How the information flow is processed in project-based companies compared to others and how it affects strategic drift.
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Abstract

In a competitive environment which needs constant strategic adaptation, the companies look for the best way to stick to markets’ trends. The way the company is organized can optimize both the required strategic adaptation and the performance of the human capital by enhancing the flow of information for instance.

Some companies are organised in a very special way and adopt a project-structure. We therefore have inquired about these project-structures and their ability to favour communication in order to enable better performance. Then comes the reason for our work, we wonder: How is information flow processed in project-based companies compared to others and how it affects strategic drift?

Existing theories concerning strategy, communication and organisation has been confronted in order to create an original lens through which we look at companies. Based on this lens are qualitative interviews led to collect empirical data from two hierarchical levels in four companies with very different businesses.

After analysis, the study shows that the strategic drift is well known by companies. Good communication is recognised as a way to tackle this strategic drift and is high on companies’ agenda. The project-structure owns several assets (like customization, size and resilience) which make it better to process information flow and which eventually reduce or eliminate the strategic drift. Yet, classical organisations and project-structures seem to create synergy for a company which uses adequately both, regarding the type of business.
Table of contents

1 Introduction ................................................................................................................................. 1
   1.1 Background of the study ........................................................................................................ 1
   1.2 Research question .................................................................................................................. 3
   1.3 Objectives .............................................................................................................................. 3

2 Research strategy ...................................................................................................................... 4
   2.1 Choice of the subject .............................................................................................................. 4
   2.2 Introductory theoretical considerations ................................................................................ 4
   2.3 Additional remarks concerning the collection and the use of theories .............................. 5
   2.4 Role of the theory in our research .................................................................................... 5
   2.5 Interpretation of knowledge in social sciences ................................................................. 6
   2.6 Interaction between social actors and the organisations ................................................... 6
   2.7 Research strategy ................................................................................................................. 6

3 Theoretical framework .............................................................................................................. 8
   3.1 Strategy .................................................................................................................................. 8
      3.1.1 Basic definition of strategy ......................................................................................... 8
      3.1.2 Strategy creation and implementation: the success criteria ........................................ 9
      3.1.3 The measurement of the success of the strategy: performance measurement ........ 11
         3.1.3.1 The performance measurement methods .......................................................... 11
         3.1.3.2 The balance scorecard approach ....................................................................... 12
      3.1.4 The strategic gap ......................................................................................................... 12
      3.1.5 The strategic drift ....................................................................................................... 13
   3.2 Communication .................................................................................................................... 16
      3.2.1 People interaction in society, Human relationships .................................................. 16
      3.2.2 Strategy and internal communication ....................................................................... 16
      3.2.3 Internal communication: top-down and bottom-up communication ...................... 18
      3.2.4 Communication channels ....................................................................................... 20
      3.2.5 Importance of communication for performance development ................................ 22
         3.2.5.1 Knowledge management ............................................................................... 23
   3.3 Organisation ......................................................................................................................... 24
      3.3.1 The theory of disaggregation by John Roberts ....................................................... 24
      3.3.2 Project-based organisation ..................................................................................... 25
      3.3.3 Link between performance and organisation ......................................................... 26
      3.3.4 Organisations that facilitates communication ....................................................... 28
   3.4 Theoretical model ............................................................................................................... 31

4 Data collection .......................................................................................................................... 33
   4.1 Technique used for collecting data .................................................................................... 33
   4.2 The realization of the interview guide ............................................................................... 33
   4.3 The selection of the interviewees ...................................................................................... 34
   4.4 The realization of the interviews ................................................................................. 34
   4.5 The treatment of the interviews .................................................................................... 35
5 Empirical study ................................................................. 36
  5.1 Companies working without a projects-structure ......................... 36
    5.1.1 Answers from the manager of the company A ......................... 36
      5.1.1.1 Strategy ................................................................. 36
      5.1.1.2 Communication ..................................................... 37
      5.1.1.3 Mixed groups ....................................................... 38
    5.1.2 Answers from the employee of the company A ......................... 38
      5.1.2.1 Strategy ................................................................. 38
      5.1.2.2 Communication ..................................................... 38
    5.1.3 Answers from the manager of the company B ......................... 39
      5.1.3.1 Strategy ................................................................. 39
      5.1.3.2 Communication ..................................................... 40
      5.1.3.3 Client division ....................................................... 41
    5.1.4 Answers from the employee of the company B ......................... 41
      5.1.4.1 Strategy ................................................................. 41
      5.1.4.2 Communication ..................................................... 41
  5.2 Companies working exclusively with a projects-structure .................. 42
    5.2.1 Answers from the project manager of the company C .................. 42
      5.2.1.1 Strategy ................................................................. 42
      5.2.1.2 Communication ..................................................... 42
    5.2.2 Answers from the employee of the company C ......................... 43
      5.2.2.1 Strategy ................................................................. 43
      5.2.2.2 Communication ..................................................... 43
    5.2.3 Answers from the boss of the company D ................................. 44
      5.2.3.1 Strategy ................................................................. 44
      5.2.3.2 Communication ..................................................... 45
    5.2.4 Answers from the employee of the company D ............................. 45
      5.2.4.1 Strategy ................................................................. 45
      5.2.4.2 Communication ..................................................... 46

6 Data analysis and discussion .................................................. 47
  6.1 Analysis of the empirical data .................................................. 47
    6.1.1 Strategy ................................................................. 47
    6.1.2 Communication ......................................................... 48
    6.1.3 Organisation ............................................................. 49
  6.2 Discussion: the confrontation between the assumptions and the empirical data ..... 51
    6.2.1 The empirical data highlight the limits of the assumptions ............. 51
    6.2.2 The ultimate assumption which takes into account the empirical data .... 52

7 Conclusion ................................................................. 53
  7.1 The research question and the objectives .................................... 53
  7.2 Tackling the strategic drift thanks to the communication .................. 53
  7.3 Organization to improve communication ...................................... 54
  7.4 Managerial implications in the field of internal strategic communication ... 55

8 Further research ............................................................. 56
  8.1 Further qualitative research ................................................... 56
  8.2 Further quantitative research .................................................. 56
9 Criteria for evaluation ................................................................. 57
  9.1 Trustworthiness ........................................................................ 57
  9.1.1 Credibility ........................................................................... 57
  9.1.2 Transferability ..................................................................... 57
  9.1.3 Dependability and confirmability ........................................ 58
  9.2 Authenticity ........................................................................... 58
  9.2.1 Fairness .............................................................................. 58
  9.2.2 Ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity ........................................... 58

Appendix ..................................................................................... 60
References .................................................................................. 63

Table of figures

Figure 1: Management of strategy: The ERV congruence .................. 9
Figure 2: Management of strategy: The ERV congruence: the strategic drift ......................................................... 14
Figure 3: Strategic drift phase 1 .................................................. 14
Figure 4: Strategic drift phase 2 .................................................. 15
Figure 5: Internal communication and strategic capabilities .......... 20
Figure 6: The project life cycle ..................................................... 28
Figure 7: Communication and project management processes ......... 30
Figure 8: Information flows in a classical organisation .................. 31
Figure 9: Communication in a project-based organisation ............. 32
Figure 10: The third way, mixing classical organisation and projects .... 52
1 Introduction

The aim of this introduction is to give some clues to the reader in order to guide him/her until the formulation of the research question and the objectives of the study.

1.1 Background of the study

A study published by the American Management Association (AMA) in 2007 shows that, amongst 1,526 managers and Human Resources experts interrogated all around the world, only 3% consider that their company is very successful at implementing its corporate strategy. They are 62% to recognize that their organization is rather moderately successful, if not successful at all\(^1\). The conclusion of the AMA is that if managers are most of the time well prepared for creating corporate strategies, they are far less efficient when it is time to implement them. Why? The AMA identifies a lack of skills of the top executives exacerbated by the absence of process for guiding the implementation of these strategies, especially in day-to-day operational activities.

This difference between the strategy and its implementation has been underlined by a lot of authors. Sterling presents for example this eloquent figure, showing that 70% of the strategies or strategic plans are never successfully accomplished\(^2\). A lot of studies point out the existence of a gap, sometimes called performance gap, or strategic vision/implementation gap. This gap commonly manifests itself by a difference between the expected results of the strategy and the strategic plan and the reality of the actual results realized by the company. Basically, it is difficult to ensure the durability of the results of the company if the forecast arrangement of its resources, planned by the top management, is badly implemented\(^3\). The origins of such a gap are multiple. It may occur, for example, because of an inappropriate and chaotic organization\(^4\). But it may also occur from a change in the environment which would necessitate a fast and relevant reaction from the company. The company is unfortunately not able to provide an answer tightly linked to the established strategy. It begins then to deviate from its strategic plan\(^5\).

If we focus more particularly on this latter source of the gap, it is noteworthy that even a company with a safe organization can suffer from a change in its environment. This phenomenon can be relatively sudden or progressive and insidious. In this former case, it makes it all the more difficult to identify and to counter. This phenomenon is usually named

\(^{1}\) [http://www.amanet.org/movingahead/editorial.cfm?Ed=474&BNKNAVID=26&display=1, 2007/05/15, 17:55]
strategic drift\(^6\). Strategic drift is basically a good example of the gap which can exist between the top management and the operational level\(^7\). The reasons why such a drift occur can be a change in demand for example, or a new competitor. But knowing the reasons for the change in the environment is not necessarily the most important and they are moreover most of time known. The most important is to understand the internal reasons. Why the company has not been able to anticipate? Why the company has not been able to react, or has badly reacted? Because of a strategic drift, the company fails to match its strategy with the reality and vice-versa. If the company wants to develop a sustainable competitive advantage, it has to close the gap.

John Sterling has realized a list of the reasons why a strategy may fail. It covers most of the business fields, including *unanticipated market change, effective competitor responses to strategy, application of insufficient resources, failure of understandings and/or communication, timeliness and distinctiveness, lack of focus, or simply bad strategy*\(^8\). Among these sources of strategic failure, one is particularly interesting due to its overall importance and its implicit impact in almost each of the other reasons. It is the lack of communication and the failure of understanding. We are talking here about internal communication between the different departments or the different strategic levels of a company. This part of the corporate communication is identified and spread by van Riel into two categories that are the *organizational communication* and the *management communication*. The organizational communication concerns the communication with environment and the internal communication whereas the management communication covers the relationship between the top management and the operational level in the sense that top management has to convince and motivate the employees of the relevance of the strategy in order to create a shared vision of the objectives\(^9\). It is crucial to consider the information flows which go from the top management to the employees and vice versa. These flows are essential for the success of the company, and might thus be a source of gap. It is besides interesting to add that the AMA concludes its report by these words “To ensure this [implementation of these strategies, especially in day-to-day operational activities], top leaders must be committed to clear, direct, and constant communication”\(^10\).

According to the computing technology industry association (CompTIA), poor communication is the reason for the failure of most IT (Information Technology) projects\(^11\). Indeed, a lack of communication between strategic and operational levels can have terrible aftermaths on the development of the company. A gap might occur if there is a problem of communication between the operational level (which is in direct contact with precise parts of the environment) and the strategic level (which has an overall view of the environment but without being directly in contact with it). It will become difficult for the strategic level to identify the change in the environment and thus to propose the adapted answer. The

\(^7\) Johnson J., Whittington R, (2006), “*Exploring corporate strategy*”, Prentice Hall, p.28
\(^8\) J. Sterling, (2003), “*Translating strategy into effective implementation: dispelling the myths and highlighting what works*”, vol. 31 N° 3, MCB UP Limited, pp. 27-32
\(^11\) http://www.comptia.org, 2007/05/15, 17:58
The communication needs structures, a framework and an organization. Are there structures which facilitate communication? How one can be sure of the well understanding of the strategy at each level of the company? And in another way, how to ensure that the information coming from the base, from the field will reach the top management intact? Goczol and Scoubeau seem convinced that firms with a structure build on project have more facilities to exchange information flows. The organization in groups of such a project-based structure would enable a better circulation of the information, or, at least, of a certain type of information, especially between different hierarchical levels. It is true that this idea is seductive. Indeed the information flows are so numerous and almost uninterrupted that it is possible to imagine the difficulty to control these flows in one big monolithic structure with a lot of hierarchical levels and with a bad vertical integration. That is why it seems logical that information between employees and between levels would be transferred more easily through a lot of small interconnected structures.

The gap between the top management and the operational level is a big strategic issue, the risk of strategic drift that occurs from this gap is particularly crucial because it concerns the sustainable development of the companies. In order to bridge this gap, the information flows are directly concerned. They are a catalyst of the strategic drift, if not one of its sources. It seems possible to link the organization of a company to the way information flows are transmitted. According to the structure it might be easier to communicate or to control these information flows. Considering two main types of organization, the classical vertical organization and the project-based organization, it should be possible to determine if there exists a correlation between the possibility to control the information flow and the organization of the company.

Based on this reasoning, we propose the following research question:

1.2 Research question

How is the information flow processed in project-based companies compared to others and how does it affect strategic drift?

1.3 Objectives

This study aims at comparing and understanding the management of information flow in both project-based companies and companies with a more classical organization. Interviews will be led at both strategic and operational levels in each company in order to come out with relevant findings concerning projects, information flow and strategic drift if relevant. This will provide paths to tackle strategic gaps through the original and blended lens of internal communication and project management. Finally, we would like to contribute to the knowledge of business administration and especially bring new angle for further studies concerning strategic gaps.

12 J. Goczol & C. Scoubeau, (2003), “Corporate communication and strategy in the field of projects”, Corporate communication: an international journal, volume 8, N°1, p.65
2 Research strategy

This chapter aims at explaining and justifying the choices made for the writing of this thesis. It goes from the reason for such a topic to be chosen to the selection of a research method.

2.1 Choice of the subject

We, as students, have been particularly intrigued by the omnipresence of strategic gaps within the different lectures we have attended here at the University of Umeå. Whether it was in the class of “Perspective on management and strategy” or of “Project management”, the strategic gap and the strategic drift appeared as a kind of shadow that constantly hanged above a business. This feeling was strengthened by our own observation made thanks to our personal readings of specialized newspapers and magazines (especially French) such as Le Point13, Le Monde14 or Les Echos15.

Building from this common observation, we had each our own interpretation, based on our personal feelings and sensitivity. One of us was more attracted by the matter of the human resources and the impact of the communication on the strategic gap whereas the other was particularly interested in the possibility to tackle the problem through the side of the organisation and particularly of the project management. Therefore, both of us have first realised our own research trying to find some clue into scientific articles and economics books. When we have confronted this preliminary research, it appears that our points of view were not incompatible and that their combination might even be relevant. We have then been guided by our supervisor in order to find a relevant angle of attack.

2.2 Introductory theoretical considerations

Strategy, communication and organisations are very common concepts in the field of the business research. However, if they are often confronted to each other, it is usually by pair. It is either the strategy with the communication or the strategy in couple with the organisation or communication and organisation but it is rare, at least from an explicit way, that these three concepts are treated equally in a same research.

The theories we have gathered are all dealing with strategy, communication and organisations. During our researches, some main lines have emerged and have thus influenced the constitution of the theoretical framework. For example concerning the organisation, the literature about project management creates more links with the strategy and the communication. That is why the theoretical part about organisations is especially focused on project management. One of our priorities when creating our theoretical framework was also to provide the reader with the maximum of relevant information in order to help him/her understanding and grasping our approach and our analysis. That is why we have sometimes put in our theories some additional information, maybe not essential to the research but which seemed important in order to have a clearer idea of the subject.

13 http://www.lepoint.fr, 2007/05/17, 10:20
14 http://www.lemonde.fr, 2007/05/17, 10:20
15 http://www.lesecho.fr, 2007/05/17, 10:21
Our knowledge into strategy, communication and organisations comes especially from our studies and are far from being those of specialists. It has maybe enabled us to consider such a theoretical connection without being scared by the scope of the subject. We hope that we have thus been able to propose a different point of view, especially in our way to confront the ideas and concepts and even though we recognize the weaknesses of our research we have tried to lead up an interesting angle that it will be possible to develop for experienced researchers.

2.3 Additional remarks concerning the collection and the use of theories

The major part of the articles which has been referenced in this study comes from two databases that are Business Source Premier (EBSCO) and Emerald Full text. The access to these databases has been possible thanks to the website of the Umeå University Library. The researches have been realised only on peer reviewed articles with the references available. This option was though only available on the Business Source Premier. The keywords used were strategy, strategy creation, strategy implementation, information flows, communication, internal communication, top-down communication, bottom-up communication, organisation, project, project management, project-based organisation and project-based industry. Cross-researches have of course been done between all these keywords. Additional information has also been found on the internet through the search engine “Google”. Concerning the books, they have been found thanks to the search engine of the Umeå University Library e.g. ALBUM. The same key words have been used as for the articles databases.

About the use of references, we have tried when it was possible, to give the original references. For example, if we have found an idea from another author in an article, we have tried to give the reference to the original author in order to facilitate the work of the reader if she/he wants to find the information. Moreover, the page number of each reference has been indicated.

2.4 Role of the theory in our research

Our study is divided into two distinct theoretical tendencies. We have first elaborated a theoretical framework in a deductive way\textsuperscript{16}. Our theoretical framework gathers the three concepts which are the base of our research, that is to say, the strategy, the communication and the organisation. From this theoretical framework have emerged two assumptions of theoretical models. Our theoretical framework has shown us the direction to give to the collection of our empirical data in giving the frame of our questionnaire for the interviews.

However after having collected our data, the analysis has led us to make conclusions about our assumptions but also to propose a new theoretical model. Our approach has then become more inductive\textsuperscript{17}. We have tried to suggest a new theory which is an evolution of our initial theoretical models. We think that this way to proceed has made us able, in a first stage, to keep the direction fixed by our objectives thanks to our theoretical framework and thus to propose a coherent study without losing the possibility to make proposals or to initiate new theories in a second stage.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p.12
2.5 Interpretation of knowledge in social sciences

As mentioned in our objectives, we have tried to understand how the information flows (the communication) were processed through an organisation when confronted to the matter of the strategy. We have chosen to adopt an attitude that enables us to understand the way of thinking of the people we have interviewed as well as the way of working of the organisations we have studied. It was an incontrovertible condition if we wanted to grasp the mechanisms of the articulations between the organisation of companies and their strategy and the way communication impacted those articulations. From this point of view, we can affirm that our position related to our interpretation of the knowledge presented in this study is hermeneutic\textsuperscript{18}. Indeed, we cannot disconnect the act of individuals from the dynamics that constituted the organisation and the communication. The communication comes from the interactions between individuals and it is the same individuals that are the living forces of the organisation. Human behaviours and the understanding of human behaviours are thus at the centre of our logic of interpretation and in the heart of our research. That is also why we were ready to be met with surprising findings during our empirical data collection as well as during the analysis of these data, but if we wanted our study to be relevant, we must managed to understand how polled people see the world\textsuperscript{19}.

2.6 Interaction between social actors and the organisations

We have mentioned in the previous paragraph that we consider that “communication comes out from the interactions between individuals and it is the same individuals that are the living forces of the organisation”. It is a sign of our constructionism\textsuperscript{20} approach. Of course, we are aware that organisations have in some way their own existence because they propose a structure and guidelines and that they might have an impact, for example, on the way communication is processed. But they are dead bodies without the social actors and additionally, communication cannot exist by itself. We have used categories in our study\textsuperscript{21}. During the entire thesis, we refer to top management and operational levels. The top management is constituted of the top managers of an organisation, they represent the strategic power. The operational level is a mixed of all the operational actors, from the middle managers to the simple employees. In our research and because of our constructionist position, we give to these categories a real social importance.

2.7 Research strategy

The considerations of the previous paragraphs lead us to adopt a qualitative approach as a research strategy. However, this affirmation has to be qualified. Indeed, even tough our epistemological and our ontological approaches should encourage us to state almost without hesitation that we have adopted a qualitative research strategy; the fact that our first stage is


\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, p.20

totally deductive should lead us to be more cautious in this affirmation. The progression of our research from the elaboration of theoretical models to the formulation of assumptions is very characteristic of a quantitative study. Bryman and Bell have though underlined that a qualitative study was not incompatible with the testing of theory\textsuperscript{22}. Moreover, the data we needed were not quantitative data but data which should enable us to have a real understanding of the vision of social actors. It seemed thus more relevant to use the methods of qualitative study for collecting the data we desired. That is why we have chosen to use semi-structure interviews which offer more possibilities to understand the way of thinking of managers and employees\textsuperscript{23}. We will detail the technique of the collection of data in the part 4 of our study.

3 Theoretical framework

This chapter provides the reader with a selection of the most relevant theoretical concepts used in this report. We will address here the main theories regarding the three components of our research question: the strategic drift, the communication flow, and the project management. These three points are linked as often as possible so as to catch the numerous interrelations which exist.

3.1 Strategy

In order to understand the concepts of strategic drift and strategic gap highlighted in our study, it is important to explain the basis of such concepts. We will discuss quickly what strategy is and we will explain how strategy and its implementation are addressed according to the structure and the organisation of the company.

3.1.1 Basic definition of strategy

Initially, the term of strategy comes from the military vocabulary. It used to designate the action to coordinate all the strengths of the nation in order to make war or to manage a crisis\textsuperscript{24}. In business, strategy was originally named \textit{business policy}. Researches about business strategy have really started to be undertaken in the 1960’s and were based on technical economics. The theories about strategy have then been enriched with other disciplines such as sociology, political science or institutional theory\textsuperscript{25}.

The strategy of an organisation concerns its long term goals and objectives and the arrangement of its resources in order to reach them. It defines the position of the organisation relatively to its changing environment and makes sure to match stakeholder expectations\textsuperscript{26}. From an overall point of view, the management of the strategy in an organisation has to deal with the congruence of three factors that are the environment, the resources and the values and culture. The environment is a source of opportunities and threats and resources represent strengths and weaknesses\textsuperscript{27}. We are interested in this presentation of the strategy because it puts the company in its environment and it is not only focused on the internal organisation. Yet, the link between the organisation and its environment is very important in the optic of the strategic drift (3.1.5).

\textsuperscript{25} B. Willauer, (2003), “Consensus as key success factor in strategy making”, Gabler edition wissenchaft, pp.11-14
In order to understand how the strategy can be linked to the communication and the information it is important to get a picture of how the strategic roles are spread within the organisation. Our study will present how the communication can be the bond between these different strategic levels. The strategy is organised on three levels of management which are the strategic position, the strategic choices and the strategy into action. The strategic position deals with the overall objectives, the environment and the stakeholder expectation. The strategic choices are concerned with the adaptation of the strategic position to the business unit and the strategy into action is interested in the day-to-day implementation of the strategy\textsuperscript{28}.

Each of this strategic level corresponds to a level of management. From the creation to the implementation, the different levels of the hierarchy are involved. That is why the formulation of the strategy has to be crystal clear in order to have the implementation as close as possible to the strategy formulated by the top management.

3.1.2 Strategy creation and implementation: the success criteria

We will not make a detailed presentation of each part of the creation of a strategy; it is not the point of our study. However, it is central to highlight the success criteria which help to succeed the strategy creation and implementation process.

The elaboration of the strategy is commonly presented as the role of top management. The implementation is then devolved to business unit managers and, of course, to employees.

We can divide the process into two parts: first the formulation process and then the implementation phase. The strategic creation is the role of the strategic position level (cf. 3.1.1) and is focused on proposing a mission and a vision for the company, which will support and guide the development of the company, as well as an evaluation of the environment. According to the sectors, this phase might also include a manufacturing part and an operational design. Concerning this phase, we could propose the following success criteria\textsuperscript{29}:

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{erv_congruence.png}
\caption{Management of strategy: The ERV congruence}
\end{figure}

\begin{itemize}
\item Resources
\item Environment
\item Values
\item Opportunities & threats
\item Strengths & weaknesses
\item Leadership and culture
\end{itemize}


- Analysis of threats and opportunities and confrontation to strengths and weaknesses
- Presentation the challenge from a concrete and operational point of view, with a list of alternative solutions.
- Verification of the holding of the most relevant information available
- Continuous re-analyse of the problem and the solutions
- Decision and proposition of a guide for action.

The second part of the strategic process is probably the most difficult and the trickiest one. Indeed, the implementation can be the scene of drift compared to the initial strategy. We will address this point later in the sections 3.1.4 and 3.1.5. The implementation of the strategy is present at each level of strategic management because without a clear direction from the top management, the business unit managers and the employees cannot well implement the strategy. However, we have also to underlie that the skills of the employees have to match the exigencies of the strategy. The strategy can be very well formulated; the operational level has to be able to undertake it. In case of mismatches, the company has to propose training and practices in order to have the possibility to rely on effective managers and employees. From an operational point of view, the strategy is really shaped at the level of strategic choices and strategy into action. Concerning this phase, we could propose the following success criteria:

- Propose simple, concrete and measurable objectives
- Communicate in order to ensure a common understanding and commitment
- Contemplate early the resources configuration needed
- Building training programmes if it is needed
- Identify priorities
- Efficient and continuous performance measurement
- Control through feedback system

It is remarkable to notice that in each of these stages, the communication is present in both the phase of elaboration and the phase of implementation. Besides, the communication is rarely explicitly quoted but it seems manifest that even the best plan that would be perfectly respected will be a disaster if the information flows does not function well between the top management and the operational level. Therefore in this paragraph, we have tried to highlight the strategic importance of the communication.

3.1.3 The measurement of the success of the strategy: performance measurement

3.1.3.1 The performance measurement methods

One of the keys of the strategic management is the measurement of the efficiency of the strategy. How is it possible to know and to evaluate whether the strategy that is being implemented is efficient and relevant regarding the day-to-day activities? It is imperative, and tricky, to match the business strategy and the performance metrics. Usually in a basic measurement system, the strategic objectives such as “reduce costs from 30%” are then divided into smaller, more concrete and particular measures such as “reducing the time taken for this task”\(^\text{35}\). But the ultimate goal is to go further than a simple measurement and to make the company able to manage the performance\(^\text{36}\). In order to reach such a goal, the measurement system has to encompass each process that impacts the business objectives. There are different methods that can enable to measure performance. Some are of course more adapted to a particular business or to a particular organisation\(^\text{37}\).

- Balanced Scorecard
- Six Sigma
- Economic Value Add (EVA)
- European Foundation of Quality Management (EFQM)
- Basel II
- Total Quality Management (TQM)
- Malcolm Baldrige Award for Quality
- ISO 9000
- President's Award for Quality
- Value-Based Management
- Management by Exception

This list, which is not exhaustive, gathers the most common used system of measurement. Some of them, such as the balance scorecard, present results that simply enable to identify the field to improve, some others set goals and budget in order to make benchmarks. Finally, some of these methods (for example the quality management program - such as the TQM or the ISO standards) go further than a simple measurement of performance and propose to structure the organization as a whole\(^\text{38}\). It is generally considered that it is a combination of certain of these methodologies that can lead to the most efficient performance management\(^\text{39}\).


We will not detail each of these programs because each of them would probably merit a whole thesis but we will call attention on the balance scorecard approach that is one of the most commonly used. The balance scorecard also enables us to give a concrete example of the way strategy can be formulated by the top management in order to be communicated to the employees. It enables an adaptation of the strategy to the day-to-day activities of each person on the operational level.

3.1.3.2 The balance scorecard approach

A balance scorecard (BSC) is a tool that translates the strategic decisions into concrete and operational measures, making it possible to analyze whether the strategy is well implemented or not. It enables the creation of a framework for the realization of specific goals linked to the strategic decisions. Each unit, subunit, or even each employee has his/her own scorecard on which are written the specific targets he/she has to reach. The scorecard is regularly checked and updated. One of the major advantages of such a method is its adaptability. Firstly, in an implementation perspective, it enables to adapt the specific objectives to the situation. Secondly, in a strategic perspective it can be easier to make the strategy evolved according to the changes in the environment.

We will come back to the BSC later in the paragraph 3.2.5 in order to focus on the effect of the method on the internal communication.

3.1.4 The strategic gap

Performance measurement is essential because it enables to evaluate the strategy and its implementation. Without credible and accurate measures it is impossible for the managers to have a good vision of the activity of the company and thus to take the good decisions. By continuously monitoring the implementation of the strategy, it should be possible to detect if the strategy is correctly executed and if it fits well the company’s environment. However it happens very often that, because of a lack of measurement or an irrelevant measurement system, a strategic gap occurred.

There could be several explanations to a strategic gap and each company has probably its specific reasons. Though, the basic characteristics and reasons for a strategic gap are often the same.

The ultimate goal of companies is to achieve a competitive advantage. Unfortunately if this advantage can be reached thanks to the core competences of the company, it is continuously

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contested and finally fluctuates a lot. As mentioned by Larry Bossidy the former chairman and CEO of Honeywell International, “Corporate strategies are intellectually simple; their execution is not.” Basically, a strategic gap is the difference between what the top management expects from the strategy that has been created and the reality of the results the company gets. Strategic gaps occur generally from a change. A change in the business environment of the company, for example, which required an evolution of the organisation or of the strategy. It can also be a change in the strategy but which is badly or wrongly planned.

Mankins and Steele list some of the factors that can explain the apparition of a strategic gap. It goes from a bad formulated plan to misapplied resource or breakdowns in communication. The outstanding point is that even tough companies realise only two-thirds of their strategic performance potential, the exact reasons are most of time unknown or difficult to identify by the top management.

The results, or rather the damages, of a strategic gap are often the same. Unhappy customers, uninformed employees, etc, there is a real danger to be taken in a vicious circle. If changes are badly managed it will create progressively a culture of miscarriage. Employees will expect that the plans will not be realised, because they are unrealistic and their commitment will progressively decrease. The consequences for the business can be disastrous.

Mentioning the strategic gap leads us to point out what might be the strategic impact of a deficient communication. A good understanding of the strategic gap will enable to grasp the notion of strategic drift and thus clearly defines the link between the strategic drift and the internal communication.

3.1.5 The strategic drift

When a strategic gap occurs, it may have different reasons, and different forms. We could say that strategic drift is a kind of strategic gap that is pretty particular. If we consider the 3 congruent elements evoked in the part 3.1.1, the strategic drift is characterised by the fact that the strategy does not fit anymore with its environment. Our aim in this study is to identify how a bad communication can lead to such a drift. And then, our objective will be to propose the means to avoid or to minimize this risk.

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48 M. C. Mankins & R. Steele, (2005), p.68
In order to understand what strategic drift is, it is necessary to consider that organisations know generally some periods of continuity. During these periods of continuity, strategy does not evolve so much or, if so, changes progressively. These periods can be long and can lead to a strategic drift. It is the strategy that gradually fails to meet the exigencies of the environment.

When the top management becomes aware of the drift, a period of flux generally arises. During this period there are a lot of strategic changes but quite chaotic. They can lead to either a new period of continuity if strategy matches again the environment or, on the contrary, to an important period of trouble, and even maybe to the end of the activity.

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The later the company becomes aware of the drift and reacts, the harder it will be to catch up to the environment. It will take time and require always bigger and difficult organisational transformations such as, in the worst cases, downsizing.

In the case of the strategic drift, the key is definitely the flexibility and the company has to know how to manage the changes it has to do and fills the gap between what is planned and what is done. Very often, the drift is due to a multitude of small problems and it is difficult to identify the exact reasons but we can summarize them under the generic term “resistance to the change”. It can also come from negligence from the top management which does not monitor enough the direction where the company goes and which neglects the implementation of the strategy. That is why it can be a real challenge in a dynamic environment to realign the strategy and it necessitates most of time serious evolutions of the management techniques.

The strategic drift appears as the perfect telltale of the degree of efficiency of a communication system within an organization. The strategic drift may be due to either a bad analysis of the environment by the top management and an inability to communicate the strategy, or by a low-quality feedback from the operational level that is in contact with the environment in day-to-day activities. In both cases, there is at least one flow of information (top-down or bottom-up) which does not work. We touch here the heart of the research question of our study. By tackling the problem of strategic drift and strategic gap through the lens of the communication and of the organization, we try to make it more concrete and thus more easily understandable and solvable.

3.2 Communication

After having introduced the concepts of strategy, performance measurement and strategic drift, we would like to focus on a particular aspect of the mechanism of organisations. This concerns the flows of information within the company. How can these flows impact the strategy creation and execution? Internal communication is usually made of two flows that are top-down and bottom-up. It makes to the communication the cornerstone, or maybe the backbone of the strategy implementation.

3.2.1 People interaction in society, Human relationships

The working world is very social and very diverse. This is a mix of individuals from different group identities. The interactions between these groups and the interactions between the individuals belonging to these groups are complex and can be a source of conflicts. The Social Identity Theory (SIT) states that individual classified themselves into categories. According to the way they perceive the others, they also classify them into categories. These classifications have an impact on the way individuals interact with each others\textsuperscript{56}. This short sociological introduction is important because we tackle the case of the internal communication and we will compulsorily meet the impact of human relationships in our study. The principles of the SIT are all the more true as we are interested in the relationships between the top management and the employees which are in a nutshell, the relationships between two different social categories. We have to be aware that it can impact the way communication is processed within the company. For example an employee, impressed by the fact that his/her manager belongs to a so-called superior category could give up giving his/her opinion or a negative feedback on the strategy. The people interaction are intricate and even the best organisation might be destabilised by incongruous social consideration. A strategic drift may occur for very diverse reasons and even the smallest effect can be amplified by a snowball effect, especially in the matter of the communication.

In the paragraph 3.2.2 and 3.2.3 we will first detail the importance of the communication in a strategic perspective, first from an institutional point of view (3.2.2), and then we will focus more on the mechanisms and the relationships between people (3.2.3).

3.2.2 Strategy and internal communication

For companies, communication has become over the last twenty years so crucial that it is now a critical success factor in most of the businesses. That is why the communication has from now on to be managed strategically. Indeed, the acts of stakeholders are fluctuating a lot and they have to receive clear signals\textsuperscript{57}. By stakeholders we mean mainly shareholders, investors, customers, suppliers, employees and the general public.


In this study we will focus on the internal communication. Indeed, we would like to discover to which extent communication within the company impacts the strategy and whether the structure of the organization can have an influence on the communication. Thus, concerning the internal communication, and from a stakeholders’ perspective, we will focus especially on the relationship between managers and employees. Richard Dolphin proposes a brief and discerning definition that can help us to delimitate the internal communication. For him, internal communication is “transactions between individuals and groups at various levels and in different areas of specialization and these transactions are intended to design (and redesign) organization and coordinate day to day activities”58. However, we have to be aware that internal communication is tightly linked to external communication, but we will develop this point in the paragraph 3.2.3.

If we focus on the definition of strategy proposed in 3.1.1, we remark that strategy aims at reaching a competitive advantage through the utilization of resources. We can identify two kinds of resources, tangibles and intangibles59. Tangible resources are for example raw materials, human capital or intellectual property. Intangible resources are concerned with internal capabilities. These capabilities are all the cooperation and the interactions between people and tangible resources60. We are clearly here in the field of the internal communication. And it leads us to think that internal communication has an essential strategic role, all the more as it can be a source of competitive strategic advantage. Tucker et al advances the hypothesis that firms with a well structured and operational organizational communication system would create more relevant strategies that they would be able to execute more effectively61. We will go deeper in the understanding of this theory in the following paragraph (3.2.3) when focusing on the relationships between employees and top management.

In a strategic perspective, the communication between the top management and the employees is at stake. In term of strategy, communication must mainly deal with the information of employees, the management of changes and the motivation of employees62. Basically, the effectiveness and the commitment of employees depend largely on their knowledge and their understanding of the strategic issues of the company63. Therefore, a good communication should enable a better understanding of the strategy, a better commitment and a lower resistance to change which eventually leads to a better implementation of the strategy. Regarding that, some CEOs are thus ready to offer a strong empowerment to employees. For example, we can quote Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric and a respected figure in business circles, who says while speaking to his employees: “We want you to share

this problem with us. We lay out all of the data... When you make a value like teamwork important, you shape behavior”64.

The internal communication can also have an important strategic impact on the external communication. By external communication we mean the communication with the stakeholders who are not working in the company such as the supplier, the customers or the general public. Indeed, the perception of these stakeholders in some way depends on the perception employees have from their own company. Through the internal communication it is thus also the “corporate reputation” which is at stake. It puts the internal communication in the front line in order to get competitive advantage and to find solutions to strategic problems65.

The strategic role of communication appears clearly in this paragraph, but we would like to go deeper in the understanding of the functioning of the information flows. What are their dynamics? How is it possible to impact them? Then it should enable us to have a better idea of how to tackle the problem of communication in order to solve the strategic drift.

### 3.2.3 Internal communication: top-down and bottom-up communication

The internal communication can be divided into two main information flows. A top-down flow that goes from the top management to the employees and a bottom-up flow that goes from the employees who are on the field to the top management. These flows interest us a lot because they are the link between the head and the body of the company, between the head and the environment. Basically, they are the link between the creation and the implementation of the strategy.

The literature is pretty rich concerning the top-down flows. Authors insist a lot on how to get employees involved or how to be sure that the strategy is well understood by employees. A particular attention is given to the relationship between the employees and their company because this relationship becomes more and more strategic and crucial in term of benefit and competitive advantage. That is why employees want now to get early information about the business, in order to play a role in the decisions making process66. We can mention by the way that this is the sign that they are ready to commit themselves to the company. It is moreover interesting to notice that the main goal of the top-down communication flow often means getting people involved. That is why the top-down communication is so important, and so difficult to carry out. The alignment of employees with the strategy of the company is difficult to get but also to preserve. It is a big challenge for top management to communicate the strategy in a way that it sounds relevant because it is rooted in the heart of the business. We point here out a very important point when considering the strategic drift. Stinson emphasises the fact that when you elaborate a programme of communication, this programme can be efficient during two or three years but it will finish by being obsolete because of the

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66 Ibid, p.323
change in the environment. It shows that even though the strategy is good, the company can lose the contact with its environment because of a bad top-down communication.

The bottom-up flow is very often initiated by the top management. The top-down communication has to be undertaken in a way that employees feel the motivation to imply themselves in the company and adopt a value adding attitude. It is the role of the top management to ensure that the information flow works in both ways. As mentioned in the previous paragraph (3.2.2), the main objectives of internal communication are informing, carrying out change and motivating. In the matter of pure information, sharing the information is the best way to provoke an answer and to get information on the other hand. There is also here the opportunity to create a company spirit. Concerning changes, developing a bottom-up communication can reduce the reluctance to change. If people are early informed and can thus give feedback because they have the time to give feedback, it can be very beneficial for the business, especially because through a bottom-up flow you get direct information from the field. About motivation, we can say that it is the opportunity to create interaction and exchange between people. And thus it enables to create or to strengthen the communication flow in the both ways.

The organisation of these flows is pretty intricate. Tucker et al propose a scheme that illustrates these fluxes. In order to facilitate the understanding of this important point, we think it is interesting to present it in this part.

They divide the communication according two levels, the individual level and the collective level. At each level corresponds a certain type of knowledge that has a particular shape. At the individual level, there is the tacit knowledge is based on the experience of each person. It is very difficult to share a tacit knowledge and it takes time. The objective knowledge on the contrary is concrete and can be shown and is thus easier to share. This knowledge has then to be communicated at a collective level. At the collective level, organisational routines and the top management are responsible for the transmission of collective knowledge. This collective communication is done through institutional processes for the tacit knowledge and through leadership for the directing and integrating the objectives knowledge. Institutional processes are element of the communication that has a cultural origin such as ritual or integration patterns.


The good organisation of these flows improves the strategic capabilities of the company. This figure enables to link the top-down and bottom-up flows to the strategy. It highlights the mechanisms which can explain the dynamic of the internal communication. Identifying these mechanisms and especially the role of the routines and of the top management enables us to surround the actors of the internal communication and thus to better concentrate our research on the goal of tackling the strategic drift.

3.2.4 Communication channels

Our study being focused on the information flows between the different hierarchical levels, it seems important for us to make a brief point on the different means of communication which are possibly used in the companies.

We can consider two main kinds of communication, the oral communication and the written communication. One of the first and main means of communication is of course the face-to-face conversation. This kind of communication may occur in a formal meeting or in an informal way, when the two or more interlocutors get together. Another way to communicate verbally is the phone. More recently and thanks to the development of the technology, new media have appeared. For instance, it is now possible to have a video conference where you can speak by word of mouth and see your interlocutor.

Concerning the other ways of communication, through written expression, there is of course the possibility to send letters or faxes. But the apparition of the email has revolutionized the
way to communicate within companies. The email has become ubiquitous and has now been commonly adopted by the major part of the companies. It has almost become difficult for a company to communicate without email. We can also add the more and more common use of intranet or databases which communicate information to a large amount of people within the company.

In the framework of our study, it might be interesting to focus a bit more on why a certain means is used for communication. What do the users look for in each communication means? Van den Hoof et al highlight four main criteria that could explain on which basis the choice of media is done.

- The possibility to get a feedback immediately
- The possibility offers by the mean of communication to express different element of communication such as body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, etc
- The possibility to express subtlety and nuances
- The possibility offers by the media to focus on a particular person

Daft and Lengel introduce the notion of task and environment in the choice of the media. Indeed they support the idea that it is possible to find a perfect match between the task and the media. In the same way, the environment can influence the use of a certain media. For example, if all your colleagues and co-workers use emails, you are almost obliged to use emails too.

However, we do not have to neglect the symbolic importance of the different media. It can sometimes explain that a media is chosen in spite of the possibility to choose another media that would have been better. For example, in the face-to-face meeting, you can find the symbol of the commitment and of the personal interest. This point might be very important, particularly in the relationship between the top management and the operational level. Employees can feel that they are more considered by their managers and thus have the will to commit more and to take more interest in the implementation of the strategy if some parts of the strategy are communicated to them face-to-face. Moreover, it is also important to keep in mind that the more customized, we could almost say individualized, a media is to a specific interlocutor, the more efficient it will be and the message will thus be better understood.

Each communication means has of course its advantages and its drawbacks. One of the objectives of this study will be to identify clearly, thanks to the empirical data, which means are the most efficient according to the work and the result expected and thus to conclude if there might exist some means that are better for the top-down or bottom-up communication. It would also interest us to discover whether some communication means are favoured or

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72 Ibid, p.6
preferred by top management and others by employees. And also which ones are prioritized for top-down and bottom-up communication.

3.2.5 Importance of communication for performance development

Considering the performance as how well the strategy is implemented and is successful (3.1.3) and regarding the topic of our study, we have to focus on the importance and the impact of the communication on the performance. That is to say: how can the communication improve performance? We can take the link between communication and performance from two sides. Let’s begin with the question of the communication and of its importance in the enhancement of performance.

First, we can mention that without an effective coordination between the different levels of hierarchy in the company it is not possible to get a good or an optimal performance. Usually, each level depends on each other and a high degree of cooperation is thus needed. Indeed, if cooperation between people is lacking, time can be easily wasted, for example because a work has been done twice or because a task cannot be implemented as long as another one has not been accomplished. We can thus articulate the link between communication and performance around two main factors that are the commitment and quality, the cooperation being a catalyst and a cement of these factors. The communication is an implicit but ubiquitous actor of each of them.

The commitment of the employees is an indispensable element of success and high performance. This commitment is achieved through a perfect understanding of the strategy and the objectives and their acceptance by the stakeholders and mainly the employees. Thus, an effective communication is imperative in order to be sure that there is a real will among the employees to tend towards an enhancement of performance and thus business results.

Moreover, the quality of a team work for example has inevitably a positive influence on the performance of a business, and this especially in project-based companies. In order to reach a high level of quality, it is indispensable that there is an opened communication between the members of each units or team or hierarchical level, but also between the top management and the employees. The quality of the sharing of information influences the quality of the work and thereby the general performance. In addition, it enables to create a unity and cohesion in a team that cannot be bad for the performance.

But we can also then tackle the problem of communication and performance from another point of view. Indeed, we have shown that communication is essential to performance but the research for performance can also help to improve the communication. The example of the balance score card approach (BSC) introduces in the paragraph 3.1.3.2 is a relevant example. The BSC has thus several advantages. It is first a way to get people involved and committed

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78 M. Hoegl, K. Weinkauf & H. G. Gмуenden, p.41
to their job and to the goals which have to be reached. Secondly, it is a source of more consistent communication which then enables to save time and to make the decision-making process more efficient. Lastly, it is often presented as a good tool for communicate with the different stakeholders. It compels the stakeholders to clearly state the goals and objectives, as well as the way to reach them, in order to communicate them to each stakeholder. Moreover it obliges also the stakeholders to have regular feedbacks concerning these goals because each unit or person who has a balance scorecard has to refer then to a superior level of the realisation of the goals integrated to the score card\textsuperscript{79}.

This link between the communication and the performance seems obvious in the literature. Our research will try to show that this link effectively exists. It might enable then to stress the importance of the communication in the performance measurement and thus in the implementation of the strategy. It will be also interesting to see if some tools of measurement such as the balance scorecard are used in companies in order to improve the internal communication and thus to make the strategic process easier. It would eventually be important to check if some organisations enable a better use of these tools and thus a better circulation of the information flows. Therefore, we will be very close to the heart of our topic which is to compare the way the information flows are processed according to the types of organisation. We will focus more on this side of the problem in the third part of this theoretical framework.

3.2.5.1 Knowledge management

It sounded important for us to say a few words about knowledge management. Knowledge management can be integrated in the figure 5 presented in the paragraph 3.2.3 both at the individual level where it is part of the tacit knowledge and at the collective level where it could be part of the organizational routines. Gorelick and Tantawy-Monsou propose a definition of knowledge management which presents knowledge management as “a framework for applying structures and processes to the individual, group, team, and organizational levels so that the organization can learn from what it knows (and acquire new knowledge if required) to create value for its customers and communities. This Knowledge Management framework integrates people, processes, and technology to ensure performance and learning for sustainable growth”\textsuperscript{80}. Knowledge management is not that widespread in the companies or at least not from a structured way. Knowledge management can interest us in the way that it is a step towards an institutionalization of the sharing of information. There is a will to build a scalable organization and to place communication in the heart of this one. It could be from a big interest in the perspective of the strategic drift. Because the organization is then closer to the day to day activities of everyone and become able to adapt itself to its environment when it is “learning from what it knows”. The communication between the top management and the operational level is moreover better because they are really integrated to a same structure. There is not anymore just an addition of different departments and layers of


management. The organization becomes able to develop its business from a sustainable way and thus to struggle efficiently against the strategic gap.

3.3 Organisation

The last part of our theoretical framework is more focused on the organisation of companies. By organisation, we mean the way firms structure their business and how they are internally organised in order to perform as efficiently as possible. The organisation is the last piece of the puzzle of our study. Indeed, we have first introduced the concept of strategy drift and of performance, then the communication. Now we are going to present the structure which gathers all the actors of the strategy creation and implementation, the communication being the articulations of this structure. The goal of our study is to discover whether there is a link between a better communication and the organisation of the company. In our research, we are particularly interested in the companies with project-based organisation. We will detail in the paragraph 3.3.2 what is a project-based organisation. We would like to know if the structure of project-based companies can enable a better internal communication and thus to be more able to avoid a strategic drift.

3.3.1 The theory of disaggregation by John Roberts

We introduce this part with the presentation of a theory that is a base of our study. This theory called of *disaggregation* is a first step towards the idea that smaller unit in a big organisation may enable a better circulation of top-down and bottom-up information flows.

John Roberts brings an interesting idea that helps developing the idea of strategic drift. A strategy can indeed evolve relatively quickly if a change occurs in the environment. The top management informed for example by the operational level, notices, or anticipates this change and thus modifies the original strategy in a strategy closer to the new environment. But if it is possible to change the strategy rapidly, it is far from being the case of the organization.

Therefore, in the purpose to deal with the strategic drift John Roberts proposes to build an organization extremely adaptable and thus strategy focus. All the measures such an organization implies are called *disaggregation*. The basic idea is to change your mind concerning the structure of the company by creating small subunits in the organization and giving each of them a relatively important power of decision. The advantage is to cancel some levels of management and thus to give more responsibilities to the subunits. The performance arises from the linkage of the subunits. The role of the management is to be sure that this link is efficient and optimized, each subunit becoming dependent on each other in a relevant way. We would like to use this theory of the *disaggregation* and show that the organization of the company into projects might give the same results and thus create a very supple

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83 Ibid, p.27
structure more easily adaptable to sudden change into the environment and the strategy. It
would also be easier to measure the performance of small subunits instead of bigger one.

3.3.2 Project-based organisation

As mentioned earlier project-based organisations have a central place in our study. In order to
compare how are processed the information flows in the project-based companies it seems
important for us to briefly introduce what is a project-based organisation, and what are its
main features compared to what we could call more “classical” organisations.

Before going more into details about project-based organisations, let’s recall quickly what a
project is. We can use the definition of the Project Management Institute (PMI) which
presents a project as “a temporary endeavour undertaken to achieve a particular aim and to
which project management can be applied, regardless of the project’s size, budget or
timeline”84. In order to make this definition more explicit we can also use this definition
proposed by the British Standard Guide to Project Management and which makes of project
“a unique set of coordinated activities, with definite starting and finishing points, undertaken
by an individual or organization to meet specific objectives with in defined schedule, cost and
performance parameters”85.

Therefore, the project-based industry corresponds to companies which “manage their business
activities both in intra-organization and in inter-organization or in network context”86.

Project-based organizations are thus applying the structure of a project to their whole
management. They are structured around projects and only work with projects.

Moreover, we cannot talk about projects without saying a few words about project
management. Project management “is the application of knowledge, skills, tools, and
techniques to a broad range of activities in order to meet the requirements of a particular
project”87. Projects interest us a lot for our study because they propose a well define structure,
with a precise organization of people, time and money. They are organized around five main
steps which are initiating, planning, executing, controlling, and closing. This possibility to
monitor with a high precision the evolution of a project thanks to a very complete plan posted
of several deadlines is very important from a strategy implementation perspective. This
permanent monitoring and measurement of the realization, if applied to the implementation of
a strategy, might give very interesting results. And this especially because thanks to clear
plans and well designed organizations, projects should enable a more direct and efficient
communication. That is why in the frame of our study, we would like to focus on project-
based organizations and discover if their specific structure makes them able to a better
internal communication in order to tackle more efficiently strategic gaps and, more
particularly, strategic drift.

industry”, Business Process Management Journal Vol. 10 N°6, p.673
86 Ibid, p.674
87 http://www.pmi.org/info/PP_WhatIsAProject.asp, 2007/05/08 at 23:02
3.3.3 Link between performance and organisation

The organisation plays a major role in the way the strategy is thought and implemented. Moreover, at the stage of the implementation, the organisation may play a central role in the quality of the performance and the quality of the measurement of this performance. At last, and even though communication is first a matter of human relationships, it is in the organisation that reposes the guide for the flows of information.

In this paragraph, we will first explain rapidly what the link between the organisations is, from a general point of view, and what the strategy is. Then, in order to go deeper in the field of our research, we will focus more on a certain type of organisation, that is to say project-based organisation (3.3.2). As mentioned above, the link between strategy and organisation is tight. The key of a successful implementation of the strategy relies on the capacity of the organisation to gather and manage the generally approved elements of the implementation\(^{88}\). These success criteria are basically those we have presented in the paragraph 3.1.2. It is a big challenge for an organisation to be able to succeed in the realisation of these elements. It is particularly difficult because, whatever the type of organisational structure, companies have to link workflows between each other. These workflows generally circulate between teams and not individuals. In order to be competitive, the link of these workflows has to be upstream and downstream\(^{89}\). That is to say towards the strategic level and from the strategic level. The link between these workflows is the communication and the role of the organisation is to provide tracks to the workflows and thus to the flows of information.

We have now observed the role of organisation in the strategic process. But one of the goals of our research is to discover if all the types of organisations offer the same possibility to implement as well as possible the strategy. We would like to confront the organisation by projects to the matter of the strategic gap. As we have mentioned many times since the beginning of this report, the environment is nowadays continuously and quickly evolving and changing. This compels the top management to monitor at anytime the implementation of the strategy and the fit of the strategy with the company’s environment. It can be achieved through a drastic reduction of the complexity in the organisation\(^{90}\). This reduction of the complexity concerns for example the number of processes, the number of levels of hierarchy, in the communication. This will be possible if the organisations become flexible, with fluid boundaries and become thus be integrated to a network. The size of the organisation would be reduced and big companies would be made of small one\(^{91}\). This kind of structure would be very close to project organisations. That is why we are now focusing more on the link between project-based companies and strategy.

The major advantage of projects when addressing the matter of the strategy is that it offers the opportunity to link the strategy, or the vision, to clear and measurable objectives. The


challenge is then to connect the objectives to the strategic gaps. This enables a real commitment from people and ensures thus a respect of the strategy. The role of the top management is to grasp how project management can enable to create flexible strategies. In this case project management may deeply impact the way to consider the strategic processes. Indeed a project is a long and costly process and you cannot decide to launch your company in a project if the strategy has not been perfectly developed. The strategy must therefore demarcate precisely the limit of the project in providing clear goals. The communication of these goals has moreover to be particularly clear. If the strategy has been well developed, the top management must then know exactly how each project contributes to the strategy, and to which extent. Another advantage of projects in the field of strategy is that thanks to the fact that they have generally objectives easy to identify for stakeholders, such as the building of a house for example, they make it easier to keep visible the goals of the strategy for everybody in the company. Projects and strategy are thus implied in a two-way relationship. Project management can influence the way to develop a strategy but strategy can move the project management to consider the project in an overall structure or network, strengthening thus the flows of information within the company.

We also have to stress the fact that projects and the way they are structured can enable to measure performance more easily and more accurately. The fact to reduce the complexity as mentioned above in this paragraph enable to projects to use tools such as the balance scorecard presented in the paragraph 3.1.3.2. The phenomenon to divide the strategy into small tasks and to monitor attentively the realisation of them is a big advantage when considering the measure of performance and the measure of the fit between the intended strategy and the strategy realised, especially because it is easier to communicate about clear objectives and tasks. We can see here a relevant means to tackle efficiently the strategic gaps.

If we come back to the strategic gaps, we can also notice that a structure with projects through a portfolio approach can be particularly relevant. The difference which exists between the expected situation of the company and the reality can lead to a cycle of projects. This cycle of project has the aim to close or at least to reduce or minimize the strategic gaps. If we take the case of the strategic drift, we can assume that a project is launched: that corresponds to a strategy developed according to the environment of the company at a given moment. When this project is successfully finished, the strategy has been implemented correctly and the strategy should fit the environment. But it could happen that the environment will change rapidly then or is maybe already evolving. A new project is then launched in order to adapt the strategy to the new environment. A programme of projects is thus developed that has the difficult task to link and to coordinate all the projects. Moreover this programme exists at each level in the company that is impacted by the strategic plan such as the human resources or the sales and marketing. This organisation might provide an efficient way to tackle the strategic drift.

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95 M. Davies, ”A Portfolio Approach to Programme Management & Project Design”, p.1
Even though it is not indispensable to our study, we would like to make two more precisions concerning the relationships between the projects and the strategy. We would first like to stress that the success of a project is not necessarily linked to a successful project management. Indeed, a project can be a success because it improves the business of the company on the long-term even though this project has not respected its limitations of time or budget. In this case, we can consider that the project management has been failing. This precision has its importance if we consider the matter of the flexibility. But we also have to be aware that overspending or exceeding the deadline too much may have important implications regarding the strategic drift and the internal communication. Eventually, we would like to underline the limits of projects with long-term objectives. They can be a source of lack of connection with the strategy and a source of drift from the environment.

3.3.4 Organisations that facilitates communication

In the previous paragraph, we tried to focus on the interactions between the structure of the organisation and the strategic process. However, one of the major actors of the strategic process is the communication. Our study aims at studying the impact of the organisational structure on the communication and thus, on the strategic process. In this paragraph, we will try to emphasise the role of the organisation into the sharing of information. As well as in the previous paragraph, we will also present with more details the impact of having a project-based structure on the communication.

As the environment is changing more and more quickly, companies have been obliged to evolve. We have mentioned in the paragraph 3.1.5 that flexibility is a cornerstone in order to struggle against the strategic drift. The new organisational forms developed by the companies

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aim at achieving a high level of flexibility in favouring the internal communication. These new structures are called modular, cluster, learning network, perpetual matrix organisation, spinout or virtual corporations. We will not detail all these forms but we will emphasis their main features that are basically a shorter hierarchy with fewer levels, more responsibilities for the subunits and the employees, the development of networking between teams and units as well as encouraging the cooperation, or the reduction of the size of the teams and units. Such features are able to favour and develop the internal communication. This idea supports the proposition of John Roberts concerning the disaggregation explained in the paragraph 3.3.1. The organisation by projects gathers a lot of these characteristics and has thus been particularly developed and used over the last 10 years. Especially because as explained in the paragraph 3.3.3., projects ensure an optimal implementation of the strategy according to the resources available, they also enable to be reactive to the evolution of the environment and at last they favour the organisation of knowledge management in facilitating the relationships between units, teams and hierarchical levels.

Goczol & Scoubeau do not hesitate to state that project-based organisations, thanks to their structure, make the internal communication easier. They explain that by the fact that such companies develop a central team working, focused on the general characteristics of a project, which is the backbone of the structure. Around this backbone, different groups are articulated and are more specific in order to answer to the particularities of each project. These groups are obliged to evolve in order to fit the special exigencies of the projects and it makes thus the sharing of information easier because the boundaries between individuals are weaker. People know how to work together and have the habit to share information with other teams or groups involved in the project. The organisation with projects also implies that teams often depend on each other, this requiring a transparent communication from everybody.

The following chart will explain why we are particularly interested in the project management in order to facilitate communication and reducing the strategic drift. This figure demonstrates the importance of the interaction between the communication and the project structure. In some way, the communication supports the good organisation and articulation of the elements of a project structure. But in another way, Goczol & Scoubeau demonstrate that communication is also efficient because of the project structure.

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99 J. Goczol & C. Scoubeau, (2003), “Corporate communication and strategy in the field of projects”, Corporate communication: an international journal, volume 8, N°1, p.65

Figure 7: communication and project management processes
3.4 Theoretical model

Our theoretical framework has been elaborated with a precise goal. It has led us to formulate two assumptions for our theoretical model. We hope that the analysis of the empirical data will enable us to select one of these assumptions and/or to improve these models in order to create a tool that will contribute to oppose efficiently to the strategic drift. We especially hope that it will enable to identify some clues in order to identify the sources of drift and the relevant areas on which acting in order to reduce or to avoid the drift.

Assumption 1

In the assumption 1, the strategy (3.1.1) is implemented according to the analysis of the environment relying on the information that passes through the organization. We are in the case of a classical organization structured around different departments (sales, marketing, production, finance, Human Resources…) which all work for the whole business. The top management creates the strategy and organizes its implementation (3.1.2). The operational level implements the strategy and gives feedback to the top management concerning the evolution of the environment (3.2.3). The risk of strategic gap or strategic drift can be high if there is a bad communication both from the top to the bottom and/or from the bottom to the top (3.1.4, 3.1.5). This risk is strengthened by the fact that this kind of organization is commonly characterized by an accumulation of the levels of hierarchy as well as by a coordination and an interaction between departments which is not always optimum (3.3.3) and can badly impacts the communication (3.2.2, 3.2.4) of the strategy and the measure of the performance (3.1.3, 3.2.5).

Figure 8: information flows in a classical organisation
Assumption 2

In the assumption 2, the strategy and the environment (3.1.1) are very close thanks to the possibility through the project-based organization (3.3.2) to adapt the objectives very precisely and to monitor the implementation of the strategy (3.1.3, 3.3.3). It makes the strategic drift easier to avoid (3.1.4, 3.1.5) because the communication welds and unifies the system (3.2.2, 3.3.4). The permanent measure of performance enables a clear communication between the top management and the operational level (3.2.5), facilitated by a shorter hierarchical structure (3.3.4). The organization around the team which participates to projects makes the communication easier and from a better quality because it can spread more easily into the whole organization (3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.5, 3.3.4).

*Figure 9: Communication in a project-based organisation*
4 Data collection

This chapter aims at providing the reader with the explanations about the organization of the collection of data, from the justification of the technique used to the precision concerning the environment of the collection.

4.1 Technique used for collecting data

As mentioned in the paragraph 2.6, we needed to collect qualitative data. We chose semi-structured interviews because we need data that were comparable enough. Our goal was to compare how information flows were processed in project-based companies and in companies with a classical organization. That is why we needed to respect a certain structure in our interviews. We have realized an interview guide which has emerged from our theoretical framework. The guide, which has been validated by our supervisor, is structured in three parts, each one treating a specific concept namely strategy, communication and organization. However as we were in the case of a qualitative interview, we were not focused too strictly on the order of the question. Moreover the interviewees were totally free to develop their thoughts around the guidelines we proposed to them.

The use of a semi-structured interview was also imposed by time constraints. Indeed, we realized our interviews during the working hours, so the managers and the employees were able to give us one hour of their time but not more. In such a short amount of time, it was necessary to guide them a bit in order to get answers to all the questions we needed. We have thus been sometimes obliged to limit the development of thoughts of the interviewees.

4.2 The realization of the interview guide

The interview guide has been elaborated from the theoretical framework (Appendix 1). You can find in the guide the same plan as in the theoretical framework e.g. three parts: strategy, communication and organization. The first part is concerned with the matter of strategy. The main goal of that part is to understand how the strategy is shared in the company and how it is perceived by the managers and by the employees. The second part is focused on the communication, with the goal to discover how and by which channels the communication in the company is processed. Eventually, the third part is more interested in the organization. This part was in fact often the first which we presented to interviewees because it was a way to make sure that they feel confident about these questions concerning their day-to-day work and the organization of their company.

During the realization of the interview guide, we were also very careful in ensuring that our questions will encourage the interviewees to give their own point of view and their own perception of their environment. As mentioned in the paragraph 2.6., our approach is constructionist and we are interested in understanding what people think.
4.3 The selection of the interviewees

As mentioned in our research objectives (1.3), we wanted to compare how information flows were processed in project-based companies and in companies with classical organization. That is why we needed to make interviews with both types of companies. In each company, our objective was to interview two different hierarchical levels. We got interviews in each company with members of the top management and with members of the operational level.

Out of respect for the request of some companies to remain anonymous, we will not divulge the name of the companies that we interviewed. Concerning the companies with classical organization, we have interviewed a public company (that we will call company A) and a consulting company (Company B). The project-based companies are a construction company (Company C) and an IT consulting company (Company D). All the polled respondents are working in Umeå.

In the company A we have interviewed the two head managers and one employee. The two head managers were interviewed together because they both manage the company with different responsibilities. Because both are complementary and represent the top management, we have unified their declarations: they like to speak from one voice.

In the company B we have interviewed the head manager of the unit of Umeå and one employee.

In the company C we have interviewed a project manager and a team leader.

In the company D we have interviewed the director of the communication for the region of Umeå and a project manager.

4.4 The realization of the interviews

The interviews for companies A, B and C have been realized in the late April and the interview for company D in the early May. All the interviews have been tape-recorded. We asked before the interview if it was a problem to the interviewee if we recorded the interview. It has never been a problem. The average length of an interview was one hour. We have also to add that we are both men and that we have interviewed only women in the company A, and one woman in the company B. We do not think that it has created any bias. Our behavior has been exactly the same as with the other interviewees.

For the company A, the interview of the managers has been set itself without any problem. We just have to mention that one of the managers left the interview at five minutes from its end for professional reasons. The other manager has thus finished the interview alone. For the interview of the employee, there was only one interviewer because the other interviewer was traveling abroad. During the interview of the employee, there were no managers present so the employee was totally free to speak.

In the company B, we first met the manager and the day after the employee. These interviews were without interruption and without any problems. We interviewed each individual separately and they were thus free to say whatever they wanted.
In the **company C**, we first interviewed the team manager. This interview was a bit fussy because the person did not speak very good English. He understood our questions, even tough we were obliged to simplify them and he answered to some questions in Swedish. We have then asked to a Swedish student from the USBE to make the translation of the tape recording. We are aware that in term of validity this interview is a weakness but we had a lot of difficulties to get an interview with people from project-based companies, especially because their workload was generally important and their deadlines very short. The time was then too short for trying to get an interview in another company. The interview of the project manager in the company C did not pose any problem.

In the **company D**, we have interviewed first the project manager and then the director of the communication. However, we have to precise that during the interview of the project manager, the director of the communication was present. He did not take part to the interview but we can believe that his/her presence might have altered a bit the quality of the answers provided by the project manager. Maybe he/she does not feel totally free to say what he/she thinks. Here again, we are aware that the validity of this interview is maybe a bit lower. However we have no element to prove that the presence of the director of communication has inserted a bias.

### 4.5 The treatment of the interviews

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, all the interviews were tape-recorded. We have then transcribed each interview. The transcription of the interviews is available to any person who would like to consult them. It has enabled us to better scrutinize the information given by each interviewee. It was thus easier to have clear ideas and to identify the points that will interest us for the analysis.
5 Empirical study

This chapter depicts the results obtained from the empirical data. For each company, the displayed results follow the questions of the questionnaire which address first the strategy, then the communication and, when relevant, the projects.

Among the four companies which were studied, two work with a projects-structure and two do not. The two companies which don’t work with projects are a public service (Company A) and a consulting company (Company B). The two others which work exclusively with projects are a construction company (Company C) and an IT consulting company (Company D). In order to come up with a better comparison, we have first interviewed the companies not based on projects. Here are the results.

5.1 Companies working without a projects-structure

5.1.1 Answers from the manager of the company A

5.1.1.1 Strategy

The manager thinks the strategy is well implemented. Still, she admits some employee would not say they know the “strategy” of the company if they were asked about it because “strategy” is not a common term in this company. The manager thinks every staff member understands the three strategic objectives of the company though they do not understand the word “strategy”. Indeed, the employees work with practical things but don’t see it as a strategic activity. They don’t always make the connection.

Each year, there is a survey to check the understanding and the knowledge of the company’s goals for employees’ own unit and more than 70% of them do. The survey also shows positive results for the following question: Do you have the possibility to come up with new ideas?

The boss declares that the employees can also participate to decide the way to reach the objectives. They are indeed closer to customers; they know more than the managers what the situation looks like. The way to reach the objectives is discussed in leading groups twice a month where for instance, the staff members decide what a virtual community for the company should look like. Even if the staff members don’t take the final decision, their opinion is important for the basis of the final decision.

When asked about the gap between what is expected and what is done, the manager answers that “there is always something happening on the way when you communicate”. She thinks that’s why the managers should decide how the goals set by the politicians should be met. The reasons for the objectives stay the same while the way to reach them changes along the hierarchical scale. The manager thinks the gap in communication is a natural reason because of respective experiences which are different. The manager works a lot to make understand the reason for doing something: “if you know why, you can still do it, even if you disagree”.

The manager only resorted to compulsory methods twice in her career.

The leading group and the manager value different aspects of the work: here is another gap.
There can sometimes be some mismatches between skills and objectives, which are tackled by recruitment and formation in order to “have the right person at the right place”. To ensure good communication climate, there are individual meetings twice to three times a year. At this occasion, the employee is proposed training opportunities if needed. There is an individual development plan which sets goals and the opportunity to get new skills if needed.

5.1.1.2 Communication

There is a written communication policy which says that managers should have very early communication and employees’ involvement. This communication policy is for all the public services of the Kommun. (early communication, meetings for each unit, staff member must be able to make suggestions before the decision is taken).

One of the manager’s tasks is to translate politicians’ words. For example, “a virtual community” means “a website”. The manager thinks she communicates well. She is a good example of managing by walking around (or phoning around). She, as a manager, communicates more (in quantity). “Everybody should know what is going to happen, when, and who is responsible” so that they know how to react adequately. The communication is getting better though it’s more and more reading communication. The manager wants to make it a dialog.

To favour the double-flow of information, the employees must always have the opportunity to suggest, even though their opinion is not followed. Every unit has its own meeting plus sometimes big meetings. For participation, everyone has a responsibility to be active and share knowledge and experiences. The meetings with trade unions occur every month, which enables the manager to “take the temperature”, to see if people are satisfied.

Yet, the manager feels she has to talk and involve more. Sometimes, “they know what we think and we know what they think but we don’t discuss it”. The manager feels they need more exchange and debate to learn from each other.

The communication means are phoning, e mails and physical meetings. Face-to-face talking is the most efficient but the manager says she also needs meetings (it’s another shape of dialog). It is easier to present something in meetings if you have first communicated “within four eyes”. The manager checks the understanding of employees in the meetings. Communication means must be complementary and repeated. The more sensitive the topic is, the more important it is to make it face-to-face. Talking is the best way to check if people are “on the train” and to get feedback.

The geographical spreading of the offices is an obstacle to a very good communication. The manager thinks people don’t meet enough with one another. The units are separated from one another. There should be a forum which brings them together. Sometimes the managers think she should force people to make short visits, work for a week on another place. It’s a talk on the place which makes new ideas come up. Vertical communication is important but horizontal communication should also be favoured.
5.1.1.3 Mixed groups

Surprisingly enough, the manager acquaints us with the fact that a project-structure is sometimes adopted in the company for very specific tasks. This prototype of organisation was started two years ago and has only been used three times for special projects; she calls it the “mixed groups”. These groups, which are composed of members from different units, work on a special mission within the most important topics. These groups split during the meetings to favour dialog. At each session, they consider the proposals of the previous one. The manager says that mixed groups should be developed because they have energy. She should listen to them and put more energy in them.

5.1.2 Answers from the employee of the company A

5.1.2.1 Strategy

The employee thinks she has a good idea of the goals of the company even if she is not sure to get them perfectly right. She is aware that her company has a special environment to deal with. Regarding the political forces which wield influence on the decisions of her managers, there is written documentation for each unit (which counts from 20 to 25 members).

She feels there is a gap between what should be done and what is done. It happens that the goals given are not realistic because the decision makers don’t know about the practical situation. Some goals are not always reachable even if the team wants to reach them. For example, her unit was asked to focus more on a specific population but this population is not always reachable. Therefore the goal can not be entirely fulfilled. The respondent declares that “a goal remains something you head towards”.

Business units have freedom to solve problems in some issues which are not decisive. When there is a problem, the employee feels really free to report to the managers. She feels listened to even if she understands sometimes her remarks can’t be applied. In small issues, she can also take part to the decision-making process. She feels there is a match between employees’ skills and objectives. When someone has trouble, it’s easy to ask colleagues for help.

5.1.2.2 Communication

The respondent does not think that there is a written communication policy (though there is one). Some times ago, the information was not the same and did not reach everybody at the same time but now the information is given in the same way to every employee. The respondent thinks the communication is good in the company even though a few people still think the managers never listen. It looks normal to her; you can not please everybody.

She dedicates a lot of time to communication. She thinks that everybody who wants to communicate to the managers is able to do it. Intranet is not used as much as common mails because the information on the intranet seems to be of less importance. Thanks to mail, she can collect every detail of the opinions of every colleague which is really practical. The respondent admits that talking face-to-face has a flaw: you can forget details. “The day after,
you have a picture of the talk and the other person has another picture”. Regarding feedback, when there is no answer, it seems that the suggestion has been accepted. When the suggestion is not welcome, there is reaction.

According to the respondent, the main obstacle to a very good communication is the fact that some people don’t feel that what they say is important to the management. “Some don’t say anything because they don’t feel they will be listened to”. She wonders if it comes from a lack of self-confidence or not. She points out that face-to-face talks are really important not just to communicate the facts but to make the climate for better communication.

5.1.3 Answers from the manager of the company B

5.1.3.1 Strategy

The interviewee is the head of the office of the auditing company. According to him, the company’s strategy is well implemented (both on corporate and local levels). The strategy is also well understood. The boss feels to have a lot of freedom (business is always said to be local though the tools are national). He points out that the employees have different positions within the company so they have different knowledge of the strategy of the company. For instance, the employees close to clients are not that much affected by the strategy; indeed, “they come to work, push the clock, and go home”. Yet, some employees are more involved in the decision-making process and know more where they are heading. The boss declares that “some people must know about the strategy, not all”.

Each employee has a balance scorecard which consists of an extract from the business plan. This balance scorecard shows from three to four areas including clients, people and firm (profitability). These balance scorecards are formulated for the firm, this office and the employee. They make the involved person wonder which part of the scorecard has to be improved and how.

There is always a lack between what is expected and done, “you deal with people” he says. The boss explains he wants people to go outside their comfort zone. He admits some of the employees can forget about the balance scorecard. To avoid this, each employee has a coach/mentor. The coach is expected to follow up the employee’s scorecard. The coach is expected to make a continuous job but he/she meets only twice a year. Meetings with coaches are appreciated because employees feel they are listened to. Motivation also rises because they know more their part.

Every employee that wants to take part to the decision making process has the possibility to do so. There is a low hierarchy so that the employees can come up with ideas face-to-face. Coaches are not always senior managers but colleagues. The employees can then talk to the coaches if they want an issue to be discussed. There is three ways to go reporting for something: through the group chief, the coach or directly the boss.

The boss thinks there is a good match between skills and objectives. When they are lacking competences, they try to fill this gap. They propose to the employees to learn more.
5.1.3.2 Communication

The respondent admits that the communication is confusing because the organisation is complex. There are indeed several dimensions with crossed responsibilities which sometimes collide. There are the departments for audit, tax advisory, etc…, the service lines and their leaders, the local offices and the client divisions. A central system has been tried out to gather and share information but it has been forsaken. Indeed, if someone is not updating, the system collapses.

The boss tries to always be available to help solve more quickly and discuss the problem. He believes this creates a helpful climate. Communication is therefore considered as a strength. Information is considered to be important for success because the employee has to know its role in the whole process. The problem is then to balance between the client work (thanks to which the company earns money) and the time for communication.

Not many tools can be found to measure the efficiency for communication. Though, the company has agendas to check that meetings deal with specific points and what has been said the previous time. Surveys are made once a year (one chapter concerns the strategy and the way it is implemented and understood). The company has received good results on these anonymous surveys.

The boss says that the climate at the office is very positive and open. Every employee can go to anyone to get a good answer. There are no separate rooms, they sit in a landscape. Yet, the top-bottom and bottom-top flow is not processed in the same way: it is a “state of nature” the boss says. The head of the office indeed shares more information that he can receive.

There are sometimes bad energies lost in rumours. If the boss would have been acquainted, the problem would have been quickly solved. The respondent thinks that “you don’t always speak your mind to the boss” though he feels employees are free to come and talk.

The communication means used are the following: e-mails, group meetings, office meetings, service lines meetings, yearly regional meetings with managers of northern offices and intranet. The boss is convinced that the communication means have to be complemented because for example, when some people are missing to a meeting, they must be sent an email. To get feedback, the boss sees how the employee reacts during a face to face talk. The respondent plans to develop office meetings in order to share the same information to everybody in the same way.

The focus on the client can be an obstacle to a very good communication because the client is the priority of the company. The boss says that choosing between a meeting and going to the client is easy: you always go to the client. There is a documented plan for each client work with mandatory steps. Each client work is evaluated every year. Everything is documented every year for each project in order to stock information over the years for different consultants. Each year, they wonder what the clients’ expectations are and what can be improved on the coming year (in order to always be better). To improve the working structure, the respondent thinks that the work should be evaluated continuously because today they until the end of the work to evaluate it.
There is a geographical obstacle for the company which has 125 offices in Sweden. It is indeed difficult to share information everywhere; each office has its filters. There is quality control every third year of this office.

5.1.3.3 Client division

When faced with big contracts with big clients, the company can adopt a client division which looks like a project structure. The project teams are changing and can have up to seven members with an average of four members. The boss says in these teams, information sharing is better because “the employees are close to one another”. They are meeting continuously. Their planning is also updated. They know more or less what everybody is doing. “They also know what everybody is good and bad at”.

5.1.4 Answers from the employee of the company B

5.1.4.1 Strategy

The employee thinks the big strategy is well communicated especially through intranet. The employee feels she knows and understands well about the strategy. There is also a meeting once a month with the auditing group. There, the boss depicts the economy. Though she thinks not all the employees get all the information. The information differs between the groups because of the characteristics of the leaders. She thinks some of the information is lost on the way though the leaders try to deliver everything.

The employee has a good though incomplete understanding of her job. The job is difficult and the regulations are constantly changing. Sometimes the information is too much on the intranet, she would like a résumé (more structured and selected information) and more daily news plus the new big regulations. The manager would also be expected to give the employees updated information; it is not systematic.

She thinks the strategy of the company is connected to what she is doing in everyday activities. The employee can easily ask senior managers or specialists for help. Within the range of her skills, and if she is allowed, she can choose the best way to solve a problem. The employees also do their own budgets. Like the boss said, the coaches help the employee to set his/her objectives. Though, they only meet once a year compared to what the boss declares (twice a year). The balance scorecard is discussed with the coach. The match between and employees’ skills objectives is quite good. Sometimes the objective is quite high but the possibility to try out is always offered with some support.

5.1.4.2 Communication

The respondent thinks the communication is good in the company. The employee even thinks the company has an internal communication policy (which does not exist, says the boss who does not see the point in having a written internal communication policy). She believes this communication policy protects employees from being spammed for instance. Yet, there is a lot of information coming from the business environment but she does not feel to have time to
select all information so she can loose some. Everyday, she does not spend more than half an hour on communication and she mainly receives information.

The interviewee thinks communication is very important to implement strategy. Though she can ask to have more regular, selected and structured information, she won’t. She thinks before asking, she has to be very disappointed: “it’s not that bad that I have to ask”. She also says that in her company, feedback is not always given. Information is taken, and nothing more. When asked about prospective improvements, she says the information could be better sometimes. A mail to clarify which decisions have been made would be sufficient, she says.

5.2 Companies working exclusively with a projects-structure

5.2.1 Answers from the project manager of the company C

5.2.1.1 Strategy

The project leader (or the “platschef”) thinks all of his team members know and understand the objectives given. The boss feels free to take decisions. One of the strengths here is that the company is small and the team members know their colleagues very well. The team is made of fifteen members in average. This team includes twelve members among which are seven carpenters, a painter, a climber, an electrician and metal experts.

There is a specific plan which is drawn by the boss before the beginning of the project. The respondent says that in 95% of the cases, the plan is followed. Otherwise, there can be some delays. To prevent and tackle delays, there are meetings every fourteen days to check the advancement of the project. The team members can easily reach the boss. Moreover, the boss is often assisted by an “arbetsledare” and a team leader. Those two also participate to the creation of the plan. The “arbetsledare” is in close contact to team members and fixes small problems. With larger projects, the “platschef” is almost always in the office dealing with economics, materials, and check-ups while the team leader makes the link with the floor work. With contracts of five millions SEK, there is no “arbetsledare”. But with contracts above thirty millions SEK, there can be two “arbetsledare”.

5.2.1.2 Communication

The boss thinks the communication in the company is good and there is no written communication policy. The size does matter, he says. Thanks to its simple organisation in projects and its limited number of employees, the communication flow seems good. The project leader thinks he gives about two hours a day to communication in average. The respondent acknowledges that working in a project-structure helps the sharing of information because of the following-up and the control induced by regular meetings. The project leader uses projects’ tools which update and share information within and between projects (cost, events, etc…).
More information is given by the project leader to the team than the contrary. The boss feels he’s the leader and therefore has to tell much to his team members. The respondent also says that asking direct questions is the best way to get feedback and check if information has been acquired and understood. Information is also made on paper before meeting. To start with the project, there is a big meeting with all the team members who receive a written documentation about the project. Then, the points of the document are read loud and discussed to be sure everyone gets them. The project leader declares it is a good way to make the employees acquire the objectives. Indeed, the employees listen and read: the information means are complementary.

In the company, all “platschefer” meet every two months to share experience. There they can help one another according to their respective skills. Intranet helps also sharing skills. The distance between the head office and the work places (sometimes fifty kilometres) can sometimes be an obstacle for a very good communication.

5.2.2 Answers from the employee of the company C

5.2.2.1 Strategy

The employee is the team leader and he feels that he knows and understands what he has to do. He feels he can resort to his team or his leaders to solve problems. When a problem arises he says he does not involve the entire team and he tries to solve the problem with the adequate specialists. The employee feels that he and his team leader trust one another which creates the condition for a good teamwork.

The “platschef” is the first one to get involves in the project and then the project leader comes in. Once the “platschef” has done all the planning, the project leader comes to discuss the planning from a practical point of view. Together with the “platschef”, the team leader solve different problems in different the stages of the planning. Thus, the team is ensured to have the best possible start for the project.

The team leader feels to have freedom to choose the solution he prefers when faced with a problem. He also thinks the team is good enough for the objectives of the project. It is just that sometimes the tasks are not given to the best person on the workplace. When an employee does not fit the work, he is moved to a workplace more adapted.

5.2.2.2 Communication

The communication within the project team is very good but it is sometimes more delicate with the office. The respondent feels the project leader has in charge the communication with the office. Indeed, the project leader makes it in a better way.

The employee thinks the office could sometimes be more direct. “The office doesn't talk to me but the workers talk to me everyday”. The respondent says there is a very good atmosphere in the team and he says he spends from 50 to 60% of his daily work on communication.

The employee thinks the company has a written internal communication policy (which does not exist). He says there is a lot of internal communication, especially by computer system.
The interviewee says his company is small compared to its competitors, which is one of their strengths. There are short paths to the decision-making process. He says that in the big companies they can not make such fast decisions. It takes time. There are also negative aspects. Generally speaking they have succeeded pretty well but of course it still happens that things go wrong and mistakes are made but they try to fix it as quickly as possible.

The interviewee declares that it’s very important that all employees have the chance to come and say what they want and that they are part of the decision-making process. He thinks this is true from the very beginning of the project so has to be able to influence the result in the most positive way. He says that everybody wants to move forward and that no one wants the company to be slow and with stiff hierarchy. “From the lowest worker until the highest boss it should work as well as possible”, he says. The respondent says that it is good for the people who are out on the field feel to be able to come with ideas and suggestions: it is a positive-sum game.

When asked about the most common communication means, the respondent quotes the face-to-face talkings. “We are at the same work place at all the time. We talk everyday we have “fika” and coffee and eat together.” Sometimes only, the employee says they have meetings. The team leader is present to some meetings but not those with the customers. The interviewee says communication is good though it could be better. He declares that the young generation helps to improve the communication. He asserts that old people are not so good with communication because they are slightly slower in seeing opportunities and they use straight lines. “We who are on the field have very good dialogue between us and we talk without obstacles”, he says. When asked about potential improvements, he would like more events to “take down the wall between the office and the workplace on the field”.

5.2.3 Answers from the boss of the company D

5.2.3.1 Strategy

The interviewee is the communication manager of 450 people within all the local offices. He thinks the employees know and understand the main strategic point of the company which is to be as flexible as the client wants. Once a year, there is a survey which includes a part on the strategy.

According to the communication manager, there will always be a gap between what is expected and what is done, you can always be better. He says that if you don’t feel the gap, it means that you are wrong. In the business of his company, the strategy often changes, just like the people because there are also new employees, not just new technologies. Thus, there are always new elements to include. To measure the success of the strategy, the manager relies on hard factors like economics and even sometimes he listens to his own deep feelings though it is not the most decisive. Sometimes the manager realises they don’t have a competence that they need. They can hire or train.

The communication manager declares that the kind of organisation they have offers them the opportunity to work in the best way. It is simple: there is a well defined task for a very customer which should be carried out in a specific time thanks to an adequate team. The
manager says they form new projects for new products. Indeed, according to him, it would be hard to get a “line” organisation. Working in projects makes the company more flexible. It is a way to be more adapted to the market. “Projects, it’s a way to work that fits our business”, he says. The manager does not see how the company could be organised differently from a projects-structure. “Without projects, we would not have business” he declares.

5.2.3.2 Communication

The communication in the company could be better though it’s improving. They are working on increasing the clarity of the strategy and try to increase involvement. The communication manager says the company tries to have “high ceiling”, to make people come more easily with feedback phone, mail, face-to-face. The final decisions are taken by the management but as much as possible, all people’s opinions are taken into account as a base for the decision. The respondent says his main problem is to know where to use mass information and where not to. He says that they have realised that sometimes information was too far away from the people. Indeed, he thinks there must be a connection so that the employee “takes it to his heart”. There must be a balance between the resources you allocate to communication and the resources you allocate to the rest of the work.

The respondent says that 80% of his work is related to communication. His role is to try to keep the employees together by informing them about what others are doing. He also helps others to communicate. There is no written communication policy and the communication manager admits it would be good to have one soon. According to the interviewee, you can just inform but you also have to communicate and create a dialog about the strategy. He is convinced that through the dialog, you can be ensured that communication has been effective. He says that the employees’ interventions in meetings have helped the managers open their eyes. He also says that he has to use different kinds of communication depending on where is the employee (in office or at clients’).

The respondent says that you always have to wonder “is this working?” to check the efficiency of a process, so that you can try in different ways to reach excellence. The interviewee says that there are several levels of feedback: “If you get no feedback, it’s good and having good feedback, it’s better”.

There is intranet for the company where they try to avoid double information. The structure of the intranet should be improved and the access more adapted to information which concerns each employee. The profile system sometimes hides the information.

5.2.4 Answers from the employee of the company D

5.2.4.1 Strategy

The respondent is the project manager responsible for the project team dealing with the maintenance of an IT system at a big Swedish networking company. The project manager thinks that the goals and the objectives are clear for the fifteen members of his team. It is important to precise that nine of his team members are employees from the client and six
come from the same company as the project manager. The project leading team is leveled as followed: project leader “object leader”, and team leader. Having object leader and team leader helps sharing the information though sometimes it is filtered. The objectives are given by the client and the team leader also takes part to the decision making process, but no one else does. The managers are here to help him prioritizing his work.

To sum up, the interviewee says that there are two main goals: answering troubles and be sure that the answers are delivered as planned. To help the project manager with his work, there are trouble reports and a task-following system that can be checked anytime. There is also a tool displaying the change requests from customers. The project team has a morning meeting three times a week to go through an agenda. Each Friday, there are stand up meetings with the new development projects and the maintenance teams. The efficiency of meetings are evaluated and adapted to the need of the project. The project team can only meet once of week if the rhythm is slowed down. To solve a problem, the project manager takes the employee individually and not in big meetings. He says it is then easier for the employee to “open his heart”.

5.2.4.2 Communication

The project manager admits that there is confusion is complex organisations like his company. The communication could be better with a simpler organisation, the project manager does not really understand how the company is organised. The organisation should be shorter, he even advises to cut one level of hierarchy in order to have a clearer and easier structure which could be divided according to business units. He thinks the company should be more related to business and customers, because “without business, we would not be here”.

The project manager says that half of the day is spent on communication. The project manager thinks his company has an internal communication policy to ensure confidentiality (though this policy does not exist). The respondent also believes that communicating the objectives is very important. It’s also important that the members do not sit and wait, if they have a problem, they must inform about it.

When asked about which kind of information is shared up and down the hierarchical scale, he answers that the status report and the budget for example are communicated above. When communicating downwards, the project manager focuses on project and customer information, future tasks, planning issues and hot issues. At steering group, he says that not many details are given compared to what he gives to his team during meetings. He declares that there is more communication from him to the team members than the contrary. Information is repeated to be sure it is acquired and he also walks around to check.

The project manager says that above six team members, the team needs a project leader. When asked about the reason for a projects-structure, he answers that “projects is the way to work for our business”. The most common communication means are phone, mail, and face-to-face discussions. The last is the best because it enables instant feedback. The project manager feels the employees can inform him easily through all the listed communication means.
6 Data analysis and discussion

This chapter will analyze the empirical data through the lens of the theoretical framework. We will try here to analyze the results through our two assumptions and see if they need some modifications in order to be valid.

6.1 Analysis of the empirical data

6.1.1 Strategy

Sharing the details of the strategy with employees is a plus which is not always considered as a priority by the managers. Indeed, while informing about the objectives close to the employee is vital\textsuperscript{101}, informing about the global strategy can sometimes be irrelevant\textsuperscript{102}. Either the employee does not care or he does not need more information, he already has too much to select from: giving more would be a handicap\textsuperscript{103}.

The strategic drift is recognized almost everywhere and even seems natural\textsuperscript{104}. Heading towards perfection remains the only way to reduce it\textsuperscript{105}.

Since the environment and the resources keep on changing\textsuperscript{106}, the strategy should be in constant adaptation so as to reduce strategic drift\textsuperscript{107}.

When the gap between the skills needed and the skills available is identified, training or hiring is often considered\textsuperscript{108}.

\textsuperscript{103} A. Dortok, (2006), p. 322
\textsuperscript{107} J.L Thompson, (1999), p.280
6.1.2 Communication

For all, communication seems to be high on the agenda for the right implementation of the strategy. The boss is always expected to give more information and more often than the rest of the team\textsuperscript{109}.

The presence of an internal communication policy seems to be rare in the private sector even if the employees believe they have one (when there is none in reality) or wished they had one. The way communication is formalized seems to be important\textsuperscript{110}.

Even if face-to-face talking seems to be a very efficient way to communicate\textsuperscript{111}, it turns out to be pointless to try to rank the communication means. Indeed, they are complementary\textsuperscript{112}. Repeating information in different ways remains the best way to be sure the message has been received\textsuperscript{113}.

Moreover, simply informing the employees is not enough any more\textsuperscript{114}. Those have a need for information much deeper. The face-to-face communication, whatever it concerns, must create a good atmosphere so as to favour dialog on real issues\textsuperscript{115,116}. Indeed, some employees would not dare talking even if they have something to suggest (company A and B). Therefore, the geographical distance between employees is also seen as an obstacle to a very good communication.

Making the employees feel listened to favours involvement in the work and increases the probability for acceptation of the final decision made knowing the employees' view\textsuperscript{117}.

Information has to be shared (in time and in means) as equally as possible to ensure the cohesiveness of the group\textsuperscript{118}. No member should be left apart, everyone should know what is going to happen, when and who is responsible\textsuperscript{119}. A better cohesion through a better

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, p.6
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, pp.4-5
\textsuperscript{114} T. A. Stewart (1993), “Welcome to the revolution”, Fortune, 128 (15) p.83
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid, pp.173-174
\textsuperscript{118} A. Dortok, (2006), p.323
communication enhances the overall performance and tends towards the reduction of the strategic drift\textsuperscript{120, 121, 122}.

The way information is shared remains of delicate matter. The balance is hard to find in quantity, frequency and relevance. On the one hand, the amount of information must be sufficient (but not too much), updated, personalized and relevant to the receiver\textsuperscript{123}. On the other hand, the company can not allocate infinite resources to communication, just like every employee.

6.1.3 Organisation

The way the company is organised also widens influence on the communication. Indeed, with low hierarchy, the information flow is processed easier, safer and quicker\textsuperscript{124, 125, 126}.

The information is shared so instantly in projects that it is considered to be included in the work scheme of a project-based structure\textsuperscript{127}. Since the work scheme of a project-based structure is deeply embedded in the environment (the company D has employees from the clients in the project team) and the strategy, the communication flow includes all three features just like the assumption 2 likes to show.

Employees in projects know perfectly their business and their team members. The size matters, when the team is smaller, it shares information better and everyone has a clear part to play\textsuperscript{128} and the objectives are clearer\textsuperscript{129}. Having smaller teams allows better communication and better climate for it\textsuperscript{130}. Since communication is recognised as a decisive factor and since

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid, pp.39-41
\textsuperscript{124} M. Freedam, (2003), “The genius is in the interpretation”, Journal of Business Strategy, March/April, p.31
\textsuperscript{127} J. Henderson & R. McAdam, (2000), p.364
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid, p.364
\textsuperscript{130} J. Goczol & C. Scoubeau, (2003), “Corporate communication and strategy in the field of projects”, Corporate communication: an international journal, volume 8, N°1, p.65
communication is better in projects, the strategic drift seems to be better tackled through a project structure.

In project-based structures, the continuous evaluation improves the resilience of the team by reducing time between the appearance of a problem, its identification and its fixing\textsuperscript{131,132}. By being closer to the customer (even in the customer’s office), the project team is also quicker to answer any change request from the customer\textsuperscript{133}. All in all, the better processing of information\textsuperscript{134} reduces time between all operations and aims towards a lower strategic drift.

When the project leader is given almost total freedom on how to reach goals, there is no resort to upper hierarchy and the adequate answer to a problem comes much quicker\textsuperscript{135,136}. Since the project manager knows perfectly the internal resources he has (each member’s strengths for instance) and the market requirements (expert in his field), he is the only one to be able to give the best possible work, which tends to reduce the strategic drift.

The project-structure is a way to customize the organization according to the client’s need\textsuperscript{137}. Therefore, the project team always changes and fits perfectly its environment and the market’s requirement\textsuperscript{138}. The perfection before the very beginning of the work reduces the strategic drift once it starts.

The structure of the organization also depends on the nature of the business\textsuperscript{139}. Yet, even companies which are not used to working with projects resort to this structure for special goals: they set up a team of experts to reach an objective within a specific period\textsuperscript{140,141}. Those companies acknowledge the accuracy and the dynamism of such project teams.

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6.2 Discussion: the confrontation between the assumptions and the empirical data

6.2.1 The empirical data highlight the limits of the assumptions

After having analyzed the empirical study, it first appears that both assumptions can be used in the same company. Indeed, the two structures can coexist and the project structure is used for a special kind of service or product. When the product or service needs customization and requires the possibility to apply some later changes from the customers, the project structure is recommended. In such a structure, the information is shared almost instantly which gives the operations a great flexibility\textsuperscript{142, 143}. For other products or services which can be massively produced, a “classical” organisation remains well adapted. Indeed, if the environment changes less often or less quickly, the “classical” organisation is the only one to grant economies of scale through a less customized and therefore less costly operations management\textsuperscript{144}.

Yet, the reason for going for assumption 2 is that the “classical” organisation tends to leave apart some aspects of the environment because of a less instinctive flow of information. Mistakes or obstacles in the information flow seem to be one of the main reasons for the strategy to be unsuitable. The aftermath is then the strategic gap and finally, the strategic drift. Meanwhile, a project-structure is consolidated by a quick, adequate and effective communication\textsuperscript{145}. It tends to reduce the strategic gap by trying to put together the strategy and the environment. For instance, not only the company D works in its clients’ office but it also hires client’s employees in project team: how do you want to be closer to the environment and the customer? The tactic is even to bring parts of the environment in the project team so as to own the environment\textsuperscript{146}. Communication in project not only tends to prevent the strategy and the environment from being disconnected but it also tries to make them so close that they are blended. Indeed, the project is customized according to the very need of the client: strategy and environment are more likely to be unified\textsuperscript{147}.

Eventually, according to the analysis, we have modified our assumptions so as to provide the business research with a valid contribution. We have decided to blend both assumptions into one so as to cover all prospective cases. Here is the ultimate assumption that we propose.

\textsuperscript{142} M. Freedam, (2003), “The genius is in the interpretation”, Journal of Business Strategy, March/April, p.31
\textsuperscript{146} J. Henderson & R. McAdam, (2000), p.364
6.2.2 The ultimate assumption which takes into account the empirical data.

Just like in the assumption 1, the strategy remains implemented according to the analysis of the environment relying on the information that passes through the organization. There is still a classical organization structured around different department which all work for the whole business, event for the projects division. In this scheme, the decision-making is processed from the top management which receives feedback and information on the environment both from the operational level and the project teams which are in charge of the strategic implementation. There is still a risk of strategic gap.

Yet, to balance this risk, the organisation can resort to projects when a specific work is needed in a short period of time. Aside from the “classical” operations, the projects would achieve precise missions of high importance just like the elite forces would do with experts in the military field. Thanks to very precise objectives, to the monitoring and performance measurement of tasks and thanks to a fluid flow of information, the projects tackle efficiently the strategic drift. The project teams can be set up on demand, according to the need and do not prevent team members from having other occupations. Finally, the project team avoids all paper work thanks to a central “classical” organisation which is specialised in this matter and support them: there is gain of efficiency.

Since the project works very well in its very business, one can wonder if the communication outside the very project is not endangered. It is then up to the management to make the work of all different projects and operations match the whole strategy and communicate about this to grant unity.
7 Conclusion

This chapter aims at presenting the answer to the research question as well as the implications from a managerial point of view.

7.1 The research question and the objectives

For a better understanding of the conclusions of our research, we will now remind the research question presented in the paragraph 1.2. Our research question was “How is information flow processed in project-based companies compared to others and how it affects strategic drift?”.

Our objectives were to study the way project-based companies deal with the matter of the internal communication compared to more classical organisations. Two assumptions emerged from our theoretical framework and we used them for collecting our empirical data and then analysing them (3.4). In order to be relevant in our study of the information flows in the perspective of the strategic drift, we have interviewed two levels of hierarchy in each company, that is to say the strategic level and the operational level.

7.2 Tackling the strategic drift thanks to the communication

The conclusion we propose is originally from the confrontation of our theoretical study and of our empirical data analysis. First, it is surprising to notice that if the strategic drift is known by everybody, it is almost accepted with resignation. This stance towards strategic drift is regrettable because it maintains the feeling in the company that in spite of all the efforts of everybody there will be always something going wrong. The goal is not to reach perfection but it is a matter of frame of mind. The strategic drift finds its foundation in a certain nonchalance concerning the strategic issues when confronted with the day-to-day preoccupations. Moreover, on one hand the employees imagine that they cannot change things and even though they could they do not dare to make strategic remarks. And on the other hand the managers create the structures for encouraging employees to involve themselves in the strategic process but they do not necessarily animate them. In the end there is an accumulation of tools and measures that are laudable resolutions but that become often just high words or pious hope. This frame of mind is however not so prevalent among project managers and project team members. It is maybe due to the fact that they have very clear and quantified objectives to reach and that a drift is not allowed. The communication is also more direct and easier among the teams and team members of a project.

Therefore, all the managers agree about the fact that the best and unique way to struggle against the strategic drift or to improve the strategic process is the communication. It appears that the internal communication is the keystone of the strategic creation and implementation. We have though to differentiate the form and content.

Concerning the form, even tough the electronic communication is omnipresent in the day-to-day communication, managers in both kinds of organization prefer the face-to-face meetings when they have to communicate. It enables, among other things, to have an immediate feedback. Yet, a communication means is not better than another, they are all complementary.
A project-based structure with its organization into small teams can enable an easier strategic communication and thus a better commitment from the operational level.

Concerning the content, the analysis has shown that in both types of organization the top-down flow needs to be bigger than the bottom-up flow. However there is a difference between the information that managers think employees have to know and the information employees would like to know. Managers limit their sharing of information to what they think is essential for avoiding the strategic drift. But employees need a bit more in order to feel the confidence of their bosses and thus to have the will to make the extra effort that would change anything. In order to really avoid the drift, it is thus also important to receive feedback of quality from the field. Employees make a good feedback if they feel that what they say is taken into account and considered by the top management. The top management has to send the good signals, for example in integrating the employees to the decision making process as in company A or C. That is what it costs to establish a real circuit from the strategy to the environment through the organization (Figure 8).

7.3 Organization to improve communication

Project-based organizations seem to own all the qualities in order to avoid a strategic drift. Being organized into projects allows developing actions which fit exactly strategic objectives notably because the project leader has total freedom for a decision-making process which is the closest to the customer. Regarding communication and strategy, project-based structures offer the possibility to give very clear individual objectives to each member of the team and to easily show their link with the strategic objectives of the company. It is highly valuable in term of understanding of the strategy by the employees and of commitment in the development of the company’s strategy. Moreover, each team member knows everybody’s skills and expertise, the work is then processed in an optimized way.

In project-based structures, the continuous assessment improves the resilience of the team by reducing time between the acknowledgement of a problem, its identification and its solving. By being closer to the client (even in the client’s office), the project team is also quicker to answer any change request from the customer. In a nutshell, the better processing of information reduces time between all operations and aims towards a lower strategic drift.

However we have to nuance the impact of the organization on the communication. If a project-based structure can facilitate the communication between the top management and the operational level for the matter of strategy, it does not mean that it will be so efficient when considering the communication within the company as a whole. The company D is an example of a good specific communication within projects but which turns out to be less instinctive on the corporate level. We can also remark that the geographical distance is an obstacle difficult to overcome even with project-based structures. The role of the managers is then momentous.

That is why it might be relevant to build a flexible organization, working both with a classical structure and projects (Figure 10). Projects are then used for avoiding the drift when it is absolutely not possible to risk having a strategic drift. The projects are so customized to the need of the client that they are reducing are eliminating the strategic drift. Yet, a company needs to complement this kind of operations management with “classical” organizations when lower costs and economies of scale are needed. At last the company would benefit from such
a system thanks to the development within the company of a real inter-team work that might be the premised of an organization in networking. Such an organization would enable a better use of communication in order to make easier the fit between environment and strategy.

7.4 Managerial implications in the field of internal strategic communication

Among our objectives, there is the will to contribute to the knowledge of business administration. That is why we would like to make some remarks and proposals concerning the managerial implication of our research.

Besides the strategic gap, we can notice that the first gap appears often between the will of the managers and their acts. This gap is most of time due to a lack of time, not to a bad will.

Fighting against the strategic drift is only possible if the information flows work top-downwards and bottom-upwards. However, in spite of the will of the managers to ask for a feedback and to practise, for example, the policy of the opened door, the employees do not necessarily take the initiative. Serious thinking should be initiated about this matter and communication must be favoured whenever it is possible.

Eventually, complex or dot matrix organisations loose in clarity and slow the information flow. The organisation should remain clear and simple so as to prevent filters from being created and the information flow from being stuck within its own unit.

“Think global, act local”

The projects enable a perfect implementation of the previous quotation. Thanks to communication in small teams and a decision-making process closer to the problem, the need of the customer is perfectly fulfilled. Globally, it will decrease the strategic drift and increase the company’s performance.

Employees in projects know perfectly their business and their team members. The size matters, when the team is smaller, it shares information better and everyone has a clear part to play and the objectives are clearer. Having smaller teams allows better communication and better climate for it. Since communication is recognised as a decisive factor and since communication is better in projects, the strategic drift seems to be better tackled through a project structure.

Eventually, when the project leader is given almost total freedom on how to reach goals, there is no resort to upper hierarchy and the adequate answer to a problem comes much quicker. Since the project manager knows perfectly the internal resources he has (each member’s strengths for instance) and the market requirements (expert in his field), he is the only one to be able to give the best possible work, which tends to reduce the strategic drift.
8 Further research

During our work on this study, we have identified other researches which could be interesting to lead on the subject. Here is a short presentation of studies that could enable to go deeper in the study of subject addressed in this paper.

8.1 Further qualitative research

Some qualitative research could be done about the same subject but at a larger scale. It could be interesting to confront from example companies with managers and employees from different countries. It would enable to reinforce the transferability of the assumptions presented in our study.

Moreover it might also be interesting to realise a qualitative study on the same subject but with CEO from multinational firms. In our study we have interviewed people who had local responsibilities. However in big multinational companies it might be much more difficult to communicate about the strategy efficiently. One of the findings of this research highlights the difficulties to ensure a good internal communication when there are different geographical locations. We could assume that these big firms might run a higher risk of strategic drift. It would be interesting to go deeper in this direction.

Eventually a multiple-case study could be realised to study companies with a classical organisation, with a project-based organisation and with both types of organisation. It would be interesting to choose successful and unsuccessful companies in different sectors with changing environments. The idea would be then to see if being organised with projects might enable to avoid efficiently the strategic drift or whether some other factors are also important.

8.2 Further quantitative research

One of the major researches might also be a quantitative study which would be realised on an important number of companies and that would enable to study the degree of satisfaction of employees and managers within companies about their knowledge of the strategy and about the internal communication. It could then be interesting to confront the results from companies in classical organisations with companies with project-based organisations. It could validate some findings of our study through a bigger amount of companies.
9 Criteria for evaluation

This chapter aims at providing the reader with the elements of trustworthiness and authenticity of our research.

In order to propose criteria which are better adapted to qualitative research and thus more easily understandable and assessable by the reader, we have chosen to adopt the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba\textsuperscript{148}. They organise their measure around two main criteria which are trustworthiness and authenticity.

9.1 Trustworthiness

The criterion of trustworthiness aims at convincing the reader of the value of the research and that it has been realised with a scientific way\textsuperscript{149}. Trustworthiness is made of four sub-criteria which are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

9.1.1 Credibility

This criterion enables to prove that the study has been realised according to conformed methods\textsuperscript{150}. One way to give some credibility to our study was that it has been validated by some other researchers and by individuals of the studied environment. In order to achieve the criterion of credibility on our theory and methodology, we have regularly submitted our research to our supervisor who is an experienced researcher in business and economics. Our thesis has also been read by two other researcher of the USBE that are specialist in project management and in business strategy. Their remarks have been taken into account, especially concerning the conclusion. It has enabled us to reinforce the credibility of our thesis, especially concerning the theory and the findings. Moreover in order to have credibility on our empirical data, we have presented a transcript of the interviews to the people interviewed. Each interviewee has received a transcript of his/her own interview with the request to give feedback if they thought their ideas have been badly understood. It enables us to affirm that our research has a rather high credibility even though we are aware that a higher credibility might be achieved thanks to a presentation to more researchers and professionals. However, it would have taken too much time to ask to more people to read our work.

9.1.2 Transferability

This criterion shows the possibility to adapt the findings of our research to other environments. In some way, transferability debates of the possibilities to generalize the findings of our research\textsuperscript{151}. In order to make the results of our thesis easier to confront to diverse environments, we have proposed a detailed description in the theoretical part of the type of organisations which might be concerned by our findings. We are aware that we could have detailed more precisely the companies which were studied in our empirical part, but it

\textsuperscript{148} A. Bryman, E. Bell, (2003), p.288  
\textsuperscript{151} Y.S. Lincoln & E. Guba, (1985), p.124
could have altered their anonymity. However, the fact that these companies belong to very
diverse sectors of activities (public organisation, finance consulting, construction industry and
IT consulting) allows us to consider that the findings that have emerged from the data
collected in these companies might be applied with relevance to other sectors or other
companies.

9.1.3 Dependability and confirmability

We will handle dependability and confirmability in the same paragraph because they rely on
the same technique of validation. Through dependability, we try to ensure the reliability of the
study. Confirmability is expected to ensure that the authors have not intentionally introduced
biases in the study. Lincoln and Guba propose a method that, if it is seriously realised, it can
validate both criteria. It is the method of the auditing\textsuperscript{152}. In our case, our supervisor has had
the role of the auditor. We have regularly transmitted to him our work in order to keep him
informed about the progresses of our research as well as about the methods used and the data
collected. He has thus validated, for example, the questionnaire we used for the collection of
our empirical data and also the companies we chose to interview.

9.2 Authenticity

Lincoln and Guba present five criteria which should conclude to the authenticity of the
research. These are fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic
authenticity and tactical authenticity\textsuperscript{153}.

9.2.1 Fairness

The best way to ensure the criterion of fairness was to collect the point of view of different
people in the same company from different hierarchical levels. Indeed, to ensure our clear
understanding of the way information flow is processed and to assure fairness of answers, we
have addressed our questions to a member of the operational level and a member of the top
management as described in the paragraph 4.3.

9.2.2 Ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity
and tactical authenticity

We will deal with these four criteria in the same paragraph because they all rely on the
necessity to have a feedback from the different individuals we interviewed. We have given an
exemplar of our thesis at each of the person interviewed and, of course, we hope our findings
will help them. However, we cannot honestly testify to the ontological authenticity, educative
authenticity, catalytic authenticity and tactical authenticity of our thesis because the time
between the day when we have presented to the interviewees our thesis and the day when we


pp.246-250

58
will defend our thesis is too short. Indeed, we think that assessing the impact of our findings on each interviewee needs more time than one or two weeks. We can assume that the understanding of the social environment and the understanding of the problematic of the other collaborators might be assessed relatively quickly. However it seems difficult to evaluate the impact of our thesis on the concrete acts of the interviewees. That is why we are aware that our research has a weakness concerning its authenticity.
Appendix

Interview guide

Strategy

As a boss, do you consider your strategy is well implemented?
Is well understood?
How would you assess your knowledge of the company’s strategy?
How would you assess your understanding of the company’s strategy?

As a boss, how do you assess/measure this implementation (What kind of tools do you use?)?
Why?

Do you sometimes feel there is a lag/gap between what should be done and what is done?
If yes, do you have any idea why this lag/gap exists?
How could the lag/gap be tackled?
How would you assess the lag between the appearance of a problem and its solving?

How can you measure if the strategy fit well with the environment of the company?

As a boss, do you think each employee has a good understanding of his/her job and of his/her role in the company?
What could you do in order to clarify this understanding and to increase commitment?

Do you make stakeholder mapping? Does it help?

As an employee, do you understand clearly the strategy to implement?
As an employee, do you think this strategy is relevant compare to the analysis you make from your day to day activities?
If you would consider the strategy is not adapted, would you inform you hierarchy?
How? By which communication channel?
Do you think you hierarchy would take your comment into account?

How employees take part to the decision-making process?
Do you have an “ideas box” in order to enable people to come up with new ideas?
How would you assess the range of your freedom in decision-making?
How would you assess your participation in the decision-making process?
What is your job?

How would you assess the match between employees’ skills and the objectives given?
Who can take the decisions and in which matter?
Do the employees’ skills match missions and objectives
Where is there a mismatch?
Which solutions are considered to tackle this mismatch?

Communication

How would you assess the communication within your company?
What importance do you give to communication in every day’s activities?
Do you have an internal communication policy/plan?
If no, why?
If yes, what does it consist in?
Is the plan renewed regularly? Yearly? Every semester? Every trimester?
In your business, from the internal point of view, what are the key success factors? Is communication one of your priorities/strengths?
In which extent do you think that communication has a major role in the implementation of a strategy?
Can you give concrete examples of successful communication within your company?
How do you select your communication according to the actors?

What are the elements that could enable a good communication? (Organisation, leadership, Total Quality Management, knowledge management…)

Is the information equally processed from top to bottom and from bottom to up?
In speed, means, frequency and quantity?

Do you systematically assess your actions or communication tools?
If no, why?
If yes, with which tools or methods?

Do you question your own communication?
According to which criteria?

Which communication means are the most efficient and used? (Face-to-face communication, Official letters, Information meetings, Formal conferences, Phone calls, Emails, Forms to fill in…)
Which suggestions would you make?
How would you assess the feedback on information for each of these communication means in your company?
How would you assess the feedback on information in your company?

Do you have a central database/Intranet to share information with all business units?
How would you assess the efficiency of this Intranet in gathering effectively information in a common database?

Which tools or supports should be developed for your company in the matter of internal communication?
According to you, what are the objectives of an internal communication strategy?
According to you, what are the main obstacles or difficulties which are detrimental to a very good internal communication in your company?

Which evolutions are important in the coming years concerning internal communication in your company?

Project

Do you work with projects?
If no, what does your structure look like?
If yes, why?
Would a project-structure help the sharing of information?
(Every business unit having common support departments (accounting, legal...), regular checking of the advancement of the project)
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64


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