‘A systematic Literature Review of the extant Body of Knowledge on how to successfully implement Strategy’

Author: Ryan Anthony Thomas Holowka
University of Twente
P.O. Box 217, 7500AE Enschede
The Netherlands

In order to successfully implement a strategy – a feat that reportedly 70 per cent of organizations fail to do – management must recognize that strategy development and strategy implementation are not two separate activities, but interlinked. While there has been a substantial amount of work on strategy implementation over the past decades, there is no up-to-date literature review that combines these many findings. By systematically reviewing the articles on strategy implementation published in five highly ranked scientific journals, between 1980 and 2015, this paper contributes to reducing the existent gap in the literature. The findings of this study suggest that successful strategy implementation requires a hierarchical, three phase model: Plan, Communicate, and Manage, which managers can consult in order to increase their organizations chances of realizing its strategic vision.

Supervisors: Dr. ir. Jeroen Kraaijenbrink
Ir. Björn Kijl

Keywords
Strategy, Strategy implementation, Strategy execution, Success, Failure, Literature Review

Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and the full citation on the first page. To copy otherwise, or republish, to post on servers or to redistribute to lists, requires prior specific permission and/or a fee.

Copyright 2015, University of Twente, The Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social sciences.
1. INTRODUCTION

“I’d rather have a first-rate execution and second-rate strategy any time than a brilliant idea and mediocre management.”

Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase

More than a decade ago, when Jamie Dimon spoke these words he was aware that having a great idea will not ensure success; only the solid execution of a sound strategy can create a competitive advantage (Neilson, Martin, & Powers, 2008).

With reported strategy implementation failure rates between 50 per cent and 90 per cent (Dion, Allday, Laforet, Derain, & Lahiri, 2007; Kaplan and Norton, 2001; Mintzberg, 1994), the subject has received much attention from both researchers and practitioners (Cândido & Santos, 2015). Nonetheless, the majority of literature on the topic of strategy is concerned with the making and developing of strategic decisions (Miller, 1997). Companies are thus adept at developing strategies, but regularly fail to successfully implement these (Neilson, Martin, & Powers, 2008). However, only successfully strategy implementation can result in a superior organizational performance (Bonoma, 1984; Heide, Gronhaug & Johannessen, 2002; Neilson, Martin, and Powers, 2008).

As a result of this problem, there is a high demand for guidelines and frameworks to help managers combat the problems related to this issue. With a wide range of differing recommendations proposed by both researchers and practitioners, managers are faced with the increasingly difficult task of filtering out all the “noise” and finding the plan of action that best fits their (unique) circumstances (Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009; Proctor, Powell & McMillen, 2013). A further reason for managers’ difficulties to find guidance suitable to their situation is that many of the studies focussing on implementation strategies are inconsistent, poorly described and lack theoretical justification (Proctor, Powell & McMillen, 2013).

When developing strategies, managers need to know what has to be taken into consideration, and what needs to be in place, in order to successfully turn a strategic vision into action.

This paper thus sets out to perform a systematic literature review of the extant body of knowledge on how to successfully implement strategy, for the time period from 1980 to 2015. The aim of this review is to determine how researchers per decade (1980s, 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s) have advised practitioners to successfully implement their strategy, thus avoiding the fate of so many failed strategies. The research question this review addresses is thus:

“What are the recommendations per decade on how to successfully implement strategy?”

The findings of this paper have several academic, as well as practical benefits. With respect to the former it contributes to the literature on strategy implementation by offering a comprehensive analysis of the available literature on effective strategy implementation published in five highly ranked journals in the time period from 1980 – 2015. With regards to the latter it provides both practitioners with a set of underlying categories which need to be addressed when trying to successfully implement a strategy. It thus offers a check list, against which managers can compare their organizations current status quo and adjust accordingly in order to reduce the likeliness of failure. Furthermore this may be considered as a benefit to academics as well, since such a set of categories provides a framework based on which to structure future research. By analysing not only the current advice on successful strategy implementation stipulated in the literature, but also by taking into account the recommendations that have been elaborated since the interest in this topic first arose in the mid-1980s (Alexander, 1985; Wernham 1984), a more comprehensive representation of the advice, thought to influence strategy execution, is provided. Furthermore this long-term inclusion allows for observations concerning the prevalence of the recommendations over a time period of 35 years, which can aid managers in deciding which recommendations to focus on.

1.1 Defining the concepts

With regard to the posed research question, this paper needs to define the concepts it is working with.

1.1.1 Strategy

Strategy is of relevance to nearly every company, and the people working within them (Johnson, Scholes, & Whittington, 2011). However it was not until the 1960s, that strategy as a business discipline arose, due to the works of, inter alia, Chandler (1962) and Ansoff (1965) (Kiechel, 2010; Freedman, 2014). Until then the term strategy, which originates from the ancient Greek word strategos (Greek: στρατηγός), and literally means “army leader”, was used to describe an army general (Kazhdan, 1991). Presently there is no consensus on the definition of strategy; as such this paper elects to adopt the strategy definition provided by Johnson, Whittington, and Scholes (2011). This paper thus considers strategy to be “the long-term direction of an organisation”, as this definition includes both deliberate and emergent patterns of strategy.

1.1.2 Strategy implementation

This paper employs the terms strategy execution and strategy implementation interchangeably. “Strategy execution is concerned with: firstly, creating a portfolio of change programs that will deliver the strategy; and secondly, it involves attracting, allocating, and managing all the necessary resources to deliver these change programs” (Franken, Edwards & Lambert, 2009). Several authors have argued that the adoption of a decision can be regarded as successful strategy implementation (Bourgeois and Brodwin 1984; Piercy, 1991). Miller (1997) however sees this definition as too simple. She argues that adopting a strategy, will not necessarily lead to a successful outcome. Miller (1997) thus distinguished three features of successful strategy implementation, (1) completion, (2) achievement, and (3) acceptability. This paper chooses to follow this definition of success, as it extends beyond the simple definitions previously mentioned.

Opposing successful implementation is failure to turn the strategic vision into action. While it may be argued that not all failure (the lack of success) is bad, since companies can use failure to learn and improve (Edmondson, 2011), all failure to implement strategy will have some negative consequences, be it in the short term, or in the long term.

As such, when discussing failure, this paper adheres to the definition of Cândido and Santos (2015) with a failed strategy being considered either a strategy which was formulated but not adopted, or a strategy which was implemented, but the goal of which was not achieved.

1.1.3 Recommendations

This paper considers recommendations to be suggestions about how an organization, or individuals within an organization, should behave or act, and what needs to be done, in order to successfully implement a strategy.

1.2 Structure of the paper

The following sections of this paper are structured as follows. The second section begins by outlining the methodology and framework adopted to reach the objective of this paper. The third section includes a review of the literature, followed by a discussion of the findings in the fourth section. Part of the discussion, which is an overarching conclusion, followed by a
(sub)section addressing the limitations of this review, as (sub)section which offers practical implications and suggestions for further research.

2. METHOD
In order to determine what the advice, per decade, on how to successfully implement strategy is, a systematic literature review has been conducted. The method chosen for this review is a tabular review, which is often employed to summarize the findings of numerous studies (Dooley, 2008). By making use of a literature review, this paper will inform practitioners and researchers about the available body of research (Rhoades, 2011) on the topic of recommendations for successful strategy implementation.

This review of the literature began by gathering all papers including the wording “strategy and implement*”, “strategy and execut*”, “implementing and strategy”, as well as “executing and strateg*” in Title, Abstract or Keywords, from the bibliographic database SCOPUS. In the search terms above the asterisk sign (*) represents wildcard characters (Cândido & Santos, 2015).

Figure 1 describes the search process performed using the SCOPUS database, with each new row representing a filtration step. The text in each row represents a limitation criterion, while the number indicates the amount of articles that remains after adjusting for the limitation (e.g. after limiting to the subject area of Business, Management and Accounting, a total of 10,286 articles remained for the search term “Strategy + implement*”).

Through this step 74 articles were excluded from further review, based on the same exclusion criteria as the previous review of the abstracts: 1) the article is unrelated; 2) the focus of the article is too narrow; 3) the article has a different focus. This resulted in 48 articles (see Table 1) which were included in the actual literature review.

3. RESULTS
As demonstrated above there is an abundance of articles on the implementation of strategy, yet their focus varies (e.g. successful implementation, failure to implement, complexity and quality of the methodology used) which demands careful analysis of the findings. The recommendations, and the amount thereof found in the articles, vary to a similar extent. While some articles give concrete guidelines and step by step instructions on successful strategy implementation (e.g. Franken, Edwards, & Lambert, 2009; Neilson, Martin, & Powers, 2008; Reed & Buckley, 1988; Taylor, 1997), others propose more general advice (e.g. Beer & Eisenstat, 2004; Garvin & Roberto, 2005).
In Table 1 the frequency and distribution of articles on successful strategy implementation per decade is visualized. What springs to eye is that for the period from 1980 to 1989 (1980s) only six articles concerning successful strategy implementation were published, in the journals used in this review. The first article included in this paper was published in 1984, with the majority of articles being published in the 1990s (16) and 2000s (19). Further, it is noteworthy that the articles from the 1980s and 1990s were all published in Long Range Planning, with the exception of three articles appearing in the Harvard Business Review, the first being published in 1997. It is not until the 2000s (2000 – 2009) that the articles are more evenly published by a wider range of journals, with all journals included in this review, except for the British Journal of Management, containing articles with recommendations on successful strategy implementation.

Table 1
Article Frequency and Distribution by Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>SMJ</th>
<th>LRP</th>
<th>HBR</th>
<th>BIM</th>
<th>CMR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980-1989</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990-1999</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000-2009</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note:
SMJ = Strategic Management Journal
LRP = Long Range Planning
HBR = Harvard Business Review
BIM = British Journal of Management
CMR = California Management Review

Table 1A (see Appendix), which is the result of the tabular literature review, lists the recommendations on successful strategy implementation for all articles that were included in this paper. Through inductive coding, underlying trends were identified which lead to the grouping of the recommendations into ten categories. The frequency and distribution of these categories is depicted in Table 2. While not exhaustive, these categories have been identified, by this study, to be a necessity for, or support, successful strategy implementation. As such, in order for an organization to successfully turn its strategic vision into action, the literature analyzed in this review suggests to take into consideration the following areas of focus:

1. **Communication**
   Once a strategy has been devised, management must clearly communicate it (what is to be done, targets, and initiatives) to the stakeholders. Senior management must encourage open, two-way communication, giving the employees that are involved in or affected by the changes the possibility to question the decisions made, in order to understand and ultimately turn them into results. To communicate more effectively organizations can devise a strategy map, which visualizes the strategy and thus eases implementation by making providing an explicit guide.

2. **Human Resources Management**
   Human Resources Management comes into place at two stages, the first being involving the right people in the planning stage. While senior management have a good overall view of the company, mid-level managers generally have more detailed knowledge about the actual capabilities of their departments. Involving them early on in the strategy development stage will ensure that senior management has the necessary information for devising a sound strategy. The second stage concerns the guidance and control of the stakeholders involved in implementing the strategy. Senior managers must guide and manage employees’ behaviors on a collective basis, and support them in developing appropriate skills needed for successful implementation of the strategy (e.g. though training). As such the HR department holds a pivotal role in turning strategy into action.

3. **Planning**
   Before a strategy can be implemented it has to be thoroughly planned. While it is possible to implement a sub-par strategy, the results will nonetheless be inferior to those achieved through implementing a carefully crafted strategy. A strategy should identify potential implementation problems in the development stage, so as to address them before they occur. However, the strategy must not be too specific, thus permitting adjustments to be made during implementation, nor should it be too vague, which would leave stakeholders without a concise plan.

4. **Alignment**
   Top management must ensure to dynamically create alignments between the company’s corporate strategy and its strategic actions. Furthermore management must align the priorities, plans and practices of all stakeholders across the organization, which also includes executives’ need to be united in the identification of actions required to bridge the future.

5. **Culture**
   The organization should develop a leadership and execution-driven culture which reinforces rapid and effective decision making, and inspire employees to implement the developed strategy. This can be achieved by making the company’s values and beliefs more explicit and by emphasizing the need to produce value for customers, shareholders and other stakeholders. An organization that strives to successfully implement a strategy should encourage a culture of learning, in order to accumulate more relevant strategic knowledge, which can help employees to take responsibility for a wider range of issues.

6. **Ground rules**
   There is a set of rules that every organization needs to take into account when aiming to successfully implement their strategy. Examples of ground rules are: strategy and implementation are inseparable, the strategy must be feasible and of high quality, the strategy should be simple yet concrete, or purpose is always more important than pre-defined tasks. If the understanding of these ground rules is not present, strategy implementation is sure to fail.

7. **Commitment**
   It is important to gain strong emotional commitment from employees early on in both the development and implementation stage. Only if everyone involved in the implementation of the strategy assumes responsibility for its execution will the vision turn into action.
8. **Resources**

   The greatest strategy cannot be implemented if the people tasked with implementing it do not have the appropriate resources. Senior management must thus provide sufficient resources such as financing, manpower, technical expertise, time, or information. Without these the developed strategy will not lead to the intended outcome, or will not be implemented at all. The knowledge on the availability of resources is thus a vital part of the strategy development stage.

9. **Framework**

   Frameworks or management approaches such as the balanced score card can assist managers in measuring key performance indicators to determine the state of strategy implementation. Visualization of the strategy through e.g. a strategy map can further assist in communicating the strategy to the relevant stakeholders.

10. **Structure**

    There are contrasting views on whether or not to restructure an organization in order to implement strategy. Generally it can be argued that restructuring an organization to make it leaner, fitter and simpler will have a positive effect on the implementation of strategy. However, changing a structure that does not impede implementation might do more harm than good.

---

### Table 2

**Theme Frequencies and Distribution by Decade**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus of recommendation</th>
<th>1980s</th>
<th>1990s</th>
<th>2000s</th>
<th>2010s</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground rule</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

Some of the recommendations depicted in Table 2, such as communication and planning, which are the most frequently mentioned themes supporting strategy implementation, have been discussed by a wider variety of authors (Alexander, 1985; Garvin & Levesque, 2008; Morris & Pitt, 1994) throughout the decades. While their recommendations concerning the facets of strategy implementation on which to specifically focus on may vary, their underlying advice is to pay attention to these areas in order to achieve success when implementing a strategy. Other recommendations such as structure (e.g. Kleinbaum & Stuart, 2014; Taylor, 1995) and commitment (e.g. Jenster, 1987; Morris & Pitt, 1994) were discussed in fewer articles, being absent from the literature in the 1980s, as well as the 2000s and 2010s, respectively.

A general trend that can be identified throughout all recommendation categories, with the exception of commitment and resources which peaked in the 1980s, is the increase in articles pertaining to the said categories, from the 1980s to the 2000s, before decreasing again in the 2010s. Even by multiplying the number of articles in the 2010s by two, so as to obtain an approximation of the total articles which would be published by the end of the decade, the amount thereof is still below the amount published in the previous decades, being the second lowest of all decades that were analyzed.

4. **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

4.1 **Discussion**

Strategy formulation and strategy execution are interlinked (Calori & Atamer, 1990; Campbell & Alexander, 1997; Mintzberg & Water, 1985), since a great strategy is useless unless it can be successfully implemented (Neilsen, Martin & Powers, 2008). Once a comprehensive strategy determining the long-term direction of an organization has been devised, all too often it reaches a standstill, as problems inhibit the successful implementation thereof (Alexander, 1985; Cândido & Santos, 2015). This is highlighted by the fact that strategy implementation failure rates of 70 per cent are commonly stated (Cândido & Santos, 2015; Franken, Edwards & Lambert, 2009). This study aims to improve managements’ chance of successfully turning their vision into action by providing recommendations which are deemed by the literature to have a positive impact on strategy implementation.

The findings of the conducted systematic literature review suggest that management may adopt the following plan of action managers should take in order to successfully implement their strategy:

1. **PLAN**

   Carefully plan a balanced strategy that is able to identify potential problems during the implementation stage and which permits to address them before their occurrence. During this stage it is important to include the right people. Only if senior management has the knowledge, which lies with the middle managers, can the necessary resources be efficiently allocated and the strategy be successfully implemented.

2. **COMMUNICATE**

   Communicate the developed strategy to all affected stakeholders. A means thorough which to accomplish this is to involve change agents, and visualize the strategy by providing employees with a strategy map. Furthermore employees need to be able to engage in a two-way communication that enables them to question the decisions made, in order to understand and ultimately turn them into results. This would eventually generate commitment from the employees through developing a sense of ownership.

3. **MANAGE**

   Once the strategy has been developed and communicated to all the affected stakeholders, senior management must be actively involved in the implementation of the strategy. Executives should align the new strategy and promote a culture of learning which would inspire people to implement the developed strategy.

The aforementioned guidelines indicate that successful strategy implementation follows a “plan, communicate, manage” structure. As such, the identified categories exist within a hierarchical order and can be inserted into a pyramidal structure. Only once the lowest level, planning, has been thoroughly completed, should the strategy be communicated to stakeholders. Once the strategy has then been communicated to all the stakeholders involved, and they have been offered the possibility to understand it, senior management can, and must,
actively be involved in the implementation process. These findings imply that the most important step for strategy implementation is, in fact, the planning step, which coincides with the most important ground rule observed in this literature review: strategy implementation and strategy development are not two separate activities, but are interlinked, as argued as early as 1987 by Pendlebury, and as recently as 2015, by Leonardi.

Figure 3. Hierarchy of strategy implementation.

Concerning the prevalence and frequency of the recommendations given throughout the decades the following can be stated. The three most frequently discussed themes related to successful strategy implementation, found thorough this literature review, are communication (26), human resources management (24) and planning (21). All three were first mentioned in articles in 1985 and have since been consistently associated with, and described as, supporting successful strategy implementation. This serves a clear indication of their importance. Commitment on the other hand, has not been mentioned since the 1990s. A possible explanation for this might be that scholars no longer consider commitment to be an essential part to strategy implementation, which would conclude that neither should managers.

The reason for the decrease in articles containing advice on how to successfully implement strategy may be found in the study of Cândido and Santos (2015). Their review of the literature on strategy implementation failure rates implies that the overall failure rate of strategy implementation has been sinking, with failure rates around 45 per cent being reported by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2013) and the Project Management Institute (2014). This number stands in contrast to the numbers presented in the 1980s by e.g. Kiechel (1984) and Gray, (1986). Cândido and Santos (2015) point out however, that the studies included in their review are mixed in terms of their definition of failure, and features concerning the complexity and quality of the methodology used for the analysis. Therefore, while a trend towards a decreasing failure rate of strategy implementation is observed, it is not possible to say whether this indeed is the case, or whether the phenomenon may be attributable to the different methodologies used in each case. As such it is not possible to determine whether this potential decrease has had an influence on the amount of papers published on successful strategy implementation.

4.2 Conclusion
High strategy implementation failure rates have regularly been reported, however there had been no substantial review of the literature on how to successfully implement strategy. This literature review thus contributes to the field of strategy through an attempt to reduce the gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive overview of the advice and recommendations given by researchers and practitioners in the time from the 1980s until the 2010s. This study has found that in order to turn a strategic vision into action, management must recognize that strategy formulation and strategy implementation are not two separate sets of activities, but are interrelated. Basic on the findings of this review, the key to successful strategy implementation lies in the planning of a sound strategy, which accounts for possible problems during execution, and is able to allocate the necessary resources to the respective departments. The strategy should then be communicated to all stakeholders, explaining why the strategy was developed, what will happen, and who will be responsible for implementing the change. This can generate commitment from all parties involved in strategy implementation, increasing the chance of success, when being guided by a competent management team. If organizations follow these recommendations the chance of successfully implementing their strategy should increase, thus reducing the chance of failure.

5. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH
5.1 Limitations of this study
First and foremost it must be acknowledged that the reviewed literature is in no way exhaustive, with only articles published in the Strategic Management Journal, Long Range Planning, Harvard Business Review, British Journal of Management, or California Management Review, being included. This thus excludes much of the literature on strategy implementation, potentially constituting a sampling bias. The fact that the aforementioned journals were used to obtain articles for this review, in itself, constitutes a limitation. Secondly, the article selection process might be flawed, as the first filtration step excluded any and all articles that contained seemingly irrelevant abstracts. This may have led to the exclusion of articles containing information relevant to this review. The same is true for the second filtration process, which may have, equally, wrongfully excluded articles based on their introduction and conclusion. Finally the inductive coding of the implementation success might contain errors, with the categories being inadequately identified, or advice potentially being assigned to the wrong category.

5.2 Academic Relevance
The academic relevance of the present study resides in the fact that it furthers the knowledge in the field of strategy research, by systematically reviewing recommendations on successful strategy implementation for the period from 1980 to 2015.

5.3 Practical Relevance
With respect to the practical relevance of this paper, these are as follows. First, managers may use the findings of this paper to determine whether their organization is on a path to successfully implementing their strategy. The presented categories relevant to strategy implementation may act as a checklist for practitioners, so as to enable them to compare the current state of their organization to the recommendations given in the literature. Furthermore the proposed plan of action may support executives that are preparing to develop a new strategy, by summing up the most important aspects needed for successful implementation.

5.4 Recommendations for further Research
The following suggestions for further research are propose. First, further research would need to be conducted in order to determine the reliability and validity of this study’s findings. Due to the fact that this literature review contains only articles from five select journals, further review of the literature, with a focus on articles not included in this paper, could be undertaken. Alternatively a survey with a representative sample may be conducted, so as to find support for the categories.
determined in this review. Furthermore a study linking advice and failure would be of interest, as it could provide managers with advice on how to combat a certain failure.

While reviewing the literature it became clear that, although there is advice on how to successfully implement strategy, be it in the form of abstract advice or concrete step by step instructions, there was a lack of studies that showed these strategies in action. It would therefore be highly interesting to conduct a multiple case study with firms that adopt the advice given in the literature, in order to determine their effectiveness. Another possible research topic might be to determine whether the potential decline in strategy implementation failure has an effect on the decrease of articles containing advice on successful strategy implementation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS
I would like to thank Dr. ir. Jeroen Kraaijenbrink for his valuable feedback during the writing of this thesis. Furthermore I would like to thank MSc. Christina Baukloh for her helpful insights and advice.

REFERENCES


## APPENDIX A

### Table A1
Recommendations on Successful Strategy Implementation per Decade

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Article Design</th>
<th>Focus of recommendation</th>
<th>How can strategy be successfully implemented?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td>Alexander, L. D. (1985)</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Two-way communication that permits and solicits questions from affected employees about the formulated strategy, issues to be considered or potential problems that might occur. Management must clearly communicate to all employees what the new strategic decision is about, why the strategic decision was made, and what employees’ new responsibilities, tasks and duties are; Obtain Employee Commitment and Involvement early on and maintain it throughout the implementation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>The formulated strategy must be fundamentally sound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Provide sufficient resources (i.e. money, manpower, technical expertise, time)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Develop an implementation plan that strikes the right balance and is neither too vague nor detailed and identifies possible implementation problems</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hussey, D. E. (1985)  | Empirical | Human resources management | Training is a powerful weapon for implementing strategy (training objectives and initiatives should be periodically reviewed by top management) |
|                    |           | Alignment | Close integration of training to company objectives and strategies |

Jenster, P. V. (1987)  | Empirical | Resources | The quality of the available information is a vital source that can make or break a strategy; During implementation assumptions made while planning the strategy change, therefore getting the right information on developments in critical issues and the firm’s strategic progress is essential to directors and managers |
|                     |           | Human resources management | Top management should guide and participate in the implementation; Think-positive – all negative non-constructive statements undermine the project; Involve the right people early on |
|                     |           | Commitment | The project and its success belong to all employees, everyone involved must take responsibility |
|                     |           | Culture | Success is dependent on timely completion of all assignments. Any unsolved problems must be brought to senior management’s attention within 24 hours and receive immediate attention |
|                     |           | Alignment | All members of the organization need an understanding of the different steps; Excuses” don’t get the job done – if there could be a delay, bring it to senior management’s attention in due date |

Pendlebury, A. J. (1987)  | Empirical | Ground rule | Strategy and implementation are inseparable; The strategy must be feasible, in terms of what it asks people to do, over the time period in consideration |
|                       |           | Planning | Develop actions plans which are correctly balanced between people, systems and technology |
|                       |           | Commitment | Gain commitment of the organization as a while |
|                       |           | Resources | Obtain the resources and skills necessary to implement the plan |
|                       |           | Communication | Document and communicate the strategy and plans |

Reed, R., & Buckley, M. R. (1988)  | Case study | Alignment | Identify strategic intent by matching strategy benefits with the organization’s needs. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Human resources management</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Control</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Calori, R., &amp; Atamer, T.</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Ground rule</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christensen, C. M. (1997)</td>
<td>HBR Article*</td>
<td>Ground rule</td>
<td>Resource availability; Provision of reliable information and supporting materials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Giles, W. D. (1991)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>The strategy must mirror the realities of the company’s environment, and the resource allocation must mirror the strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Visualization</td>
<td>The management team must be united in its understanding of the problem to be tackled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Map the functional strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Create a plan for the projects to implement the strategy, i.e. define specifically how money and manpower must be spent over time to implement the strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Strategy generation and implementation must be seamless</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Sophistication follows ownership, but over-sophistication hinders ownership</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>Ownership makes implementation work irrespective of strategy (Implementers must be able to take ownership of the strategy by designing their own implementation)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ground rule</td>
<td>Acknowledge that a problem exists and do something about it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Gratton, L. (1996) | Multiple Case Study | Communication | Articulate the vision |
| Planning | Identify factors for strategic impact; Create pathways to the future |
| Alignment | Align strategic factors with current capabilities; Align strategic intent and the behavior of individual teams; Executives need to agree on what long-term means, identify actions required to bridge the future and debate actions which take into account the likely blocks to change |
| Culture | Values, motivations and the behavior of the organization’s members are critical |

| Lorange, P. (1998) | Empirical | Culture | Learning, in order to accumulate more relevant strategic knowledge, should be at the centre of a firm’s strategic implementation efforts |
| Human resources management | Involves the HR department |

| Communication | Communicate effectively |
| Planning | Strategic consequences need to be anticipate beforehand |
| Commitment | Include people responsible for implementing the strategy in the strategy formulation |

| Communication | Clear communication about strategic objectives (as put forward by Hrebiyiak and Joyce) |
| Experience | Experience of senior management |

| Piercy, N., & Morgan, N. (1991) | Empirical | Communication | Internal marketing: Develop an appropriate language for managers to describe the strategy |

<p>| Raimond, P., &amp; Eden, C. (1990) | Empirical | Planning | Need a clear vision of what the company should be |
| Resources | Need the people appropriate to that vision; Need to allocate resources; Need to select information |
| Control | Need Performance measures appropriate to the goal and vision |
| Ground rule | The immediate emotional effect of the planning meeting on the planners is a reliable barometer for forecasting whether agreed plans will be successfully implemented |
| Commitment | Strong positive emotional commitment; Involve all people who are essential to the implementation of the strategy in the planning stage |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Framework</th>
<th>Alignment</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Human resources management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shaw, G., Brown, R., &amp; Bromiley, P.</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Case Study</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Transform the strategy into a compelling story which tell everyone what the goals are and how to reach them</td>
<td>Inspire the people who have to implement the plan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, B.</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Organization structure (initiatives concerned with: decentralization, de-layering, outsourcing and autonomous work groups)</td>
<td>Company culture (company-wide communication programs promoting corporate mission statements, and training programs focused on customer care, TQM and innovation)</td>
<td>Human resources management (managing people as a “strategic resource” with tighter measurement of performance and performance related pay)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor, B.</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Restructuring the organization (making it leaner, fitter and simpler)</td>
<td>Re-engineering business processes (simplifying and speeding up the company’s key processes such as product development)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zabriskie, N. B., &amp; Huellmantel, A. B.</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Formulate a competitive, winning strategy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobni, C. B., &amp; Luffman, G.</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Human resources management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beer, M., &amp; Eisenstat, R. A.</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>HBR Article*</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Organization wide communication is key. The organization needs to have a collective (several levels of management across important functions and value-chain activities need to be engaged) and public (senior management needs to keep everyone three or four levels below them informed about what is going on) conversation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burgelman, R. A., &amp; Siegel, R. E.</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Framework</td>
<td>The Strategy diamond can be used to systematically examine a venture’s strategy execution.</td>
<td>A venture’s top management must make sure to dynamically create alignments between the company’s corporate strategy and its strategic actions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dobni, C. B. &amp; Luffman, G.</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Human resources management</td>
<td>The key to successful strategy implementation lies in the ability to guide and manage employees behaviors on a collective basis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Market orientation facilitates strategy implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authors</td>
<td>Study Type</td>
<td>Perspectives</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eppler, M. J., &amp; Platts, K. W.</td>
<td>Multiple Case Study</td>
<td>Visualization</td>
<td>Visualize strategy (e.g. through a synergy map); Provide an interface to capture, aggregate, present and explore information; By visualizing progress in real-time managers can track implementation progress visually and identify deviations from the plan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Franken, A., Edwards, C., &amp; Lambert, R.</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>By facilitating communication, the use of visualization can lead to new insights regarding possible positive or negative interdependencies among goals or implementation steps</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garvin, D. A., &amp; Levesque, L. C.</td>
<td>HBR Article*</td>
<td>Alignment</td>
<td>Strategic change portfolio alignment (identification and prioritization of an agreed collection of programs that will deliver the strategy)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garvin, D. A., &amp; Roberto, M. A.</td>
<td>HBR Article*</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Convince employees that radical change is imperative; demonstrate why the new direction is the right one; Manage employee mood through constant communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaplan, R. S., &amp; Norton, D. P.</td>
<td>HBR Article*</td>
<td>Human resources management</td>
<td>The key executing strategy is to have people in the organization understand it, including the crucial but perplexing processes by which intangible assets will be converted into tangible outcomes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaplan, R. S., &amp; Norton, D. P.</td>
<td>HBR Article*</td>
<td>Alignment + Human resource management + Control + Visualization</td>
<td>Have everyone in the organization clearly understand the underlying hypotheses, to align all organizational units and resources with those hypotheses, to test the hypotheses continually, and to use those results to adapt as required</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kaplan, R. S., &amp; Norton, D. P.</td>
<td>HBR Article*</td>
<td>Human resources management</td>
<td>Create a central office for strategy execution, the office of strategic management, which becomes the focal point for ideas that percolate up through the organization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alignment
Good coordination between the OSM and other functional departments which are responsible for: planning and budgeting, human resource alignment, and knowledge management; Align the strategies of the business units, support functions, and external partners with the broader enterprise strategy

Communication
Communicate the strategy, targets, and initiatives to employees

Control
Hold regular review meetings

Framework
Make use of the balanced score card

HBR Article*
Framework
Use a strategy map and the balanced score card (provides a template and a common language for assembling and communicating information about value creation)

HBR Article*
Human resources management
Managers need to be able to translate the strategy into operational plans and the execute the plans and achieve the performance targets

Alignment
Ensure that strategy leverages internal strengths to pursue external opportunities, while countering weaknesses and threats

Planning
Understand the management cycle that links strategy and operations, and know what tool to apply at each stage of the cycle; Strategy needs to be translated into objectives and measures that can be clearly communicated with all units and employees

Visualization
Make use of the strategy map

Culture
Develop a leadership and an execution-driven culture

Communication
Hold strategy reviews to determine whether strategy execution is on track, where problems are occurring in the implementation, why they are happening, what actions will correct them, and who will have responsibility for achieving targets

Mankins, M. C., & Steele, R. (2005)
HBR Article*
Ground rule
Keep the strategy simple and make it concrete without a clear sense of where the company is headed and why, lower levels in the organization cannot put in place executable plans

Planning
Debate assumptions, not forecasts: the assumptions underlying the long-term plans must reflect both real economics of the market and the performance experience of the company relative to its competitors; Discuss resource deployments early; Clearly identify priorities

Communication
Use a rigorous framework, speak a common language

Control
Continuously monitor performance

Human resources management
Reward and develop execution capabilities

Multiple Case Study
Communication
Clear communication is essential and translation is key ... The vision of the decision must be conveyed to others in integrated, non-technical language to gain receptivity and counter resistance to change

Planning
Both manage the logistics of what has to be done, and create receptive organizational contexts

Multiple Case Study
Planning
Prioritize Decisions: Rank decisions importance, then put managerial energy behind them

Communication
Ensure political acceptability: Communicate effectively with key stake-holders
Ground rule

Don't change structures unnecessarily: If organizational structure does not impede decision implementation, leave it alone;
The decision matter more than the organization: success depends on a a combination of relevant experience and firm readiness; Successful strategies demand particular rather than universal approaches to implementation

Experience

Draw from previous experience with implementation

Planning

A degree of planning, perceptive organizational analysis and sensitivity to human issues are all constituents of successful implementation


Survey

Planning + Communication + Alignment+Culture

17 Fundamental traits of organizational effectiveness, devided into four categories:

Clarity of decision rights, Design information flows, Align motivators, Make change to structure


Multiple Case Study

Alignment

Congruence is necessary to ensure that organizational elements work together to promote strategic goals

Slater, S. F., & Olson, E. M. (2000)

Survey

Alignment

Requires the alignment of all functional level strategies

Human resources management

Sales force management is important to the successful implementation of strategy


HBR Article*

Human resources management

Make use of a Chief Strategy Officer (CSO) who adds value by building world-class strategy development and execution capabilities. CSO ensures the capabilities they develop are implemented by managers and integrated throughout the organization

Culture

Rapid and effective decision making


Empirical

Communication

Two-way communication and critical feedback are vital to success; Willingness of employees involved to implement the strategy

Ground rule

The vision underlying the strategy has to be sound

Culture

More employees need to take responsibility for a wider range of issues

2010s


Empirical

Culture

Need to be able to adapt rapidly (response) and flexibly (range of options)

Planning

Inclusive planning must have a rational element that facilitates the coherent linking of ends, available ways, and existing means (i.e. understand what means are available and when, who will be responsible for what, dependencies between participants and activities, priorities and timings, and operating boundaries)

Ground rule

Purpose is always more important than any pre-defined task


Empirical

Alignment

The executive style (Manager/Defender, Producer/Analyzer, Maestro/Reactor, Leader/Prospector) and strategy must be aligned à executives matter
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Type of Study</th>
<th>Human resources management</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Huy, Q. N. (2011)</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>Understand and address the causes of middle manager’s group-focus emotions in situ; Group focus-emotions and social identities (including language and tenure) can help or hinder strategy implementation; Middle managers emotions (as a proposed strategy can help or harm self-interest) can help or hinder strategy implementation as their emotions can influence many of their subordinates’ emotions, thinking an behavior; Organization-related social identities for middle managers are key contributors to top-down strategy implementation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kleinbaum, A. M., &amp; Stuart, T. E. (2014)</td>
<td>Empirical</td>
<td>Corporate staff is central to the implementation of corporate-level strategy; Social structure of the corporation influences strategy implementation success</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leonardi, P. M. (2015)</td>
<td>Case study</td>
<td>The business units general manager’s prior experience and other personal characteristics (specifically, risk profile and tolerance for ambiguity) should match the business unit’s strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parmigiani, A., &amp; Holloway, S. S. (2011)</td>
<td>Multiple Case Study</td>
<td>Strategy formulation and strategy implementation are not two separate activities (Mintzberg and Water (1985) but inherently intertwined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas, L., &amp; Ambrosini, V. (2015)</td>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>The developed strategy must be of high quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note:** *As it is difficult to determine the type of article a Harvard Business Review Articles constitutes, these have been coded as HBR Article, unless otherwise indicated.*