



Sculpting global leaders

Challenges and opportunities of corporate strategy implementation in the South African telecommunications sector

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DECLARATION

I, Saadiqah Kubheka declare that this research article is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the Graduate School of Business Administration, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

S. Kubheka

Saadiqah Kubheka

Signed atMidrand.....

On the28..... day ofFebruary..... 2023.....

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A4 - Turn-it-in report

ABSTRACT

Despite the substantial research conducted in the field of strategic planning, strategic management and strategic implementation, limited research dedicated to the telecommunications industry exists.

The telecommunications industry enables connectivity, which is unique as it's acts as a business enabler which most industries rely on to conduct their businesses in an efficient and effective manner. A telco also employs a variety of skillset's ranging from highly technical Engineers to highly commercial Accountants and Customer Care agents which all need to operate as a collective for the business to function optimally.

With this background, the main research question is as follows; with the downward cascading of organisational strategy being a common approach to create awareness throughout the organisation, why are there still huge pockets of an organisation who are not aware of the organisation's strategy?

The research commences with a literature review which investigates the existing academic research findings within the field of organisational strategy and applies the Mintzberg 5 P's concept which explores different lenses to view strategy to gain competitive advantage.

Utilising a qualitative research approach, by interviewing 12 research participants from the telecommunications industry as well as research survey completed by 45 further participants to supplement the research. It was found that employees have absolute trust in the Board of Directors to formulate the strategy of the telco. It was further found that the Board is largely inaccessible to the middle and junior levels of the organisation but more accessible to senior managers. This causes a communication barrier as many great innovations would not reach the correct audience.

The research further reveals that the board does not regularly integrate with staff or with the operations in order to have an understanding of the operational challenges and opportunities the organisation is faced with instead there is a great reliance placed on senior and middle

management to share information both upwards and downwards. This could result in limited information being shared with the Board to use in the process of decision making and likewise limited information cascaded to the lower levels of the organisation, which could be the key contributing factor in answering the main research question.

The report concludes with opportunities for Telco executives to consider and implement to align the experience and interaction with organisational strategy throughout the organisation. It is acknowledged that strategy experts exist within an organisation, however, middle management and operational staff interact with customers daily and thus have first-hand experience of the challenges and opportunities the Telco is faced with. A telecommunications company sets to benefit positively from creating internal events and forced interactions dedicating to strategic cascading, implementation and monitoring.

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1. Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed background, purpose and context of the study regarding the challenges and opportunities relating to the strategic cascade process specifically focussed on the telecommunications industry of South Africa. The section is divided into various subsections which assists in framing the research questions which is contained at the end of this chapter.

1.1 Background

For many years the telecommunications industry was perceived as a discretionary or luxury service. This has steadily evolved to an essential service, which has brought along stronger regulation by governments, coupled with increased public interest. The telecommunications industry supplies a critical service, namely connectivity. This is achieved by enabling access to information, by being a transmitter of information in the form of voice, video, audio and word, as well as being a key enabler for economic activity by enabling business continuity and supporting globalisation. With the rise in demand for internet access and connectivity, telecommunications companies within South Africa have been forced to evolve their business strategy over time to meet the shifting demands of their operating environments. The demand for more data, more connectivity and more devices has been further accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which created the need for home offices and reliable connectivity outside of the standard commercial office environment.

1.2 Research problem statement

The purpose of this research report is to deep dive organisational strategic formulation, implementation and management techniques to solve the following problem statement: **Why does organisational strategy lose traction during the process of cascading its strategic objectives.** The research aims to provide insights to senior leadership teams around how their formulated strategic objectives are received by their organisations, coupled with recommendations to improve the overall effectiveness when cascading organisational strategy.

1.3 Context of the study

The research has been ringfenced to telecommunications organisations headquartered in South Africa, with most of the said organisations qualifying as multinationals, with operations around the world.

The telecommunication's operating environment is unique by nature due to its ability to revolutionise and accelerate economic growth. The increased reliance on connectivity due to the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our way of life and introduced new and more efficient methods to get everyday tasks done. The digitization of processes which previously used to be manual business processes requires telecommunications as an industry to respond to the continuously changing needs of their customer base. The unprecedented growth surge in the industry has created the need for a deeper understanding to its unique operations which is currently lacking from the perspective of dedicated telco specific academic research.

Strategy formulation is often carried out by management consultants in conjunction with senior leadership teams. Very often this strategy formulation is agreed upon without the inputs of supervisory and operational staff, and hence there is reluctance from the said staff to adopt and live the strategy. A further complication in the way strategy is formed is also the fact that there is a disconnect between senior leadership and operational staff. Senior leadership is often not involved at an operational level, which is granular enough to truly appreciate the challenges in executing strategy, and hence strategy is set in a manner that does not take major operational nuances into account.

1.4 Research Question

The problem statement has been sub-divided into three sub-sections, namely:

- R1; Who effectively formulates strategy and what are the associated benefits and challenges.
- R2; Does the Board of Directors hold sufficient understanding of operations to effectively set strategic objectives,

- R3; With the downward cascading of strategy being a common approach to create awareness throughout the organisation, why are there still huge pockets of an organisation who are not aware of the organisation's strategy?

This report commences with a literature review where the introduction unpacks the problem statement further. The report then concludes on the available literature identifying the areas which this research will cover.

1.5 Significance of the study

This study investigates and measures the efficacy of the organisational strategy cascade processes within the South African telecommunications sector which is unique in terms of its reach and direct impact on the South African economy. This is further supported by (ICASA, 2020), which reports an average of 9.5 percent year on year increase in smartphone penetration in South Africa with 91.2 percent of the South African population connecting to the internet with at least one device in 2019. A recent study by (Touré, 2010) suggests that increasing internet penetration 10 percent can increase a country's GDP by 1.3%, which is a significant positive contribution for a developing country like South Africa. This economic transformation can be achieved if telecommunications organisations operate effectively and have congruence in their organisational goals.

The telecommunications industry and its associated network services providers could be described as a Complex Network according to (Valdez, et al., 2020), where a Complex network is described as a set of nodes or a vertex connected via internal links. Other examples of Complex Networks could be the World Wide Web, the power grid or traffic. In telecommunications service provider organisations (Telco's), the make-up of the employee base varies in expertise and skill levels. Some staff are expert Engineers who are technical by nature and carry out physical maintenance at a network tower, other staff are ICT Policy experts who are more academic in nature, whilst others are business minded commercial minds who prioritises profits and shareholders. This is very different to a law firm where most of the employees are attorneys, lawyers or paralegals. Alternatively, a construction company where most employees are technical in nature. Organisations who specialise in a specific field

can channel communication and cascade strategy in a manner that can easily be understood by their likeminded organisations. Telcos on the other hand, require a more deliberate approach to cascading strategy due to its complex operating environment. Telcos require all divisions of their complex network to be operating with synchronicity to achieve the best business outcome.

This study will provide insights to Executive Committees and Boards around how their strategic initiatives and formulation processes are received by the organisation they represent. Executives will find the conclusions and recommendations as providing a guide to their future strategic objective determination and implementation.

1.6 Delimitations of the study

The research is solely focused on South African telecommunications companies because industry dedicated research relating to organisational effectiveness in the telecommunications sector is currently limited and this therefore represents an opportunity to contribute positively in a very important sector.

The research is in no way concerned with the content of the organisational strategy or the actual strategic objectives. Instead, the research focuses on the strategy formulation and communication process with telecommunications companies.

The research requires a narrative understanding of an employees lived experience which is subjective by nature. Aggregating the respondents data is therefore challenging as they do not always fit into specific themes. The research therefore identified common topics and themes – however, these are not exhaustive.

1.7 Definition of terms

Bands – Similar to job grades, bands are referred to groups of employees operating at a similar level within an organisation. The three relevant bands used in this research report is staff band, middle management and senior leaders.

C-suite - a term used to describe business executives in an organisation. The letter C, in this context stands for “chief”. As in Chief Executive Officer or Chief of Strategy.

People leaders – Any employee who leads or manages one or more subordinates.

Senior leadership team – The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) consists of the highest-ranking employees at a company.

Staff band – The staff band is the operational muscle within an organisation. Staff band is usually managed by middle management.

Telco’s – Corporate telecommunications companies or Network services providers

Towers – Network infrastructure used by Telco’s to transmit telecommunication signals

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The following literature review commences with a deep dive into the Mintzberg five P’s concept of strategy as a management theory to ground the overall research. The Mintzberg theory will be applied to the telecommunications industry from the perspective of corporate strategy implementation. Further, an academic literature review specific to the overall problem statement, i.e. to identify the root cause for a lack of strategy adoption and execution within corporate telecommunications organisations.

In order to unpack the problem further, three key contributing questions have been identified namely, **who sets organisational strategy and what are the associated challenges and benefits?** For strategic objectives and strategic implementation plans to be effective, they need to be made by a collective who are adequately informed, skilled and experienced. Being informed goes beyond having an industry understanding. It also requires a deeper understanding of the telecommunications operating landscape, and a specific appreciation that a telecommunications company requires a wide variety of employees to operate effectively (for example both electrical engineers and accountants). The strategic objectives that are set should be both relatable and aspirational.

Secondly, **does the Board of Directors hold sufficient understanding of operations to effectively set strategic objectives?** The telecommunications operating landscape can be complex - there are the technical infrastructure and network operations which require technical expertise, as well as blue-collar labour. In addition, there is the customer service environment which could arguably be more important than the network infrastructure. Both the network and customer operations require in-depth and thorough operational understanding to set strategy appropriately.

Lastly, **why does strategy get lost during the process of cascading and implementation?** More prevalent in larger corporates, strategic objectives are clearer and more well known the higher up the corporate ladder an employee is placed. Whilst entry level to middle management employees appear less familiar and less involved with the strategy of their employer. This problem has the potential to directly impact revenue as not all executors of strategy understand what they are required to execute.

2.2 Management theories and attributes

The research is anchored on the Mintzberg Strategy Concept which regards strategy as a plan to enable a company to bring about improved performance (Mintzberg, The rise and fall of strategic planning, 1994). The Mintzberg concept defines strategy in the form of 5 P's namely, Plan, Ploy, Pattern, Position and Perspective. Mintzberg further considers the interrelationships between the five definitions and asserts that strategy formulation directly relates to strategic implementation and the eventual overall organisational performance. The Mintzberg 5 P's provides alternative ways to view strategic management by providing insights into an organisations strategic dimensions through different lenses and perspectives (Dreyer, 2002).

The first P refers to the concept of organisational strategy as a **plan**, where strategic planning is referred to as the **forward looking** process of breaking down organisational goals into steps (Mintzberg, The rise and fall of strategic planning, 1994). Once the steps are known, the plan should be further defined to outline the implementation of the said plan whilst estimating the anticipated consequences associated with the execution. Within the telecommunications

industry this could include having a detailed roadmap on how to achieve organisational objectives such as increasing market share or business expansion. Very importantly, the plan should detail the steps required to achieve the strategy.

The second P refers to strategy as a **ploy** or a specific manoeuvre designed to outcompete rivals. Specific plotting to disrupt the industry could form part of the strategic plan of an organisation. Mintzberg focuses on the positives which arise from strategy as ploy by outsmarting competitors in order to gain competitive advantage. From a telecommunications strategic perspective, strategy as a ploy could be in the form of strategic acquisitions of smaller industry players or key partnerships or alliances with local authorities through both commercial and corporate social investment initiatives. (French, 2009) does however allude to the fact that strategy as a ploy may more closely related to tactics as opposed to actual strategic management.

The third P refers to strategy as a **pattern** or a set of consistent actions over a period of time. Thus strategy as a pattern is **looking backward** and adjusting to current or anticipated organisational needs. As per (Amjad, 2013) the process of strategy execution should form a set of consistent actions over the lifespan of the business, which thus creates a pattern. In the case of a telecommunications company, this could include the regular rollout of products, regular network upgrades or regular strategy review and post strategy implementation sessions which are deliberate and intentional.

The fourth P refers to strategy as a **position** being strategy as a unique or defensible market position. For a telecommunications organisation this could involve designing a strategy which enables the development of a strong brand and reputation. Internally all employees are potential ambassadors for the brand and the organisation as a whole. Enabling employee involvement in the creation and execution of organisational strategy gives the company the unique opportunity to position itself as a service provider of choice.

The final P refers to strategy as a **perspective** or a company's underlying beliefs and values. Perspective involves making strategic decisions whilst taking the organisation culture into consideration. The lens used for setting strategy should be a multifocal lens which considers

the perspective of all levels of management specifically those directly responsible for executing the organisational strategy. Organisation behaviour and thinking processes of management and employees determines the organisational perspective (Hill, Jones, & Schilling, 2014). For a telecommunications organisation, this could include a perspective that prioritizes internal innovation in the form of corporate entrepreneurship, prides themselves on customer service or demonstrates a firm commitment to corporate social responsibility initiatives.

Overall a telecommunications company could use Mintzberg's five P's of strategy to guide a range of strategic decisions from developing the overall strategy to cultivating a unique brand and reputation. Where Mintzberg falls slightly short is the aspect of post strategic implementation review. A high rate of strategic failures are well documented within academic research based on South African companies as found by (Jooste & Fourie, 2009) which attributes most strategic failures to a lack of strategic leadership from the executive leadership team.

2.3 Who effectively formulates corporate strategy

(Coulson-Thomas, 2021) speaks to the great level of difficulty which is brought on by attempting to define a business strategy, more so if the said strategy is carried out by the executive Board of Directors. Executive boards of directors usually operate within defined frameworks and are governed by regulations and corporate governance protocols. The writer further questions whether boards have the collective ability to think strategically or whether they are bogged down by their standard duties as board members.

The King Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa 2016 (King IV) requires that the board set strategic direction. Boards often operate within a pre-defined annual calendar with little regard for the modern business challenges which requires constant review and adjustment of strategy. Even in the event of an emergency, an urgent board meeting must be called with a required quorum which must be met for any decisions to be effective. Boards are therefore unable to be agile enough to ensure that adequate analysis and efficient strategic decision making is actioned. (Hussey, 2001).

A study by (Mueller, Sillince, Harvey, & Howorth, 2005) highlights the conflicting priorities faced by board members in fulfilling their monitoring role, which requires independence, whilst fulfilling their strategy role, which requires involvement. It is further supported that the board must be involved at a deeper level than just monitoring (Fiegener, 2005) to effectively set strategic objectives.

A study by (Fauver & Fuerst, 2006) proposed that it be mandatory to have employee representation on the board based on a study of German corporates where labour representation on boards is mandated by the country's corporate governance law. The value of this approach is evident as the study finds powerful means of direct monitoring and inputs reduces agency costs within organisations. The study does however find that the same benefits do not hold true for organisations with union representatives.

In a study on sources of organisational inertia, (Naegele, Hoppmann, & Girod, 2019) found that environmental and strategic issues impair the board's ability to judge strategic issues thus prolonging decision making which could have a negative effect on the agility of the overall organisation. If a board is consistently in limbo due to conflicting strategic decisions which demand their attention, this will ultimately flow throughout the organisation, especially if operations depend on specific board resolutions.

Leading during times of crises leads to minimal time to fully interrogate business solutions (James & Wooten, 2009). A key example of this challenge was the pressure placed on boards during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic was new to everyone and taking the time to align critical design making activities to strategy was not necessarily a board priority. Some boards were able to make strategic decisions around organisational operations which resulted in minimal productivity loss, whilst other boards may have missed the mark in acting with sufficient speed, resulting in COVID-19 outbreaks in the workplace leading to a drop in productivity.

2.3.1 What are the benefits and challenges of following this approach

Organisation strategy is very rarely successfully executed naturally without deliberate and intentional interposition. This is supported by (Sterling, 2013) who asserts that; success in strategy execution cannot be achieved without putting the necessary interventions in place

to ensure that organisational strategic success is realised. The best strategic minds could formulate a failproof strategy, however this does not guarantee executionary success if similar effort is not applied to the cascaded of the said strategy.

Research conducted by (Oyuko, 2019) focusses on a large telecommunications corporate and reveals a positive relationship between the inclusion of employees at all levels within the strategy formulation and execution process and the overall success of strategy execution, which steers us away from the common practice that the board should be solely responsible for setting the organisational strategy.

(Hamel, 1996) describes the board or executive committees as powerful strategy defenders with the greatest privileges and the largest invested in the past as they are often marketed as experienced and seasoned professionals. A key takeaway from this report is that strategy formulation requires revolutionaries and not necessarily experienced board members. Experience comes from the past whilst strategy looks to the future, and thus the board may not be the correct custodians of the role as strategic creators and leaders.

2.4 Does a board of executives hold sufficient operational understanding to effectively formulate strategic goals?

The King Report on Corporate Governance for South Africa 2016 (King IV), principal 7, advises that the board should comprise of the appropriate balance of skills, experience, knowledge, independence and diversity for it to govern objectively and effectively. Whilst experience could indicate operational experience, non-executive board members would not necessarily be involved in organisation specific operations however they are tasked to make strategic decisions for the said operation. The Board of Directors differs regarding the type of experience and industry knowledge that they possess (Carpenter & Westphal, 2001). Whilst some members of the board have knowledge obtained through direct interaction, others would have obtained knowledge by second hand observations from their colleagues who bring experience from other board engagements (Haas & Hansen, 2005).

A long-standing criticism of boards and senior leadership teams is that they lack the required time and information to be more effective. (Lorsh, 1989) The board operates at a strategic

level, which often leaves the board with limited time to experience the actual operations on the ground. One critical shortcoming is that the Board of Directors are spending too much time fulfilling their governance responsibilities as many holds full time executive positions whilst carrying out non-executive engagements for at least one other organisation (Kress, 2018).

(Brenes, Mena, & Molina , 2008) advises that corporate organisations should intentionally strike a balance between ongoing operations and new strategic initiatives. Challenges arising from the strategic process is usually attributable to dwelling on new strategy development and implementation whilst forgetting to maintain current operations (Chetty, 2010). A relatable example of this phenomena would be a customer contacting a telecommunications company for support with a problem and being advised that a new system has been implemented. This demonstrates how a lack of operational understanding could impact overall strategic success.

A study by (Ait Omar, Garmani, El Amrani, Baslam, & Fakir, 2019) researched the impact of customer confusion on the decision-making strategies of Internet Service Providers (ISPs) within the network and telecommunications market. A key finding in the underlying cause for customer confusion related to the transformation of the telecommunications customer over time since yesterday's customer is no longer today's customer. Using the best response algorithm, the research concluded that clearer organisational strategies and high customer satisfactory services resulted in a more adaptive and understanding customer. This study demonstrates the need for strategy creators to have an in-depth understanding of the customer, it demonstrates that if telecommunications strategies are defined with the customer in mind, the customer can interpret the service offering and associated pricing in a manner which is more rational. Therefore, clear insights and understanding of the day-to-day operations and challenges of the is imperative when defining organisational strategy.

2.5 With the downward cascading of strategy being a common approach to create awareness throughout the organisation, why are there still huge pockets of an organisation who are not aware of the organisation's strategy

Standard practice within organisational structures are for strategic decisions to be formulated by the executive committee and/or senior management which is then cascaded to middle and lower level management to execute (Ndunge, 2014), however the lack of awareness around the strategic reasoning especially to those spheres of management not directly involved in the strategic formulation would render the strategic cascade process unsuccessful and incompatible (Neilson, Martin, & Powers, 2008)

Large corporate organisations often find it challenging to cascade their organisational strategy even though a common practice is to establish a dedicated corporate strategy division who owns this objective (Brunsman, DeVore, & Houston, 2011). The corporate strategy division is often limited due to their lack of involvement within the various sub-divisions of the corporate organisation, which results in poor business strategy implementation.

Organisational culture, which includes the collective attitudes and interaction norms, could often be the cause of strategic change strategies failing at implementation (Davis, 2003). The key players in the telecommunications space of South Africa are large organisations with in excess of 5000 employees each (Owler, 2022). This results in bottom heavy organisational structures where the various departments adopt their own departmental cultures focused on their departmental priorities, which is usually only related to a specific component of the overall organisation's strategic goals.

Analysis strategy is defined by (Sayyadi, 2021) as a tendency to search for the root cause of problems and generate alternatives to solve them. Analysis strategy encourages organisations to apply information systems and their associated data outputs to investigate the various alternatives, which then assists in determining the potential level of effectiveness prior to selecting a finalised roll-out strategy. This could be as elementary as applying a strategic rollout plan to a test group and testing its efficacy by using extrapolation techniques prior to rolling out to the entire organisation. Organisations however spend more time on

strategy formulation and less time on strategy implementation, resulting in a disconnect in the overall understanding of the organisational strategy.

(Musundi & Nzulwa, 2018) conducted a study on the Kenyan telecommunications industry investigating the influence of employee relations strategies on the strategic performance of the organisation. The study found employee involvement as a critical factor affecting strategic performance. This is further supported by (Akaegbu & Usoro, 2017), who asserts that a key element in successful strategic execution is the involvement of employees. Once awareness is created around the strategic process specifically targeted at the employees, their motivation and commitment to achieve the strategic objectives is enhanced and more deliberate.

Defensiveness is also a common barrier to the effective implementation of corporate strategy as new and improved strategy would have analysed the current state of operations to seek opportunities for efficiency. Executives and management could take an offensive approach which results in the adoption of a defensive strategy towards change. (Sayyadi, 2021)

(Oleksandr, 2013) studied the relationship of globalisation and corporate strategy specifically focused on multinationals with a collective of small, medium and large operations across the globe. The author finds that the corporate strategy formulated by multinationals are favoured towards their operations in more developed countries, which ultimately deepens the cross-country differentiation as organisations try to implement a one size fits all strategy which does not consider all unique nuances of their various geographies. This is further supported by (Lawlor, 2007) who researched the anti-Eurocentric movement which concerns countries who actively pushes back against eurocentrism as a method not to lose their inherent identity and culture. The impact again of actively pushing back against strategic implementation to protect localised identity would result in a lack of congruence in the understanding of strategic objectives.

2.6 Literature review: summary and conclusion

Academic strategic literature specifically focussed on the telecommunications industry is limited as the available literature tends to focus on corporates and boards of directors in a

more general nature. Overwhelmingly, the available literature promotes that the Board of Directors should assume responsibility of setting the organisations strategic goals with the inputs of subject matter experts. Opposingly, literature also suggests that most board members are ineffective at implementing strategy due to being inundated by their corporate governance responsibilities which remains rigid and time consuming with minimal room for the unique demands of telecommunications industry. A well-balanced Board of Directors brings a wealth of experience and industry insights to an organisation and thus the strategy set for the organisation would be well informed from the perspective of industry related standards. There are however opportunities to include employees or their representatives in the process of setting strategic objectives as this allows the board to receive direct insights from those tasked to operationally execute the set strategy.

Literature reviewed around the board's thorough understanding of organisation operations, strongly suggests the need for board members to remain independent enough to effectively carry out a monitoring and oversight role whilst remaining involved and informed sufficiently to effectively set strategic objectives. This balance can be challenging to achieve which results in board members either leaning more towards independence or more towards involvement both of which yield their own challenges and opportunities.

Strategic implementation is often treated as a project by telecommunications corporates who adopt a new or improved strategy. Post strategy adoption by the C-suite, a project manager is enlisted which is then followed by a project plan with specific project milestones aimed at the supervisory and operative levels of the organisation. Project plans have start and end dates whilst strategy needs to live within the organisational culture. Therefore, using standard project management techniques to implement strategy will continuously fall short of having a long-term impact.

The literature also demonstrates the impact of globalisation and how it can affect the cascade of strategy both negatively and positively. Organisations lean towards favouring their larger operations when setting strategy. The larger operations are often geographically located within economic hubs and urban settings. When attempting to apply the same strategy to the operations in a more rural setting, the priorities of that specific operation may be very different from their headquarters, thus creating a mismatch in strategic objectives. By

contrast, having a headquarters in an economic hub holds benefits for their more rural operations as they would have constant insights into a faster paced, more technologically established siblings.

The literature reveals many recommendations, however the knowledge regarding a systematic and fully integrated organisational strategy cascade and success measuring framework remains incomplete.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter details the research methodology. The plan that was undertaken was to conduct the research by following a systematic process to solve the identified research problem. The research methodology utilised incorporated the research design with the supporting justification for the approach. The paper also includes the methods of participant selection and the justification for utilising the said methods. Further, the techniques of data collection and data collection instruments used, as well as data analysis approach and the associated justification are also included.

3.2 Research Design

This study's research design made use of a **qualitative general method** of data collection through conducting research interviews, as well as the use of an anonymous survey. Qualitative general research design methods aids the capturing of expressive information not conveyed in quantitative data about beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviours (Valcárcel & Cárdenas, 2005).

Utilising a predesigned set of questions, narrative interviews were conducted with employees or those affiliated with the telecommunications industry, in order to understand their experiences and perceptions in a manner that is more in-depth and thorough.

The purpose of the research survey was to extract qualitative data to obtain an understanding of collective experiences and understanding of the research topic. Limited open ended

questions which enables the participant to unpack their experiences with the subject matter is encouraged by (Bergin, 2018).

This research is limited to the telecommunications industry of South Africa, which narrows the pool of respondents to a single industry, thus justifying the choice of a qualitative research design methodology as the appropriate approach. Additionally, much of the research published in the organisational strategy discipline consists of work conducted using quantitative methods. While these results are typically quantifiable and generalisable, it does not allow for an in-depth understanding as to why strategies are not cascaded successfully. The aim of the research is thus to uncover the factors underpinning the phenomenon, which therefore further warrants the use of a qualitative research methodology.

The method of approach was email communication as the main mode of contact. Some participants were also contacted via telephone where the need arose.

3.3 Participant Selection

3.3.1 Interviews

The population considered for sampling for the research interviews was all employees (permanent and contracted) of the telecommunications industry within South Africa. The target sample size was 12 narrative interviews aligned to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) recommendation of 10 - 50 participants as being a sufficient sample size. The narrative interviews were conducted in addition to the research survey, which is covered in section 3.3.2.

The sampling technique used is classified as the purposive approach as specific individuals were targeted for participation in the research. The justification for the use of this technique is the requirement to have variety in the feedback, as well as obtain feedback from the perspective of different levels of employees within the telecommunications industry. Additionally, the researcher wanted to reach participants who were well versed with organisational strategy, as well as those who are more operational in their occupation and

thus may not directly interact with organisational strategy. Thus, identifying specific participants based on their occupation was imperative to obtain a well-balanced data set.

Table 1 contains the detailed listing of survey participants indicating their participant ID, job grade, job family and tenure. All participants are employed full time within the telecommunications industry of South Africa.

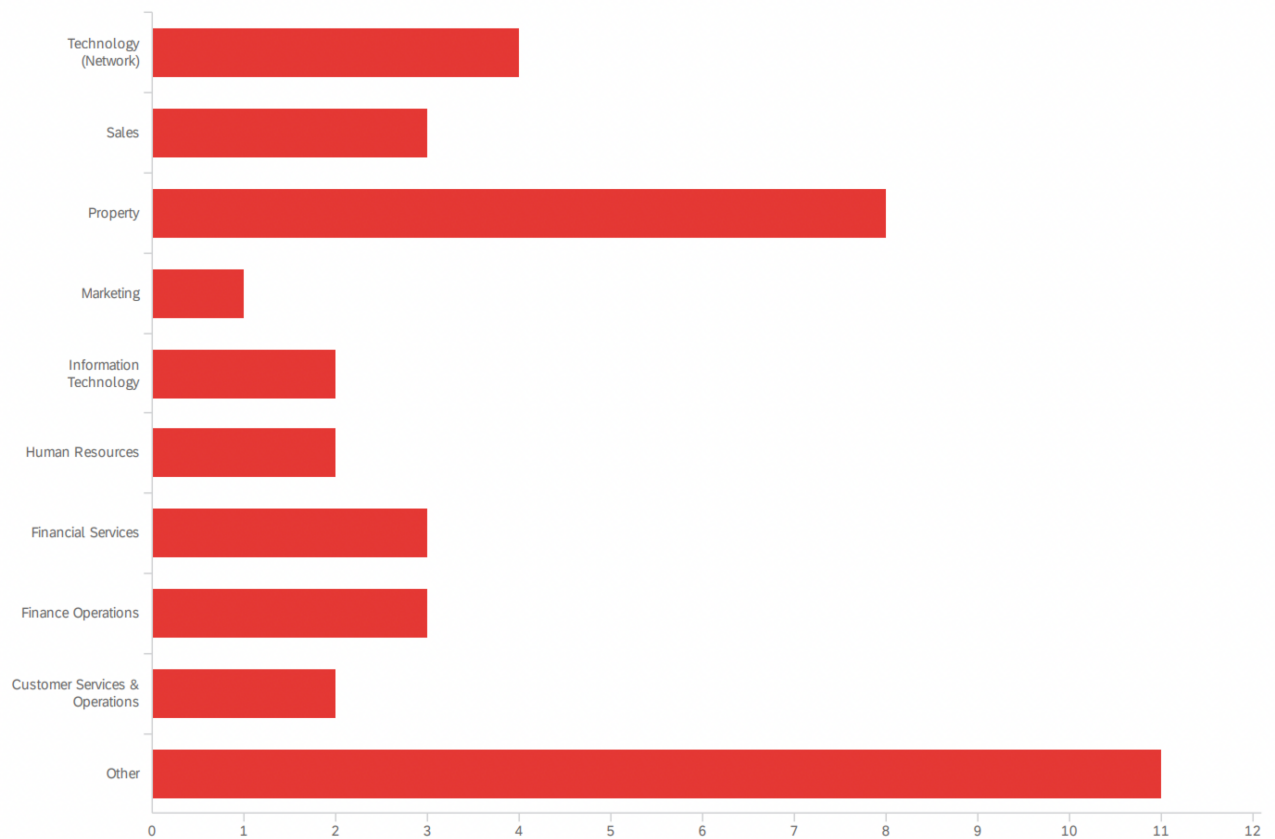
Participant ID	Job Grade	Job Family	Tenure (Years)
Participant 1	Staff Band	Property	20
Participant 2	Staff Band	Property	6
Participant 3	Staff Band	Human Resources	12
Participant 4	Staff Band	Finance	7
Participant 5	Staff Band	Sales	4
Participant 6	Middle Management	Consumer Marketing	3
Participant 7	Middle Management	Property	3
Participant 8	Middle Management	Network Technology	11
Participant 9	Middle Management	Information Technology	17
Participant 10	Middle Management	Corporate Strategy	5
Participant 11	Senior Leadership	Corporate Strategy	1
Participant 12	Senior Leadership	Customer Operations	16

3.3.2 Research Survey

The population considered for the sample of survey respondents was all employees (permanent and contracted) to the telecommunications industry within South Africa. The target sample size was 35 survey respondents, aligned to (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) recommendation of 10 - 50 participants as being a sufficient sample size. The actual number of respondents was 46, thus exceeding the target respondents. The respondents included employees and fixed term contractors ranging from different skill levels to different divisions within South African Telco's. 65% of the survey respondents identified as people leaders whilst 35% identified as operational staff.

The sampling technique used is convenience sampling as the purpose of the survey was to obtain a generalised understanding of the telecommunications employees level of awareness regarding the organisational strategy pertaining to their environments.

Table 2: Demonstrates a graphic view of the department which the survey respondent associates with. This demonstrates the survey respondents are diverse in their background, giving the research a multifaceted view



3.4 Setting

All interviews were held virtually using Microsoft Teams, where majority of participants were in a quiet environment with the ability to speak freely and confidently. No non-participants were present during the interview in order to ensure anonymity and confidentiality for the participant. . All interviews took place within the period of November 2022 – January 2023.

3.6 Research Instrument

The research instrument consisted of structured interviews with a predefined set of open-ended questions. Broad topics were outlined in the interview structure and the interviewees were allowed to explore the topics with the researcher in order to gain the required level of richness from the narrative.

The second research instrument consisted of an anonymous survey to obtain a further consensus on overarching questions which required a wider input.

The combination of instruments ensures that data analysis is adequately triangulated as supported by (Bergin, T 2018).

3.6.1 Data collection

All interviews were audio recorded. Additionally, 5 of the 10 interviews were video recorded after permission was obtained from the interviewee. This assisted the researcher to have a view of the participants body language, in addition to their answers to the questions. The average interview length was 40 minutes. The average time to complete the online research survey was 08 minutes.

3.7 Data Analysis

The analytical model utilised to conduct this research is the content thematic analysis, aligned to the data analysis steps as described by (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The steps are as follows; (1) familiarizing oneself with the data, (2) generating the codes, (3) constructing the themes, (4) reviewing potential themes, (5) defining and naming themes, (6) producing the report. The justification for utilising content thematic analysis is due to the use of the research survey in conjunction with the research interviews. Content thematic analysis will enable the researcher to utilise aspects of quantitative data in the form of percentages to further support the research and data analysis.

The data analysis method used was an in-vivo coding process in order to organise the interview material into categorical themes using Qualtrix and Voyant Tools software, enabling comparison and correlation between the responses from the research participants to generate structured topics aligned to themes. This method will be used to ensure that the authenticity of the responses are retained and the opinions of the survey participants are honoured and considered thoroughly during the theme identification stage of the data analysis.

3.8 Ensuring rigour

Rigour has been established by focussing on the criterion of transferability and credibility. The researcher employed a pilot study before the actual interview and survey process to establish the appropriateness of the research design chosen. The pilot study outcome has not been included in the final study. The following criterion were focussed on to ensure rigour.

Transferability : By providing thick description, the researcher ensured that all participants were fully informed on the purpose of the research. The researcher ensured that the frame of reference was understood, that the participants felt protected and safe enough to share and engage freely knowing that their anonymity will be upheld.

Credibility: Post transcription, the summaries were returned to the research participants for the purposes of obtaining a consensus that the substance of the interview was correctly articulated and captured as per the participants intentions.

To increase reliability we apply data collection methods carefully and consistently, and standardize the procedures of the study by utilising a limited setting to conduct interviews specifically virtually. Apply the same amount of time for each interview meaning all participants receive the same amount of time to formulate their responses.

4. Research and Discussion

The research sought to answer the main research question which was; With the downward cascading of strategy being a common approach to create awareness throughout the organisation, why are there still huge pockets of an organisation who are not aware of the organisation's strategy? The research findings and discussion seek to answer this main question in addition to the sub questions as proposed in section 1.4.

This section considers the findings from the narrative interviews in conjunction with the findings collected through the research survey. The collective findings, together with a review of relevant literature, will provide a framework for the overall findings and associated topics. Several topics focus around the accessibility and relatability of senior leadership, which was seen as a key barrier to effective integration with staff at a lower level of the organisational structure. Other key themes relates to a lack of interest in organisational strategy by predominantly operational or staff band employees due to matters like conflicting priorities and gatekeeping by middle management.

The themes relating to the topics identified will be unpacked further in sections 4.1 – 4.7 below.

4.1 Hierarchy

The first key theme which emerged from the findings was the very evident hierarchy and the negative impact this has on the perceived availability of the senior leadership team to the rest of the organisation. (Mintzberg, 1981) established the importance of hierarchy in determining salience levels of managerial tasks. However, later research cited the role which hierarchy has on the perceptions of management from staff at different levels in the hierarchy (Perrow, 1986).

Within the corporate environment, career advancement often comes with years of loyalty and sacrifice. Once an employee reaches the C-Suite, they tend to demand a certain level of respect and exclusivity, thus making them inaccessible to the wider organisational population. This could also be greatly influenced by cultural norms and values especially since, in South Africa, having power and influence commands additional respect from those who are not part of the C-Suite and no longer classified as peers. The findings from the current research however indicate a disparity between the perceptions of senior management, middle management and the staff band.

4.1.1 Board accessibility

Participants who identified as executive level employees indicated a smaller access barrier when compared to middle management or the staff band as indicated by *Participant 11* who

is a current executive, commenting *“When I was hired, I found access to executive and operational information very challenging. My colleagues knew more than me about everything in the business due to their tenure with the company, which was longer, and they could therefore build relationships with strategic partners over time. It seemed as if I was being tested by my colleagues as information was not regularly available or at hand. I could not just walk up to my colleagues because COVID-19 meant we work from anywhere even though peer to peer relationships were yet to be established”* This indicated a barrier at entry however *participant 11* further stated the following; *“This is a very common phenomena in corporate culture and is not isolated to a band”*. *Participant 11* explained that this experience with access to their peers in the C-Suite was short lived and overcome with assertiveness and deliberate intentional enquiry.

Participant 12, also a more senior executive within their organisation with 16 years of experience, shared that they do not have challenges with accessing information, their line managers or their peers, allowing us to deduce that hierarchy does not have a lasting negative perception on senior leaders within the telecommunications industry.

A significant proportion of participants who identified as mid-level management and people leaders indicated that access to their senior leadership team would be indirect through their people leader. *Participant 6* indicated the following; *“when I have DOA, I usually call the Chief directly”*. *Participant 7* shared a similar experience. However, they believe that they do not have sufficient seniority to be acknowledged by the C-suite. This may be a false perception being created as no other middle level manager participant shared a similar experience.

On the contrary, the staff band’s experience with hierarchy was a lot more prevalent. *Participant 5*, an Account Manager within the Sales business unit, stated the following; *“I don’t even know where they sit! Do they even come to the office?”* supported by *Participant 4*, a Financial professional from the Financial Operations space stated *“My line manager prefers that we do not send reports to other managers because they want to be the only ones who shine”*

The difference in experience is very prevalent based on the data analysed. The feedback also indicates that tenure plays an important part in how an organisations hierarchy is perceived.

4.2 Calibre of leadership

Corporate Governance scholars speaks to the importance of appointing directors of sufficient calibre to lead an organisation (Heracleous, 2001). There are best practices which are promoted as it relates to board composition to ensure that decisions made reflect the calibre, expertise and balanced composition of the senior leadership team.

In response to the discussions held relating to the level confidence held in the Board of Directors as strategic leaders, the majority of survey participants demonstrated a high level of confidence in their Executive Committee, which was supported by the following feedback.

“Yes I trust the board, they hold a wide range of experience as they have been within the industry for a significant amount of time” – Participant 8

“ Yes the board is very knowledgeable” – Participant 1

“Yes, I trust the board to make good and sound strategic decisions because they know their business and the South African operating environment. Many board members have MBA degrees so they are academically qualified to hold office” – Participant 9

“Yes, the board is trustworthy thought leaders who make us proud when they win awards in ICT. If my CEO wins the award over his peers, it means even outsiders believe in his ability.” – Participant 10

Data collected from the narrative interviews demonstrates a great level of respect for the Board of Directors due to the business challenges which they are expected to navigate.

“The Board of Directors should not be underestimated, it takes great leadership skills and courage to take accountability for a large multinational organisation and make it a success. You must remember that when the business does well, the board is compensated dependent

on their remuneration agreements, but when business does not meet the agreed targets, the job of the board becomes very challenging as they are held accountable ” Respondent 16

4.3 Middle-management gatekeeping

A third theme identified was around the lack of information cascading initiatives specifically by middle management, who are key in disseminating strategy.

Gatekeeping is defined as the process of controlling information as it moves through a filter which is associated with exercising a form of power (Barzilai-Nahon, 2009). Corporate gatekeeping is defined by (Oh, 2004) as deciding whether to grant or withhold knowledge. This could be applied to the telco environment where the information component of the definition is job specific. Corporate environments are characterised by a highly competitive internal landscape where colleagues compete for attention, recognition and promotion. A middle manager has the ability to exercise power within the workplace by sharing a limited amount of strategic direction with the intention to be indispensable.

Gatekeeping creates huge knowledge gaps, which could span on for centuries (Swartz, 2009) The lack of knowledge accumulates over time which could be detrimental to both individuals and organisations. Withholding information as a managerial practice could have potentially negative consequences such as damaging relationships, eroding trust and hindering productivity and innovation.

Participant 7 reflected the comments of several other participants - he/she finds it challenging to effectively complete certain tasks independently due to dependencies on their managers to share certain information. This appeared to be a common theme amongst the staff band respondents.

“I have been working on a project “in the background” for months without knowing who the stakeholders are. My manager wants me to prepare and publish presentation decks and then distributes it as his own. I do not get access to those meetings to learn more about the intention and goals of the project ” Participant 7

A classic definition of gatekeeping can be seen in the following statement; *“Only my manager has login credentials to our reporting tool. Anytime I require reports I have to request them from my manager.” Participant 9*

“My manager says that we cannot have access to the reporting tool because we will mess up the data and expect her to fix it, so its best that only one person accesses the reports.” Participant 9

If middle management find it challenging to cascade information to their teams, this will hinder the flow of information to the lower levels of the organisation, especially the staff band. Despite the limitations, middle managers can make a positive contribution to strategic development by providing insights from their functional areas and collaborating with their senior leadership to execute strategic initiatives. Middle management can be the advocate for their functional areas by collaborating with their staff to ensure that their perspective and input is taken into account by the Senior Leadership Team.

4.4 Challenges relating to collecting strategic inputs from the wider organisation

The Board of Directors operate at a strategic level as they are responsible for setting the overall strategic direction of the organisation. The board has a fiduciary duty to act in the interest of the organisation and the stakeholders. This requires an understanding of the operational landscape and also requires a focus on long-term strategic planning.

At a strategic level, the board should identify key strategic issues and opportunities and prioritise opportunities aligned to the agreed business strategy. In order to effectively provide guidance and oversight to management, the board must align operations with strategic goals. The Board must therefore rely on their management teams to keep updated with regards to the operational challenges and successes of the organisation, in order to plan and set an achievable and realistic strategy.

Referencing back to section 4.1.1, where it was argued that board accessibility for senior managers is less challenging when compared to the board access of the staff band. This can

then be further extended when we try to determine the ease of access to contribute to the organisational strategy. It would be safe to make the assumption that senior managers can contribute to organisational strategy with less barriers due to the board access which they enjoy. This is supported by the following comments from research participants;

Participant 9 says “ We have regular strategy sessions, which are led by the strategy division. We are asked for our inputs on strategic proposals but it does not seem to carry much weight because the strategy team would already have deep dived the proposals and thus are not as open to feedback as they could be”

Participant 6 commented “ Yes we do speak strategy but it is not formalised like other meetings”

Participant 12 shared that “Even though there is a dedicated Chief of Strategy they rely on us as the business to share opportunities which we see in the market. “

There is a stark comparison when comparing experiences shared by senior managers to those experiences shared by middle management and staff band participants. Specifically, as they reflect on their experiences of how they perceive the strategy formulation and reflect on the opportunities they have to contribute or interrogate the organisational strategy. Middle managers express a sense of frustration around the topic of strategic inputs, where the frustration is more intense with those middle managers who have a longer tenure with their employer. This could indicate that middle managers have, over time, experienced challenges which hinder their ability to effectively contribute to strategy.

Factors such as a lack of access to information could limit the middle managers ability to make informed strategy related propositions for board consideration. Another factor would be the focus on day-to-day operations, which is the core function of a middle managers role. This would leave limited resources and time to devote to strategic thinking and planning. This is further supported by the following sentiments shared by survey participants;

“There is very few opportunities for myself and my team to really contribute to the strategy of the organisation as a whole. Honestly, we don’t really know where it is formed” says Participant 6. Similarly, Participant 8 does not recall the last time they were involved at the conceptual stage of forming strategy. “ I see it as a task for the EXCO or the investors, they will tell us what they want the company to achieve and we are focussed on the delivery”

“There is many members of staff, not everyone can be a strategy expert. I do not think that my inputs would change anything” Participant 5

In concluding this theme, the data indicates the following; the lower on the hierarchy an employee is, the more challenging it is for them to contribute to the organisational strategy, especially where formal channels for collective strategic planning are not in place . More senior members seemingly have more opportunities to contribute to strategy during the formulation phase. However, the inputs of their wider teams are not effectively collected. The biggest take away from this theme is the level of disempowerment felt by the staff band. The staff band do not feel heard or valued. They do not believe that they can add value to the organisational strategy as they are rarely engaged for input. The staff band believes that strategy and strategy formulation is outside of their ambit, which would have a negative impact at the phase of strategy execution. This will be explored further in section 4.7.

4.5 The role and existence of strategy champions

Strategy champions is a type of corporate champion who internally promotes organisational strategy at various levels of an organisation. Corporate champions can be nominated at divisional, as well as employment band level to ensure relatability with the audience which they serve. The role of a traditional corporate champion is not to monitor but to create awareness, and be the custodian of information ensuring that the subject matter is continuously top of mind, similar to how “Hygiene Champions” were created during the COVID-19 pandemic to lead the hygiene agenda and be the relatable source of information and guidance to employees who lack the confidence to reach out to a more senior member

of staff. Some organisations also refer to corporate champions as super peers, super users or change champions as per organisational change experts, (Chrusciel, 2008).

Strategy champions stem from the concept of corporate champions whereby integrated resources are suitably upskilled and deployed within the various pockets of the organisation to share information with their colleagues. The agenda of a strategy champion is to obtain buy in and create awareness. A clear cascade and communication plan needs to be in place to ensure penetration and access to relevant information throughout the organisation.

In analysing the survey feedback, the majority of survey participants indicated that they do not have access to a strategy champion or that they are unaware of the existence of a strategy champion. However, Participant 2 and 3 both indicated that they were the nominated strategy champions for their divisions. *“I was trained through a facilitated process on the content of the 2019 strategy and then I was sent on a facilitation course to help me share the strategy with my team.”*

This could indicate a lack of awareness on behalf of the greater organisation on the initiatives being taken by the telco to share and cascade strategy as the champions have been put in place but it seems they are poorly managed and poorly monitored. Additionally, this could indicate that the champions nominated are ineffective or lack support within their spaces.

“I do not have a direct line of contact with these individuals. I need to work through other team leaders to get the message across” Participant 3

Further, where survey participants were aware of a strategy champion, the participants were either grossly unsure of who the champion is or unsure of how to approach the champion for support. Again, this does leave the impression that strategy champions are not effectively or correctly managed to derive their full benefit.

Participant 7, who is an executive, was able to provide additional insights. “Strategy champions are nominated by their line managers annually. The role is a double hatting role

which is not separately remunerated. This could be why strategy champions are ineffective in its current form”

Participant 7 argues that existing strategy champions could be more effective if they received compensation either monetarily or otherwise for the effort output towards their role as strategy champion.

4.6 Communicating organisational strategy

A study conducted by (de Salas, 2014) on the effectiveness of strategy communication within the Financial Services industry - the study found that visualisation of organisational strategy by visually and graphically demonstrating how it is linked to a particular business process yielded stronger results and achievement of strategic goals when compared to pure written communication. Like telecommunications, financial services also employs a wide variety of staff from different disciplines which means not all staff are inherently technical and not all staff are inherently financial. This would create the requirement of a middle ground of sorts.

Based on the sample surveyed, 74% of participants asserted that they are not aware or well versed in their employers organisational strategy. 60% of participants acknowledged that they have not seen or discussed strategy within their departments for the past 6 months.

Participant 5 shared that “ The strategy is shared in small fragmented pieces. We need to listen and read in-between the lines in order to truly understand what the actual strategy is”.

This challenge could indicate the need for a formalised strategy communication plan where learning methods of the organisation is assessed in order for the most effective method to be implemented. A key step in successfully cascading strategy is communicating the said strategy effectively and measuring the efficacy once delivery of the speech or engagement session is completed.

“After the big launch of our last strategic change absolutely nothing happened. I don’t understand why they spend money on strategy launches if they are not going to follow up”

Participant 10

There is disparity between the access to strategic cascade initiatives enjoyed by senior managers and the access of the staff band. The research data collected and aggregated concludes that strategy is being communicated in a manner that is one dimensional and not catered to the multi-disciplined organisation that a telco is - this could be due to lack of skill or resources. Where inadequate resources in the form of time and personnel exist, it will result in strategy cascade failure. More effort should be placed in curating how strategy is cascaded, and measuring the effectiveness of that communication should form part of the cascade process.

4.7 Conflicting priorities relating to implementation

A lack of alignment can impact the success of strategic implementation. For strategy to be successful, it will require alignment of goals and objectives at all levels of an organisation. A lack of alignment can lead to conflicting priorities and internal confusion about what is most important. The staff band are focused on their priorities, especially given that their key performance indicators which translate into commissions or performance bonuses are not usually related to strategy matters. A challenge with this manner of operating is that it can create a culture where individual performance is prioritised over team congruency.

The following sentiments have been shared by interview participants, which demonstrates the individualistic culture which arises when organisational goals and functional goals are misaligned.

"I don't get paid to think about strategy, I get paid to make sales so that I can earn a commission". Participant 5

"How does knowing the strategy benefit me directly? If I know the strategy would I be able to afford a new car or a new property? I am an Engineer, which is my trade. My manager is the one who will know the strategy, not me" Participant 2

“Half of the time I cannot remember who shared information about the company strategy, so I google it but that would give me external strategy which contains all the fluff, so it’s a waste of my time” Participant 8

In the absence of direction which stems from a lack of leadership, strategic planning could be a success but the strategic implementation would fail. This aligns to the comment from *Participant 9 “There is a wish-list but no proper roadmap of how items are supposed to be implemented”*

Senior leaders find it challenging to build engagement within their teams specifically around strategic implementation. Senior managers relay a message relating to performance management methodologies, indicating that staff will focus their energy on matters relating to their performance metrics. If understanding and implementing strategy both directly and indirectly is not incentivised, it creates disconnect within teams. This is supported by participant 12 as follows;

“I find it challenging to get my junior staff engaged and interested in our strategy; even departmental strategy is not seen as a valuable topic to discuss. I think this is because many leaders fail to make strategic conversations relatable and thus employees sees strategy as a topic which falls outside of the ambit of their roles”

Conflicting priorities can arise within telco’s, which can lead to difficult decisions about where to allocate financial resources. When the board decides to channel funds to other areas of the business, it typically means that there are competing demands for the resources and the board has determined that other areas of the business are a higher priority. It is important to note that when the board decides to channel funds to other areas of the business like selecting the to invest in the mobile network and implementing a staff hiring freeze, it does not mean that Human Resources is unimportant or that its objectives won’t be achieved. Instead it simply means that other areas of the business needs more attention and resources at the current time.

Participant 12 shares their sentiments very well on board prioritisation and demonstrates a sense of understanding and maturity to the decisions made by the board.

“We don’t always agree with the strategic priorities set by the board but we do respect the decision. Remember that financial resources are channelled in the direction of strategic priorities. In order for me to deliver as a Head of Customer Operations, I need a high functioning customer contact centre, but the EXCO may concede that the business needs a new network grid and thus the customer contact centre may be deprioritised”

5. Conclusion and Recommendations for future research

This section provides a summary of the findings from the research analysis and discussion. The summary will be structured by the research questions RD1 to RD3. This section will then propose recommendations for stakeholders as well as suggestions for further research.

The literature and findings from this research study suggests that organisational strategy cascade initiatives can become a complex process based on intrinsic attributes of the company. The success or failure of corporate strategic initiatives develops through a combination of formal and informal leadership styles, which is further influenced by the organisational culture.

The overall data analysis reveals a very different experience an interaction with company strategy between the staff band, the middle managers and the executive leaders. Whilst the roles of each category of employee varies significantly, the concept of strategic congruence requires that all stakeholders work together to achieve a common goal. Having conflicting priorities essentially makes an organisation weaker and thus addressing the challenges identified will result in a stronger strategically aligned organisation.

With regards to RD 1: The data reveals that Boards of Directors are respected for their experience and expertise within the telecommunications industry. The Board of Directors is trusted to formulate organisational strategy due to their experience and expertise within telecommunications sector.

An opportunity for differentiation, which aligns to Mintzberg’s first P, strategy as a plan, would be to create specific opportunities for all staff to interact with the organisational

strategy in some form. This could be through the implementation of “strategy focus groups or strategy days”, which creates the time and space for staff to focus on strategic formulation and implementation as a collective. A common phenomena within telco’s is the variety of resource expertise which the company employs. An Engineer does not need to interact with a Finance Business Partner until budgeting season arrives. Neither party really understands each other’s expertise and priorities due to the limited interaction and involvement within spaces outside of their environments. Therefore, these ad-hoc interactions should be encouraged for the purpose of aligning interdepartmental objectives. Dedicating a certain strategic objective to the staff band to set and implement would not only create alignment amongst the staff band, it will also create a sense of ownership, involvement and tolerance.

With regards to RD 2, the research finds that Board of Directors are isolated and inaccessible to the majority of the organisation. Being “out of touch” with operations or solely relying on your management teams for operational updates does create the risk of not receiving an holistic status of the organisation. The Boards experience with operations would often be cushioned as staff would place 120% effort when they are aware that the Board is conducting a visit to their operations. We can therefore determine that the Board of Directors does not hold sufficient understanding of operations in their current form. Pandemic’s like COVID-19 has changed the way businesses operate and thus relying on aged(???) experience as a basis for future strategy would be a plan to fail.

An opportunity for the Board to apply Mintzberg third P, Strategy as pattern, would be to formalise interaction with the board at a staff band or operational level. Since literature has found that EXCO members are often inundated with meetings and very busy schedules, it is recommended to schedule interactions and sessions with Board in order for them to gain a more thorough and in-depth understanding of their operations. The key to success with this plan of action is consistency, and thus creating a pattern would ensure the greatest level of success.

With regards to RD3 , we can confirm that the reasons for strategic cascade failure is intricate and thus cannot be solved with a single solution. The biggest challenge identified as an overall theme in the discussion is the disproportion of experience between the senior leadership,

middle management and the staff band. This challenge creates misalignment and poor engagement within the organisation.

The second key contributor to strategic cascade failure is the lack of a feedback loop or program to track the success of strategic cascade initiatives.

A third key contributor is the methods adopted to cascade strategy. The methods adopted are not impactful and thus renders it ineffective.

Specific intervention must be considered to address challenges relating to middle management. Instead of withholding information, middle managers may benefit from developing their communication skills and empathy to create a more inclusive and productive work environment. Encouraging dialogue and feedback, as well as providing regular updates and status reports, can help to build trust and support team cohesion and performance.

The South African telco's are large corporate organisations with access to a variety of experiences through their diversified staff. This is an opportunity to propel the businesses to greater success if their talent and skills can be harnessed, nurtured and applied to achieve the Telco's strategic objectives. The introduction of a "Strategy Day" with the assistance of nominated strategy champions and communication experts could be the foundation of ensuring success in the strategy cascade process. The introduction of a regular alignment check-in at all organisational levels could act as a reminder that organisational strategy exists and every role within the organisation contributes to the success or failure of the organisation.

5.1 Recommendations for future research

This research study was based on a qualitative research methodology with the use of a qualitative general research design. The sample size was 12 and saturation was met. Whilst the sample size was representative of the ratios of senior executives to staff band employees, the sample was concentrated to four telco's operating with South Africa. It may be appropriate in future to take a sample which is more representative of the telecoms industry throughout South Africa.

Given the inductive nature of the research, a number of findings occurred which was not anticipated by the research. The gatekeeping of information by various levels of management was an important finding. It is therefore recommended that future research specifically focussed on management empowerment. In such research it would be beneficial to sample managers only to understand what influence their gatekeeping behaviour.

Finally, further research should be conducted around offering some form of compensation for all employees to be strategy champions. Specifically a feasibility study could be conducted to estimate the potential positive impact on the Telco should compensation be offered for strategy champions. This may not be monetary reward but could be in a different form in order to drive interest and engagement.

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7. APPENDICES

A1 – Cover letter to survey participants

A2 - Research Instrument – Survey Questionnaire

A3 - Research instrument – Interview Guide

A4 - Turn-it-in report



Sculpting global leaders

10 June 2022

Introductory letter to research participants

Dear Respondent

My name is Saadiqah Kubheka a Masters student in Business Administration at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

May you please assist me in completing this 3 minute survey which will be used for data collection for my dissertation: **Challenges and Opportunities relating to corporate strategy implementation within the telecommunications sector** under the supervision of Professor Zunaid Bulbulia. The report hopes to make a meaningful contribution to the understanding of factors that influence strategy adoption within the telecommunications environment.

The survey link is:

[Link](#)

Participant identity will be kept confidential and anonymous for the research. At no point of this research will you be required to reveal your identity. All information gathered from the research will only be used for academic purposes. Your responses is your personal opinions and experiences, you are therefore not responding on behalf of your employer or any third party organisations.

Thank you for taking part in this online survey. Your participation will make a valuable contribution to academic knowledge.

Should you have any queries please feel free to contact my supervisor and I on the following contacts.

Professor Zunaid Bulbulia: zunaid.bulbulia@wits.ac.za

Saadiqah Kubheka: 2510570@students.wits.ac.za



The purpose of this survey is to obtain insights into the effectiveness of organisational strategy adoption initiatives. The survey comprises of three sections with five questions each, requiring on average 7 minutes to complete. The survey is aimed at participants who are associated with the telecommunications industry in South Africa. Your anonymity is guaranteed and you are not required to quote the name of the telecommunications organisation at any time.

Q1. I am currently employed by or contracted to a telecommunications company

- Yes
- No

Q2. Select the option which best describes your association to a telecommunications company

- Permanently employed
- Contract /Short term assignment/ Other

Q3. Tenure of your association with the organisation

- > 10 years
- 7 – 9 years
- 4 – 6 years
- 0 – 3 years

Q4. Are you a people leader?

- Yes
- No

Q5. Select your operating division

*Select the nearest operating division if your specific division is not available

- Technology (Network)
- Sales
- Property
- Marketing
- Information Technology
- Human Resources
- Financial Services
- Finance Operations
- Customer Services & Operations

- Other

Q6. How familiar are you with the organisation's strategic objectives?

- Not familiar at all
- Slightly familiar
- Moderately familiar
- Very familiar
- Extremely familiar

Q7. I think the organisation's strategy is realistic and achievable

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other (Please elaborate)

Q8. I have the opportunity to contribute to the organisation's strategy.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q9. How can the organisation improve the communication/cascading of the organisational strategy?

*Consider communication methods, frequency etc. visibility all answers are correct

Q10. The organisation has strategy champions which I can contact when required

- Yes
- No
- Other (Please elaborate)

Q11. My department has a clear departmental strategy

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q12. In my team, we hold regular strategy dialogues

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q13. The organisational strategy is applicable to my role.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Q14. My senior leader is familiar with what I do in my role

* Your senior leader is generally your manager's manager.

- Not familiar at all
- Slightly familiar
- Moderately familiar
- Very familiar
- Extremely familiar

Q15. I trust my senior leader to set the strategy for our team

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree
- Other (Please elaborate)

A3 – Appendix 3



Interview Question Guidance

The questions are there to prompt the conversation however the participant will be encouraged to share any further perspectives related to the research questions.

Q1. Are you currently employed by or contracted to a telecommunications company

Q2. What best describes your association to a telecommunications company?
Employee / Contractor / Affiliate

Q3. Tenure of your association with the organisation

Q4. Are you a Senior Leader (EXCO), Senior Management, Middle Management, Operational Staff / Staff Band (Define to participant)

Q5. Which division within the Telco do you identify with. What are key functions of your department / team

Q6. How familiar are you with the organisation's strategic objectives and how often do you interact with your organisation's strategic objectives?

Q7. Do you think your organisation's strategy is realistic and achievable? Please elaborate

Q8. Do you have opportunity to contribute to the organisation's strategy.

Q9. How can the organisation improve the communication/cascading of the organisational strategy?

Q10. The organisation has strategy champions which I can contact when required

Q11. Does your department have a clear departmental strategy

Q12. In your team, do you hold regular bi-directional strategy dialogues

Q13. The organisational strategy is applicable to my role. Do you know where you fit in and how your role contributes to achieving the strategy

Q14. My senior leader/Line Manager is familiar with what I do in my role.

Q15. I trust my senior leader to set the strategy for our team

Q16. How often do you interact with your senior leader? Work? Social? Other?