Stimulating Non-Management Employees’ Contribution to Strategy Implementation

An Analysis of Non-Management Employees’ Strategically Aligned Behavior in the Strategy Implementation Process

DISSEPTION IN TPA, 15 ECTS
May 31, 2011

Authors:
David Hansson  - 870123
Arvid Mårtensson  - 840125

Supervisor: Joakim Tell
Examiner: Bernd Hofmaier
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In writing our dissertation we have received the support and encouragement from our supervisor Joakim Tell who has been a sounding board and has given valuable input and suggestions throughout the process. We would particularly like to thank him for this.

We would also like to express our gratitude to Henrik Florén and Bernd Hofmaier, along with our colleagues who provided us additional feedback and comments in the seminars.

Special thanks to the companies and the respondents who kindly took part in this research and were open and helpful with us in the process of collecting the empirical data.

During our master’s studies at Halmstad University, and in particular during the period of writing this dissertation, we have received invaluable support from our families and friends whom we would also like to thank.

__________________________  _________________________
David Hansson                     Arvid Mårtensson

__________________________
Date & City

~ ii ~
ABBREVIATIONS

NME - Non-Management Employees

NPD - New Product Development

RQ - Research Question

SAB - Strategy Aligned Behavior

SI - Strategy Implementation
ABSTRACT

The importance of strategy formulation is well known and has consequently received a lot of attention from researchers and managers alike, however, strategy is not of any use if it cannot be implemented successfully. The field of implementation has received more and more attention lately but there is still much left to study and understand. One gap in the area is related to non-managers as executors and how they can contribute to a successful implementation; the purpose in this study is therefore to provide an initial foundation to fill this gap but also to link the factors to a context.

To gauge the success of implementation as influenced by the non-management, the smoothness of the implementation was considered, i.e. how frequent the problems were. The first step was therefore to find possible problems affected by the actions of the non-management and then to consider why they occurred. This was done with the help of the theory of strategy aligned behavior.

A qualitative study using interviews with managers and employees from two medium-sized manufacturing companies within a regional cluster in southern Sweden was chosen to gain the necessary data in order to reach the purpose of our study.

In the analysis of the research, the theory was found to be closely correlated to the empirical findings for the most part. With attention to the type of implementation discussed, the findings could be related to a context of where they occurred and then presented in a 2x2 matrix using measures of competence and company linkages. The findings include, as theory emphasizes; the importance of communication, not only in general but also in specific contexts. Further, an importance of the difference of strategic purpose and strategic effects could amongst other things also be seen.
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Background .................................................................................................................. 1
   1.2 Problem Discussion ...................................................................................................... 2
   1.3 Research Purpose ........................................................................................................ 3

2. **Theoretical Review and Frame of References** ................................................................. 4
   2.1 Definitions in Strategy Implementation ......................................................................... 4
   2.2 Theoretical Frame of References ................................................................................. 5
   2.3 Problems of Strategy Implementation ........................................................................ 7
      2.3.1 Problem Identification and Communication .......................................................... 7
      2.3.2 Capability of Implementation ................................................................................ 9
      2.3.3 Interpretation .......................................................................................................... 9
      2.3.4 Obstructivism ....................................................................................................... 10
      2.3.5 Prioritization of Efforts ......................................................................................... 11
   2.4 Context .......................................................................................................................... 12

3. **Methodology** .................................................................................................................. 14
   3.1 Research Strategy and Approach ................................................................................ 14
   3.2 Sample .......................................................................................................................... 15
   3.3 Data Collection ............................................................................................................ 15
   3.4 Literature Sources ....................................................................................................... 17
   3.5 Methodology Discussion ............................................................................................. 17

4. **Empirical Findings** ......................................................................................................... 19
   4.1 Company Alpha ............................................................................................................ 19
      4.1.1 General Company Information ............................................................................ 19
      4.1.2 Problem Identification and Communication ......................................................... 19
      4.1.3 Capability of Implementation .............................................................................. 21
      4.1.4 Interpretation of Strategy ..................................................................................... 22

~ V ~
Stimulating Non-Management Employees’ Contribution to Strategy Implementation

4.1.5 Obstructivism ........................................................................................................... 23
4.1.6 Prioritization of Efforts ........................................................................................... 24
4.2 Company Beta .............................................................................................................. 24
   4.2.1 General Company Information ............................................................................ 24
   4.2.2 Problem Identification and Communication ....................................................... 25
   4.2.3 Capability of Implementation .............................................................................. 27
   4.2.4 Interpretation of Strategy .................................................................................... 27
   4.2.5 Obstructivism ...................................................................................................... 28
   4.2.6 Prioritization of Efforts ....................................................................................... 29

5. Analysis .......................................................................................................................... 30
   5.1 Structure .................................................................................................................... 30
   5.2 Architectural Implementation .................................................................................. 30
   5.3 Radical Implementation .......................................................................................... 32
   5.4 Incremental Implementation ................................................................................... 34
   5.5 Modular Implementation ......................................................................................... 36

6. Conclusion & Discussion ............................................................................................... 37
   6.1 Conclusions .............................................................................................................. 37
   6.2 Practical Implications ............................................................................................. 38
   6.3 Theoretical Implications ....................................................................................... 38
   6.4 Shortcomings of the Study ..................................................................................... 38
   6.5 Further Research ..................................................................................................... 39

Bibliography ....................................................................................................................... 40

Interview Guide .................................................................................................................... 43

~ vi ~
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

“For almost two decades, managers have been learning to play by a new set of rules. Companies must be flexible to respond rapidly to competitive and market changes” (Porter, 1996, p. 61). Porter is referring to the importance of having the right strategy in “today’s dynamic markets and changing technologies” (ibid) and illustrates the focus that the area has seen during the last decades in order to formulate it. There is however another side of the same coin, as many authors have pointed out; no matter how brilliant the formulation - strategy is nothing without an effective accompanying implementation (Aaltonen, 2003; Bonoma, 1984; Hrebiniak, 2006; Neilson, Martin & Powers, 2008; Noble, 1999).

The formulation of a new strategy may be a difficult task for the management team assigned to do so, however, implementing the strategy within the whole organization is often an even more problematic task (Hrebiniak, 2006). To further complicate the field, it is also subject to complex processes involving a multitude of skills and knowledge to be able to carry out the desired strategic plans (Aaltonen, 2003). Despite the importance and the apparent complexity of the field, there has been relatively little research directed to the area, possibly due to the assumption that strategy formulation is considered to be the only important element of success. This prioritization issue has resulted implementation to take a back seat to the importance of strategy formulation and become something of a strategic afterthought (Noble, 1999).

To further highlight the importance of focusing on implementation and the possible negative aspects of considering the implementation solely as a “strategic afterthought”, one could consider the surprisingly high percentage of attempted strategies that either fail or have substantial problems in the phase of implementation. The exact percentage is widely varying with some authors claiming over 90% to be unsuccessful (Kiechel, 1982; Dion, Allday, Lafforet, Derain, & Lahiri, 2007) while these may be extremes, Carlos and Santos (2008) review 38 articles and concludes that the percentage is usually found to be 50-90%.

Strategy generally affects a great number of members of the organization; these organizational members are therefore also often required in various actions leading to the implementation of the strategy (Aaltonen, 2003). It is therefore also important for the success of the implementation to consider the input of all individuals that have to ultimately “live with it” (Heracleous, 2000, p. 82). This means that the implementation of a strategy has far more widespread effects in the organization than formulation which to some extent can be conducted at a top-management level. Separating and examining these different executors of strategy has often been the focus of many authors striving to understand the field of implementation.
Despite the influence of all levels in the implementation there is several gaps in the research, Aaltonen points out one such gap by stating that a focus is needed in “strategy realization on the micro levels in organizations” (2003, p. 2). This is further specified by Li, Guohui and Eppler (2008) pointing out a particular lack of focus on NME (Non-Management-Employees). Köseölü, Barca and Karayormuk (2009) amongst other authors also show the impact such executors could have as the “individual issues” (p.85) closely interlinked to employees was found to be the second most prominent to impede the progress of the implementation. Along with the already established importance of the NME as executors (Noble, 1999) this provides a suitable focus of research to improve the understanding on the area of implementation.

1.2 Problem discussion

The field of strategic implementation needs to be better understood in order to make formulated strategies reach the whole organization more successfully, more often and more efficiently. The area of implementation could benefit from having research conducted in a way that results are easily applicable to the whole organization. Focusing on the different organizational levels of execution may provide a useful perspective to allow such an application as the results can easily be projected onto the organizational structure. There are several authors using this kind of study (Noble 1999; Bantel 1997; Schmidt & Brauer 2006; Schaap, 2006; Chimhanzi, 2004) etc.

Whereas the formulation of strategies usually occurs on managerial levels in companies, the implementation has executors that more often spanning the entire company and several levels, yet the focus remains primarily set on management (Li et al., 2008). In order to provide a more complete view of these organizational levels there needs to be a greater focus on the contribution of the NME to the implementation, following the discussion of Li et al. (2008) the focus would therefore fill a lack of knowledge in how “employees enable or interfere with strategy implementation and why” (p. 40).

Most authors of this type of organizational levels are of a single-level type which only focuses on one level without considering the implications to others. This lack of context can create problems when attempts are made to control factors occurring in more than one level, i.e. leading NME through factors within management, resulting in contradictions or lack of context in the existing theory. An example of this could be to consider communication as being positive, but when? what? how? and to whom? This, along with reasons of practical application means that this study will have to retain the management perspective on the area, and adopting a slight “mixed level study” similar to Hrebiniak (2006) and Higgins (2005), further reducing the lack of “special research relating to lower management and non-management” (Li et al., 2008, p.40).

By filling the gap and thereby providing a slightly more complete picture, it will therefore complement and contribute to existing theory by looking at NME, how managers can influence them and in which situation they should do so.

**Research Question: How can non-management employees’ strategy aligned behavior be stimulated in different implementation contexts.**
1.3 Research Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge within strategy implementation both by providing an initial foundation into non-management as executors to fill a gap but also by linking the factors to a context. The perspective may additionally allow factors to be identified that can be correlated to other fields of study as within behavior sciences, allowing vast existing knowledge to be applied to implementation.

Ultimately, the purpose is to provide researchers and managers alike with a clearer overview, resulting in deeper understanding and more effective implementation.
2. Theoretical Review and Frame of References

2.1 Definitions in Strategy Implementation

There is no universally accepted definition of SI, this has resulted in the overall lack of a consistent research base in the literature of SI, this is due to the diversity of perspective that has been used in defining the concept (Noble, 1999). The literature therefore spans over numbers of definitions of SI and with it, the area of focus within the research becomes different. An early definition by Ansoff (1965) suggests that a strategy emerges after going through several levels of activities and can therefore be seen as a range of steps from formulation to a successful implementation. This definition has been further elaborated and can be grouped into the different perspectives being a process, behavior or a combination thereof (Li et al., 2009).

Noble (1999) presents several researchers definition of SI listed and suggests a more cohesive definition where SI is defined as “the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of strategic plans” (Noble, 1999, p 120) i.e. a behavioral perspective that can be useful in assessing the involvement of NME in implementation. This can however be seen as limited in its considerations that lead to the strategic plan and does not consider those actions that lie outside of the strategic plan but which constitutes the strategic purpose, e.g. the process of implementation as illustrated by Aaltonen and Ikkävalko (2002). Therefore, a slightly modified version of his definition is used to describe implementation within this study; “the communication, interpretation, adoption, and enactment of strategic plans and purposes”.

Using the aforementioned differentiation between strategic plans vs. purpose means that there is not always a straight chronology between formulation and implementation; after the work of implementing has begun, problems discovered may require the strategy to be revised and temporarily be projected back to the formulation phase, Nutt (1986) also points out the ubiquitous nature of implementation. These parallel, overlapping phases may be causing problems when studied if not simplifications are applied. For the sake of study these stages will therefore be simplified into a more definite step-by-step process than it really is, this means that once the implementation has begun, an action leading to the change of formulation is considered to be part of the implementation process. As the implementation and outcome of the strategy will be separated as described hereunder, this should not have any relevant impact of the quality of the study. It should however be noted that such problems of formulation will not be accredited to implementation despite this simplification, this will have relevance in later definitions.

It is necessary to note that other words than just implementation is used to identify the concept of SI, some authors are also using execution to describe implementation and few, if any make any distinction thereof. (Sashittal & Wilemon, 1996; Li et al. 2009). Consequently, the use of execution or executors is not distinguished from implementation or those implementing it within our study, SI will predominantly be used as the central definition of SI whereas executors will denote those implementing it.
It is difficult to gauge the success of implementations, this is because the outcome is dependent on the strategy itself, one would therefore have to look at how well the implementation corresponds to that of the initial plan or purpose. Another problem is to tell a good implementation from a bad one as every implementation has just various degrees of success in various areas and situations.

To circumvent this problem, the study will rather than look at the outcome of the strategy, look at how smooth the implementation was, this is determined by the number of occurring problems in the process which is in turn determined by the actions of the employees involved. In other words, the success of the implementation is gauged by the number of problems occurring throughout the process. As no weight is being put on the result i.e. economics or otherwise combined outcome of formulation and implementation, a simplification of the area can be made without losing relevant context while allowing an easy way to tell a good implementation from a bad one. Whereas this method may have been used previously, no such application was found by the authors.

As the focus is on the NME behavior towards a successful implementation we assess their positive and negative actions from a strategic standpoint with the aforementioned definition in mind. Gagnon and Michael (2003) simply call this behavior “strategically aligned behavior” and define it as “on-the-job actions that are aligned with the strategy” (p. 25). A SAB therefore translates into a behavior that can give a smoother implementation.

The term NME (Non-Management-Employees) has been borrowed from Li et.al. (2009) and is used to further highlight the focus of the thesis being on employees of little or no position of making decisions beyond their own actions. This is in contrast to the term “employees” which could technically include managers of various levels, and hence a field that has already seen a substantial research attention. The term allows such a distinction to be made while allowing use of a preexisting and unified term to denote employees of this sort.

2.2 Theoretical Frame of References

Earlier research on SI is often focusing on subjects within higher managerial hierarchy, often top or middle management. Daily tasks of these managers are essentially to control an organization through planning, staffing, leading, directing etc. whether being in a state of SI or not. This is relevant as the top-down management perspective is reflected as it is being used as a basis for research and provides means of separating concepts into categories within models. With this in mind, the focus of NME takes on a completely different perspective as opposed to management studies and a different way of categorizing and separating actions and reasons behind them may be necessary. While the perspective is different, they should nonetheless more or less represent two sides of the same coin. As such, existing research within SI may be useful in identifying possible problems as well as underlying factors and other aspects.
The framework shown in Figure 1 is based on the assumption that all levels of management and NME, through their actions and behavior influence the process towards SI. All managerial levels are obviously also influencing each other as this is part of their daily tasks as managers. Using the definition of SAB as “on-the-job actions that are aligned with the strategy” allows a simplification of the model to be made to avoid cluttering as this interaction between levels is SAB if it leads to the implementation, this is shown below:

![Figure 1. Showing progress towards implementation as an effect of SAB](image)

As mentioned, based on existing models and theory, various problems that frequently occur in SI and that is influenced or can be related to NME in different ways has been pinpointed and presented. These problems have then been categorized with regard to the influence that NME could have had as well as broken down into its possible causes with use of theory discussing SAB.

To illustrate SAB in the framework, the theory has been simplified into two categories with a third added as a possible additional cause for problems or i.e. lack of SAB. The categories that is needed for a SAB to occur is; that employees must be allowed to act (freedom), they must be able to act (ability), and they must be willing to act (motivation). Failure to fulfill any of these criteria may lead to a slow and problematic implementation that may even be resisted by the employees themselves.

**Motivation:** The criteria or category “motivation” is here thought to include factors describing employees’ desire to act towards a SAB, for example motivation, commitment and sense of responsibility. This criterion includes those items seen as “stimulating motivation” in (van Riel, Berens & Dijkstra, 2009, p. 1201).

**Ability:** Ability includes factors of employees as knowledge of how to do a particular task or the information regarding tasks and actions which is to be done, but also for e.g. tools and resources available to the employee to perform these actions. This criterion includes those items seen as “stimulating capability”, “informing about strategy” and “informing about role” (van Riel et al., 2009, p. 1201).
Stimulating Non-Management Employees’ Contribution to Strategy Implementation

Freedom: This have to the authors knowledge not been discussed earlier but may be important, particularly from a NME standpoint as they may be subject to a wide range of limiting factors from management and organizational structure but also because of the unconventional solutions that may be necessary to solve unconventional problems expected in the implementation. It describes external factors permitting employees to act towards a SAB, such factors may be their freedom of communication or that they are free to act to solve problems outside of their daily operations.

2.3 Problems of Strategy Implementation

In this part, the most frequently identified problems of SI as mentioned in various papers will be presented, outlined and categorized based on their expected cause following the previous section of the theoretical frame of references. As also mentioned in the theoretical frame of references, the challenges within this part are derived from those identified in papers often using a focus on higher hierarchical levels. Applying the aforementioned thinking of “two sides of the same coin” will lead us to possible expected challenges and problems influenced at the NME level.

2.3.1 Problem Identification and Communication

Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002) illustrate how implementation is the link between realization and planning of a strategy and how the process is thereof is shifting from one to the other to finally reach the vision. A practical explanation of why this is could be that the formulated strategy is not always the “correct” one; problems occurring in the NME implementation phase may not be seen by managers formulation the strategy, therefore an identification and communication of problems is necessary for the implementation to progress.

Porter and Smith (2005) are discussing this problem in detail from a management perspective which can possibly be used to describe the above scenario from a NME perspective as well. (Ibid) are arguing that for effective implementation, it is necessary to consider the ability of managers to sense, and respond accordingly to problems occurring in the execution.
Problems can be categorized in various severity depending on when they can be “sensed” as follows: “avoidable problems which are not anticipated during implementation planning” (Porter & Smith, 2005, p. 1703), “emergent problems which are detected only after they become major problems” (ibid), “evident problems that are not responded to as effectively as possible” (ibid). This is similar to Alexander (1985) noticing that there are examples both of how previously known problems was not communicated to the required management level, but also how problems that first surfaced in the SI stage was not solved smoothly enough. These are additionally two of the most frequently occurring problems in strategic implementation (ibid) and as this problem may also be a cause of long and costly delays in SI if the strategy would need a reformulation this will be an important area to focus on. Porter and Smith (2005) find that the severity of the problems depends on several factors; “time pressure, affective conflict among implementers and project novelty” (p. 1702) is increasing the severity whereas “experienced managers, greater buy-in to the implementation plans and detailed implementation plans” (p. 1702) decreases the severity. This is useful as it provides a context to the type of implementation.

The first part of this problem is “sensing” or identifying it, Porter and Smith (2005) suggests that this is related to the “knowledge structures and information processing capabilities of the marketing managers involved” (p. 1703), similarly NME could be thought to do so through their capability of SAB, i.e. they must be informed and aware of the strategy that is has, or is in the process of being formulated, they must also have some degree of knowledge of daily work causing the particular inconsistency between plan and future implementation. Noble (1999) mention that “one conceptualization of strategy implementation is a “trickle down” process” (p. 122). Often, senior management is the head of the strategic initiative which are then communicate through middle management to employees (Ibid). An assumption in the context of this “trickle down” process would be the vagueness in this communication. Therefore, a lack of early involvement or consistent cross-communication might cause delay or problems that reduce the effective identification, increasing its severity.

The corresponding “action” to the problem would in the case of the non-managers be to communicate the problem to the right instance, one that may be one or several levels above NME, for this to happen the right channels must be available throughout the company where either a good communication is guaranteed by including NME into strategic decisions, a communication that is not filtered through many layers or through a hierarchy which is tolerant towards cross-hierarchical communication.

What is not addressed by Porter and Smith (2005) is the SAB derived requirement of motivation to address the problem, while this may not be a problem for managers, one would think that NME must have a certain level of commitment or sense of responsibility to the company in order to motivate NME to go out of their way to point out the problem.
2.3.2 Capability of Implementation

It appears to be a common occurrence for the SI to face problems because the employees of the company simply lack the capability to perform actions necessary to realize the strategy; “Capabilities of employees involved were not sufficient” (Alexander, 1985, p. 92). Köseolu, Barca and Karayormuk likewise finds a problematic “lack of enough capabilities of employees” (2009, p. 84).

The categorization of this problem under capability groups several subsections of these into the same category; Viseras, Baines and Sweeny (2005) also mention problems in how the capabilities of employees were not sufficient in the training and instructions given, and that the employees are “Trained in how to work with the new practice/system/application/technology” (p. 162). Further, Thompson, Gamble, and Strickland (2006) concludes that most situations of implementation success needs “Staffing the organization with the needed skills and expertise, consciously building and strengthening strategy-supportive competencies and competitive capabilities, and organizing the work effort” (p. 42) as well as “Allocating ample resources to activities critical to strategic success” (ibid).

The capability to perform the SI might also depend on intangible issues such as the available information in every situation; according to Nielson, Martin and Powers (2008), the main reason for failing in the execution phase of strategy may depend on companies’ incapability and misguided focus. Right decisions and information flow is on the other hand the most powerful drivers for an effective SI (ibid). Nielson et al. (2008) does however find that employees usually have the information when it comes to understand the bottom line of their job. (Ibid) shows in their research the benefits of adopting this resource and utilize a “smart customization”. As problems are prone to occurring despite this, it may also suggest that in implementation, it’s simply not enough to have good bottom knowledge but also more specific knowledge of the particular implementation at hand.

Viseras et al. (2005) and Alexander (1985) both mention problems more related to the definition of implementation tasks and activities and awareness of the project. This is similar to Nielson et al. (2008) finding that another important factor was found to be that “everyone has a good idea of the decisions and actions for which he or she is responsible” (p. 3), hence relating the problem to an understanding of the implementation as a whole and how the employees’ can contribute through a SAB.

2.3.3 Interpretation

This problem is similar to the aforementioned problem as both will have a high degree of focus on the ability, specifically the information being transferred, nonetheless, Köseolu, Barca and Karayormuk (2009) has a similar, separate category for this challenge as a “lack of understanding of the strategy” (p. 84). The same factors is in other words important here but from a slightly different perspective, for example, training and instructions are important, but not to be able to do the particular actions but rather to understand how they are to be performed to best follow the strategy – “a great amount of information does not guarantee understanding” (Aaltonen & Ikävalko, 2002, p 416).
This is therefore using the same focus from Alexander (1985) as earlier where a focus on training and instructions of the employees as well as the definition of implementation is necessary.

Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002) provide a good insight into this particular problem; whereas communication has been discussed thoroughly in various articles, they still consider much to be done, referring to the interpretation in particular rather than the amount of communication as “Sufficient communication does not guarantee successful implementation, however. “Interpretation, acceptance and adoption among implementers are crucial” (p. 417). They consequently found a considerable correlation between problems in SI related to this particular obstacle, in particular when the strategic issues had to be applied to everyday decision making (ibid).

Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002) also noticed that a majority of the communication was in the form of top-down, however, they point out the importance for the employees to have the possibility of “commenting, querying or questioning it” (p. 417) in order to understand the strategy. This therefore instead requires a “continuous two-way communication with feedback and reacting to bottom-up messages.” (ibid, p. 417). In the process of communication with the purpose of understanding between the superiors and subordinates, the informal communication was found to be more important than the formal communication of strategy (ibid). They continue to discuss the purpose of the implementation to be important in order to understand why and how individuals should act in different situations (ibid), further reinforcing this previously discussed particular type of communication.

2.3.4 Obstructivism

“No single quality of management practice is more highly correlated with success [than employee participation].” (Deetz, Tracy & Simpson, 2000, as cited in Vaughan, n.d, p. 2), this is an essential part of any company and a lack of employee participation or even an obstructive behavior can be very problematic. Several authors discuss this particular problem in implementation; Bardach (1979, as cited in Nutt, 1986) identifies possible problems that may occur when people in organizations face changes which they disagree with or find threatening, chances are that these people use gesture, delay or obstruction to contain or block these changes.

Authors as Guth and Macmillan (1986) discuss similar intervention and sabotage problems on middle management level but also discuss less severe forms of the same behavior, namely passive behavior and self-interest misalignment which could potentially be applied to NME. This problem is caused by a low self interest in the change which causes low prioritization and poor overall quality (ibid).

Guth and Macmillan (1986) points out the importance of communicating the strategy on a personal basis of self-interest rather than from organizational interests to reduce such behavior through a greater motivation. This is similar to findings of Gagnon and Michael (2003) indicating that “employees with increased knowledge of a strategy tend to exhibit increased levels of commitment, job satisfaction, and trust” (p. 24). Another finding is that there is a reduced cynicism towards the SI with higher levels of knowledge and involvement through SAB (ibid).
In conclusion they advocate knowledge and interest in the change initiative (ibid). Nutt (1986) is similarly suggesting that “To be successful, managers must devise tactics that neutralize or at least contain people who delay making essential commitments, protect turf, posture, or carry out vendettas.” (p. 230), Marcus (1983) does however suggest that education and participation are far more preferable than coercion, thus possibly making motivation and training the preferred alternative to “containing” people.

This may be an important aspect to consider in the NME level of strategy execution. The problem is prominently occurring if employees have a low level of motivation and dedication towards the company, hence creating a correlation to the SAB category of “motivation”. While the most efficient way of avoiding the problem may be to shift the negative aspects through enthusiasm, positive attitude and creative thinking as found to be important by Viseras et al. (2005) with aforementioned authors and to create a feeling of needed change for the better (ibid). As a reason for the problem may be if these employees are not allowed to participate in the decision making through meetings and similar to vent any particular concerns of theirs, relates the problem to employees’ possibility of participation through communication, i.e. “freedom”. The category of “capability” is also seen through the importance of knowledge as pointed out by Gagnon and Michael (2003); Marcus (1983).

2.3.5 Prioritization of Efforts

SI may often be time consuming and in the process it could therefore clash with daily tasks and other goals set within the company. If the strategy is due to be implemented at the set time it is necessary that employees is allowed and have the perspective to prioritize their efforts and do not let more short term competing activities distract their attention from implementation (Alexander, 1985). For example, following Viseras et al. (2005) there should be a limited number of projects being implemented at any one time to better provide focus and prioritize efforts and resources, a sense of urgency should also be maintained throughout the project (ibid).

Robertson and Gatignon (1986) discuss the need of sponsoring within the SI correlating that a slow adoption by the organization depends on the radical change required by the implementation effort. This sponsoring might provide a possibility to keep the implementation on track instead of let it get adrift, both influencing motivation and freedom for the NME i.e. free to focus on the implementation. Nutt (1983) similarly discuss the significance of planning and the significance of use of change agents or champions in order to “sell” the implementation to those involved.
2.4 Context

Problems and factors could have different influences in different contexts and if they not are assessed with this in mind the outcome may be of little use. Many researchers point out that "communication is an important factor, but there are no in depth analyses about how exactly communication influence strategy implementation" (Li et al., 2008, p. 32). The aforementioned challenges as obstructionism, capability, prioritization and interpretation as mentioned above will therefore be more relevant if they are related to suitable external dimensions.

One dimension of implementation taken into consideration is related to the number of individuals and departments involved in the implementation. The fundamental part of this study is related to the importance of hierarchy due to the NME focus. As also mentioned, communication is a reoccurring, important factor that is highly dependent on what is being communicated to whom. The complexity of the implementation can therefore be assumed to be related to its degree of cross-organizational involvement and linkages.

Another important aspect of implementation can be seen to be the knowledge, competence and capability of the company as seen in factors of SAB (Gagnon, Michael, 2003; van Riel et al., 2009) and being components of the aforementioned problems. A dimension that can assess the complexity of implementation may therefore be related to these factors to assess how different the implementation is to what is already known or done by the employees; if the knowledge required is new or old, minor or substantial, i.e. does the implementation include a slight incremental change or a radical new product?

These dimensions are similar to those of another model, however used in a different setting, namely the Henderson-Clark model seen in their article from 1990 used in innovation management, this model has been used as an inspiration for labeling and layout. Their model can be modified with a difference in perspective being used; in essence, the model is seen with a company perspective rather than a product perspective; the original dimension of product linkages has accordingly been changed to the linkages within the company, and the attention of the function of components, is changed to a focus on the competence. These dimensions provide the means of dividing implementation into suitable contexts depending on clearly visible characteristics and can be seen in Figure 3 below.
“Company linkages” refers to such activities and communications within the company that requires the participation of cross-functional or cross-hierarchical employees or departments for a successful implementation to occur. The scale of competence will instead primarily depend on the level of knowledge required by the individual employees but also the accumulated knowledge by the team as a whole to reach the same goal.

By the use of the model on a different perspective means that some, but not all knowledge of the original model will be applicable. Both products and a implementation of a strategy is ultimately a process with set of actions leading to a set goal even if the dynamics and the forces acting within are different. Hypotheses can be drawn from the challenges of the original contexts as they appear in Henderson & Clarke (1990) that may then be used in a similar way as the adaption of the model; e.g. novel and technologically challenging products may share similar characteristics as their strategic counterpart as they share the same dimensions that divide them into the contexts. However, the model was primarily used as an inspiration and concepts found in either adaption may not be possible or even useful to interpolate.

Figure 3. Model modified from Henderson & Clarke (1990), by application of a different perspective.
3 Methodology

3.1 Research Strategy and Approach

A qualitative research strategy has been used throughout this thesis; this strategy is often characterized by the generation of ideas rather than get absolutely measurable data about the reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007). As the research has had a focus within the complex field of SI with a focus on filling a theoretical gap and providing a context to the subject, the qualitative research strategy suits this focus well; it allows a deeper understanding of a particular subject needed in the generation of new theory but also as it emphasizes the context (Bryman & Bell 2007).

Further, the additional focus of non-management fits the qualitative tendency to “embody a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals’ creation.” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.28). We therefore conclude that the strategy encompasses the RQ and purpose of the study and is suitable to be used throughout the research.

In the thesis the process has shifted between two research approaches in different phases; on the one hand we have deduced literature into a theoretical frame of references within five described categories which have then been the foundation for the interviews as well as a point of reference for the analysis. On the other hand, an inductive approach has been undertaken as in the research process in order to develop and explore a new employee perspective on SI and fill a gap of knowledge. Alvesson & Sköldberg (2009) refers to Hansson (1952) and argue that a deductive approach can give a faulty picture of the research since it “presupposes that scientific discoveries happen through airy speculation, which remains to be tested by through empirical analysis” (2009, p. 6), whereas induction is instead a way to explain the data, not to summarize or condense it (Ibid). These two approaches can be seen as two opposite extremes, nonetheless, their inherent differences has been used to complement each other throughout the research.

The principal argument for interpretivism is that the study of the social world requires a different view in terms of logic of research procedures; it strives to understand rather than explain behavior (Bryman & Bell, 2007). SI can be seen as less structured, chaotic and without any formality in which an interpretivist approach is the most suitable. Additionally, the importance of the individuals to the implementation is fundamental to the position of having a constructivist view, hence taking the individuals’ role in influencing the organization into consideration (Bryman & Bell, 2007).
3.2 Sample

The sample is consisting of two medium-sized companies located in the southern of Sweden producing heavy vehicle. The companies are working with in a non-line assembling in a job-shop production characterized by a relatively high flexibility and labor content and skill.

The companies used in the sample are medium-sized companies as defined by the European Union (2003) in terms of their employees. The development departments at the companies have due to their size limited resources to, in detail, overview their construction design for their products which require proficient and self-acting employees. This increases the chances of coming across problems in the non-management level. In a smaller company there would be less structure in the organization and in a bigger company it would instead be too inflexible for NME to give input and act independently.

The companies that have been chosen in this study are interesting since they are part of a regional cluster in the south of Sweden and important for the regional development (Regionförbundet Södra Småland, 2011). The reason why these two companies are chosen in this study is because they can be seen as motors in the cluster of both suppliers and service companies which together employs approximately 11000 employees (Vinnova, 2004). These companies are similar in their type of product, production and level of technology which ensures that observations can be correlated between the companies.

The companies have a similar way to assemble the components to the finish products in a job-shop structure, where the companies are using a mostly stationary approach for assembly; one or two employees (assemblers) start from an empty chassis and build the finished product. The employees in the companies are largely involved and have a big room of freedom in their work i.e. they are not directed by a foreman and therefore take many production decisions as their daily planning and failure reports by themselves. Using a sample of this structure where employees’ experience and involvement is considerable further allows problems of non-SAB to be seen in this level.

Both companies studied have a decentralized structure where employees can, and are to some extent expected to contribute to the progress of daily works and implementations within the company. This is a common company structure or “culture” in Sweden and may therefore have less applicability in companies and cultures used to a more hierarchal structure. The focus of such companies does however allow a greater chance of getting an insight into the possible contributions that the NME can provide than a study of hierarchical companies would yield due to the greater influence and responsibility of the NME.

3.3 Data Collection

In order to get valuable data for this thesis we have chosen semi-structured interviews. In this interview structure, questions to the interviewee might not follow the interview guide precisely and can be much more free than quantitative interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 474). Further, Bryman and Bell (2007) point out that these semi-structured interviews must, even if they are free in their structure, be similar from interview to interview and the questions will be approximately the same.
To get a perspective from NME we have during to the interviews put our focus to understand and interpret their situation and pattern of behavior. The distribution of the interviews was as follows:

- Company Alpha: Three NME from the production with different product orientations and the production manager.
- Company Beta: Three NME from the production with different product orientations and the plant manager.

The methodology for the interview selection was essentially to choose experienced NMEs but also to find NMEs with experience of different departments or areas. The authors also asked for interviewees without any internal relations to lessen the risks for this to hamper the empirical findings.

The first step during the interview was to come up with a tentative empirical data, this was based on the interview with the production manager at Company Alpha and a consecutive interview with an NME, a similar approach was then made at Beta. To ensure that this data was consistent, two interviews at Company Alpha were added at a later date. During the interviews, the same interview guide with minor modifications was used, this, in order to allow a comparison yet at the same time suit their specific context and to reduce the sensitivity of some questions.

The semi-structured interview guide was based on the five problems mentioned in the theoretical frame of reference and the underlying causes were developed from the criterion of SAB as found under the same section. The interview guide was structured with an introduction for every topic in order to direct the interview to our point of view and clarify what is being asked for, an open question of the specific area was then asked to start off the discussion in an open and explorative fashion. To fulfill the need of valuable data within each of the five problems we have prepared follow-up questions, these are to a large extent based on expected causes as discussed within SAB.

The interviews started with a brief introduction of the topic, explanation of the terminology and with “warm up” questions about their names, profession etc. The interviews were held at the companies in April of 2011 except for two phone interviews with Company Beta held in August of 2011. The interviews were recorded for later transcription.

Besides primary data as described above, secondary data was used to describe the general company information, this information was found on the companies’ websites.
3.4 Literature Sources

The scientific literature used in the thesis are collected from numerous databases; ABI/Inform (ProQuest), Google Scholar, Emerald Fulltext, Oxford Journals, Harvard Business Review, JSTOR, Directory of Open Access Journals, Academic Search Elite (EBSCO), Kluwer Online, Wiley-Blackwell. Throughout the research process a wide range of keywords have been used; in the beginning wide search words were used as; strategy, implementation, execution, non-management, employees and as the research progressed, the deductive search became more specific using articles with useful keywords and references to other articles. Recurrent researchers encountered in the thesis which has provided inspiration are e.g. Alexander (1985), Li et al. (2008) and Noble (1999).

3.5 Methodology Discussion

Bryman and Bell (2007) emphasizes the importance of validity and reliability in both internal and external perspectives within research, other authors describe these concepts under different labels e.g. Patel and Tebelius (1987) with more or less the same content. Regardless of the labels of the concepts used, it is important to stress the meaning of keeping a high degree of quality since the measurement not is a major preoccupation among qualitative researchers. (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

To allow a confirmation of a study an external reliability is necessary to ensure “the degree to which a study can be replicated” (Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 410). (Ibid) stresses the difficulty to replicate a study in social settings.

Here we have adopted a similar symmetric social role within the interviews in order to allow a replicating in following researches. This criterion has been considered by providing the reader with the sample used for the interviews, as well as how the interview itself was conducted. However, due to the use of a qualitative research strategy it is difficult to make it truly replicable as it is not possible to “freeze’ a social setting and the circumstances of an initial study” (LeCompte and Goetz, n.d) as cited by Bryman and Bell, 2007, p. 410)

To reach a high internal reliability it is necessary to let more than one observer or member of the researches team participate in the interview and agree about what they say and hear Bryman and Bell (2007, p. 410). In the research process both authors participated in every part of the research, from the initial interviews to the interpretation and analysis of the findings.

According to Bryman and Bell (2007, p. 410) internal validity means “if there is a good match between researchers’ observations and the theoretical ideas they develop”. The use of a qualitative research method strengthens the internal validity (ibid). Notes were taken during the interviews but to further ensure that the data collected was used properly the interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to ensure that no valuable data were lost. The transcription was additionally written using a time stamp to ensure easy review and accurate interpretation.
Bryman and Bell (2007, p. 410) finally defines external validity as the “degree to which findings can be generalized across social settings”. The findings can be generalized for populations similar to those chosen in the sample. Whereas the findings may be also applicable to companies of smaller and bigger size, a smaller company there would be likely face problem less frequently and in bigger, the solutions may require considerable company structure changes to be employed. The use of SAB to denote success means that a differentiation is done from the daily work of non-managers, the findings should therefore be possible to generalize across NME of various departments and functions.
4. Empirical Findings

4.1 Company Alpha

4.1.1 General Company Information

Company Alpha is a medium-sized developer and manufacturer of heavy vehicles, located in a small city on south part of Sweden with approximately 140 employees. The company’s products have a high level of technology and innovations as a result of many years of development and improvements. The final assembly of the products are conducted in Company Alphas own assembly plant whilst the manufacturing of the input components are being outsourced.

Company Alpha has since its establishment in the early 50’s built up a network of worldwide sales organizations available to them and through this, almost all the products can be channeled for export. Based on each sale a product specification with the information about the vehicle will be transformed into drawings for the NME in the workshop. The customer has a high level of flexibility and freedom to compile their vehicle for their specific purpose. To allow such a non-standardized product the production is diversified, requiring flexible assembly procedures and knowledgeable employees. The production is conducted without foremen; all fitters therefore have a big responsibility to manage their own time and follow the production plan to deliver the right product at the right time. The company has its own R&D department for the daily continuous improvements as well as NPD. Because of the need of input components the Company Alpha makes sure to have a close relation to their suppliers.

The organizational structure at Company Alpha is described and experienced as a flat and nonhierarchical. Even if the company are divided in different departments such as sales, R&D, production support, service and post market almost all of them are under the same roof. Company Alpha has an open mind to contribute to personal development at a company level and makes often internal recruits between the departments which stimulating the employees for new work tasks, but also to a personal level connect the departments to each other.

4.1.2 Problem Identification and Communication

To manage and establish new underlying strategic decisions such as new products or new solutions for the production, Company Alpha has formal weekly meetings where the design department and production preparation are represented, there are however no NME involved at this stage. These weekly meetings are a basis for the design department in which all the changes for existing products as well as new products will be planned. Smaller strategic changes or improvements which come up in these meetings are communicated to the NME by modification message.
These messages are handled out to them in a message box where the changes, purpose and last date of implementation are addressed. Whereas this works well in smaller implementations, the NME experience that they often lack sufficient information regarding bigger implementations of new products and that they are not involved in the implementation phase early enough.

“We’re unfortunately not being contacted until the final assembly, an example could be Volvo’s Stage 3B where we get the plans and we have to solve the problems then and there. The construction has already been finished by the time that we get involved which isn’t optimal; some things could’ve been solved in advance” (NME interview response translated by the authors)

Due to the later involvement of the NME, suggestions and changes from the employees in this stage of product development might take long time to implement since material has been ordered and the delivery date for the vehicle has already been set.

In the stage of bigger product implementations i.e. new engine generations requiring new technological content and where more people are involved i.e. purchasers, designers and salesmen, the assembly teams have an informal dialogue together with these persons to find sustainable solutions for subsequent products and for final documentation. This dialogue starts when the input components reach the workshop and the assemblers will start the assembly. As lack of information or knowledge is often occurring in this phase of the implementation for the employees, the dialogue is therefore often at the request of the assemblers as they come across these practical problems. The dialogue concerning problems is usually held with the design engineers, purchasers or salesmen in their offices and as they are finished with their “part” of the implementation, they may therefore have moved on to other assignments.

The communication for actual problems that has been detected by NME is supposed to be channelized through to the production engineering department. For all kinds of new product implementations almost all NME does however prefer to use a more informal approach for communication based on a dialogue directly to the responsible design engineers similar to when they experience a lack of information. This is usually working well but it can also cause problems; it requires that the design engineers have the time, but also that they have the capability to understand and interpret the situation from the NME perspective in a short time.

“It feels as if the company wants to have it more “territorial”, it [communication] is supposed to go through the production engineering department and then to the design engineering department, but I circumvent this now as I’m working on a special one... ...it feels as an unnecessary route to take” (NME interview response translated by the authors)

When new customized products are implemented in parallel, for example if many customized products are ordered to a specific customer, it is frustrating for the design engineers to manage inputs from two or more assembly teams simultaneously.
The design engineer must also distinguish between the suggested opinions in terms of their relevancy, which ideas are useful in pursuing and which are not - what are their possible contribution to the product or process. Problems faced in these scenarios are that design engineers are frustrated because they cannot oblige all wishes while the NME are frustrated due to their unfulfilled suggestions.

When it comes to bigger NPD projects, Company Alpha choose experienced assembly teams to assemble the new products as opposed to the specialized customized products which usually accrue to the ordinary production plan and teams. When new products building on previous knowledge and technological content e.g. simple mechanical solutions forthcoming in the production, the assemblers have a degree of freedom to manage and solve smaller issues by themselves, for example to decide location of components in the frame of the vehicles to arrange hoses between given positions in the hydraulic system.

The NME have in these cases a unique insight and particular knowledge based on their practical experiences to improve the new products; however this knowledge is not fully utilized until the later phases of the implementation. Due to the company’s input component strategy where all manufacturing of components are outsourced, the NME experience that they lack information regarding the status of the new product implementation project and therefore they have trouble seeing the progress of their own actions, resulting in less motivation.

Company Alpha emphasis their flat organization and non-hierarchy structure in the company. This approach serves the company well because of all the open discussion between the individuals of different levels at the company that can solve minor, frequently occurring problems. Many problems will therefore be solved without any formal diffuse communication. A negative consequence of this open communication, Company Alpha has experienced is that it is hard to maintain all formal documentation. For example, when a new product is finished and it will be delivered out of the production, the NME could face the same problem again since the documentation has yet to be implemented.

### 4.1.3 Capability of Implementation

To succeed with new product implementations the NME require a basis of fundamental knowledge how the products work i.e. how the hydraulic system works, the engine and gearbox installation etc. To come up with improvements or to point out failures when it comes to new product implementation it requires a good fundamental knowledge. Overall, the employees of the company have sufficient knowledge about the products and how to assemble new components even if some continuous education, especially for inexperienced employees, was mentioned to possibly increase the understanding of the implementation.

The company has faced a fast growing technical component variety which also requires a wide variety of particular skills from the employees. Examples of problems that the company has faced are new engine electronic systems or advanced exhaust burning systems; the employees are often feeling frustrated from a lack of information and have call for more information about the specific systems, how to handle it in terms of assembly and to understand how it works. To meet these challenges for new product implementation, the company has used the supplier’s knowledge to cope the high level of technology.
As mentioned in the previous chapter of communication, the information and purpose regarding NPD and other new projects in the production could have been communicated better, also for the capability to perform them in a good way.

“...the information is always poor, if we are going to implement a new engine for example; we only know that it is a new engine, we do not know get to know anything about the product itself, what has Volvo, as in this case, made to improve emissions and such, it's just an engine for us.” (NME interview response translated by the authors)

The production plan is often adjusted for new product implementation, the bigger and more complex the new implementation is, the longer implementation time will be provided. In here the problems regarding the time aspect is not in the workshop itself but more in the supplier chain i.e. that all input components are on time and the knowledge to install it is satisfied.

4.1.4 Interpretation of Strategy

The interpretation phase of SI for the NME in terms of new products or modified products starts when the input components reach the workshop. The majority of the information to NME for bigger implementation of new products is a set of assembling drawings in combination with an order specification. Here, the employees experience that the order specifications can be unclear and inconsistent and the drawings are additionally not always completely finished when they reach the workshop, one reason for this could be because of the design department and the purchasing department does not have all the information from the suppliers. Another reason could be that is hard to create all the solutions and predict practical implications on the desktop in the design department. Based on these indistinct instructions, the NME experienced a lack of interpretation capability and the understanding of new strategies.

Problems regarding interpretation could also be that the purpose and the short and long term goals are not communicated by the management. The lack of a cohesive picture for the projects causes the NME to have less understanding of the implication of their actions.

As mentioned before, the dialogue is more frequent under implementation phase but still, the way to work with divisional departments creates barriers for a deeper ability to interpret and understand the purpose as well as the details. The NME emphasizes their wishes to take part of the discussions regarding the bigger implementations before it reach the workshop in order to allow a better two-way communication at an earlier stage; they suggest that no more than 10 minutes would gain them the understanding that they are looking for.
4.1.5 Obstructivism

Company Alpha has had some experience of obstructionism in implementation; however, due to a quick intervention there have been few cases of apparent damaging obstructionism.

The commitment is primarily based on individual issues such as the interest of the work assignments etc. The company has a general high level of responsibility amongst their employees. The result of the employees’ actions (or lack thereof) is often visible due to the type of work conducted in the implementation of minor changes, direct sabotage is therefore not likely to occur, but rather, a lack of personal engagement may be present although not noticed.

When it comes to implementation of new products it might sometimes tend to get a negative view just for the reason that it is unknown changes that are being implemented. Another negative aspect of new product implementation can be if input components are missing and the assembly must stop while awaiting these parts, this can contribute to an annoyance in the workshop. Whereas this is not obstructionism in itself, it shows how little it takes to lower morale as soon as the cause is out of the employees’ hands.

When it comes to changes in the production layout as well as bigger strategic decisions which will be implemented such as outsourcing of assemblies to suppliers where there are apparent implications to the employees themselves, the employees tend to be more doubtful or even feel threatened. One such example included how the NME reacted upon being told that they were supposed to help in establishing a new production plant within the same company on another location. Outspoken obstructionism then occurred as the employees were worried that their jobs might be in jeopardy, upon explaining the true reasons behind the decision and the impacts, the employees felt assured and proceeded to implement the decision. Similar occurrences happened when changes were implemented in the production layout, whereas no major obstructionism was noted, practical implications meant increased understanding and motivation of change.

Upon asking how well the purpose has been communicated to the employees, a non-manager responds:

“...we made our own hoses ourselves at first, but then there was a discussion of whether they should buy finished hoses instead, I felt that I get to do less and less tasks, so it becomes somewhat of a threat - what will be the next step, and the one after that? I felt that I wanted to keep doing my own hoses. The reasons why [refers to the change] were to save time and money, well I think so, but I’m not entirely sure, I don’t care too much. But today there’s nothing wrong with doing it this way, it feels ok” (NME interview response translated by the authors)

Another NME further affirmed the theory, saying that more communication about the purposes and goals regarding the changes could make the reason for implementing it seem more apparent, hence increasing understanding and reducing risks of obstructionism.
4.1.6 Prioritization of Efforts

Company Alpha has no specialized development teams or departments in the workshop for new product implementations. Bigger new product implementation is mainly being distributed to experienced assembly teams but is still a part of the ordinary production plan, even if the allocated time for assembly is increased. Smaller product implementations projects are often located at randomly chosen assembling teams and follow the usual production planning. This way to arrange the production makes the priority of the new products equal to the ordinary production; however, there is no risk of parallel implementation in this type of implementation as each team is only working on one product at a time.

In some cases when there is an extra rush of specific products for delivery, the customer always comes first, the implementation is therefore of lower priority and has to wait as the resources are relocated elsewhere. This is obviously problematic from a implementation standpoint, but a leveling that the company will have to make.

When new products are in the implementation phase in the workshop, other departments have already got other tasks, it might therefore become a gap and a difference of the priority between the focus of the new products since the other departments have got new tasks.

4.2 Company Beta

4.2.1 General Company Information

Company Beta is a medium sized company with its 55 employees, the company is located in a small locality be the west coast of Sweden in the county of Halland. The company has though its surroundings and experience gained a leading position within Sweden for developing and manufacturing heavy vehicles of the particular type. The company has been in the industry since the early 60’s and has throughout its history been known for producing highly qualitative and innovative products that fits the needs of individual costumers. The company has, possibly due to the limited market, had to sell their products on international markets, this is something that has been the case since the early years of the company and as of now they are represented in countries such as Denmark, Austria, Switzerland, Scotland, Ireland and Germany.

Company Beta places a great weight in offering “costumer-minded” products and services that fits the needs of the individual costumer throughout the products’ life cycle, this has awarded them with high levels of customer satisfaction and accompanying repurchases. To accomplish this, they have a knowledgeable and flexible production line arranged in a job-shop flow structure. The combination between a highly flexible, complex product and customer support means that the support must be fully aware of the specifications and individual changes made to every product in order to be able to help the costumers with problems that might eventually occur, this is managed through detailed documentation of every product and the changes made to it.
Company Betas innovativeness may partially be accredited to their continuous implementations of minor product improvements and other strategic decisions on a three month basis with the occasional larger, overlying implementations which is usually spanning greater periods. This results in an ever improving business where problems that arise can be relatively quickly eliminated. Being a Swedish company, they have also adopted a relatively flat hierarchy and structure both within the company as well as towards customers where communication can flow across “borders” without much resistance or filtration. The small size of the company contributes to a entrepreneurial approach and the small size of the industry building connect the employees at all levels to each other.

The apparent importance of the environment can also be seen to influence daily work as this is another area of focus for continuous development and one in which Company Beta live up to and surpass many of the legislative demands that are faced with.

### 4.2.2 Problem Identification and Communication

Company Beta has essentially two slightly different ways in addressing issues and implementing strategic decisions depending on the extent of its changes; when looking at incremental changes in various parts of the company they make use of a so-called “produktråd” or loosely translated: “product council” in which an intermediary from every part of the company will represent the thoughts and ideas of their department, e.g. from production, service, purchase, R&D etc. While the idea is that everyone will have an opportunity to take part of information and give their thoughts there also appears to be a problem for this to work satisfactory in reality; NME experience that they do not receive enough information that they could use in order to earlier identify and possibly avoid future problems and likewise, the management have a frustration as how to reach these employees, how much and what information to share without making it seem excessive or redundant.

Because of slight problems of communication, the NME experience difficulty in expressing possible problems in advance, this in turn means that problems is identified at a stage in which it is expensive to do anything about it and it can take several months before e.g. necessary preparations are made and stocks are down to levels which allows the changes to be implemented. Until this happens the idea is generally of a low priority (5) in the ranking system (1-5) used by the company until it is ready and it coincides with the approximate three month window of implementation used. The long implementation times then negatively affects employees’ motivation for pointing problems like these out, as despite giving valuable input, they sometimes experience that their ideas are not taken into consideration, their ideas rank low on the list of priorities and that inputs is essentially not appreciated. The company is well aware of this problem of giving positive feedback and tries to at least tell the employees when the idea essentially is “in the pipeline”.

~ 25 ~
When it comes to bigger strategic decisions as NPD there appears to be a well-functioning communication within different management levels, yet again, poor communication with the NME that for example assemble the product. In the case of NPD, the assembly team is arranged in a form of “tiger team” which consists of some of the most experienced and motivated individuals, yet they do not get any hands on experience of the project until the prototype will be assembled. The rest of the assemblers are not involved in the project at this point at all. The late involvement is important to note because in this type of implementation there are also parts of the product that cannot, and is not fully specified at this point; it is up to this team of assemblers to solve and report back how it was done, or if not possible, why it was not done. There are however also examples of better communication which also appears to be working much more smoothly, e.g. in the sales of some products with specific wishes from the customers where the assemblers are asked to see if the customers’ wishes are viable.

When it comes to the motivation and personal sense of responsibility for the employees needed to go “out of their way” to point out things that are not of great personal influence to them there is as expected hard to see a general “level”. There may be factors that can be affected from the company's perspective but in the end both interviewees agree that it is a mostly a personal behavior that can be observed; some people simply see the job as a must while others have an interest in their work and take pride in their efforts.

The manager points out that it is these latter people that often advance and make it into the more experienced groups as those assembling prototypes. External factors thought to influence this motivation is for example mentioned to be the size of the company where the tasks are not repetitive and there is still a possibility for the employees to see their contribution to the result. Unsurprisingly, while things “get done” on a day-to-day basis relatively independent on the personal interest, it appears to be up to the most motivated to come up with solutions and taking the extra step when necessary.

Communication is the next important factor to consider in the light of this issue, similar to many other Swedish companies, Company Beta has a flat hierarchy and structure which also allows a certain degree of freedom of communication between the individual levels. This has proven to be an efficient way of solving small problems in implementation and can compensate for a lack of information or knowledge given. An overly informal communication has however also produced some problems as Company Betas NME often solves problems which are then meant to be reported back to other departments without doing so other than informally. This causes the same problems to keep occurring at the assembly and the “special solutions” to solve them means that the product is not corresponding to the documentation of the customer support. Meanwhile, NME may not consider the implications of solving the same problems over and over but rather considers themselves to do the design engineers a favor. This might be an effect of a previous problematic relationship mentioned by the NME in which an earlier design engineer did not consider the input from the assembly team, they simply knew from experience that they have to solve it themselves. This appears to be changing for the better with their new engineer that possess both practical knowledge and who is more open for suggestions.
4.2.3 Capability of Implementation

Company Betas workforce constitutes of knowledgeable employees that for the most part have the capability to solve problems that occurs themselves. There is occasionally problems based in that they do not possess the necessary knowledge, this is not as prominent in NPD as the team working with this generally has a wider knowledge due to its structure. When such problems do occur it is often possible for employees, through the flat organization, to gain access to the necessary information by talking to either co-workers or managers.

A lack of communication has already been mentioned but this is also occasionally a problem that occurs in this situation, for example documentation may not always be up to date which creates problems where the product does not correspond to the pieces that the assemblers receive from the suppliers.

Betas high customer focus and acceptance to special needs of customers often acts as a constant source of annoyance to the employees as they will have to solve problems as they go and adapt the product to the needs of the specific costumer, few product are the other ones alike and there is little standardization to speak of in these cases. The large variation creates a lack of knowledge on a huge variety of particular parts and combinations that is not easy to counteract through information exchange, sometimes this information is not even available.

To counteract this issue, the company is instead planning to relocate all non-standard costumer customization from the general production to a more experienced group that will be responsible for all such customization. This group responsible for implementation of higher technological novelty can therefore gain, and make use of experience to a higher degree, further; their position will grant them a higher level of freedom in solving problems.

The time constraints visible can both be an effect and cause of problems in the production, problems will often cause implementations to take a longer time, but according to the manager, a narrow time constraint will also cause continuous implementations as e.g. quality to get potential problems if there is not sufficient time to build in quality or for quality assurance.

To improve themselves in this area Company Beta will implement a higher degree of standardization which will cause employees to gain a deeper, rather than wider knowledge of a specific area.

4.2.4 Interpretation of Strategy

It is easy to wander into the previous category as they appear as be very closely linked at the level that is being studied; one fundamental challenge that can be specifically attributed to this category is however those related to the misinterpretations that occur for one reason or another. There are suggestions that this is occasionally happening in the company, however, the reasons why this is happening may according to the manager be due to poor downwards integration or, trickle-down effect of ideas of solutions. Or as the NME also points out, the information of what is to be done is not always up to date, there is again, a matter of communication and information sharing.

~ 27 ~
NME also claims that while there are information and meetings of progress, what is said is often not of much interest from their point of view. Nonetheless seems as if this is not a very big problem to the greater part, even a lack of information can be overridden by a greater degree of experience and knowledge and the NME can therefore act individually towards the strategy as long as they understand the purpose of it. Some NME experience that information is being kept from them on a need-to-know basis in order to prevent sensitive information from reaching the market; this is nonetheless generally accepted and of less problem as it is often information of future plans that do not concern the NME at the point.

Technically demanding and bigger implementations is unsurprisingly said to be more challenging as they generally demand more information and understanding of the strategy. The information sharing needed to understand the strategy is said to come from several sources despite having a designated person to report to; “it’s generally the design engineers that come down here to show us new things, we’ve usually a bit of a discussion with them” (NME interview response translated by the authors) another example is how sometimes, the information comes from completely different sources: “sometimes, sales comes down to tell us what is needed to be done to the machine despite that this should really go through the production manager.” (NME interview response translated by the authors)

4.2.5 Obstructivism

The first reactions are similar to those of Company Alpha; the motivation and commitment of the employees is highly individual, nonetheless the manager recognize the importance of attempting to motivate their employees and to have higher levels of commitment.

As already mentioned, it takes a long time to implement ideas spawned in the production due to various constraints. This may give a lower positive feedback and therefore could potentially cause them to disregard such positive actions in the future; resulting in a type of obstructionism, or at least, lack of positive behavior.

When discussing the more severe form of this behavior, i.e. directly negative, halting or contra-productive actions, they appear to be less common or at least less visible for the same reasons as in Company Alpha. When tendencies for these do seem to occur or are expressed, they are not commonly related to the type of strategy that the authors has primarily focused on i.e. NPD, but rather in bigger, more threatening strategic decisions involving changes to the structure or similar implementations.

In these circumstances, the company has an experience that it is necessary to have a strong change agent that can push the strategy to the NME, but also that it is important to convey the effects of the strategy. The manager points out that it is important to discuss the changes from the NME point of view and how it will affect them personally positively to give a more positive outlook on the changes as well as to let them realize that the implementation it not threatening.

A successful example of this case could be an installation of a new warehouse management system where the incitements of a smoother access of parts and less manual labor motivated the personnel and gave a
more positive outlook. This particular implementation went according to the manager very smoothly. Another example which was mentioned was the more difficult implementation of the new production line where it was more difficult to validate the reason of change on an individual level.

In this discussion, the manager also mention how there’s a difference of what is effective to communicate depending on the levels of personal commitment of the employees, whereas those of little commitment also has little interest in the company as a whole, they prefer to know the effects of the implementation for them personally, the highly committed personnel it more motivated by also understanding the purpose of the strategy.

**4.2.6 Prioritization of efforts**

Since Company Beta has slightly different approaches to different types of SI there emerges a possibility of comparison between these different approaches. Looking at minor implementations of lesser importance or magnitude, the different departments of the company has a structure and function similar to every-day work with limited communication and cooperation.

Company Beta has noticed that the importance of this type of implementations may be overlooked and as one department is finished they just “hand it over” and it loses momentum and attention at the next “table”. There is a tendency for progress to halt as there is no one to follow up on and push for progress. Because of this, the company has found that it is essential for every implementation to have a project owner with the responsibility to make sure that they are not forgotten between the departments.

The NMEs in Company Beta shares this view and also points out what could also be observed in company Alpha; “...the smaller the changes are, the harder they are to implement” (NME interview response translated by the authors) The interviewee is here referring to the chance that these types of implementations gets overlooked; “For me personally I think it’s because it’s a bit unclear as to who have the responsibility for what; no one really takes charge and you expect others to do it”(NME interview response translated by the authors)

In bigger implementations as NPD situations where the departments work together this appears to be less of a problem, in this type of implementation there is also an outspoken prioritization of the implementation and a sense of urgency that may be helpful to finish the implementation.
5. Analysis

5.1 Structure

In the empirical findings it soon became obvious just as some authors have already found; factors that are commonly deemed to be important have many different implications in different contexts. Individual factors makes up the problems brought up in the theoretical framework depending on their situation, phase and combination to ultimately result in those problems suggested in the theory and seen in the empirical findings. Out of the factors that are presented few, if any, ever appears to have a negative impact on implementation, one could therefore conclude that you should make sure that all factors are fulfilled at all times. Whereas this might be possible in a perfect world, the authors recognize that due to the depth of the contexts it is not viable for the managers’ to make sure that this is true at all times - they have to focus their efforts depending on the specific context.

As the purpose and contribution of this research is both on a practical and theoretical point of view, effort will be taken to make sure that the outcome of the research will result in a model that is simple to apply for a manager yet nonetheless captures the relevant depth of the context as important from a more theoretical and practical point of view. To allow this, a matrix with two dimensions was chosen to divide strategies (and their following implementations) into four different areas as described in the theoretical context, within these, the individual factors previously seen in the problems in various configurations will be discussed to show which are especially important to focus on in order to allow the three mentioned categories of SAB of the NME.

5.2 Architectural Implementation

Implementations of this type are characterized by a high degree of company linkages and is reinforcing to competence. Implementations that you would expect to find in this section could be a new production layout.

Motivation: In this particular type of implementation with a companywide implementation there appears to be a particular risk for NME to feel threatened by the substantial changes occurring in all levels. Consider the examples found in obstructionism discussing structure and layout; it is hard to see the effects of the changes for these employees as they are often not part of the discussion or lack the necessary knowledge to see the big picture.

When this insecurity and threat appears there is also a greater risk that some employees try to lag or hinder the implementation on their level (Bardach 1979, as cited in Nutt, 1986) examples of this can be seen in the same aforementioned examples or in the response by the employee in the same section - the personal threat was his major concern and although he had limited insight into why the change was implemented he was content with understanding the effects of the change.
It may not be realistic to let all employees take part of the decision making or have complete transparency from a practical standpoint but it has been shown that it can be very helpful to communicate the purpose and effects of the strategy (Guth and Macmillan, 1986), this way it is easier for employees to see how this affects them on a personal level and the implementation becomes easier to relate to, resulting in less resistance (ibid).

Whereas the empirical findings are generally supportive of this conclusion when discussing problems of obstructionism stemming from a sense of threat, an exception of the suggestions to communicate the strategy from a personal basis as suggested by Guth and Macmillan (1986) can be seen in implementation obstructionism of passive behavior in Company Beta; Whereas NME with a low degree of commitment will be primarily interested in the effect of the strategy from a personal basis of self-interest similar to that threat, NME with a high degree of commitment and experience can instead be motivated by a larger scale purpose of the motivation behind the strategy. As mentioned above, the most common obstructionism seen here would nonetheless be that of threat, suggesting the importance of communicating the effects rather than the purpose of the strategy.

**Ability:** The widespread company involvement in this type of implementation also creates many layers of intermittent communication as a result of information flow across many natural borders within the company. The hierarchy of the companies in this research was in both instances flat but there were nonetheless examples of filtering of information across these “borders”; as in Company Beta where documentation of solutions to problems is not communicated upwards, creating problems in providing costumer with the necessary support etc. In this type of implementation it therefore appears important to make sure that the formal information/communication exchange is working satisfactory.

As opposed to the radical and modular implementations the companies generally did not create any special structures within non-managers in this type of implementation that affects the communication process and cooperation amongst NME that could affect their capability, however it does not appear to be very important for this particular implementation either; according to the companies there is seldom a lack of knowledge that does not allow the NME to do their part of implementation in the way described by Alexander (1985) or Köseolu, Barca and Karayormuk(2009). This could be explained by the fact that Viseras et al. links this problem to in particular “new practice/system/application/technology” (2005, p. 162) something that is reduced due to the reinforcing capability tendencies of the implementation, leaving only a necessity of the basic capabilities of the job. An employee of Company Alpha similarly suggests that a continuous, basic training for, in particular inexperienced new employees, could be useful to keep this from happening in cases as this type of implementation.

**Freedom:** Depending on the extent of the implementation on a competence and cooperation standpoint, Company Beta uses different approaches; in implementations of reinforcing or low competence levels the company does not expressively use any particular prioritization that allows implementation to be done in advance of other problems as they should according to Alexander (1985). Similarly Company Alpha does the opposite at times as they occasionally prioritize the daily work.
Of course, it is up to the companies to decide whether they should focus on the implementation or shorter term problems but with respect to the aspect of freedom, despite not having an outspoken freedom to prioritize the implementation, the employees appear to have a generally high degree of freedom in their decisions throughout most aspects of implementation. Due to the company-wide implications of the implementation it not commonly conducted in parallel with daily work or other implementations, eliminating the risk of under prioritization of the implementation and following Viseras et al. (2005). There also appears to be a less frequently occurring problem in this implementation characterized by, what at least should be a good communication, hence reducing the chance of implementation losing momentum between departments, this is also in line with Viseras et al. (2005).

Figure 4. Architectural implementation focus

5.3 Radical Implementation

This type of implementation may be the most demanding as it is subject to the challenges of a substantial strategy both from a company-, and technology wide standpoint. Examples of implementation that fit into this type may include radical and innovative NPD.

Motivation: In addition to the effects of motivation on a company-wide implementation seen in the aforementioned implementation, this type is also subject to the factor with relation to the degree of new competence needed in the implementation as the severity is increased by the project novelty (Porter & Smith, 2005). In this type where the practical knowledge of the NME comes into play and it becomes important in order to consider the implications of decisions taken on a management level, the problem sensing and communication therefore become more important. The importance of motivation of these aspects was derived from SAB and the assumption that employees must be willing to point out the problems. Examples of this could be seen, particularly in Company Beta, where the more motivated was said to be the ones most likely to come up with such solutions and problem communication. Both companies mention that much of employee motivation is simply dependent on the mentality of the employee; therefore it is hard to find factors said to increase this motivation.
Two factors that could be seen in both companies was however the importance of giving them feedback and appreciation of their input in order not to reduce motivation for similar behavior. Company Beta also showed the importance of listening to the employees in the first place to maintain the motivation in the example of where the NME felt that there was not any point in commenting improvements as the designer refused to listen.

**Ability:** Another important aspect of problem avoidance has been found to be the first part of sensing the existence of the problem (Porter & Smith, 2005), there are examples of the NME to first off, not being involved at the right time as for example in the quote within implementation of Company Alpha suggests. If the employees are not involved at an early stage “avoidable problems which are not anticipated during implementation planning” (Porter & Smith, 2005, p. 1703) could occur due to the obvious lack of information and involvement described in the theory. The late involvement would also cripple the response to the problems as shown in Company Beta where the late input caused the solution to the problems to be delayed due to the cost of changing in the late stage of the implementation, further, this also caused a reduced motivation.

Another more general factor of importance is the purpose of the implementation for; in a highly complex implementation the NME could benefit from a understanding of the purpose in two ways, first; there is no guarantee that all problems of implementation has been thoroughly or successfully implemented as the NME come across them in a more hands-on manner. A good understanding of the purpose allows them to both see that there is a problem in how things have been solved as well as to solve any problems occurring at their level.

The importance of general information has been well established in the theory i.e. discussing problem avoidance, interpretation and capability of implementation, several examples of this could also be seen in the empirical findings. Within this particular type of implementation, both companies are arranging the most experienced and knowledgeable NME in a form of “tiger-team”. By arranging the teams in such a fashion the companies leverages or concentrate their NME abilities, something that the companies has found to cause less problems, or faster problem resolution. This could therefore suggest that knowledge or experience causes problems to occur less frequently or at least, be solved faster. As this type of implementations primarily focus on new or radical technology is appears as if previous knowledge can be extrapolated on new technology. Whereas it may be difficult to induce experience it may be possible to give knowledge through training, if not, it could be a useful strategy to do as the researched companies to concentrate the available assets and resources through the group structure.

Should there be a lack of information in this type of implementation as it also appears to be occasionally as seen throughout the empirical findings; the importance of communication comes into play. The importance of formal communication is important for the same reasons as in architectural implementation, but even more so in this context. However, the empirical findings also show a strong importance of the more informal communication when there is a lack of information or knowledge for the non-managers; when this happens, NME of both companies adhere to and prefer a very informal communication despite that they officially should take another route of communication.
The employees find that this is the quickest way of solving minor problems and a lack of information; however, it can also be seen to annoy or overwhelm the managers if it becomes excessive. The bigger risk of a lack of information and knowledge present in this type of implementation will therefore cause informal communication to be more important for the progress of the implementation.

**Freedom:** Whereas this implementation appears to be the most demanding, there it might be the least risky from this point of view, as in the architectural implementation there is little risk of “losing sight” of the implementation between the departments of the company due to a lack of prioritization of resources. Unlike the architectural implementation, there was even less risk of parallel implementations in the companies due to the changes in structure to a tiger team, this might have been differently if it was not so, but it reinforces the importance of concentrating the capabilities as mentioned above.

As generally found within the companies; there was a generally high degree of freedom, the employees know what they can and cannot do and despite having guidelines as e.g. in the communication routes it even happens that they ignore them.

![Figure 5. Radical implementation focus](image)

### 5.4 Incremental Implementation

*This type of implementation is the least extensive as there is little company or technological involvement. Examples of this type of innovation may be minor, incremental product improvements.*

**Motivation:** Being the least extensive the implementation does not require many of the factors discussed in the previous implementation situations, it is also often either emerging from the NME, irrelevant or well understood by the same hence, obstructionism and similar actions as an effect of a threatening or poorly understood strategy purpose or effect shouldn’t be seen within this type as often. This correlates well to the findings, or lack thereof as no such problems was mentioned in the interviews.

Both companies are communicating such changes to the NME through a note or modification message, this appears to be sufficient in this implementation and would not cause the overload of irrelevant information described in the empirical findings.
As Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002) and Nielson et al. (2008) claims, the NME have the practical experience which means that they may also have ideas of minor improvements that can be useful in the implementation. In implementations as this where the importance may be overlooked due to a lack of extensiveness, the motivation to communicate these ideas or problems may be low.

There were examples of this in Company Beta where the ideas were not communicated as the NME did not consider the importance of it i.e. they thought that they were doing the design engineers a favor by solving it themselves again and again. The companies must encourage them to contribute through actively asking for feedback or providing incentives. The two companies are different in this respect; whereas Company Beta continuously asks for input there is no such process in Company Alpha. Both companies rank the input from NME rather low for various reasons which, as discussed, may reduce such future positive behavior. A minor, but continuous discussion with NME is therefore useful in this kind of implementation.

**Ability:** The low company linkages will reduce the need of strict communication and the reinforcing capabilities also reduce the need of informal communication following the aforementioned findings. With regard to the importance of knowledge and information the implementation shares similar effects to that of the architectural implementation, no considerable differences in approach, effect or solution was seen.

**Freedom:** There are examples of how the lack of prioritization in the implementation caused this type of implementation to halt, compared to the bigger implementations which either uses a different structure or has an informal prioritization, this is not the case in this implementation, rather, the implementation occurs parallel to daily work in increments and it may even be difficult to distinguish it from daily work on this level. Company Beta noticed that the implementation of minor changes are likely to completely halt due to this, but also because there was no apparent sense of urgency Viseras et al. (2005) or project champion Nutt (1983) that could follow it up. The prioritization of efforts and the importance of having a project owner in the implementations of this particular type can therefore be concluded.

![Incremental Implementation Focus](image)

**Figure 6. Incremental implementation focus**
5.5 Modular Implementation

This type of implementation is characterized by a high degree of overturned capabilities but a low degree of company linkages. Examples of this type may be larger product improvements.

Motivation: As in the radical implementation, the importance of listening to the NME at an early stage and making use of feedback as in Company Beta can be necessary to keep the level of motivation up. The possible lack of importance similar to the incremental implementation may suggest the importance of having similar, continuous discussions with the NME.

Ability: As it shares a similar degree of technological and competence enlacement it also shares similar aspects in this context to the radical implementation i.e. it may be difficult for the NME to notice problems and understand the function of for example a sub-assembly if there is no apparent purpose of the implementation.

As in the radical implementation, it is necessary to have an informal communication for the sake of outweighing a possible lack of knowledge stemming from the greater knowledge required from the implementation. There should also be an early involvement of the NME to make sure that their possessed practical knowledge is put to use early on.

Freedom: Due to the use of tiger teams there is again no observed risk of parallel competing workloads, reducing the risk of this. If no tiger team is being used there should, as in the incremental implementations, be a clear owner of the project and prioritization of efforts as it might suffer from a lack of insight from other departments similarly due to the reduced company linkages. for the same reason it is also a greater risk of this type of implementation to lose its sense of urgency and importance, therefore, the implementation may stall or be conducted with a very limited personal commitment.

Figure 7. Modular implementation focus
6. Conclusions & Discussion

6.1 Conclusions

Our RQ was; how can non-management employees’ strategy aligned behavior be stimulated in different implementation contexts. Taking context into consideration to allow a practical application of the findings, strategic implementation was categorized along two dimensions reflecting their complexity and their inherent difficulties that needed to be taken into consideration to promote a SAB. These two dimensions were company linkages and novelty of the capabilities needed i.e. reinforcing or overturning.

Company linkages take the number of different company departments into consideration and how they are working together. The findings suggest that high company linkage implementations may appear threatening for NME due to their size and widespread effects; this demonstrates the importance of communicating the strategy to NME from a personal perspective, lessening the perceived threat. The communication across several internal borders within the company also creates a risk of information filtration and loss of information, therefore there was found to be an importance of having a well, functioning formal communication.

In an opposite situation of as a low company linkage involving few departments could be seen to suffer from a poor visibility and sense of urgency, causing the implementation to halt. To keep the implementation to be progressing, a prioritization was found to be important, alternatively to have a project champion that can stimulate and keep track of the progress. A low sense of urgency and importance could also be seen to reduce the tendency for employees to communicate their input; the process of implementation towards the vision is thereby slowed. This could be increased through incentives and frequent meetings to promote ideas.

Capabilities needed in implementations could either be seen to be new and overturning, or reinforcing established capabilities. In overturning capability implementations there is a need of utilizing all capabilities within the company as well as empowering the employees by giving relevant information. To utilize the existing capabilities, it could be advantageous to have a structure that includes the most experienced employees. Further, to utilize the ideas of the NME, an importance of involving them at an early stage was found as well as giving feedback and encouraging their ideas. In order to give new capabilities, apart from a general lack of information that was often seen, communicating the purpose of the strategy helped the NME as they were given a wider perspective of their actions and the function. When a lack of information was present, an informal communication was found to be effective to allow them to get the necessary input.

In a reinforcing implementation, less new information will be present and instead the importance shifts to having a solid foundation of knowledge to utilize, therefore suggestions were made to have employee training and similar actions to assure that the fundamental knowledge is shared by all employees.
6.2 Practical Implications

The focus of NME contribution to SI in medium-sized firms has practical implications as it provides management with a better insight into ways that permits NME to act in a SAB towards a smooth implementation. By also making a distinction between high and low linkages as well as reinforcing or overturning implementation we provide managers with a contextualized guideline for distributing their resources for each implementation in order to achieve the best results.

The study shows, that even if the NME appear to have enough time and fundamental knowledge to implement the strategy, the companies often experience difficulties in SI. In this study we have seen differences between what NME need and what the company provides when the strategy should be conveyed in the trickle-down process. Additionally, there was often inconsistencies between the managers and non-managers perception of different areas of the implementation, i.e. communication; resulting in an incapability to utilize the NME capabilities. The managers will have to have an increased insight into this, i.e. through the use of feedback from the employees to lessen the extent of this problem.

6.3 Theoretical Implications

In an academic perspective, our result brings a deeper understanding of the employees’ participation of SI, a field that has been largely overlooked likely due to NME unconventional importance to strategy in the phase of implementation. By studying medium sized companies where the NME have a large involvement of product’s final appearance and quality we can reflect earlier studies veraciousness but also come up with new findings. Previous literature highlights different factors which in varying degrees influence SI, in our qualitative study we confirm these factors but emphasizes the importance of a specific context. The importance of specific factors uncovered can be used as a link to a vast amount of behavioral sciences applicable to the area though the model.

In essence, with an academic grounding and a practical approach, this research can be seen as a brick adding new knowledge but also providing understanding and linkages to old, hence building a better understanding of SI.

6.4 Shortcomings of the Study

One potential shortcoming of the study was reflected in the disagreement of the expected problems and the empirical findings; whereas a lack of capability and will of SAB was frequently observed, there were few, if any, examples of problems occurring due to that the NME were not allowed to act, i.e. “freedom”. Swedish culture is known to often be supportive, trusting and characterized by low hierarchy levels. These tendencies can also be seen in the companies chosen as the sample which might therefore explain the absence of this particular problem.
The focus on NME and their opinion of the company, situation and management is without a doubt a sensitive and complex matter. Therefore there is a risk that the NME as well as management interviews conducted withhold some sensitive information despite attempts of considering this through the questions. Furthermore, the managers may also have limited insight into what is actually happening at NME levels as seen in some examples, something that has both positive and negative effects on the study.

The relatively different context used throughout the research means that earlier studies have to be interpreted to be considered from their potential effects rather than used in their entirety. The novel context also means that all factors and their causes or effects cannot be expected to have been found in this research but should be object of further studies.

6.5 Further research

There are still many gaps to be filled in SI, this study can provide several starting points for both a wider and deeper understanding of the specific context of NME where the shortcomings of this study can be a basis of assessment to ultimately provide a more complete picture. Since this study lacks the contrast of a high vs. low hierarchy structure this could be a viable first area of focus that could potentially affect many of the problems discussed in the study. Further, there could possibly be more problems and SAB-factors left to consider for a complete overview of the area.

Despite identifying middle-sized companies to be the most suitable subject of study for the context, it would also be interesting to see how this applies to other sized and types of companies to see how generalizable the results truly are. Following this, as much of what is written about implementation is inductive and with few linkages to other theory, a more deductive approach to the whole area could be interesting to conduct in order to see the complete picture.
Stimulating Non-Management Employees’ Contribution to Strategy Implementation

Bibliography


~ 40 ~
Stimulating Non-Management Employees’ Contribution to Strategy Implementation

Mergers and Acquisitions: The Integration Game, Hay Group, Philadelphia.


~ 41 ~


~ 42 ~
Interview Guide

1. Problemidentifikation och kommunikation

**Uppvärmning i ämnet:** Här undersöker vi om anställda har haft möjlighet, kunskap och anledning att dels identifiera, dels kommunicera problem eller lösningar som de har identifierat i en implementering eller strategisk formulering som delegerats från annat håll, t.ex. att en montör, genom sin praktiska kunskap kan ge input till en konstruktör som annars hade blivit förbisett.

- Hur väl och i vilket skede blir de anställda involverade i det strategiska beslutet? Hur ser till exempel informationsutbytet ut mellan konstruktörer och montörer? Sker möten tidigt eller sent i utvecklingen? När får de anställda information om strategin?

- Hur ser strukturen och hierarkin ut i företaget? flyter kommunikation smidigt genom olika nivåer eller regleras detta genom en hierarki?


- Hur ansvarstagande och hur högt personligt engagemang skulle du säga att de anställda besitter?

- Finns det exempel på där anställda har tidigt påpekat problem som annars först skulle ha identifierats vid ett senare skede? Finns det exempel på där anställda inte har gjort detta trots möjlighet och kunskap att göra detsamma?

- Finns det exempel på problem som kan tänkas ha avvärvts i ett tidigare skede om anställda hade haft information eller möjlighet att kommunicera deras input? Vad hade krävts för att avvärja detta problemet innan det uppkom eller innan det blev problematisk?

- Behövdes strategin ändras efter att problemet hade identifierats?

2. Kapabilitet av implementering

**Uppvärmning i ämnet:** Vi undersöker här förutsättningarna för de anställda att utföra den nya strategin på det tänkta sättet; med andra ord att man har tillgång till tillräckliga medel i form av kunskap, information, tidsplanering och diverse verktyg eller metoder.

- Anser ni att de anställda har bra möjligheter för att kunna implementera strategin exempelvis i form av kunskap, information, tidsplanering och diverse verktyg och metoder?

- Har det inträffat att anställda någon gång har stött på problem angående detta?
- Hur löstes bristen på dessa förutsättningar?
- Hade mer tid förbättrat resultatet?

**3. Tolkning av strategi**

**Uppvärmning i ämnet: Här är syftet att undersöka hur väl det strategiska beslutet tolkas och har blivit förstått hos de anställda, detta för att de dels själva skall kunna agera i enlighet med den valda strategin men också kunna undvika problem orsakade av missuppfattningar.**

- Hur och hur väl kommuniceras strategiska beslut i avseende på mål, syfte, tidsplaner etc?
- Har de anställda möjlighet att, utifrån denna information, agera självständigt utan behov av detaljstyrning?
- Hur tillgodosier sig de anställda information om detta om de inte anser sig ha tillräcklig förståelse?
- Har det någon gång uppkommit problem på grund utav att anställda har trott sig tolka strategin rätt men i själva verket har en felaktig uppfattning?

**4. Motsträvighet**

**Uppvärmning i ämnet: Här undersöker vi med vilket engagemang och motivering de anställda går in för implementeringen och om eventuella strategier som de anställda hotas av eller ogillar påverkar detta negativt, t.ex. att anställda tolkar effektiviseringsåtgärder som hotfulla för sitt eget jobb eller att lösningar som anställda anser olämpliga genomförs med begränsad drivkraft.**

- Hur väl brukar syften med strategiska beslut kommuniceras till anställda?
- Finns det exempel där någon av de diskuterade problemen har uppkommit? Vad var syftet med den aktuella strategin (om någon nämns) och hur mottogs denna?
- Märks det någon skillnad på hur smidigt strategier som mottas positivt respektive negativt implementeras trots att de båda slutligen blir genomförda?
- Används några olika typer av incitament eller andra motiverande faktorer vid implementeringar?

**5. Prioriteringar**

**Uppvärmning i ämnet: Vi undersöker hur man prioriterar strategiska beslut och beteenden gentemot mer vardagligt arbete, t.ex. om man flyttar i implementeringen störs för att lösa mindre kortsiktiga problem i det vardagliga arbetet.**

- Hur brukar implementeringen ske i företaget, lite allt eftersom eller med någorlunda klara tidsramar och mål?
- Händer det att nya beslut ibland blir “ståendes” om ingen följer upp dem.
- Behandlas implementering parallellt med andra uppgifter eller tillsätts en särskild grupp för att fullfölja det som enda uppgift.
- Kommer några exempel i åtanke där sådana “vardagliga problem” försenar framgångarna i implementeringen

6. Övrigt

Fins det andra faktorer som antingen påverkar resultatet positivt eller som skapar problem av olika slag som ni kan erinra er om att uppkommer i olika typer av implementeringar.