

# **Strategy Implementation to the Workforce of Healthcare Organizations: Challenges and Facilitators**

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**There has been a lot of research about how top management should implement their strategy. However, there has only little been written or researched about the strategy implementation to the workforce. For instance, what are the experiences of the employees in terms of challenges and facilitators of strategy implementation. How could the workforce influence the success of strategy implementation? The goal of this research is to create an understanding on how the workforce experiences the strategy implementation and how they can contribute to a successful strategy implementation. This paper suggests that there are several barriers and facilitators for employees by implementing a strategy. For instance, good communication, involvement of employees and a open organizational culture are experienced as facilitators. But on the other hand, uncertainty, not being informed well and the time frame of implementation are barriers for a successful strategy implementation to the workforce.**

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## **Keywords**

strategy implementation, strategy execution, workforce, challenges, Workforce Scorecard, workforce success

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Chandler (1963) strategy is 'the determination of the long-run goals and objectives of an enterprise and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resource necessary for carrying out these goals'. Strategy is therefore setting the long-run goals for a company for each individual. Managers as well as other employees act in order to achieve the long-term goals. The three main branches of strategy are context, content and process. Each of these is important to effective strategy-making (Johnson, Whittington and Scholes, 2011). The process phase is about the formation and implementation.

The strategy implementation process is not an easy thing to do, but it is important for an organization and therefore needs a lot of attention. Strategy implementation demands planning, discipline, motivation and controlling processes. The implementation process is a process which normally demands much more energy and time than the formulation process of the strategy. 'But it's worth the effort' (Raps, 2004). Making a strategy implementation work throughout the organization, is quite difficult (Hrebiniak, 2006). Effective implementation of a strategy requires an coordinated and appropriate effort of individuals throughout an organization. The behavior of not only top managers and directors, but also middle managers and other employees within an organization have important consequences for how strategy forms within the organization.

## 1.1 Problem Statement

In the literature little has been written or researched about the implementation of a strategy to the workforce. Several researchers have emphasized the role of top management and middle management in the strategy implementation process. But unfortunately, only few researchers have studied the impact of the non-management, the workforce, on strategy implementation (Mazzola & Kellermans, 2010). Noble (1999) states: *'The lack of shared knowledge with lower-level management and non-management employees creates a barrier to successful strategy implementation.'*

Non-management employees may delay or even prevent strategic changes in an organization, that they find threatening or disagreeable (Nutt, 1983). Mintzberg (1985) argues that realized strategy forms from deliberate influences emanating at the top of an organization, as well as emergent influences at middle and lower levels of the organization.

Nowadays, a lot of companies are subject to change, for example companies in the healthcare sector. In this sector, a lot is going on in terms of financial and legal forces. There are a lot of cutbacks, companies need to adjust their strategy accordingly to this. Because of this fact, it is very interesting to investigate the strategy implementation in the healthcare sector. It is useful to provide an insight into what are the experiences of the workforce about the changes in the company, especially in terms of strategy implementation and strategy changes. The results of this research can contribute to the understanding of CEO's about strategy implementation to the workforce. This is the practical relevance of this research. As mentioned before, in the literature only little has been written or researched about the strategy implementation to the workforce. Therefore, this research has academic relevance. This importance to investigate strategy implementation to the workforce, is due to the lack of existing knowledge about this field of expertise.

## 1.2 Research question

The goal of this research is to identify the experiences of the workforce of strategy implementation and approaches how to tackle challenges of strategy implementation to the workforce,

within the healthcare sector. The research question that arises from this is: *How can the workforce contribute to a successful strategy implementation, in healthcare organizations?* To support this research question, several sub questions are presented: *How does the workforce in health care organization experience the strategy implementation process? What challenges of strategy implementation does the workforce encounter? And what are the solutions to overcome these challenges?* In order to answer these questions, a literature review is done on the characteristics of workforce success. Additionally, several interviews are conducted to find out what the experiences of the workforce on strategy implementation are and what the challenges and barriers are in this implementation process.

# 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical framework will provide essential information that contributes to answering the research question. Underlying theory and existing scientific knowledge is explained. This section is divided in different parts, the elements of the Workforce Scorecard that is used for this research.

There is a wide variety of models about strategy implementation. These models focus on different aspects of organizations, and pay only little attention to the workforce. The eight-lever model of Crittenden and Crittenden, is an example of a model for strategy implementation. This model focus especially on the management strategists. The authors of this model suggest that implementation is comprised of two main variables, structures and managerial skills (Crittenden and Crittenden, 2008). Another model that looks at strategy implementation is the management control systems of Anthony (Anthony, 1965). These models do not pay attention to the workforce. In contrast to these models, the Workforce Scorecard does pay attention to the strategy execution to the workforce. Therefore, to understand the strategy execution to the workforce, the Workforce Scorecard of Beatty, Becker and Huselid (2005) is used. This model is more applicable to investigate the strategy implementation process to the workforce, because the focus is on the workforce. Another reason to use this model is because the Workforce Scorecard illustrates in a clear and cogent manner how to turn strategy into strategy implementation by focusing on elements of workforce success that can be tracked and monitored.

According to Kaplan and Norton (2004), there is an increasing importance of intangible assets within organizations. When intangible assets play an important role within organizations, strategy implementation process need to address the mobilization and alignment of these intangible assets (Kaplan and Norton, 2004). Healthcare organizations deliver different services to their clients. These services are provided by their employees. So these employees are important intangible assets for the healthcare organizations, and therefore the mobilization and alignment of these intangible assets is of value for the strategy implementation in these organizations.

## 2.1 Workforce Scorecard

The Workforce Scorecard will help to understand to create an understanding why human capital is helping the organization or why it needs additional development itself. With this model the management can act to help the firm succeed and identify priority areas for the workforce. The Workforce Scorecard focuses on the intangible assets and therefore is useful. Beatty, Becker and Huselid (2005) put the important aspects of workforce success into four categories:

1. *Workforce success.* This segment is about the HR's deliverables, mind-set, culture, behaviors and competencies that drive operational, financial and customer strategies, the unique identity of the organization.
2. *Workforce mind-set and culture.* Every organization create expectations and norms that the workforce needs to understand. The employee behavior shapes the culture, and the culture shapes the employee behavior. Culture can be measured and assessed in terms of its impact on the company's strategic success.
3. *Workforce competencies.* This represents the knowledge, ability and skills of an employee. Competencies, what each employee is able to do. These competencies can be measured and monitored.
4. *Leadership and workforce behaviors.* It is important that leaders and employees behave in ways consistent with the strategy for it to be executed. These behaviors can be defined and measured to ensure that leaders and employees do what the company's strategy suggest needs to be done.

With these elements, the measures to adopt can be identified. When these categories are aligned with the business strategy, a prospect is defined about how the firm's strategy can be implemented. To add value to the company, organizations need employees to apply the right knowledge. Managers should use both prospective (leading) and retrospective (lagging) indicators in planning and using human resources measures (Weatherly, 2003).

The Workforce Scorecard is based on a system of leading and lagging indicators of firm success and acknowledge the importance of both tangible and intangible assets. This model is as much about managing workforce success as it is about measuring workforce success. It is about the focus on the strategic performance of employees. The Workforce Scorecard is designed to provide the company with current and strategically relevant measures of workforce performance and the leading indicators of this performance. Senior executives generally have very restricted tools for measuring workforce success or they holding line managers responsible for workforce performance (Beatty, Becker and Huselid, 2005). For the workforce to have impact, the organization need good measures. In order to establish impact of the workforce, proper measurements are crucial. Even if the right things are not accepted or will not be used, this will have little total impact (Beatty, Becker and Huselid, 2005). According to the authors of this model, the key dimensions of the strategy execution process include operational and customer success, which in turn help generate financial success. Workforce success is frequently the key performance driver, directly or indirectly, for elements of strategic success. This is shown in the next figure:

Managing Human Capital to Execute Strategy

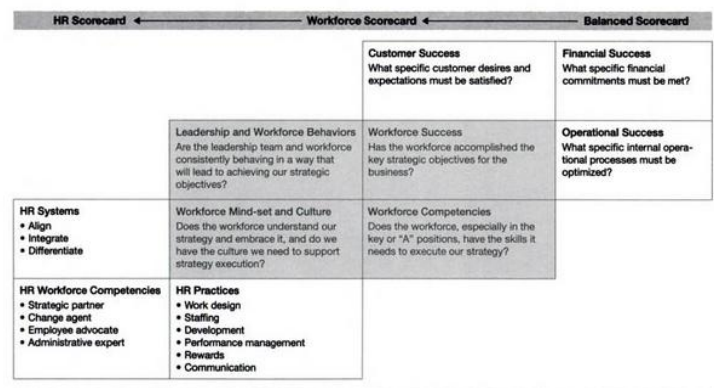


Figure 1. Workforce scorecard of Becker, Beatty and Huselid.(2005)

## 2.2 Workforce Success

Organizations will usually begin with identifying a business outcome (workforce success) and then explore the relationship between that business outcome and a single leading indicator in the Workforce Scorecard (like leadership competencies).

The Workforce Success is the most important dimension on the Workforce Scorecard. The reason for this is, that is it captures the 'bottom-line' workforce performance. This shows how well the workforce has contributed to the implementation of the firm's strategy. The workforce success could be influenced by the three other elements; behaviors, competencies and mind-set and culture. The contribution of the three factors to workforce success can be graphically represented:

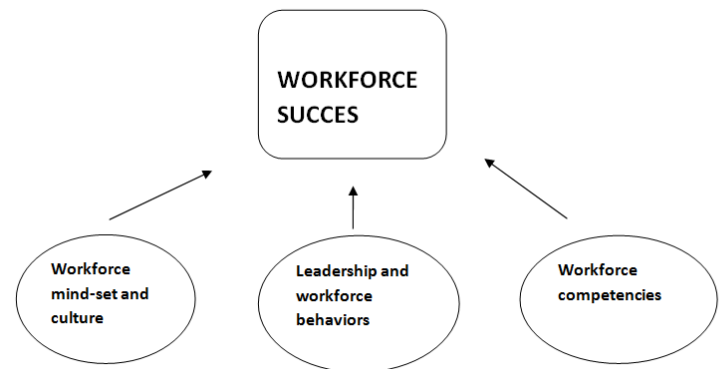


Figure 2. The workforce success

Workforce success is thus the main lagging indicator for measuring the performance of the workforce (Beatty, Becker and Huselid, 2005).

The other three elements of the Workforce Scorecard, behaviors, competencies and mind-set and culture, are leading indicators of workforce success. These measures are important because they capture the drivers of workforce success and show where line managers need to invest in order to maximize workforce success.

## 2.3 Leadership and workforce behavior

The most immediate lagging indicator is the behaviors of the leadership team and the workforce (Beatty, Becker and Huselid, 2005). According to Van der Maas (2013) when leaders practice moral virtues such as fairness, integrity, honesty, loyalty, determination, courage and responsibility increases the readiness of the workforce to follow the leader. He stated that having a people-oriented management style is a key factor for successful implementation. Not only is it important to communicate the strategy to the people but also to listen to their reactions to the strategy. Employees are more accepting of undesirable decisions when they receive clear and adequate explanations for those decisions (Van der Maas, 2013). Van der Maas (2013) argued that managers need to develop an empowering and fearless culture in which employees dare to take initiative, voice their opinion and are not afraid to make mistakes.

According to Kim & Mauborgne, it is important to establish fair strategy processes. When the workforce perceive a process as fair, they take initiative in implementing the strategy and go beyond the call of duty. They stated that to create a fair strategy process the following criteria is needed; 1) involve people in the strategy process and in the strategic decisions that affect them, by asking them for their input and feedback. 2) Explain to the workforce why final strategic decisions were made. 3) State the (new) behaviors you expect from the people in a clear way. And be clear about what will happen if they fail to accomplish them (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005).

Employees are likely to be cynical about organizational change because of the following reasons: feeling uninformed, lack of communication and respect from managers, negative disposition and lacking participation in decision-making (Reichers et al, 1997). Employee commitment is very important in this. Employee commitment can be secured by involving employees in the strategy formulation and implementation process. When employees think that it is (partly) their plan, they are more committed and supportive of the plan. Another way of increasing employee commitment is by clearly communicating the strategy of employees (Van der Maas, 2013).

## 2.4 Workforce competencies

Workforce competencies are the skills, abilities, knowledge and personality characteristics that serve as the establishment for workforce behaviors. Adequately trained staff is very critical for top management to ensure successful strategy implementation. Implementing a new strategy often requires new activities and ways of thinking. This can be learned by training and educating employees. Training and education improves employee skills, knowledge, and self-confidence and makes them perform better (Beatty, Becker and Huselid, 2005). Participation allows management to get knowledge of the specialized knowledge of lower-level employees, which can improve the strategy and its execution. A strategy that is developed and implemented without participation of appropriate employees is likely to be resisted during implementation. When employees feel that they have meaningful input in the strategy they aim to be very committed to that strategy (Van der Maas, 2013).

According to Van der Maas (2013), when organizational members have a high sense of implementation self-efficacy and believe that they can perform the new strategy implementation tasks successfully, they are more likely to perform well. Contrary, organizational members with low self-efficacy have little ambition to execute new tasks, especially more complex and unfamiliar tasks. As strategy implementation often entails new and unfamiliar tasks, this negatively influences the

implementation effort. Even when organizational members do have the required capabilities they can be afraid to take on a job with more responsibility, which entails more risk. Another result of low self-efficacy may be that, organizational members can become afraid to make mistakes, take initiative, and participate in decision-making (Van der Maas, 2013). A low implementation self-efficacy may stem from a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem. An authoritarian management style may be another source of low self-efficacy. When organizational members are not rewarded when they perform well but do get criticism when mistakes are made this may lower their implementation self-efficacy as well. Managers can increase the level of self-efficacy of employees through coaching and counseling, rewarding performance, a people-oriented management style and by creating an organizational culture in which people are able to make mistakes and learn from them (Van der Maas, 2013).

## 2.5 Workforce mind-set and culture

Workforce behaviors are in part driven by the larger culture of the organization, particularly around the role of performance. Culture reflects a firm's fundamental assumptions and values about what behaviors are appropriate throughout the organization, and it is critical that a firm has a workforce culture that is both high performance and strategic. Organizational culture refers to shared assumptions, values and norms (Schein, 1985). According to Barney (1991) organizational culture is a source of sustained competitive advantage and Deal and Kennedy (1982) stated that empirical research shows that it is a key factor to organizational effectiveness. Workforce culture needs to strengthen the thought that some jobs and positions are more strategic and more valuable, because of their direct influence on key strategy drivers (Huselid, Becker and Beatty, 2005). According to Van der Maas (2013) better social relations increase the cooperation, motivation, and effectiveness of organizational members.

To implement a strategy successfully, proactive organizational members are needed who participate in strategy formulation and implementation. In order to participate, organizational members need to dare to take initiative, voice their opinion, and not be afraid to make mistakes. Therefore, an empowering and fearless organization culture needs to be created in which organizational members are able to make mistakes without being punished for it. When organizational members believe that well-intentioned interpersonal risks will not be punished, this fosters learning behavior (Edmondson, 1999). All these aspects influences the impact of strategy implementation process.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to illustrate the characteristics of the experiences of the workforce about the strategy execution process. This allows us to see how they can contribute to a successful strategy implementation. Therefore this is a combination of descriptive and explanatory research. The empirical data is gathered by interviews among nurses. In the first instance, employees of three different health care organizations were interviewed in order to compare these organizations. What are the differences in experiences between the employees of the organizations. Semi-structured interviews are used to gather the data. In semi-structured interviews a list of specific questions will be used, to define the areas that need to be explored. But there is also some freedom for interviewer and respondents to discuss certain topics and add information. The respondents first are asked to participate and they have done this voluntarily.

The results of the interviews are used to investigate how the companies implement their strategy into the company, especially to the workforce. How are the four categories of the Workforce Scorecard presented in the company and what challenges do the employees experience? The Workforce Scorecard model, mentioned above, will help to give an answer on how goes the process of strategy implementation, and what are the experiences of the workforce about strategy implementation. What are their challenges in this process.

As mentioned before, employees of three healthcare companies are interviewed. Of each company three employees have been interviewed. These employees worked on the lower level of the organization. The criteria for these respondents, was that he/she must work in the company at least half a year. Because they must have had the time to be well informed about the strategy. Their findings are stated and linked to the theory. The results are presented and analyzed in the next section. Appendix I shows a template of the interview that was conducted with the employees of the healthcare organizations.

## 4. RESULTS

The answers of the interviews will be presented in a qualitative way. Summaries of the findings are provided in the following section, 4.1. In this section the main information given in each interview is separately outlined. Thereafter, a cross case analysis is performed.

### 4.1 Results per interview

The first set of interviews was performed with district nurses of healthcare organization X. This organization has 4723 employees, representing 2295 FTE in 2013. As stated before, healthcare organizations are subject to change. This resulted at organization X in removing several layers on a managerial level. Two of the three respondents were unanimous about the fact that this elimination of layers is one of the main barriers of a successful strategy implementation. In contrast, the third respondent did not have a positive nor a negative attitude towards this removal. According to her, communication lines were still short enough.

#### 4.1.1 Respondent 1 of organization X

The first respondent experienced that the management team is more physical remote, and this is identified as a barrier. The communication lines are still short but the number of interactions declined. Communication between management and the workforce occurs especially by e-mail instead of personal contact. Another challenge for the management is that they could listen more to the workforce in terms of experiences and point for improvement. However, the respondent also mentions that it is possible yet to put forward this feedback (it just could be extended).

To the factor mind-set & culture she explained that the culture became much more formal, more independent and more individualistic. The workforce can take initiative and they do not experience a culture of fear. They dare to speak about their opinion and problems.

To the factor competencies this respondent believes that the workforce should master the nurse processes, should think 'out of the box', be open and flexible and the workforce should give feedback to their colleagues about strategy implementation. This knowledge about the strategy decisions is available on the intranet and they have the opportunity to learn about changes in the strategy through workshops. But she would rather go to a care-related lecture, more than a lecture about the organization.

She stated that the leadership style has also changed. Before the big change in healthcare organizations, it was more clear and

the manager was closer to the workforce. Nowadays, someone within the team takes the leadership role, but this respondent prefers a leader from the management who is closer to the workforce. The workforce can give feedback and improvement ideas to the management team. This team has an open attitude for feedback and improvements of employees. Different projects about strategy changes are present, hence the respondent misses a long term evaluation on these projects.

Overall, this respondent finds the competencies very important for the implementation of a strategy. When a manager lacks the capacity to implement a strategy, it becomes difficult to have a successful strategy implementation. The culture facilitates the job satisfaction and this culture has changed because of the changes in healthcare. All three the aspects are identified to influence the success of strategy implementation to the workforce.

#### 4.1.2 Respondent 2 of organization X

The second interview was also held with a district nurse of organization X. She stated that the strategy today is questionable. A majority of knowledge about strategy is available on the intranet. But in practice, it is up to workforce to decide whether they deal actively with this knowledge or not. This respondent confirmed the increasing remote of the management as a barrier of strategy implementation. She stated that there is a lot of uncertainty at employee level: uncertainty about the role of manager and about the expectations from the management to the workforce. According to her, a significant number of employees has a seeking attitude. The workforce has to figure out how to implement the change in their team and how to fit this change in the existing culture. She experienced a lack of horizontal collaboration between different teams, teams are very self-contained. Therefore, she finds it difficult to say whether the strategy successful is implemented or not. In addition, she mentioned confusion about the future and it is up to the management to create some certainty. The management has deployed team coaches to manage and support the strategy changes. A challenge for the management, according to this respondent, is also the communication. The management should communicate in a more clear manner and has to make explicit agreements. Another important aspect according to the respondent is the fact that the management should have an in-depth understanding of the content and applicability of the strategy. This respondent also confirmed that the management should evaluate more about the different strategy changes. They stressed that a successful strategy implementation could occur when the management team explains well why some changes should be done and the long-term goals should be clear. According to the first two respondents, these are points of improvement within this organization. The management should look at the implementation together with the workforce. What is going well and what should be improved?

To the factor mind-set & culture she stated that the culture within the team is as 'We go for it'. But again, the uncertainty impedes this. This respondent confirmed the possibility for employees to take initiative, about new ideas and improvements.

About the competencies, she stated that employees need to be patient, open, flexible, responsible and a proactive attitude towards the strategy. As a facilitator for strategy implementation she mentioned the so called key-users, the employees who are educated about a certain strategy before it actually is implemented.

Again, the physical distance of the manager is indicated as a barrier for strategy implementation. Hence, she does not experience a mental distance. Despite the fact that the manager

operates on a higher level, it feels like the manager is on the same level and thinks along with the employees. Overall, she stated that the aspect culture, competencies and leadership style and behaviors are equally important. These aspects could influence the motivation of the employees and therefore also the strategy implementation. The most important thing, according to her, is the communication across the management team and the workforce and a successful strategy implementation could occur through the removal of uncertainty.

#### *4.1.3 respondent 3 of organization X*

The third interview was held with a nurse specialist of organization X. She stated that management team communicates sufficient about strategy. She identified communication as a contributor for successful implementing a strategy. But, according to her, it especially depends on whether the employees want to be informed or not. She experienced the management team as open and accessible, but the workforce need to have a proactive attitude. She argued the intranet as an aspect for improvement. To implement the strategy more successfully, she stated that the intranet should be used more as a communication tool. The employees should use the intranet for example to give each other advice and ask questions to experts.

To the factor mind-set & culture, she explained that the culture strongly support the strategy implementation process. She experienced the culture as social, accessible, friendly and open and according to her this is very important for the implementation of new plans. This respondent confirmed the fact that employees could voice their opinion and are able to make mistakes without being punished. Again, she did not experienced a culture with fear. A point for improvement is according to this respondent the rewarding process. Sometimes it would be nice for the workforce to get more appreciation from the management. This might be difficult for the management team, but it would increase the motivation of the employees. According to this respondent the workforce need some competencies to successfully implement the strategy; be patient, be flexible, be open, be willing to change, be motivated, see added value of the strategy.

Overall, she find all three elements equally important, they are inherent to each other. But culture and leadership are especially important. If they are well matched, you might successfully implement a strategy with fewer skills. However, she identified competencies also important for the implementation process, but in a lesser degree.

The second set of interviews was held with employees of healthcare organization Y. This organization has 2658 employees, representing 1122 FTE in 2013. In contrast with organization X, this organization has not removed managerial layers recently.

#### *4.1.4 respondent 1 of organization Y*

The fourth interview was conducted with a district nurse of organization Y, who experienced the management team as being accessible. As main barriers in the implementation process, she identified that the strategies nowadays are unclear and very ad hoc (the time frame for actual implementation is too short). In addition, the interview revealed that involvement of the employees and being informed on time is seen as main facilitators for successful strategy implementation.

About the aspect mindset & culture, this refers to the earlier mentioned facilitators: involvement and being informed. Involvement, helps the workforce to successfully carry out the strategy. The culture is open, and fearless to a certain extent, people can make mistakes but there are consequences (like

personal feedback). Feedback can be given in both ways, from management to the workforce and vice versa. This respondent mentioned that the participation of the workforce always could be increased. The communication about strategy occurs through different channels; by meetings, e-mail and intranet. Another facilitator for a successful strategy implementation, is the way the management controls the implementation process (random sampling and audits). This respondent stated that the different aspects, mind-set & culture, competencies and leadership style could not be seen separated, it is inherent to each other. The most important thing according to this respondent is the employees to have their input in the implementation process.

#### *4.1.5 respondent 2 of organization Y*

The fifth respondent was also a district nurse of organization Y and she identified mainly the same barriers and facilitators of strategy implementation as the fourth respondent. This respondent also experiences the management team as accessible. She confirmed the implementation process by meetings, e-mail and intranet. Again, she mentioned the strategy nowadays as unclear and ad hoc. In addition, she argued the difficulty of adopting a strategy in this uncertain time. The management team has to think ahead. She mentioned this as a challenge for management team in this organization. They could be faster and more efficient when changes are implemented in a shorter time frame.

To the factor mind-set & culture, she confirmed a open and human oriented culture.

To the factor competencies, this respondent mentioned that the knowledge about the change is very important, about the content and implementation process of the new strategy. The skills for a successful implementation are according to this respondent; thinking along, be creative, problem solving ability and be patient.

The leadership style is formal with informal aspects. Overall, this respondent mentioned that all three aspects as equally important and a successful implementation starts with preparatory work. This results in an increase of clarity.

#### *4.1.6 respondent 3 of organization Y*

The sixth interview was held with a district nurse of organization Y. She experienced that the strategy is not entirely clear to the employees. The process from management to the workforce is long. This is a barrier for a successful implementation. The communication about strategy could be improved, according to this respondent. The communication could be more clear and efficient. Because of the big change in the law, healthcare organizations need to be creative. She confirmed the fact that the involvement of employees is a facilitator to strategy implementation. This is a successful thing in this organization. Employees are heard. Again, she experienced the culture as well as the management as open and accessible.

About the factor mind-set & culture, this respondent further experienced the culture as quite individual, but it depends on the level and how employees deals with it. The organization had in the past a culture with some fear. However, the management team ensured that this has been resolved, mainly by good communication with employees. She mentioned that there is a reward process. Especially appreciation from management, but also a gift when there was much work been done. She confirmed that employees are strongly encouraged to take initiative and give points for improvement to the management team. She confirmed that employees need to be well informed in advance about the strategy or change. The employees are offered training and education in order to carry out the strategy

of the organization. The vision of the organization should be well carried out by the employees. When this happens, the strategy is successfully implemented according to her. Again, she mentioned that employees need to be open, flexible, be patient, be creative, can be motivating and have a more comprehensive look. Again this respondent mentioned that the evaluation, after a change has being implemented, sometimes is missed. Who is responsible for what, is not always clear. This is a point for improvement for the management team, but it is also a responsibility for the employee to be proactive. He/she should also ask for clarification. Uncertainty could be removed through good communication. According to her this could be more efficient and more concrete.

Overall, she finds all three elements important for a successful strategy implementation. But behavior is a determining factor. If there is a strategy conceived, how successful this is happening mainly depends on the behavior of employees. But, according to this respondent, this is related to the culture and the leadership style of the organization.

The third set of interviews was held with employees of healthcare organization Z. This organization has 328 employees, representing 133 FTE. In contrast with organization X and Y, this organization is much smaller.

#### *4.1.7 respondent 1 of organization Z*

The first respondent of this organizations, was a nurse. She stated that much information about strategy comes from the Works Council and the intranet. According to her, it is questionable if all employees look enough on the intranet. This respondent stated that management should inform her employees earlier. This is a barrier for a successful strategy implementation, because employees do not have the time to implement it well. Many changes come at the same time. Employees can have their input in the implementation process, but this could be increased. The involvement of employees could be more. This should be stimulated by the employees self but also by the management team. Her experience is that employees do not optimal feel that they can have an input.

About the aspect mind-set & culture she experienced a culture as 'we do it together'. But because of the change to small teams, it becomes more individualistic. There is no culture with fear for making mistakes. As mentioned before, the initiative of employees could be more stimulated by management.

About the aspect competencies this respondent mentioned the importance of being well informed about the change and about how this should be done in what time frame. This is sometimes still a challenge for management. To implement a strategy successfully the employee need to be open, flexible, creative and be able to communicate the strategy of the organization well. In a team you need a mix of different people, for example you cannot just have only leaders in your team. When recruiting staff this should be taken into account, according to her. Employees are offered training and education in order to carry out the strategy of the organization, but usually the courses are focused on care content. There are a lot of workgroups were in preliminary stage a number of employees are involved.

She experiences the leader as accessible, and there is especially contact with the manager and less with the principle. There is some evaluation after a change is implemented but this could be increased. Employees should be more pro-active but the management could also evaluate more. Feedback could be given in both ways. But management could be more open and may show more to the employees so that is becomes more accessible to them.

Overall, all three aspects are important for a successful strategy implementation to the workforce, according to this respondent. These aspects flow into each other.

#### *4.1.8 respondent 2 of organization Z*

The second interview of organization Z was also conducted with a nurse. She stated that the strategy is being implemented through agreements or trough courses. To the workforce the strategy is not always clear. This is because they often have a different perception than the management, and because management uses sometimes difficult language that employees does not understands. Also the evaluation/feedback to the workforce is a challenge for the management. The involvement of employees could definitely be increased. The management should ask more often for the barriers which employees experienced. Management must more often have a personal conversation with their employees.

About the aspect mind-set & culture she confirmed the experience of the previous respondent. A challenge for the management is to increase the involvement of employees for a successful strategy implementation, but it is certainly the responsibility of employees to take more initiative. This respondent mentioned the rewarding process in this organization as positive. Managers appreciate their employees, for example with positive feedback but also with a present on special occasions.

About the aspect competencies, this respondent identified the challenge for management to communicate their strategy to their employees in a simpler way. According to this respondent, employees are offered opportunities to learn knowledge and skills about the strategy.

She confirmed the fact that the management implement changes ad hoc, this could be done more incrementally. National, much has changed in health care, but this could be transferred better by management according to this respondent. She experienced the management as accessible and if a layer is removed it could be more difficult for employees, but she does not see this as a barrier for a successful strategy implementation. In contrast with previous respondent, she stated that the management team evaluate the implementation of strategy. Managers often ask employees which bottlenecks they encounter and which support they still need.

She confirmed the equally importance of the three aspects; mind-set & culture, competencies and leadership and behavior.

#### *4.1.9 respondent 3 of organization Z*

The last respondent was with a nurse of organization Z. She experienced a lot of communication about strategy by management team. Especially the latest big change was carefully implemented. But she also stated that management implement some strategy changes very ad hoc. She confirmed this as a challenge for the management. Another challenge, according to her, is that management should better understand the consequences of the strategic change. And sometimes it is not clear who will do what at what time. Because there is recently a new director, there is still some confusion in the organization. Management should anticipate more here and create more clearness. She confirmed that management should involve employees more in the process, especially employees in the lowest level of the organization, because for a successful implementation they need their involvement. Employees need to be involved before a implementation is carried out, this involvement is a facilitator for a successful strategy implementation.

To the aspect mind-set & culture, she identified employees being committed to the organization. This culture could be supporting the implementation process. She confirmed a culture without fear. A proactive attitude of employees could be increased. Employees can come up with more ideas, voice their opinion more, but it can also be more stimulated by management. She confirmed the rewarding process in this organization.

She experienced a different leadership style among the managers. The different ways of leadership is sometimes perceived as troublesome. They are not aligned and that is confusing for employees. But on the other hand, the managers do have an open attitude towards employees. She also confirmed the uncertainty, due to the changes in healthcare but also due to the management of the organization. The input of employees could be increased. When employees give their opinion it is not clear whether the management takes this opinion into account or not. This respondent confirmed the missing evaluation after a change is implemented and identified the aspects equally important. The involvement of employees is the most important thing, according to her.

## 5. CROSS CASE ANALYSIS

In this section, the results from the interviews are compared with each other by a cross case analysis. According to Donmoyer (2000) a new understanding is given shape in case of generalizing across cases that were constructed or derived from different contexts. This confirms the relevance of a cross case analysis for this investigation about the experiences of strategy implementation.

All interviews were interesting and brought a better understanding of the experiences of the workforce about strategy implementation. The interviews revealed that in general the employees in healthcare organization faces similar barriers and facilitators to the implementation of a strategy. Hence, some differences between individuals and between organizations were present.

The most dominant factor in all the interviews was communication about the strategy. Communication is seen as the most important instrument to reach a successful strategy implementation. There need to be sufficiently conversations between management and lower level employees. What is the opinion of the workforce, which challenges do they encounter, what is expected of the workforce? It also turned out that it is important that employees know why a strategy or change should be implemented. In addition to communication, employee involvement is experienced as important for all respondents. When employees can find themselves in the strategy of the organization and they carry it out, this helps a successful implementation of the strategy.

Understanding of the strategy is increased by involvement of the workforce. All the respondents mentioned this participation as a very important aspect. A proactive attitude of the employees can anticipate challenges and help to successfully implement the strategy. In any case, the identification and knowledge about the strategy or change will help employees to better implement this strategy or change. Another important aspect in this, is that the conversations between management and employees need to be familiar en accessible so that employees dare to speak about their opinion and problems. All respondents experienced their management team as accessible. However, some in a greater extent than the other. Especially in organization Y approachability of management is well experienced.

Three respondents mentioned preparatory work as a facilitator, for example in form of workgroups, key-users etc. With this, the strategy is first determined and well plotted before it is implemented to all the employees. Therefore the strategy can be articulated more clearly and concretely to the workforce.

The main barriers that were experienced are uncertainty and unclear objectives. Due to the big changes in law in health care, there is a lot of uncertainty. These uncertainty is also experienced within the organization. Four respondents added to this that uncertainty can also be eliminated because of the proactive attitude of employees, by asking for clarity of the management. Another barrier was the evaluation of a change within the organization. When a change was implemented, the evaluation is often missed. Where do we want to be in five years with this change, but also an evaluation about the change. How is it implemented? What went well/wrong? Seven respondents mentioned this missing evaluation aspect.

As mentioned before, in organization X the managerial layer was removed. Employees of this organization identified physical distance of management as a barrier for the implementation process. In contrast, organization Y and organization Z did not remove this layer and even two of the three respondents of organization Y identified this physical presence of managers as a facilitator for strategy implementation. The third respondent mentioned the many layers from management to the workforce as a barrier for successfully implement a strategy. In organization Z, the respondents did not explicitly mentioned this removal as a facilitator or barrier.

All the respondents identified the leader role as very important to create a big engagement of the workforce. But some mentioned at the same time that employees need to be positive and motivating about strategy and change. Eight of the nine respondents stated that it is up to the workforce to decide whether and to what extent they deal with the strategy. Five of the respondents mentioned that employees could participate more in the implementation process. But again, this could in particular be increased when employees want to be proactive and have a desire to actively participate in the strategy process.

All the respondents mentioned that a reward process with incentives could be helpful to motivate employees. Three respondents identified a rewarding process in their own organization. The others not really identified a rewarding process in their organizations, except that the managers will give positive feedback when something went well. But they all agree that a rewarding process is very important, for motivating employees.

Another facilitator is timely informing employees. Management could in the beginning, before the real implementation, make use of the so called key-users or workgroups. And when the strategy or change is clear and obvious, then implement timely to the workforce. With this uncertainty about the content and about who is responsible for what could be avoided. Especially organization Y and organization Z, two employees of both organizations, experienced the activities of management as ad hoc. They think the challenge for the management is to think ahead and that they need to have a bigger time frame when implementing a change. The third respondent of organization Y experienced ad hoc situations, but she added to this that often there is an underlying reason for this.



Barriers of successful strategy implementation			
	Uncertainty	Time frame of implementation	Distance to the management *
Organization X	Respondent 1	√	-
	Respondent 2	√	√
	Respondent 3	√	-
Organization Y	Respondent 4	√	-
	Respondent 5	√	-
	Respondent 6	√	√
Organization Z	Respondent 7	√	-
	Respondent 8	√	-
	Respondent 9	√	-

Facilitators of successful strategy implementation			
	Clearness (communication)	Involvement of the workforce	Distance to the management *
Organization X	Respondent 1	√	-
	Respondent 2	√	-
	Respondent 3	√	-
Organization Y	Respondent 4	√	√
	Respondent 5	√	√
	Respondent 6	√	√
Organization Z	Respondent 7	√	-
	Respondent 8	√	-
	Respondent 9	√	-

Table 1. Barriers & facilitators of a successful strategy implementation, according to the sample

The cells marked with an '√', indicate importance of the mentioned barrier or facilitator to successful strategy implementation (positive contribution in case of facilitators and negative contribution in terms of barriers). The cells marked with a '-', indicate that this barrier or facilitator is not identified or mentioned as a contributor to successful strategy implementation.

\*) Because of the removal of the managerial layer in organization X, the distance to the management is identified as a barrier by these employees. At the same time, the presence of this managerial layer in organization Y and Z is identified as a facilitator for strategy implementation. (Distance as a barrier means large distance between management and employees. Distance as a facilitator means management close to the employees)

Both organizations experienced an uncertainty which is also mainly due to the major changes in health care. But it is the responsibility of management team to communicate clear to the workforce and stimulate the involvement of them.

All in all one can say that healthcare organizations should have a clear communication towards their employees about the strategy. The outstanding factor in strategy implementation is communication, because it is the way to motivate employees and to bring them to work in the same direction. Through clear communication the barriers and challenges of understanding the strategy can be solved. One respondent explicitly mentioned the intranet as a facilitator for this. She stated that organizations should use their intranet more as a communication tool, in order to successfully implement their strategy. It can be used to give each other advice, ask questions to experts, exchange ideas, all in order to implement to strategy properly.

Another important factor is that employees need to have a proactive attitude towards this strategy. When they feel like it is their 'plan' and they want to participate in the implementation process, this would help a successful strategy implementation.

Interestingly, many respondents between and within the different organizations mentioned the same barriers and facilitators for a successful strategy implementation. These barriers and facilitators are identified in the table above.

## 6. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER OUTLOOK

### 6.1 Conclusion

The intention of this paper was to answer the research question how the workforce can contribute to a successful strategy implementation, in healthcare organization. It intended to outline the experiences of employees about the strategy implementation process and what the challenges and facilitators were. A number of conclusions can be drawn from the research findings.

#### 6.1.1 Mind – set & Culture

The mind-set & culture is experienced as important for a successful strategy implementation according to all the respondents. Some of them experienced it as more important than others but all stated this aspect as important. It should be an open culture, where employees could work without fear and dare to take initiative. Especially taking initiative by employees is identified very important for the success of a strategy implementation. All respondents mentioned that the management should stimulate the involvement of employees and five respondents mentioned that employees should have a proactive attitude of themselves. So it is also up to the employees self to be proactive.

### 6.1.2 Competencies

Especially, the knowledge about the strategy or change is very important for employees to understand. And they need to know the underlying reason. Why should a certain strategy be implemented and who is responsible for what.

According to all respondents, employees need to be open, flexible, thinking along, be patient, be proactive, having good communication skills and be creative.

### 6.1.3 Leadership & workforce behaviors

Also the leadership is identified as important for a successful strategy implementation, according to all respondents. Managers need employees who are involved in the process. In order to achieve this, all respondents stated that communication is the most important factor. Employees need to know what happens in the organization and especially why something needs to happen. They need to understand the underlying reason. To increase the involvement of employees it became clear that management need to be open and accessible. They should want to receive feedback and advice of their employees. What are their challenges, barriers and facilitators and how can management assist them.

### 6.1.4 Workforce success

All respondents were unanimously about the fact that all of the three aspects, mind-set & culture, competencies and leadership and behaviors are important contributors to the overall workforce success. They are inherent to each other.

In order to provide a more comprehensive answer to the research question, the elements of the Workforce Scorecard are supported with barriers and facilitators for successful strategy implementation by the workforce. This is graphically presented in table 1.

### 6.1.5 Barriers

The empirical findings that were revealed in the interviews suggest that there are several barriers and facilitators for successfully implement a strategy; uncertainty, physical distance of management and the time frame of implementation.

Uncertainty is an major issue that could prevent a successful strategy implementation. But it is not sure if this is entirely attributable to the management of the organization, because nationwide there is some uncertainty and confusion about the change in healthcare. This also causes uncertainty within the healthcare organizations and makes it difficult for management teams to implement the strategy.

Another barrier for successfully implement a strategy is the distance of management to the workforce. In general the closer the management to their employees, the better it is for the success of implementing a strategy according to the respondents.

Finally, the aspect time frame of implementation is seen as a barrier. According to the respondents the strategy needs to be implemented incrementally.

### 6.1.6 Facilitators

Several implementation variables are of importance for a successful strategy; clear communication, openness, accessible, workforce involvement, physical distance of management team. All the respondents identified one aspect as the most important one for a successful strategy implementation process; communication. The communication between management and employees must be strongly encouraged. In this way it becomes clear what the challenges and barriers are and thus where further improvement can be achieved. What is expected from whom and how are we going to implement the strategy or change. But also to prevent and countering uncertainty. This is

a challenge for all organizations and must always have the attention of the management team. The management team itself must clearly know what her strategy is, and she must be able to clearly and easily accessible implement this to the workforce. Employees need to be involved in the whole implementing process. The workforce must have an open attitude to this. So organizations must also make sure that they employ employees who can carry out properly the vision and strategy of the organization.

## 6.2 Scientific implications

This paper draws attention to the contribution of the workforce to a successful strategy implementation. In the past, only limited attention was given to this field of study. On top of that, the existing literature did not focus on healthcare organizations explicitly.

## 6.3 Practical implications

The results of this study could support managers in their daily activities, to implement a successful strategy. An insight in the contribution of the workforce to a successful strategy implementation could help the management to focus on important aspects and therewith improve their strategy implementation process.

## 6.4 Limitations & further research

This study, the literature review and the interviews, is limited due to time and resource constraints. Therefore, it cannot be said that this research comprises all the facilitators and barriers for a successful strategy implementation in healthcare organizations. On top of that, there are many rural cutbacks and major changes going on in health care. This currently makes a successful strategy implementation even more difficult.

A considerable limitation is the fact that only district nurses are being interviewed. To find out more in-depth about the workforce experiences of strategy implementation, employees of even lower levels should also be interviewed.

Further research needs to be carried out in order to either deny or confirm the findings of this paper. For instance, future studies may provide a more in-depth answer on how the workforce could contribute to successful implement a strategy. For instance, in the field of communication. Other studies already elaborated on the importance of employee communication. For instance, Gruning (1992) argued that employee communication has become one the most important contributors to organizational effectiveness and Grates (2006) stated that employee communication includes facilitate engagement and building trust among the employees. The question that arise here, is how management should communicate; through face-to-face interactions or other forms of mediated communications. According to Kalla (2005) the selection of communication tools had to be made on how effective they are in achieving the bottom-line of the business goal and how they fit in the strategic process. Begley (2004) stated that face-to-face communication is the most powerful interaction and An and Frick's (2006) argued that face-to-face communication is faster, easier and more convenient than mediated communication. However, computer and other information technologies are very useful in informing employees about important messages as well as gathering their feedback and ideas (Wright, 1995). These studies could be the starting point for a more in-depth research about the contribution of communication to workforce success.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that it is only focused on home care organizations. Hence, the healthcare sector includes more different types of organizations. For instance,

hospitals and nursing homes. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate also these other types to provide a comprehensive view.

This study can be viewed as an introduction into the field of strategy implementation to the workforce in health care organizations, what their experiences are and how they can contribute to a successful strategy implementation.

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## 8. APPENDICE

The interview started with asking permission to record the interview. Then, a couple general question about strategy implementation was gathered. Followed by questions about the elements of the Workforce Scorecard.

Q1. How is strategy executed within this firm?

Q2. How successful is the strategy implemented within this organization?

Q3. What are the barriers and challenges for successful strategy implementation?

Q4. What are the facilitators for successful strategy implementation?

Q5. What is going well, according to you, in this implementation process within this organization?

The following questions provide an answer to the workforce success.

### Mindset and culture

*The mind-set and culture of an organization is about the expectations and norms that the workforce needs to understand.*

Q6. In what terms is the company’s culture supporting the strategy implementation?

Q7. To what extent is there an empowering and fearless organization culture?

Q8. Do you dare to take initiative, voice your opinion in this organization?

Q9. What about making mistakes? Are you (not) afraid to make

mistakes?

Q10. Can you tell something about the rewarding process in this organization?

### **Competencies**

*Competencies are the knowledge, skills, abilities, and personality characteristics.*

Q11. What knowledge do you need to successfully implement the strategy?

Q12. To what extent is this knowledge available to you and your colleagues within the organization?

Q13. What skills do you need in order to successfully implement the strategy?

Q14. To what extent are these skills present / developed in you and in your colleagues within the organization?

Q15. What personality characteristics do you need to successfully implement the strategy?

Q16. To what extent do you and your colleagues have these personality characteristics?

Q17. Does learning and training play a role in the implementation process in this organization?

Q18. If yes, in what way?

Q19. Are you and your colleagues offered opportunities to learn about the knowledge and skills to implement the right strategy? For example coaching.

Q20. If yes, to what extent?

Q21. Is from the management known what knowledge and skills are important for successful strategy implementation?

### **Leadership and workforce behavior**

*The behavior must be consistent with the strategy. It ensures that leaders and employees do what strategy suggests to be done.*

Q22. Can you tell something about the leadership style in this organization?

Q23. In the strategy implementation process, could the workforce participate in this process?

Q24. If yes, in what way? If not, what is the reason for this?

Q25. What is your opinion about this participation part of the workforce?

Q26. How is the communication about the (strategy) decisions, the management make?

Q27. How monitors the management team the strategy implementation?

Q28. Can you tell something about 'feedback'. From the management towards the workplace? And vice versa?

### **Workforce success**

*A successful strategy implementation to the workplace. This workforce success is defined as HR's deliverables, mind-set, culture, behaviors and competencies that drive operational, financial and customer strategies, the unique identity of the organization.*

Q29. We just looked at the three possible elements of workforce success separately, which may have an influence on the success of a strategy to the workforce. Do you find these elements equally important to successfully implement a strategy or do you see a difference here?

Q30. How could these elements, according to you, effects the success of the strategy implementation?

Q31. Are there any other elements that may contribute to the successful implementation of a strategy within the organization?