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## Developing effective strategic communication for sustainable strategic implementation performance

 Albadri Albaloula Ali<sup>1\*</sup>,  Abdulrahman Saleh Aldogiher<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Department of Management, College of Business Administration in Hawtat Bani Tamim Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University, Alkharj 11942, Saudi Arabia.

Corresponding author: Albadri Albaloula Ali (Email: [a.alagib@psau.edu.sa](mailto:a.alagib@psau.edu.sa))

### Abstract

The study's objective is to examine strategy communication (SC) issues during the strategy implementation (SI) process and how to set up effective SC for sustainable implementation performance. The methodology is based on a review of the literature and an examination of related studies that have addressed the impact of SC on SI. The study found that SC is one of the top ten factors that influence SI, either positively or negatively. Some research emphasized communication and its elements as an individual factor, while others attributed the impact to communication characteristics. Also, the majority of those to whom SC is directed are from corporate or top management to lower managers, and occasionally to non-managerial levels. Some research has identified the SC tools and methods employed, whereas others have not. The number of examined studies is minimal, which limits the findings. The implication is that selected studies examined many types of organizations, which broadens the scope to include numerous industries of varying characteristics. This study examines SC alone as a factor affecting the SI process, whereas several earlier studies, if not all, looked at SC in conjunction with other relevant factors. The framework and model have added value to the strategy management field.

**Keywords:** Developing effective performance strategy communication, Strategy implementation, Sustainable.

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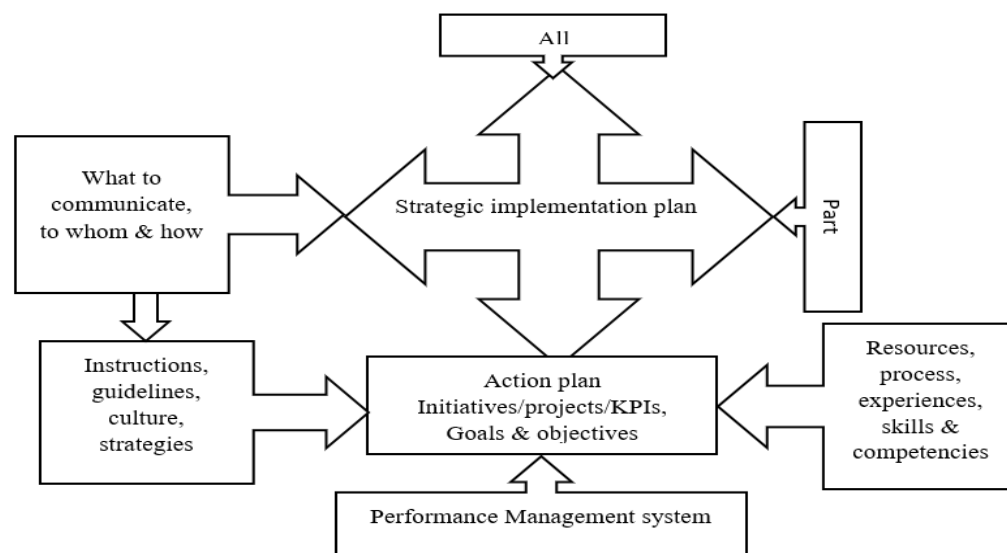
## 1. Introduction

Strategic management literature and a number of studies have emphasized the importance of strategy communication (SC) to strategy implementation (SI) (e.g., Lim and Chuah [1]). These studies have focused on understanding strategic communication obstacles while implementing the strategic plan, and how to sustain effective SC to achieve sustainable

competitive strategic performance is a critical concern for organizations today. Many studies have identified SC as one of the most challenging enablers or barriers to the success of SI in an organization. Example: study of: Ali [2], Claesson and Karlsson [3], Chirwa and Boikanyo [4], Ben and Reuben [5], and Cândido and Santos [6]. Based on these findings and many other results, this study aims to track SC activities inside the internal organizational environment, identify the most significant issues that occur during the process of the SI stage, and propose a framework model. During the process of SC and between any two or more points of communication, a hindrance may occur against what to be conveyed, to whom, and how, and if it isn't detected early as it is smaller, it will get larger and impact others in a method of cause and effect [6]. Therefore, having an effective internal communications system will bring significant value to institutions. Good SC enhances consistency and sustainability in the workplace and expands spaces for greater coordination and the exchange of knowledge and ideas. SC can take multiple shapes and be deployed via a variety of methodologies, including top-down, bottom-up, vertical, horizontal, and network, but the essential question is whether or not it is an impediment or enabler and positively or negatively affects the SI process. What strategic implementation elements and components are to be communicated and what not to communicate, and how and what proper methods should be used. What to communicate, such as the corporate strategy comprised of the vision, mission, values, and strategic goals, with their execution objectives, initiatives, and KPIs.

### 1.1. Study Question

According to the strategic management literature and previous research, communication is one of the most frequent SI challenges [2, 3, 6, 7]. The SI comprises various activities within a number of organizations' departments and units; each has its own specialized tasks and duties focused on achieving the strategic goals, objectives, and related projects. Communicating the strategic priorities and choosing the more proper communication methods are of great concern to all organizations today. Therefore, this study is a trial to find answers to the questions. What are the strategic communication challenges during the SI process, and how can to sustain effective strategic communication? From Figures 1 and 2, the study will attempt to track and assess the most prevalent communication challenges experienced during the SI process within the organization's internal environment.



**Figure 1.**  
Model illustrated theoretical framework.

Determining strategic communication obstacles while implementing the strategic plan, as well as how to sustain effective SC to achieve competitive strategic performance, is a significant challenge for organizations today. Figures 1 and 2 provide an overview description of a proposed framework, which attempts to address the research concerns through pertinent examples. What to communicate to whom, and how? The first and biggest challenge is to carefully determine these three strategic pillars for strategy implementation. Entire (all) or partial (part) of the strategy plan documents, to whom and how to be conveyed? (Figure 1). The common and well-known method is cascading down the corporate implementation strategy by conveying the SI plan with its strategy and action plan(s) to strategic business units or functional middle management levels, who subsequently communicate it to their units and sections. This could be done through either an approval of the strategic implementation process assigned to SBUs and functional departments, as called cascading down [8, 9], or as per delegation or position assignments. The author contends that the most effective technique of conveying strategy is through interactive, top-down, bottom-up, and vertical alignment and consensus to develop and strengthen strategy understanding and execution buy-in. However, it is very important to make sure that the communication process in this stage is being effectively implemented, using appropriate channels and methods, i.e., top management committees, direct meetings, dialogues, training and coaching sessions, written, verbal, and non-verbal instructions and guidelines. The next stage is to disseminate and break down the strategy implementation plan into action plans with clear, quantifiable KPIs for each strategic unit or functional department, and an executor(s) should be assigned with the team. As a result, communication channels and methods will differ for a variety of reasons, including the fact that this stage is becoming increasingly large, specialized, complex, and

interconnected as strategic goals, main KPIs, and strategies are expanded with complicated details and for varied levels of line administration. As a consequence, activities and assigned duties would be expanded and interconnected in a single department or with other departments within the internal or external organization. Blockages during each stage process are expected; therefore, alert and accurate tracking programs should be in parallel with each communication step. Each unit and section with a single functional department should have an action plan or implementation map that includes more detailed activities and KPIs for each objective project/s responsible by the owner of the strategic goal, governed by implementation instructions and guidelines of the chosen strategy/ies, and provided by the implementation resource. Personal coaching and extensive implementation of hands-on sessions should be followed simultaneously. Performance management systems should be launched early, not only to track any obstacle or barrier encountered or that might occur during and within any strategic communication channels, but as a vital and skeleton communication system that should be designed and well executed. Liaw et al. [10] assured the importance of establishing an effective communication system at all organizational levels in order to support the success of SI.

## **2. Literature Review**

Strategic management literature and many pieces of research have highlighted the importance of SC in SI. The study of Lim and Chuah [1] highlighted the significant role of SC and strategic consensus on the success of SI. Lim & Chuah's findings assured that SC is important to the SI success, and poor and ineffective communication result in a blockage to the success of an organization's SI. Other studies have identified SC as one of the most challenging enablers or barriers to the success of SI in an organization. Example: study of Ali [2], Claesson and Karlsson [3], Chirwa and Boikanyo [4], Ben and Reuben [5], and Cândido and Santos [6]. Based on these findings and other results, this study aims to track strategic communication activities inside the internal organizational environment and identify the most significant issues that occur during the process of the SI stage and propose a framework model. Strategy implementation as an important second phase of the strategic management process is described as a dynamic, continuing, and complicated process including many activities carried out by managers and employees to turn strategic plans into reality and achieve sustainable strategic performance [11]. However, during the process of SC and between any two or more points of communication, a hindrance may occur against what to be communicated, to whom, and how, and if it is not being discovered immediately as it is smaller, it will get bigger and impact others in a way of cause and effect [6]. This is also supported by Brinkschroder [12], who asserts that SI depends on an integral perspective, emphasizing that managers and strategy implementers must consider the interacted, interconnected, and interrelated nature of several aspects and should not ignore any of them. Research by Forman and Argenti [13] demonstrated the significant link between SC and the success of the SI process. This was then claimed by Rapert et al. [14] that SC improves shared understanding and could also reduce ambiguity among individual managers.

### *2.1. Role of Internal Communication*

It is obvious that having an effective internal communications system brings significant value to institutions. Effective SC enhances consistency and sustainability in the workplace and expands spaces for greater coordination and exchanging of knowledge and ideas. Employees are more productive within a continuous interconnection of exchanging accessible data and information, ideas, and knowledge. They also experience a feeling of connection, not only to their practice area or department but to the entire institution as a whole, because they know what is going on [15]. However, the process of creating and expanding effective and sustainable internal communications cannot occur by chance; it requires considerable quantities of change, which is embedded in the SI as a change concept. This change must be driven by the institution's mission and strategies, enhanced by transformational strategic leadership and functional management, initiating change within themselves and being a sample to follow and construct that as a part of the organization's culture. Employees' adherence to strategic implementation change determines the effectiveness of change activities, and communication is one of the ways to increase this commitment [16]. The behavior of the leadership and top management is thought to be one of the strongest methods for transferring an essential message. They should practice strategic behavior by empirical application to the vision, mission, and values of their organization as non-verbal communication methods. Definitely, this should be among all other organizational official communication tools, such as written messages, visual, and verbal communication, carrying instructions, guidelines for new and creative ideas, and thoughts for enhancing the successful implementation. These could be consistent with the definition of communication as the interchange of ideas, data, thoughts, and knowledge between individuals through words, gestures, or symbols (Priya's 2018, cited in Chirwa and Boikanyo [4]).

### *2.2. Communication Strategy Implementation*

The type, nature, and methods of SC can be either impediments or enablers to SI success. It depends on various surrounding factors for the execution process. SC can take multiple shapes and be deployed via a variety of methodologies, including top-down, bottom-up, vertical, horizontal, and network, but the essential question is whether or not it is an impediment or enabler and positively or negatively affecting the strategic implementation process. What strategy implementation elements and components should be communicated and what should not be communicated, as well as how and what approaches should be used. Beer and Eisenstat [7] in their study "The Six Silent Killers of SI," identified insufficient vertical communication as a key SI barrier, declaring that it does not only blocks the SI but also impedes the discussions for the other barriers. Effective communication of all aspects of a strategic plan across an organization is crucial for its implementation, Andersson and Jansson [17]. Yang et al. [11] emphasized that the subject matter of such communications should clearly describe what additional responsibilities, tasks, and obligations the impacted personnel must perform. It also

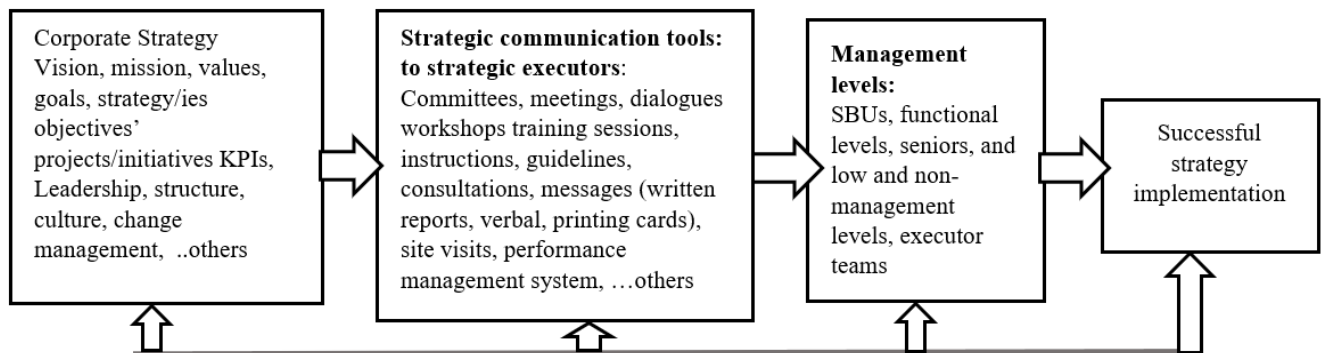
covers the why behind the modified job activities, as well as the basic reasons why the new strategy decision was made in the first place.

According to Noble [18], the framework of SI efforts is based on four stages, where each one of these stages is impacted by communication. The first one is the pre-implementation stage, which is concentrated on sustaining routine cross-function communications to enhance understanding and gratitude; the second is the organizing implementation effort, which is to discuss and settle implementation issues promptly in the process; and the third is managing the implementation process, which includes constantly updating the implementation staff on progress and changes in objectives; and the fourth stage is to optimize cross-functional performance by communicating implementation progress throughout the firm to generate buy-in.

SI is defined as a systematic process and a logical set of connected activities that enables an organization to take a strategy and make it work, Wheelen and Hunger [19]. As SI comprises activities and components, it is derived from the strategic implementation plan (document) illustrated by a strategic map aligned with the corporate strategic plan. The what to be transferred from a static situation to talk and walk. To bring energetic life to the organization through letting initiatives and projects of strategic objectives up and running, moving, and actioning. It is the stage of the performance management system that is continuously monitored and tracked against robust, quantifiable KPIs, yielding competitive outcomes and sustainable achievements. During this stage and while implementation is ongoing, impediments and obstacles are expected to emerge and impede the seamless functioning of the implementation process, and vice versa. Positive factors are expected to develop. However, how to eliminate the negative and maximize the positive variables toward success and sustainable SI performance.

The most important point here is how to sustain and preserve positive strategic factors and eliminate negative ones. Chirwa and Boikanyo [4] found six factors of effective communication that influence SI, which include speed, flexibility, credibility, provision of feedback, and channels of formal and informal communication. Lorange [20] proposed that some new strategy processes and activities should be quitted or changed in an early stage so as to save resources instead of implementing unprofitable activities and be better employed in other processes that really have major potential returns.

Figure 2 shows the most important direct or indirect influencing factors to the process of successful SI. These include what to communicate, such as the corporate strategy key components: the vision, mission, values, and strategic goals with their execution objectives, initiatives, KPIs, and strategies. These are critical elements and factors and must be expressed and communicated in articulated and clear forms, especially their embedded concepts and conceptualizations, and what they mean to each single management level.



**Figure 2.**  
Shows what to communicate, to whom, and how.

Example: Communicating the strategy statement, the vision and mission, values, and the strategies must all be thoroughly understood, fully aligned, and assigned to the strategic goals and their detailed KPIs, supported by the procedures of each action plan. This requires a package of aligned leadership, structure, and a culture focused on changing the entire organization towards a fully strategic, sustainable consensus. Building team leadership distributed into strategic management-focused groups would be a great enabling factor for successful SI. In brief, it is the ability to build a sense of ownership to embed and instill within these executor teams. The second phase is determining which appropriate communication methods and tools are to be used. It is much preferable to have a select committee of members who are knowledgeable and well-trained in strategic planning, reinforced by professional strategic advisors. Additionally, intensive workshops, training sessions, and discussion groups are essential communication methods. Continuous messaging, both written and verbal, along with all possible printed cards and short pamphlets, should remind and outline the strategic implementation intentions. Constructing and implementing a robust strategic performance management system is the backbone for successful strategy implementation.

### 3. Research Methodology

The objective of this study is to investigate SC challenges during the SI process, determine what to communicate, to whom, and what suitable strategic communication methods should be used. The accessible relative literature and research have been selected and reviewed from peer-reviewed journals and electronic databases. The study focused on theoretical and empirical studies that examined the relationship between internal communication and strategic implementation. The criteria used are based on searching the data engine by using the words and terms "strategic communication," strategic implementation," and "strategy execution." Moreover, articles address the subject of strategy implementation/execution as a

crucial topic, even if their title words do not include strategy implementation/execution, basically ensuring that the articles handle aspects enabling or impeding the success of SI. Also, the reference lists of the selected studies have been used. Based on this, 17 studies have been found and reviewed. All findings of examined studies include strategy communication as an enabler or impediment to strategic implementation. Table 1 shows the related selected studies and the ranking of communication, among other strategic implementation factors.

**Table 1.**

Showing the studies with ranking of communication among other strategic implementation factors.

#	Study Author	Comm. Rank	Communication Tools Used & To Whom	Note
1.	Amin and Afiqah [21]	2/8	Formal and informal (assigned duties and tasks are vague). Varied tools are used, such as meetings, written documents, and emails.	dualistic
2.	Ali [2]	1/13	Reviewed studies used varied communication tools for all organizations.	Dualistic
3.	Chirwa and Boikanyo [4]	6/6	Communication characteristics (speed, credibility, flexibility, provision of feedback, informal/formal communication channels used: verbal & nonverbal).	Positive
4.	Ben and Reuben [5]	2/4	Technology, vertical comm & specific communication departments used tools for all employees.	Positive
5.	Vigfússon, et al. [22]	9/16	Poor communication (obstacles).	Negative
		11/18	Frequent communication. (Success factors).	Positive
6.	Kiptoo, et al. [23]	4/4	Effect of communication, & lack of communication. between the executive and middle levels negative impact.	Dualistic
7.	Cândido and Santos [6]	1/22	Insufficient communication. (Case study (22 obstacles found	(negative)
		4/65	Communication and perceptions are the most common categories that have obstacles to successful SI (reviewed studies found 65 obstacles).	Negative
8.	Alharthy, et al. [24]	9/13	Effective communication (contents, tasks & duties and decisions, and clear of process as tools).	(positive)
9.	Obeidat, et al. [25]	2/5	effective coordination among varied parties, communication of problems requiring quick decision, clarity of criteria for strategy execution success, and the goals of the strategy.	Positive
10.	Engert and Baumgartner [26]	6/6	communication with respect to sustainability in the form of sustainability reports, (corporate sustainability vision, mission, strategies, objectives, and initiatives).	Positive
11.	Julius [27]	5, 6, 7 & 8/11	4 factors out of 11 issues of communication. Poor/vague strategy, inadequate information sharing, unclear strategies & conflicting priorities and poor coordination across boundaries. Lack of clear comm channels.	negative
12.	Al-Kandi, et al. [28]	1/7/4	Group: process & personnel (out of 4 specified groups have higher impact on SI) comprising 7 items, among which (involvement and communication ranked first among 7 items of group#1). communication definition of goals and actual planning.	Dualistic
13.	Alamsjah [29]	3/7	Effective communication and coordination among middle managers with top management, peers, staff, customers, and suppliers.	(positive)
14.	Yang, et al. [11]	4/9	4/9 individual factors (corporate communication. duties & tasks need to be done by assigned employees/communication barriers are: organization structure, learning, personnel management, or cultural constraints.	Dualistic
15.	Sterling [30]	4/7	Insufficient or failure of buy-in understanding and /or communication.	negative
16.	Zagotta and Robinson [31]	2/7	Success factors for strategy execution using mantras (short, simple, meaningful phrases showing how to achieve your vision).	(positive).
17.	Beer and Eisenstat [7]	4/6	Poor communication, no open interaction between senior management and staff, which led to a rise in cynicism.	Negative

#### 4. Findings

As shown in Table #1, 14 out of 17 studies have ranked SC among the top five factors influencing SI, and 5 out of 17 studies ranked communication between 6–10 factors positively or negatively influencing factors on SI. Some examined studies highlight similar aspects of communication as related influencing variables, as Julius [27]. The result revealed that some studies mentioned communication as an individual factor, while others referred to the impact of communication as the

characteristics of communication, such as flexibility, credibility, etc. [4]. Moreover, it has been noticed that the impact and influence of communication is tested either from a negative or positive perspective or dualistic factors [22]. Based on the objective context of the examined study, some use poor or insufficient communication (e.g., [7, 22]), while others test the communication's positive effectiveness (e.g., [4, 5, 23]). However, both of the methods investigated the correlation between communication and strategy implementation. Also, the study indicated that the majority of those to whom the strategy communication directed are from corporate or top management to the SBUs, functional departments, medium and low managers, and finally to the non-managerial level, which is occasionally considered or, at last, the communication methods and tools used are varied; some are formal, informal, verbal and non-verbal, written, and through all types of available technology. The most effective methods of strategy communication observed are: direct and open interactive meeting sessions, training, workshops, coordination, top-down, bottom-up, vertical, and horizontal. Continuous and follow reports are also found to be one of the official communication tools. In addition to various types of dialogue with organization stakeholders. In certain studies, SC methods were considered problematic on their own. Some research has identified the SC tools and methods employed, whereas others have not.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

The objective of this study is to examine (SC) issues during the strategic implementation (SI) process. This is done by addressing the study questions: what, to whom, and how to communicate during the SI process. The study found that communication is the most frequent influencing factor during the SI process. As shown, SC is among the first ten factors positively or negatively impacting SI. It is also revealed that communication involves many interacting, correlated, and interconnected activities between the sender and recipient for transmitting messages through various tools and methods during the SI process in order to achieve sustained competitive strategic performance. During this process, SC impediments or enablers are found to impact positively or negatively the seamlessness of SI sustainability. The effectiveness of SC could be tracked and found in communication alone or in its characteristics and style before being accumulated. The communication messages comprise the key components of the strategic implementation plan, such as the strategy/strategies, vision, mission, goals, objectives, and KPIs enhanced by the action plan. The implementation plan is addressed to (SBUs), functional management, middle management, and the non-management staff (executors) within a complex internal and external organizational context. The methods and instruments utilized to communicate the strategic implementation plan are the most important aspects during this stage. In all of those situations, how to align and concur the implementation process with available resources in the face of a complex and unstable environment, faced with implicit and explicit impediments that may embed and restrict the seamless implementation process.

This study is a trial to investigate the relationship between SC and SI and determine the best approach for establishing and implementing an effective SC for sustainable SI performance. Based on the studies examined, it is concluded that SC has a more significant positive or negative impact on SI among other influencing SI factors, and it is a dualistic factor. That is, both effective and ineffective, poor and enriched communication have a positive or negative influence, depending on the messages being communicated, who is receiving them, and the methods and tools used within an unstable context. As an outcome, having an effective internal communications system will add enormous advantages to organizations. Effective SC improves workplace consistency and sustainability while providing new opportunities for better interaction, information, and idea sharing to facilitate in-depth strategic understanding. SC can take on several forms and be applied using a variety of approaches, including top-down, bottom-up, vertical, horizontal, and network, but the critical question is whether or not the selected forms are an impediment or enabler, favorably or negatively affecting the SI process.

## 6. Recommendations

Designing, creating, and implementing an innovative model for SI success is entirely dependent on a seamless and effective SC process. As SI is a complicated and iterative process that must be executed by managers at all levels, including non-managers, in a rapidly changing organizational context, agile SC systems are of vital importance. Such SC systems should emerge from strategic alignment and consensus in decision-making, data and information interchange, and the use and dissemination of resources by and to all stakeholders to ensure shared long-term competitive strategic performance. Second, substantial theoretical and empirical research and study should be conducted on SI, particularly SC, in order to thoroughly examine the effective variables at the individual, characteristic, and collective levels of various SC features and dimensions.

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