



Vaasan yliopisto
UNIVERSITY OF VAASA

Aku Rasmus

**Enhancing strategy implementation process
through sensemaking**

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Työn ohjaaja:	Ausrine Sylanskite
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TIIVISTELMÄ:

Organisaatiot kamppailevat strategian implementoinnin haasteiden kanssa. Työntekijöiden ymmärrys ja käsitykset strategiasta, sen tavoitteista ja terminologiasta haastavat organisaation jäseniä hierarkian eri tasoilla, ja yksilöt ymmärtävät asiat omista näkökulmistaan. Tehokkaan ja menestyksekkään täytäntöönpanoprosessin kannalta on tärkeää, että organisaatio pystyy yhdenmukaistamaan strategian ymmärtämistä työntekijöiden keskuudessa. Yhtenäinen ymmärrys strategiasta ja sen sisällöstä auttaa organisaatiota saavuttamaan strategiset tavoitteensa ja sitouttamaan työntekijät tavoilla, jotka tukevat tavoitteiden saavuttamista.

Tässä tutkimuksessa selvitetään, miten sensemaking-teoria voi tehostaa strategian implementointiprosessia. Tutkimuksessa selvitetään, miten strategia ymmärretään organisaation eri tasoilla, miten sensemaking-teoriassa tunnistetut tekijät jo vaikuttavat organisaatioon ja miten viestintää voidaan käyttää strategian vaikutusten tehostamiseen. Tietoa on kerätty haastattelulla, joissa korostetaan organisaation henkilöstön ääntä ja tekijöitä, joihin voidaan vaikuttaa strategian vaikutusten mahdolliseksi lisäämiseksi sensemaking-teorian näkökulmasta. Haastattelujen lisäksi tapaustutkimuksessa käytettiin tietolähteenä myös case-yrityksen strategiaan liittyviä asiakirjoja.

Tulokset osoittavat, että organisaation strategian termistö on epäselvää joillekin keskijohdon ja alimman hierarkiatason työntekijöille, mikä vaikuttaa strategian implementointiprosessiin. Sensemaking-teorian näkökulmasta esimiehen vaikutus yksilön sensemaking-prosessiin oli havaittavissa jokaisella hierarkiatasolla. Konkreettisuuden luominen strategiaan voidaan sensemaking-teorian näkökulmasta nähdä tekijänä, joka luo johdonmukaisuutta strategian ymmärtämiseen organisaatiossa.

Strategian täytäntöönpanoprosessia voidaan parantaa viestinnän avulla selventämällä strategian termistöä työntekijöille, luomalla mittareita, joiden avulla työntekijät voivat seurata strategian tavoitteiden saavuttamista, ja lisäämällä strategiaviestintää. Strategiaviestinnän lisääminen eri kanavien kautta voi vaikuttaa strategian toteuttamiseen, mikä edistää työntekijöiden strategista suuntautumista ja organisaation strategisten tavoitteiden saavuttamista. Sensemaking-prosessin rooli voidaan nähdä samanlaisena hierarkiatasoilla. Informantit näkivät johtajan vaikuttajana strategian ymmärtämisessä, mikä luo johtajalle roolin, jossa hän voi merkittävästi vaikuttaa strategian ymmärtämiseen jokaisella hierarkiatasolla. Sensemakingin rooli voidaan havaita myös johtajan vuorovaikutuksen ulkopuolella. Sensemaking-prosessiin vaikuttavat yksilön käsitykset ympäristöstä ja viestintä muiden organisaation jäsenten kanssa. Konkreettisuuden tuominen strategiaan voidaan nähdä sensemaking-teorian näkökulmasta tekijänä, joka luo johdonmukaisuutta strategian ymmärtämiseen organisaatiossa.

AVAINSANAT: strategy, implementation, communication, sensemaking,

UNIVERSITY OF VAASA**School of Management**

Author:	Aku Rasmus
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Supervisor:	Ausrine Sylanskite
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ABSTRACT:

Organizations struggle with the challenges of implementing strategy. Employees' understanding and perceptions of the strategy, its objectives, and terminology challenge members of the organization at different levels of the hierarchy, and individuals understand things from their perspectives. For an effective and successful implementation process, it is important that the organization can harmonize the understanding of the strategy among employees. A consistent understanding of the strategy and its content will help the organization achieve its strategic objectives and engage employees in ways that support achieving its goals.

This study explores how sensemaking theory can enhance the strategy implementation process. It will explore how strategy is understood at different levels of the organization, how the factors identified in sensemaking theory already affect the organization, and how communication can be used to enhance the impact of the strategy. Data has been collected through interviews that highlight the voice of the organization's staff and the factors that can be influenced to potentially enhance the impact of the strategy from the perspective of sensemaking theory. In addition to interviews, the case study also used documents related to the strategy of the case company as a source of information.

The findings show that the organization's strategy terminology is unclear to some employees in the middle management level and lowest hierarchical level, which affects the strategy implementation process. From the perspective of sensemaking theory, the manager's influence on the individual's sensemaking process was noticeable at each level of the hierarchy. Bringing concreteness to strategy can be seen from the perspective of sensemaking theory as a factor that creates coherence in the understanding of strategy within the organization.

Improving the strategy implementation process through communication can be achieved by clarifying the strategy terminology for employees, creating metrics that allow employees to monitor the achievement of strategy objectives, and increasing strategy communication. Increasing strategy communication through different channels can impact strategy implementation, which contributes to the strategic alignment of employees and the achievement of the organization's strategic goals. The role of the sensemaking process can be seen as similar at hierarchical levels. Informants saw the manager as an influencer in understanding strategy, which creates a role for the manager to significantly influence the understanding of strategy at each level of the hierarchy. The role of sensemaking can also be observed outside the managerial interaction. The sensemaking process is influenced by the individual's perceptions of the environment and communication with other organization members. Bringing concreteness to strategy can be seen from the perspective of sensemaking theory as a factor that creates coherence in the understanding of strategy within the organization.

KEYWORDS: strategy, implementation, communication, sensemaking,

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The researcher is interested in how employees understand the strategy of the case organization and how this understanding can be unified through communication and sensemaking. By creating a common understanding, the company can increase the strategy's impact, improve the strategy implementation process, and potentially positively impact the achievement of strategic objectives. The research was chosen to be conducted as a case study so that the results of the research can be used most effectively in the case organization.

1.2 Aim and research question

This study aims to provide information to the case organization on how to develop strategic communication to enhance the strategy's effects on the organization by giving attention to the sensemaking process. Due to the increase in recruitment numbers, the company wants to find out how to improve the implementation of the strategy by enhancing communication of the strategy.

This study have one research question and three objectives. The research question is "How can the strategy implementation process be enhanced by applying sensemaking theory at different hierarchical levels?". This study has three objectives to fill the research gap and answer the research question:

1. The first objective is to find out how strategy is understood at different levels of the organization.
2. Find out the role of sensemaking in strategy implementation across hierarchical levels of an organization.
3. The third objective is to determine how to increase the strategy's influence through communication.

1.3 Structure of the study

The first chapter of the study is the introduction, which presents the background and current situation of the study, the objectives, the research questions, and the structure of the study. The second chapter is the literature review, which presents the theoretical perspective and reviews the main themes of the topic. It includes descriptions of strategy, strategy implementation, communication, and sensemaking theory. In addition, the literature review describes the engagement of phenomena in the strategy implementation process and finally identifies the gaps that the research seeks to address. The third chapter focuses on the methodology of the study. It illustrates the research philosophy of the study. Chapter four presents the case of the organization, research methods, data collection and analysis and discusses the factors affecting the reliability of the study. Chapter five presents the findings of the study by theme. Chapter six presents the main findings of the study which are compared with existing theory, presents theoretical and managerial implications, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Strategy

Strategy can be defined as the positioning of the organization that is different and relevant to the organization. Positioning of the organization must create practical value. The strategy includes a set of actions and decisions aiming to provide the organization success (Porter, 1996, p. 64,68). A strategy is a conscious action plan with goal orientation. The strategy creates coherence for the organization, producing the direction in which the organization aims to advance with its activities. (Vuorinen, 2013, p. 15). According to Whittington et al., (2020) Noted theorists of strategy emphasize various components of strategy. Due to the scope and diversity of the term strategy, it is challenging to define strategy in one way. (Kamensky, 2010, pp. 18–19) Mintzberg (1987) does not define strategy in one way but instead presents five different definitions of strategy: plan, ploy, pattern, position, and perspective. Mintzberg's strategy as the plan has two key features. The strategy was drawn up before the start of the activity, and it was created deliberately and intentionally. When strategy is a ploy, according to Mintzberg (1987), the intention is to threaten competitors, for example, with a strategy of expanding business actions, which may scare competitors away even though the real intention is not to expand business actions. The actual strategy was to scare competitors away. Third, Mintzberg's definition of strategy is a strategy as a pattern. When strategy is a pattern, it is a consistent line of actions. Mintzberg's fourth definition of strategy is a strategy as a position. When defining strategy as a position, when strategy is seen as a position, strategy is the chosen position in the company's operating environment. In this definition, the strategy acts as an interface between the organization and the environment. The fifth definition of the strategy by Mintzberg is a strategy as a perspective. Strategy as a perspective is observing and noticing the operational environment included with the selected position.

In this study, the term strategy has been described by Mintzberg (1987). One of Mintzberg's definitions of strategy is to describe it as a pattern of actions taken by a company. Actions will establish and communicate the organization's objectives and

purposes, as well as develop significant policies and plans for achieving those objectives. According to Mintzberg (1987), Strategy defines the kind of business the organization does, the quality of the financial and human organization it is or intends to be, and the financial and non-financial contribution it makes to its shareholders, employees, customers and communities.

Mintzberg's (1987) strategy definition emphasizes patterns, which supports this study well. Mintzberg emphasizes patterns because they interconnect policies, principles, and organized activities. Patterns create continuity, unity, and consistency in the organization. This thesis aims to create unity and consistency of strategy in the case organization across different hierarchical levels and to study the enhancement of implementing the company's existing strategy.

2.2 Strategy implementation

Strategy implementation has various definitions. It can be defined as a process that aims to systematically connect the different processes of the organization to support the strategy. (Ungerer et al., 2016, p. 220) According to Jones et al., (2019), strategy implementation involves several key components, such as providing products and services, supporting their delivery, improving operational efficiency, and establishing the company's organizational structure, control systems, and culture. Whittington et al. (2020) define strategy implementation as converting a selected strategy into organizational action to achieve strategic goals and objectives.

De Oliveira et al. (2019) recognized five parts of the strategy implementation process. The first part is converting the strategy into a plan of action, which supports achieving the organization's strategic objectives. The second part is coordination, which is the organization managers' effort to organize employees and chosen supervisors to execute strategy implementation actions. These actions are defined to increase understanding, dedication, cooperation, and conflicts, which may produce beneficial outcomes. The third part is communication, which relates actions to increase information regarding

strategy and process of implementation. Information that is needed to communicate to enhance the strategy implementation is the organization's objectives regarding strategy, actions needed to achieve objectives, due dates, results that have already been achieved, responsibilities, and changes that need to be made. Communication must be interactive in order to increase understanding of the strategy and its content within the organization. The fourth part is control and feedback. For successful strategy implementation, reviewing the achieved result is essential. By reviewing already achieved results, managers can control and optimize implementation process activities and parts to support strategy and organization objectives. Fifth is developing policies for human resources and the capabilities of employees. Developing competencies of employees together with policies of human resources promotes organizations to have access to required human resources and competencies to achieve the organization's objectives, which it has set to strategy. (de Oliveira et al., 2019, p. 336) define strategy implementation as the design of an organization. MacLennan (2010) describes the designing process of the organization to support strategy as a two-phased process. In the first phase, the organization converts the objectives of the organization into activities. MacLennan emphasizes the importance of converting objectives to activities from the perspective of designing the organization to support the strategy implementation process. According to MacLennan, the second phase is to align organizations' design and processes to support strategy implementation. This phase includes aligning performance resources, roles, the organization's structure, processes, projects, and organizational capacity and capabilities to support the alignment of the strategy.

Strategy implementation through culture happens by changing or creating a culture in the organization that supports strategy implementation. Organizational culture affects the employees' way and level of implementation of strategy in their daily work. From the strategy implementation point of view, it is important to understand organizational culture and how to develop it. (Verweire & van den Berghe, 2004, p. 100) Culture defines shared values, attitudes, and behaviors of the employees, which affect strategy implementation on employee and organizational levels. (Crittenden & Crittenden, 2008, p. 307)

According to Ritakallio and Vuori (2018), the strategy implementation process should begin by sharing roles and responsibilities. When employees know their responsibilities, they can increase their proactivity level and prioritize and plan their work to support the organization's strategy. Ritakallio and Vuori (2018) state that an effective strategy implementation process considers how to motivate employees to work towards strategic objectives. Ritakallio and Vuori recommend affecting emotions to increase employee motivation in the organization. The strategy implementation process can also be done purely as an analytical process and with logic, but Ritakallio and Vuori (2018) state that emotions drive people.

Engberg et al. (2015) have recognized issues in strategy implementation at different hierarchical levels. Issues consider a lack of understanding of higher hierarchical level strategy intents or actions in lower levels of hierarchy. To avoid issues in the strategy implementation process, Engberg et al. suggest addressing the importance of strategy at all hierarchical levels of an organization and emphasizing the importance of middle managers. Middle managers must be fully committed to the plan, and top managers must recognize the significance of their actions in enabling or preventing strategy implementation. Communication at the top management level with a high commitment level and developed strategy implementation processes will not secure successful strategy implementation. The level of strategy implementation needs to be evaluated and measured.

The organization should also consider how it will measure the strategy's progress. Regarding the organization's strategy and what it is implementing, measuring the progress can be done, for example, by following metrics of customer satisfaction, revenue growth, quality metrics, or new customers by following the numbers of new customer acquisition. (Allio, 2005, p. 16) Typical measurements for organizations are budgeting and forecasting tools. Because of the characteristics of the strategy implementation process, Allio (2005) suggests using different quantitative and qualitative metrics. Alongside financial metrics and metrics illustrated previously, an increase in patent-related metrics can illustrate the

performance of the strategy implementation process as well. While there are different approaches to how strategy implementation can be achieved, the dimensions of strategy implementation have been identified through rigorous empirical research. Communication is one of the five key dimensions and, therefore, plays an essential role in reaching employee alignment across the hierarchy.

2.3 Strategic communication

In order to implement strategy effectively, it is necessary to communicate strategy in a form that every employee can understand and apply at work. (Ritakallio & Vuori, 2018, p. 153) It is necessary to create a common understanding regarding the strategy to enhance strategy implementation. Individuals understand definitions differently, and for that reason, implementation of the strategy may suffer and not be so sufficient. (Allio, 2005, p. 16) To communicate strategy effectively, Beer and Eisenstat (2000) state that in order for the implementation of the strategy to be carried out efficiently, the strategy should be in a simple format. Collis and Rukstard's (2008) suggestion for the format is a strategy statement that makes it easy to communicate at different levels of the organization effectively and clearly. They bring the focus on three key factors: vision, advantage and scope. To define a clear and effective strategy statement, an organization must have already made compromises in the strategy formulation phase to strategy. The organization must accept that some of its strategic visions must be set aside because, for example, it can be challenging to grow the organization and simultaneously increase profitability. (Collis & Rukstard, 2008, p. 85)

To enhance the implementation of the strategy, Beer and Eisenstat (2000) point out in their study issues that need to be considered and investigated in the organization. These issues consider poor communication between different levels of organization vertically and horizontally. Poor communication blocks the organization's internal learning process of the strategy and weakens the possibility of creating a unified understanding of the organization's strategy. To enhance strategy implementation communication must be possible in every direction of the organization, vertically and horizontally. With open

strategy communication, a well-planned strategy can be implemented to meet the organization's goals from implementation. (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000, pp. 29, 31, 33) Strategy implementation can be made more effective by creating a coherent set of strategy vocabulary and concepts for the organization to use at different stages of implementation. (Weiser et al., 2020, p. 984)

Strategic communication can also be used to create and influence strategically aligned behavior of employees. Strategically aligned behavior (SAB) refers to employee behavior that supports implementing the strategy and behavior in line with the chosen strategy. (Van Riel et al., 2009, p. 1197) The amount and accuracy of information shared affects the building of strategic consensus, which influences the implementation of the strategy in the organization. If the organization does not share enough information with employees, work efficiency suffers because employees are not stimulated to behave in accordance with the SAB. From a strategic communication perspective, there are two types of information that contribute to the implementation of the strategy. The information about the strategy and the employee's role in its implementation. These two types of information can potentially influence behavior that supports strategy implementation. (Van Riel et al., 2009, pp. 1199–1203)

For an organization to effectively implement its strategy, it must align its internal factors to support the chosen strategy, a process known as strategic alignment. Aligning employees has a noticeable impact on an organization's ability to create a successful strategy implementation process. (Boswell, 2006, p. 1490) Employee alignment happens via informing and teaching employees regarding the organization's strategy and objectives, these two actions develop employees' line of sight to understand the organization's strategy, processes, and objectives, which increases employees' ability to perform and act in a way which supports the implementation of the organizations strategy. Line of sight refers to employees' understanding of strategy and how to perform in a way which supports it. (Boswell, 2006, p. 1490) To develop a line of sight, the top management of the organization must have a clear vision of the strategy and objectives to facilitate

information and communication successfully to employees. The importance of line of sight increases at lower organizational levels. Line of sight has been seen to be weaker in lower levels of the organization. Factors for decreased line of sight are lack of communication or understanding of the strategy. A decreased line of sight may drive lower-level employees to create their own objectives, which may be misaligned with the organization's objectives and strategy. (Boswell, 2006, pp. 1492–1493)

When strategy alignment is lacking with employees' line of sight, it can create a hierarchical erosion effect in the organization. Hierarchical erosion is an effect when some parts of the process become less favorable in lower hierarchical levels. The reason for hierarchical erosion can be a different understanding of strategy or objectives and a sense of belongingness to the organization, team, or business unit. (Gibson et al., 2019, p. 1714) The level of appearance of this effect is seen increasing in lower hierarchical levels when organization. The effect can be avoided by active involvement of employees and increasing level of coordination, which creates a perspective to see an organization as a whole instead of team or subgroup level. (Gibson et al., 2019, p. 1718)

According to Heesen (2012), The strategy alignment process can be divided into three phases to succeed in the process of strategy alignment across the hierarchy. The first phase is to gain managers' understanding of the benefits of the strategic alignment. The second phase is to formulate the organization's strategy and objectives. Heesen (2012) specifies that progress toward the strategic objectives must be measurable by Key Performance Indicators that support the strategy. Heesen claims that the importance of communication in the strategic alignment process is crucial because members of the organizations must share a common understanding regarding KPIs. Without the utilization of information that organizations have there is no alignment or benefits. He states utilization of information at all levels of the organization supports decision making to support formulated strategy and implementation of strategy. Heesen (2012) states that last phase of the strategy alignment process is implementing the strategy. Heesen states that to start the last phase, all levels of the organization must have knowledge to work and

plan their individual and unit performance in a way that supports formulated strategy. According to Heesen (2012), this phase includes also following the performance towards decided goals with previously decided KPIs. Heesen states that an alignment process is made in this way to accelerate the learning process in the organization and support achieving above-average results and reaching strategic objectives.

Differences in different hierarchical levels in sensemaking may create an atmosphere which supports born of the hierarchical erosion effect, which has negative impacts on strategic alignment and strategy implementation. To avoid hierarchical erosion, organizations should review the coordination of strategy implementation and prevent hierarchical erosion effects by emphasizing coordination, communication, measuring, and reinforcing the similarity of sensemaking processes so that strategy sensemaking is carried out at different levels of the hierarchy similarly. (Gibson et al., 2019, p. 1721,1722,1742)

2.4 Sensemaking theory

Sensemaking often involves gathering information, gaining an understanding of the information and then using the understanding to finish a task (Sharma, 2007, p. 1). According to Weick (1995), Sensemaking can be defined as a repeated cycle of thinking based on retrospective factors. The factors individuals use to form predictions about the consequences through anticipation and assumptions. Sensemaking is creating a framework from factors to understand and create meanings and common understanding. (Weick, 1995, p. 6) From the organizational perspective, sensemaking activities assist in developing and maintaining common understanding, which enables organizations to unify the processes that promote the achievement of the organization's goal. In organizations, sensemaking is a social process. Members of the organizations make conclusions from their environment and, together with other members and they form explanations that enable them to conduct collective actions. (Maitlis, 2005, p. 21) Managers can influence the sensemaking process in an organization. Successfully influencing the sensemaking process motivates employees to change their performance and behavior. Employees can also help others develop continuity in the processes and strengthen and

increase their understanding of the vision of the organization. The role of middle management in an organization's sensemaking process is essential. Their role is to keep the business running and to communicate the strategy and vision defined by management to the lower levels of the hierarchy. (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, pp. 89–90)

According to Weick (1995), there are seven identified characteristics of the sensemaking process in organizations. Weick's first identified characteristic is identity. The identity is shaped mainly by self-perception of the world around us, aspirations, and the unique individual who becomes as an individual tries to understand it. Individuals handle and interpret the sensemaking process through identity. (Weick, 1995, p. 18) Second, Weick's (1995) identified characteristic is retrospectivity. The retrospective sensemaking process is an attentional process where sensemaking has been made based on earlier experiences and experiences to make sense. (Weick, 1995, pp. 24–26) Third identified characteristic is an enactment of sensible environments. This means interacting with the environment, shaping it to make it understandable, and creating meanings. The purpose of an enactment is to influence the environment in a way that contributes to the sensemaker's sensemaking. (Weick, 1995, pp. 30–38) Fourth characteristic is social. Although sensemaking is an individual process, it is influenced by social interactions where members of an organization use a common language and create meaning together. (Weick, 1995, pp. 38–43)

The fifth characteristic is ongoing. The sensemaking process has no concrete beginning or end. As an individual gains new knowledge and experiences, the sensemaking previously done may change from the original. (Weick, 1995, pp. 43–49) The sixth characteristic is focused on and by extracted cues. This character of the sensemaking process refers to an individual's sensemaking process based on important cues perceived in the environment and possible factors perceived by the individual. (Weick, 1995, p. 49) Seventh is driven by plausibility rather than accuracy, which refers to the tendency of the individual in the sensemaking process to form understandings and explanations of the environment that are more plausible to the sensemaker than entirely accurate. This

character appears in situations where decisions need to be made quickly or, for example if there is too much or too little information to make accurate sense in the process. In these cases, sensemakers aim to achieve the most plausible outcome. (Weick, 1995, pp. 55–62)

The effects of sensemaking theory on strategy implementation are more pronounced if the organization has a clear hierarchical structure. Top management is in an influential hierarchical position. If they are not actively involved in the strategy implementation process, the strategy implementation process of the organization and the employees are exposed to possible misinformation that does not support the implementation of the chosen strategy. To support the strategy implementation and the sensemaking process, senior management should actively participate in the implementation process to create a common understanding of the strategy to be implemented across the different hierarchical levels of the organization. (Friesl et al., 2021, p. 8) According to Maitlis (2005), sensemaking also plays a vital role in strategic alignment by creating a consensus on strategy among organization employees. Sensemaking affects employees' identity building, perception of the organization's image, and how they react to organizational events. The dynamic characteristics of sensemaking increase the role of communication and control at higher organizational levels. Maitlis states that with the influence of higher levels on the sensemaking process of employees at lower hierarchical levels, sensemaking becomes more controlled, which increases the success of strategic alignment.

Maitlis (2005) identified four different types of organizational sensemaking, which depend on leader and stakeholder sensegiving levels. Sensegiving in this context is an act of influencing the sensemaking process to support preferred redefinition (Maitlis, 2005, p. 22). The first type of organizational sensemaking is guided organizational sensemaking. In this type, the leader and employee act with a high level of sensegiving. The process of sensemaking is controlled closely with a high level of stimulation. This type of sensemaking creates consistency in the processes and unites abundant conclusions. (Maitlis, 2005, p. 35) The Second type of organizational sensemaking that Maitlis (2005) identified was

fragmented organization sensemaking. In this type, the sensemaking process is less controlled with a high stimulation level. Fragmented sensemaking in organizations provides many limited conclusions and processes that are incoherent. In this type of sensemaking, Maitlis discovered leaders level of sensegiving is low, and employees are high.

According to Maitlis (2005), restricted organizational sensemaking results from a low level of stimulation combined with a high control level. This results are united with limited conclusions with a single, one-time activity or planned consistent process. The last sensemaking process that Maitlis (2005) identified as minimal organizational sensemaking. This sensemaking process's level of stimulation and control is low, leading to perfunctory conclusions with single-time actions. According to Maitlis, in this type of sensemaking process, both parties put a low amount of effort into sensegiving. This will be the root cause of the minimal results of the organizational sensemaking process.

The strategy implementation process can be seen as interactions between sensemaking and sensegiving. The strategy implementation process may suffer from higher hierarchical level sensegiving actions which are unclear or incomplete. The lack of vertical interactions in organization between senior and middle management increases lateral interactions between middle management. These lateral interactions influence the sensemaking process by creating unexpected outcomes in the middle management sensemaking process. To create consensus regarding strategy in an organization between employees at different hierarchical levels, the top management's role is to operate as a mediator and influence the sensemaking process with accurate and precise sensegiving. This will increase the probability of a common understanding regarding strategy and decrease the possibility of undesired outcomes from the individual sensemaking processes in the whole organization. (Weiser et al., 2020, pp. 980–981)

2.5 Theoretical framework

The literature review aims to provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for strategy, strategy implementation, strategic communication, and sensemaking. It presents relevant research to support the case study.

Mintzberg's (1987) definition emphasizes patterns in strategy, which supports this study well. Mintzberg emphasizes pattern because it creates interconnection between policies, principles, and organized activities. Patterns create continuity, unity, and consistency in the organization. This thesis aims to create unity and consistency of strategy in the case company across different hierarchical levels and to study the enhancement of the implementation of the company's existing strategy.

Strategy implementation by de Oliveira et al., (2019) is defined as a process of communicating an organization's challenges to the whole personnel, converting strategy into actions that support the chosen strategy, and creating consistency by allocating organization resources to support strategy. The definition by de Oliveira et al., is chosen for this thesis because it emphasizes the role of communication in the strategy and aligns the organization to support the strategy. This study aims to provide information on how to develop strategic communication to enhance strategy implementation in a case company by applying sensemaking theory. Definition by Ungerer et al., (2016) emphasize connecting different processes systematically to support strategy. Whittington et al., (2020) have similarities with Ungerer et al., definition. The definitions above will be helpful in a study if the aim is to develop the processes of a case company beyond communication and sensemaking theory to support strategy implementation.

Weick (1995) defined sensemaking as a repeated cycle of thinking to understand and create meanings and common understanding based on retrospective factors. Weick's definition of sensemaking supports the study to find answers to how an organization can enhance strategy implementation by applying sensemaking theory. Weick's definition

emphasizes common understanding, which will be necessary for an organization from a strategy implementation perspective.

According to Maitlis and Christianson (2014) Scholars have two different orientations regarding how the sensemaking process can be defined. It can be seen as the process of an individual using their resources to make connections to perform well and predict the consequences of their actions (Klein et al., 2006, p. 71). Louis (1980) highlights and describes sensemaking as more individual-centric. Louis notes the socialization process but highlights the need for the individual to generate conclusions independently as a cognitive process. This thesis approaches sensemaking theory more as a social process involving discursivity, as the thesis case study aims to explore the impact of strategy implementation through communication and by affecting the sensemaking process.

Presented theories and theoretical insights are used to compare empirical data in chapter 4 to answer the research question "How can the strategy implementation process be enhanced by applying sensemaking theory at different hierarchical levels?". Although the topic has been researched extensively, and the interest in the effects of sensemaking on strategy, strategy implementation, and strategy alignment, the literature review is not able to address the research question mentioned above or the objectives of the study, which are to find out how strategy is understood at different levels of the organization, find out the role of sensemaking in strategy implementation across hierarchical levels of an organization and to determine how to increase the strategy's influence through communication. Implementing the desired strategy may be significantly compromised or replaced by an emerging strategy that may have a negative impact or differ from the original one. The reasons for this can be many and can be organization-specific.

The literature review isn't able to give answers to research objectives or research question. The literature review is not able to provide information or empirical data to achieve research objectives which are set to the thesis. The gaps that where literature review is not able to answer is how can the strategy implementation process be enhanced by

applying sensemaking theory at different hierarchical levels. According to Weick (1995), managers influence the sensemaking process of employees lower down the hierarchy in the organization, which affects strategy implementation and how those lower-level employees understand the strategy. When managers influence the sensemaking process among employees lower down the hierarchy, it is not known how exactly the managers influence the sensemaking process and what the effects are. The empirical part of the study aims to find out what role managers play in the sensemaking process of employees in order to be able to answer the research question.

Mintzberg (1987) defines strategy as a pattern of actions. Actions establish and communicate organizational goals and purposes and develop key policies and plans to achieve these goals. Thus, the theory is not able to answer the questions of how the case company communicates its objectives and develops plans to achieve its objectives and key policies. Strategy can be understood differently in different hierarchical levels and between individuals. The strategy implementation process varies between organizations, creating differences in sensemaking processes at individual and organizational levels. To answer the research question, there is a need to research the role of sensemaking in strategy implementation at different hierarchical levels in the case company in the empirical part.

When previously mentioned knowledge gaps are fulfilled, there is a demand to research how the organization is able to increase the influence of strategy through communication. Ritakallio & Vuori (2018) define strategic communication as communicating strategy in a form that every employee can understand and apply in their work. In order to improve the effectiveness of strategy implementation and answer the research question, it is essential to study in the empirical part of the study how the case company communicates its strategy, in what form, and whether the employees understand the information obtained through strategic communication in a uniform way or whether the understanding of strategy differs at an individual or hierarchical level.

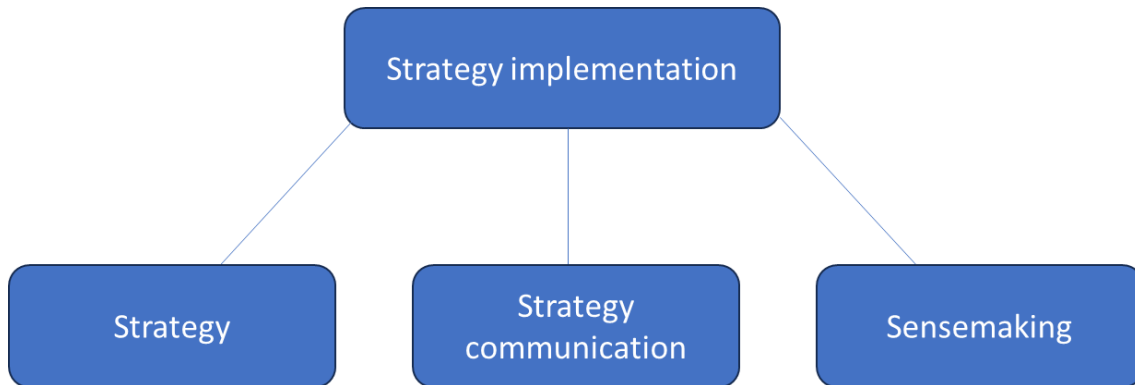


Figure 1 Visualization of theoretical framework.

The figure above illustrates the links between the different theories of the theoretical framework. Strategy, strategy communication and sensemaking all influence the process of implementing strategy in an organization. The theoretical framework will be used as a basis for the interview questions, which will be conducted during the empirical phase of the study. According to Alasuutari (2011), the theoretical framework can be used as a perspective from which to analyze the study's findings.

3. Methodology

This chapter outlines how the research was carried out, describes the research process, and focuses on describing the methodological approach of the research. Chapter 5 describes the research methods used and the research philosophy. Chapter 4.2 focuses on data collection through interviews. Chapter 4.3 presents the methods of data analysis, and chapter 4.4 discusses the assessment of the study's trustworthiness.

3.1 Research philosophy

Ontological assumptions form the aspect of how to see and study research objects. In business and management, objects are organizations, management, employees' work-life, and events of organization. The ontology determines how to see business and management. Ontology reflects the interpretation of what constitutes the reality of the matter and answers the question of whether the whole is to be understood as subjective or objective. The ontological perspective of this study is subjective, which interpretations of individuals are constructed socially. Even if interpretations are constructed socially, there are as many interpretations as there are individuals. (Saunders et al. 2023, p. 134-136) According to Maitlis & Christianson (2014) the sensemaking process is influenced by external social factors such as leaders. Weick (1995) has also identified sociality as a feature of the sensemaking process, which means the creation of a common language and meanings together.

In addition to ontology, epistemology is central to the philosophy of research. Epistemology is interested in what is known and what are the sources and limitations of knowledge. Epistemology can be divided into three different directions. The first is empiricism, which holds that reality is made up of existing material things. Empiricism is philosophically related to positivism. The second direction is subjectivism. This direction sees reality as socially constructed, which means that information is only available through social actors. This position of epistemology is related to interpretivism. The third is substantialism, where reality is seen as material, but it is recognized that people interpret reality

differently in different contexts and times. Substantialism is associated with critical realism. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 16) This study follows the interpretivism research philosophy for the reason of subjective meaning of topic of study and non-quantitative data use as knowledge. The use of an interpretivist research philosophy is supported by the research question, which in this case deals with enhancing strategy implementation through the use of sensemaking theory and increasing knowledge of the topic. According to Maylor and Blackmon (2005), The aim of interpretivism is not to explain the phenomenon under study but to understand it. This supports the objectives of the study to increase our understanding of how strategy is understood at different levels of the hierarchy, the role of sensemaking in implementing strategy at different hierarchical levels, and how to increase the impact of strategy through communication. This study uses an abductive approach. Abductive research combines deduction and induction effectively by creating comparisons and interpretations between data and theory. The approach uses the data collected to develop a theory to explore phenomena, identify themes, and interpret patterns in order to create new theories or modify existing ones. Abduction is sensitive to both data and existing theories because it exploits existing theories. Existing theories help abduction to interpret and identify patterns. (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 158,811)

4. Research approach

The purpose of this study is to find out how employees understand the strategy on different hierarchical levels in the case company and how to enhance the strategy implementation process via communication and by applying sensemaking theory. To answer the research question, the research needs to understand and explain the mechanisms that influence the strategy implementation process. Because of the purpose of the study, it is an explanatory study. Thus, the research is able to answer the question "how". The focus of explanatory research is to explain a situation, problem, or mechanisms to increase understanding. (Saunders et al., 2023, p. 181)

Hirsjärvi, Remes & Sajavaara (2009) define three traditional research strategies as experimental studies, survey studies and case studies. Since the purpose of a study is to increase understanding of a particular phenomenon, the use of a case study is justified in this research. The choice of a case study is supported by its typical features, which are the selection of a single case, a set, or a target (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 135) The aim of a case study is not to produce data that can be generalized to the population but to explore and increase the understanding of the theory and, therefore, generalize it. The exceptional nature of the case selected does not become a problem but is a key interest that justifies the use of a case study. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 136)

This study uses what Eriksson and Kovalainen (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015) describe as case study research. Case study as a research method is defined as being limited in time or place, for example, to a target such as an individual, organization, or activity through targeted in-depth data collection. The purpose of the study is to create a holistic picture of the individual case being studied. The purpose of the study is to create a picture from within the case and to create an understanding of the perspectives of the individuals within the case being studied.

The case was chosen for this study because it was seen as having potential due to its hierarchical structure, it was easily accessible to the researcher, and the organization was positive about the research and being the object of the study.

4.1 The case company

The case company is a consulting organization that provides expert services in its field, focusing on the Finnish market. The use of this case study in this research is interesting, both from the company's own point of view and from a theoretical point of view. From the case company's perspective, the study helps to improve the implementation of strategy, to develop processes and to consider the factors that can create different perceptions of strategy in an organization. The study can thus help to harmonize the perception of strategy within the case company and to implement the desired strategy.

In terms of theoretical development, the study provides practical insights into how sensemaking is applied in practice in the implementation of strategy in a case organization by answering the research question and providing answers on how applying sensemaking theory enhances strategy implementation at different levels of the hierarchy. For example, Maitlis & Christianson (2014) describe how managers can influence the sensemaking process in an organization. Maitlis and Christianson go on to argue that successfully influencing the sensemaking process can motivate employees to change their behaviors, which can lead to efficiency and behavioral change. The study seeks to fill gaps in theory by addressing the research questions of how to enhance the strategy process through sensemaking theory, what is the role of sensemaking theory in the SI process at different levels of the organizational hierarchy, and how to enhance the impact of strategy through communication.

The interviews aim to fill gaps in the research and gaps that cannot be addressed by theory. Such gaps include the enhancement of strategy implementation through sensemaking theory. Weick (1995) describes that managers at higher hierarchical levels influence the sensemaking process of those at lower levels. Mintzberg (1987) defines

strategy as a pattern of actions, interviews are used to find out the case for the organization's ways of communicating strategy and objectives. According to Ritakallio & Vuori (2018), communicating strategy must be done in a form that all employees in the organization can understand. The interviews aim to fill the gaps in the research and thus be able to provide explanations and mechanisms to improve the strategy implementation process in the case organization. The interviewees and the details of their interviews are presented in the table on page 30.

4.2 Data collection

According to Yin (2014), there are six different ways to collect data in case studies. Archival records, documentation, interviews, participant observation, direct observation and physical artifacts. Yin identifies interviews as one of the most important sources of data in case studies. The interviews can be divided into three different categories: structured, thematic and open interviews. Structured interviews strictly follow a plan and a pre-established structure. Thematic interviews are an intermediate form of structured and open-ended interviews, where themes are used in the interview, but there are no precise questions or order of questions. The open interview is not unstructured and does not contain themes. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 208,209) This study used eleven semi-structured interviews conducted using Microsoft Teams.

In addition to interviews, the case study also uses documents related to the strategy of the case company as a source of information. The study uses data triangulation to reduce the potential bias created by a single source. In data triangulation, one or more sources are used to confirm the results of the study (Nielsen et al., 2020, p. 1493). In this case, data triangulation aims to gain insight into the case of the strategy the organization is trying to implement. In this way, the original strategy can be compared with how the original strategy is understood at different hierarchical levels of the organization and how it differs from the original interpretation. With data triangulation, the study strives to provide insight into the kind of strategy the company is trying to implement. In business studies personal and in-depth interviews have been favoured typically as the

primary data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 139). Using interviewees as a source of material helps to bring out the voices and perspectives of the research subjects (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 164). In this case, their understanding of the strategy of the case company and how the strategy affects their work.

The interviews were conducted in January and February 2024. In qualitative research, particular attention is paid to the selection of interviewees because they represent different hierarchical levels of the case company (Tuomi et al., 2018, p. 73). Their work is influenced by the strategy and their understanding of it. The interviewees represent different levels of the hierarchy, so the research can explore how strategy is perceived at different levels of the case organization and how the perception of strategy differs. This will enable the research to find ways to improve the effectiveness of strategy implementation coherently and to identify differences in the interpretation of strategy at different levels of the hierarchy, thus developing strategy implementation more coherently by using sensemaking theory. The interviewees, managers, and the Group Manager represent the top management of the case organization. The Senior Engineer and the Project Managers represent middle management. Analysts and Engineers represent the lowest hierarchical level. The common factor with each interviewee is that they work on the same client. The workload of the people working varies, depending on the clients projects statuses, the work ordered by the client, and the hierarchical level of the interviewee.

Informant	Title	Date	Length of the interview (min)
Person 1	Manager 1	06.02.2024	37 min
Person 2	Manager 2	06.02.2024	65 min
Person 3	Group Manager 1	08.02.2024	37 min
Person 4	Group Manager 2	02.02.2024	28 min
Person 5	Senior Engineer	07.02.2024	59 min
Person 6	Project Manager 1	15.02.2024	30 min
Person 7	Project Manager 2	14.02.2024	39 min
Person 8	Engineer 1	01.02.2024	29 min
Person 9	Engineer 2	26.01.2024	30 min
Person 10	Analyst	20.02.2024	35 min
Person 11	Engineer 3	25.01.2024	59 min

Table 1. List of interviewees

Interviewees at the same hierarchical level are used as comparison groups in the interviews. In this case, interviewees 1 to 4 represent comparison group 1, which consists of interviewees at the top of the hierarchy. Comparison group 2 consists of middle managers interviewees 5 to 7 represent this group. The third comparison group is the lowest hierarchical level in the case company, represented by interviewees 8 to 11. According to Eriksson and Kovalainen (2015), the purpose of comparison groups in qualitative research is to identify the presence or absence of a phenomenon in different groups and how the explanations, possible effects, or possible consequences of phenomena vary between comparison groups.

To understand how employees at different hierarchical levels understand the strategy and how it affects their work. Four people from senior management, three people from middle management, and four people from the expert level were selected for interviews. The interviews were conducted in Finnish and English on MS Teams at the case company's headquarters in Vaasa, in a conference room that was easily accessible to the interviewees, and the interview situations were easy to avoid distractions and make it easy to record the interviews. All interviews were recorded to ensure detailed and transparent data. The interviews ranged from 28 minutes to 65 minutes, with an average of 41 minutes. Before the interviews, questions were provided to the interviewees in advance

to allow them to focus on the questions and prepare for the interview. The questions can be found in Appendix 1.

The interviews were guided by four different themes: strategy, strategy implementation, strategy communication, perceiving the strategy, and challenges (sensemaking). The themes were chosen based on the theoretical framework and the research gaps so that the interviews enabled the collection of information that could answer the research question, the objectives, and the research gaps.

The questions on strategy and implementation in the interviews aim to find out how the interviewees define and describe the strategy and how the strategy is reflected in their working methods. The questions on strategic communication aim to find out how the interviewees perceive the ways in which the strategy is communicated. The questions in the sensemaking section aim to find out the influence of managers on the sensemaking process and how interviewees form their perceptions of the strategy. The use of these themes in the interviews will support the theory, the research question, and the objectives of the study.

4.3 Data analysis

Data analysis can be seen as one of the core tasks of the study after data collection. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 211) The purpose of data analysis is to produce a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study and an interpretation based on facts. Also, at the same time, to produce a more detailed interpretation of the meaning of the material in context. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 120) According to Puusa et al., (2020), Data analysis is linked to the collecting of the data, and therefore the analysis of the data starts already during the data collection. The analysis started with a transcription of the collected data, after which the data was read through and categorized. Categorization is the process of coding and classifying the data collected for the study. Categories can be keywords, phrases, sentences, or themes, depending on the size of the units of analysis to

be used. Categorization determines the quality as well as the reliability of the analysis. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, pp. 122–123)

The Gioia method has been used to analyze the data. In this study, the use of the Gioia method is supported by the qualitative nature of the data. The Gioia methodology allows to creation of an analysis of qualitative data that meets the high criteria that scientific publications require for quality qualitative research (Magnani & Gioia, 2023, p. 1). The strength of the method is its systematic approach to research and data analysis. The analysis of the data was carried out in three stages. In the first step, codes and categories were created. The first order of concepts are informant-oriented and created based on informants' words. The informants in this study are the interviewees. The second-order themes are theory-oriented. In the second stage, the theoretical model was developed through continuous comparison. In the third stage, the results of the study were presented using the secondary themes and the dimensions created, often with reference to quotes from informants.(Magnani & Gioia, 2023, pp. 2–4) The use of the Gioia method provided a systematic way for the study to analyze the case study data and inter-theoretical coherences and generate new possible concepts based on the collected data and theory. Section six discusses the study's findings and the connections between the data and theory collected and presents the findings that emerged from the aggregation of the data and theory.

4.4 Trustworthiness of the study

Typical concepts used to measure the reliability of research are reliability and validity. The validity of a study refers to the ability of the research method to measure the issue or item being studied. For example, the validity of a study may suffer in a situation where the interviewee understands a question in a different way than the researcher intended. In this situation, an error in the results will occur, which will affect the validity of the study. (2009, pp. 231–232) When a study is valid, its results are accurate, i.e. specific and factual. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 306)

In this study, the interviewees were informed before the interviews took place and about the objectives of the interviews. The interview questions were sent to the interviewees approximately one week before the interview in order to confirm the validity of the interviewees' answers. Interviewees were not asked to prepare for the interviews in advance but were given the opportunity to prepare and familiarize themselves with the questions. This was done in order to minimize errors and misunderstandings of the interview questions. In order to confirm the reliability of the study, bias was avoided. Interviews were recorded and conducted under as similar conditions as possible and in the same way for each interviewee. Interviews were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews to improve the transparency of the study. Interview situations were kept relaxed and neutral. The interviewees were also given the opportunity to ask clarifying questions if they felt the questions were necessary.

The reliability of a study means the reproducibility of the results of the study, i.e. to minimize the randomness of the results. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2015, p. 305; Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 231) According to Saunders (2023), there are four factors that undermine reliability. Interviewee errors, which are factors that negatively affect the interviewee's responses, such as haste. The interviewee may give biased answers, for example, in situations where the interview can be overheard by outsiders. In such a situation, the interviewee may end up giving erroneously biased answers. The researcher's mistakes can cause a loss of reliability in situations where the researcher misunderstands the interviewee's answers, is unprepared, or is affected by a physical condition such as fatigue. Researcher bias can affect the interpretation of responses if the researcher's attitudes or beliefs affect the interpretation of the data and the recording.

In addition to the above-mentioned factors, the reliability of the study can be improved by drawing up a detailed plan and report on how the study was carried out. The circumstances of data collection and production, the time spent, possible distractions, and misinterpretations in the interviews were acknowledged and disclosed in the research report. (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, p. 232)

5. Findings

The results of the interviews are discussed in this section. The aim of the interviews was to find out how the employees and managers of the case company understood the company's new strategy and how the implementation of the strategy could be improved. Secondly, this chapter reviews and analyses the findings of the study. The findings of the study are analyzed by using the Gioia method in order to create coherence between the findings and the collected data and the theoretical framework of strategy, strategy implementation, strategy communication and sensemaking theory. During the analysis phase, the data did not create new themes, as the data only addressed the themes of the theoretical framework.

The data obtained from the interviews were compared with secondary data sources, which were the case organisational strategy documents that were available. The comparison aims to examine whether the members of the case organization interpret the strategy in the way the organisation has defined it.

5.1 Strategy

5.1.1 Objectives and message of the strategy

For an effective and successful strategy implementation, the employees of the organization must understand the objectives of the strategy and the content of the strategy.

Group Manager 2: "The way I interpreted it, at least the strategy is to grow the company through sales and then to try to move now purely to that high-end consulting, to bring more value to the customer."

The interviewees' understanding of the organization's strategy was relatively consistent. Still, the interviews repeated a lack of understanding of the strategy's terms, which means that the interviewees raised the issue of what the terms mean. If the strategy is

misunderstood or employees' actions are not aligned with it, the implementation process will suffer.

Project manager 1: *"I think the main goal of the strategy is to show to our employees that we want to aim for being a high-end consultant and that obviously is a very like fluffy word."*

In general, the case company's strategy is to grow and become a high-end consulting company. When the interviewees were asked to describe the strategy and its message, the answers were duality.

Project manager 2: *"The strategy is a growth strategy without expanding business areas. The strategy's message to the inside is that it is a quality and growth strategy... and maybe the external message is something like brand clarification."*

Project manager 1: *"We want to develop into new business areas ... Rest of it is maybe the thinking as a high-end consultant we would like to make our all employees like use, utilize the high-end consultant thinking when doing their work."*

The dichotomy in the interviewees' responses is reflected in the pursuit of growth. Whether growth is sought in business areas in which the case company is already active or whether growth is sought in new business areas. The interviews raised the issue of acquiring the necessary competencies to pursue growth. There were no clear differences between the comparison groups, which described the strategy in a similar way. This may be due to the fact that the new strategy was discussed at an event held about a month before the first interviews.

Project manager 1: *"How do we make sure that we have the competence to consult in all these different forms, where we need to be able to consult in the future?"*

5.1.2 Opinions regarding strategy

The opinion of the case company on the strategy was generally good, but some interviewees raised issues they were concerned about and were therefore not fully satisfied or agreed that the strategy was good.

Engineer 3: "I have mixed feelings myself that it's a good strategy in a way and a strategy in the right direction, but I'm not quite sure if we can achieve the objectives of the strategy if it's too ambitious for its timeframe."

In terms of opinions on the strategy, interviewees said the new strategy would create coherence and focus. Few of the interviewees highlighted that the strategy was unclear, that they expected a more concrete implementation, and that some aspects of the strategy were too optimistic. The interviewees who commented on the strategy in the above way represented the lowest and middle levels of the hierarchy.

Engineer 3: "I have mixed feelings about the strategy. It is a good strategy to a certain extent and points in the right direction, but then I'm not quite sure that we can achieve that strategy, that it is too ambitious for its timeframe."

There was no clear contrast between the comparison groups. In each of the comparison groups, interviewees described the strategy in similar terms, as a growth strategy with a focus on being a quality service provider. Opinions about the strategy were positive. However, five out of eleven interviewees reported critical views on the details of the strategy. The interviewees highlighted the timeframe for achieving the objectives of the strategy, the lack of clarity of the strategy, and the lack of concreteness.

5.2 Strategy implementation

The interview questions on strategy implementation were designed to obtain the interviewees' opinions on the level of implementation, their perceived role in

implementation, the factors that influence implementation, and their motivation to implement the strategy.

5.2.1 How the strategy is reflected at work

Group Manager 2: *"On a personal level, my focus has been put on sales, that I should find more hours for it somewhere."*

In general, the strategy is reflected in the respondents' work, especially in increased sales work and monitoring of results. One interviewee says that the strategy is particularly visible in the development of new competencies. Two interviewees say their role is central to the implementation of the strategy. The interviewees each say that they have their own role in implementing the strategy.

Analyst: *"I think everyone has an important role in implementing the strategy, but of course, different people are involved, as are different parts of the strategy."*

There are clear differences in the interviewees' responses between the comparison groups. The role as part of strategy implementation is perceived to be smaller the lower down the hierarchy of the case company you go. At the lowest level of the hierarchy, one's role is unclear or seen only as part of strategy implementation. Similarly, at the highest level of the hierarchy, the role in strategy implementation is seen as essential and central. Perceptions of the role in strategy implementation at the middle level of the hierarchy partly mirror those at the lowest level, emphasizing the role as one element in the organization carrying out its own tasks to support strategy implementation.

Engineer 1: *"My role in implementing the strategy is relatively small, because I am not a manager, but I would compare myself to a piece of machinery."*

Manager 1: *"Well, since basically well it is my responsibility to implement the strategy. My role is more to just communicate the strategy and help in defining specific actions"*

and tasks that need to be done to implement the strategy so that others know what they should do.”

5.2.2 Factors influencing the implementation of the strategy

When the interviewees were asked about factors that influence the implementation of the strategy, information and communication came up in the answers. If the strategy is not communicated effectively to support the implementation process, it will be difficult to achieve its objectives.

Analyst: “The first is to communicate the strategy, and I think it would be really important to explain the rationale for the different objectives.

Concrete objectives so that everyone knows what needs to be done in practice.”

Two of the interviewees also mentioned the adoption of the strategy by employees. If employees do not believe in or like the strategy, it is more difficult to act on it.

Engineer 3: “The business performance of an organization is so dependent on the contribution of its employees that if the performing level is not made to believe in the strategy and objectives that we can do this, the strategy will not be realized.”

There were apparent differences in responses between the comparison groups. In the interviews, those in the lowest hierarchical group reported that implementation was influenced by opinions and attitudes toward the strategy. In the other two comparison groups which were middle and highest hierarchical levels, there was a clear perception of the impact of communication on strategy implementation, both positive and negative.

Other factors that were perceived to affect the implementation of the strategy were that resources at the middle and top levels of the hierarchy were perceived to be scarce, increasing the workload in a way that was seen as challenging the effective

implementation of the strategy. The impact of resource scarcity on strategy implementation was highlighted by interviewees representing the top and middle levels of the hierarchy.

5.2.3 Achieving and measuring the objectives of the strategy

When the interviewees were asked how the case company achieves and measures its strategic objectives, there were apparent differences in the answers. Three of the eleven interviewees, each representing a different hierarchical level, stated that it is impossible to measure strategic objectives because some of the objectives of the strategy are not concrete.

Project manager 2: "I have not understood the concrete objectives of the strategy so it is impossible to measure the objectives of the strategy."

Seven of the interviewees, representing each level of the hierarchy, said that some of the objectives were measurable, such as the financial objectives. Conversely, some interviewees said that the nature of some strategic objectives and their achievement made it challenging to measure them.

Analyst: "Some goals are quite easy to measure or track, such as selling new products and finding new customers, recruiting employees and so on. But for example, one aspect of the goal is this strengthen certain skills. So, measuring that is then again more difficult."

There were no significant differences in responses between the comparison groups. In each comparison group, one person felt that it was not possible to achieve and measure the strategic objectives or did not know how to measure them.

5.2.4 Increasing motivation to implement the strategy

When asked about the motivation to implement the strategy. The interviewees' answers were varied. Communication and making the strategy concrete, together with regular monitoring and feedback on the work done, were seen as factors that could have a positive impact on motivation. Three of the interviewees pointed out that motivation comes from the job itself. Other factors mentioned by interviewees as having a positive impact on motivation were financial compensation, a realistic strategy, and financial targets. In addition to the above, interviewees highlighted high workloads and increased responsibilities as having a negative impact on motivation.

Project manager 2: *“Communicating the strategy better, making the benefits of the strategy concrete, what the benefits of implementing the strategy will be for me. In concrete terms, so that I can be motivated by it.”*

There were similarities in the responses between the comparison groups. At the highest and middle levels of the hierarchy, increasing communication and concreteness of strategy was perceived as a motivating factor, together with regular monitoring. The variation in motivational factors among individuals was high for the other interviewees.

Project manager 1: *“I like to see things in a concrete way and to understand what they mean and so that's that's maybe something to increase the motivation otherwise it's it's there's a risk it's hard to understand what we are doing.”*

5.2.5 Pitfalls of Strategy Implementation

Five out of eleven interviewees, representing all hierarchical levels of the organization, highlighted communication as a pitfall in strategy implementation. In terms of communication, the lack of clarity of strategy-related terminology and the limited amount of strategic communication were perceived as problems. Other themes raised in relation to the implementation of the strategy were the lack of indicators to monitor progress

towards the strategy's objectives and the lack of targets. Lack of accountability for the strategy's objectives and identification of critical points in the strategy. Interviewees also raised concerns about the high level of recruitment and its impact on the case's performance and the transparency of the quality objective and strategy defined in the strategy within the organization.

Engineer 3: "Company needs to think about implementing strategy by increasing communication, or thinking more strongly about what kind of communication is being communicated and to whom and who is responsible for communicating and making sure that communication has reached the lowest level of its communication ladder."

The comparison groups agreed on the perceived lack of communication in the case company. The top and middle levels of the hierarchy raised the most communication-related issues. The above levels also highlighted factors related to the strategy's objectives that they felt needed to be developed.

5.3 Strategy communication

Questions related to the communication of the strategy were used to find out the interviewees' opinions and experiences of the communication of the strategy, whether they felt that the communication was clear, adequate and how they felt about the means used in the communication.

5.3.1 Communication methods and clarity of the strategy

Interviewees pointed to meetings, the strategy kick-off event, written publications, and oral communication as the channels used to communicate the strategy. The case organization communicated the strategy at its December celebration event, the strategy kick-off in January, and the internal communication applications in use. Two of the interviewees felt that communication was good and clear. The remaining interviewees

felt that there were shortcomings in the communication of the strategy, both in terms of lack of information and lack of clarity.

Project manager 2: *“The strategy is communicated at many levels, but still quite high-flying. In other words, it has not yet been put into concrete terms. The communication is not very concrete.”*

According to the interviewees, communicating the strategy would be improved by giving concrete examples of how the strategy will affect their work in practice, as some interviewees currently feel that the strategy is unclear due to its top-down nature. The repeated communication of the strategy and the communication of the monitoring of the progress of the implementation of the strategy emerged in the interviewees' responses as communicating the monitoring of progress in implementing the strategy.

When comparing the responses between the comparison groups, similarities can be found in the responses regarding the communication of the strategy, the perceived shortcomings, and areas for improvement. Two interviewees representing the lowest and highest levels of the hierarchy perceived the strategy's clarity and level of communication as good.

5.4 Sensemaking

The interview questions were based on sensemaking theory to find out how the interviewees' understanding of strategy could be influenced by sensemaking theory and to create a coherent understanding of the case company's strategy, its objectives and how the strategy affects practical work.

5.4.1 Understanding the strategy and how to increase understanding

Six of the interviewees described the strategy as a plan or guideline for the organization to achieve the goals it has set. Three described the strategy as a direction or path that

the organization is following. Interviewees described the strategy as a tool or position of the organization.

Manager 1: *“Strategy to me, is how you plan to reach your goal.”*

Interviewees feel that the different methods have a positive impact on their understanding of the strategy. Five of the interviewees said that communication helped them to understand the strategy better. Making the implications of the strategy concrete and giving examples were also perceived to have a positive impact on the level of understanding of the strategy by interviewees. The objectives and indicators defined for the strategy were also perceived to have a positive impact on the understanding of the strategy, as well as their own knowledge base, the possibility to go through the strategy in small parts so that the whole is more comprehensible.

There were differences in the responses within the comparison groups. In each comparison group, one interviewee saw communication as helping to understand the strategy. Each comparison group also mentioned objectives and metrics, such as KPIs, as helping to understand the strategy.

5.4.2 The perceived role of the manager in understanding the strategy

Seven of the interviewees say that the manager's role is to communicate and answer questions about the strategy. Their responses reflect the assumption that a manager understands and can answer questions about strategy.

Engineer 1: *“If I have a question about strategy, the manager can answer it...”*

Three of the interviewees highlighted the manager's role in making the strategy concrete as an important way of helping to implement and understand the strategy. The interviewees highlighted the division of responsibilities, timetables and communication of the strategy.

Project manager 2: *“The role of the manager is very important, and in practice, their job is to concretize the message of the strategy and to show by example what the strategy is. So, their role is very important to make sure that I understand the strategy.”*

The manager's role was also seen as a connecting factor between the workplace and the employee. The manager's role was seen as guiding the employee to develop his/her skills in a way that supports the organization's objectives and makes the organization aware of the employee's aspirations.

Engineer 3: *“I've always thought that the role of a manager is to be between me and my workplace. First of all, to explain to me what the workplace's objectives are for me or what they want me to be able to do or produce, for example, what skills they want me to have.”*

The interviewees' responses between the comparison groups were similar. In each group, the supervisor's role as an information broker through discussion was emphasized. At the lowest and middle levels of the hierarchy, the manager's role as a strategy enabler responsible for translating strategy into practice was emphasized. Two interviewees, who are at the middle and top levels of the hierarchy, said that their position influences employees' understanding of strategy in the organization.

5.4.3 Factors influencing the understanding of the strategy

When asked to identify the factors contributing to respondents' understanding of strategy, responses varied widely at the individual level, with no apparent differences or similarities between comparison groups.

Project manager 2: *“At the moment, I don't have extra time to think about strategy. Freeing up my time to think about the organization's strategy would help.”*

Two of the interviewees highlighted in their responses the limited time resources available, which makes it challenging to understand the strategy. According to another interviewee, the lack of time is explained by the high workload.

Analyst: "Setting concrete targets and a clear plan. The strategy, and in particular the objectives of the strategy, must be justified so that you know what you are working towards."

Five of the interviewees highlighted the need to clarify the strategy. The strategy was perceived to consist of many objectives for different parts of the business, creating ambiguity in prioritization. According to interviewees, understanding the strategy can be improved by developing an implementation plan and providing concrete examples.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of clear communication, participation in the strategy development process, seeing the impact of one's own work on the implementation of the strategy, and the opportunity to familiarize oneself with parts of the strategy to understand the strategy as a whole. Interviewees felt that the above factors had a positive impact on their understanding of the strategy. The impact of clear communication as a positive factor was highlighted in each of the comparison groups.

5.4.4 The impact of the interviewee's position on understanding the strategy

When asked about the impact of their position on understanding the strategy, seven of the interviewees felt that their position in the organization helped them to understand the strategy. Positive influences on understanding strategy were perceived to include the advantage of having access to information relevant to strategy, the opportunity to discuss strategy development with those responsible for strategy development, and the time spent in the company, which makes it easier to understand the implications of different aspects of strategy. Interviewees also felt that working longer in the organization helped them to understand the strategy and the decisions behind it.

Manager 2: *"I have access to all the information, and I can make a difference, so my position helps me understand the strategy.."*

Two of the interviewees felt that their position undermined their understanding of the strategy. The factors that they considered to have a negative impact on strategy understanding were their position in the hierarchy and lack of access to the latest information.

Project manager 2: *"The communication of the strategy must be very simple and concrete throughout all the steps so that it comes across to me as clear and simple even in concrete terms."*

In general, the responses between the comparison groups show that working longer in the organization at the middle level of the hierarchy and at the lowest level was perceived as helping to understand the strategy of the organization. At the same levels, position was perceived to hinder understanding of strategy due to hierarchical levels and limited knowledge.

5.4.5 Other factors raised by interviewees

When asking interviewees what they would like to bring to the interviews. Interviewees highlighted the importance of strategy for the organization and wanted it to be given attention, time and resources. Concretization of the strategy and clarification of terminology were emphasized, as unclear terminology can have a negative impact on different processes in the organization, such as recruitment, leaving potential jobseekers unhired by the organization.

Group Manager 2: *"For example, in some recruitment processes possible potential job applicants are ignored because someone interprets them as not meeting the organization's criteria. The organization needs a common interpretation and guidance.."*

It was also highlighted that the organization needed to analyze its critical success factors and competitive factors. This was seen as an opportunity to develop a strategy to support the achievement of the organization's objectives.

Manager 2: *"I would like to have an analysis of what are our critical success factors and how to strengthen them and what are our competitive factors..."*

Strategy	Strategy implementation	Strategy communication	Sensemaking	Hierarchy
<p>Understanding of the organization's strategy was relatively consistent.</p> <p>The strategy was perceived as unclear and abstract.</p>	<p>Limited resources in the middle hierarchy can hinder strategy implementation.</p> <p>Financial targets were measurable, while some strategic objectives were challenging due to their nature.</p> <p>Timely monitoring and feedback are suggested to have a positive impact on motivation.</p>	<p>Interviewees were confused about the strategy's terms.</p> <p>Communication influences strategy implementation positively and negatively, along with opinions and attitudes.</p>	<p>Strategy is described as a plan or guideline, direction, path, tool, and organization position.</p> <p>Clear communication aids strategy understanding.</p> <p>Giving examples makes the strategy more accessible to understand.</p> <p>Strategy objectives and indicators had a positive impact on understanding.</p> <p>Managers assumed to understand the strategy.</p> <p>Managers play a crucial role in implementing and understanding the strategy to make it concrete.</p> <p>Position in the organization experienced to help understand the strategy.</p>	<p>At each level of the hierarchy, a higher level was assumed to understand the strategy and its content.</p> <p>The hierarchy is perceived to affect access to information about the strategy.</p>

Table 2 Concluding key findings.

6. Discussion

The study contributes to the discussion on the development of the strategy implementation process and how it can be enhanced by sensemaking theory. The study highlights the most common factors that influence a case organization's efforts toward more effective strategy implementation. This chapter outlines the main research findings and presents the theoretical and managerial implications. Finally, the chapter presents the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

To answer the research question "How can the strategy implementation process be enhanced by applying sensemaking theory at different hierarchical levels?" the study has three objectives, which are answered in the following chapter: 1) How strategy is understood at different levels of the organization 2) The role of sensemaking in strategy implementation across hierarchical levels of an organization. 3) Determine how to increase the strategy's influence through communication.

Clarifying the strategy's terminology for staff can have a positive impact, as can using indicators to monitor the measurement of objectives. The manager was seen as an influencer in understanding the strategy, which creates a role for the manager where a person can significantly influence the understanding of the strategy at each level of the hierarchy. With managers at every level influencing the understanding of the strategy, it is important that managers have the same understanding of the strategy. Increased communication of strategy through different channels can influence the implementation of strategy, contributing to the strategic orientation of employees and the achievement of the strategic goals of the organization. Informants emphasized that strategy is abstract, and bringing concreteness to strategy can be seen from the perspective of sensemaking theory as a factor that creates coherence in the understanding of strategy in an organization. The implications for management are discussed in more detail in section 6.3.

6.1 Main findings

The first objective was to find out how staff at different levels of the hierarchy understood the strategy. In the case company, staff described the organization's strategic objectives as a unified goal of growing the business and positioning themselves in a quality mindset that was consistent with the strategy. Although the strategy and its objectives were described coherently, opinions on the strategy were divided. Six informants considered the strategy to be good, while five raised issues that made the strategy partially unclear or required further development in order to complete the strategy implementation process effectively.

The informants highlighted issues in the terminology of the strategy, the implementation timetable, and the monitoring of implementation, which have a potentially negative impact on implementation. Regarding the terminology of the strategy, the lack of clarity of the terminology related to the quality image and how to measure the desired quality was perceived as unclear. The timeframe for the strategy was seen by informants as tight, given the strategy's performance targets, recruitment, and the potential new competencies and resources required from the organization. The indicators to measure the achievement of the strategy's objectives were perceived by informants' responses as needing improvement. The indicators related to business profitability and growth were perceived as clearly measurable, but those related to staff competencies and quality of services were perceived as lacking.

The second objective of the study was to explore the role of sensemaking theory in strategy implementation at different levels of the hierarchy in a case organization. The impact of sensemaking theory in the case organization is reflected in the influence of managers on the sensemaking process. Informants from different levels of the hierarchy reported that by discussing the strategy, managers help to understand the strategy and its content better. Managers are in a position in the organization through which strategy implementation can be influenced negatively or positively to create a coherent understanding of the strategy.

As informants draw conclusions as individuals during the sensemaking process from external factors and interactions with other members of the organization, ambiguities in strategy terminology brought up in interviews can negatively affect strategy implementation if explanations created by individuals during the sensemaking process are incorrect and shared in interaction situations. This can negatively affect not only the individual but also other members of the organization in the sensemaking process and, consequently, the implementation of the strategy of the case organization.

Informants reported that various factors such as increasing time resources, making the strategy more concrete, increasing the length of the organization's work, and increasing communication contribute to the understanding of the strategy, which is a matter of influencing the factors of the individual's sensemaking process. During the sensemaking process, the individual perceives things through seven different channels, through their own identity, retrospectively by reflecting on past experiences, by sensing the environment, socially through interactions with others, through continuous sensemaking, through environmental cues, and through credibility. The scarcity of temporal resources affects the sensemaking process by undermining the individual's ability to use the sensemaking process, which may lead the individual to draw incorrect conclusions about the strategy and its content. The length of time working in an organization affects the individual's sensemaking process through retrospectively, allowing the individual to mirror past experiences. Concretization of the strategy affects the individual through continuous sensemaking and sensing of the environment.

The third objective of the study was to identify ways to increase the impact of strategy implementation through communication. There were clear recurring features in the informants' answers regarding communication. The lack of communication on strategy and the lack of clarity on strategy terminology. The majority of informants perceived communication to have taken place at the launch of the strategy and at various meetings. In terms of terminology, informants highlighted the lack of clarity about what specific terms

in the strategy mean from an employee's perspective and how to act in accordance with the terms. In terms of strategy implementation, ongoing strategy communication is seen as a critical tool for communicating strategy, but there is a risk that strategy communication does not take up an undue amount of the organization's time from operational work.

Ambiguities in strategy terminology affect strategy implementation at the individual level. In order to achieve a coherent strategy implementation, clarification and harmonization of communication across all levels of the hierarchy of the case organization and between units will facilitate communication.

Informants described the strategy as one of growth and high quality. Given the number of interviewees, representing around 32% of the case organization, the organization had a better understanding of the strategy than typical organizations. According to a study from Kaplan & Norton (Kaplan et al., 2005), only 5% of the employees in the organization know or understand the strategy of the organization. For an organization's employees to be able to implement a strategy, they need to understand the strategy, its objectives and its meaning. From the perspective of the case organization, it is positive that the informants were able to describe the strategy and its message in a coherent way.

Strategy can be described as the conscious and purposeful taking of actions and decisions to achieve organizational success. The strategy provides direction and identity and creates coherence in the work of employees. Once a strategy has been created for an organization, it is worth considering whether the strategy answers the question of why and where the organization is aiming with its strategy and why employees would implement it. (Vuorinen et al., 2023, p. 14) At a theoretical level, strategy is described in many different ways, depending on the school of thought. Common to these descriptions are the conscious actions and decisions taken to pursue the objectives of the organization. When asked about the importance of strategy for the organization, more than half of the respondents described strategy as an organizational plan. Another theoretical description of strategy that emerged in informants' descriptions was the importance of strategy

as a direction for the organization and a path to follow. The answers refer to Mintzberg's (1987) definition of strategy, which can be described as plan, ploy, pattern, position and perspective.

Opinions on the strategy were divided. Six of those interviewed considered the strategy to be good or very good. The remainder saw room for improvement, resulting in neutral opinions. If the opinions of employees are not recognized or acknowledged by the organization's management, this can lead to a loss of motivation and commitment. From the point of view of the case organization, it is vital that employees' opinions on the strategy are identified in order to minimize any negative impact on the implementation of the strategy at the employee level. Employees' attitudes in an organization are influenced by their position. Those in leadership positions identify more strongly with the organization and are more committed to it than those in non-leadership positions (Van Riel et al., 2009, pp. 1202, 1214). More than half of the informants say that the strategy is reflected in concrete terms in increased sales efforts. The majority of informants see their role in the implementation of the strategy as a single implementer within the organization. The above is partly explained by the positioning of the informants used in the case study within the hierarchy of the case organization. As explained in the data collection section, the informants used are employees from different levels of the hierarchy of the organization.

To measure the achievement of the strategy's objectives, the interviewees mentioned financial indicators such as sales, turnover and EBIT. According to Allio (2005) indicators create a common language and, therefore, have a positive impact on the implementation of the strategy. Informants highlighted the need to measure the achievement of more abstract objectives, such as quality and objectives related to staff practices.

The case organization should promote employee motivation, by building capacity to implement the strategy and by communicating the strategy (Van Riel et al., 2009, p. 1222).

The informants identified communication and related factors as the primary development points in the strategy implementation process in the case organization.

All informants felt that the communication of the strategy needed to be improved. Various elements of strategy communication were highlighted that would allow for a better understanding and implementation of the strategy at the individual level. According to the informants, communication, making the strategy concrete and clarifying the terminology of the strategy contribute to a better understanding of the strategy. The role of the manager in understanding the strategy was also perceived as necessary because communicating with the manager is perceived to bring clarity to the strategy, which also makes managers responsible for communicating the strategy. As a rule, one's own position in the organization was perceived as helping to understand the strategy. Factors that influence understanding of strategy through position, according to informants, are work experience in the same organization and access to information that contributes to understanding strategy. Informants also raised the issue of the weakening of strategy implementation within the organization if people in managerial positions do not understand the strategy or misunderstand it.

Top management has an influential role in strategy implementation. If they are not actively involved in the process, meanings for the strategy are created informally. This creates a situation where misinterpretations of strategy are possible, negatively affecting strategy implementation by trickling down from middle management to the lowest level of the hierarchy. (Friesl et al., 2021, p. 8)

The purpose of the case study is to develop the strategy implementation process of a case organization and to contribute to the general debate by demonstrating the impact of the factors found in the study on strategy implementation. In addition, this study focused on how staff perceive the process of communicating and implementing the strategy and what challenges are encountered on the way to effective strategy implementation. The study highlighted the most common problematic factors that hinder the

company's efforts to achieve the strategy's objectives. The study also suggested elements of successful strategy implementation. This chapter presents the main findings of the study and outlines the theoretical and implementation implications from the perspective of communication and sensemaking theory. Finally, the chapter presents the limitations of the study and suggestions for further research.

To understand how to influence strategy implementation through communication and sensemaking theory, the study explored how strategy as a term, how strategy is perceived, how it affects employees, and how strategy implementation can be made more effective. The study used the research question "How can the strategy implementation process be enhanced by applying sensemaking theory at different hierarchical levels?" to answer the research question, the research objective was to fill the research gaps: 1) Find out how strategy is understood at different levels of the organization. 2) Find out the role of sensemaking in strategy implementation across hierarchical levels of an organization. 3) Find out what are the ways to increase the influence of the strategy through communication.

6.2 Theoretical implications

This study contributes to existing theories on strategy, strategy implementation, strategy communication, and how sensemaking relates to them. Using sensemaking theory to enhance the strategy implementation process, a wide range of research was conducted to explore how a case organization should develop a strategy implementation process to enhance strategy implementation and the achievement of strategy objectives. Using sensemaking theory to enhance the strategy implementation process, a wide range of research was conducted to explore how a case organization should develop a strategy implementation process to enhance strategy implementation and the achievement of strategy objectives. How does strategy guide an organization's pattern of actions (Mintzberg, 1987), and how implementation (Whittington et al 2020) is an essential part of achieving strategy goals and communicating strategy, connects employees to strategy and implementation (Ritakallio & Vuori, 2018, p. 153). However, tying these three

elements together does not necessarily produce the desired outcome for organizations. Sensemaking theory adds a component to this triad that can enhance individual understanding of strategy and thus improve strategy implementation (Maitlis, 2005, p. 21; Weick, 1995).

Understanding the benefits of sensemaking theory in strategy implementation processes has considerable theoretical significance in the following areas. The study seeks to answer questions that the literature review cannot answer in the case of a case organization. The literature review cannot answer the questions related to the study's objectives and the case company. The gaps that the literature review cannot answer are how strategy is understood at different hierarchical levels in the case company and provide insight into the role of sensemaking in the implementation of strategy in the case company at different hierarchical levels. The strategy implementation process can be enhanced by applying sensemaking theory in the case company while managers influence the sensemaking process among employees lower down the hierarchy. It is not known precisely how managers, in the case company, influence the sensemaking process and what the effects are. The theory cannot answer questions about how the case company communicates its objectives and develops plans to achieve its objectives and key policies. To improve strategy implementation, it is necessary to examine the role of sensemaking in strategy implementation at different hierarchical levels of the case company. To improve the implementation of the strategy, it is necessary to know how the case company communicates its strategy, in what form, and whether employees understand the information they receive.

When compared to existing literature, the results of the study support the existing sensemaking literature. In the case of the case organization, managers at each level of the organizational hierarchy had a key influence on individuals' understanding of strategy through the sensemaking process, as discussed by Maitlis & Christianson (2014).

6.3 Managerial implications

The first aim of this study was to find out how strategy is understood at different levels of the hierarchy in the case organization. The informants could describe the main features of strategy but did not understand the strategic terminology or found it unclear. Clarifying the terminology used in the strategy for staff can have a positive impact, together with using indicators designed to monitor the measurement of objectives. The above factors influence strategy implementation through individual sensemaking, helping to unify the understanding of strategy in the case organization.

The role of the sensemaking process can be seen as similar at hierarchical levels. Informants saw the manager as an influencer in understanding strategy, which creates a role for the manager to significantly influence the understanding of strategy at each level of the hierarchy. With managers at every level influencing the understanding of the strategy, it is important that managers have the same understanding of the strategy. The role of sensemaking can also be observed outside the managerial interaction. The sensemaking process is influenced by the individual's perceptions of the environment and communication with other organization members. Thus, increasing the communication of strategy through different channels can impact strategy implementation, which contributes to the strategic alignment of employees and the achievement of the organization's strategic goals. The informants highlighted the strategy experience as ambiguous, and bringing concreteness to strategy can be seen from the perspective of sensemaking theory as a factor that creates coherence in the understanding of strategy within the organization.

6.4 Limitations

It is essential to understand the limitations of systematically collected data, which prevent us from understanding the phenomena studied. The first limitation of this study concerns its methodological approach. A case study aims to collect detailed information on a single case, in this case, a case organization. The second limitation is the qualitative

approach of the study, which seeks to understand interpretations as well as different perspectives (Hirsjärvi et al., 2009, pp. 134,160-161). The aim of this study is to understand how the target company's employees understand the strategy and how the implementation of the strategy could be improved by using the theory of communication and sensemaking. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized, as the experiences of the informants are strongly dependent on the case organization. Nevertheless, the results of the study add insights into the factors that influence strategy implementation, the challenges of the implementation process, the impact of sensemaking theory at different levels of the hierarchy, and the role of the manager from a sensemaking perspective.

The interview questions could have been more specific to serve the research questions better. The layout and structure of the questions could have been better formulated to make the interviews more in-depth. Restructuring the structure and interview questions would also have made it easier for the researcher to answer the research questions, as the interview questions would have served the core themes more precisely. For example, in the interview structure, two of the questions related to communication were too similar, which may have had an impact on the quality of the responses. On the other hand, the informants' responses indicated that the questions were understood in the way the researcher had intended. The study could also have focused more on sensemaking theory and its use and implications in strategy implementation processes, helping to understand the topic more broadly and bringing new insights into practice and theory.

6.5 Suggestions for the future research

This study offers several opportunities for future research. This study looked at how strategy implementation could be developed in a case study organization. It would be interesting to conduct a new study focusing on the impact of sensemaking in companies of different sizes or in different sectors. What differences are observed in a large multinational company compared to a company with only a few employees, for example start-ups. In either case, can sensemaking be used more or differently to enhance the strategy

implementation process in organizations and how are strategies perceived in large companies compared to small companies? How does the role of the manager in the sense-making process differ among employees in these companies?

The second proposal theme is strongly related to the theme of this study and would be a viable research opportunity for the continuation of this study. The proposal is to examine how the process of implementing strategy in an organization has evolved and whether the objectives of the strategy have been achieved. It would be interesting to investigate the most effective ways of engaging staff to act in a way that supports the achievement of the strategy's objectives. Thirdly, the study highlighted the role of sense-making in strategy implementation, thus the use of sensemaking, for example, in organizational training situations, could be explored in more depth.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview Questions

Tietoon perustuva suostumus - menettelyn selittäminen on tarpeen ja haastateltavan suostumus tallentamiseen.

1. Miksi tämä tutkimus tehdään?
2. Miten tietoja käytetään?
3. Voidaanko tallentaa?
4. Onko vielä jotain kysyttävää?

Interview time approximately one hour.

Informed consent – explaining the procedure is needed and getting interviewee's agreement to record

5. Why this research is done?
6. How will the data be used?
7. Can you record?
8. Do they have any remaining questions?

Yleiset kysymykset

- Kertoisitko ammattillisesta taustastasi sekä kauan olet työskennellyt yrityksessä?

Strategia

- Mitkä ovat yrityksen strategian tavoitteet?

- Kuvailisitko strategian? Kertoisitko strategian viestin?

- Mitä mieltä olet yrityksen strategiasta?

Strategian implementointi

- Kuinka strategia näkyy työskentelyssäsi?
- Kuinka näet roolisi strategian toteuttamisessa?
- Mitkä asiat voivat mielestäsi vaikuttaa negatiivisesti tai positiivisesti strategian implementointiin?
- Kuinka tavoitteisiin pääsyä mitataan ja saavutetaan käytännössä?
- Millä tavoilla motivaatiosi toteuttaa strategiaa voitaisiin lisätä?
- Kuinka kehittäisit strategian implementointiprosessia?

Strategian kommunikointi

- Miten strategiaa viestitään?
- Millä tavoilla strategiaa viestitään yrityksessä?
- Onko strategian viestintä selkeää?
- Voisiko strategian viestintää mielestäsi kehittää, jos voisi niin miten?

Sensemaking

- Miten ymmärrät strategian merkityksen?
- Mitkä keinot auttavat sinua ymmärtämään strategian?
- Miten näet esimiehesi roolin strategian ymmärtämisessäsi? Millä tavoin he auttavat sinua ymmärtämään ja toteuttamaan strategiaa käytännössä?

- Mitkä tekijät voisivat edistää strategian ymmärtämistäsi?
- Miten asemasi yrityksessä auttaa tai estää sinua ymmärtämästä strategiaa?

Lopetus kysymykset

- Onko jotain mitä haluaisit tuoda esille tässä haastattelussa?

General questions

- Can you tell us about your professional background and how long you have worked for the company?

Strategy

- What are the objectives of the company's strategy?
- Could you describe the strategy?
- Describe the message of the strategy?
- What do you think about the company's strategy?

Strategy implementation

- How is the strategy reflected in your work?
- How do you see your role in implementing the strategy?
- What do you think could have a negative or positive impact on the implementation of the strategy?
- How will the achievement of the objectives be measured and achieved in practice?
- In what ways could your motivation to implement the strategy be increased?
- How would you improve the strategy implementation process?

Communicating the strategy

- How is the strategy communicated within the company?
- Is strategy communication clear?
- How is the strategy communicated?
- Do you think that strategy communication could be improved, and if so, how?

Sensemaking

- How do you understand the meaning of strategy?
- Which ways help you to understand the strategy?
- How do you see the role of your supervisor in your of comprehension of the strategy?
In what ways do they help you to understand and put the strategy into practice?
- What factors could contribute to your understanding of the strategy?
- How your position in the company helps of prevents you from understanding of the strategy?

Concluding questions

- Is there anything you would like to highlight in this interview?