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The Nexus Between Strategic Decision-Making, Strategic Communication and Organizational Performance: A Critical Literature Review

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Abstract

Strategic decisions are long term, highly unstructured, complex, inherently risky, and have a great impact on the future of the organization. Strategic decisions are those important decisions that typically require a vast number of organizational resources, and consideration of the firm's environment consideration. Decision-making is so important that none of the managerial functions can be performed without it. Decisions influence organizational direction, administration, and structure. Decisions can be costly or beneficial depending on the approach of the decision-making process, the quality of the decisions made. In this regard, strategic decision-making should be well communicated. In an organic company with a stated focus on the people who make it up, its flexibility allows important information to arrive in necessary doses, impacting daily decisions and in the organization itself, with no conflicting messages to the market and simplifying the process of an implementation strategy. Communication holds several fences to implementing a strategy in a company. The strategies of communication are created when there is a crisis or a major event clearly requiring communication issues to be resolved. Most companies understand and appreciate the importance of creating strategic plans to drive decision making over the long term. Strategic and proper communication gives a channeling on how to deal with upheavals such as major changes in the company or organization, layoffs and downsizing, and technological change. The idea is that the companies cannot organize organizational resources without knowing where the organization wants to be and how it will get there, hence effective communication is a key factor to consider. This paper sought to establish the relationship between strategic decision making, the organizational performance and the role of strategic communication on the relationship. The paper adopted a qualitative research design and used secondary data. A critique on previous studies done by scholars. A significant relationship between strategic decision-makings and organization performance was established. The paper revealed that strategic decision-makings and organization performance will be incorporated as such decision support system these factors will be the catalyst between strategic decision-makings and organization performance. The paper recommended that responsible managers should be geared towards facing and tackling the challenges of strategic communication like poor authority structure, lack of coordination

and support from other management levels and resistance from lower levels and poor planning activities in order to realize better performance.

Keywords: *Strategic Decision-Making, Strategic Communication, Organisational performance*

1.1 Introduction

Decision-making is one of the most important functions of managers in any kind of organization (Nooraie, 2012). It is central managerial activity in all types of business organizations; large and small, for profit and not - profit, private and public (Elbanna & Child, 2007). Successful strategic decision making enables an organization to maintain competitive position, align internal operations with external environment and survive threats and challenges. Conversely, because of its magnitude, a single, poorly made strategic decision can lead to the demise of an organization and result in corporate embarrassment, large economic losses for stakeholders or even bankruptcy (Mueller, Mone & Barker, 2007). Decision making involves an act of identifying and ably selecting among an array of alternatives based on the inclination (Harris, 2009). Decision making includes variety of processes that are all intermediate steps between thought and action which are the precursors to behavior (Talley, 2011).

Previous reviews of the role of context in making strategic decisions create an informative overview of the contextual factors that impinge on strategic decision processes (Child, Elbanna & Rodrigues, 2010; Papadakis, Thanos & Barwise, 2010; Shepherd & Rudd, 2014). The strength of these reviews lies in creating awareness of the integrative approach to context as an explanation for strategic decision processes and the ways in which they factor into the relationship between the process and outcomes of strategic decisions. However, there is still need to establish the role strategic communication as a vehicle to enhanced organizational performance.

The role of strategic communication revolves around helping the organisation respond to environmental uncertainty (Murphy, 2007; Argenti, 2015; Cornelissen, 2020). While strategic communication is recognised as a multidisciplinary endeavour (Sandhu, 2009), it remains central to the practice of public relations (Chia & Synnott, 2009) and aligns with the management of communication on behalf of an organisation. Zerfass (2009) acknowledges the embedded nature of strategic communication function within organisational social structures acquired through shared interpretations and routines.

Several studies have shown that organisational communication is an important driving force of ensuring business performance (Gay, Mahoney & Graves, 2005; Mitrofan & Bulborea, 2013) as it ensure that the organisational cooperative system is dynamic and links the organizational purpose to the participants. Furthermore, it also highlights the multiple interpretations that symbols might manifest as well as the impact of history and various organisational constituents on the communication process (Jaradat & Sy, 2012).

According to Carmona, Iyer and Reckers (2011), the communication of a good strategy is usually given less attention than the creation of that strategy and yet without good communications effective execution of the strategy is impossible. There is a generic agreement that communication effectiveness has been one of the leading indicators of an organization's business performance (Meng & Pan 2012). Previous research reported that one of the main reasons behind the failure in the implementation of strategies is usually attributed to the top managers' poor communications strategies (Lueg & Julner 2014; Cokins, 2017). The ability of these human actors to communicate in an effective manner may be itself a source of competitive advantage or disadvantage (Malina & Selto, 2001). The terms strategic

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communication and communication strategy are also commonly interchanged in the literature (Steyn & Puth, 2000; Clampitt, DeKoch & Cashman, 2000; Cornelissen, 2020). These terms generally reflect decision making in communication activities driven by corporate strategy (Argenti, 2015). Employees' perceptions about the communication process must be considered, because what they think or feel affects how they interact and act with the organisational environment (Arnold & Silva, 2011; Borca & Baesu, 2014).

However, previous literature has not yet established evidence on the mediating role of strategic communication on the relationship between strategic decision making and organisational performance, hence this paper sought to establish the relationship between strategic communication, strategic communication and organizational performance. This paper adopted a qualitative research design which entailed a critical review of literature on the effect of strategic decision making on organizational performance and the role strategic communication plays in this relationship. The rationale for this design was to interrogate views, methods, and findings of authors on the relationships among study variables.

Strategic Decision-Making

Strategic decision-making is defined as an organized process of information gathering, processing and evaluating it is a part of the process of transferring knowledge and information into the administrative activities (Ghaliah, 2015). Strategic decisions also refer to exceptional decisions characterized by inclusiveness, rationality and long-term, and include a series of stages that constitute the cornerstone of the success of business organizations; any error that occurs in it will expose the organization to significant risks (Rteimeh, 2021). Therefore, the organizations seek to keep these decisions away from the impact of the external authorities or authorities that have certain powers, with the need to take into account the decentralization when making those decisions.

Strategic decision-making is the most important and plays vital roles in any organization, it is a centralized management activity in all types of business organizations; large and small, for-profit, non-profit, private and public, it is also a long-lasting process, largely unregulated, complex, risky and has a major impact on the future of the organization (Ivan & Ivana, 2012). (Ahmed, Bwisa, Otieno & Karanja, 2014) indicated that making the right decisions is not only limited to what the organization wants, but also includes what it should do. On the other hand, the consequences of not making a decision can be more severe than making the wrong decision. Strategic decision-making is very important because of its characteristic. The importance of strategic decision-making stems primarily from the impacts on the organizational performance.

Decision-making is considered one of the most important things that affect the position of the institutions and organizations in the market, especially if these decisions are related to the strategic decisions (Issawi, 2015). The importance of strategic decision-making is that it is related to the future side and the time dimension. It also includes fields of life in all its forms that are related to the long term and future perspectives (Hamza, 2008).

Strategy Communication

Strategic communication is largely about messaging for effects (Eyre & Littleton, 2012). Strategic communication as it is viewed as a production and distribution function where strategies and decisions are made towards achieving the organisation's objectives (Falkheimer, 2014). Moreover, as advocated by Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Van Ruler, Verčič, & Sriramesh, (2007), strategic communication can be understood as 'the purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission' and it is used in different academic areas such as management, marketing, public relations, technical communications, and political communication (Bellou, 2014).

The concept of strategic communication is attractive, but rather fuzzy and not properly defined (Nothhaft, Werder, Verčič, & Zerfass, 2018), that its disciplinary status remains unclear (Werder, Nothhaft, Verčič, & Zerfass, 2018), and those variations of communication (van Ruler, 2018) and strategy (Winkler & Etter, 2018) are not explored to their full extent. Several authors have proposed alternative approaches to research the field. Only a minority argue explicitly for concentrating on a specific perspective and more rigor (Nothhaft, 2016; Seiffert-Brockmann, 2018). The term strategic communication embraces various goal-oriented communication activities, signaling a managerial approach to the ways in which organisations off all kind communicate. Zerfass and Sherzada (2015) mention that strategic communication has become an important organisational asset, and in many cases, presume as a valued dimension of strategic management processes (Falkheimer, 2014).

Scholars have argued the importance of strategic communication in organisation development. Managers are increasingly required to be communicative leaders (Heide & Simonsson, 2011), i.e., to be strategic communicators of visions, values and goals as well as facilitators of organisational change. Moreover, constructing effective information and communication systems between management and co-workers, and also between organisations and their stakeholders, have become crucial for efficiency. Furthermore, learning from feedback has made managerial communication a core asset for contemporary organisations (Falkheimer, 2014). Thus, organisational leaders depend on communication strategists to make them better communicators (Edmondson, Gupte, Draman, & Oliver, 2009). Strategic communication is used by managers as it contributes to the organisation's effectiveness, trust and legitimacy and efficiency. Strategic communication is used as a tool for enforcing, enhancing or changing the organisation's identity among employees and the organisational culture. Strategic communication is related to the importance of maintenance, change or strengthening organisation's images among stakeholders (Falkheimer, 2014; Falkheimer & Heide, 2018).

Organizational Performance

Organizational performance may be defined as an analysis of a company's performance as compared to its goals and objectives (Osman et al., 2017). Osman et al. (2017) mentions that when looking at performance from the customer perspective, it will encompass measures such as customer satisfaction, customer retention, new customer acquisition, customer response time, market share and market profitability. Performance measures the health of the competitiveness with other market players and thrives such that it can expand to their market share, have a strong market presence and increase its production and supply lines. Performance can be measured in financial terms or non-financial terms. Financially it can be in terms of returns on equity and assets, the profitability indices, growth margins and revenues (Osman et al., 2017). The non-financial terms of performance include effective and efficient quality of service delivery, proper use of organizational resources, expansion of the firm into new market regions, increase in production and product lines and satisfaction of customers in terms of their needs, preferences and getting products where and when they want them (Pretorius, 2016).

Strategic Decision-Making and Organizational Performance

Alsoboa, Nawaiseh, Karaki and Al Khattab (2015) studied the impact of usage of strategic decision-making techniques on Jordanian hotels' performance. The findings revealed that Jordanian hotels achieved good performance relative to competitors. The study results also showed that Activity-Based Costing System (ABC) system strategic decision-making techniques were used by Jordanian hotels. The findings further indicated that ABC system and all of strategic decision-making techniques, except of Activity Based Management (ABM) technique, have a statistically significant positive effect on Jordanian hotels' performance.

Using a longitudinal research approach, Reymen, Andries, Berends, Mauer, Stephan and Van Burg (2015) examined the dynamics of strategic decision making in venture creation. The findings highlighted stakeholder pressure as an additional condition influencing scoping decisions. The results suggested an important pathway-shifts in strategic decision-making logics-through which scoping may ultimately impact firm performance. From the study findings, there is need for entrepreneurship education in training and supporting both effectual and causal decision making to enable entrepreneurs to plan, adapt, compete and collaborate in order to limit downside loss.

Bakonyi (2018) examined the reason why firms centralise their strategic decision-making during crisis and realized that companies centralise because they would like to gain efficiency. The paper sought to understand why although decentralisation during crisis is more beneficial in the long run, still economic downturn increases the probability of centralisation. The short-term advantages of concentration of authority (such as whole company focus, easier communication and higher decision speed) override its longer-term downsides such as less innovation and flexibility. Alhawamdeh and Alsmairat (2019) reviewed the relationship between strategic decision making and organization performance. The study concluded by reviewing the literature and previous studies indicate that the strategic decision-making process plays an important role in the effective performance of the organization. The studies also showed that the internal and external environmental factors that affect the performance of the managers to make strategic decisions, as well as, the using of decision support systems help decision-makers in providing the required information in time, which helps to raise the performance of the strategic decision that a direct impact on performance of the organization.

Strategic Communication and Organizational Performance

Okuneye, Lasisi, Omoniyi and Shodiya (2014) conducted a study on internal communication strategy and performance using a case study of Nigeria service and manufacturing industry. It was indicated that a communication strategy that is very comprehensive is considered to be of a vital importance to the success of an organization and that effective communication strategy helps in setting the directions that are geared towards the improvement efforts. The study noted that communication strategies that are well aligned tend to enhance the performance of an organization. These strategies are believed to influence the energy levels for improvement purposes. Clear communication, while providing feedback on success, keeps managers focused on goals and priorities. Effective communication methods, processes, and procedures have an immense and direct impact on learning and creativity in organizations (Okuneye et al., 2014).

Otieno, Waiganjo and Njeru (2015) investigated the impact of employee communication on the performance of organizations in the horticulture industry in Kenya. This study involved all flower farms located in Naivasha. The research design adopted in this study was cross-sectional survey research design. Respondents in the study were drawn from the target population using a stratified random sampling method. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered. Inferential analysis including correlation and regression analysis were applied in testing the relationship between the variables.

Putri (2017) examined the role of strategic communication in supporting the performance management system. The study sought to establish the role of strategic communication in implementing and institutionalizing Balance Score Card (BSC) as a performance management system at an Indonesian private university. The study examined the role of management in communicating key performance indicators (KPIs) for evaluating and measuring faculty performance. An explanatory case study method was used and data collected through semi structured interviews, document reviews, informal conversations and observations. Strategic communication was found to have a great support on the performance management system.

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Mahmud, Zulfikri, Ismail and Miskam (2020) examined the barriers to effective communication in an organization. The study looked at the relationship between communication, internal and external factors. Qualitative data was obtained using questionnaires. Non-probability approach was used to obtain the sample size. The study results revealed that organisational environment affects effective communication more than language and culture do.

Strategic Decision-Making, Strategic Communication and Organizational Performance

Nahum and Carmeli (2020) looked at the leadership style in a board of directors and its implications of involvement in the strategic decision-making process. The findings revealed the highlight on the importance of the BOD leadership style, the potential sources of leadership power and their influence on the work environment and norms that develop within the board with regard to its involvement. The results demonstrated the importance of the expert and referent sources of power and the shared values within the BOD in shaping the context and dynamics of the BOD's involvement. De Castro Peixoto, Golgher and Cyrino (2017) study aimed at linking the decision support system used by senior executives with the perceived benefits of intelligence, organizational structure and strategic decisions in the Brazilian largest companies. The questionnaire was used as an instrument to gather the primary data in order to test the hypotheses. The study reached several results, the most important of which is that the repeated use of the decision support system is positively related to the mental model, the availability of information and the expansion of analysis.

Aregay (2019) investigated on how internal communication affects employee performance using a case study of Ethiopian Ministry of Health. The findings of the study revealed a positive relationship between information reliability and performance of employees. Bakhuya (2015) researched on how communication strategy affects strategic planning at African Banking Corporation, Kenya. Through a case study design, qualitative data was collected using interviews guides and analysed using content analysis. The study findings revealed that effective communication positively and significantly affects the successful implementation of strategy.

Kibe (2014) investigated how communication strategies affect organizational performance using a case study of Kenya Ports Authority. From the study, communication strategies were found to play a key role in improving the performance of an organization and that it entails the process of transmitting information and creating an understanding between two or more people. Effective communication is considered to play an integral part of the organizational process as it creates efficiency from the top management to the lower management of an organization. The study noted that well planned and organized communication will in the end help in making planned decisions regarding on how organizational performance can be improved and lead to the attainment of set goals and objectives. It was noted that in today's world the strategies of communication have become common, and they are widely used as part of the planning process, giving a clear detail on how one should communicate with various groups of people.

Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) conducted a study on the impact of effective communication on organizational performance. The results showed that communication acts both as a symptom and a source of performance issues in the organization and that organizations that are poorly designed in terms of communication will have ineffective processes, unaligned rewards, inconsistent client/partner orientation, fragmented expectations and team leaders who are not qualified. The results suggested that communication strategies in any organization are considered to be one of the most integral components of any performance improvements approach, organizations looking to achieve strategic goals set well-defined communication

approaches and that a well-defined approach is one that includes the staff and aligns with the business goals of the company.

Okora (2021) examined the effects of Communication Strategies on Performance of Telecommunication Firms in Kenya. The study was anchored on the communication theory. The study was a desktop type of research. The study found that communication styles had a positive effect on performance. The core components of communication styles include passive communication, aggressive communication, submissive communication, manipulative communication and assertive communication. The assertive communication style was found to be the best communication style to be used in the organization. Assertive communication express positive and negative ideas and feelings in an open, honest and direct way. The study found that integrated communication had a positive effect on performance.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

This paper investigated the relationship between strategic communication, strategic communication and organizational performance as presented in a diagrammatical form in Figure 1.

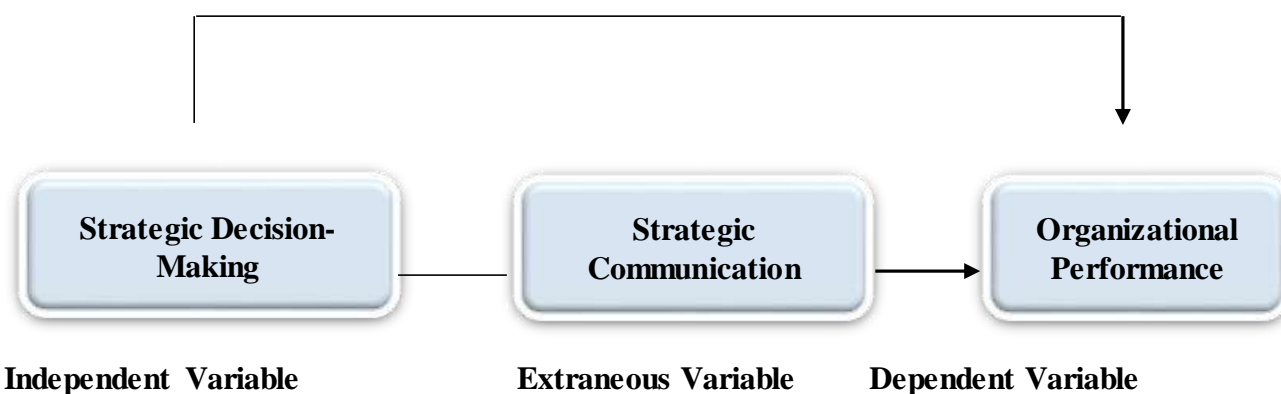


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Conclusion

Strategic decision-making and managers cannot be separated. They go inline together. Moreover, with the organization’s concern on the firm performance, strategic decision-makings are considered crucial to managers that manage the organization. Nevertheless, managers are affected with several factors in their strategic decision-makings for organization. These factors will directly and indirectly affect their well-being of the organization. As such, various studies have been conducted looking into various aspects and factors in relation to managers, strategic decision-makings, and firm performance.

The factors between strategic decision-makings and organization performance will be incorporated as such decision support system these factors will be the catalyst between strategic decision-makings and organization performance. There is evidence of significant relationship between strategic communication and firm performance. Once strategic communication is accepted, perhaps the greatest pragmatic obstacle to the development of a strategic communication perspective, lies in the conviction that a community of scholars and practitioners already exist.

Understanding the tensions during crisis communication could help managers and those involved develop crisis simulations and other drills to help better prepare crisis managers to

communicate well during a crisis. As decision-makers create their strategic decisions, they prioritize their competing discourses in the message based upon which tensions they perceive to be of greatest importance to the publics. Decision-makers should work on raising the level of efficiency of the strategic decision-making, especially in terms of the determination of the problem, and to develop effective alternatives in line with the reality of the company and its available possibilities, and to find a clear mechanism that includes the detection of deviations and correcting them, and improving the ways of decision-making.

Additionally, since communication is a central function in organizational performance, concentrating on sound effective communication can be influential in improving the accuracy and speed with which employees perform their tasks, coupled with other developments such as structures that will facilitate the ease of access and flow of communication. Getting the message across effectively and having it understood is a prerequisite to progress. Existing organizational work requires organizations to focus more on effective communication processes since tasks are becoming extra complex due to multicultural work environments. There is no point in moving forward if the basic message is lost, or there are barriers in the process. Hence, the head of corporate communication should initiate policy development guided by the activities that support strategic communication in order to strengthen the flow of information within the organization and consequently promote the realization of the set goals and objectives. Communication can be understood as a practice that is conveyed to the general public. Effective communication is aimed at helping managers perform the basic organizational functions like planning, organizing, motivating and controlling.

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