Vaula Korhonen

Strategy implementation from a multilevel perspective in a high-growth firm

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ABSTRACT:

Effective strategy work is important in terms of company's competitiveness. However, effective strategy implementation (SI) should not be overlooked, as it is one of the pre-requisites for outperforming organizations. Strategies are more likely to fail during the implementation phase rather than during formulation, which calls for attention to seek the best way to implement a strategy. Strategy implementation is important since if a company does not have strategic consensus, the members of the organization are operating for different goals and objectives, which can be harmful to the business. In the literature, strategy implementation seems to be fragmented and missing a unified concept.

In this case study, the aim is to follow the strategy implementation process in an organization and to investigate whether it is possible to achieve a consensus between different organization levels via strategy implementation tools. The level of the case organization's complexity is increased due to the case firm's characteristics, i.e., being a high-growth firm. The study is conducted by qualitative action research method, and the data is gathered through semi-structured interviews. The research is abductive, which means that the researcher deepens the grasp of both theoretical and empirical phenomena by switching between different types of research activities and between empirical observations and theory.

The findings suggest that strategy should be implemented through internal projects, and through the communication of good quality. The case organization's context requires looking also at the complexity theory's direction. This thesis provides recent research for the case organization and investigates how the strategy's implementation process is being executed. As it turns out in the empirical part, internal projects play a significant role in the strategy implementation process in addition to good communication, which has been broadly recognized in the literature. The limitations of this study lie in the company's characteristics and this thesis is for a single case study. However, this thesis provides new insight into projects as strategy implementation tools. The originality of this paper is to investigate strategy implementation from a multilevel perspective in a high-growth firm and to examine projects as an SI tool.

KEYWORDS: Strategy implementation, high-growth company, complexity, communication, project

TIIVISTELMÄ:

Tehokas strategiatyö on yrityksen kilpailukyvyn kannalta tärkeää, mutta tehokasta strategian toteutusta ei tule aliarvioida, sillä se on edellytys organisaation menestymiselle. On havaittu, että strategiat epäonnistuvat todennäköisemmin vajavaisen toteutuksen kuin suunnittelun takia, mikä korostaa huomion kiinnittämistä strategian toteutukseen. Tämä on tärkeää, sillä jos yrityksellä ei ole konsensusta strategista, organisaation jäsenet toimivat eri päämäärien mukaan, mikä voi osoittautua haitalliseksi liiketoiminnalle. Kirjallisuudessa strategian toteutuksen nähdään olevan pirstoutunut, ja siitä puuttuu yhtenäinen teoreettinen käsitys.

Tässä tapaustutkimuksessa tavoitteena on seurata strategian toteutusprosessia organisaatiossa ja selvittää, onko strategian toteuttamistyökalujen avulla mahdollista saavuttaa konsensus eri organisaatiotasojen välillä. Tapausorganisaation monimutkaisuuden tasoa nostaa tapausyrityksen ominaisuudet tämän ollessa nopeasti kasvava tuotantoyritys. Tutkimus toteutetaan kvalitatiivisella toimintatutkimusmenetelmällä ja aineisto kerätään puolistrukturoiduilla haastatteluilla. Tutkimus on abduktiivinen, mikä tarkoittaa, että tutkija syventää käsitystään sekä teoreettisista että empiirisistä ilmiöistä vaihtamalla erityyppisten tutkimustoimintojen välillä sekä empiiristen havaintojen että teorian välillä.

Tutkimuksen tulokset viittaavat siihen, että strategiaa tulisi toteuttaa sisäisten projektien ja laadukkaan viestinnän kautta. Tapausorganisaation konteksti edellyttää myös kompleksisuusteorian suunnan tarkastelua. Tämä opinnäytetyö tarjoaa tuoretta tutkimusta tapaustutkimusorganisaatiolle sekä selvittää, miten strategian jalkauttamisprosessia toteutetaan. Kuten empiirisessä osiossa käy ilmi, sisäisillä projekteilla on kirjallisuudessa laajasti tunnustetun hyvän viestinnän lisäksi merkittävä rooli strategian toteutusprosessissa. Tämän tutkimuksen rajoitteina ovat niin ikään yrityksen ominaisuudet, ja tämä opinnäytetyö on toteutettu yksittäistapaustutkimuksen näkökulmasta. Tämä opinnäytetyö antaa kuitenkin uutta näkemystä projekteista strategian toteuttamisen työkaluina. Tämän artikkelin uutuusarvo muodostuu näkökulmasta tutkia strategian toteuttamista monitasoisesta näkökulmasta kasvuyrityksessä ja tarkastella projekteja strategian implementoinnin työkaluna.

AVAINSANAT: Strategian implementointi, kasvuyritys, kompleksisuus, kommunikaatio, projekti

Strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory.
Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat.
— Sun Tzu

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Abbreviations

CAS   **Complex Adaptive System**
HGF   **High-Growth Firm**
PM   **Project Management**
SI   **Strategy Implementation**

1 Introduction

To make profit and succeed financially, companies must answer to competition and find ways to differentiate. This happens through strategic choices, and company strategies have become a source of competitive advantage. Consequently, researchers, as well as practitioners long for understanding how to form the right strategy for the current situation, how to strategize, and how to prepare for changes in the environment. Furthermore, strategic planning has become a field of research with several domains.

Organizations need strategies to ensure their operational decisions benefit the objectives in the horizon. Strategy formation is broadly studied subject in management literature, yet ways to bring strategies into practice are more difficult to study (Friesl et al., 2021). To implement a strategy, all levels of the organization must be committed (Noble, 1999). However, obtaining commitment to a strategic plan at all levels of an organization is often difficult (Whitney & Smith, 1983).

Durand et al. (2017) issue a concern that strategic management literature is fragmented, and they try to find out where the boundaries of strategic management lie. According to Weiser et al. (2020), academic literature fails to define what strategy implementation (SI) is and what it is not (Friesl et al., 2021). As Friesl et al. state in their article, strategies tend to fail due to implementation rather than formation (Egelhoff, 1993; Hickson et al., 2003) which is why it is important to focus also on the implementation side of strategy. In literature, SI is seen as a broadly studied subject. However, according to Friesl et al. (2021), the SI literature is fragmented.

Tawse and Tabesh (2021) highlight that according to Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2006), the strategy implementation has not received as much attention as other areas of strategic management, which has led to the situation that the process between strategy and the outcome remains somewhat unclear. It has been claimed in the literature that 50 to 90 percent of strategies fail, although Cândido and Santos (2015) question that the evidence behind that estimate is outdated, fragmentary, or even absent. Raps

(2004) reported that the success rate of strategy implementation could lie between 10 and 30 %. Furthermore, Neilson et al. (2008) find that 60 percent of employees evaluate their firm as weak at implementing strategy based on a poll for employees from more than 1,000 organizations. This emphasizes the fact that it is not given that a firm succeeds to put carefully planned strategy into action, which after all, is the goal for the strategy work.

Indeed, based on studies, the utmost significant aspect of strategy work is how to get strategy work to get the intended results, i.e., how to get the right strategy implemented (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Modern businesses often operate in networks, which makes the business environment complex. This adds an extra layer of challenge to companies' attempts to operate in an optimal way. Complexity theory brings depth to try to understand that dilemma. It is a broad field of research, and it has been adapted originally from natural sciences since the natural environment and phenomena are remarkably complex (Grobman, 2005). Modern, networked businesses form entities that are complex adaptive systems (CAS) (Turner & Baker, 2019).

Furthermore, scholars have faced difficulties with organizational complexity since high-growth firms (HGF) adapt swiftly on an organizational level as well. Although studies have shown the economic importance of high growth businesses, the literature on HGFs is scattered and lacks systematic assessment (Coad et al., 2014). As a result, a firm foundation is required for investigating and developing new information regarding HGFs. According to Demir et al. (2017), high growth has been quantified in the literature by both relative and absolute measurements. However, there is no consensus.

As for definitions for strategy, the common and general definition of strategy is a multifaceted concept (Mintzberg 1994; Ansoff 1984; Kaplan & Norton 2004; Kamensky 2000). Mintzberg defines strategy as an organization's plan for the future as well as a set of instructions on how to carry out that goal. Mintzberg (1994) defines strategy as a plan

and a pattern of consistent conduct. He considers strategy to be a formula that may be derived from operational procedures acquired throughout time.

Strategic management is seen to derive from strategic war management, and in the 1960s, the concept was introduced into corporate use and management practices. Field of strategic management research has expanded, and it has been utilized in organizations among public and private sector. From societal aspect, strategy implementation takes place when there is some change compared to status quo that needs some actions. It requires change in people's behavior to do something that differs from the previous way of operating in an organization. However, scholars and practitioners face more and more so-called wicked problems when trying to optimize and adapt (Turner & Baker). Thus, social sciences must answer to complex reality through newer methods and theories, that is complexity theories (Turner & Baker, 2019).

The research gap lies in the fragmented literature about strategy implementation. According to some interpretations, the gap is that strategy research focuses on strategy formation rather than implementation (Hrebiniak, 2006). Research on SI appears to be fragmented and lacking in a comprehensive knowledge of the phenomenon itself, as opposed to being overlooked, as claimed two decades ago by Hrebiniak and Joyce (2001). Strategy implementation research is lacking unified body. Consequently, academics struggle to contribute to a research-based body of knowledge (Friesl et a., 2021). Moreover, there are organizational and managerial challenges to form strategies and put them into practice in a way that results in the desired outcome (Friesl et al., 2021). A study by Weiser et al. (2020) shows that researchers have approached strategy implementation from several different intellectual domains. These include for instance, contingency theory, organizational control theory, and agency theory (Weiser et al., 2020).

There are many case studies about strategy implementation, yet strategy implementation does not have a unified framework (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). Strategy implementation tools depend on the context and environment where the organization is operating

in, and the heterogeneity of strategies and situations make it difficult. Albeit seen important, most of the research focuses on the function of senior management in implementation, leaving out the role of tools (Friesl et al., 2021). Moreover, Tawse and Tabesh highlight that strategy implementation should be included in strategy research. This case study's purpose is to contribute to the use of strategy implementation tools and investigate the possibility of successful approach to strategy implementation form a multilevel perspective.

The key concepts of this study are presented in figure 1 in the order from broadest to narrowest concept, complexity theory being the broadest concept in literature. Strategic management includes strategy research, and after that is strategy implementation which shall be seen as a part of strategy research.

| Complexity theory |
| Strategic Management |
| Strategy |
| Strategy Implementation |
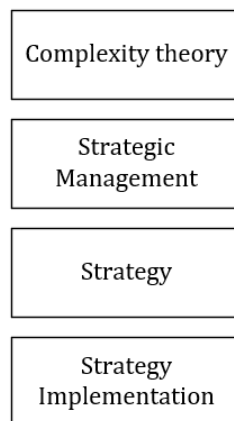
Figure 1: Key concepts

Strategy implementation is important for business since if the organization does not have strategic consensus, the members of the organization are operating for different goals and objectives (Noble, 1999). The organizational environment affects not only the strategy itself but also how it should be implemented. Organizational structures have changed during centuries, and today many organizations are structured and managed as project organizations. Naturally, this affects the way new strategies can be implemented efficiently.

1.1 Aim and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to follow a strategy implementation journey in a context of a high-growth firm, and to find the ways to harmonize the strategy through the organization. Strategy formation is followed by strategy implementation, which is studied in an abductive way by interviewing multiple different levels of the organization, and ways to harmonize the strategy are followed by participating in the strategic change. Therefore, the research focuses on the case company's characteristics. The case company is a high-growth firm, and the environment where the strategy is implemented, is not stable or predictable organization. The research gap for the thesis lies in the fragmented literature about strategy implementation, which Friesl et al. (2021) highlight in their literature review.

The aim for this study is to interview people from different positions in different levels of the organization to find out how the new strategy should be aligned between different organization levels. In order to execute a strategy successfully, every member of the organization should be able to describe what the strategy is, as well as tell how their own work is related to the strategy (Puusa et al., 2015). This requires circumstances that allow communication throughout the organization. Middle-level managers must get the message from executives in order to execute and plan effectively (Alamsjah, 2011).

In other words, the aim is to increase understanding about strategy implementation from a multilevel perspective. The research questions are as follows:

Q1:	How should strategy implementation be aligned between different organizational levels?

Q2:	What is the role of communication between different levels in strategy implementation?

Being a single case study, the qualitative data sample is taken from one case company. Therefore, the sample size and geographical location, as well as demographical representation are limited. Being an abductive study, the theoretical part is broadened after the empirical part of the study due to themes that arose from the interviews.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of eight parts, first of which is introduction. The introduction introduces the most relevant concepts briefly, study background, purpose, and the research questions. The second part is the literature review which presents the most relevant theoretical approaches regarding the research questions. Also, a theoretical model as well as a tentative framework are presented. The third part is the methodology part where research methodology is presented. In the fourth part, the case company is introduced. That is followed by the empirical part in which the research data is analyzed from several perspectives. After that, existing literature about the initial findings is presented. Finally, findings and discussion conclude the findings and key take aways from this research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Defining strategy implementation

Company strategy helps members of an organization in decision-making, and it also determines how they can endeavor strategic objectives (Suominen, 2011). However, even a well-formulated strategy is ineffective if it is not implemented. To implement a strategy, all levels of the organization have to be committed (Noble, 1999).

In literature, strategy implementation has been defined in several ways to describe the nature of putting strategy into action (e.g., Hill & Jones, 2013; Thompson et al., 2013). However, in extant research, a unified definition of strategy implementation is missing (Weiser et al., 2020), and strategy's implementation has faced several perspectives trying to define the concept (Noble, 1999, p. 120). Hrebiniak and Joyce (1984) argue that implementation is a series of interventions, whereas Aaker (1988) argues that strategy implementation involves converting strategic alternatives into an operating plan. Also, Floyd and Woolridge (1992) write about interventions that align organizational action with strategic intention.

According to Noble (1999), strategic consensus stands for shared understanding about strategy among individuals and groups within an organization. Furthermore, Wooldridge and Floyd (1989) take the consensus construct further by adding managers' commitment to the strategic initiative. Strategy implementation's success derives from effective strategic planning. However, it shall be noted that it is only the implementation that can produce superior performance even if the strategy is well formulated (Noble, 1999).

According to Weiser et al. (2020), recent literature reviews reveal that top researchers have drew from a wide range of intellectual domains, including contingency theory, organizational control theory, agency theory, and others. This has resulted in fragmentation in the strategy implementation field, and the literature is devoid of a clear definition of what strategy implementation is and is not (Weiser et al., 2020). Weiser et al. argue

that SI has taken an adaptive turn compared to earlier attempts towards conceptualized strategy implementation models.

Miles and Snow (1978) had more pragmatic approach by executing best practices by creating a typology for organizational strategies. These strategies divide into four strategies based on their levels of exploitation and exploration, and the strategies are defender, analyzer, reactor, and prospector. They provide response styles for these different cultures in an organization based on what strategy typology the organization falls into.

In strategy implementation, Dobni and Luffman (2003) discovered a gap between the scope and impact of a market orientation in a holistic coalignment perspective. According to these scholars, this perspective stands for orientation-environment-performance relationships, and firm performance as well as strategy implementation are influenced by the firm's market orientation. Their market orientation model includes relationships between behavior (market orientation), action (marketing strategy), and outcome (return on investment). The alignment between behavior, strategy, and environment represents the behaviors and actions needed for effectiveness (Dobni & Luffman, 2003). According to Kohli et al. (1993), it is necessary to consider variables that may work in tandem.

Another element to strategic management is communication, and according to Suominen (2011), strategy is possible to manage and execute through communication. According to Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002), SI could be seen as a link between planned and realized strategy. According to their study, numerous interviewees connected communication issues with the difficulties in implementing strategies. A prevalent concern among organizational members was the development of a shared understanding of strategy (Aaltonen & Ikävalko). Their study shows that there is still a lot of room for improving strategy communication since most of the communication was top-down and not everyone understood it (Aaltonen & Ikävalko).

To emphasize the importance of effective strategy implementation (SI), Tawse and Tabesh (2021) conducted a framework. According to them, an effective implementation could be a source of competitive advantage. There is an extensive literature about strategy work, planning, and decision making. However, the literature around strategy implementation is fragmented (Candido & Santos, 2014). Scholars like de Oliveira et al. (2019) and Greer et al. (2019) have called for more attention to SI in research, and Tawse and Tabesh argue SI reaching momentum in strategic management.

Another reason for effective SI is to ensure the outcome is possible to evaluate: if strategy is not effectively implemented, it is impossible to effectively evaluate the strategy and its merits (Bonoma, 1984; Lee & Puranam, 2016; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). There is an important distinction between effectiveness and efficiency. As Peter Drucker has famously coined, there is difference between efficiency and effectiveness. It is that efficiency is doing things right, but effectiveness is doing the right things. Strategic goals must be effective in order for the organization to go to the next level. If an objective does not have such a broad influence, it is usually not strategic (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

The source for effective SI is important to acknowledge since as mentioned, strategy should be the source of competitive advantage (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). The framework is a result from a literature review that collects managerial actions that influence strategy implementation effectiveness. The framework consists of aggregate dimensions of strategy implementation effectiveness that include dynamic managerial capabilities, managerial actions, and conditions of effective SI. First, managerial actions refer to the actions that impact the implementation process. Managers utilize these steps to communicate, adopt, and implement a strategy or strategic initiative. Secondly, conditions refer to characteristics of the emergent state that occur from management activities and specify three important components necessary for SI effectiveness. These factors describe how management decisions affect SI effectiveness in the end. Thirdly, managerial capabilities stand for the underlying management capability to generate the best possible set of conditions by implementing the most appropriate managerial actions.

In their paper, Tawse and Tabesh (2021) justify the need for a unified framework by mentioning that Noble's (1999) research does not provide comprehensive enough a view about relationships between constructions, and that there is no comprehensive description of the mechanisms that connect a wide variety of management activities to SI effectiveness (Yang et al., 2010). In order to further understand the reality of strategy implementation, the process of strategy implementation is presented further in the next part.

2.2   The process of strategy implementation

Strategy execution, as opposed to strategy formulation, requires more cognitive work and is more emotionally and psychologically exhausting (Tawse et al., 2019). To bring strategy implementation to a more concrete level, the implementation process must be defined. The Office of Strategy Management is a concept that Kaplan and Norton proposed in their HBR article in 2005. The managerial suggestion to a strategy problem arose from the finding that there is a remarkable gap between ambition and performance. According to their research, 95 percent of employees were unaware or did not understand their company strategy. Mankins and Steele (2005) have also found that only 60 percent of companies' strategy's potential value is realized. Thus, the process through which strategy is implemented is important. There are a lot of articles and lists online that suggest certain steps for implementing strategy (see e.g., Miller, 2020). In academic literature, strategy implementation process has been defined through different practices.

Structure and process matching as an important practice of SI has been highlighted by several scholars (see e.g., Govindarajan, 1988; Kerr & Jackofsk, 1989; Lee & Puranam, 2016). Friesl et al. (2021) presented five key practices through which implementation is accomplished: structure and process matching, resource matching, monitoring, framing, and negotiating. Friesl et al. approach SI through Strategy-as-Practice point of view of which focus is on the social aspect of strategy practitioners (Whittington, 1996).

As said, the conceptual framework conducted by Friesl et al. (2021) includes five implementation practices, first of which is structure and process matching. Early research emphasized the importance of internal organizational alignment, but it did not provide much insight into how that could be accomplished. According to Friesl et al. (2021), the early research was mostly at the general practice level, seeking to establish the missing link between strategy and performance by examining implementation as structural decisions that resulted in a good fit, which was in line with contingency thinking. Contingency thinking stressed the external fit by agreeing on a strategy direction and then structuring the organization to support the strategic objective (Friesl et al., 2021).

According to Friesl et al., recent research on strategy implementation delves into the contextual activities of aligning structures and processes with a specific strategic objective. This research often does not make an effort to connect implementation to performance because of its more micro-level focus. A study by Jarzabkowski et al. (2019) shows how the effort to implement strategy had unforeseen repercussions that prevented SI. Their research demonstrates how these unexpected outcomes led to reflective action cycles, which led to changes in the recommended strategy and structure. As a result, they underscore Mintzberg's (2000) worry about the emergent nature of strategy.

The second practice is resource matching which refers to aligning resources with the demand of strategic intent (Bower et al., 2005). According to Hakonsson et al. (2012), resource matching is seen as a significant predictor of implementation success and firm performance, which is aligned with a contingency logic. According to Friesl et al. (2021), most of the research on resource matching focuses on the function of senior management in implementation, leaving out the role of tools. The third practice according to Friesl et al. (2021) is monitoring. Findings demonstrate that monitoring may occur in close contact between senior managers and SBU managers, via reporting and control mechanisms (Gupta, 1987). Recent studies highlight informal monitoring activities (Thomas & Ambrosini, 2015). In contrary, these findings indicate that process controls

may impair strategy implementation since they inhibit sensemaking and diminish perceived autonomy and self-control.

Framing is the fourth SI practice. It refers to the method used to communicate the strategy and its rationale (Meyer & Stensaker, 2006). It is related to communication and sensegiving since it refers to creating a shared understanding among the members if the organization (Friesl et al., 2021). According to Friesl et al., by using this method, a manager can enable an organization member to reorient their thinking.

Finally, negotiating includes conflicting internal and external stakeholders' goals (Friesl et al., 2021). Coercive adoption of a new practice in situ was studied by Canato et al. (2013), who discovered that coercive demands over time altered cultural beliefs. As a result, their findings challenge the widely held belief that culture usually prevails over strategy. Consequently, strategy results are shaped by negotiations (Friesl et al., 2021). Managers affect strategic outcomes, according to Lê and Jarzabkowski (2015), by "filling strategy content with meaning and action and determining its micro-elements" (p. 456). Their research demonstrates how the nuances of strategy content cannot be predicted in advance but rather emerge throughout the implementation process (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015).

This framework is drawn on the strategy-as-practice point of view, which is derived from process school of strategy (Chakravarthy and White, 2006; Mintzberg, 2000). The process perspective is often described also as a school of configuration, and the definition is that the organization considers strategy to be a transformational process for a company. This school depicts a strategy's relative steadiness, which is broken up by big leaps to new stages every now and then (Mintzberg, 2000).

2.3 Critical aspects of strategy implementation in high-growth firms

Although high-growth firms (HGF) offer the possibility to study what is behind economic growth on company level, studies have faced difficulties with sampling and following

those companies (Demir et al., 2017). Additionally, scholars have faced difficulties with organizational complexity since high-growth firms evolve rapidly on the organizational level as well. The significance of high growth firms has been established by research but the literature of HGFs is fragmented and lacks systematic assessment (Coad et al., 2014). Therefore, there is need for solid foundation for exploring and building new knowledge about HGFs. According to Demir et al. (2017), the high growth has been measured in extent literature by both relative measures and absolute measures, yet there is no agreement in the literature. The problem in choosing the measurement is that relative measures over-sample smaller firms whereas absolute measures over-sample larger firms (Delmar, 1997).

Strategic management in a HGF is based on the ways founders and employees leverage (1) human capital, (2) firm human resource management (HRM) practices, (3) firm strategy, (4) firm innovation, and (5) firm capabilities for growth (Demir et al., 2017). Demir et al. summarize these as the drivers for high growth based on empirical studies. Based on these, Demir et al. developed a conceptual framework to integrate the theory of strategic management in the research of high-growth firms.

According to Andrews (1971), a company's strategy is defined as a pattern of decisions that establishes its objectives, purposes, or policies and results in the firm's strategies for accomplishing those objectives. Demir et al. (2017) identified two main strategy practices that are pertinently related to high growth based on this definition of strategy: strategic planning and differentiation. In several contexts and studies, strategic planning has been seen to correlate with high growth (see e.g., Shuman et al., 1985; Fischer et al., 0997; Littunen & Tohmo, 2003). On the other hand, Barringer et al. (2005) found there was no significant difference between firms that grew slow and rapidly in terms of strategic planning, but there was difference in the vision and orientation for growth. However, Siegel et al. (1993) discovered statistically significant differences between HGFs and ordinary enterprises in terms of employing formal business plans, revising plans on a regular basis, and identifying goals and priorities.

Strategic planning in high growth companies requires ability and agility to adapt the organizational structure and systems to the changing environment (Davila & Foster, 2005; Hambrick & Crozier, 1985). According to the literature, HGFs have a tendency for compounding strategic planning and forecasting issues (Bos & Stam, 2011), which highlights the necessity of flexible routines, process-performance modifications, and standardized planning cycles (Grant, 2003).

As mentioned, scholars have struggled with organizational complexity since high-growth enterprises experience rapid organizational evolution. In order to expand the theory about the complexity, the complexity theory from organizational aspect is presented in the next part of the literature review.

2.4 Complexity theory

Complexity theory draws from natural science research that examines uncertainty and non-linearity. There are many theories that are associated under complexity theory, which serves as an umbrella term for several theories (Burnes, 2005), but strategic management's take on complexity theory is focused on organizations and their adaptation to uncertain conditions. Complexity refers to the phenomenon where systems adapt to changes (Burnes, 2005). Sherman and Schultz (1998) state that today's business is quicker and nonlinear, with results that are not proportionate to their causes. Jalonen (2006) states that although unpredictable, complicated, and emergent occurrences are uncontrollable, encountering and comprehending them can be encouraged through expanding system openness and interaction.

One way to conceptualize the basic idea in complexity is so-called wicked problems. McMillan and Overall (2016) argue that wicked problem-solving eliminates a culture of denial, fast adaptation to easy failure, and short-term fixes to communications feedback. By temperament and time frame, managing wicked problems is a multifaceted,

multitasking organizational challenge. For top executives, performance management systems must be designed with fundamentally distinct attitudes. (McMillan & Overall, 2016)

McMillan and Overall (2016) state that since the current strategy tools are based on microeconomics and linear causal mechanisms, they do not serve in real world's disruptive change and social dynamics. The wicked problems call for understanding of complexity and open social systems (Turner & Baker, 2019). Complexity science, sometimes referred to as the "new science" (Ma & Osula, 2011, p. 94), views organizations as complex systems that cannot be observed using conventional linear approaches. According to Ma and Osula (2011), it is becoming more popular across different disciplines as a way of making sense of and being able to manage such complexity.

In strategic management, complexity theory brings understanding how companies or corporations adapt to their contexts and deal with uncertainty. Organizations have complex structures because they are dynamic networks of interactions, not aggregations of separate static entities. Because of the numerous dependencies, competitions, linkages, or other forms of interactions between their elements or between a particular system and its environment, their behavior is intrinsically challenging to describe. Non-linearity, emergence, spontaneous order, adaptability, and feedback loops are examples of 'complex' properties that result from these interactions (Cowan et al., 1994) The fact that such systems are found in so many different domains have led to the study of their similarities becoming a stand-alone subject of study (Rosenhead et al., 2019). Such a system is commonly represented as a network, with nodes representing the components and connections representing their interactions (Rosenhead et al., 2019).

A complex adaptive system (CAS) is a model of a subset of a complex system that may alter and learn through experience (Rosenhead et al., 2019). This is accomplished through the interaction of so-called agents, which learn and adapt as a result of interactions with other agents. According to Rosenhead et al., manufacturing businesses are

examples of CAS. Turner and Baker (2019) found that the tenets of complex adaptive systems are path dependence, non-linearity, emergence, adaptiveness, and that they have a history, are irreducible, they operate between order and chaos, and that they are self-organizing. A characteristic to describe CAS is also to operate between chaos and order, which is the uniqueness in CAS (Turner & Baker, 2019).

2.5 Tentative theoretical framework

The tentative framework in this context covers strategy implementation in a complex environment. Therefore, framework builds on Tawse and Tabesh's (2021) aggregate dimensions' framework of strategy implementation, complexity theory in social science context (Rosenhead et al., 2019; Turner & Baker, 2019), and the aspects and characteristics of a high-growth firm (Demir et al., 2017). The conceptual framework conducted by Friesl et al. (2021) introduces five implementation practices. Those are synthesized from literature to provide upper-level practices but help to proceed in investigating which are the SI tools in the case company.

In this tentative framework, a high-growth company operates in a complex environment. In the context of this study's scope, the strategy is being implemented in a rapidly growing business environment, and the implementation process is considered from a multi-level perspective. The theoretical framework, complexity theory, addresses all of this. Strategy implementation tools are included in the theoretical framework, as this viewpoint also includes the idea of gap identification with the fragmented literature. In other words, the tools are not specified in this tentative framework, although some scholars suggest the role of communication, which is tested in the case organization. This leads to the empirical part, where strategy implementation is examined within these preconditions.
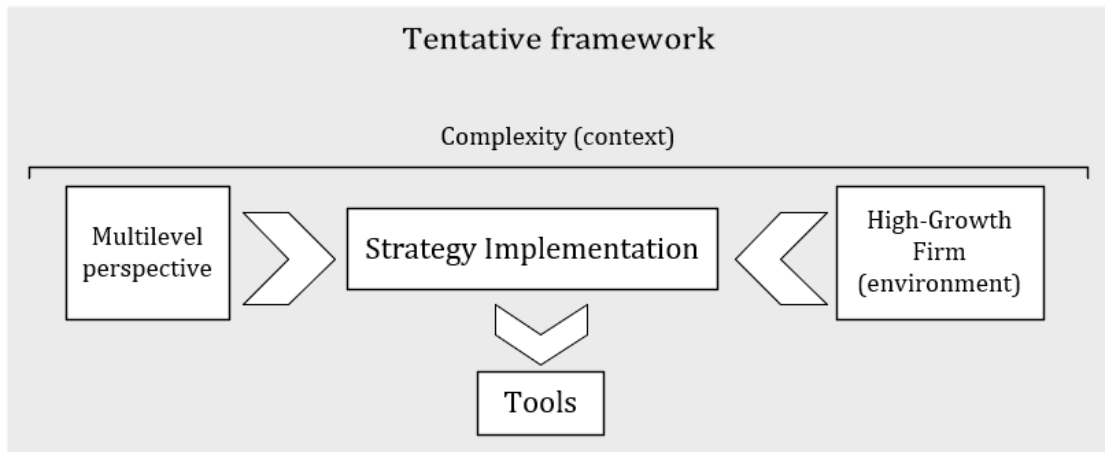
Figure 2: Tentative framework

The tentative framework's context is theoretically under complexity theory since it co-vers strategic management's research. The research objective, strategy implementation, is examined through multilevel perspective. The research about high-growth company builds the environment for the framework. Finally, the research questions aim to find out the tools for strategy implementation.

3   Methodology

The third part of the study presents the methodology behind the study. First, the ontology and epistemology are presented and grounded. That is followed by the case selection process, research design and the interviews. After that, the data collection as well as the role of the researcher are described. Lastly, the trustworthiness of the study and limitations of the study are described. The figure (3) below demonstrates the causality od the research design.
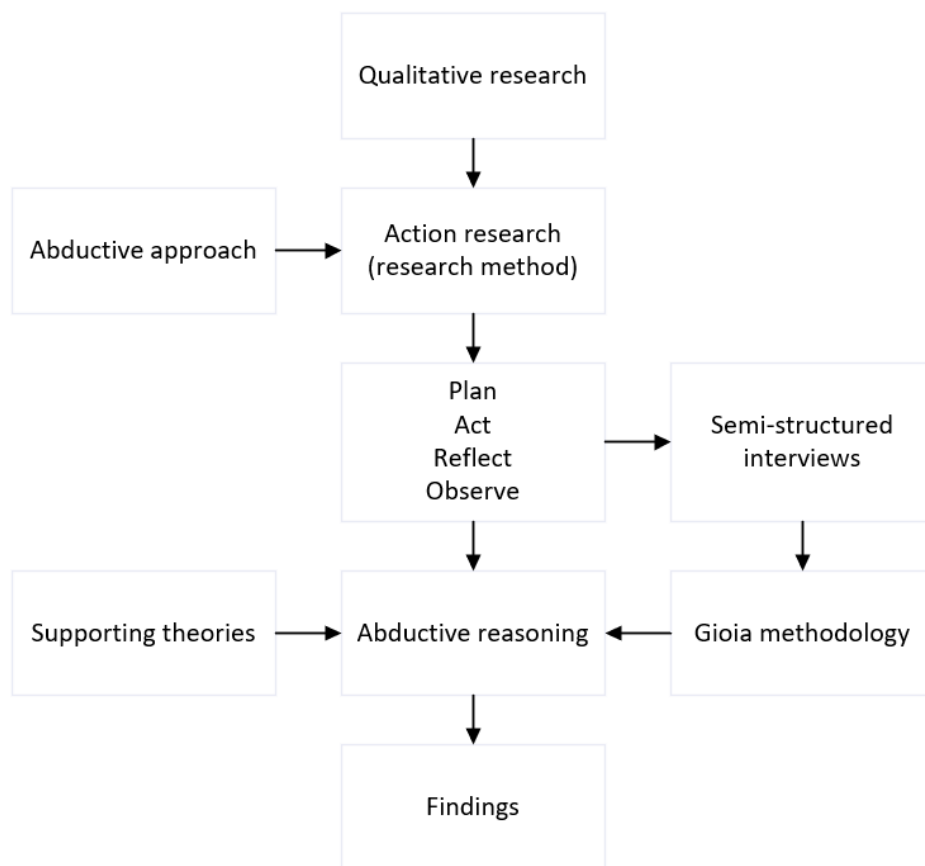
Figure 3: Methodology

3.1 Ontology and epistemology

As a concept, strategy implementation is often connected to control and supervision. According to Čater and Pučko (2010), strategy implementation is seen as a "systematic process composed of a logical set of connected activities that enable a company to make a strategy work" (p. 210). According to General Finnish Ontology YSO, strategy work is ontologically associated with strategic planning.

The philosophical study of existence is known as ontology. Generally, from ontological point of view, research can be objective or subjective. Objectivism holds that an item has an objective reality that exists independently of the subject. Subjectivism includes the idea that reality can be also something else. For ontological position, this research is subjective research since it is based on verbal data (see e.g., Saunders et al., 2021). The research type is exploratory, and being subjective research, it aims to comprehend human behavior and the factors that influence it. Subjectivism can also be called social ontology. This means that the research subject is based on people's perceptions, that is, the interviewees' perception on strategy. Social ontology asserts that social phenomena are human-created things, implying that several interpretations of reality can exist concurrently (Patomäki & Wight, 2000).

The object of the research is ever-changing, and thus it is difficult to reduce it to a measurable form. Being case study research in an organization, the study subject has also ontologically individualistic features (Epstein, 2009). The reality is built based on groups and individuals' complexes of actions. The organization where people are is both constraining and enabling one's behavior.

Epistemology stands for how knowledge is created. From epistemological position, knowledge in this thesis is acquired through abduction. Abductive research, i.e., theory-related research, falls somewhere between theory- and material-oriented research, might be thought of as a bridge between the two (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Thus, explanations or confirmation from theory are sought to justify the interpretations of the

material's findings. The researcher might also make observations regarding the lack of correspondence between the empiricism and past studies. (Eskola, 2001.) Abductive reasoning is another term for a theory-bound approach to the material (see e.g., Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2002, p. 99; Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Abductive reasoning aims for reasonable explanation or hypothesis. Charles S. Pierce (1877) defined abduction as a rational inference regarding the causes of an observed phenomenon. Peirce developed the term for the process of coming up with a scientific explanation, which he placed alongside inductive reasoning and deductive reasoning.

Abductive case research is not linear, and thus it should take into account the intertwined nature of case studies' handling of the various elements (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Dubois and Gadde suggest systematic combining as a way to build theory from case studies. Their approach to describe and illustrate the abductive research process succeeds to entail the fact that the researcher is able to deepen the grasp of both theoretical and empirical phenomena by often switching between different types of research activities and between empirical observations and theory. (Dubois & Gadde). The preliminary analytical framework is constructed of articulated preconceptions. This is demonstrated in the following figure 4.
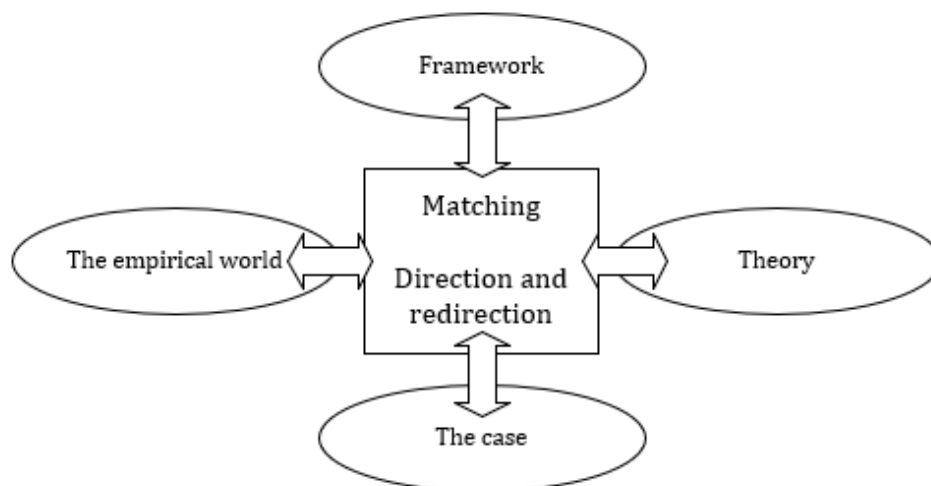
Figure 4: Abductive research process (Dubois & Gadde, 2002)

Epistemologically there are four options, positivism, realism, interpretivism, and pragmatism. This study has interpretive approach which can also be called epistemological relativism. This means that reality is constructed within the human mind. Social phenomena consist of subjective perceptions. For that reason, the researcher must ask the interviewees how they perceive the phenomena that is being investigated. (Wittgenstein, 1972)

3.2 Case selection

Being a case study, the case selection process started with contacting the company's operations management team member and a c-level manager who is responsible of operations management. After a positive reaction to the research proposal, multiple emails were sent, and meetings were held in order to understand the current situation in the organization and the need for the study. Since the organization had recently started a strategy process, the study case was naturally linked to the new strategy and its implementation. The topic for the research was selected due to personal field of interest, as well as relevance of the topic in the given situation. Notwithstanding, it could be stated that the final decision for selecting strategy implementation for the case was strongly affected by the recent articles stating the importance of strategy implementation.

The selection of the case was narrowed down to a scope of one sub strategy. This decision was made because one of the new sub strategies concerns almost the entire organization, and it is a high-priority sub strategy that initiates many projects. This sub-strategy is called Operations and Supply Chain (OSC), and its focus is on an industrialized supply chain.
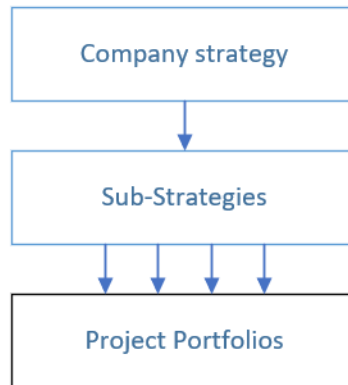
Figure 5: Project portfolio hierarchy

3.3 Action research

Qualitative research method is used in this study to investigate and understand a phenomenon in the given situation in the company. To conduct a model from the organization and contribute to strategy implementation, chosen research strategy is action research. This is to plan, act, reflect and observe the changes in the organization. This takes shape in a spiral that repeats the cycle in planning, acting, reflecting, and observing. This adds on information in the study process and feeds that back in the organization.

The research is conducted as a qualitative action research study in a case organization. The purpose of choosing this method is to follow and participate in the strategy implementation process. The objective is to create change and participate actively in the change as well as to participate the members of the case organization (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This is to enhance personnel's perceptions on the objectives and their connection to strategy.

The purpose of the research is to acquire theoretical and practical information about the subject of the research, to prepare solutions and to examine the functionality of the solutions and the extent of the area of applicability. According to Koshy (2010), action research is a technique for enhancing practice. It entails action, assessment, and critical reflection. Following the implementation of changes in practice based on the obtained

evidence. Action research is participatory and collaborative; it is carried out by people working toward a common goal. It is based on circumstances and is context specific. Based on the participants' interpretations, it fosters reflection. At the point of application, action and knowledge are generated. Problem solving can be a part of action research if doing so results in bettering practice. As the action progresses in action research, findings will become apparent, but they are not definitive or absolute. (Koshy, 2010)

It is focal to create change that affects social practices, problem solving, and actions that lead to change. This proceeds as a process where attendance of the personnel is important. Change interventions play a significant role in making small changes in organizations and societies. Action from action research point of view stands for research subjective, instrument, as well as research objective.

Since the study is conducted as action research, the interview questions can be semi-structured since the interviews are held to a critical reference group alias the people in the case organization. The purpose of choosing action research for research methodology is to create change and participate people in the organization during organizational change.

3.4   Data collection

The data is gathered from semi-structured interviews as those enable leaving space for the interviewer adapting to the situation and asking follow-up questions, unlike in a structured interview. Due to interviewing people from different backgrounds and different knowledge, the interview questions were modified based on their positions in the organization. Therefore, the framing of the interview questions was different depending on the person's position. Another aspect that affected the interview questions was the action research aspect. While proceeding with the interviews and analyzing the answers, some certain themes were repeatedly brought up. Therefore, the next round of interviews included more questions about those aspects.

The data is primary data, and the data collecting method used in this study is qualitative semi-structured interview (see e.g., Elo et al., 2014). In the given circumstances, the qualitative method is chosen since qualitative interview is more effective way to find out what do people think about the strategy implementation in the case company, compared to questionnaires. Hence, it is possible to investigate how people react and perceive the new strategy in the organization. On the one hand, interviewing people enables them to express opinions and feelings about the topic, and on the other hand, the interviewer gets to understand and explore the topic from the interviewees point of view by asking follow-up questions.

Since the interviewer is also an employee in the organization, and the purpose is to develop the organization's implementation process, semi-structured interviews are chosen to help to construct the questions. The interviews are conducted through seven steps: determining the goal of the interview, contacting the interviewees, preparing the interview questions, conducting the interview, transcribing the interview, analyzing the interview, and finally, analyzing and modifying questions for the next interview round, if needed. Due to interviewing people from different positions, some questions are deleted, added, or altered to be able to grasp the most relevant information about their viewpoints and opinions in the interview. Therefore, managers and employees do not answer to exactly the same questions, although the agenda for the interview stays the same.

The selection of the interviewees is based on their tasks and titles in the case company, as well as their participation in the strategy process. The empirical part of the study consists of rounds of interviews, first of which was conducted before the strategy is launched. Therefore, the first interview round is conducted among board members who are leading the strategy process and have the best knowledge of the new strategy and the realities behind that. The second round takes place when the strategy is launched. Therefore, the CEO is the most relevant person to answer to questions about the implementation plans. Furthermore, the interview with the CEO could provide an outlook on the strategy

and the thoughts behind that, which could help to understand the strategy, and then compare it to the views of other organization members' views.

The interviewees are categorized in three groups: board members, c-level managers, senior salaried employees, and employees.

	Date	Duration	Location	Interviewee
1st interview	10.Nov.21	40 minutes	Helsinki	Board member
2nd interview	29.Nov.21	55 minutes	Helsinki	Board member
3rd interview	17.Dec.21	50 minutes	Helsinki	Senior Salaried Employee
4th interview	11.Jan.22	75 minutes	Teams meeting	Senior Salaried Employee
5th interview	18.Jan.22	55 minutes	Teams meeting	C-level manager
6th interview	22.Mar.22	55 minutes	Helsinki	Employee
7th interview	07.Apr.22	45 minutes	Teams Meeting	C-level manager
8th interview	29.Apr.22	60 minutes	Helsinki	Employee
9th interview	02.May.22	40 minutes	Teams meeting	Employee

Table 1: Interviews

3.5 Analysis of the empirical material

To conduct an abductive analysis from the interview data, it is processed by coding the transcribed interview data in categories which capture the meaning in the participants speech. This labeling enables summarizing the attitudes and perceptions about the interview questions. This also allows to process long interview material and to analyze it through these thematic categories. The used categorizing method is so called Gioia

method (see e.g., Langley & Abdallah, 2011). After labeling, the labels are summarized in categories, which were analyzed and put into groups. These groups started to form the second order level categories.

Generally, the interview questions about communications created discussion about internal communications and information. Employees and senior salaried employees wished there would be more communication, and that it should be higher quality and right timed. Executives acknowledged that there should be more internal communication, and that it would be beneficial to organize strategy updates at least once in a quarter. Board member's point of view was that functioning internal communication is prerequisite to a functioning organization, and that communication must offer employees something they can relate to.

3.6 Role of the researcher

Being an action-research, the process requires participation and presence from the researcher. While conducting this study, the writer worked as an Operations Management Trainee and Thesis Worker at the company, which leads to a role of a double agent. During the writing process, the writer's title was changed to Operations Management Coordinator due to a responsibility in a project as a Project Manager. The role of the researcher was taken under consideration while selecting topic for the research, and the research method, action research, supports this role. It is beneficial that while conducting research, the thesis worker gets to participate on the processes as well as meetings and understands better the phenomena behind the initiative that led to a new strategy.

Before starting to write the thesis, the thesis worker had learned about the company and gained insight on the environment, value chain, processes, and organizational culture, while working in another department. However, compared to a situation where the thesis worker would be new to the organization, the setting would not be dramatically different, since the situation in strategy implementation was new to everyone in the

organization, and the situation enabled the thesis worker to act as a change agent from day one.

While conducting the study, the thesis writer also took a part in a development project which required many hours of organizing and participating workshops to different teams in the organization. Consequently, the understanding of the ongoing projects and initiatives, as well as current processes, deepened simultaneously. At the same time, the writer was able to contribute better to the strategic development projects.

3.7   Trustworthiness of the study

A relevant question in terms of trustworthiness is whether to choose prescriptive or semi-structured questions (Elo et al., 2014). For action research, it is beneficial that the interview questions are subjected accordingly, to create a shared understanding of the studied phenomenon. The dataset from the interviews is conducted by recording and transcribing the interviews before the analysis phase.

The theoretical part is reviewing peer-reviewed articles from highly esteemed journals. The focal paper behind the initial idea for the study is Tawse and Tabesh's (2021) article about an introductory framework, and a literature review by Friesl et al. (2021) about strategy implementation. These papers provide the most recent view of strategy implementation literature.

The interviews were conducted with people who can be classified into specialists or generalists. The interviewees are professionals in their own field of work, whether it is in production, office, or management. The study also includes observation which is done during the entire research period. Observing and participating in projects during the research period which was also a period of time where a lot of change took place. As for validity and reliability, there lies the possibility for human error as the interview data is based on open-ended questions in this qualitative research.

3.8 Delimitations

The delimitation in this study is that it focuses on interviews that are conducted on individuals, and thus it cannot find an overall theory about strategy implementation. The decision is made to control the scope of the study. Moreover, the study focuses on building a model or a proposal of strategy implementation for the case organization, in addition to examine how research questions are being answered in the existing literature.

4 Case organization

The case company is undergoing a strategy process due to the company's next phase of growth and internationalization. The company has grown rapidly in the past years and in October 2022, it employs approximately than 350 professionals from over 40 nationalities. The company is a global market leader in its own niche market, and the product is made for scientific purposes. The market is expected to grow globally due to new technological and scientific breakthrough.

The company has specialized in a certain area and developed the product, which has led to the situation where the product itself creates competitive advantage. In Porter's terms in general strategies, the case company falls into differentiation focus strategy. The customer orders customized systems that suit their requirements and needs, so the production is mainly engineer-to-order. The company's customer service is highly prioritized, and the customers can always contact the scientists that have developed the system.

The former strategy was informal and implicit. However, as the company had grown so rapidly, it demanded more structure to the management and a new strategy for the next phase of internationalization. The company operates in several countries through international offices. Based on the interviews, the company seems to be in a place where business strategy is being implemented for the first time. Information about strategy is important since as long it is just a strategy update it is just sentences without actions. The information about strategy must become a routine which means that the management team must engage the employees to adapt the strategy.

The company had developed sub-strategies, all of which are focused on a certain strategic dimension. This study focuses on one of these sub-strategies: the operations and supply chain strategy. This requires process-mapping and developing a management system where these processes and sub-processes are determined. This is put into practice by creating projects that involve most teams in the organization. Consequently, the

management system requires employees' participation which could make more people aware of the system and the sub-strategy.

In other words, the final objective for the projects in the MWB project portfolio is to have the desired processes in place. The way to accomplish the goal and fill in the implementation gap is to use the strategy implementation tools that theory suggests. The options are selected based on the interviews for the board members and top management. The process of strategy implementation required changes in the organization structure, and due to the rapid growth, the company hired business professionals.

5   Initial findings

5.1   Description of the strategy process

Aim of the study is to explore strategy implementation (SI) on multiple levels to identify how strategy implementation can be facilitated in a high-growth company. The new strategy was formed by the board based on the data from the participation of the employees in the process. This was conducted by collecting SWOT analyses made by teams of the organization. From that data, the board, together with the top management, gathered a summary that was reportedly in line with their perception of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Based on those findings, the strategy work team crafted strategic objectives. The new business partner enabled arrangements for interim chief officer during the development and implementation process.

The strategy work had continued by recognizing the sub-strategies and defining must-win battles (MWB). There are several MWBs in the new strategy, and each one must be won to achieve the strategic objectives. The progress of each MWB is reviewed in every leadership team's meeting which take place once a month. These monthly reviews enable to monitor operative processes and ensure that the management is steering the company to the right direction. The updates from the MWBs and their portfolios' proceeding are shared quarterly to the employees in a townhall meeting.

In this study, the focus is on one of the sub-strategies that is equivalent to one of the must-win battles. This MWB focuses on industrializing operations and supply chain, and it is processed and initiated into a project portfolio. Due to the organizational change, the company moved towards project organization and project management practices. Each must-win battle has its own projects, and the projects are managed according to the instructions given by the company. New practices and instructions are to ensure the project manager knows the responsibilities in communication during the project. The purpose is also to steer and follow up the ongoing projects in order to stay in the schedule, scope and budget.

During the research period, there were several different phases which are illustrated in the following figure (6). The focus of the research was on the beginning to get insight about the plan and ways how the strategy work process has gone, and how the intended strategy is planned to be implemented throughout the organization. In the group 1 and 2's interviews, there were mentions about projects and communication, which then steered the research towards those themes.

In the following interviews, other groups were tested with these, i.e., asked about those same themes, and how these affect their work and attitudes towards the strategy implementation. After the interviews were written open and analyzed, more theory was expanded regarding these themes, forming a clear view of what the company sees as an important regarding strategy implementation. After the empirical findings and the abductive addition to literature, one unifying concept arose from the entity, that is, the complexity aspect through which complexity theory in organizational context was added.
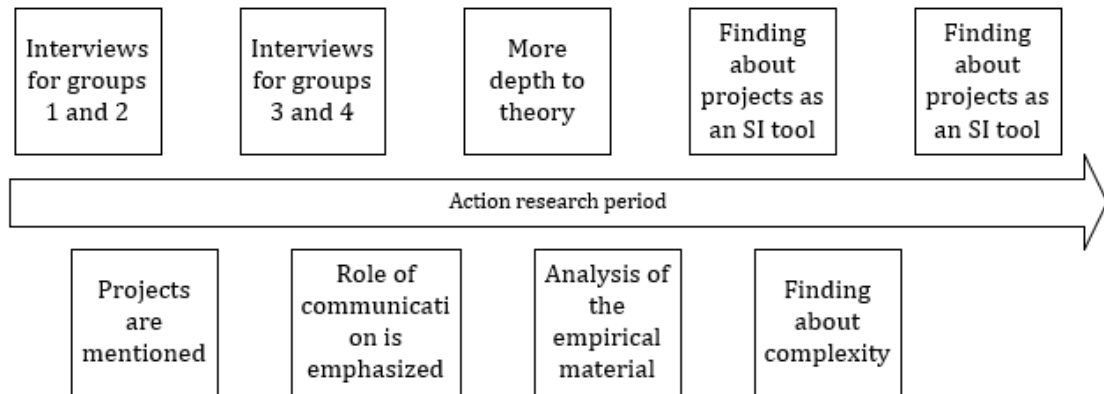
Figure 6: Line graph of the research period

5.2 Strategy implementation

According to a member of the board, the company strategy must be disclosed to the employees, and everyone in the company must get something out of it. Otherwise, it is not explicitly determined what is required from the employees. By elaborating what the strategy is, the employees can comprehend what should be prioritized in their daily work.

The responsibility of strategy implementation is not self-explanatory, since although the CEO has the main responsibility, the implementation itself is done by the employees. The new strategy is implemented by people and through projects. In parallel to the implementation of the strategy, new structures are being created and new fundaments implemented into project management practices.

Due to the target market's rapid growth, the company must be able to adapt to changing environment and grow with the market to avoid any gaps on the market. As the company grows rapidly, some growing pains will always take place in an organization. Additionally, as the organizational culture has been adaptive to continuous growth, there can occur resistance to the new way of growing and preparing for growth. According to a board member, the appearance of resistance is natural and there always is some amount of people who do not want to change. According to the interviewee, management's job is to motivate those who are willing to face change and ensure that those change agents motivate others and comprehend what the change means for them and their work.

According to a board member, strategy implementation had started before launching the strategy among employees. This had taken place by hiring new executives and other professionals to take initiative in the change process. During the research period, the company hired new professionals, managers, and directors to build and develop internal processes in order to enhance the practices to meet the ambition level and implement the strategy. Strategy implementation is strongly connected to change management in this case since the new strategy forced the company to shift form the old way of working into a new paradigm. The change required new project management practices implemented in the company, and the strategy was refined into sub strategies, which were refined into smaller projects in each division's project portfolios.

Accordingly, one way of implementing the strategy was to establish project management as a new practice and a way of working. By organizing the strategic objectives into project portfolio, the project stakeholders must seek out the way to put it into practice. Each

project has a steering group, project manager, and project team, and they ensure that the project objectives are achieved.

5.3 Multilevel perspective

The interviews were held on four levels of the organization: board, executives, senior salaried employees, and employees. These are separated into groups from 1 to 4 (figure 7). The reason for this is to find out the differences in comments and perceptions of strategy between different levels of the organization. In order to convey the strategy message throughout the entire organization, its internal communication shall be at a good level. The aim of the research is to examine strategy implementation from a multi-level perspective, which makes this classification very focal one in this context.

To take this further, the purpose of this classification is also to help get started in possible further actions, if there are significant differences between the levels. Thus, it is possible to identify the gaps and plan further implementation of the business strategy.

The strategy is implemented through several projects of different scopes and sizes that participate different teams. In more specific, the sub-strategy for operations and supply chain development requires every team's participation in terms of process mapping and definitions. At the same time, this is to fill the gap between current processes and the desired level of process performance.
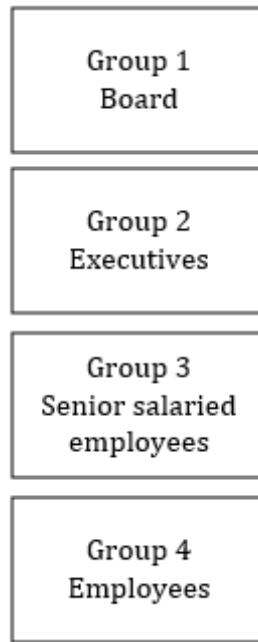
Figure 7: Levels of the organization

5.4 Projects as SI tools

The case organization has initiated and completed projects before, but professional project management practices have not been utilized before the strategic change. From project management point of view, the new strategy should be seen as a shift into a project organization. During the research period, the company established a project management office (PMO). The purpose of the PMO is to implement the project management practices among project managers, as well as take responsibility of documenting projects and trainings for project managers. Projects employ many stakeholders inside and outside the company that affect to projects' outcomes and are also influenced by the projects.

The aggregate level is to look project as a tool in strategy implementation. The next figure (8) presents the first and second order levels from the interview material.
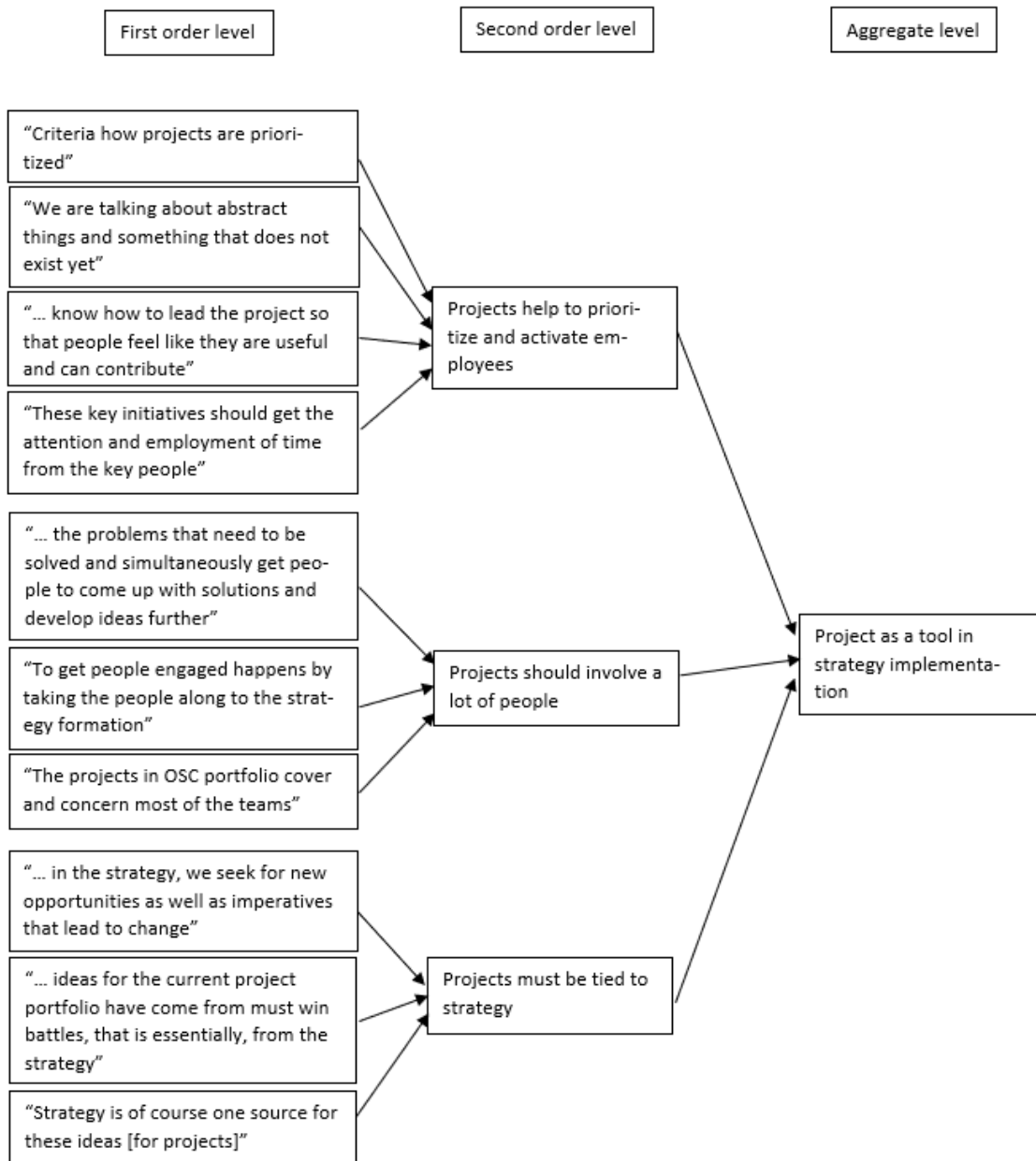
Figure 8: Gioia analysis, projects an SI tool

Certain themes rose from the interview data, and these were coded to categories. The first order level stands for the parts of the interview data. These were collected into bigger categories, which are called second order categories, which are connected to prioritizing, involvement, and connection to strategy. These are then unified in the aggregate level to conceptualize projects as a strategy implementation tool.

During the research period and interviews, it became clear that projects are the company's new way of executing the new strategic initiative. The projects are initiated by managers and the project work requires that roles are assigned in the starting phase, including project manager, project team with responsibilities, and steering group. This enables better control over the starting projects, since the reporting responsibilities are explicitly told.

5.5 Role of communication

Top managers must communicate the organization's goals, values, strategy, and strategic objectives to organization members. This communication must be clear and constant and should happen through both formal and informal ways. (Barry & Fulmer, 2004; Kirsch et al., 2010; Lebas & Weigenstein, 1986).

As mentioned, the target market's rapid growth forces the company to adapt to changing environment. Additionally, the company is also going through some internal organizational changes. Consequently, strategic planning could be difficult and contain uncertainties. In parallel, the continuous change can lead to, or demand, cultural change which might be difficult to lead through from managerial perspective. It is crucial that the company seeks for new growth factors that could affect the future and lead to strategic turns. During the period of research, the company started to implement the new strategy, and it was divided into four sub strategies.

The growth at the center of the strategic change is reflected in each sub strategies, and this study focuses on one part of the strategy, that is, one sub strategy. The purpose of the sub strategy is to enhance the internal real end-to-end processes in the company's value chain. According to the interviewees from the executive board, the purpose of the sub strategy in question is to industrialize the supply chain to meet the industry standards. This participates almost every team in the organization.

Strategy communication is crucially important but communicating does not necessarily ensure successful implementation of a strategy. Based on the interviews, communication must reach everyone in the organization, it must be consistent, it must be timed adequately, and the quality of communication is seen at least as important as the quantity of it. In the following figure 9 the role and importance of communication is elaborated further via Gioia method with first order levels, second order levels, and aggregate levels.
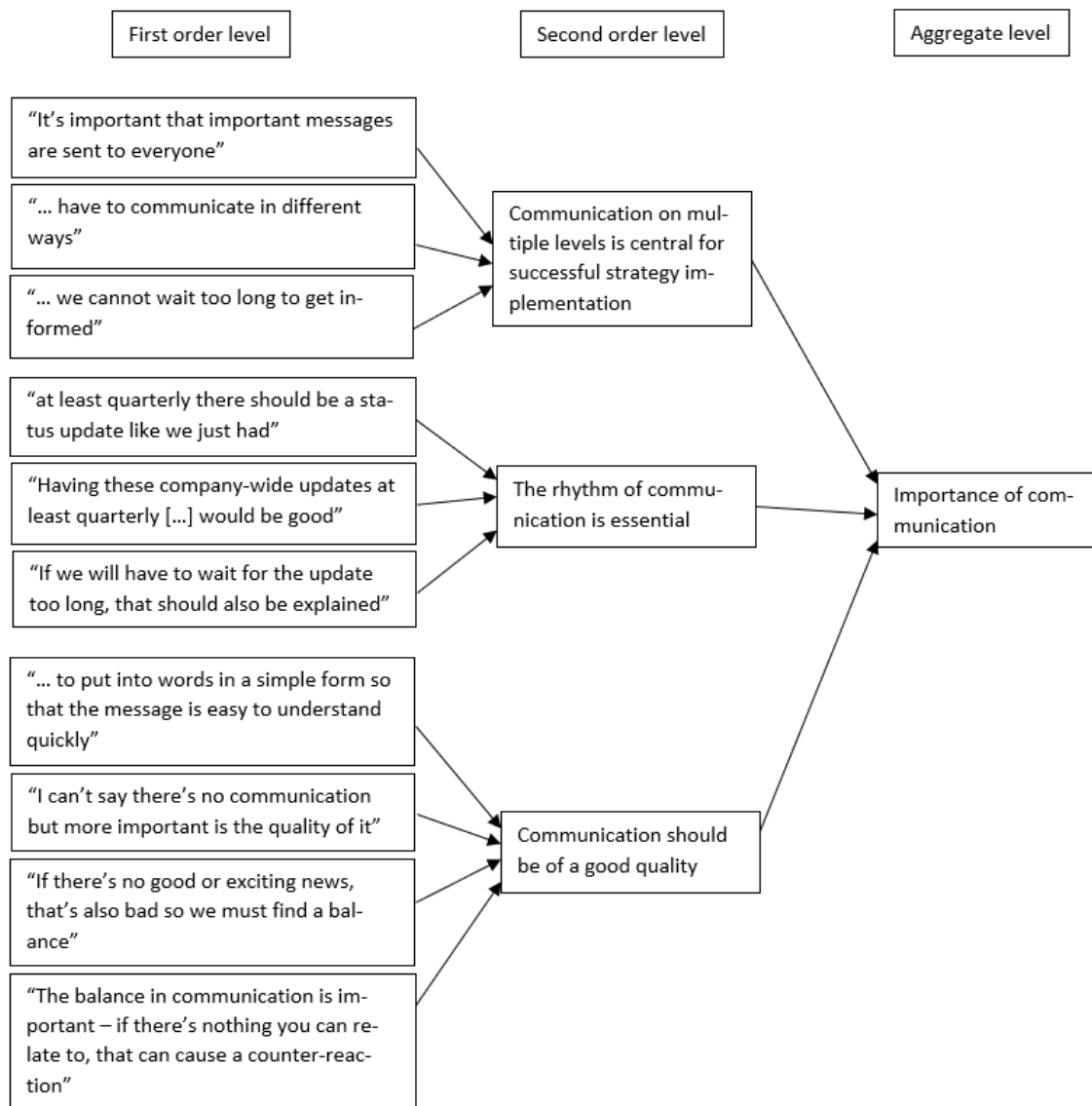
Figure 9: Gioia analysis, importance of communication

The interview data was handled in the same way as in the project as a tool analysis. The interview data showed that communication was highlighted in several contexts regardless of the level the interviewee was working, and the quality and quantity of communication was mentioned in several interviews. Depending on the level the person was working in, the viewpoint was different. In the group 1, the viewpoint was that communication is "extremely important" and on the other hand, that it has been "underestimated […] a bit".

6 Existing literature about strategy implementation tools

6.1 Projects in strategy implementation

(Grundy, 1998) writes about the tools in strategy implementation and project manage-ment, and how these can be cross-fertilized. According to a literature review, both SI and PM literatures have developed separately (Grundy, 1998). Musawir et al. (2020) state that project governance literature is fragmented. Bjorvatn (2022) argues that this lack of conceptual development is notable given that empirical research (Schoper et al., 2018) identifies internal initiatives as a significant category. In fact, there is what may be de-scribed as a "white spot" on the project-management theory map (Bjorvatn, 2022). This lack of theorization has a negative impact on company.

Projects are directed and controlled by project governance (McGrathy & Whitty, 2015). Project management is a well-known concept in business practice and literature. PMBOK (Project Management Institute, 2013) states that deliverables and information are shared between the project and operations at each stage for implementation of the de-livered work. PMBOK also states that projects might be necessary while improving oper-ations (p. 13). However, according to Morris and Jamieson (2005), top management has long seen project management as an execution-oriented discipline that has been left out of the strategy formulation and implementation processes.

According to Kerzner (2019), there are four critical components to project management excellence. These are effective communications, effective cooperation, effective team-work, and trust. Kertzner (2019) has been studying project management maturity, and in his book, he highlights the role of strategic planning in project management. He states that project management is increasingly viewed as a way of accomplishing strategic ob-jectives in business, and this is perceived as a delivery system for strategy implementa-tion (Kertzner, 2019).

After a strategy formation, the second phase is to implement the strategy, which means to translate the strategy into reality. Kertzner (2019) states that this is where project management should be involved, and all management levels should participate in the implementation. Thus, there is an attempt to find the right fit between the business objectives and the status quo. When all organization levels participate in this attempt to find the right fit, it results in integrating all aspects of the functions in the organization (Kertzner, 2019).

What comes to literature that combines both strategy implementation and project management, for instance Grundy (1998) has studied the cross-fertilization of theory and practice. Accordingly, strategic management provides a toolkit to complement project management practices. Additionally, those tools are applicable also in tactical projects (Grundy, 1998). In particular, Grundy suggests that these techniques are optimal in cross-functional projects, such as those in business development, structure and culture change, continuous improvement, and quality management (Grundy, 1998).

6.1.1 Emergence of projects in strategy implementation

An extended use of Mintzberg's (1994) deliberate and emergent strategy, proposed by Grundy (1998) is to apply them in both strategy implementation and project management. According to Grundy, the terms do not apply only to project strategy but also to its value. A model presented by Grundy is to display the development of a project strategy: it might start as deliberate strategy but evolve through different phases. These phases are deliberate strategy, emergent strategy, submergent strategy, emergency strategy, and detergent strategy (Grundy, 1998). These phases do not necessarily form determined cycle in a specific order, but it is noteworthy to observe how projects shift between deliberate and emergent modes (Grundy, 1998).

According to Grundy (1998), deliberate strategy refers here to a project that is well-defined by objectives and ways to achieve those goals, whereas emergent strategy stands for the fluidity of goals and somewhat unpredictable or uncertain way of achieving these

goals. Submergent strategy means that the project is turning into more of random actions and the project appears to be controlled by events (Grundy, 1998). A project follows a detergent strategy when it is recognized as off-course and needs to be steered back to track. It could also be steered onto a completely new track (Grundy, 1998). The emergent view of projects and strategy entails both top-down and bottom-up views (Bjorvatn, 2022). According to Lampel (2011), Mintzberg and Water's (1985) discussion of deliberate and emergent strategy appears to overcome the apparent contradiction between the two theories.

Kerzner (2019) suggests that project management maturity assessments should be small changes rather than disruptions, since that could force people away from their comfort zones. This, in some extent, could cause organizational disruption. Kertzner's (2019) way of presenting project management maturity models confluences with incrementalism, Kaizen, and participating in all organization levels, which are familiar from Lean philosophy.

6.1.2   Projects as tools in strategy implementation

McElroy (1995) writes about the hierarchy of strategy and projects and presents a pyramid where the aim is on the top, followed by strategy and programs, and projects being at the bottom of the pyramid. McElroy' has studied strategy implementation and change through projects. According to Grundy (1998), this viewpoint of the evolution of strategic thinking affects and creates strategic projects and project-sets that form strategic programs.

A recent study by Bjorvatn (2022) highlights the role of projects in internal development that serves the parent organization. He states that although the significance of projects in economic growth has been broadly recognized, internal projects have been left aside. This is paradoxical because internal initiatives account for up to 80% of project-based labor in industrialized economies measured in person hours (Schoper et al., 2018).

Top executives have expressed a limited willingness to undertake disruptive organizational change through internal projects, owing to a failure to see the full potential of combining organizational-level strategy with project management (Accenture, 2018). According to Söderlund (2004), scholars have long advocated for a deeper understanding of the link between strategy creation and project management.

6.2   Communication in strategy implementation

The importance of communication in strategy implementation has broadly been recognized in studies. From employee perspective, strategy implementation can mean change, and leaders often face barriers for change, such as employee resistance. Top managers must communicate the organization's goals, values, strategy, and strategic objectives to organization members. This communication must be clear and constant and should happen through both formal and informal ways. (Barry & Fulmer, 2004; Kirsch et al., 2010; Lebas & Weigenstein, 1986).

Organization's internal communication consists of verbal and written communication (Aaltonen & Ikävalko, 2002). Effective internal communication is essential for organizations' performance because it influences strategic managers' capacity to motivate staff and accomplish goals (Alshawabkeh et al., 2018). In order to get people on board with the strategy, the goals and objectives must be communicated in a right way.

Shimizu (2017) proposes that one fundamental problem with implementation is that often the quality of communication is overestimated by the sender of the message. According to Shimizu, this often results in misunderstanding in both ends which might provide insight into why so many attempts to implement a strategy fail. Shimizu found that the way of communicating had effect on the way the message was perceived. Shimizu suggests information exchange over information sharing. The act of communicating should not be the goal. Managers should instead consider how communication directs, inspires, and offers the psychological safety required to implement a new strategy (Lovas & Ghoshal, 2000).

A literature review conducted by Shimizu (2017) explores communication during strategy implementation and suggests the barriers for implementation based on literature. Due to current strategy being usually more familiar to a firm's employees, a new strategy is riskier (Denrell & March, 2001), particularly if the firm faces constant change that affects employees' assumptions of the strategy (Shimizu & Hitt, 2004). However, it should be noted that strategy's fit and likelihood to bring positive change is always dependent also on the strategy content itself and the operating environment. Secondly, employees at different levels in an organization tend to have various perspectives and orientations (Ireland et al., 1987). Thirdly, according to Kotter (2008), people in organizations might feel anxiety and fear when new strategy is being presented, which might prevent from committing to the new strategy. In a literature review, Shimizu (2017) collects three interrelated barriers of strategy implementation from previous literature (Neilson et al., 2008; Sull, 2007; Ford et al., 2008, & Hrebiniak, 2006). These are: (1) uncertainties and unexpected problems inherent in a new strategy; (2) inadequate shared understanding of a new strategy; and (3) employee resistance.

Strategy message must be consistent. Currie and Procter (2005) reported cases where team managers have instructed their teams to continue working like they have before and carry on as usual despite the new strategy. Ateş et al. (2020) argue that a middle-manager with visionary leadership style does not help to align the strategy since the employees receive mixed messages from c-suite leaders and team managers.

According to Tawse and Tabesh (2021), communication must succeed not only top down but also bottom up and across the organization to achieve success in strategy implementation. This means that middle managers and top management must commit to participative leadership and share information about processes and strategic objectives and effectively to ensure excellent strategy implementation (Raes et al., 2011). Similarly, Hambrick and Cannella (1989) emphasize the importance of intraorganizational

communicating since their model of efficient strategy implementation approaches communication through selling the idea to every stakeholder.

The timing of communication is also important, since if strategy implementation starts too much in advance, some employees might feel fear or futileness (Detert & Burris, 2007), and the new strategy might end up being condemned as a failure although the potential benefits could outperform compared to the current strategy (Denrell & March, 2001).

7 Findings to strategy implementation

The literature about both strategy implementation and project management is fragmented. Although there are several descriptions of the terms 'strategy implementation' and 'project management', those are rather clear as concepts in the literature. These are also common terms in practice, although the definitions and ways to describe them might change depending on who is answering. During the interviews, the answers of the way strategy is being implemented began to take a path towards project management, and this was also what top management started to reinforce.

Many of the interviewees highlight the importance of communication in strategy implementation. However, the role of communication is also brought up in other contexts. Internal communication plays an important role when any changes take place in an organization, and many employees feel that there could have been more communication and information sharing in both quantity and quality. Therefore, the most topical aspects of this study are communication and internal projects in strategy implementation.

During this study, the case organization was going through a paradigm shift from academic and entrepreneurial 'world of freedom' into a model that fits in the growing organization and serves the value chain better, as well as brings process-wise clarity, and increases capabilities. In order to implement the new strategy and understand the new way of thinking, the case company chose to divide strategically important initiatives into project portfolios and programs, and to reinforce project management practices internally. In other words, during the action research, not only the strategy has changed. New management practices and training for project managers have also taken place.

The research questions were as follows:

Q1: How should strategy implementation be aligned between different organizational levels?

Q2: What is the role of communication between different organization levels in strategy implementation?

In the Gioia analysis, there were two ascending themes which were importance of communication and the role of project management in strategy implementation. These findings form the aggregate level findings, which branch into second and first level findings. These findings are presented in the following parts.

7.1 Projects as tools in strategy implementation

Projects as strategy implementation tools provide answer to the first research question. From the interviews, it became clear that strategy is being implemented through internal projects. The first order level data was grouped into second order categories which were: (1) projects help to prioritize and activate employees, (2) projects should involve a lot of people, and (3) projects must be tied to strategy.

In the interviews, projects were seen as an important aspect of the strategy implementation process. Along with the new strategy, the organization was to take a leap towards new way of managing core functions in the supply chain. In the case organization, projects are the channel through which the change agents operate in order to put the paradigm shift into practice.

Projects as a tool for change was brought up in the organization when major areas for development had been identified. Prior to defining the projects, the organization had noted and identified major shortcomings in the processes that were being taken forward. In such a demanding change process, it is important to determine the appropriate quantity, scope, and level of ambition for the projects. The interviews reveal that problems and areas for development are approached in a pragmatic way through projects, in which way the process of change is also perceived.

7.1.1 Projects help to prioritize and activate employees

The function of projects in strategy implementation includes the assumption from strategy research that implementation is more successful with the involvement of staff than

if management spills the result on top of the staff as ready-made truths. Project work results in a high level of participation in process mapping, with each team contributing to the definition of processes so that they can impact the ultimate outcome and have the best grasp of the process as they go. While participating in projects, employees also become more aware of the current state of company strategy, and thus participating in projects affects positively on the experience of communication and receiving new information.

> *"I myself rely on the strategy and I am the type of employee that I think it guides what I do" (G3)*

> *"These key initiatives should get the attention and employment of time from the key people" (G1)*

> *"People are often busy already. […] The challenge is certainly in the beginning to get people to see and rather to find time for these most important things. And that's exactly what this is aiming for, that this just makes it easier to prioritize things." (G1)*

On the other hand, those interviewees who were not participating in projects said that strategy is not present in their daily work.

> *"Strategy has not been present in my own work in any way." (G3)*

As for projects as strategy implementation tool, the interviewees highlighted the importance of projects in the current situation. It shall be noted that not every situation in this company, nor same situation in all other companies require for the same actions. However, in this particular case projects were mentioned often during the interviews

> *"Well, a project is a way to make […] controlled big changes in a short time and now in […] there are a lot of things that could be developed to a better level and on the other hand we have a fast growing company and it has been recognized that the current operating model will not be able to last for many years to continue in the same way, i.e. big changes must be made in our operating methods. We need to develop our processes, organization, and get people on the same map when making these changes, and a project-based operating method is the best way to do it." (G2)*

7.1.2 Projects should involve a lot of people

What was mentioned in most of the interviews was the involvement of people in the strategy work and in implementation phase. This is of course logical but also very important indicator about the stage of willingness to participate in the strategy process. If people would have said that strategy implementation should be dictated from the upper management,

> *"To get the people engaged happens by taking the people along to the strategy formation." (G1)*
> *"The whole staff was participating in the strategy process" (G2)*

However, not all in employee groups thought that the participation of employees was completely successful.

> *"From my point of view, the attempt to participate the whole staff in the strategy process was not so successful"* (G2)

From employees' perspective, initiating projects was seen as more structured way of working and not sticking to old practices where work was sometimes considered as project-based working but there were no real project management practices in place.

> *"Now we are thinking more about what is really worth doing, not just for someone to say that this would be nice to try, and we will implement it here or someone else will implement it and then it will be tested once and then it will be sold already." (G4)*

> *"Hopefully every employee is involved in at least one of the must-win battles" (G1)*

7.1.3 Projects must be tied to strategy

The connection to strategy is important since that way management can be assured the operations in the company are aiming for the same direction that is intended by the strategy. The projects' connection to strategy came clear in the interviews, as several people from groups 1 and 2 mentioned that the objectives for project portfolios came were derived from the strategy.

"… ideas for the current project portfolio have come from must-win battles, that is essentially, from the strategy" (G2)

"In the strategy, we seek for new opportunities as well as imperatives that lead to change" (G2)

In other words, the upper-level strategy could be interpreted as initiative for projects, and the must-win battles are the intermediate steps for reaching the strategic objectives. However, that does not take stand on how projects should be prioritized amongst themselves if they compete on the same resources.

7.2 Importance of communication

The importance of communication provides insight to the second research question. The aggregate level consists of the second order levels, which are the following: (1) communication on multiple levels is central for successful strategy implementation; (2) the rhythm of communication is essential; and (3) communication should be of good quality.

On a general level, groups 1 and 2 highlighted more the importance of projects, and groups 3 and 4 highlighted more the importance of communication. There can be several different reasons for that, but one might be that managers are more involved and interested in the upper-level operations, whereas from employees' point of view, the touchpoint to strategy comes from managers, which requires effective communication. Even though it might seem to managers that there is not anything to communicate regarding strategy, it might feel to employees that something is not communicated. However, communication was also seen as extremely important from managers' point of view.

"[…] it's easy to get into a situation where, in a way, if there's nothing to say for a while, then it's assumed that things aren't being told to us now, but sometimes it's like nothing so significant has happened yet that there's anything to report." (G2)

"[…] we need actually to work on like how to improve our communication like inside the department and outside the department, inside the company…" (G4)

7.2.1 Communication on multiple levels is central for successful SI

As for communication on multiple levels, this consists of perception of the information being shared. If some teams for instance are left without information of company-wide matters, their perception of strategy is non-existent. According to the interviews, the perception of strategy's connection to one's own work was not communicated. On the other hand, this depends on the level and task the person is working at the given moment. However, a noteworthy finding is that the connection to strategy does not appear by itself, at least not necessarily in the form of intended strategy.

"Basically, I assume that I just have to do my job well so that we can reach the finish line as a company, and we all have our own part in that. But it was not communicated in the way that this is now strategically important that you do this. But of course, that's where I implement it for my part." (G3)

As mentioned, the rapid growth forces the company to adapt to changing environment. Additionally, the company is also going through some significant internal organizational changes. Consequently, strategic planning could be difficult. In parallel, the continuous change can lead to cultural change, which might be difficult to lead through. It is crucial that the company seeks for new factors that could affect the future and lead to strategic turns.

"From outsiders' perspective this is always told that this is very simple, but it is not simple. If you have your lead scientist, they should also be motivated. So, finding the right way is the most difficult for us." (G1)

Strategy communication is crucially important but communicating does not necessarily ensure successful implementation of a strategy. Based on the interviews, communication must reach everyone in the organization, it must be consistent, it has to be timed adequately, and the quality of communication is seen at least as important as the quantity of it.

"It can't just be communication, but it has to be like action, monitoring and improvement... like – it doesn't stop as if it comes true. When we don't communicate

like that yet, at least, in any way other than where exactly in these development groups, like small groups." (G2)

7.2.2   The rhythm of communication is essential

However, the time between strategy update and initiating projects should not be too long. It is important to seize the opportunity of the momentum that follows a strategy launch event. Therefore, also the rhythm of communication is important. The rhythm of communication is an important aspect of communication in order to ensure the quantity stays in adequate level.

> *"And if you don't communicate a lot, because you can actually contribute to other people, if you don't know what the project is or what is relevant, it's very hard to contribute, because you know, where are you going to help?" (G1)*

> *"In that moment [strategy launch] it was inspiring, and I feel that somehow that momentum disappeared pretty quickly" (G3)*

> *"I think it is extremely important. And I think I have underestimated that also a little bit. Just by looking at the reaction from the strategy update. So many positive reactions." (G2)*

> *"If we will have to wait for the update for too long, that should also be explained." (G2)*

7.2.3   Communication should be of good quality

As for quality of communication, some interviewees said that there is communication, but it is not the best quality. This came up repeatedly in group 3 and 4 interviews, which indicates that the level of quality in communicating about strategy might have been over-looked.

> *"It really requires effective communication and thinking about how to bring those things up, and not being afraid to bring them to this community as well. At first, it's annoying, but eventually it becomes a part of us." (G3)*

> *"I can't say there's no communication but more important is the quality of it." (G4)*

The managers as well as project managers must be good communicators. Even if the reality is complex and complicated, managers should stick into understandable language.

"…to put into words in a simple form so that the message is easy to understand quickly." (G2)

The message should also be balanced so that the message's receiver can understand that in the intended way.

"The balance in communication is important – if there is nothing you can relate to, that can cause a counter-reaction." (G2)

8   Discussion and conclusions

Since strategies are more likely to fail during the implementation rather than during formulation, practitioners should be interested in seeking the best way to implement a strategy. During this research, some themes rose above others, and these formed the aggregate levels of the analysis. The aim of this thesis was to increase understanding about strategy implementation from a multilevel perspective despite the fragmented literature. The abductive approach to this case study brings depth to the tentative framework, which introduced complexity theory, multilevel perspective, high-growth firms, and tools in the context of strategy implementation. The purpose of the empirical part was to see how these are carried out in practice.

In the literature reviews, it became clear that during strategy implementation, the communication must be adequately carried out and strategy message must be consistent and effective (Alshawabkeh et al., 2018). As for project management, businesses' top management has seen project management as an execution-oriented discipline that has been left out of the strategy formulation and implementation processes (Morris & Jamieson, 2005). Thus, its potential in strategies' implementation has been overlooked. Indeed, scholars have urged for a better understanding of the relationship between strategy creation and project management (Söderlund, 2004).

The introductory framework conducted by Tawse and Tabesh (2021) defined managerial actions, conditions, and dynamic managerial capabilities as aggregate dimensions. These correlate to this thesis' interviews, especially to those with managers and board members. In order to successfully and effectively implement a strategy, the structural factors must support the strategy, and the company must be fit to the strategy (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021), which requires good communication and leadership. Indeed, the framework by Tawse and Tabesh (2021) emphasize the importance of communication from several viewpoints, although it is not mentioned alone as one capability to effective SI. Tawse and Tabesh's framework is conducted from literature, which indicates that

communication is still seen as important from the viewpoint of SI effectiveness, which is in line with the other results of this study.

As for taking strategy implementation forward, Friesl's et al. (2021) suggest that organizations should pay attention to structure and process matching, resource matching, monitoring, framing, and negotiating. In the case organization, KPIs are being developed and implemented, which enables better view to follow how strategic objectives are met. Also, framing which includes the idea of good communication should be considered important in management (Friesl et al., 2021).

The aggregate levels of this thesis' analysis are importance of communication and project management as a tool in strategy implementation. In literature, strategic projects and strategy implementation have found to be somewhat fragmented. However, it remains clear that these aspects shall not be overlooked during strategy execution phase, and that there is a lot of justification available about these aspects (Bjorvatn, 2022). Managers must be aware of the importance of communication in order to increase the shared understanding of strategy and improve strategy communication (Aaltonen & Ikävalko, 2002).

What theory does not emphasize, but what rose in the empirical part of the study, is project work as a strategy implementation tool. Projects have been studied broadly, but those have not been tied to SI work. By translating strategical objectives into project portfolios, the responsibility naturally gets passed on to project managers and project teams to work on the objectives. Projects also demand independent work and local decision making, which encourages people to achievements and according to motivation theories, (see e.g., Herzberg et al., 1959; Herzberg, 1966; Locke et al., 1981) increases motivation.

By establishing new and more professional practices in project management, the company prepares and educates employees to enhance processes, tools, and current ways

of working. Implementing new strategy through projects works in both ways. By determining the project portfolio, top management has general impression of the focus points, and on the other hand, project managers and other employees know the order of priority for their workforce in different projects. However, by shifting into more professional way of managing projects, top management does not only trust that the employees implement the strategy they have curated. Moreover, they participate in project creation and follow-up through projects' steering groups. This participative approach is in line with Hrebniak's (2006) view about management's role in strategy's implementation phase. To conclude, this participative approach ensures the strategy's implementation is realized from multilevel perspective.

Projects are temporary, and they are initiated to create a defined deliverable or deliverables that are usually something unique (Project Management Institute, 2015). Projects are initiated and controlled through project management, and there are many tools within project management practices that help to understand the requirements, objectives, and constraints. Project portfolio is a wider entity which includes projects, but it can also include programs.

Complexity of modern businesses and variety of different strategies and business environments might shed light to why strategy implementation is considered as indefinite field of research. As the company grows rapidly, some growing pains will always take place in an organization. Additionally, as the organizational culture has been adaptive to continuous growth, there can occur resistance to the new way of growing and preparing for growth. This highlights the importance of complexity leadership.

8.1 Theoretical implications

Although unpredictable, complex, and emergent events cannot be controlled, their encounter and comprehension can be facilitated by enhancing system openness and interaction (Jalonen, 2006). There is theory about complexity in organizational change (Burnes, 2005). According to Burnes (2005), organizational change is important but

difficult, and the theoretical framework has been much debated, and the planned approach to change has turned into the perception of transformation model that supports complexity theories.

Complexity theory suggests that organizations should follow low-hierarchy model (Burnes, 2005). This supports the concept of project organization where cross-functional project teams consist of people from various positions, and the projects are led by project managers who do not have the same ownership as opposed to a line organization. From contingency theory perspective, low hierarchy is emphasized in organic organizational structure that was coined by Burns and Stalker (1961), and Lawrence and Lorsch (1969). Projects have been seen as a way to create something new that has not been done previously (Project Management Institution, 2013), but according to this study, projects in practice can be seen as a way to implement a new strategy.

8.2   Managerial implications

This study provides insight to the case organization about the state of the company's strategy implementation process as well as the state of communication and what requirements determine the wanted outcome. The interview data reveals observations and opinions, but also sheds light to the company's culture, which literature is often described as the black box (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). This study also points out some development points while also suggests topics for future research.

Projects provide a mechanism to provide communication channels and manage projects using established theory and project practices. Projects enable the effective implementation of strategic objectives as part of operational activities, but management must also concentrate on ensuring that other internal communication occurs effectively and on time. Managers who formulate the strategy should not think that the planning is for them, and their subordinates will execute the strategy implementation phase (Hrebniak, 2006). Effective implementation requires clear project plans, which require effective and adequate communication between teams, supervisors, and managers. During the

research period, the line organization and functions were revised, and project management office (PMO) was introduced in order to implement the new approach to projects.

8.3 Model of strategy implementation in the case company

As Whittington (1996) states, rather than having knowledge of some theoretical ideal, actual competency frequently involves a willingness to operate within existing structures and routines. The case company must implement the new strategy in the framework and context they are in. Based on observation, interviews, as well as participating in projects and taking responsibility in project management, the findings of the company framework of SI are summarized in the figure 10. The board is responsible for providing the elements of strategy for top management. Before establishing the strategy, the input from employees and managers has been collected, and thus the new strategy is feeding the collected information back to the organization. Concurrently, vision and mission are also informed to the organization.

Figure 10: Company's strategy process

The strategy is divided into smaller sets of strategic objectives, and these are commonly called sub strategies. In the company, these are called must-win battles (MWB), and every MWB focuses on some aspect of the new strategy. The MWBs comprise high-priority project portfolios since those are seen to be strategically crucial projects. This study focused on one sub strategy, that is, one must-win battle, and its scope spans across the company's value chain and its development. This means that the projects in the portfolio are focused on developing several practices, such as key performance indicators (KPI), process mapping, planning, production, and sourcing, to name a few.

The change management and strategy implementation take place in the project teams. There are change agents that enable the project managers to plant the seed for change

and thus ensure that the planned changes happen. Due to establishing a project management office (PMO), every project must have a steering group. The purpose of a steering group is to observe, steer, evaluate, and report the outcomes or unpredictable results of a project. This provides initiatives to new projects or changes to ongoing projects, and eventually, this binds into the annual strategy process. Consequently, the information from projects is fed back to the top management team and the board.

To conclude the observations in this high-growth company, balancing between order and chaos can occasionally create the feeling of 'somehow we manage'. The pendulum-like switching from sense of control results in uncertainty, which is an integral part of complexity and wicked problems. However, as heard during the observing the organization during the study, one can be "certain that some actions work in practice, but not if they work in theory". Oddly enough, this crystallizes complexity theory's idea into practice.

8.4   Suggestions for future research

For the future research, this study suggests that internal projects as strategy implementation tools would be developed further, which is also supported by a recent study conducted by Bjorvatn (2022). Projects could be a good way to divide and sort out strategically important objectives into concrete projects that will be handed out to project groups. Further research could investigate the tool and its use by conducting a qualitative study.

In addition, strategic change in this context could be studied further. Strategic change per se was not in the scope of this study, but it could be something to investigate further on. In particular, how strategic change affects the operative business and initiating new projects. In the case company, the projects are forced to proceed fast, and new projects are being initiated frequently. Thus, it would be beneficial to create a loop for information to convey from projects to the next strategy work or strategy update.

On general level, one could conduct a study about the process through which sub-strategies and project portfolios are derived from upper-level company strategy. Complexity theory in organizational context could provide insight into the role of middle-managers.

8.5 Limitations

This case study examines a strategy process in a growth company that is linked to broader organizational change. The strategy implementation in this study refers to a smaller sub-strategy within the larger framework, with the aim of transforming present internal processes into an industrialized supply chain. The sub-strategy involves most of the organization's teams in order to map the processes and to develop the internal processes in a more professional and efficient way. Therefore, the findings from this study might not be transferred into another organization or function as they are, even if they can provide new insights into the use of strategy implementation tools.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview questions

- Could you describe the strategy process and elaborate what methods were used?
- Regarding the strategy and its implementation, how do you see the current state of the implementation phase? (Has it started?)
- According to your opinion, what are the next steps in the strategy implementation?
- What has succeeded? What are the biggest achievements?
- Is there something that could have been better?
- In your opinion, how should strategy implementation be executed? Whose responsibility that is?
- What do you see challenging in strategy implementation?
- What would be required to implement a company strategy successfully?
- What is important in strategy implementation?

- Could you describe the strategy process and elaborate what methods were used?

- Regarding the strategy and its implementation, how do you see the current state of the implementation phase? Has it started?

- According to your opinion, what are the next steps in the strategy implementation?

- What has succeeded so far? What are the biggest achievements?

- Is there something that could have been better?

- In your opinion, how should strategy implementation be executed?

- Whose responsibility is that?

- Making strategy work is more difficult than strategy making. What do you see challenging in strategy implementation?

- What would be required to successfully implement a company strategy?

- What is important in strategy implementation? (Role of communication?)

- The strategy was presented in a must win battle format. Is there some kind of unifying umbrella strategy above these must win battles?

- Would you consider the must win battles as strategies alone?

- What metrics do you use to monitor how implementation is proceeding?

- Has your vision clarified during this strategy process?

- What has changed already in this organization?

- What should be changed?

- What is strategy?

- Are you aware of our strategy?

- How would you describe it?

- Do you see that strategy implementation has started? (strategy implementation: the activities within an organization designed to manage the activities associated with the delivery of a strategic plan)

- According to your perception, has strategy implementation started?

- Is it aligned with how you think it should be implemented?

- What is the role of communication in SI?

- What kind of communication do we need?

- Are you participating in any project at the moment? Is it related to some of the must-win battles?

- Have you seen any changes in project management practices this year?

- What kind of changes have you seen in your team after the strategy was launched?

- How about in the organization?