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Strategy implementation

an assessment of empirical research and suggestions for future research

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ABSTRACT:

This Master's thesis got its inspiration from a few articles from the early 2000s, which questioned senior executives' understanding of the elements of a strategy statement, which should crystalize the ends, domain and means guiding the business forward. If this was found questionable two decades ago, could the same be valid still? Are businesses lacking in clarity in their strategies, which in turn impedes their implementation? Without a clear goal set by the strategy, how could business make sure, and follow up on, its successful implementation?

Through a systematic literature review, this study sheds light on what the level of empirical research done on strategy implementation is. Through an as objective as feasible material selection process, 59 scientific journal articles are identified for final selection review, which then resulted in a total of 38 articles which fit all of the set criteria.

The selected articles are classified, and their key findings then summarized. Overall evaluation and results are then compounded from key findings from the reviewed articles, revealing some of the factors identified to be fundamental for successful strategy implementation.

The depth and breadth of the reviewed articles was found narrow and varying and the same also applied for the chronological split of the publications, with majority (92%) of the articles having been published in the 21st century. Findings of the empirical studies covered by the articles were drawn from very varying samples, focusing on a dedicated industry, or dedicated cultural or hierarchical domain, etc. Connecting points or reoccurring aspects were also identified. Similar characteristics of the reported aspects were grouped as follows: support and engagement of the upper management; management competencies; knowledge and competencies of the personnel; organization of strategy work; and participation and compensation of the personnel. However, the applicability of the components of a successful strategy implementation would benefit from further empirical validation.

The underlying presumption that many companies, whether public or private, may not understand the reasons on failing or lacking strategy implementation was not properly found valid nor invalid, but it rather remains open and allows room for further research. Thus, the study concludes with suggestions for future research.

KEYWORDS: strategy, strategy implementation, strategy execution, implementation, execution, literature review

VAASAN YLIOPISTO**Johtamisen akateeminen yksikkö****Tekijä:** Laura Lindborg (y104876)**Tutkielman nimi:** Strategy implementation: an assessment of empirical research and suggestions for future research**Tutkinto:** Kauppatieteiden maisteri**Oppiaine:** Strategic Business Development**Työn ohjaaja:** Jukka Vesalainen**Valmistumisvuosi:** 2022 **Sivumäärä:** 63

TIIVISTELMÄ:

Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma sai kimmokkeensa muutamasta 2000-luvun alussa julkaistusta artikkelista, jotka kyseenalaistivat ylemmän johdon ymmärrystä koskien yrityksen strategiasta annettavan lausunnon merkitystä. Strategiasta annettavan lausunnon tulisi ohjata yrityksen toimintaa kiteyttämällä strategian tavoite, toimialue sekä tapa, jolla tavoitteeseen päästään. Jos johdon ymmärrystä kyseenalaistettiin pari vuosikymmentä sitten, voiko olla, että tämä oletamus pitää edelleen paikkansa? Puuttuuko yrityksiltä strategista selkeyttä, mikä osaltaan haastaa tai jopa estää strategian toimeenpanoa ja toteutusta? Miten yritys varmistaa ja seuraa, että strategian toimeenpano onnistuu linjassa suunnitelmien kanssa, mikäli sen toteutus toimii ilman selkeitä strategian asettamia tavoitteita?

Pro gradu -tutkielmaani varten tekemäni systemaattisen tutkimuskatsauksen kautta saamme käsityksen strategian toimeenpanon ja toteuttamisen saralla tehdyn tieteellisen tutkimuksen määrästä, laajuudesta ja syvyydestä. Tutkimusmateriaalin valinta noudattaa mahdollisimman objektiivista valintaprosessia, jonka kautta valintaprosessin viimeiseen karsintavaiheeseen valikoitui yhteensä 59 tieteellistä ja akateemista julkaisua. Näistä tarkempaan tutkimukseen valikoitui yhteensä 38 artikkelia, jotka täyttivät kaikki asetetut hakuvaatimukset.

Systemaattisen kirjallisuuskatsauksen kautta valikoidut julkaisut ryhmiteltiin ja tärkeimmät löydökset referoitiin osaksi tutkielmaa. Julkaisuissa raportoiduista ja näistä referoiduista löydöksistä luotiin arvio sekä kirjattiin ylös yhteneviä tekijöitä, joiden tavalla tai toisella nähdään tieteellisissä tutkimuksissa vaikuttavan strategian toimeenpanon ja toteutuksen onnistumiseen tai epäonnistumiseen.

Läpikäytyjen julkaisujen laajuus ja syvyys todettiin sekä kapea-alaiseksi että vaihtelevaksi. Lisäksi julkaisujen kronologinen jakauma painottui vahvasti (92 %) julkaisuaikajohdan mukaan 2000-luvulle. Julkaisujen kuvaamien empiiristen tutkimusten havainnot tehtiin hyvin vaihtelevista tutkimusotoksista. Otokset keskittyivät vaihtelevasti eri toimialoihin, tiettyyn kulttuurilliseen kontekstiin tai organisatoriseen hierarkiatasoon, jne. Yhteneviä sekä toistuvasti raportoituja tekijöitä oli kuitenkin tunnistettavissa empiiristen tutkimusten tuloksista joko strategian toimeenpanon ja toteutuksen edesauttajina tai heikentäjinä. Löydöksistä tunnistettuja yhteneviä tekijöitä ryhmiteltiin löydösten yhteenvedossa seuraavan mukaan: ylimmän johdon tuki ja sitoutuminen; johdon kompetenssit; henkilöstön tiedot, taidot ja pätevyys; strategiatyön organisointi; sekä henkilöstön osallistuttaminen strategiatyöhön ja heidän palkitsemisensa. Näitä tunnistettuja tekijöitä olisi kuitenkin eduksi validoida kattavammin empiiristen tutkimusten kautta.

Taustalla oleva hypoteesia siitä, että monet julkiset tai yksityiset yritykset eivät ehkä ymmärrä syytä strategian toimeenpanon epäonnistumiseen tai puutteelliseen toteutukseen, ei todettu asianmukaisesti päteväksi eikä pätemättömäksi. Hypoteesin oikeellisuus jää täten avoimeksi ja antaa tilaa tulevaisuudessa tehtävälle lisätutkimukselle. Pro gradu -tutkielmani edistää näin ollen akateemista keskustelua nostamalla esiin ehdotuksia lisätutkimuksen tarpeesta sekä näkökulmia tutkimukseen kaivattavista parannuksista.

AVAINSANAT: strategia, strategian toimeenpano, strategian toteuttaminen, toimeenpano, kirjallisuuskatsaus, tutkimuskatsaus

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1 Introduction

An article by David J. Collins and Michael G Rukstad (HBR, April 2008), *Can you say what your strategy is?*, claimed that "Most executives cannot articulate the objective, scope, and advantage of their business in a simple statement. If they can't, neither can anyone else." (2008: 83). Similarly, Donald C. Hambrick and James W. Fredrickson (Academy of Management Executive, 2001) in their article raised a question, *Are you sure you have a strategy?* – discussing about the abundance of frameworks and tools guiding strategy work but questioning whether these tools are used correctly to define a clear and unified over-arching strategy that succeeds in guiding the whole company towards the same direction, and ultimately supporting with achieving the strategy's objective or goal.

The above citations called the author's attention in 2015 with a question, about how companies can execute and successfully implement their strategies if the above statements are valid and senior executives do not know the elements of the strategy statement, in terms of the ends, domain and means the statement guides its business with (Hambrick and Fredrickson, 2001: 84-85). Without a clear goal set by the strategy, how would a business make sure of and follow up on its successful implementation and how would it be guided to make the essential trade-offs as emphasized in its importance by Porter (1996) and Hambrick and Fredrickson (2001).

As per Tamon Casadesus-Masanell and Joan E. Ricart (2010), businesses also face difficulties in distinguishing between strategy, business model and tactics. They claim that whereas strategy would clarify the chosen business model to compete in the market with, business model clarifies the way the business operates and adds value to its stakeholders. And finally, tactics allow flexibility within the business model to react to the market while employing the chosen model. (2010: 196)

On a general level, we can say that a strategy process consists of planning, formulation, and implementation. Since the 1960s, scholars such as Henry Mintzberg have

characterized strategy literature by different schools of thought, presenting many views on “how many actors -- participate in the strategy process” (Hautz, 2016).

"-- the tree may be a more suitable image for the growth and development of strategy formation --. In a tree, the branches are no more or less important than the roots, and the branches on either side cannot be cut off without putting the tree out of balance." (Mintzberg, H., Lampel, J., 1999: 29).

In line with the aforementioned metaphor, we assume that strategy work needs to have balance between the different stages of the process, including sufficient focus on implementation. The impact of formalization in strategy implementation was studied by Radomska in 2013 through a qualitative research that showed “that having a formal strategy document often resulted in the use of formal systems of strategy implementation” (Radomska, 2013: 80). Radomska also “pointed out that the formalization of the implementation of the strategy stems from the formalization of the whole process of strategic management, as evidenced by the regularity of the work at all stages” (Radomska, 2013: 80). Whereas another study from 2005 found that matching structure and behavior to strategy were identified as positive contributors to the success of a strategy (Olson et al., 2005).

"But the essence of strategy is in the activities – choosing to perform activities differently or to perform different activities than rivals." (Porter, 1996: 64)

One can claim that any well-functioning business, to deliver its intended value, is ultimately relying on smoothly interconnected, manual, and automated processes, across a company but also across its partner network. Competitive advantage is often sought after from the connecting processes or a value chain as we can also refer to them. In addition, a business would be interested in following its macro- and microenvironment to be ready to adjust its strategy to position itself competitive in the local and/or global marketplaces.

The above mentioned applies, especially with businesses operating on a global marketplace with complex cooperation networks and interlinking processes, systems, and technology reliance. Few of the industries that come to mind are international postal and freight services, airports, and the aviation industry including both passenger air transport and air freight. These mentioned realities can bring added challenges to strategy implementation, especially when involving major changes. The listed industries are simply shared as an example and are not studied here within. They could, however, be considered as industries of interest for future research on strategy implementation.

In this paper, we study the magnitude of empirical research conducted on strategy implementation. The intent is to identify whether the above claims stand true. Can it be that even with the numerous tools and frameworks, businesses lack in clarity in their strategies, thus impeding their implementation? Will the empirical research conducted thus far, reveal some of the factors of successful strategy implementations?

Within this study, there is no focus on any industry in particular, though the findings may later be applied to any of the aforementioned industries, with highly complex internal and external cooperation networks. But with this study, we are rather mainly interested in strategy implementation in a form of assessment of existence and magnitude of empirical research in the area. As defined further down in the research methodology, the research is three-folded – built around, firstly on a systematic literature review on *strategy implementation*, secondly synthesizing on the concepts and findings, and thirdly making suggestions for future research.

1.1 Research problem and justification

This study focuses on studying empirical research conducted on strategy implementation. The study is exploratory and qualitative in nature, intending to identify the magnitude of empirical research published in connection with strategy implementation, in order to identify possible research gaps. Through this approach, this report aims to provide

validation on whether there could be a need for further research on strategy implementation, in terms of components of successful strategy implementation.

Article by Newbert (2007), *Empirical Research on the resource-based view of the firm: An assessment and suggestions for future research*, is used as a basis for the methodology applied in conducting systematic literature review. The aim of a systematic literature selection is to identify the most relevant pieces of literature through an objective selection process. These articles are then reviewed, summarized, and synthesized on the main concepts in order to gain more understanding on the research question at hand. Finally, managerial implications and suggestions for future research are drawn from the literature review.

Based on the material referenced in the introduction on what is strategy, the author expects that though there are numerous frameworks and tools around strategy work, the literature review would either showcase as indecisive without further study or reveal that many public and private companies may not understand the exact reasons for failing strategy implementation – thus, further study would be needed on the factors of successful strategy implementation.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The study on strategy implementation discussed within this paper is conducted through a systematic literature review, using the principles and methodology described by Newbert (2007) in his article and which he had retrieved and adjusted from an earlier article and work by David R.J. and Han S-K. (2004). As per these authors, the method applied by them in their research was found as objective as feasible.

The objective of this study is to report the current level of empirical research carried out, on strategy implementation by,

1. documenting the search, selection and delimitation process of relevant articles,
2. reviewing and summarizing the findings of the selected articles, and

3. synthesizing to report in compoundly some of the findings of the reviewed studies as well as reporting the level of existing research identified through the literature review and proposing further research within the chosen topic.

The following paragraphs will describe the methodology adapted for this study in more detail. Following this, this paper will then move on to review the literature selected on the basis of the conducted systematic literature review. Based on the reviewed literature, results of the review are reported. Lastly, the study concludes with suggestions for future research opportunities and implications to consider from practical, managerial point of view.

1.3 Delimitation

Delimitations are planned to be done strictly in line with the methodology applied in the above-mentioned articles by Newbert (2007) and by David R.J. and Han S-K. (2004). The delimitation process thus is very systematic and highly objective in nature. Irrespective of the high objectivity of the research material delimitation, the process involves aspects which are subjectively judged by the author and thus should be taken a note of. The subjective parts impacting the delimitation include, for instance the selection of keywords used in the journal article searches. In terms of the delimitation process around abstracts and full article reviews, few of the delimiting aspects incl. non-English version of the publication, single case studies with very little empirical support, and conceptual papers. One of the aims of conducting the study in a systematic manner and documenting the search and selection steps is to allow repeatability of the study, either to validate the outcome of the study or to use the method as a starting point with an intention to offer new insights to the topic of strategy implementation.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research strategy and method

The study is three folded. Firstly, the topic *strategy implementation* will be examined through a systematic literature review. Secondly, a thorough synthetization on the concepts and findings is conducted to report the results of the review. Thirdly, based on the literature review and synthetization on the selected literature, identified research gaps as well as practical applicability of the findings for theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

Different ways of conducting systematic literature review can be found from published studies. Some methods however can be less objective in the selection and delimitation of relevant scientific publications. Therefore, this study is methodologically guided by the systematic literature review approach applied and thoroughly described in the article by Newbert (2007).

Newbert (2007) assessed in his report the magnitude of empirical support on the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm. He used a few earlier studies as a basis for comparison. A study on RBV by Barney and Arian (2001) was claimed more subjective in the scientific material selection process, and thus as a methodological guidance, Newbert referred to an article by David and Han (2004), which discussed about a stepwise approach that was more objective in manner in regards to material selection. Newbert in the end used an adapted version of the systematic literature review approach used by David and Han (2004).

As described by Newbert (2007), David and Han (2004: 43) used the following set of criteria when conducting their systematic literature review. Same steps are repeated as part of this study on *strategy implementation*, with some adjustments having been made on the below described steps to reflect the search conducted for the purpose of this study – including keywords and database selection as the main differentiator.

1. Only published journal articles to be searched.
2. Use ABI/Inform and Business Source Premier (EBSCO) databases for the search.
3. Require that selected articles contain at least one primary keyword in their title or abstract, to ensure substantive relevance.
4. Require that selected articles also contain at least one of five additional key words in their title, to eliminate substantively irrelevant articles.
5. Require that selected articles also contain at least one of the following seven 'methodological' keywords in their title or abstract, to ensure empirical content: data, empirical, test, statistical, finding*, result*, or evidence.
6. Only select articles that appear in journals in which multiple articles appear, to eliminate substantively irrelevant articles.
7. Read all remaining abstracts for substantive context (i.e., discussion of the core tenets of the theory) and empirical content (i.e., mention of statistical analysis), to ensure substantive and empirical relevance.
8. Eliminate duplicate articles by consolidating results from the selected databases, ABI/Inform and Business Source Premier (EBSCO).
9. Read all remaining articles in their entirety for substantive context (i.e., article tests the core tenets of the theory) and adequate empirical content (i.e., article presents results of statistical tests), to further ensure substantive and empirical relevance. (Newbert, 2007: 124-125)

As per few libraries' search guides and guides on academic research (including one from Brown University), a systematic review relies on pre-defined eligibility criteria on e.g. inclusion and exclusion, and search and extraction of research material being delimited with a purpose to answer a specific pre-defined research question. As per the approach defined above and applied by David and Han (2004) and later by Newbert (2007), systematic and quantitative methods are used to a great extent to keep the study as objective as feasible in the literature pool selection. Ultimately this paper aims to answer the

following primary research question: “*What is the magnitude of empirical studies conducted on strategy implementation?*”. In addition to this, light will also be shed on the general success factors for strategy implementation with the following secondary research question: “*What are some of the general contributing factors for successful strategy implementation?*”.

In terms of exclusions and inclusions that carry subjective aspects, the method applied here includes firstly the selection of keywords used in journal article searches, and secondly, the selection of the articles which remain for a full article review.

2.2 Literature search

The search and selection of the literature on *strategy implementation* has been conducted, closely following the steps described in the previous chapters and as applied by David and Han (2004) and later by Newbert (2007). Whereas both David and Han (2004) and Newbert (2007) both used ABI and EconLit databases as their sources for scientific publications, for this study ABI and Business Source Premier (EBSCO) were chosen. All three databases are among the most comprehensive databases in the field of business and economics.

Keywords used in the second search step were adjusted for the purpose of this study and can thus to some extent carry subjective judgement from the author, whereas the methodological delimitation from the third step contained the exact same seven keywords as what were used by both David and Han (2004) and later by Newbert (2007). Asterisk (*) in the search terms was used as guided by David and Han (2004) and later by Newbert (2007) to allow different suffixes for the listed keywords.

Table 1. Summary of the selection criteria for the systematic literature review on *strategy implementation*.

| Nr. | Filter type | Description of the selection step | ABI/IN-FORM Col-lection | Business Source Premier (EBSCO) | Total |
|-----|--------------------------------|--|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|
| 1 | Substantive | All articles with -- “strategy implementation” -- in title or abstract (limited to peer reviewed, scholarly journals where full text is available and published before the end of 2020) | 477 | 168 | 645 |
| 2 | Substantive | At least one of five (-- “strategy execution”, “strategic”, “strategic management”, “process”, “strategy execution plan” --) additional keywords must also appear in title or abstract | 294 | 92 | 386 |
| 3 | Methodological | At least one of seven keywords (data, empirical, test, statistical, finding*, result* or evidence) indicating empirical data or analysis must also appear in title or abstract | 191 | 51 | 242 |
| 4 | Substantive | Article must appear in a journal that has returned more than one item from the filters above | 104 | 29 | 133 |
| 5 | Substantive and methodological | Remaining abstracts read for both substantive relevance and statistical analysis | 47 | 16 | 63 |
| 6 | Duplicates | Deletion of duplicate articles found in both databases | 43 | 16 | 59 |
| 7 | Substantive and methodological | Remaining full articles read for both substantive relevance and statistical analysis | 26 | 12 | 38 |

[Note 1: The above listed steps follow the exact steps as described by Newbert (2007: 126) in his article, with the exception of 1) the selected keywords for step two, and 2) duplicates check was chosen to be done before full article review.]

*[Note 2: *, indicates of a wildcard used in the search, allowing different forms of spelling to be used such as singular and plural. This approach was adopted from the approach used by As David and Han (2004).]*

[Note 3: In step five, one article was discarded as published, i.e. full text available only in Portuguese. Also, single case studies lacking empirical support (on a wider scale) were excluded in step five as part of abstract review. Several of these articles mentioned balanced scorecard models in their abstract as a studied model. Single case studies which were not apparent from the step five abstract review, were later excluded in step seven as part of full article review.]

[Note 4: In step six, in addition to excluding three articles identified as duplicates (deducted from Business Source Premier (EBSCO) article count), one article was excluded as published in 2021 and thus was conflicting with the step one criteria of “published before the end of 2020”.]

3 Review of the literature

Following the completion of the six steps of the article selection process described in the previous chapter, 59 articles were selected to be read in full. The full article review resulted in 38 articles selected as being relevant from the point of view of the systematic literature review and set selection criteria. In the end 21 articles were excluded. However, as mentioned above, although the chosen selection process and criteria aims to be as objective as possible, the method applied includes subjective aspects both in keyword selection (step two) as well as in the full article review (step seven). Thus, a list of articles excluded in the final selection step (step seven) are included in the appendix (Table 5) with short reasoning on why the listed articles were chosen to be excluded.

3.1 Structured review and classification of the selected studies

Included 38 articles with substantive relevance and statistical analysis are listed in chronological order in the following (Table 2) and some of the key findings are then summarized (Table 3). Results of the review are reported, incl. concepts related to strategy implementation are drawn on, in the following chapter on the basis of the summaries of the selected articles' key findings. The connecting points, scope of empirical studies as well as the characteristics of the samples used in the selected studies, are then discussed in the final chapter, under conclusions.

[text continues on page 34]

Table 2. Summary of the selected empirical articles listed in chronological order, including details on the journal, data sample and methodology applied.

| Nr. | Authors | Title | Journal; Year of publication | Sample size & characteristics | Type of empirical support |
|-----|---|--|--|--|---|
| 1 | Gupta, A. K., Govindarajan, V. | <i>Business unit strategy, managerial characteristics, and business unit effectiveness at strategy implementation.</i> | Academy of Management Journal; 1984 | 58 strategic business unit GMs from the US east coast Fortune 500 corporations | Quantitative, Exploratory empirical study (questionnaire) |
| 2 | Kim, W. C., Mauborgne, R. A. | <i>Procedural justice, attitudes, and subsidiary top management compliance with multinationals' corporate strategic decisions.</i> | Academy of Management Journal; 1993 | In this two-stage longitudinal study, complete responses were received from 119 executives of subsidiaries from 19 multinational corporations which had agreed to join the study. 60 different subsidiaries were represented by the 119 respondents with the following geographical split; 29 subsidiaries from North America, 24 from Europe and 7 from Asia. | Quantitative |
| 3 | Sanz-Valle, R., Sabater-Sánchez, R., Aragón-Sánchez, A. | <i>Human resource management and business strategy links: an empirical study.</i> | International Journal of Human Resource Management; 1999 | CEOs or if not possible, another member of the management teams of 200 Spanish companies from Murcia region were interviewed | Qualitative |
| 4 | Peng, W., Littlejohn, D. | <i>Organisational communication and strategy implementation--a primary inquiry.</i> | International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management; 2001 | 3 UK-based hotel chains with diversified business portfolios (e.g. in terms of their location, size, market levels, and brands), also the corporate context varied among the three (managerial and administrative systems used, resources | Qualitative, Exploratory paper (reference to an empirical study conducted and discussed outside the paper itself) |

| | | | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|--|--|-----------------------------------|
| | | | | and capabilities, IT infrastructure, strategic objectives, etc.). | |
| 5 | Okumus, F. | <i>Towards a strategy implementation framework.</i> | International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management; 2001 | 2 international hotel groups with altogether 100 executives, managers and employees from corporate, regional and operational level participated in the semi-structured interviews | Qualitative (case study approach) |
| 6 | Näsi, J., Aunola, M. | <i>Easy to design - Difficult to implement: An empirical survey of the strategic management practices of large companies.</i> | Academy of Strategic Management Journal; 2002 | The study targeted the largest Finnish corporations with mainly CEOs or Presidents as respondents. Altogether 108 acceptable answers were received. | Quantitative |
| 7 | Dickinson, S., Ramaseshan, B. | <i>An investigation of the antecedents to cooperative marketing strategy implementation.</i> | Journal of Strategic Marketing; 2004 | Answers were received from 409 Australian firms from nine key industries, incl. agriculture, horticulture, aquaculture, retailing, viticulture, education, tourism, construction, and manufacturing. These industries generally have businesses benefiting of cooperative marketing arrangements. Out of the responding firms, "199 firms were currently or had been recently involved in a cooperative arrangement", while 210 had not. | Quantitative |
| 8 | Wu, W., Chih, H. C., Ya-Jung, W. | <i>A study of strategy implementation as expressed through Sun Tzu's principles of war.</i> | Industrial Management & Data Systems; 2004 | The usable sample as claimed by the authors, consists of 203 questionnaire responses received from the high, middle and low-level managers and supervisors of the largest Taiwanese corporations. | Quantitative |
| 9 | Ishak, A. | <i>Marketing Strategy Implementation: A Study of</i> | Jurnal Siasat Bisnis; 2004 | Altogether 76 completed questionnaires were received from interviewed marketing managers from Indonesian companies. | Quantitative |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|--|--|
| | | <i>Small and Medium Companies in Indonesia.</i> | | | |
| 10 | Lane, N. | <i>Strategy implementation: the implications of a gender perspective for change management.</i> | Journal of Strategic Marketing; 2005 | The sample consisted of a survey conducted within a large British company, combined with earlier conducted multi-company survey results. | Qualitative, exploratory |
| 11 | Naranjo-Gil, D., Hartmann, F. | <i>How top management teams use management accounting systems to implement strategy.</i> | Journal of Management Accounting Research; 2006 | Respondents in the sample were 473 members of top management teams of Spanish general hospitals forming 92 complete top management teams. | Qualitative |
| 12 | Akan, O., Allen, R. S., Helms, M. M., Spralls, S. A. III. | <i>Critical tactics for implementing Porter's generic strategies.</i> | The Journal of Business Strategy; 2006 | Sample covers survey responses from 221 employees from a variety of organizations, initial sample covering over 200 organization. The organizations of the respondents were from service, manufacturing and government/non-profit sector/industries. | Quantitative |
| 13 | Harness, T. | <i>Research methods for the empirical study of strategic human resource management.</i> | Qualitative Market Research; 2009 | The sample consists of two layers: 1) quantitative layer covers responses received from 67 organizations which each had provided two responses (one from the HRM director and one from HRM manager); 2) qualitative layer considers responses from four organizations. For the qualitative study, the selection was made of the participants of the quantitative study with a link "between market characteristics and business strategies; but not between business strategies and HRM policies". | Two folded research: 1) quantitative, 2) qualitative |

| | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|--|--------------|
| 14 | Vänttinen, M., Pyhältö, K. | <i>Strategy process as an innovative learning environment.</i> | Management Decision; 2009 | The study was part of "the Innovative Operating Models for Improving Municipal Services (KIMPPA) project of Helsinki University of Technology". This study's sample consisted of 10 transcribed interviews conducted from the municipal organization of the city of Espoo (Finland). | Qualitative |
| 15 | Glaister, K. W., Dincer, O., Tatoglu, E., Demirbag, M. | <i>A comparison of strategic planning practices in companies from the UK and Turkey.</i> | The Journal of Management Development; 2009 | The sample consisted of structured mail questionnaire responses (from CEOs or their senior executive in charge of strategy development) from relatively large 113 UK based firms and 135 Turkish firms. | Quantitative |
| 16 | Chi-Hung, Y., Lee, G.-G., Jung-Chi, P. | <i>How information system capability affects e-business information technology strategy implementation.</i> | Business Process Management Journal; 2012 | Responses received from 191 chief information officers from major Taiwanese firms formed the sample for this study. | Quantitative |
| 17 | Trez, G., Luce, F. B. | <i>Organizational structure and specialized marketing capabilities in SMEs.</i> | Marketing Intelligence & Planning; 2012 | The study produced 424 usable responses across small and medium-sized Brazilian furniture manufacturing companies. | Quantitative |
| 18 | Ramaseshan, B., Ishak, A., Rabbanee, F. K. | <i>The role of marketing managers' commitment and involvement in marketing strategy implementation.</i> | Journal of Strategic Marketing; 2013 | The sample consists of 204 responses received from Indonesian companies' marketing managers or persons with direct involvement and responsibility for marketing strategy within a strategic business unit (SBU). | Quantitative |

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| 19 | Philip Omondi, M., Ombui, K., Mungatu, J. | <i>Factors affecting effective strategy implementation for attainment of Millennium Development Goal 5 by international reproductive health non-governmental organizations in Kenya.</i> | TQM Journal; 2013 | 35 responses received from ten international reproductive health (RH) non-governmental organizations (NGO) operating in Nairobi, Kenya formed the sample for this study. | Both quantitative and qualitative |
| 20 | Johnson, E. N., Reckers, P. M. J., Bartlett, G. D. | <i>Influences of timeline and perceived strategy effectiveness on balanced scorecard performance evaluation judgments.</i> | Journal of Management Accounting Research; 2014 | Experimental materials used in the study were assessed by 111 MBA studies from a large US-based university, with an average of 8+ years of work experience. | Qualitative |
| 21 | Mostafa, S. R., Mohsen, A. S., Blooki, M. L. | <i>Interaction among intra-organizational factors effective in successful strategy execution: An analytical view.</i> | Journal of Strategy and Management; 2014 | A non-random sample of 20 experts of both academics and professionals in the field of strategic management (covering areas of strategy planning, execution, and control) was selected to respond a questionnaire. 12 completed questionnaires were returned and used in the final sample. | Quantitative |
| 22 | Jansen Van Rensburg, M., Davis, A., Venter, P. | <i>Making strategy work: The role of the middle manager.</i> | Journal of Management and Organization; 2014 | In the first phase of the study, total of 654 responses were collected through structured interviews held with South African middle managers representing 480 private sector organizations. During the second phase, focus group discussions were held with 20 additional middle managers, from both public and private sectors. | Qualitative |

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| | | | | "The findings reported in this article are part of a larger study that investigated the roles and practices of middle managers in South African organizations". | |
| 23 | Theriou, N. G. | <i>Strategic management process and the importance of structured formality, financial and non-financial information.</i> | European Research Studies; 2015 | The sample consists of structured questionnaire responses received from 188 senior accounting officers from large Greek firms. | Quantitative |
| 24 | Elbanna, S., Andrews, R., Pollanen, R. | <i>Strategic planning and implementation success in public service organizations: Evidence from Canada.</i> | Public Management Review; 2016 | 180 senior public officials from Canadian public service companies contributed to this study through their responses in a survey. | Quantitative |
| 25 | Gębczyńska, A. | <i>Strategy implementation efficiency on the process level.</i> | Business Process Management Journal; 2016 | 30 Polish large and medium-size enterprises were surveyed for the purpose of this study. | Quantitative |
| 26 | Pollanen, R., Abdel-Mak- soud, A., El- banna, S., Mahama, H. | <i>Relationships between strategic performance measures, strategic decision-making, and organizational performance: empirical evidence from</i> | Public Management Review; 2017 | Findings were drawn from a sample of 143 questionnaire responses received from senior Canadian government officials (incl. federal, provincial, and municipal levels). | Quantitative |

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| | | <i>Canadian public organizations.</i> | | | |
| 27 | Permana, D. | <i>Toward the best model of strategy implementation in Indonesian Islamic banking from the lens of strategic clarity.</i> | European Research Studies; 2017 | Total of 253 questionnaire responses from middle managers from head operating and branch offices of 35 Indonesian Islamic banks contributed to this study. | Quantitative |
| 28 | Hodgkinson, I. R., Ravishankar, MN., Fischer, M. | <i>The ambidextrous manager: what role does culture play?</i> | The Journal of Business Strategy; 2017 | 12 managers of a single company (a European airline) contributed to this study through in-depth interviews conducted with open-ended questions. | Qualitative |
| 29 | Anning-Dorson, T. | <i>Moderation-mediation effect of market demand and organization culture on innovation and performance relationship.</i> | Marketing Intelligence & Planning; 2017 | The sample consists of completed questionnaire responses collected from management members of Ghanaian service sub-sectors, covering banking, insurance, consulting, media and communication, hospitality, and retailing. | Quantitative |
| 30 | Mukherji, A., Mukherji, J. | <i>The key role of metacognition monitoring in the performance of small firms: The mediating roles of systems, orientation, implementation, and strategy.</i> | Journal of Competitiveness Studies; 2018 | 153 responses from entrepreneurs from different industries operating in the southern region of a major US state contributed to this study. | Qualitative |

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| 31 | Alcaide-Muñoz, C., Bello-Pintado, A., Merino-Diaz de Cerio J. | <i>Manufacturing strategy process: the role of shop-floor communication.</i> | Management Decision; 2018 | The sample consists of answers from plant management and plant supervisors of a total of 189 manufacturing plants located in 10 different countries. All these plants were going through high performance manufacturing (HPM) project and operated in automotive, machinery and electronics industries. | Quantitative |
| 32 | Vanderli, C. P., de Carvalho, M. M. | <i>Can internal strategic alignment influence performance? An empirical research applying structural equation modelling.</i> | Academia; 2018 | Total of 125 valid survey responses were received from large and medium sized, Brazilian companies' executives, operating within manufacturing and service sectors. | Quantitative |
| 33 | Noga, G. | <i>Problems of adapting enterprises in the strategy implementation process. Case of Poland.</i> | Business, Management and Education; 2018 | 69 Polish business entities were involved in the study. Initial selection was made from the Institute of Economics of the Polish Academy of Science's ranking of 500 innovative businesses. | Quantitative |
| 34 | Čizmić, E., Hrnjić, A. | <i>Improving corporate governance through application of balanced scorecard: The case study of Bosnia and Herzegovina.</i> | Sarajevo Business and Economics Review; 2018 | 100 organizations (respondents consisting primarily of top managers, but also middle managers and first line supervisors) from Bosnia and Herzegovina contributed to this study, with organizations ranging from companies to local self-governing institutions. | Quantitative |
| 35 | Desmidt, S., Meyfrootd, K., George, B. | <i>Shared strategic cognition in Flemish city councils: the relevance of</i> | Public Management Review; 2019 | 1704 Flemish (northern region of Belgium) city councillors contributed to the study with their responses. City councils approve strategic priorities, as well as "elaborate and refine them | Quantitative |

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| | | <i>political and demographic group characteristics.</i> | | during strategy implementation" and "resolve emerging issues". | |
| 36 | Smith, B. D. | <i>Between saying and doing is the ocean: an empirical exploration of the gap between strategic marketing plans and their implementation in the life sciences industry.</i> | Journal of Strategic Marketing; 2019 | Usable responses were received from 391 respondents from 53 large and medium firms from within life science industry, incl. pharmaceutical and medical technology sectors. | Both quantitative and qualitative |
| 37 | Nderitu, J. W., Waiganjo, E., Orwa, G. O. | <i>Investigating the effect of organizational culture on strategy implementation process of private chartered universities in Kenya.</i> | International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science; 2020 | Total of 198 middle level managers, academic staff members and students' leaders from 10 Private Chartered Universities in Kenya contributed to the study. | Both quantitative and qualitative |
| 38 | Wei, Y. S., O'Neill, H., Zhou, N. | <i>How does perceived integrity in leadership matter to firms in a transitional economy?</i> | Journal of Business Ethics; 2020 | Firms from nine Chinese cities with three different levels of economic development contributed to this study. 20 firms from each nine cities were selected with 22 employees from each firm (incl. one senior HR manager, one senior marketing manager, and 10 randomly selected middle managers as well as 10 randomly selected lower-level employees). Altogether the sample consisted of 3960 responses from 180 firms. | Quantitative |

Table 3. Summary of the selected empirical articles including the key findings of each article.

| Nr. | Authors; Year of publication | Synopsis of the key findings |
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| 1 | Gupta, A. K., Govindarajan, V., 1984 | Contributing to the contingency theory of organization from the interfirm to the intrafirm context, the findings of the study propose that build SBUs' effectiveness is positively contributed by greater willingness to take risk, greater experience with marketing and sales as well as with tolerance for ambiguity. Whereas the same hamper effectiveness in the case of harvest SBUs. |
| 2 | Kim, W. C., Mauborgne, R. A., 1993 | Findings from the two-stage longitudinal study support that subsidiary executives' compliance both directly and indirectly is enhanced by procedural justice exercised by multinational corporations. Implementation of strategic decisions was positively impacted by the support of multinational's subsidiaries' executives, primarily in global industries, whereas the effects were not as constant in multidomestic industries. The attitudes of commitment, trust and outcome satisfaction reflected positively in this study, supporting effective implementation of strategic decisions. |
| 3 | Sanz-Valle, R., Sabater-Sánchez, R., Aragón-Sánchez, A., 1999 | The results of the study propose there is some contingency between strategy and HRM. Some differences (but with no causality possible to assess due to the nature of the data) were identified in the human resource practices depending on the strategy adopted by different companies. Companies following cost leadership strategy invest less money in training in contrary with companies following innovation or quality strategy, to encourage creativity, flexibility, propensity to take risks and co-operation (innovation strategy), and to stimulate co-operation and continuous development (quality strategy). The most significant differences between the three types of strategies were detected in relation to remuneration systems where companies following innovation strategy afforded higher remuneration compared to the other two, to support attracting the people with the mentioned skills. |
| 4 | Peng, W., Litteljohn, D., 2001 | The findings support communication having a pervasive role in every aspect of strategy implementation, overarching in a complex way to organizing processes, organizational context and implementation objectives which in turn have a consequential positive or negative effect on the strategy implementation process. Also, the role of interpretivism was raised by the authors of the study as a way to identify organizational context and management perceptions, allowing political and power dimensions to be uncovered. The authors claimed that interpretivism is "useful in understanding the distribution of decision-making authority and power and the consequential influence on strategy implementation in multi-unit organizations with a great range of vertical and horizontal relationships". This organizational power structure was identified shaping formal communication through either enabling channels of communication or the opposite, consequently either supporting or not, the strategy implementation process. |
| 5 | Okumus, F., 2001 | The study proposes an implementation framework based on its findings, covering context variables, including "strategy formulation, environmental uncertainty, organizational structure, culture, operational planning, communication, resource allocation, people control and outcome". Whereas the authors state the process variables are primarily used and employed in implementing decisions, context variables are taken account of and support implementation process and outcome variables support in identifying expected results of the initiated strategy. The authors recommend managers to take a note of |

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| | | the importance of the internal context organizations, to help supporting receptive context to change, and instead of divisionalized and bureaucratic structures, favor "network" structures. It is necessary for managers to know to work under complex and dynamic conditions. Also, the importance of large organizations to identify the implications of implementing many projects simultaneously and/or complementary and/or previous/current projects' influence on the future ones. |
| 6 | Näsi, J., Aunola, M., 2002 | The study identified that strategic management may work as a consistent process in strategy formulation and budgeting stage, but a consistent total implementation system is lacking as well as the wisdom which would facilitate the implementation stage. On sub-function level, consistency was identified e.g., in a form of "an organizing system, a communication system, a motivating system and a control system" but no consistent system identified for the total implementation stage. |
| 7 | Dickinson, S., Ramaseshan, B., 2004 | As per the authors of the study, "Strategy and environments together allow firms to achieve objectives". In order to gain strategic advantage, firms seek for new or different strategies and thus assessment for viability of varying strategies is important. The results of this study suggest that firms operating with high intensity, potential for growth and needing solutions to high entry requirements, benefit of considering co-product, co-promotion, co-distribution, and co-branding strategies. "Competition sharpens strategic planning and proactiveness as well as speed of strategy adjustment." Whereas industry characteristics was identified as a single significant antecedent for cooperative marketing strategy implementation, managerial perception on the role of promotion, high level of behavioral commitment, formalized operations, and procedures in terms of communication and documentation, and higher mean levels of firm competence were also identified as antecedents for higher level of cross-firms cooperation. |
| 8 | Wu, W., Chih, H. C., Ya-Jung, W., 2004 | The findings indicate key success factors (KSFs) being significantly influenced by Sun Tzu's principles of situational appraisal, strategy implementation and strategic control. Strong interrelationship was also identified between Sun Tzu's principles of situational appraisal and strategy implementation as the findings show that firms knowing their internal and external environments, are able to react more swiftly, and put emphasis on adaptability, and deceptiveness while implementing their strategy. Similarly, significant interrelationship was identified with the mentioned situational appraisal and strategic control, including intelligence and security - in terms of how information is used to support strategy implementation. |
| 9 | Ishak, A., 2004 | The findings propose that organizations achieve higher performance levels in implementing marketing strategies when implementation is supported by marketing managers' evaluation and control as well as commitment to the strategy. Proposed by the findings as well is an active engagement by top management to support operational managers with strategy implementation. Overall, the study identified "four fundamental factors -- in marketing strategy implementation, namely commitment, consensus, evaluation and control", and autonomy. |
| 10 | Lane, N., 2005 | The study identified manager gender reflecting "significant differences between the extent of the implementation of the control strategy and the outcomes achieved". The author raised as a possible bias, companies' promotion policies, in case promotion is biased and "only the most talented and capable women" are "promoted to management positions". The management of strategy implementation at interpersonal level was identified as a critical determinant for success of strategy implementation. Thus, further research is proposed by the author on "individual characteristics of effective strategy implementors". |

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| 11 | Naranjo-Gil, D., Hartmann, F., 2006 | The findings indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between the (interactive) use (for financial and non-financial information) and applicability (e.g., for resource allocation) of MAS [management accounting system] by top management teams [TMT] and strategy implementation. The background and characteristics of TMT impact on the effectiveness of the use of MAS in relation to strategy implementation, both to flexibility strategy as well as to cost strategy. Professional TMTs are likely to use MAS to flexibly and adaptively manage their organization, also relying on nonfinancial performance measures, thus supporting implementation of flexibility strategies. As the authors had quoted, the findings "are consistent with Simons' (1995, 2000) arguments that an interactive style promotes search, innovation, and coordination, and thus enables strategies with multiple goals". Whereas the findings propose that more administrative TMTs are likely to focus less on nonfinancial measures and apply "classical top-down control, with less involvement of subordinates". |
| 12 | Akan, O., Allen, R. S., Helms, M. M., Spralls, S. A. III., 2006 | <p>Based on the findings, in order to succeed with any given of Porter's generic strategies [differentiation, cost leadership, focus or combination], a number of tactics are necessary. Previous research has not yet identified "tactics associated with each of the generic strategies". Thus, the study aimed to identify tactics used by the respondent organizations when implementing any (of Porter's) generic strategies.</p> <p>"The practices that we identified as critical were the ones that appeared to be the most significantly related to organizational performance. They are the ones that differentiated the high performers from the average performers. As such, they should be carefully and thoughtfully focused on by organizations attempting to implement a specific strategy." (2006: 45)</p> <p>Few of the practices and/or tactics identified per the different generic strategies included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Differentiation strategy: "1) innovation in marketing technology and methods; 2) fostering innovation and creativity; and 3) a focus on building high market share" - Cost leadership strategy: "the minimization of distribution costs" - Focus strategy: "1) providing outstanding customer service; 2) improving operational efficiency; 3) controlling the quality of products or services; and 4) extensive training of front-line personnel" - Focus/differentiation (combination) strategy: "producing specialty products and services; and producing products or services for high price market segments." |
| 13 | Harness, T., 2009 | The findings suggest there is only very little association between HRM policy and business strategy, whereas respondent organizations showed strong links between their market characteristics and their business strategies. The studied organizations showed having four factors influencing their HRM policies, including stakeholders, management philosophy, labor market conditions, and organizational culture and power. Though high degree of planning was involved (including HRM aspects), "a broad range of contingencies affected the strategy making process". |

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| 14 | Vänttinen, M., Pyhältö, K., 2009 | Strategy implementation was found ineffective and the commitment of staff members as low. The findings indicate that this could be due to what was identified in the interviews, that "both the strategic- and operative-level employees considered the strategic level as active strategy makers and the operative level as passive receivers of the strategy". The experiences across organizational level were consistent but not across the levels. The perceptions employees had about their own role towards the strategy varied and the operative level did not acknowledge themselves being active participants in the strategy process. The study identified significant problems in the success of the city strategy implementation due to "the way the strategy process was conducted". |
| 15 | Glaister, K. W., Dincer, O., Tatoglu, E., Demirbag, M., 2009 | A number of significant differences was identified between the strategic planning practices applied by Turkish (transitional economy) and UK (advanced market economy) firms. The findings indicate that Turkish firms were more favorably disposed to strategic planning whereas the adoption and use of a range of tools and techniques on strategic analysis was more constantly applied by UK firms. To ensure that each group involved in strategy work, covering both strategic planning and strategy implementation, organizations should seek a coherent interface between those responsible for the aforementioned phases. The first hypothesis of the study was that there would be "significant differences between the strategic planning practices" applied by firms in the two studied markets was supported by the findings. However, a contrary finding was made with the second hypothesis which expected that the UK firms would have been more favorably disposed to strategic planning and so the Turkish firms were identified being more favorably disposed, showing "greater adoption of and commitment to the identified dimensions of strategic planning". Relatively short time horizon was identified across most dimensions of strategic planning whereas, and as per the authors' quotation "strategy is fundamentally concerned with "the long-term direction of an organization (Johnson and Scholes, 2002)". The study also identified firms putting more focus in the formulation aspects of strategy as compared to the implementation and evaluation of it. This could be due to the fact that respondents held roles responsible and more concerned with formulation than implementation. "Both groups of firms, -- tend to believe that the strategy process is more a deliberate process than an emergent process". |
| 16 | Chi-Hung, Y., Lee, G.-G., Jung-Chi, P., 2012 | The capability of information systems was identified having an important and direct effect on the quality of implementation of IT strategy, and consequently the quality of the implementation process affecting performance of e-business. The authors suggest the following capabilities to be considered as aspects supporting enhancement of overall operational performance of e-business: chief information office's capability on information system/technology leadership, IT resource allocation capability, departmental collaboration capability and knowledge sharing, and finally system development and project management capability. |
| 17 | Trez, G., Luce, F. B., 2012 | The study had primary focus on the impacts of inter-firm relationships and inter-functional processes to marketing capabilities, indirectly referencing to the impacts of the same to strategy implementation (through new product development or NPD). The findings suggest that "increased dispersion in marketing activities impact product development", thus allowing authors to argue that their "results reflect what Webster (1997) classifies as flexible structures, companies that share activities and knowledge". |

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| 18 | Ramaseshan, B., Ishak, A., Rabbanee, F. K., 2013 | The study found that commitment exercised by marketing managers towards strategy implementation carries strong, positive impact on organization's performance. The authors state that "the factor 'innovative culture' as an antecedent of commitment towards strategy implementation has not been explored by researchers". |
| 19 | Philip Omondi, M., Ombui, K., Mungatu, J., 2013 | The findings of the study show that within the studied sample, policy regulations, management competencies, and resource allocation having a positive impact on the success of strategic plans' implementation. Within the management competencies, effective internal and external communication was identified through the study contributing to effective strategy implementation, whereas from the resource allocation point of view, availability of sufficient financial and human resources was identified as a significant contributor or non-contributor depending on the sufficiency level of the same. |
| 20 | Johnson, E. N., Reckers, P. M. J., Bartlett, G. D., 2014 | The results of the experimental study propose that "organizations can benefit from including an explicit timeline for strategy implementation as part of the strategy map". The findings support reducing financial fixation in a BSC context when a timeline information is provided in connection with a strategy implementation plan. It was also identified that when the validity of the underlying strategy was accepted, it was more likely that the strategy was achieved. Further involvement of the relevant personnel to strategy development process has been found to enhance "understanding of and support for strategy implementation", rather than having top management only working with the strategy development. |
| 21 | Mostafa, S. R., Mohsen, A. S., Blooki, M. L., 2014 | <p>Through literature review, and using interpretive structural modeling (ISM), the authors identified and prioritized 13 key intra-organizational factors that positively contribute to successful strategy implementation. By using the integrated model of ISM-DEMATEL for intra-organizational factors identified and prioritized, the authors recommend managers involved in implementation of strategies to: validate the properness of the planned strategy; seek consensus of the majority of internal stakeholders for the selected strategies; do the necessary compromises between strategies and organizational structure and culture; concretize the strategies to clear plans and projects; lead the strategic change in the organization; secure necessary resourcing; provide strong support for the implementation and managerial capabilities; promote commitment among internal stakeholders; efficiently manage employees in the phases of the implementation; and setup proper control and monitoring mechanisms to follow the progress of strategy implementation.</p> <p><i>[Note: The research methodology used in this study is very different from the other studies with narrow non-random sample of experts used to validate the model.]</i></p> |
| 22 | Jansen Van Rensburg, M., Davis, A., Venter, P., 2014 | The middle managers seem, as per the results of the study, to generally associate their roles as implementers of strategies as well as messengers between their teams and upper-level managers. In addition to the aforementioned roles and the traditional role of planning, organizing, leading and controlling, held by middle managers to support successful strategy implementation, the authors added 'advocacy' and 'improving operational practice' as additional roles for middle managers. Advocacy, identified in particular in the public sector, refers here to interpretation and internal selling of the already decided (e.g., government policies). The study also showed middle managers (around 30%) seeing themselves as facilitators and downward influencers. The results also indicate that the changing business environment requires middle managers to hold an important role and enact in their strategic role. |

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| 23 | Theriou, N. G., 2015 | The findings indicate that, strategic decision-making process for both strategy development and implementation are equally structured in Greek firms. No significant difference was identified for strategy development in the use of financial and non-financial information, but "there is significant difference in the evaluation of financial -- and non-financial information for strategy implementation". This finding with clear difference between strategy development and strategy implementation, may be partly biased due to the respondents selected for the study and accountants more often being involve in strategy implementation than development. It was also claimed that annual performance measurements in implementation process mainly use financial information, as compared to non-financial information. |
| 24 | Elbanna, S., Andrews, R., Pollanen, R., 2016 | Formal strategic planning was found through the study being beneficial to public organizations and positively contributing to strategy implementation. The success of strategy implementation was further identified mediated by managerial involvement, in particular in the face of stakeholder uncertainty. The findings propose that strategic planning is more likely to provide its full benefit when managers are involved in the process. It was however also mentioned by the authors that solely formal strategy planning will not guarantee the success of strategy implementation as the relationship of planning and implementation is also moderated by other factors, incl. stakeholder uncertainty. |
| 25 | Gębczyńska, A., 2016 | The study identified insensitivity of strategy implementation being higher on the strategic level and gradually lowering towards lower managerial levels. The surveyed enterprises indicated decomposing their strategic objectives onto the functional level and less onto the process level. As per the findings, "information transfer is not -- problematic aspect of strategy implementation, particularly in medium-size organisations". However, training in the scope of strategy implementation seems to be lacking and thus would benefit of further focus. Strategy was also identified with limited extend being integrated to the enterprises' incentive systems which may decrease employees' motivation and involvement in strategic initiatives. |
| 26 | Pollanen, R., Abdel-Maksoud, A., Elbanna, S., Mahama, H., 2017 | The findings support the use of strategic performance measures (SPM) due to their identified positive contribution to organizational performance. Support was also found on the use of SPM in strategic decision-making and as a positive contributor between strategic processes and organizational performance. |
| 27 | Permana, D., 2017 | It was identified through the study that clarifying and aligning vision, strategic priorities and strategy's scope have contributed to the success of strategy implementation. Middle managers were identified having an important role as implementers of strategic vision. Intended strategies should guide middle managers in terms of priorities and through this affect managers' behavior and subsequently performance outcome. Thus, harmonizing the understanding of the intended strategy within managers situated level below the top management team is likely to have a positive impact in the implementation outcome. The author reminds that these findings should be treated with caution, considering the cultural context present within the sample used for this study. |
| 28 | Hodgkinson, I. R., Ravishanker, MN., Fischer, M., 2017 | The study touches upon aspects that can hinder the success of strategy implementation. "Culturally embedded practices" were identified as hindering aspects and possible blocks of managerial ambidexterity. It was also mentioned that often strategy planning is disconnected from those executing it. Thus, it can be found hard for managers to put the planned |

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| | | strategy into practice, especially if the underlying cultural world of the organization counters with the proposed strategic initiatives. |
| 29 | Anning-Dorson, T., 2017 | The findings support the following hypothesis set to the study: "strong innovative organizational culture will mediate and mitigate the negative effect of market demand on product innovation and performance relationship". In other words, it was found that firms which nurture innovation culture within their organizations may harvest product innovation's positive effects on their performance, even in the face of the environmental effect of market demand which could otherwise dampen performance. |
| 30 | Mukherji, A., Mukherji, J., 2018 | The study found significant positive impact to firm's financial performance among firms applying metacognitive monitoring, which consequently resulted in stronger strategic orientation, and greater utilization of marketing analysis, supporting systems and strategic clusters. |
| 31 | Alcaide-Muñoz, C., Bello-Pintado, A., Merino-Díaz de Cerio J., 2018 | Manufacturing strategy implementation was shown by the findings to be positively influenced by formal strategic planning. In addition, three out of four communication practices (GPS, SIF, and FBCK) showed statistically significant and positive effect on the implementation success. Furthermore, and in particular, two shop-floor communication practices (feedback/FBCK and instructive communication/CIM) were identified as important practices for them acting as strategy formalization and implementation relationship strengtheners. Though the study raised the existence of formal planning possibly carrying also negative effects for the fact of being less flexible model, benefits of formal planning include identification of internal and external resources, efficient resource allocation and control of the whole strategy process. |
| 32 | Vanderli, C. P., de Carvalho, M. M., 2018 | The study provided empirical validation through its findings that identified internal strategic alignment and business performance to have positive relationship. Internal alignment considered both vertical and horizontal alignment, where vertical alignment seizes of actions such as formal planning, consideration for management capabilities to support implementation as well as people's involvement in it. Whereas, horizontal alignment consists of "understanding of customer needs, and process alignment (inter-functional) that can deliver what the customer needs". |
| 33 | Noga, G., 2018 | The importance of organizational culture as well as its structure, skills and knowledge were identified through the study towards effectiveness of strategy implementation. It also became apparent the enterprise needs to adapt to the strategy implementation process. In addition to the aforementioned, the respondents of the study also raised the following as important tasks in strategy implementation: "determining the priorities, assigning responsibility, assessing the results, and supervising the implementation". What the study did not confirm is "any relationship between management style and resources" towards the effectiveness of strategy implementation. |
| 34 | Čizmić, E., Hrnjić, A., 2018 | The study found that implementation of the balanced scorecard concept (BSC) carries a positive impact in terms of improved business/institutional performance. The findings also support that not only private companies but also government institutions can benefit of implementing BSC model to assist in improving their performance. Though the primary focus of the study was on the use of balanced scorecard model, it consisted of indirect reference to the success of strategy implementation/intended outcome. |

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| 35 | Desmidt, S., Meyfroodt, K., George, B., 2019 | Among the findings of the study is the role of cognitive structures. These structures (mainly homogeneity/heterogeneity) were identified influencing how effectively or ineffectively strategic decisions can be made. Cognitive structure was also identified as "an important mediator in the strategic management-performance relationship". Constraints on the development of shared cognition on strategic goals within the group were identified in connection with ideological diversity and differing political roles, more than with the diversity in demographic terms. |
| 36 | Smith, B. D., 2019 | The findings suggest that there is a significant gap between espoused and enacted strategy with "only a 50% overlap between plans and execution" identified in connection with marketing strategy in the life sciences industry. The study raises also the difficulty to measure anything if strategies get only half implemented. As the most important cause for the identified gap was found to be intraorganizational conflicts, followed by lack of individual commitment. Factors influencing individual commitment, incl. unattractive rewards or belief in reward. To improve the effectiveness of marketing strategy implementation, the author states that both identified causes should be addressed simultaneously. |
| 37 | Nderitu, J. W., Waiganjo, E., Orwa, G. O., 2020 | The study reveals the importance of clan culture as an influencer towards successful implementation of corporate strategy within Private chartered universities in Kenya. Clan culture becomes apparent e.g., through teamwork and commitment of employees which were also identified as important, positive contributors supporting strategy implementation. Furthermore, communication by the management also carried a positive effect when done well. Whereas lack of award incentives and training of staff were seen as demotivators or detractors of efficient strategy implementation. |
| 38 | Wei, Y. S., O'Neill, H., Zhou, N., 2020 | The findings support the hypothesis that the higher the perceived integrity of firm's managers, the better the employee productivity, supporting directly enhanced firm's performance and effective implementation of dual strategic orientation. However, with low perceived integrity of firm's leaders, focus on dual orientation may hurt firm's performance and thus findings support low integrity firms to focus on innovation or market orientation only. |

3.2 The extent of empirical studies on strategy implementation

As expected in the beginning of this study, the extent of empirical studies conducted on strategy implementation is rather narrow. The extent is discussed here within on a general level, whereas the results of the reviewed and summarized articles are covered in the following chapter (4 Results).

Altogether 38 articles were identified to meet all of the set selection criteria. Some of the characteristics of the selected sample can be drawn from the years of publication (Figure 1) and the geographical coverage (Figure 2) of the samples studied in the selected articles.

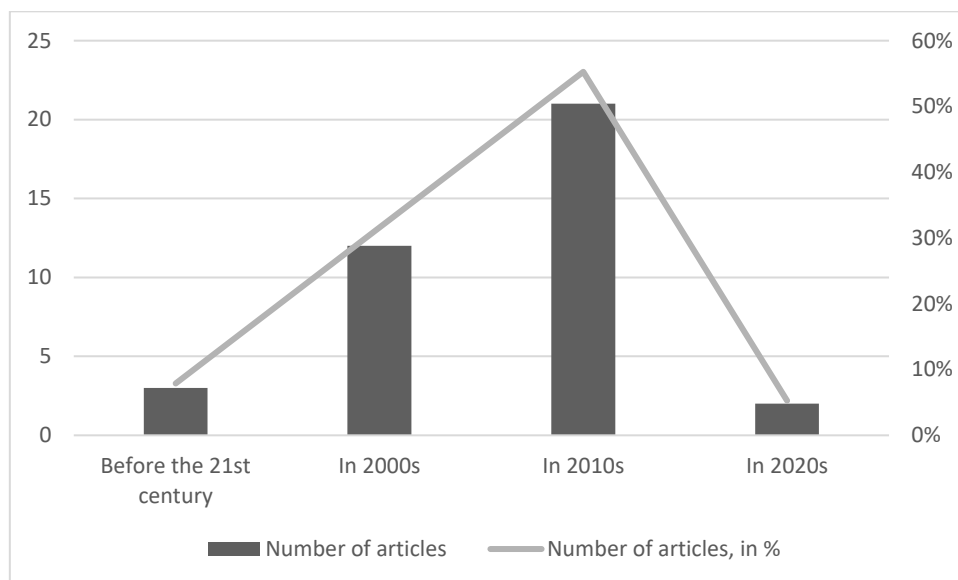


Figure 1. Number of articles, per period of publication.

Out of the selected 38 articles (Figure 1), only three (8%) were published before the 2000s. In the 2000s twelve (32%) articles were published, in the 2010s twenty-one (55%) articles, and most recently, in 2020 two (5%) articles. From this split, it can be seen that strategy implementation has been increasingly studied only in the past two decades – though the overall extent and coverage of studies still remains fairly narrow.

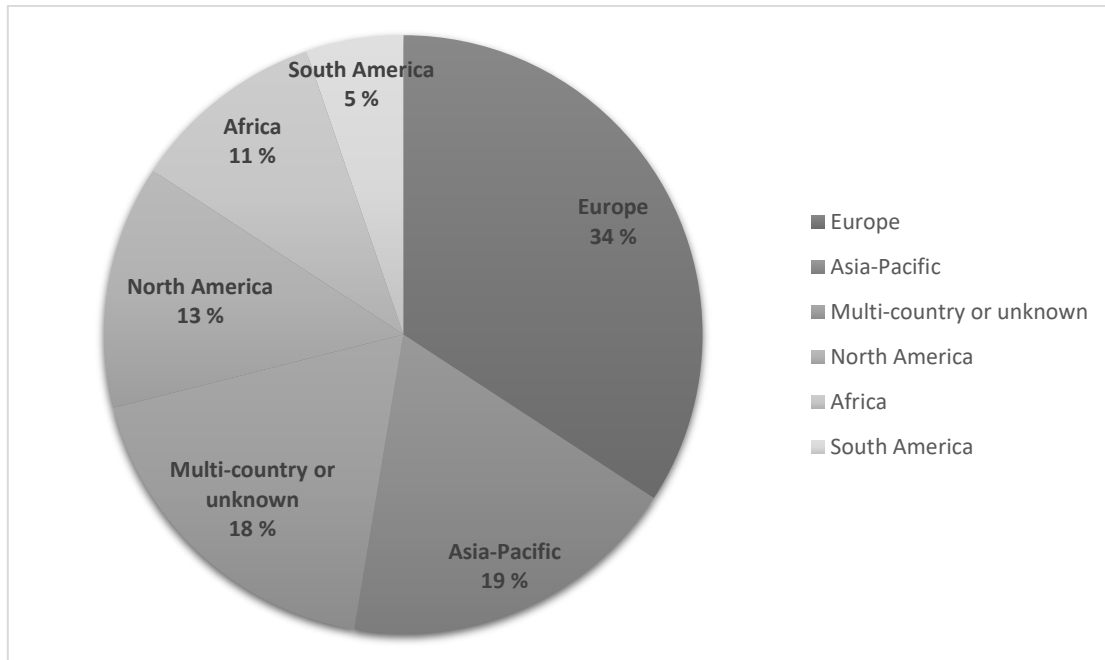


Figure 2. Number of articles, per geographical coverage.

The geographical coverage of the studied samples covers the following regions in order of number of articles from higher to lower (Figure 2): Europe (34%; 13 articles); Asia-Pacific (18%; 7 articles); multi-country coverage or unknown geographical coverage (18%; 3 + 4 articles); North America (13%; 5 articles); Africa (11%; 4 articles); and South America (5%; 2 articles).

Table 4. Results by journal.

| | # of articles | % of total articles |
|--|---------------|---------------------|
| Journal of Strategic Marketing | 4 | 11 % |
| Public Management Review | 3 | 8 % |
| Academy of Management Journal | 2 | 5 % |
| Business Process Management Journal | 2 | 5 % |
| European Research Studies | 2 | 5 % |
| International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management | 2 | 5 % |
| Journal of Management Accounting Research | 2 | 5 % |
| Management Decision | 2 | 5 % |
| Marketing Intelligence & Planning | 2 | 5 % |
| The Journal of Business Strategy | 2 | 5 % |
| Academia | 1 | 3 % |
| Academy of Strategic Management Journal | 1 | 3 % |
| Business, Management and Education | 1 | 3 % |
| Industrial Management & Data Systems | 1 | 3 % |

| | | |
|--|-----------|-----|
| International Journal of Human Resource Management | 1 | 3 % |
| International Journal of Research in Business and Social Science | 1 | 3 % |
| Journal of Business Ethics | 1 | 3 % |
| Journal of Competitiveness Studies | 1 | 3 % |
| Journal of Management and Organization | 1 | 3 % |
| Journal of Strategy and Management | 1 | 3 % |
| Jurnal Siasat Bisnis | 1 | 3 % |
| Qualitative Market Research | 1 | 3 % |
| Sarajevo Business and Economics Review | 1 | 3 % |
| The Journal of Management Development | 1 | 3 % |
| TQM Journal | 1 | 3 % |
| <i>Total</i> | 38 | |

Looking at the search results and final selection of the 38 articles by journal, we can see that the publications are widespread across multiple, altogether 25 journals (Table 4). Majority of the articles (61 %) were published in 10 different journals with few of the journals having focused on a specific business domain.

4 Results

Chapter three classifies the selected 38 articles and summarizes the findings of each article. Each of the articles discuss strategy implementation either directly or indirectly, and either on a more general level or rather by focusing on a specific domain, such as marketing or sales. The extent of empirical studies on strategy implementation were also reported in terms of the chronological (when article was published), and geographical (to what geographical context the studied sample was tied to) dimension.

In this chapter, we look at the overall evaluation of the reviewed literature, as well as synthesize on the concepts and findings identified from the selected articles. The synthesis is made by discussing the applicability of the articles on *strategy implementation*, as well as the reoccurring aspects identified in the reviewed studies either as hindering or facilitating components for successful strategy implementation.

4.1 Overall evaluation and results

The extent of the articles identified against the selection criteria shows the narrow coverage of the topic through empirical research. Majority of the research in the selected articles is purely quantitative (63 %), followed by purely qualitative (26 %), while articles mixing both qualitative and quantitative research only account for 11%. Single case studies, conceptual papers, and literature reviews on the topic of strategy implementation were excluded in the selection process (Table 5), including elimination of 36% (21 articles) of articles due to the aforementioned characteristics in the last selection step (step 7).

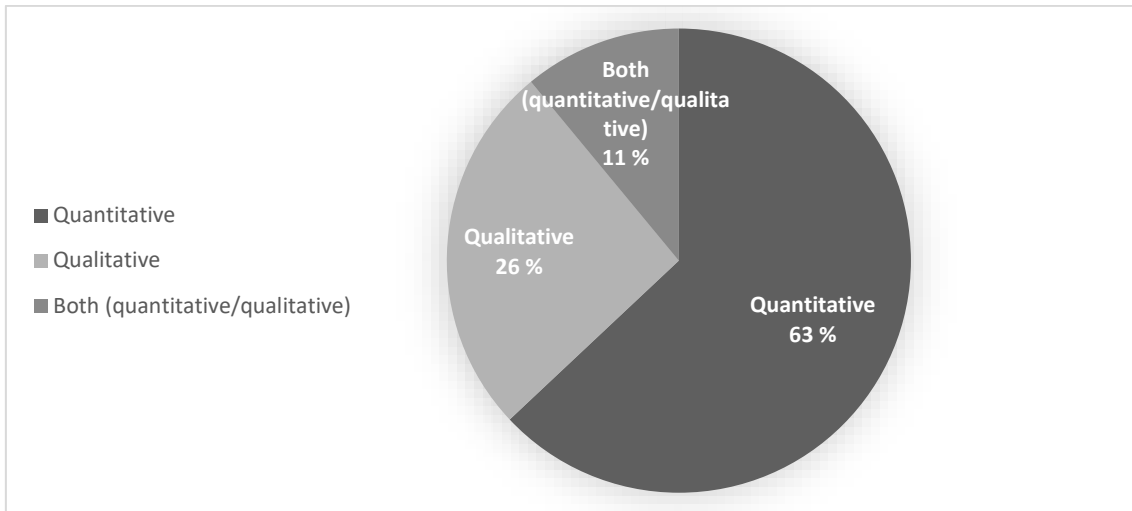


Figure 3. Type of empirical support provided by the selected articles.

Considering the geographical split (Figure 2) of the markets studied in the research, majority of the studies in the final sample focus on developed markets. Though the coverage is major within developed markets, majority of the studies focused on a single market which limits the generalizability of the findings due to e.g., varying cultural aspects present in different geographical locations, whether developed, developing or underdeveloped region. Furthermore, many of the studies focused on a specific strategy implementation (such as marketing strategy), and/or only indirectly identified aspects that contribute to the success or conversely hinder the success of strategy implementation.

One of the articles retained as a relevant article as per the set selection criteria, carries characteristics of a single case study – the article by Hodgkinson and Ravishankar (2017). In this article, the authors conducted in-depth interviews with 12 managers of a single company. However, as the article studied the hindering effects on managers' ambidexterity, it can be considered that each respondent represented themselves in the study, rather than a single company. This being said, it is nevertheless very likely that managers from a same company have similar perceptions of the hindering aspects.

Regardless of the fact that single case studies, conceptual papers, and literature reviews on the topic were excluded, due to the reason that the extent of empirical studies on strategy implementation are rather narrow and studies published rather young – with

92% of the articles having been published in year 2000 or later –, relevance can be identified also from the excluded articles. Thus, these have been included in the appendix (Table 5) as well as in the references for easy reference and retrievability.

4.2 Strategy implementation and applicability of the reviewed literature

A conceptual article from 2001 (D.C. Hambrick and J.W. Fredrickson) starts with the following statement: "After more than 30 years of hard thinking about strategy -- ". It is now more than 50 years, and we can still claim that there is ambiguity around the concept of strategy, specifically around strategy implementation and how it is reflected and actioned in practice. The reviewed articles covered multiple angles by assessing different levels of strategy in various cultural and industrial contexts. They present results of empirical research as well as aspects identified having either direct or indirect positive or negative impact on strategy implementation. The following summarizes and synthesizes the presented repeatedly reported aspects and connecting points (grouped per characteristic similarity).

4.2.1 Support and engagement of the upper management, and management competencies

Support from executives and other levels of managers, as well as active engagement by top management came up repeatedly having positive causal effect to strategy implementation, incl. articles by Kim, W. C., Mauborgne, R. A. 1993; Ishak, A. 2004; Elbanna, S. et al. 2016. Furthermore, *management competencies* were identified by the study of Philip Omondi, M. et al. (2013) with effect to strategy implementation.

Strategy validation, alignment, and consensus are few of the concepts presented by the results of the reviewed empirical research as having impact on the success of strategy implementation. Unless there is an internal buy-in and common understanding across the necessary levels of organization on a given strategy, how can the organization move towards its shared goal/s through strategy implementation? Findings of Mostafa, S. R. et

al. (2014) talk about validation of the properness of the planned strategy and about seeking “consensus of the majority of internal stakeholders for the selected strategies”, also supported by Ishak, A. (2004). The same concepts are referenced through the findings of article where clan culture was found having positive impact on corporate strategy implementation (Nderitu, J. W. et al., 2020). The positive impact of seeking alignment, both vertical and horizontal, is brought up by Vanderli, C. P. and de Carvalho, M. M. (2018). Formal planning and acknowledgement of management capabilities are identified as vertical alignment enablers whereas horizontal alignment considers customer point of view and inter-functional processes.

The aforementioned can be claimed to work as a basis for aims to successfully implement a strategy. Few of the means for strategy validation, alignment, and consensus, and for achieving that internal buy-in, could be other concepts also identified with positive impact on strategy implementation and something that can be considered as management capabilities – but no direct correlation presented to the aforementioned concepts – including *advocacy* (Jansen Van Rensburg, M. et al., 2014), *downward influencing* (Jansen Van Rensburg, M. et al., 2014), *communication* (Peng, W., Litteljohn, D. 2001; Alcaide-Muñoz, C. et al. 2018; Nderitu, J. W. et al. 2020), and *use of information* (Wu, W. et al. 2004).

One of the studies identified [marketing managers'] *evaluation* and *control* as well as *commitment* to the strategy (Ishak, A., 2004), supporting effective implementation of strategic decisions. The study by Glaister, K. W. et al. (2009), on the other hand, found that the studied firms put more focus in the formulation aspects of strategy as compared to the implementation and evaluation of it. Noga, G. (2018) noted that firms need to *adapt to the strategy implementation process*. This was also supported by the findings by Wu, W. et al. (2004) which stated that firms *knowing their internal and external environments*, are able to react more swiftly, and put *emphasis on adaptability*, and *deceptiveness* while implementing their strategy. All the aforementioned points set specific requirements for management capabilities.

4.2.2 Organization of strategy

Organization, resourcing, and roles, and responsibilities also came up both as impeding, as well as supporting contributors to strategy implementation and well link to the below-discussed aspects of participation of the personnel to strategy work. The previous concepts were discussed both through availability and allocation of resources (whether human or IT), as well as how one perceives their role and responsibility as active actors in strategy implementation.

Chi-Hung, Y. et al. (2012); Philip Omondi, M. et al. (2013); and Alcaide-Muñoz, C. et al. (2018), all referred to the role of *resource allocation* in their findings. Whereas *responsibility for strategy implementation, incl. roles and responsibilities* were also mentioned repeatedly by other authors, both through positive and negative findings (negative example: Vänttinen, M., Pyhältö, K. 2009; positive example: Jansen Van Rensburg, M. et al. 2014; Permana, D. 2017; Noga, G. 2018). The clearer the roles were, the more positive impact the different actors could extend on strategy implementation. Similarly, *organization of processes* can also act either as a positive or negative contributor to success of strategy implementation (Peng, W., Litteljohn, D., 2001).

4.2.3 Knowledge and competencies of the personnel

The attitudes of *commitment, trust, and outcome satisfaction* were reflected positively in one of the studies (Kim, W. C., Mauborgne, R., 1993). Similarly, *training of staff* – or more specifically the lack of it – was identified as a demotivator or a detractor of efficient strategy implementation in the study by Nderitu, J. W. et al. (2020).

Although the tactics or practices identified by Akan et al. (2006) as critical aspects to take a note of when implementing a specific strategy, they can rather be seen as the elements of a strategy statement [*the ends, domain and means*] than as aspects that in reality concretely support strategy implementation. They (Akan et al., 2006) did however

identify “extensive training of front-line personnel” as an important tactic, supporting implementation of a focus strategy.

4.2.4 Participation and compensation of the personnel

Involvement of the relevant personnel to strategy formulation and development process has been found as a positive suspect impacting strategy implementation (Johnson, E. N. et al., 2014; Elbanna, S. et al., 2016). Hodgkinson, I. R. et al. (2017), however, found that strategy planning is often disconnected from those executing it. Due to this, it can be hard for managers to put the planned strategy into practice, especially if the underlying organizational cultural counters with the proposed strategic initiatives (Hodgkinson, I. R. et al., 2017).

Sanz-Valle, R. et al. (1999) found differences in relation to *remuneration systems* depending on the type of strategy adopted by a firm. Their study identified that companies which were following innovation strategy afforded higher remuneration compared to the other two strategies [cost leadership; quality], to support attracting the people with the mentioned skills. The aforementioned supports the presumption that skills and compensation should be in balance to support strategy implementation. Further support is found from the annotation that *lack of award incentives* and above-mentioned *lack of training of staff* were identified as demotivators or detractors of efficient strategy implementation in the study of Nderitu, J. W. et al. (2020). Limited support for the same finding was also identified by Gębczyńska, A. (2016), with incentive systems’ possible decreasing effect on employees’ motivation and involvement in strategic initiatives.

4.2.5 Further aspects to take a note of

Aspects that were not referenced in more than one of the studies but still worthy to take a note of, incl. the study and findings by Lane, N. (2005) on *gender impact* on strategy implementation. The study by Lane, N. (2005) identified that depending on the gender of the manager there could be seen “significant differences between the extent of the

implementation of the control strategy and the outcomes achieved" (2005: 125). Promotion policies, in case promotion is biased and "only the most talented and capable women" are "promoted to management positions" was raised as a possible bias on the finding. In connection to the study on gender impact, Lane, N. (2005) noted the *management of strategy implementation at interpersonal level* as a critical determinant for the success of strategy implementation.

Finally, the results of the experimental study by Johnson, E. N. et al. (2014) propose that "organizations can benefit from including an explicit timeline for strategy implementation as part of the strategy map" (2014: 167). *Definition of a time span* was not really reflected throughout the studies reviewed, except for one other study where the authors identified a relatively short time horizon across most dimensions of strategic planning, whereas, and as per the authors' quotation, "strategy is fundamentally concerned with "the long-term direction of an organization (Johnson and Scholes, 2002)" (Glaister, K. W. et al., 2009: 376).

5 Conclusions and suggestions for future research

5.1 Conclusions

This systematic literature review on the empirical studies conducted on strategy implementation sheds light on what the level and extent of research done in the field is. Through an objective selection of material, 59 scientific journal articles were identified for a more thorough review, resulting in a total of 38 articles, which were identified to match with the set criteria. These articles focused on directly empirically studying strategy implementation or doing so by touching the domain of strategy implementation closely enough.

This study covered three phases, which all contributed to the primary goal of gaining a better understanding of the extent of empirical research done on *strategy implementation* as well as the secondary goal of identifying key components affecting successful strategy implementation. First, a systematic literature review on the selected domain of *strategy implementation* was carried out. Following this, secondly, a synthesis on the concepts and findings both on the level of the reviewed article as well as in consolidated form was formed in order to identify reoccurring findings and to report the results of the final set of reviewed articles. And thirdly, the identified managerial implications were summarized and suggestions for future research were made.

The depth and breadth of the reviewed empirical studies varied and so did the chronological split of the publications, with 92% of the articles having been published in the 21st century. Overall, the extent of empirical studies conducted on strategy implementation was found to be narrow with only 38 articles identified to the final set of articles which were reviewed in full.

The applied part of this study, under chapter 4 (Results), generalizes and identifies repeating concepts. Generalizations are made with the acknowledgement that the scope of the study where the findings originate from may focus on a dedicated industry, or

dedicated cultural or hierarchical domain, etc. Thus, it is important to consider the findings of this study both through the applied part as well as through the article level synopsis, also taking a note of the samples studied based on which the connecting aspects were drawn on.

Although the extent of empirical studies identified to be focusing on strategy implementation was found narrow, some factors of successful strategy implementation were revealed. The applicability of the repeatedly reported aspects and factors of a success on strategy implementation would benefit from further empirical validation for the aforementioned reasons.

The connecting points, the repeatedly reported aspects or otherwise aspects worth taking a note of from the findings of the empirical studies, included the following (grouped per characteristic similarity and reported in more complete form under chapter 4.2, incl. references to the respective authors):

Support and engagement of the upper management

- Support from executives and other levels of managers, and active engagement by top management

Management competencies

- Advocacy, downward influencing, communication, and use of information
- Evaluation and control
- Adaptation to the strategy implementation process
- Firms knowing their internal and external environments
- Strategy validation, alignment, and consensus

Organization of strategy work

- Resource allocation, and organization processes
- Responsibility for strategy implementation, incl. roles and responsibilities

Knowledge and competencies of the personnel

- The attitudes of commitment, trust, and outcome satisfaction
- Training of staff

Participation and compensation of the personnel

- Involvement of the relevant personnel to strategy formulation and development process
- Remuneration systems, and lack of award incentives

Further aspects to take a note of

- Gender impact
- Management of strategy implementation at interpersonal level
- Definition of time span

In the beginning of this study, the author expected that the literature review would reveal that many companies, whether public or private, may not understand the reasons for a failing or a lacking strategy implementation. This hypothesis was not properly found valid nor invalid – but remains open and allows room for further research.

5.2 Managerial implications

How well the findings of this study are applicable to practice can be questioned, due to the narrow extent in which success factors of strategy implementation have been studied. Also, how well generalizable the findings of the reviewed empirical studies are can be questioned – as the scope and depth of the selected studies varied to an extent. Taking the aforementioned constraints and limitations of this study into consideration, the identified factors that can either attract or detract success in strategy implementation can at least be actively kept in mind by managers from different levels when working on its corporate and business strategies and when planning for their execution.

Putting a strategy into practice may be difficult for many companies. Thus, one of the primary tasks of upper management should be to make sure that corporate and business strategies are understood by all – throughout all units and hierarchical levels. To help

with this, upper management should be engaged and committed to support in strategy implementation. Upper management should take a note of the competencies of the managerial levels as well as the knowledge and competencies of all their personnel. Similarly, both the way how strategy work is organized and whether relevant personnel is involved in it, carry a role. Furthermore, personnel's commitment to strategy implementation can be supported by providing appropriate training for staff as well as making sure the compensation and incentive models support personnel's involvement in strategy work. Finally, making sure and validating that there is an aligned view and understanding on the roles and responsibilities carries its significance.

5.3 Limitations

This study was conducted as a systematic literature review. Due to the chosen selection criteria and the fact that only two databases were used, the gathered sample proved to be rather narrow. This in turn naturally reflects to the applicability and scope of this study and should be considered as a possible limitation. However, it should also be noted that even with the application of multiple databases the provided sample might not have been much different.

Nevertheless, the article selection and review process followed a systematic approach, claimed as per the reference material to be as objective as possible – the steps of the selection process which were not fully search technical carried a subjective angle. The mentioned steps are subject to subjective judgment of the author, mainly steps 5 and 7, and this should be taken a note of. To ease the repeatability of this study as well as the reference to the excluded articles, list of articles excluded in the step 7 can be found in the appendix – with short comments on why the article was excluded.

Furthermore, due to the approach selected for this study and the limited number of empirical articles identified for the thorough review, the depth and breadth of the reported results as well as ability to draw conclusions is limited. However, to keep the content of this study as relevant to the systematically selected empirical research papers, the

Results chapter (chapter 4) is fully and solely based on the papers selected through the review rather than it seeking validation also from other papers related to the topic but with no direct empirical support.

Finally, and due to the aforementioned reasons, one should acknowledge the applicability of the generalizations drawn from the review against these documented limitations, and thus exercise caution before applying the generalizations and findings to another context. Therefore, the author also sees this area benefiting from further empirical studies as proposed in the following subchapter for future research opportunities.

5.4 Future research opportunities

Taking into account the narrow coverage of empirical research on *strategy implementation* and the varying scope of the existing literature, in order to verify and strengthen actual practical guidance to and to deliver actionable advice for managers, further empirical studies are needed. Therefore, it can be inferred that clear benefits could be achieved by conducting further research on the success factors of strategy implementation – both on corporate and on business level strategy. Furthermore, it would be important to expand the studied sample to cover various, randomly sampled industries, companies of different sizes, and from different cultural, economic, and political domains. Similarly, possible gender impact could be considered as an area to be further studied, thus echoing Lane, N. (2005) proposal for further research on "individual characteristics of effective strategy implementors". Moreover, the hierarchical split of respondents should be considered, and respondents could be selected from top management, middle management as well as the operational/functional level to get insight into how different organizational levels perceive and understand their companies' strategy, and how they perceive their own role as strategy implementers.

Finally, to avoid bias of the respondents through worry of being identified by their employer and thus limiting the level of openness in responses, one possible group to be studied would be groups of students with various levels of professional experience. For

instance, surveying executive MBA students from various institutions working in executive roles could offer a way to gain more unbiased data due to them not having to reveal their industry nor company specifics.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Articles excluded in the review step nr 7

Table 5. Summary of the articles excluded in the substantive and methodological review step (step 7), listed in chronological order and including short reasoning for exclusion.

| Nr. | Article: authors and title | Year of publication | Reason for excluding the article after full article review |
|-----|---|---------------------|---|
| 1 | Gupta, A. K., Govindarajan, V. <i>Business Unit Strategy, Managerial Characteristics, and Business Unit Effectiveness at Strategy Implementation.</i> | 1984 | Excluded, though indirect reference to strategy implementation in terms of aspects impacting on SBU [<i>strategic business unit</i>] effectiveness, depending on the relationship and power-control corporate level exercises towards its various SBUs. |
| 2 | Huston, L. A. <i>Using Total Quality to Put Strategic Intent into Motion.</i> | 1992 | Conceptual paper but touches strategy implementation process by recommending adapting of total quality principles for better success. |
| 3 | Sandelands, E. <i>All talk and no action? Perish the thought!</i> | 1994 | Conceptual paper |
| 4 | Morgan, N. A., Piercy, N. F. <i>Interactions Between Marketing and Quality at the</i> | 1998 | Not considered relevant as the paper focused on marketing-quality inter-functional relationship supporting performance outcomes. |

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| | <i>SBU Level: Influences and Outcomes.</i> | | |
| 5 | Sherman, H., Rowley, D. J., Armandi, B. R. <i>Developing a strategic profile: the pre-planning phase of strategic management.</i> | 2007 | Conceptual paper with no empirical support, describing a seven-step pre-planning process to support strategic management and planning. |
| 6 | Dickinson, S., Ramaseshan, B. <i>Maximising performance gains from cooperative marketing: understanding the role of environmental contexts.</i> | 2008 | Focus on co-marketing strategy (relevance categorized by author of this report as no/maybe) |
| 7 | Huebner, H., Varey, R., Wood, L. <i>The significance of communicating in enacting decisions.</i> | 2008 | Single case study |
| 8 | Brenner, M. <i>It's all about people: change management's greatest lever.</i> | 2008 | Conceptual paper on change management, touching also on change happening through strategic initiatives. |
| 9 | Williamson, V. <i>Developing leadership to transform our library: The library</i> | 2009 | Case study within Canadian Universities' libraries with focus on library leadership development program. |

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| | <i>leadership development program (LLDP) at the University of Saskatchewan.</i> | | |
| 10 | Getz, G., Lee, J. <i>Why your strategy isn't working.</i> | 2011 | Conceptual paper on common reasons for strategy to fail |
| 11 | Micheli, P., Mura, M., Agliati, M. <i>Exploring the roles of performance measurement systems in strategy implementation.</i> | 2011 | Single case study (on the firms of a multinational group) |
| 12 | Carvalho Simas, M. J. B. G. de, Lengler, J. F. B., Santos António, N. J. dos. <i>Integration of sustainable development in the strategy implementation process: proposal of a model.</i> | 2013 | Conceptual paper |
| 13 | Jayaram, J., Oke, A., Prajogo, D. <i>The antecedents and consequences of product and process innovation strategy implementation in</i> | 2014 | Excluded as the focus of the study was rather on the factors encouraging firms to invest in product and process innovation strategy implementation and their outcomes on firm's performance. |

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| | <i>Australian manufacturing firms.</i> | | |
| 14 | Lowy, A. <i>The six dilemmas of strategy execution.</i> | 2015 | Conceptual paper on dilemmas of strategy execution |
| 15 | Cândido, C., J. F., Santos, S. <i>Strategy implementation: What is the failure rate?</i> | 2015 | Literature review on studies conducted, discussing about failure rates in business strategy implementation in general and implementation of strategy in any specific field. |
| 16 | Author unknown. <i>Avoiding the strategy execution pitfalls: Confronting dilemmas when turning plans into action.</i> | 2016 | Review on a conceptual paper by Lowy (2015), "The six dilemmas of strategy execution" |
| 17 | Lawrie, G., Abdullah, N. A., Bragg, C., Varlet, G. <i>Multi-level strategic alignment within a complex organisation.</i> | 2016 | Single case study |
| 18 | Fedato, G. A. de L., Pires, V. M., Trez, G. <i>The Future of Research in Strategy Implementation in the BRICS Context.</i> | 2017 | Conceptual paper built on systematic literature review (relevance categorized by author of this report as no/maybe) |

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| 19 | Galpin, T. J. <i>Realizing your strategy's potential: a seven-step model for its effective execution.</i> | 2018 | Conceptual paper – however, offering practical guidance on model to support strategic initiatives' implementation. |
| 20 | Rezaee, E., Pooya, A. <i>Resource allocation to strategies of quality management with FANP and Goal Programming approach.</i> | 2019 | Single case study |
| 21 | Borrero, S., Acosta, A., Medina, A. F. <i>Culture, strategy formulation, and firm performance: a meta-analysis.</i> | 2020 | Meta-analysis of earlier studies with focus on the role of strategy formulation on firms' performance rather than on the role of strategy implementation. As no clear enough focus on strategy implementation, excluded in full article review. |

Appendix 2. Search phrases used in article search from the selected databases

Table 6. Search phrases used in article search in the selected databases, as per the steps described in chapter 2.

| Nr. | Delimitation in addition to the search phrases applied | ABI/INFORM Collection | Business Source Premier (EBSCO) |
|-----|---|---|---|
| 1 | Further delimited to peer reviewed, scholarly journals where full text is available and published before the end of 2020. | ab("strategy implementation") OR ti("strategy implementation") | AB "strategy implementation" OR TI "strategy implementation" |
| 2 | Same as in step 1 | (ab("strategy implementation") OR ti("strategy implementation")) AND (AB(("strategy execution") OR ("strategic") OR ("strategic management") OR ("process") OR ("strategy execution plan")) OR TI(("strategy execution") OR ("strategic") OR ("strategic management") OR ("process") OR ("strategy execution plan"))) | ((AB "strategy implementation" OR TI "strategy implementation") AND ((AB "strategy execution" OR AB "strategic" OR AB "strategic management" OR AB "process" OR AB "strategy execution plan") OR (TI "strategy execution" OR TI "strategic" OR TI "strategic management" OR TI "process" OR TI "strategy execution plan"))) |
| 3 | Same as in step 1 | ((ab("strategy implementation") OR ti("strategy implementation")) AND (AB(("strategy execution") OR ("strategic") OR ("strategic management") OR ("process") OR ("strategy execution plan")) OR TI(("strategy execution") OR ("strategic") OR ("strategic management") OR ("process") OR ("strategy execution plan")))) AND | (((AB "strategy implementation" OR TI "strategy implementation") AND ((AB "strategy execution" OR AB "strategic" OR AB "strategic management" OR AB "process" OR AB "strategy execution plan") OR (TI "strategy execution" OR TI "strategic" OR TI "strategic management" OR TI "process" OR TI "strategy execution plan")))) AND ((AB "data" OR AB "empirical" OR AB "test" OR AB "statistical" OR |

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| | | (AB(("data") OR ("empirical") OR ("test") OR ("statistical") OR ("finding*") OR ("result*") OR ("evidence*")) OR TI(("data") OR ("empirical") OR ("test") OR ("statistical") OR ("finding*")OR ("result*") OR ("evidence*")))) | AB "finding*" OR AB "result*" OR AB "evidence*") OR (TI "data" OR TI "empirical" OR TI "test" OR TI "statistical" OR TI "finding*" OR TI "result*" OR TI "evidence*")) |
| 4 – 7 | Selection steps following the database searches from steps 1 – 3. | | |