

Strategic Consensus and Organization Performance Relationship: Reasons for Inconsistent and Different Findings of Studies and Researches in SC-OP

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Abstract:

The findings of the studies of strategic consensus –organizational performance (SC-OP) have been inconsistent and different. Most of the strategic management literature and studies positively believe in this relation, some are neutral and the rest are not. The purpose of this study is an attempt to find the reasons for inconsistent and different findings of studies and researches in SC-OP. Moreover, the most important dimensions of SC are explored and discussed therein.

Design/methodology/ approach –The research methodology being used for this study is a literature review and analysis of SC-OP studies. Thirty-two (32) researches and studies in SC-OP have been selected from known electronic resources and databases. Selection of related literature and studies was based on searching and choosing by using the same keywords of this study (strategic consensus – organizational performance), and excluding that are not. The establishment of study hypotheses is based on reviewing the literature, selected studies, my experiences, and observations. The criteria of assessing and measuring are made by designing a model and formulating comparative tables. The content of the table rows (refer to Appendix A) includes subject titles related to the hypotheses of this study.

Findings: Definitions and concepts of SC used in reviewed literature and studies have been found different and inconsistent. The subject of consensus (who consensus) and object (what to consensus) have also been found the reasons for inconsistency and different findings for SC-OP studies. Therefore, the hypotheses for this study have been approved. In addition to that, this paper finds that other reasons for these different findings are varied and not thoroughly considered yet. To mention some of these such as: how SC developed and measured, what affects SC, research methodology, different types of strategies, internal capabilities, industry environment, and mediator and moderator variables.

Research limitations and implications: The study was subjected to how the researcher understood the data and information given hence. The big challenges to conduct this study as pilot study are: non-availability of enough funds, time for researcher is not sufficient, and companies in study area are very few and smalls'. Others are far and reluctantly to participate as study sample. Moreover, such a study alike requires a longitudinal methods using both theoretical and empirical approaches.

Originality/value: this research paper is a work of my own effort. It exerted a lot of time to read the literature and researches of SC-OP. In spite it is based on previous studies, it adds value to the strategic planning literature by confirming the approved reasons behind the inconsistent findings of SC-OP studies in addition to other reasons which require more and deep studies, such like: type of strategy and industry environment.

Keywords –Strategic consensus, strategic performance, agreement, share-understanding

INTRODUCTION:

The value and impact of strategic consensus (SC) has been a controversial issue, especially its impact and effect on the strategic management process (SMP) and then on organizational performance (OP). Whether the SC has a positive, negative or non-impact on OP. The conducted researches and studies which were reviewed in this paper are varied in their findings of SC-OP relationship. They could be divided into three categories: First category is supporting this relationship such as: Homburg et al., 1999; Iaquinto & Fredrickson, 1997; Rapert, Velliquette, & Garretson, 2002. The second category to some extent is supporting this relationship such as: Bourgeois, 1980; Knight et al., 1999.

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The third one is categorized as not supporting this relationship such as: West & Schwenk, 1996; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). These inconsistencies were confirmed by Kellermanns et al. (2005), Homburg et al., (1999).

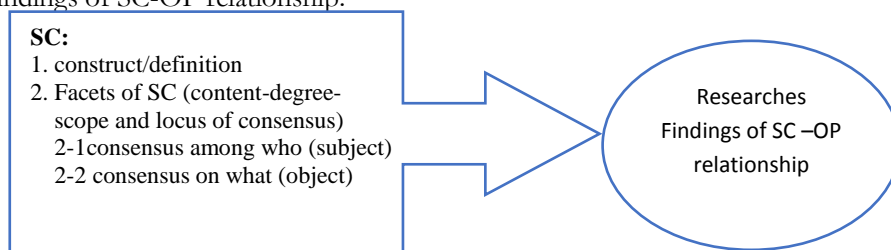
Based on my own understanding of the reviewed literature, the studies and researches in this paper, I assume the reasons for these differences are also varied. Therefore, the aim of this paper is a trial to investigate the causes and find justifiable explanations behind these differences and inconsistencies. The reviewed studies mostly focused on four reasons for these findings: 1- Difference of SC's constructs (definition and concept), 2- Facets of strategic consensus, 3-the location of consensus, and 4- research methodology. In addition to other factors which will be mentioned within the context of this study.

Regarding SC constructs, researchers and scholars grounded their studies by giving different concepts and definitions for the consensus constructs and dimensions. Moreover, the consensus development and how it should be measured are supposed to be additional reasons for these different findings. According to my view, these different concepts and definitions led to different findings. Examples: Floyd et al., (1992) defined SC as: (agreement among top, middle-, and operating-level managers on the fundamental priorities of the organization). Kellermanns et al., (2005) defined SC as: (shared understanding of strategic priorities among managers at the top, middle, and/or operating levels of the organization). Others, such as: Bourgeois (1980) defined consensus as agreement within the dominant strategy-making coalition on means and ends (appendix 1). Here, three important tracks of SC constructs and dimensions are identified: the SC among whom (doers of consensus), what to consensus, and the location of SC. These three elements are part of the controversial issue. Homburg et al., (1999) named them as follows: consensus between whom (called it as the subject of consensus, e.g., TMT), and consensus about what (called object of consensus, e.g. goals and means). In addition to that, the location of consensus which was added by Markoczy (2001) has focused on determining the location of the consensus within the hierarchical level of strategic management process.

The differences in researches, methodology and theoretical approaches are given much attention by scholars and researchers. The studies of Kellermanns et al., (2005) and Homburg et al., (1999) confirmed that the differences of theoretical and methodological approaches have led to inconsistent findings on the SC-OP relationship.

Arguments have been raised about other reasons such as: the type of chosen strategy and the dynamism of the internal and external environment of the organizational industry, which is the best context (environment) for strategic consensus. And whether there are some variables (dependent or independent) that play any role impacting the consensus within an organizational strategic management process or/ and for any chosen organizational management approach. In Kellermanns et al., (2005), the relationship between SC-OP is mediated by coordination and cooperation. As these improve strategic execution processes will increase the level of SC-OP (Dooley et al., 2000; Homburg et al., 1999; Iaquinto and Fredrickson, 1997; Knight et al., 1999; Pagell and Krause, 2002; Rapert et al., 2002). These findings show the relationship between coordination, cooperation, and SC in the strategic implementation stage. Moreover, the impact of strategic alignment between strategic priorities of the organization and its environment was researched Kellemanns et al (2005). Ali (2016) has found that most of the viewed studies have agreed about this positive impact of alignment on OP. These authors and others hypothesized that both strategic alignment and SC advocate this relationship. Especially, when the level of alignment among decision makers is higher, the OP is enhanced during the strategic implementation phase. Moreover, Floyd et al., (1992) found that the success of strategic implementation happens when managers act with shared understanding and commitment to the organization's strategic priorities. This was termed and called collective heart and mind strategic consensus.

This paper is a trial to examine the findings of thirty-two (32) studies of strategic consensus. The purpose is to investigate the reasons behind the inconsistent findings of these studies. The following model illustrates the relationship between the nature and content of SC as assumed by the author to be some reasons for inconsistent researches 'the findings of SC-OP relationship.



Model of inconsistent research findings for SC– OP relationship (established by author)

The author starts with a review of the literature and studies concerned with SC–OP relationships. Next, it presents the objectives and hypotheses of the study. Then, it describes the research methodology. Finally, it discusses the implications and directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

1-1 Concepts and Definitions of Strategic Consensus:

Since the late 1960s, researchers and scholars have started showing their interest in the subject of SC (Kellermanns et al., (2005) by conducting theoretical and practical studies. It is not surprising when one examines the SC researches in detail and finds the findings are in conflict and inconsistencies. This paper assumes different reasons for this conflict. Considering the concept, the construct of SC and consolidated measures are assumed to be some of these reasons. According to Kellermanns et al, (2005), the review of the literature has shown that there is no total agreement among researchers regarding the construct of consensus and how it should be measured. The conceptualization of SC-OP relationships was another issue of inconsistency. Moreover, other researchers and scholars have thoroughly assured the difficulty of developing a better understanding of SC for example: Bourgeois, 1985; Homburg et al., 1999; Priem, 1990; Rapert et al., 2002; West & Meyer, 1998). Based on the opinion of the author of this paper and current reviewed studies (e.g., Ketokivi & Castaner, 2004), questions and arguments are still being raised about the development of SC within organizations and how it should be managed towards the positive end of the required performance.

The other issue of SC is to determine the location of the SC and its extent of impact: at TMT, middle or lower levels, and what to consensus. This will at least help to set suitable definitions of SC and pinpoint its construct and contents and then easily identify and find proper KPI measurements within that determined location. Kellermanns et al., (2005) asserted the varied definitions of consensus content in its form and meaning which have impact on the SC-OP relationship (refer to Appendix 1). The consensus definition contains different terms with different meanings. These differences used varied measures based on what is meant by its contents, the location of consensus, and whether it is used alone or jointly with other terms (ref to shape #2)

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| <p>Consensus construct:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agreement/level of agreement 2. Shared understanding 3. Cohesiveness 4. Shared perception |
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Shape # 2 illustrates the content of the consensus drawn by the author

As per Kellermanns et. al., (2005), during the late 1960s terms like agreement and cohesiveness were used instead of consensus. Based on this and others (e.g., Floyd et al., 1992, Dess & Origer, 1987, etc.) , they have come with a broader definition of SC, such as a shared understanding of strategic priorities among managers at the top, middle, and operating levels of the organization that came up with many definitions in a number of studies. These studies focused and concurred on some word/s and phrases (e.g., **agreement and shared understanding**). As these definitions are different in words/phrases and meanings, they lead to different theories with inconclusive and inconsistent findings. They thoroughly focused on: agreement and shared perception. etc. **The author argues that the construct of these definitions (words, terms, and meaning is an immense issue, and more than that, it is to ascertain and determine who is/are sharing / agreeing and about what, and which organization level and context, these sharing /agreement is suitable for successful application. Whatever surrounding the agreement or and shared perception and to what extent and level reached. They must have power limitations and positively or negatively face uncertain environments, even those who involved in SC differ and are impacted by many visible and invisible factors.**

1-2 Objectives:

The objective of this paper is to find an answer to the following question: why researches and studies' findings of SC–OP relationship are different and inconsistent. To answer this question, it is necessary to review and investigate the strategic management literature to find the reasons behind these inconsistent findings. As the field of strategic management process is large with varied types of industries and complex changing environments. The author of this paper is objectively seeking to attest the study hypotheses - set in this study - to ascertain the justifiable reasons for these different findings of selected and chosen thirty-two (32) studies in SC published in famous journals.

1-3 Hypotheses:

As per the reviewed literature and studies on SC, the definition of SC is assumed to be one of the reasons behind inconsistent research findings. Kellermanns *et al.* (2005) pointed out that the varied definitions of consensus could be a reason of inconsistencies in the consensus literature. Moreover, Rapert *et al.* (2002) talked about the inconsistent definitions of consensus and how it should be tested and incorporated into the theory of strategic management. Adding that many other studies are not easy to compare because of the inconsistent and varied definitions of consensus and how it should be used within this context. The definitions of some formats developed for SC constructs are grounded in such words and phrases: cohesiveness, agreement, alignment, shared understanding with commitment, sharing perceptions...etc. . The definition construct of SC is the foundation for these and other researches and studies. Whoever the consensus holders (subject) or whatever the consensus (object), its location, or/and the level of consensus (strong or weak), the issue is the lack of a consistent and agreed definition used by all these or other strategic management researches and studies. The central hypothesis here is that:

H1- different definitions and concepts of SC lead to different and inconsistent findings of SC-OP relationship studies

1- 2 SC context & development: Facets of Strategic Consensus:

As per the study of Markoczy (2001), the nature of consensus formation encounters four facets: (content, degree, scope, and locus of consensus). These facets have been located throughout the levels of strategy members and at multiple levels of the organizational hierarchy. It is to somehow indicate and acknowledge the possibility that SC may be studied within and across the hierarchical levels of which the strategic management process exists. Definitely, these facets have passed through the development phases of the strategy making process, its implementation, and performance control and management.

In addition to that, Markoczy (2001) discussed three facets of consensus and added one which are grouped into four: 1-content, 2- degree (level), 3-scope and 4-locus of consensus. What the managers are agreeing about is termed and called: content of consensus, such example: certain objectives or strategic priorities, Bourgeois, 1980; Dess, 1987) or any other important competing issues for the organization (Hodgkinson and Johnson, 1994). The degree of consensus is meant that the level of managers' agreement and involvement in the content, how strongly they are involved in agreeing and committing to this consensus. The scope of consensus is the number of managers who share this consensus in and within the organization (Floyd and Wooldridge, 1992). Markoczy (2001) added the fourth and called it the locus of consensus. It meant that the location of consensus in an organization. The content of consensus describes what managers agree about and the scope of consensus identifies who the consensus is among. Homburg *et al.*, (1999) also determined the location of consensus within the organization as: consensus between whom and called it as the subject of consensus (e.g., TMT..), consensus about what and called it the object of consensus (goals and means). As this, and the reviewed studies have determined who are supposed to consensus and what are their positions in the organization, and, what they are supposed to consensus about (formulation, implementation of the strategy) or part of the unit process. Edh Mirzaei N. (2015) conducted a study about SC among individuals in operation functions, and focused specifically on how these individuals perceive the manufacturing strategy in operation units in order to get to know their involvement in manufacturing strategy formation (see Table# Appendix in this study). Whatever the positions these individuals are held in the organization, they have a direct or indirect impact on strategy execution and then organization performance. Therefore, their consensus on the objectives of strategy operation is important. Edh Mirzaei (2015) affirmed that workers should not be negligent or given marginal role in operation or manufacturing strategy. This is because if they have not been shared of the strategy formulation and implementation, they will never be committed and then exert their full efforts for the strategy priorities and then for organization performance, this due to the very low of their strategic consensus.

The author assumes that the SC must be imitated and developed at the low hierarchal level of the organization (bottom up) and the important stakeholders such as: employees/workers should be counseled and shared during the process of strategy formulation to have their consensus. It is a big and clear beginning of strategy failure that employees and workers in an organization do not participate and are not involved in the strategy process from formation throughout the implementation and evaluation. It is not a matter of giving and collecting instructions and reports from and to them, they must have a direct say in the strategy management process and especially in the formulation phase. All organization levels (top-down, down-top, horizontal, or/and networked) must be involved and even outside stakeholders must be consulted on their inputs and should be taken. It is illogical to expect good finishing of ends from someone who is not being involved from the very beginning in something.

According to the author's empirical experiences of strategy implementation and evaluation at some point in some time, we find ourselves in need of some historical views and background of organizational incidents at some point to resolve and successfully continue the execution.

H2: The different context and facets of SC yield different research findings of SC-OP relationship.

H2a: consensus among who (subjects) is a reason for different research findings of SC-OP relationships

H2b: consensus on what (object) is a reason for different research findings of SC-OP relationship

1-4 Methods:

Sample

The sample of this study is thirty-two (32) researches and studies selected from global indexed journals (appendix1). These studies were conducted by well-renowned scholars and researchers in strategic management fields and are especially focused on SC-OP relationship. The applied methodology of selection is based on navigation and searching by using the same or similar words and phrases like: (strategic consensus, organizational performance). Thirty-two studies and researches have handled the SC issue and its relations with OP. Appendix #2 has been established containing the study subject of SC dimensions and structures as per the following rows of the table: row# 1 author of the study, row#2 consensus definition, subject and object, and row#3 key words.

RESULTS:

Definition & Concepts:

Appendix # 1 is showing the number of definitions, subjects (who consensus) and objects (on what to consensus) of consensus for these selected studies. Table#1 is derived from Appendix1, which is counting the same terms and concepts frequent in these studies. It is noted that 17 out of 32 studies intentionally defined the concept using (agreement or level of agreement) among TMT or seniors' managers and few added middle level managers or/ and employees. 15 out of 32 defined the concept using (shared perception or and shared understanding) also among TMT or seniors' managers. 2 out of 32 studies utilized awareness, knowledge, perceptions, and the degree to which individual mental models of strategy overlap (shared cognition), respectively. These numbers show the difference of SC definitions and concepts used in these studies and literature. Therefore, H1 is supported.

#	Definition words	Number of studies
1	Agreement / level of agreement (11+6)	17
2	Shared understanding / shared perception /shared cognition	15
Total		32

Table #1 shows the definitions of SC within the reviewed studies drawn by the author

According to the above results, H1 is consistent and in accordance with many previous studies, the different definitions and concepts of SC are the reasons behind these differences. As this study cited, many studies in accordance with these different definitions such as: Emwanu et al.,(2012) assured that the definition of consensus is not consistent in the strategy literature. It varies [Shanley et al., 1992.] and seems to depend on how the concept of consensus is being termed and defined, leading to varied measures and findings. Consensus is sometimes defined and measured by the proportion of those in agreement [Dess et al., 1987., Priem, R.L., 1990. 16] and at other times by shared perspectives with or without commitment [Wooldridge et al., 1989., Knight et al., 1999., Floyd et al., 1992]. Moreover, the consensus development and how it should be measured are supposed to be additional reasons for these different findings.

Consensus among who (subjects):

Table #2 shows the subject of consensus (as hypothesized that consensus among who (subjects) is a reason for different research findings for SC-OP relationships. 7 out of 32 studies found that they are responsible for and among those who involved in SC application and were tested on SC elements. To term it, they are who consensus. 5 out of 32 mentioned middle managers among others who are doing consensus. 12 out of 32 studies mentioned senior managers or and all managers. One out of 32 mentioned dominant strategy making, decision making, and strategy team, respectively.

#	<u>Agreement Subjects: (who consensus)</u>	<u>N. of studies</u>
1	TMT	7
2	Middle managers	5
3	Senior managers / all managers	12
4	Decision making	1
5	Strategy team	1

Table #2 is showing the subjects of SC within the reviewed studies drawn by the author

Content of SC (consensus on what/object)

Table #3 is showing the object of SC (consensus on what), 10 out of 32 mentioned strategic or fundamental priorities to be consensus on. 7 out of 32 chose the strategy. 5 out of 32 are found to be goals, means, ends, and competitive methods. 3 out of 32 are group decisions. And one out of 32 chose environment of the organization.

#	<u>Objects (what to consensus/consensus on what)</u>	<u>N. of studies</u>
1	Goals, competitive methods – means & ends	5
2	Group decisions	3
3	Strategy – specific type of strategy	7
4	Strategy priorities - fundamental priorities	10
5	Environment	1

Table #3 shows the objects of SC within the reviewed studies drawn by the author

This finding could be compared with the table of Homburg et. al., (1999) study. Where it was found that 3 out of 12 are goals and means as an object of consensus and the rest (9) are mixed.

DISCUSSION:

According to the results of data analysis for selected studies and literature review, they used different terms and concepts of consensus. Whether these terms are used directly or indirectly, they definitely have their impact on the consequences of researcher understanding the research respondents and on those who are involved in consensus. This result gives a clear explanation and strong evidence for a close relationship between the SC definitions and concepts and the process of a study. The context of the definitions and concepts understood by the researcher and those who are involved have a role in managing and directing the study in SC, whether it is: agreement or shared understanding, ..etc., It is a compass or/and a central point for leading the whole process and procedure of a study. This agreement and understanding of who (subject) and on what (object) will be having an impact on the concept itself and those involved within the environment context. The agreement or shared-understanding as a construct may have component elements and impacting or impacted factors, capacity and extent within each of them. In addition to what else is surrounding their existence and development. Moreover, how those involved understand and translate them into actions. This depends on their understanding capacity and the efforts made by organizations. They would be more effective if they were aligned with the intended strategic plan and whether there is mismatching between their understanding and commitment shared by the managers within the organization. This argument, in accordance with what is researched and stated by Priem et al., (1995) pressures and cognitive conflict that might arise pre-or post-decision making within a group. Floyd et al., (1992) stated the findings of some researchers regarding managers who disagree with the strategic objectives and their projects will definitely work against the smooth implementation of these projects. This in simple, the organization initially has not let them buy in the strategy by involving them through the formation and implementation processes.

Regarding SC definitions and concepts, the author observes that there is a development within them and their dimensions throughout the years (1980-2020) from being narrower to a broader definitions and by extending to cover and include other terms and concepts (e.g. shared understanding, commitment, perception, common understanding, awareness, cognitive and emotional dimensions). Moreover, the development includes the SC scope of TMT to include most levels of organization, if not all: functional operator, middle employees, and front line workers.

On the other side, the term consensus has been used whether alone or jointly with the other terms is given different meanings according to the discipline and science field, for example, psychologist Mohammed; S. (2001) has referred to the term *cognitive consensus* due to the similarity among group members regarding how key issues are defined and conceptualized. Moreover, the scope of consensus as how many are involved in consensus, their levels of positions, and characteristics will be having impact on SC and then on OP.

To conclude that agreement or shared understanding is not enough, it needs other requisites like: commitment or coherent to enhance this agreement or shared understanding, for example, if TMT or managers agree on the strategic goals of the organization, but they lack a consistent sense of how to realize and achieve their strategic goals. Definitely, the end result is low performance.

Subject of Consensus:

Regarding consensus among who (subject), 7 out of 32 studies determined consensus between and within TMT. 12 out of 32 among managers, and 5 have applied consensus among middle managers. Top level of organization is noted as the most popular locus of consensus. In Comparing these numbers with the rest, one out of 32 for each (Dominant strategy, making, strategy, team, or decision makers) that we have applied consensus among only one category may differ than others. This could be compared with the table of Homburg et. al., (1999) study, 6 out of 12 are TMT plus 3 are executives or and CEOs who could be countered as TMT and the rest are student lab. These inconsistent and different subjects of consensus (who consensus) are solid approved that lead to inconsistent studies' findings. This led the author of this study to note an important issue that the locus and positions of those who consensuses as hierarchically hold high power of authority in the organization, and other players in the organization such as employees and workers are not encountered in consensus. This also leads to note that the organizational structure; culture and environment change are not stable and in fact have great roles to positively or negatively impact the process of consensus. Markoczy L. (2001) raised questions regarding the number of consensus (scope of consensus), whether they change during the strategy management process or the number remains the same and confines only to TMT. And some other studies (e.g., Knight et. al., (1999) focused on what impacts and affects the SC like: TMT demographic diversity, and group processes. Moreover, Matho et.al., (2012) studied the influence of information flow on developing SC in organizations.

Here the author observes that there is a clear relationship between the concept and the subject of SC. How those who consensus conceptualizes the consensus. Their conceptualization determines the definition and how they will build consensus during strategic making process. Markozy, 2001 argued that TMT reached consensus during the rational strategic making process for strategy formation.

Object of Consensus:

As shown in Table #3, the content or the object of consensus (consensus on what) has been divided into 5 groups. The used words and phrases combining this concept are different within the selected studies. Strategic priorities are the most frequently used in which indicate their importance for achieving high OP (10 out of 32). The chosen strategy is the second (7 out 32) and goals and means is the third (5 out of 32).

The contribution of this study to the strategy management field could be summarized into a number of things. First, it provides proof that the study findings for SC-OP relationship are varied and inconsistent due to the reasons stated in this study hypothesis in addition to other reasons. Second, study has exerted every single effort to gather the important thirty-two (32) researches and studies in one place.

Future Research:

Author's future work could be extended in several directions. In this paper, author have studied the reasons behind inconsistent and different findings in SC studies focused on consensus definitions, consensus and what to be consensus (as termed subject and object of consensus). Future research could consider the following topics:

- 1- The impact of research methodology on research's findings of SC-OP
- 2- Research Methodology as a reason for different and inconsistent findings of SC-OP
- 3- The impact of organizational- conflict on SC-OP relationships.
- 4- The effects of strategy type on the SC-OP relationship
- 5- Investigating other mediators or and antecedents that have the contribution to SC development.
- 6- Studies about other factors which may moderate the strength of the relationship between consensus and performance.
- 7- Whether SC consensus differed through a strategic process

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Table # 1 showing SC definitions

#	<u>Definition words</u>	<u>Number of studies</u>
1	Agreement / level of agreement (11+6)	17
2	Shared understanding / shared perception /share cognition	15
Total		32

#	<u>Agreement Subjects: (who consensus)</u>	<u>N. of studies</u>	#	<u>objects (what to consensus/ consensus on what)</u>	<u>N. of studies</u>
1	TMT	7	1	goals & competitive methods – means & ends	5
2	Middle managers	5	2	group decisions	3
3	Senior managers / all managers	12	3	Strategy – specific type of strategy	7
4	Decision making	1	4	Strategy priorities - fundamental priorities	10
5	Strategy team	1	5	Environment	1

#	<u>Shared understanding /perception subjects (who consensus)</u>	<u>N. of studies</u>	<u>cts (what to consensus / consensus on what)</u>	<u>N. of studies</u>
1	TMT	3	strategic priorities /specific strategy relevant/environment nature	3
2	Managers	6	6 strategic priorities	6
3	Team members /org members	2	strategy /strategic priorities	2
4	Individual employees	1	strategy	1