The Interaction between Top Management and Line Managers Implementing Strategic Directions into Praxis

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Organizations nowadays face crucial business challenges, like globalization, profitability through growth, technology integration, intellectual capital management, continuous change. Seeking to survive in the turbulent environment organizations need to assess the complexity of environment and to choose strategic development directions which are concretized in organizational strategy.

Every organization is guided by its strategy, by a design or plan for achieving an organization's policy goals and objectives, however the inequality between intended and implemented strategies exists (Mintzberg, 1978). Acknowledging this fact, the paper raises a question why organizations focus on difficulties by implementing their strategies and provides an insight into the aspects related to a successful implementation of an intended strategy into praxis.

The fruitful strategy formulation and the effective strategy implementation require the coordination of multiple actors and their activities (Heide, Gronhaug & Johannessen, 2002). Whereas top management is responsible for the strategic and organizational decisions that affect the organization as a whole (Helfat, Harris & Wolfson, 2006) and line managers operate as an intermediary between strategic and operational organizational activities (McCarthy, Darcy & Grady, 2010), the interaction between these two key actors in order to minimize the gap between strategies is essential.

Assuming that some aspects may affect the success of key actors interaction, the assumptions, which determine the nature of interaction are presented. The paper looks into four assumptions: organizational culture, organizational structure, communication and allocation of resources which discloses the complexity of interaction.

The paper proposes the discussion concerning the top management and line managers interaction and the key dimensions of that interaction seeking to ensure the implementation of strategic directions into praxis. Whereas top management and line managers can cooperate in a various number of activities, some dimensions of interaction are more significant. Goals determination, strategy formulation and strategy implementation are three key dimensions where interaction between top management and line managers is in demand if the organization strives to translate strategic directions into praxis.

Finally assessing the character of activity and the discussed assumptions, the theoretical aspects on interaction between top management and line managers were verified during the empirical research in educational organizations and is presented in this paper. This brings to conclusion that the interaction between top management and line managers implementing strategic directions into praxis should be considered as a central issue of management literature.

The paper is based on the material of the Leonardo da Vinci innovation transferring project "Crossnational quality management in continuing learning for people with low educational attainment in the European context" ("Länderübergreifendes Qualitätsmanagement in der Weiterbildung für Personen mit niedrigem Bildungsstand im Europäischen Kontext") (No 2009-1-PL-LEO05-05039).

Keywords: *strategy, strategy implementation, top management, line managers, top management and line managers interaction.*

Introduction

It is acknowledged that the success of the organization depends on how effectively the organization manages its internal activities and how well its behaviour fits with the environmental conditions (Popova & Sharpanskykh, 2011). In that context the value of the organizational strategic directions and the strategy arises. The strategic directions encompass the mission and vision of the organization, also determine what the organization intends to achieve in the future. However the realization of the strategic directions requires some concreteness, which depends on various aspects, as organizational orientation or specific characteristics of organization. Due to this fact the organization needs the strategy, that concretizes strategic directions and in here it is essential to emphasize that without implementation, even the best strategy is useless.

Strategy formulation and transforming it into action is the process, which requires multiple actors and activities. Although, according to Dandira (2011), "there is a syndrome in top management that strategic planning is supposed to be formulated by them alone, and for them it is a sign of power and an expression of the magnitude of the difference between them and their subordinates", but more actors should be involved in strategy formulation seeking to get acceptance of other members of organization, while members become more accepting of change when they understand how the change will achieve organizational goals and how it will affect the work environment (Moore, Konrad & Hunt, 2010). As line managers handle directly employees and convey organizational goals, their involvement in strategy formulation is crucial.

Line managers deal with processes how to implement strategy, which is expected to guide the organization forward, and how to achieve that the components of strategy would be implemented by every member of the organization. Meanwhile, top management can create the support atmosphere in the organization and through communication within the organization and through own actions shape and define the collective interpretations held by organization members in general (Barker III & Barr, 2002). Due to top management and line managers influence on success of the strategy implementation, the interaction between these two actors is essential.

In the scientific literature (Mintzberg, 1978) it has been long recognized that there is difference between intended and implemented strategies. The gap of interaction between the key actors (top management and line managers) in the process of the strategy formulation and implementation is one of the reasons for inadequacy. Due to the lack of interaction, the organization can fail to achieve the goals that depend on the specific characteristics of the organization, on interests of the stakeholders and on the type of the environment in which the organization is situated.

The **problem** stated in the paper: how to achieve the interaction between top management and line managers and what are the key dimensions of interaction in order to ensure the implementation of strategic directions to the praxis.

The research **aim** is theoretically and empirically to examine the interaction between top management and line managers and disclose key dimensions of interaction.

Seeking to minimize the gap between intended and implemented strategies and hereby to ensure the strategic directions maintenance the paper argues the necessity for the interaction between top management and line managers, analyses key assumptions that determine the nature of this interaction and presents main dimensions for interaction by implementing strategic directions into praxis.

Research object is the interaction between top management and line managers.

Research method. The paper is built on the analysis and synthesis of scientific literature and qualitative research.

Concept of intended and implemented strategies

Strategic directions determine the organization development trends and are concretized in the strategy. Mintzberg (1978) argues strategy has at least two different meanings - one ''take strategy as a plan'' (strategy-as-intend) and another ''take strategy as a pattern'' (strategy-as-implemented). The intended strategy represents only fundamental directions and one of the main challenges is to implement it, it means to put the formulated strategy to work. However, organizations focus with difficulties by implementing their strategies. The problems arise due to some reasons (Aaltonen & Ikavalko, 2002): weak management roles in implementation, lack of commitment to the strategy, unawareness of misunderstanding of the strategy, unaligned organizational systems and resources, poor coordination and sharing responsibilities.

As modern concepts of strategy are abstract, complex and ambiguous (Vanttinen & Pyhalto, 2009), the successful implementation of intended strategy into praxis is related to the evaluation of several aspects (Nollet, Ponce & Campbell, 2005). First, the dynamic nature of the strategy concept which is defined by internal and external processes. The organization has to handle the complexity of changes and to realize that the interaction between the key actors by implementing strategic directions into praxis will be under influence of changes within and outside the organization. Second, the set of decision-making rules for guidance of organizational behaviour. These rules can simplify or make complicated the interaction, likewise the implementation of intended strategy. Third, the subjective and objective nature of strategy. This aspect is directly related to key actors, as the number of key actors and the personality of top management and line managers influence the subjective nature of strategy and allow to reach objectivity though subjectivity. Fourth, an approach to strategy as a never-ending project. Seeking to survive organizations need to renew strategic directions and again to force the interaction of top management and line manager by transforming directions into praxis.

Whereas the practical purpose of strategy is to provide a plan that employs multiple inputs, options, and outputs to achieve a company's policy goals and objectives (Warnock, 2000): strategy decides how the organization's goals and objectives will be achieved, what operational units will be used and how those operational units will be structured; strategy also determines what resources will be needed and how these resources will be acquired and used.

According to Heide, Gronhaug and Hohannessen (2002), a formulated strategy must be implemented before it can be of specific value to an organization, though intended strategy is not equal to implemented strategy. Despite the fact that the difference between two strategies is determined by dynamic environment and this could be treated as positive aspect due to organization's abilities to react fast to the changes, the problematic aspect of the deviation from the intended strategy exist and is related to incapability to perceive or to materialize that what was constructed. This means that even "good" strategy can be not implemented despite the fact, that a considerable amount of time and a lot of efforts are appointed to choose the most effective strategy (Gudonavicius, Bartoseviciene & Saparnis, 2009). In that way the question concerning the reasons of incongruity between two strategies arise. According to Heide *et al.* (2002), successful implementation of strategy requires active and premeditated actions that include the coordination of multiple actors and activities. In that case the minimal as possible gap between intended and implemented strategies depends on the key actors, their interaction and key activities. This means that the question concerning who is involved in the process should be answered.

Top management and line managers as the key actors

Top management and line managers are key actors in the process of bringing strategic directions to the practical

environment. Top management defines where to go whereas line managers deal with how to do.

The term ''top management'' can be defined as ''the set of individuals at the top of the organization responsible for the strategic and organizational decisions that affect the direction, operations, and performance of the company as a whole'' (Helfat, Harris & Wolfson, 2006). It is acknowledged that the strategic actions of organizations are guided by the beliefs or the interpretations of top management (Barker III & Barr, 2002) and that top managers play a crucial role in strategic decisions (Camelo and Alles & Hernandez, 2011). Besides that, in the scientific literature huge amount of top management roles and responsibilities is highlighted. First, Gebhardt, Carpenter and Sherry (2006) state that top management focus is essential to begin and to direct the process of organizational change. Organizational change creates uncertainty and top management as key agents of organizational change (Cole, Harris & Bernerth, 2006) must offer a clear rationale for transformation if they want to get acceptance from other members of organization (Moore *et al.,* 2010), hereby the key processes that help to create lasting organizational change flow downward from the actions of top managers (Cole *et. al*., 2006). Second, new product development demands top management commitment, which consists of top management support and top management attitude toward risk. Support means that top managers provide teams with encouragement and help them overcome problems meanwhile top management attitude toward risk may moderate the direct and positive effect of communication on cooperation (Rodriguez, Perez & Gutierrez, 2008). Third, in competitive business context innovation has become a key factor for the successful performance of most organizations and top management is important in promoting a strategy of innovation by the process of influence (Camelo *et al.,* 2011).

According to Hales (2006), line managers duties are often "undertaken in circumstances of considerable ambiguity: being accountable for operational effectiveness but having limited authority or influence over the 'system' decisions that could determine effectiveness". As stated McCarthy, Darcy and Grady (2010) line managers act as intermediary between strategic and operational organizational activities.

Sisson (1994) states that the key role for top management and line managers is clear. Top managers should offer "transformational leadership" through the establishment of an organization's mission and values, and by being highly visible and sharing their vision for future success with other employees, meanwhile line managers have an essential role to play through their ability to "inspire, encourage, enable and facilitate change by harnessing commitment and co-operation of (the organization's) employees" (Thornhill & Saunders, 1998). Very similar view concerning top management follow Kakabadse, McMahon and Myers (1995) underlying that the work of top management can be described as external and internal leadership: the external leadership is the ability to translate external needs to internal vision, meanwhile the internal leadership is the ability to translate vision into employee action. Hence, two actors: top

management and line managers can have particular imaginations and in that context the gap arises between strategic prescriptions and actual practice. The intended and the implemented strategies can significantly differ one from another and due to this factor the organization can confront with difficulties to achieve success in market.

Interaction between two key actors means that both sides coordinate their actions and cooperate seeking to achieve the main goals of the organization. In this case it is very important to spread the information, to ask for proposals, to discuss the idea, to draw the conclusions based upon the brainstorm and to implement decisions that were agreed. However, it is essential to highlight that both actors have their own roles and responsibilities and can not be replaced one by another or cannot search for a common decision in all primary and support activities from a value-chain. Acknowledging this fact, the interaction remains important, because it could provide with some ideas in which field, what questions and how deep could be analyzed by the interaction of top management and line managers.

The identification of the key actors does not reveal the necessity for the interaction between top management and line managers. The review of the key actors tasks and responsibilities highlights the significance of the interaction (see Figure 1).
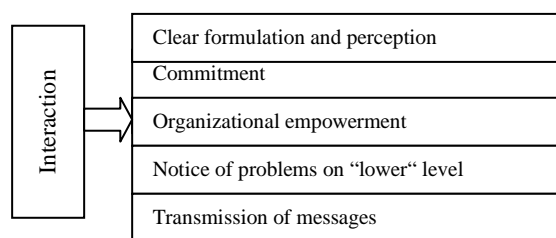
Figure 1. The reasons for the interaction between top management and line managers
Source: developed by the authors

As it is seen from Figure 1, the interaction is relevant due to several reasons: first, the interaction provides clear formulation of strategic directions and equal their perception as well for both key actors: top management and line managers.

Second, the involvement of line managers into the development of strategy strengthens their commitment to the organization. Mowday, Steers and Porter (1979) defined organizational commitment as a strong belief in the organization's goals and values and a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization. As Macky and Boxall (2007) stated, committed workers not only identify psychologically with the employer and feel stronger attachment to the organization, they are also more likely to expend discretionary effort towards achieving organizational results.

Third, the interaction provides organizational empowerment which is about employees having an influence over issues that go beyond the narrow requirements of task performance (Wood & Wall, 2007).

Fourth, line managers notice the emergent problems on "lower" level and due to interaction transmit these questions to top management, therefore the correlation of some strategic directions is possible.

Fifth, line managers "bring policies to life" (Purcell *et al.,* 2003) and do not act as "robotic conformists" (Marchington & Grugulis, 2000) in enacting directions, they have an opinion regarding the style of behaviour and the issues and their opinion should be treated seriously.

Sixth, line managers have a direct contact with employees who can understand the directions in different way and under these circumstances as the result of the interaction between top management and line managers the transparent description of strategic directions can be arranged. As stated Cocks (2010), if the process of strategic planning is undertaken only by top management, the staff is less likely to be enthusiastic about implementing something it has no voice in creating.

The relevance of top management and line managers interaction reveals possible interaction outcomes, however does not provide an answer to the question why organizations have difficulties in the process of interaction, under which circumstances the interaction brings added value to the organization.

Assumptions and the main dimensions for interaction

The identification of key actors and the significance of interaction do not disclose the assumptions, which determine the nature of interaction between top management and line managers. According to Heide *et al.* (2002), several studies have focused on the aspects of the organization that may affect the success of strategy implementation. As the main aspects influencing the interaction between top management and line managers are: 1) organizational structure, 2) organizational culture, 3) communication, 4) allocation of resources.

Organizational structure. Organizational structure can be defined as the relationship between tasks, individuals and formal and informal channels (Olsen *et al.,* 1992; Heide *et al.,* 2002). An organization can be structured in many different ways depending on its objectives. According to Thorpe and Morgan (2007), the structure of the organization influences the flow of information and the context and nature of interpersonal interaction within it. Hereby, the structure of an organization will determine the modes in which it operates and performs and affects strategy implementation indirectly through its influence on information, control and decision processes (Heide *et al,* 2002). Consequently, interaction between top management and line managers is based on organization structure and runs according legitimated processes of information sharing, decisions making and monitoring.

Organizational culture. Organizational culture is an idea, which describes the psychology, attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values of an organization. Hill and Jones (2001) define organization culture as the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organization and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization. According to Schein (2004), organizational culture is "a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems". Organizational culture has the capability to integrate daily activities of employees to reach the planned goals, also help organizations adapt well to the external environment for rapid and appropriate responses (Nguyen & Mohamed, 2011). Hereby, the interaction between top management and line managers depends on the organizational culture, on its visible and invisible characteristics.

Communication. Communication is the exchange and flow of information and thoughts from one individual to another. Communicating is a critical skill for managers - they must be able clearly to communicate both inside and outside the organization (Buoziute-Rafanaviciene, Pundziene & Turauskas, 2009). Effective communication means that the receiver understands the exact idea that the sender is intended to transmit. Hax and Majluf (1984) state that in organizations where management is unable to communicate the strategy in a meaningful manner to all relevant subjects, the strategy will most likely never be implemented (Heide *et al.*, 2002).

Allocation of resources. Grant's (1998) classification of organizational resources comprises three major kinds of resources: tangible (financial and physical), intangible (culture, reputation and technology) and human and all of these resources are essential for organizational success (Kazlauskaite & Buciuniene, 2008). According to Warnick (2002), the organization's resources make the formulation of strategies possible and give effect to strategy implementation: resources are the *sine qua non* of strategy: without resources, strategy can achieve nothing. Heide *et al.* (2002) highlight the same idea emphasizing that without sufficient resources it is difficult, if not impossible, to implement planned strategic activities.

Top management and line managers can interact in all activities that run in the organization, however some fields are more important than other. It is meaningful to highlight three main dimensions - determination of goals, strategy formulation, strategy implementation – where the interaction between main actors is essential in order to implement strategic directions into praxis.

Determination of goals. Each organization exists for the achievement of one or more goals which vary depending on the type of an organization and the environmental conditions. These goals might not be formulated explicitly, however they are taken into account in all or most decisions otherwise the organization will not exist for a very long period. A goal is an objective to be satisfied describing a desired state or development of the organization or an individual and is characterized by the features, like: 1) name, 2) definition, 3) priority, 4) evaluation type, 5) horizon, 6) ownership, 7) perspective, 8) hardness, 9) negotiability (Popova & Sharpanskykh, 2011). The organization can have "hard" (the satisfaction of them can be determined in a clear-cut way by evaluating conditions in goal expressions) and "soft" (the satisfaction of them is difficult to assess, since they refer to not directly measurable quantities) goals.
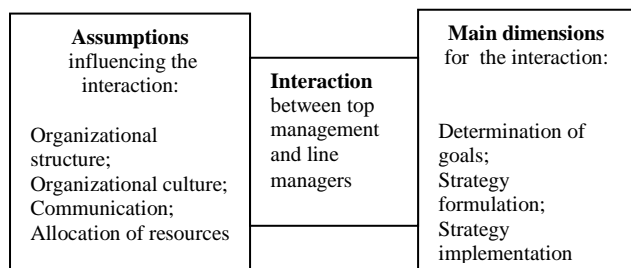
The interaction between top management and line managers by determining goals is very important as goals

describe a desired state of organization, identify what it intends to be in the future. By formulating the goals is significant that goals should be measurable, realistic, attainable, also challenging (Dandira, 2011). The interaction between top management and line managers and the synergy due to brainstorm allow to fix and to reach the goals which lead to sustainable competitive advantage.

Strategy formulation. Referring to Raffoni (2003), Cocks (2010) argues that strategy formulation is usually regarded as the exclusive domain of top management because it rewards creativity: the most admired and valued of all intellectual pursuits. However, strategy formulation needs input from the operational level to bring reliable insights into organisational capabilities and resource constraints and due to this the role of line managers increases. On some occasions, ideas emerge from intuition or suggestions that can be made by these people that are really in touch with the task (Giner, Guerrero & Ortiz, 2010), therefore the line managers as the bridge between top management and employees can propose significant ideas.

Strategy implementation. Strategy implementation is defined as an iterative process of implementing strategies, policies, programs and action plans that allow a firm to utilize its resources, to take advantage of opportunities in the competitive environment (Harrington, 2006). As it was mentioned before, there is the gap between intended and implemented strategies. According to Cocks (2010), the causes of breakdown in strategy implementation relate to the capabilities, processes and activities that are needed to bring the strategy to life. Referring to Wessel (1993), Dandira (2011) argues that top down management style, the top management working style and poor vertical communication are obstacles to strategy implementation. One of the possibilities to avoid these barriers is the interaction between top management and line managers. Control and feedback mechanisms, which are possible due to interaction, are necessary to hone the strategy implementation.

Based on the theoretical approach, a virtual representation of the interaction of top management and line managers is shown in Figure 2.

Assumptions influencing the interaction: Organizational structure; Organizational culture; Communication; Allocation of resources	**Interaction** between top management and line managers	**Main dimensions** for the interaction: Determination of goals; Strategy formulation; Strategy implementation

Figure 2. Interaction between top management and line managers

Source: developed by the authors

In summing up, it could be highlighted, that four presented assumptions influencing the interaction between top management and line managers structure the interaction nature and determine the quality of interaction, meanwhile three main dimensions present the trends for interaction in order to implement strategic directions into praxis.

Research methodology

According to Yin (1994), research strategy should be chosen as a function of the research situation, while both qualitative and quantitative methods involve weaknesses and strengths (Amaratunga *et al.,* 2002). It is very important to get a persuasive research result, therefore the choosing of one or several suitable methods can be the vital part of the research work (Shahalizadeh, Amirjamshidi & Shahalizadeh, 2009).

Qualitative enquiry often takes the form of a case study. Referring to Merriam (1998), Shahalizadeh *et. al.* (2009) argue that the case study is designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning which are involved. According to Yin (1994), case study is the preferred research approach when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, similarly Hyde (2000) states that case study is simply an in-depth study of a particular instance, or a small number of instances. According to Yin (1994), interviews are suitable when the researcher is interested in uncovering a diversity of relevant or unanticipated responses for the exploration. In here, it was chosen to use a case study and interview as research methods seeking to understand the interaction between top management and line managers by implementing strategic directions into praxis.

The data are derived from research conducted in two educational organizations in Lithuania. These organizations implement quality development system using the Learner-Oriented Quality Development and Certification (LQW) model (Zech, 2008) and according to the nature of the LQW model the organizations have described themselves in the self-evaluation reports. The organization A deals with continuing education for adults with higher education degree. The organization B provides courses for all categories of people.

Two self-evaluation reports are the object of the analysis. Based on the self-evaluation reports, the experts gave their evaluation and identified gaps of interaction between top management and line managers, also have provided the proposals concerning the interaction development. During the interview with a top manager of each organization the usefulness and expediency of the proposals were discussed. In the findings section just the analysis of interaction between top management and line managers by implementing strategic directions into praxis is presented.

Findings

Determination of goals. According to self-evaluation reports, both organizations have involved not only top management and line managers, but also the employees in goals determination. The organizations highlight that the mission and vision and strategic goals were created as part of an interactive process, however the organization A has discussed strategic directions more deeply across the organization hierarchy, meanwhile the organization B has chosen only the spread of information and due to this no contradictory discussions took place.

Organization A. Concerning the organization A the gap in interaction between top management and line

managers is due to the organizational structure. The organization A has a freedom to act, but the freedom is restricted by some frames, which are based upon strategic directions. The insufficient horizontal communication between line managers combining their partial strategic decisions by implementing common strategic directions into praxis rises some problems. Due to this fact it is necessary not only to define fields, where the agreement between the top management and one of line managers is required, but also to determine areas, where a general treaty between the top management and all line managers is in demand. This proposal was discussed during the interview and a top manager has assumed that organizational structure creates barriers for interaction: it s not easy to find a common decision between the top management and line managers.

Other reason for the gap in the interaction between top management and line managers is due to organizational culture. From the self-evaluation report it is clear that opportunism is dominant in the organization A, it means that for each department own goal has the priority as compared with common organizational goals. Accepting that organizational "culture can act as a kind of organization glue" (Heide *et al.,* 2002), the proposal for gap minimizing was to organize more often cultural, information events in order to strengthen the belief in the organization's goals and a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organization.

The gap in interaction between the key actors is also related to an allocation of resources. The organization A has limited financial and physical resources, therefore each line manager puts efforts trying to get more. Under such circumstances the danger that the implementation strategic directions into praxis will be forgotten emerges. Referring to Olsen *et at.* (1992), Heide *et al.* (2002) stated, that the allocation of financial resources also affects the allocation of human resources. Due to this fact, it is significant to follow the transparency principle by allocating resources.

Organization B. In the organization B the main reason for gap in interaction between top management and line managers is related to organizational structure. According to Thorpe & Morgan (2007), the organizational structure influences the flow of information and in the organization B very strict hierarchy does not allow all line managers to provide new ideas discussing strategic directions as the mission or vision of the organization and goals. The proposal was not to miss the possibility to use creativity of all line managers and employ advantages of synergy. Top manager has refused the proposal emphasizing that all line managers that are able to provide new approaches for goals can do it, however these ideas should be aligned with already existing strategic directions.

Similarly, communication creates the gap in the interaction between top management and line managers. According to self-evaluation report, it is clear that top management, line managers and employees do not spread information on time and using all appropriate channels. Due to this fact the organization B misses some deadlines or some activities are duplicated. Seeking to solve this problem the organization should prepare the communication within organization plan: due to top-down and down-top

communication everyone would be informed about the issues in the organization.

The gap in the interaction between top management and line managers is related also to resources. The organization B feels the lack of human resources. Accordingly, each line manager attempts to show that the workload of employees in his department is the highest, because this way is only one to get new staff. Seeking to solve the problem one of possible decisions could be to find out the workload of employees by making daily photos.

Summing up, both organizations have determined organizational goals by interacting top management and line managers, however, the key actors have faced some obstacles during interaction. In general, the organization structure, organization culture, communication and allocation of resources create obstacles for top management and line managers interaction by determining strategic goals.

Strategy formulation and implementation. When strategic directions are determined, strategy formulation and implementation into praxis in particular organization areas (fields) are crucial. Based on the self-evaluation reports and interviews material, there were chosen 3 areas, where strategy formulation and transforming into practical environment are complicated for educational organizations: needs analysis, customer relations, human resource management.

Needs analysis. Needs analysis means the use of suitable tools to systematically analyse the needs of the customers. This is significant due to an intensive competition in educational sector.

Organization A. In organization A the need analysis is not only the responsibility of top management, but also line managers should put the efforts seeking to get a clearly defined needs analysis. However, due to an organizational structure there arises the gap in interaction. Top management has involved some of line managers and employees in the team group concerning the need analysis: the working group gives the proposal regarding tools, procedures, extend and frequency. But the decisions of this working group are not more a discussion object by other employees, including line managers. In order to involve as much as possible line managers and assume that the needs analysis is the key issue for educational organization, the framework for the needs analysis should be established.

The gap in the interaction between top management and line managers is also because of communication. Referring to Hambrick and Cannella (1989), Heide *et al.* (2002) emphasize the importance of selling the strategy upwards, downwards and across the organization, which in turn demands an efficient communication system. The organization A does not follow this statement, because not all line managers are aware of the results of needs analysis, it means that top-down communication should be strengthened: the meetings and intranet could be suitable means.

Organization B. In the organization B the gap in interaction between top management and line managers is due to the organizational structure. The organization B highlights that tools for the need analysis were determined by top management, meanwhile procedures, extend and

frequency for the analysis were discussed by top management together with line managers. A clear distribution of tasks in the needs analysis makes interaction more complicated and working groups or discussions could facilitate by solving the problem.

The influence for the gap in interaction has also an allocation of resources. The organization B does not have enough staff, so the needs analysis is done by employees, who because of an intensive workload cannot concentrate on such important issue for education organization. The treatment of the needs analysis as a primary activity of the organization B could help to minimize the gap in interaction by key actors.

The communication also creates the gap in interaction, while in organization B line managers provide the results on the need analysis to top management, but top management does not give feedback, although, according to Cocks (2010), open and direct feedback and communication are critical. Due to the lack of feedback, the possibility for line managers to initiate the modification in the need analysis is poor. In order to improve the interaction, the feedback concerning the need analysis should be mutual.

Customer relations. Recognizing that the ways the organization deals with customers have an impact on survival and long term competition, both organizations treat learners (primary customers) as partners and all processes which deal with customer relations seek to orient to the needs of the customers.

Organization A. In the organization A the gap in interaction between top management and line managers is due to the organizational structure. Top management identifies the key customers, line managers and all employees are aware of learners enrolment procedures, frequency and extent. Yet, the problems are concerning the enterprises, willing to make projects and combine science outcomes and business performance. Due to organizational structure, the enterprises have to fill in huge amount of documents, to meet employees, who do not have the right to make the decision. This does not create a positive public opinion about the organization A amongst business units. Seeking to solve the problem, the simplification of procedures and clear responsibility of line managers are in demand.

The gap in the interaction between top management and line managers is because of organizational culture. Every line manager tries to keep in secret his customers from business environment, so the values and norms of publicity ant transparency are forgotten. The code of conduct could be the start for a problem solution.

The gap in interaction forms due to communication. At the top management and line managers meetings the information about key customers is presented, but it is not a discussion concerning the winning of new customers and customer protection measures. The open communication and creativity of line managers could introduce the frame for winning new learners. The proposal to use a brainstorming technique by developing new ideas was discussed during an interview, acknowledging that communication is one of the barriers for a successful interaction between key actors.

The gap in the interaction between top management and line managers is formed due to limited financial and physical resources. This influences the quality of training opinions and other services for customers. The problem could be solved by an active participation in projects, where to get some physical resources is available. This proposal was accepted just partly: the participation in projects requires more human resources.

Organization B. The organization B focuses on the gap in interaction between top management and line managers because of the organizational structure. Following the statement of Thorpe and Morgan (2007) that the structure allocates power and responsibility, top management determines the procedure how to communicate with very important customers. The responsibility for dealing with customers is allocated to line managers: they follow legal rules and requirements. The problem arises due to an unclear complains process: top management can change the decisions of the line manager without any explanations. Clear complains procedures could facilitate the interaction between top management and line managers, so the internal rules for complains dealing are in demand.

The gap in interaction between key actors arises also due to communication. Top management and line managers top-down, down-top spread the information about customers within organization, though do not communicate outside. For the public just limited information is offered giving reasons for learners personal privacy security. Due to that fact, public opinion about the organization B is not positive and top management receives quite a lot of complains. To deal with outside communication problem, knowledge of public relations is needed. The top manager agreed to prepare and offer regularly a report for the society about customers and relation with them inside the organization B.

As it was mentioned, the organization B does not have enough human resources. Referring to Bolman and Deal (1991), Heide et al. (2002) highlight that the organization cannot function properly without the energy and talent of its employees. The lack of the staff is the factor that has an influence on customer satisfaction. The contract with another company for public relations and information preparation concerning customer care processes, protection measures and an enrolment process would be one of the possible solutions of the problem.

Human resource management. The link between human resources and organizational performance is widely discussed in scientific literature (Paauwe, 2009). Whereas it is acknowledged that human resources and human resource management impact on the organizational performance, the interaction between top management and line managers for both organizations seems significant.

Organization A. The gap in interaction between top management and line managers forms due to organizational structure. Top management in collaboration with human resource manager formulates human resource management strategy and the main responsibility for its implementation lies on line managers. However, line managers can initiate changes and new things concerning skill-enhancing, motivation-enhancing and empowerment-enhancing human resource management practices. The problem is

that top management and line managers do not intensively interact regarding talent pool formation, employees appraisal and new competencies development. It means that due to an organizational structure top management does not know the talented staff and line managers are not familiar with the job vacancies which could be the right work place for their department employees. One of the proposals was to produce a career plan for each employee and to introduce these plans to all line managers and top management. Another proposal includes development plans. Both proposals were accepted by the top manager, assuming that vertical and horizontal career possibilities within organization A are not very big.

The gap in interaction of the key actors in human resource management is also due to resources. The organization A does not have enough financial resources in order to create possibilities for all employees to take part in trainings and seminars, wherefore line managers compete for these resources. The proposal was that the development plans should be created by line managers and employees together and confirmed by top management.

Communication is one of the obstacles for interaction. Huge amount of information and not always spread on time has an influence on human resource and their management. According to Heide *et al.* (2002), information related to the implementation of a strategy should be communicated orally as well as in writing, and in some cases even visually too, therefore the organization A could create in intranet the data bank for human resource and their management practices, hereby to facilitate the solution of interaction problem. The proposal was accepted just partly: top manager agreed on the data bank for human resource management, but only top management and line managers could have access to it.

Organization B. Concerning the organization B, the gap in the interaction between the key actors in a human resource management strategy formulation and implementation is due to the organizational structure. The main responsibility for the recruitment and selection, training and development, performance appraisal is put on line managers, a human resource manager is responsible just for human resource administration. According to the self-evaluation report line managers do not have competence to formulate and implement actions regarding human resources. The proposal was binary: first, to provide line managers with the knowledge how to manage human resources; second, to more involve human resource manager in human resource management practices formulation and implementation.

It is important, that the gap in interaction between top management and line managers occurs because of communication. According to Dandira (2011), there is the need for top management to have hard and soft skills and to have good interpersonal skills. Due to these features the communication process could be easier, however top management communicates just separate parts of the information concerning human resource management, meanwhile desires to get from line managers full information that regards employees. This inadequacy makes difficult to interact, therefore the complex spread of information from both sides is in demand. This proposal

was accepted by the top manager with one exception: top management can choose and even indicate the channels of communication for line managers.

As it was mentioned before, the organization B feels the lack of human resources. Due to this fact the staff is overcrowded and not satisfied with human resource management. The gap in the interaction of top management and line managers happens as a result of the disagreement how to motivate and to engage employees, as an overcrowded staff is not satisfied with work in general. The proposals were: first, to revise the job specifications and staff profiles; second, to redistribute duties and responsibilities; third, to find financial resources and to employ new workers. The top manager acknowledged that resources are an obstacle for the interaction between key actors, however agreed just with the first and second proposals.

Summing up, it could be stated, that in both organizations the interaction between top management and line managers by formulation and implementation needs an analysis, customer relations and human resource management strategies have focused mainly on barriers due to the organizational structure and communication. These obstacles are related to hierarchy, opportunism, insufficient vertical and horizontal communication and the lack of resources. Due to barriers, the gap in interaction between top management and line managers arises, hereby the difference between the strategy as a plan and the strategy as a pattern grows.

Conclusions

1. The realization of the strategic directions requires appropriate concreteness that depends on various aspects and due to this the organization needs the strategy. It has been long recognized that there is difference between intended and implemented strategies. The intended strategy represents only fundamental directions and one of the main challenges is to implement it, it means to put the formulated strategy to work. Top management and line managers are key actors in the process of bringing strategic directions to the practical environment. Top management defines where to go, whereas line managers deal with how to do. The interaction between top management and line managers provides clear formulation of strategic directions and equal perception, strengthens organizational commitment, provides organizational empowerment and gives an opportunity to make the correlations of some strategic directions. However, the gap in interaction between key actors by implementing strategic direction into praxis arises. As the main assumptions influencing the interaction between top management and line managers are the organizational structure, organizational culture, communication and allocation of resources. These obstacles create a gap in interaction process and this is one of the reasons for inadequacy between the strategy as a plan and the strategy as a pattern. Top management and line managers can interact in all activities that run in organization, however, some dimensions, as determination of goals, strategy formulation and strategy implementation are more important, as the interaction between main actors

in these fields is essential seeking to implement strategic directions into praxis.

2. The empirical study reveals that both organizations have determined strategic directions during the process of top management and line managers interaction, however, the key actors have faced the obstacles as an organizational structure, organizational culture, the communication and allocation of resources. In both organizations top management and line managers in their interaction by formulation and implementation of the strategies of the needs analysis, customer relations and human resource management have coped mainly with barriers due to the organizational structure and communication. These obstacles are related to hierarchy, opportunism, insufficient vertical and horizontal communication. Due to the barriers the gap in interaction between the key actors arises, hereby the difference between intended and implemented strategies grows. Seeking to minimize the gap and to facilitate the interaction of top management and line managers by implementing the strategic direction into praxis the obstacles should be overcome due to the changes in organizational structure, culture, communication and allocation of resources.

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Aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveika įgyvendinant strategines kryptis

Santrauka

Organizacijos sėkmei priklausant nuo dviejų veiksnių, t. y. nuo to, kaip efektyviai ji geba valdyti vidinius procesus ir kaip jos elgesys dera su išorinės aplinkos sąlygomis (Popova ir Sharpanskykh, 2011), didėja organizacijos strateginių krypčių ir strategijos vertė. Strateginėms kryptims, jungiančioms misiją, viziją ir nustatančioms tai, ką organizacija ketina pasiekti, įgyvendinti reikia konkretumo. Konkretumas atsispindi strategijoje, kurios rengimas ir įgyvendinimas yra procesas, apimantis daugybę veiklų, taip pat skirtingus dalyvius.

Pripažįstant skirtumą tarp numatytosios ir įgyvendintosios strategijų (Mintzberg, 1987), aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveika yra pagrindinis aspektas, mažinant strategijų neatitikimą. Mokslinėje literatūroje akcentuojama: egzistuojant sindromui, kad strategijos formulavimas – tai aukščiausio lygmens vadovų priedermė (Dandira, 2011), būtina kitus dalyvius įtraukti į procesą, nes tai užtikrina pritarimą pokyčiams (Moore ir kt., 2010). Kadangi tiesioginiai vadovai betarpiškai bendrauja su darbuotojais ir perteikia jiems organizacijos tikslus, tai jų dalyvavimas rengiant strategiją yra esminis. Analogiškai ir strategijos įgyvendinimo procese aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų vaidmenys susiję: nors tiesioginiai vadovai priima sprendimus dėl strategijos įgyvendinimo veiksmų, tačiau aukščiausio lygmens vadovai kuria palaikančią (įkvepiančią) atmosferą.

Problema – kaip pasiekti sąveiką tarp aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų ir kokios yra sąveikos dimensijos, siekiant įgyvendinti organizacijos strategines kryptis.

Straipsnio tikslas – teoriškai ir empiriškai išnagrinėti sąveiką tarp aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų, atskleidžiant sąveikos pagrindines dimensijas.

Tyrimo metodas – mokslinės literatūros analizė ir sintezė, kokybinis tyrimas (atvejo analizė ir interviu).

Mintzberg (1987) teigimu, egzistuoja mažiausiai dvi strategijos: numatytoji strategija ir įgyvendintoji strategija. Numatytoji strategija pateikia fundamentalias kryptis, o jos įgyvendinimas yra vienas iš pagrindinių iššūkių. Pasak Aaltonen ir Ikavalko (2002), organizacijos, įgyvendindamos strategiją, susiduria su problemomis, kurias sąlygoja silpna vadybinė veikla, nepakankamas įsipareigojimas strategijai, neadekvačios organizacijos sistemos ir ištekliai, taip pat bloga koordinacija ir atsakomybės paskirstymas. Heide ir kt. nuomone (2002), tik įgyvendinus numatytąją strategiją sukuriama vertė organizacijai, nors įgyvendintoji strategija nėra adekvati numatytajai. Neatitikimą sąlygoja dinamiška aplinka ir nukrypimas nuo numatytosios strategijos gali būti traktuojamas kaip teigiamas reiškinys, t. y. organizacijos gebėjimas greitai reaguoti į pokyčius, prisitaikant prie jų. Vis

dėlto egzistuoja ir probleminis šio nukrypimo aspektas, kai nesugebama suvokti ir (arba) įgyvendinti tai, kas įtvirtinta numatytojoje strategijoje, todėl netgi „gera" strategija gali likti neįgyvendinta. Šiame kontekste iškyla dviejų strategijų neatitikimo priežasčių klausimas. Heide ir kt. (2002) teigimu, siekiant sėkmingai įgyvendinti strategiją reikia sąmoningų ir aktyvių veiksmų, jungiančių daugybės dalyvių ir veiklų koordinavimą – būtina nustatyti pagrindinius dalyvius, sėkmingos jų sąveikos prielaidas ir esmines sąveikos dimensijas.

Sąveikos subjektai. Aukščiausio lygmens vadovai ir tiesioginiai vadovai yra pagrindiniai dalyviai įgyvendinant organizacijos strategines kryptis. Aukščiausio lygmens vadovai yra atsakingi už strateginius sprendimus, darančius įtaką visos organizacijos veiklai (Helfat ir kt., 2006; Camelo ir kt., 2011), o jų tikėjimas ir interpretacijos daro poveikį konkretiems sprendimams (Barker III ir Barr, 2002). Mokslinėje literatūroje taip pat akcentuojama aukščiausio lygmens vadovų įtaka organizacijos pokyčių procesui (Gebhardt ir kt., 2006), naujų produktų kūrimui (Rodriguez ir kt., 2008) ir inovacijų diegimui (Camelo ir kt., 2011). Tuo tarpu tiesioginiai vadovai, McCarthy ir kt. (2010) teigimu, tarpininkauja įgyvendinant strategines ir operatyvines organizacijos veiklas.

Aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveika yra svarbi dėl keletos priežasčių: pirma, sąveika sąlygoja aiškų strateginių krypčių suformulavimą ir adekvatų krypčių supratimą abiejų subjektų lygmeniu. Antra, tiesioginių vadovų įtraukimas į strategijos formulavimą stiprina jų įsipareigojimą organizacijai. Trečia, sąveika įgalina tiesioginius vadovus. Ketvirta, tiesioginiai vadovai pastebi problemas „žemesniu" lygmeniu ir remdamiesi sąveika jas transformuoja į auktesnįjį valdymo lygmenį. Penkta, tiesioginiai vadovai „suteikia praktikoms gyvybę" (Purcell ir kt., 2003) ir nesielgia „kaip robotai konformistai" (Marchington ir Grugulis, 2000), todėl jų asmenybė ir elgsena turi būti įvertinti rengiant ir įgyvendinant strategiją.

Pagrindinės prielaidos sąveikai. Nustatant aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveikos svarbą, išgryninami galimi sąveikos rezultatai, tačiau nepateikiamas atsakymas į klausimą, kodėl subjektams kyla sunkumų sąveikos procese. Pasak Heide ir kt. (2002), vienos iš pagrindinių prielaidų, darančių įtaką sąveikai, yra organizacijos struktūra, organizacijos kultūra, komunikacija ir išteklių paskirstymas.

Esminės sąveikos dimensijos. Nors aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveika galima visose veiklos srityse, tačiau tikslų nustatymas, strategijos rengimas ir įgyvendinimas yra trys pagrindinės sritys, kur sąveika įgyvendinant strategines kryptis praktinėje veikloje yra būtina. Kiekviena organizacija egzistuoja tam, kad pasiektų konkrečius tikslus, o vadovų sąveika bei sinergija remiantis „proto šturmu" leidžia nustatyti tikslus, kurie skatina ilgalaikį konkurencinį pranašumą. Strategijos formavimas nors dar ir laikomas išimtine aukščiausio lygmens vadovų veiklos sritimi (Raffoni, 2003; Cocks, 2010), tačiau yra procesas, kai idėjos kartais kyla intuityviai arba tiesiogiai konkretų darbą atliekantiems asmenims (Giner ir kt., 2010). Tai pagrindžia, kad būtina sąveika tarp vadovų strategijos formavimo dimensijoje. Analogiškai, įgyvendinant strategiją, vykdant nustatytas programas bei veiklas ir naudojant išteklius, aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveika leidžia mažinti atotrūkį tarp numatytosios ir įgyvendintosios strategijų.

Empirinis tyrimas. Kokybinis tyrimas atliktas dviejose tęstinio mokymo institucijose, įgyvendinančiose į besimokantįjį orientuotą kokybės vertinimą pagal LEONARDO DA VINCI inovacijų perkėlimo projektą „Kokybės valdymas nepakankamos kompetencijos asmenims tęstinio mokymo paslaugas teikiančiose organizacijose Europos kontekste" (Nr.2009-1-PL1-LE05-05039). Organizacijų savianalizės ataskaitos yra analizės objektas, kuriuo vadovaujantis ekspertai interviu su mokymo instutucijų vadovais metu išgrynino aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveikos trikdžius.

Analizuojant aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveiką tikslų nustatymo dimensijoje, atskleista, kad abiejose organizacijose ne tik vadovai, bet ir darbuotojai buvo įtraukti į tikslų nustatymo procesą. Organizacijos pabrėžė, kad suformuluota vizija, misija ir strateginiai tikslai yra interaktyvaus proceso rezultatas, tačiau organizacijos struktūra, kultūra, komunikacija ir resursai sudarė kliūtis sąveikos procesui vykti.

Nagrinėjant aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveiką, strategijos formulavimo ir įgyvendinimo procese pasirinktos trys sritys, kurios mokymo institucijoms yra vienos iš komplikuočiausių, t. y. poreikių nustatymas, santykiai su klientais ir žmogiškųjų išteklių valdymas. Straipsnyje detaliai analizuojamos sąveikos prielaidos, nustatant, kad organizacijos struktūra ir komunikacija yra esminės kliūtys sąveikai vykti nustatant poreikius, palaikant santykius su klientais ir valdant žmogiškuosius išteklius. Kliūtys susijusios su hierarchine struktūra, oportunizmu, nepakankama vertikalia ir horizontalia komunikacija.

Formuluojama išvada, kad organizacijos strateginės kryptys yra konkretizuojamos numatytojoje strategijoje, kuri nėra adekvati įgyvendintajai strategijai. Reziumuojant aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveikos būtinybę, įgyvendinant strategines kryptis praktikoje ir taip mažinant numatytosios ir įgyvendintosios strategijos neatitikimą, pažymima, jog organizacijos struktūra, organizacijos kultūra, komunikacija ir išteklių paskirstymas yra esminės prielaidos, darančios įtaką sąveikos kokybei. Taip pat akcentuojama, kad tikslų nustatymas, strategijos formulavimas ir įgyvendinimas yra esminės sritys, kur sąveika yra būtina.

Atlikus empirinį tyrimą, daroma išvada, kad tęstinio mokymo organizacijose organizacijos struktūra, jos kultūra, komunikacija ir išteklių paskirstymas daro įtaką aukščiausio lygmens vadovų ir tiesioginių vadovų sąveikai. Taip susidaro numatytosios ir įgyvendintosios strategijų neatitikimas.