

Strategic Communication Management and Corporate Strategy: An Integrated Perspective on Decision-Making and Sensemaking

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ABSTRACT

Strategic communication management has emerged as a critical component of organizational success in contemporary business environments. This article presents a comprehensive conceptual perspective on the relationship between communication management and corporate strategy by examining strategy as both a decision-making and interpretative process. The study reviews major approaches in strategic management research, including prescriptive and descriptive perspectives, and integrates them into the domain of communication management. The article highlights the interdependence between strategy formulation, stakeholder engagement, and organizational sensemaking. Two major dimensions of communication management—problem definition and stakeholder identification—are used to demonstrate the applicability of the proposed framework. The study argues that communication management intentionally shapes decision-making environments and contributes to both retrospective and prospective organizational interpretation processes. Furthermore, the article explains how strategic communication supports corporate strategy by facilitating interpretation, coordination, and organizational adaptation. By combining decision-making theory with interpretative perspectives, the paper offers a broader understanding of communication management strategy and contributes to ongoing discussions regarding strategy content and strategy process research.

Keywords: Strategic communication, Corporate strategy, Decision-making, Sensemaking, Stakeholder management, Communication management.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of strategy has long occupied a central position in the fields of communication management and public relations. In modern organizations, communication is no longer regarded merely as a supporting function; instead, it is increasingly recognized as an essential strategic capability that influences organizational effectiveness, reputation, and stakeholder relationships. As organizations operate within highly dynamic and interconnected environments, communication management has become closely associated with strategic planning, organizational decision-making, and corporate governance.

Two major dimensions explain the growing significance of strategy within communication management. First, communication management is widely viewed as an integral part of strategic management, contributing directly to organizational influence, coordination, and leadership processes. In this context, communication professionals are expected to participate in executive-level decision-making and organizational planning. Second, communication activities themselves must be strategically designed, implemented, and evaluated in order to ensure consistency, professionalism, and alignment with organizational objectives.

Despite the widespread use of the term “strategy” in communication literature, the theoretical foundations underlying communication strategy remain insufficiently developed. Existing studies often emphasize practical frameworks and prescriptive models without adequately integrating broader developments in strategic management

research. Consequently, there is a need for a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of communication management strategy that incorporates both decision-making and interpretative dimensions of organizational action.

This article seeks to address this gap by presenting an integrated conceptual perspective on communication management strategy. Drawing upon strategic management theory, decision-making theory, and interpretative approaches, the study explores how communication management contributes to corporate strategy formation and organizational sensemaking.

The Concept of Strategy

A. Strategy in Management Research

Strategy has been a central topic within management and organizational research for several decades. Strategic management literature has produced a wide range of theoretical approaches aimed at explaining how organizations formulate, implement, and evaluate strategies. These approaches are generally categorized into two broad streams: prescriptive approaches and descriptive approaches.

Prescriptive approaches emphasize rational planning, structured analysis, and deliberate strategy formulation. These approaches assume that organizations can systematically analyze their environments, identify objectives, and implement strategies designed to achieve competitive advantage. Linear and adaptive models of strategy formation are typically associated with this perspective.

In contrast, descriptive approaches focus on the actual processes through which strategies emerge within organizations. These perspectives emphasize interpretation, organizational learning, incremental adaptation, and the influence of environmental uncertainty. Rather than viewing strategy as a fully rational and predetermined process, descriptive approaches recognize that strategies often evolve gradually through organizational interaction and experience.

Another important distinction within strategy research concerns the difference between strategy content and strategy process. Strategy-content research focuses on the substance of strategic positioning and attempts to identify which strategies are most effective under specific conditions. Strategy-process research, on the other hand, examines how strategies are formed, implemented, and modified within organizational contexts.

Together, these perspectives demonstrate that strategy cannot be understood solely as a formal planning mechanism. Instead, strategy represents a dynamic organizational process involving interpretation, decision-making, adaptation, and coordination.

B. Strategy in Communication Management Literature

Within communication management literature, strategy has frequently been addressed from a practical and operational perspective. Many communication models and professional frameworks rely heavily on rational planning assumptions and emphasize the importance of structured communication campaigns, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement.

A large proportion of communication strategy literature is based on case studies, professional experiences, and applied management techniques. While these contributions offer practical value, they often lack strong theoretical grounding. Additionally, communication management research has traditionally accepted the strategic role of communication without critically examining the conceptual foundations of this assumption.

Several scholars have attempted to distinguish between different levels of strategic communication activity. For example, grand strategy is often associated with organizational mission, ethical orientation, and long-term

objectives, whereas communication strategies relate to the allocation of communication resources and the implementation of organizational goals. Tactical communication activities, in turn, refer to specific actions and operational practices designed to execute broader strategic intentions.

Corporate strategy and communication strategy are therefore interconnected rather than independent. Communication management functions as a translation mechanism through which organizational goals are interpreted, communicated, and operationalized across internal and external stakeholder groups.

Strategy Formation as Decision-Making and Interpretation

The traditional separation between prescriptive and descriptive approaches to strategy may be unnecessarily restrictive. A more comprehensive understanding of communication management strategy can be achieved by integrating decision-making theory with interpretative perspectives.

This integrated approach recognizes strategy as both a deliberate organizational process and a mechanism for constructing meaning within complex environments.

A. Strategy as a Decision-Making Process

From a decision-making perspective, strategy can be understood as a sequence of organizational decisions involving the selection of actions among multiple alternatives. Strategic decisions are typically associated with long-term implications, organizational rationality, and future-oriented planning.

Organizational decisions rarely occur in isolation. Instead, they are interconnected through existing structures, organizational routines, and institutional expectations. Strategic choices therefore exhibit path dependency, as previous decisions influence future possibilities and constraints.

Decision-making processes generally involve several stages:

1. Recognition of a problem or opportunity
2. Development of alternative solutions
3. Evaluation and selection of alternatives
4. Implementation and reassessment

These stages do not necessarily imply perfectly rational behavior. Organizations frequently operate under conditions of uncertainty, incomplete information, and environmental complexity. Consequently, strategic decision-making often reflects procedural rationality rather than complete optimization.

Communication management plays a significant role within this process by identifying communication-related challenges, facilitating organizational coordination, and supporting informed decision-making.

B. Interpretative Perspectives on Strategy

Interpretative approaches expand the understanding of strategy by emphasizing organizational sensemaking processes. From this perspective, strategic decisions are not merely technical or rational actions; they are also mechanisms through which organizations interpret their environments and construct shared meanings.

Organizations continuously attempt to understand complex external conditions, stakeholder expectations, and internal dynamics. Strategic communication contributes to this process by shaping organizational narratives, facilitating interpretation, and promoting coherence among organizational actors.

Interpretative perspectives highlight two important dimensions of strategy:

- Retrospective sensemaking, where organizations interpret past events and decisions to establish coherence and legitimacy.
- Prospective sensemaking, where organizations construct future-oriented interpretations that guide expectations and organizational behavior.

Communication management is central to both processes because it mediates interactions between organizations and their stakeholders while simultaneously influencing internal organizational understanding.

Communication Management and Corporate Strategy

The integration of decision-making and interpretative perspectives provides a valuable framework for understanding communication management as a strategic organizational function. Communication management not only supports organizational decisions but also contributes to the construction of organizational meaning and stakeholder relationships.

A. Strategic Communication Management

Modern organizations operate within environments characterized by uncertainty, complexity, and rapid change. Under such conditions, communication management cannot be limited to operational execution alone. Instead, communication functions must possess a degree of strategic autonomy that allows them to contribute actively to organizational adaptation and environmental interpretation.

Functional strategies within organizations are developed to support broader corporate objectives. Communication strategy represents one such functional strategy, aligned with overall corporate rationality while maintaining its own specialized responsibilities.

Communication management contributes strategically by:

- Interpreting stakeholder expectations
- Monitoring environmental developments
- Supporting organizational legitimacy
- Facilitating coordination between organizational units
- Translating corporate objectives into meaningful communication practices

As a result, communication management serves as both an operational and interpretative subsystem within the organization.

B. Problem Definition and Situational Analysis

A crucial aspect of strategic communication management involves the identification and definition of organizational problems. Strategic communication decisions are typically initiated when routine organizational processes become insufficient for addressing emerging challenges or opportunities.

Problem recognition may arise through:

- Environmental monitoring
- Crisis situations
- Stakeholder concerns
- Media developments
- Internal organizational tensions

Once a problem is identified, communication managers participate in defining its significance, interpreting its implications, and determining appropriate organizational responses.

Situational analysis therefore becomes a strategic activity that enables organizations to interpret uncertainty and develop coordinated responses.

C. Stakeholder Identification and Prioritization

Stakeholder identification and prioritization constitute another central dimension of strategic communication management. Organizations interact with diverse stakeholder groups, including customers, employees, regulators, investors, media institutions, and local communities.

Communication management contributes to corporate strategy by determining:

- Which stakeholders are most relevant
- How stakeholder expectations should be interpreted
- Which communication approaches are appropriate
- How organizational legitimacy can be maintained

Stakeholder relationships are often characterized by competing interests and conflicting expectations. Consequently, communication managers frequently face tensions between organizational objectives and stakeholder demands.

Strategic communication therefore requires balancing organizational rationality with external legitimacy. Effective communication management depends upon credibility, consistency, transparency, and responsiveness.

Organizations must also ensure coherence between internal and external communication practices. Inconsistencies between organizational actions and public communication can undermine trust and damage organizational reputation.

CONCLUSION

This study has presented an integrated conceptual perspective on communication management strategy by combining decision-making theory with interpretative approaches to strategy research. The analysis demonstrates that communication management functions not only as an operational activity but also as a strategic organizational capability that influences decision-making, interpretation, and stakeholder engagement.

The decision-making perspective contributes to understanding how communication strategies emerge through organizational choices, rationalities, and planning processes. Simultaneously, the interpretative perspective highlights the role of communication in organizational sensemaking, legitimacy construction, and environmental interpretation.

The study further demonstrates that communication management strategies cannot be separated entirely from broader corporate strategies. As functional strategies, communication strategies are closely linked to organizational objectives, stakeholder relationships, and environmental adaptation.

The integration of strategy-content and strategy-process perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of communication management. Strategic communication involves both the content of organizational positioning and the processes through which organizations interpret, negotiate, and implement strategic actions.

Ultimately, strategic communication management represents a dynamic organizational function that contributes to corporate success by supporting informed decision-making, stakeholder alignment, and organizational coherence in increasingly complex environments.

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