used in organizations to bring strategy into concrete actions. While it works as a strategy tool it also is one possibility to discuss about strategy. When using balanced scorecard in teams it would create natural opportunity to everyone to discuss about the strategy. (Quesado et al. 2017.)

Thesis was done during Covid-19 crisis that affected to this thesis process. There was organizational change done in the company that led to lack of resources to tutor my thesis. Additionally in my personal life there was a big change in the end of 2020 as I gave a birth a baby girl. Due to that timeline that I had planned stretched. If it had been possible I'd have carried out some of the development ideas into actions in the company. There could have been a workshop for management team about the tips for strategy communication. I hope to execute some of the ideas according to the plan I created when I return to work from my parental leave. Survey brought new information for the study organization but the development part of this thesis remains perfunctory. However this thesis leaves possibility to the study company for follow-up actions and further research.

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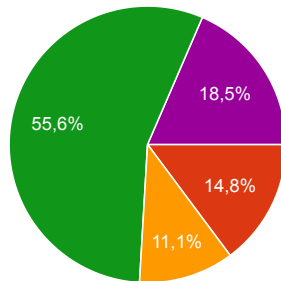


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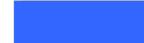
## Attachments

### Appendix 1. Survey 'How strategy guides work in sales organization?'

I know our company's strategy



I totally disagree



I disagree



I can't say



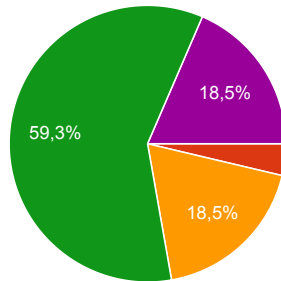
I agree



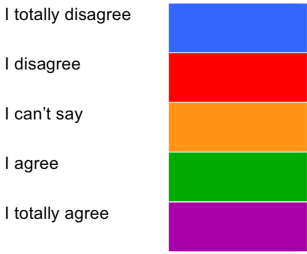
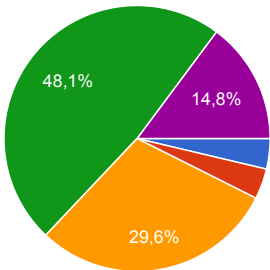
I totally agree



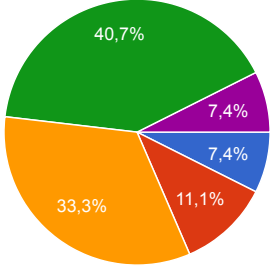
I'm committed to execute the strategy.



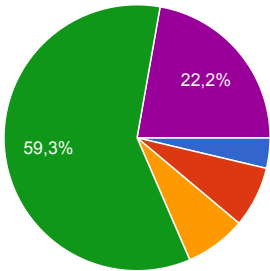
I'm excited about our strategy.



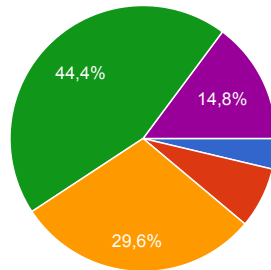
Our strategy guides my daily work.



My work is meaningful part of strategy's implementation.



I know what kind of actions I need to do to execute strategy.



I totally disagree



I disagree



I can't say



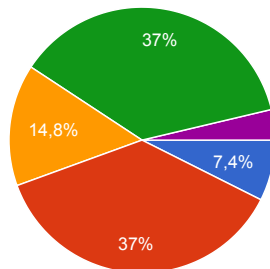
I agree



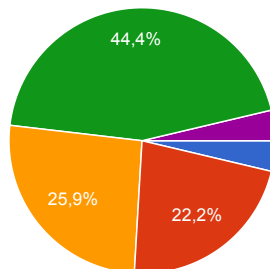
I totally agree



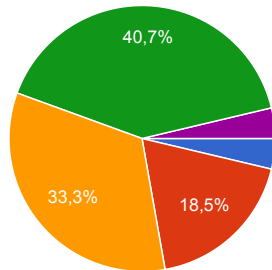
There is open discussion about the strategy in our company.



Strategy is communicated internally in our organization.



Strategy is communicated to our customers.



I totally disagree



I disagree



I can't say



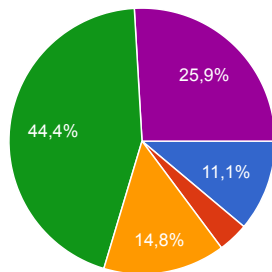
I agree



I totally agree



I miss more information and discussion about the strategy.



I need additional information about our strategy to execute it in my work.

