

The Role of Strategic Consensus in Improving Organizational Performance

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Abstract

Consensus is a general agreement that is agreed by all or almost all parties involved in decision making. In research on strategic consensus, this consensus is usually operationalized by measuring the extent to which managers have a common understanding of means and ends, or of strategic priorities. All these definitions and operationalizations focus on shared understanding. However, in several other studies consensus is not only a shared understanding, but also a commitment. Several strategic consensus studies looking at leadership in top management consider strategic consensus and strategic commitment as two dimensions of strategic consensus. Strategic consensus as a positive influence on strategic commitment has so far been established only for top management but should be applied to teams throughout the organization. Consensus was negatively correlated with performance. The difference in results was due to different definitions (operationalization) and different types of research conducted. Operationalization of consensus as a shared understanding of strategic priorities showed a consistently positive effect of consensus on performance.

Keywords: Strategic Consensus, Organizational Performance

Introduction

Several strategic consensus studies looking at leadership in top management consider strategic consensus and strategic commitment as two dimensions of strategic consensus (Amason, 1996; Dess & Origer, 1987; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1989). These studies of top management converge on the idea that as these top-level decision makers develop agreement about the importance of certain strategic priorities, they also develop a commitment to the realization of their own decisions. However, as the strategic process field evolved to focus on actors other than top managers, strategy research abandoned this approach and considered consensus and commitment as distinct constructs.

Strategic consensus as a positive influence on strategic commitment has so far been established only for top management teams (Dess & Priem, 1995; Dooley et al., 2000) but should be applied to teams throughout the organization. Research provides evidence that team members who share common goals and agreed-upon goals are more likely to feel motivated, empowered, and committed to the organization and their work (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Martocchio & Frink, 1994; Mathieu et al., 2008, Mathieu). , Heffner, Goodwin, Salas, &

Cannon-Bowers, 2000). Thus, that same effect holds for organizational strategic consensus and strategic commitment. Shared understanding, and thus social validation (van Knippenberg, van Ginkel, & Homan, 2013), among members in an organization will give them confidence in strategy; Strategic consensus leads to strategic commitment by influencing the perceived desirability and viability of the strategy. In addition, strategic consensus is a positive influence on strategic commitment because it can reduce the uncertainty associated with strategic change. Uncertainty about the (strategic) change process and the associated loss of control and fear of failure can invite negative responses to strategic change (Coch & French, 1948; Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006; Oreg, 2003). In contrast, reduced uncertainty is associated with greater support for change (Sharma & Good, 2013). By reducing uncertainty and increasing perceptions of the feasibility and desirability of strategic objectives, strategic consensus can build strategic commitment.

Strategic Consensus

Dess and Origer (1987) define consensus as a general agreement that is agreed upon by all or almost all parties involved in decision making. Knights et al. (1999) defined it as the degree to which the mental models of individual members overlap. In research on strategic consensus, this consensus is usually operationalized by measuring the extent to which managers have a common understanding of means and ends (Bourgeois, 1980; Bourgeois and Singh, 1983; Dess, 1987), or of strategic priorities (Bowman and Ambrosini, 1997). . All these definitions and operations focus on shared understanding. However, in several other studies (Dess, 1987; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990), consensus is not only a shared understanding, but also a commitment.

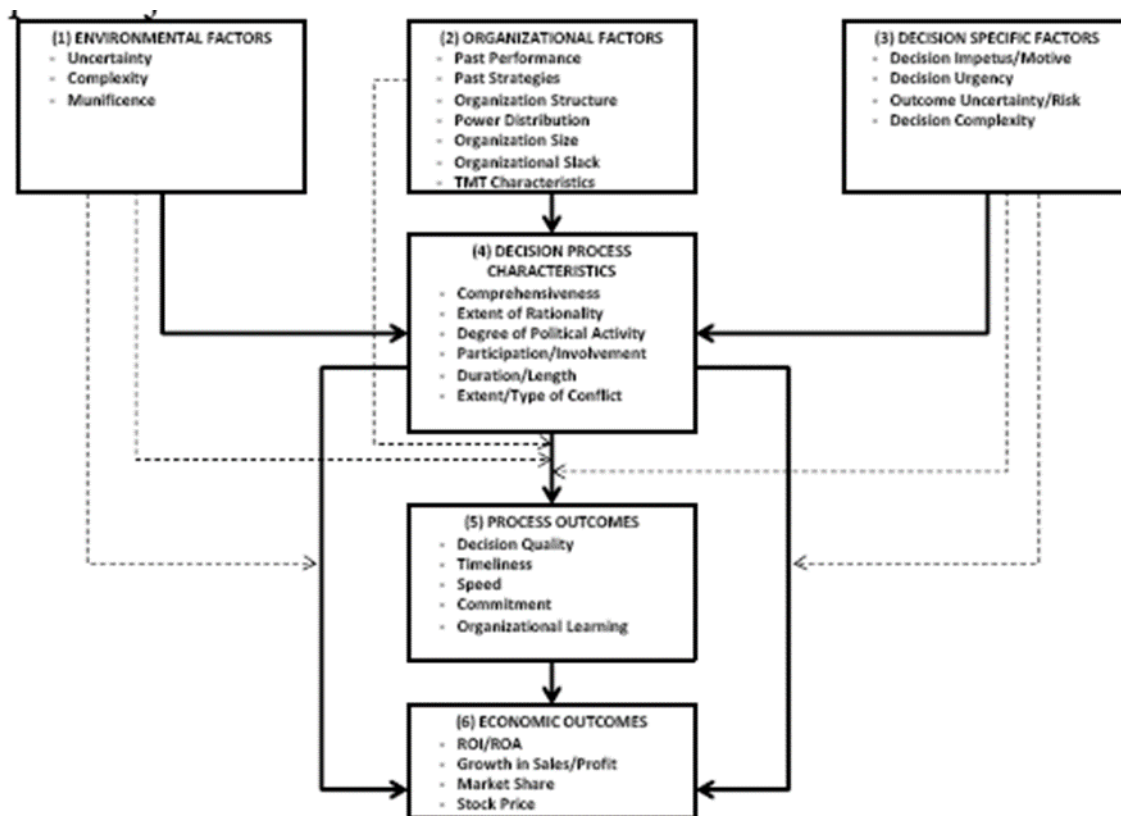
The rational-normative approach emphasizes the importance of consensus as an outcome in every stage in the strategy formulation process (Andrews, 1971; Ansoff, 1965). In the incremental-political perspective (Allison, 1971; Braybrooke and Lindblom, 1970; Cyert and March, 1963), implicit consensus is also an important factor in decision making. In this perspective, goals and methods are determined through a political process and power-based bargaining that leads to TMP consensus. Quinn (1980, p. 130) explicitly states the importance of consensus in the incremental approach, through his emphasis on the so -called 'crystallizing consensus'. Consistent with rational-normative and incremental-political perspectives, empirical researchers almost uniformly hypothesize a positive relationship between the level of consensus in TMP and firm performance (Priem, 1990 p. 469).

Strategic Decision Making Models

In the theme of strategic decision making, there are several models of decision making. Kownatzki (2002) explains that there are at least six models of decision making as follows: 1) *rational-analytical (synoptic)* or normative in which decision making is seen as a linear, systematic process, and has predetermined goals (Lechner, Mulier-Stewens, 2000); 2) *adaptive, external control, or contingency* where strategic decisions are deterministic because they are limited by the external environment (Duncan, 1972; Emery and Trist, 1965; Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967); 3) *strategic choice* which is between rational-analytical and external control, where management can determine and make decisions regarding the goals, domains, technology and structure of the company (Child, 1972; Hitt and Tyler, 1991), but at the same time they remain dependent on their environment and must continually adapt to their

surroundings (Keats and Hitt, 1988); 4) *politics and power* , where decision-making is seen as the result of bargaining and negotiation among several sub-units and individuals, each of which has different perceptions, personal interests and power imbalances; 5) *garbage can* , where decision making is seen as a simultaneous meeting between choice opportunities, problem solutions, participants, and problems (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki, 1992 p. 27); 6) *bureaucratic* which has a focus on the influence of routines, systems, and organizational structures on the decision-making process (Fredrickson, 1985; Lechner and Muller-Stewens, 2000; Rajagopalan, Rasheed and Datta, 1993).

In each stage of decision making in the normative (rational-analytical) model, there are many variables that can affect the output of each decision stage. Rajagopalan, Rasheed and Datta (1993) propose an integrative framework of the strategic decision-making process which consists of several factors that influence the decision-making process which are combined into several categories as described in Figure 1 below.



Gambar 1. Strategic Decision Processes: An Integrative Framework

In the integrative framework of strategic decision-making proposed by Rajagopalan, Rasheed, and Datta (1993) above, there are three groups of the most important antecedents in the decision-making process, namely: 1) environmental factors, 2) organizational factors, and 3) decision types. These three factors will determine the characteristics of the decision process (such as: participation, duration, conflict, political activity, rationality, comprehensiveness). The characteristics of the decision process will then produce process outcomes such as decision quality, speed, timeliness, commitment, and organizational learning.

The output of the decision process is an important factor to study because it mediates the relationship between the decision process and company performance (Rajagopalan, Rasheed, and Datta, 1993). Some of the outputs of the decision process include: 1) the speed of decisions that can affect the company's performance in a high velocity environment (Bourgeois and Eisenhardt, 1988; Eisenhardt, 1989; Baum and Wally, 2003), 2) decision comprehensiveness, namely 'the extent to which an organization carries out the process exhaustive or inclusive in making and integrating strategic decisions (Fredrickson and Mitchell, 1984), or the extent to which decisions are made based on careful analysis (Talaucar et al., 2005 p.522), 3) decision extensibility. Miller et al., (1998), namely the extent to which TMP uses a complete decision-making process in preparing long-term plans, 4) decision quality (Schweiger et al., 1986) uses six decision quality assessment criteria, namely: whether decisions use information available (best available information), uses valid assumptions, helps the organization achieve its goals, in accordance with existing conditions, is consistent with organizational strategy, and contributes to organizational effectiveness (Dooley and Fryxell, 1999 p. 396) or in general how far decisions provide the desired outcome (Eisenhardt and Zbaracki (1992).

Research in strategic management can be grouped into two categories: *content strategy* and *process strategy* (Rajagopalan, Rasheed, and Datta, 1993). Research on the strategy process has a focus on the process of how strategic decisions are generated and implemented, as well as the factors that influence them. In the realm of the strategy process, speed and consensus are two constructs that are often considered as trade-offs for the performance of an organization (Roberto, 2004). However, several other studies have shown that in addition to decision speed, consensus is an important factor to consider to achieve support and commitment from all members of the top management team (TMP) during decision implementation (eg Dooley, Fryxell, and Judge, 2000).

In research on strategic consensus, this consensus is usually operationalized by measuring the extent to which managers have a common understanding of means and ends (Bourgeois, 1980; Bourgeois and Singh, 1983; Dess, 1987), or of strategic priorities (Bowman and Ambrosini, 1997). . All these definitions and operationalizations have a focus on *shared understanding* . However, in several other studies (Dess, 1987; Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990), consensus is not only a shared understanding, but also a commitment.

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Dess and Origer's (1987) meta-study on consensus gave ambiguous results. Bourgeois (1980), Dess (1987), and Dess and Keats (1987) found evidence of a positive effect of consensus (consensus on goals, competitive methods, and environmental perceptions) on

performance. However, Bourgeois (1985) found a significant opposite relationship: differences in opinion in TMP regarding goals and perceptions of environmental uncertainty were positively related to performance. Grinyer and Norburn (1975) also found that consensus was negatively correlated with performance. Dess and Origer (1987, p. 320) proposed an explanation that the difference in results was due to differences in definitions (operationalization) and different types of research conducted. This is supported by Kellermanns et al. (2011) who found that research using operationalization of consensus as a shared understanding of strategic priorities showed a consistently positive effect of consensus on performance (Bowman and Ambrosini, 1997; Homburg et al., 1999; Rapert et al., 2002).

Priem (1990) proposes another explanation by stating that the relationship between consensus and performance is a curvilinear relationship. In extreme conditions where there are sharp differences of opinion and the CEO implements decisions unilaterally (authoritarian), performance can be worse because the implementation of decisions does not have the support of other members (Brodwin and Bourgeois, 1984 p.180). At the other extreme where there is perfect consensus, performance will also decline due to the negative effects of groupthink syndrome (Janis, 1972). Callaway, MR, Marriott, RG, & Esser, JK (1985) and the tendency to seek consensus when faced with threats (Staw, Lance, and Dutton, 1981) as well as the loss of the positive effects of minority dissent (Nemeth, 1986 Nemeth, CJ, & Kwan, JL (1987) which can stimulate divergent attention and thinking. That is, a consensus level that is too low or too high will reduce performance, or in other words there is an optimum consensus level point. For this reason, decision makers need to maintain a balance between consensus and difference of opinion, because essentially an organization can benefit from both consensus and dissent. A balance occurs when consensus does not become regimented and dissent becomes war (Hedberg, Nystrom, and Starbuck, 1976 p.56, Tarigan, S. (2013).

Priem (1990 p.471) states that consensus as an outcome can be achieved through at least three kinds of consensus processes: the 'traditional' consensus process, the dialectical process, and the devil's advocacy process. The 'traditional' consensus process can be carried out by asking decision makers to fully express their opinions (Priem, 1990 p.471) which is known as deliberation to reach consensus. This process is also termed as agreement seeking (Knight et al., 1999 p. 448). Different from the agreement seeking process, the other two processes, namely dialectical inquiries (DI) and devil's advocacy (DA) (Cosier, 1990; Mitroff, 1982; Schwenk, 1982, 1988; Cosier and Schwenk, 1990; Schwenk and Cosier, 1980), are more structured and use conflict. Both DI and DA are both constructive processes using the optimum level of conflict to reach a consensus (consensus outcome) about a solution or decision (Priem, 1990 p. 471).

Amason (1996) also found that this kind of affective conflict reduces decision quality and acceptance of the decision. Furthermore, Knight et al. (1999) found that the higher the interpersonal conflict, the less effort to undertake agreement seeking. The lack of effort among TMP members to reach agreement subsequently resulted in lower levels of consensus. On the other hand, a homogeneous TMP will have fewer interpersonal conflicts, resulting in more agreement seeking efforts which then result in higher consensus (Knight et al. 1999 p.450).

Amason (1996) found that cognitive (task-related) conflict increased consensus and satisfaction, but affective (interpersonal) conflict decreased it. Priem, Harrison, and Muir (1995) found that intentional cognitive conflict (as in DI/DA) would increase consensus on the

resulting decisions, while processes that concealed conflict (did not encourage cognitive conflict) actually prevented teams from reaching agreement because there was still a lot of conflict. unanswered questions concern alternatives that differ from the decision taken.

Consensus Rate, Decision Speed and Decision Support

Knights et al. (1999) showed that a more homogeneous TMP had less interpersonal conflict and was more likely to engage in agreement seeking in decision making. With less conflict, decisions can be made more quickly. Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Theoret (1976) state that conflict can cause interruptions so that it can slow down decisions. From the description above, it appears that the relationship between the level of consensus (consensus outcome) and speed of decision cannot be separated from the influence of conflict factors during the decision 'process'. However, Eisenhardt (1989 p.544) shows that it is not the level of conflict in the TMP that affects the speed of decisions, but rather the resolution of the conflict. The cognitive conflict (debate) required to improve decision quality (Schweiger and Sandberg, 1989) does not necessarily slow down decisions (Talaular et al., 2005). Eisenhardt (1989) found that in the face of conflict, companies that are quick to make decisions apply consensus with qualification where the TMP will first try to reach a consensus, but if that doesn't work, the CEO or the relevant VP is trusted to make decisions. In this way, the TMP can reach consensus while maintaining speed of decision. Eisenhardt (1989) also finds that sluggish firms do not have active resolution and allow conflicts to drag on until the TMP is finally forced to make decisions because time is running out due to deadlines (meaning low consensus, low decision speed) or waiting until consensus is reached in TMP, for example through the agreement seeking process (high consensus but low decision speed). Thus, in cases where there is high conflict (eg due to heterogeneous TMP), the use of agreement seeking may cause the level of consensus to be negatively correlated with decision speed if management does not have an effective conflict resolution mechanism such as conditional consensus (Eisenhardt, 1989). In situations where the TMP is homogeneous, there will be less conflict (high consensus) and higher decision speed (Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Theoret, 1976), or in general there is a positive correlation between the level of consensus and decision speed.

In addition to influencing the speed of decisions, consensus also affects how well decisions are implemented (Schweiger and Sandberg, 1991). Some early views in management science agree with the phrase of the Roman statesman Cicero "Diversity in council, unity in command" This means that differences of opinion are needed at the time of decision making, but once a decision has been made the team must build consensus, so that it is as if the two are independent (Dooley and Fryxell, 1999). However, a more modern view today sees that interactions in the decision process affect the formulation process as well as the implementation process (Schweiger and Sandberg, 1991). The pattern of relationships formed during strategy formulation will at the same time become the basis for its implementation. That is, consensus in the decision process will affect support and commitment at the time of implementation as shown by Parayitam, Olson and Bao (2010).

Innes (1996) Innes, JE, & Booher, DE (1999) in his writings states that the emergence of consensus building as a deliberative method has become more popular as a model for overcoming complex public problems by risking the interests of many parties. He also tried to draw conclusions from various opinions (Susskind & Cruikshank, (1987); Fisher & Scott, (1988); Carpenter, (1989); Carpenter & Kennedy, (1991); Potapchuk & Polk, (1994) and stated that building consensus are instructions that explain how to organize groups, arrange meetings and complete tasks.

Meanwhile Woltjer (2000, 2017)) defines Consensus Building as a process in which a group aims to get an agreement that is acceptable to all parties involved. A consensus will always reflect a clear group and a clear topic.

Local consensus building according to Innes (1996) will work most effectively in the context of a centralized system for growth planning and management, where countries, regions and regions explicitly develop and coordinate their policies and priorities. Furthermore, in the context of space, Purwanto, Djunaedi, Sudaryono, & Wibisono, (2012, 2016) state that the substance contained in the consensus is to build communication to reach an agreement on the use of space together both at different times and at the same time while maintaining the principle of togetherness. to respect each other and not harm the other party.

Consensus Building and Planning Solutions

Planners in practice will always be in contact with various forms of institutions and organizations, sometimes planners act as experts who provide technical prescriptions and on the other hand are needed as facilitators who communicate various organizations and interest groups (Ebrahim & Ortolano, 2001). Planners' attention to how to use information and communicate has also been the concern of researchers (eg; Habermas, (1984); Fischer & Forester, (1993); Sager, (1994); Innes, (1998). decisions including in public policy need to be clearly stated, will decision making by consensus be related to the concept of *collaborative planning* , or may be closely related to *communicative planning*, then what about stakeholder involvement and assistance that will intersect with *participatory* and *advocacy planning* and how decisions What can be taken that might require negotiations that lead to *transactional planning* ? The next question is if indeed these various concepts are interrelated, how is the relationship between the various concepts and what is their role in finding the best consensus ? To explain this relationship, it may be useful to review a little about the planning typology in question.

Rittel & Webber (1973) describes how to find scientific solutions to social policy problems will always fail, because the problems are "wicked problems", while science develops to overcome "tame problems". Although Rittel & Webber (1973) also explained that the "wicked problems" in question are not intended to describe evil things but rather mathematical problems that are resistant to resolution, at least this explains that truth in social policy is very relative. Even in a diverse society, it is said that there are no undisputable public goods, no objective justice, policies on social problems are difficult to say right or wrong and there is no definite solution. Furthermore, Innes, (1996) concludes that at this time building consensus through rational communication is very important, because various groups have representatives who are able to communicate, even though they are interpreted as "knowing"

people, only to defend their interests. Consensus building is also said to have no clear boundaries, is always adaptive and constantly evolving and usually begins in informal discussions between stakeholders. Among other things in the context of strategic planning as in several reviews below:

1. Communicative Planning

Communicative planning is characterized by the view that planning is a series of long-term processes that focus not only on the object of planning but also on the process and its communication. The communicative planning process is open in the sense of being inclusive and transparent; the public can gain knowledge of what is going on, *communicative planning* aims to advance deliberative democracy by exploring the potential for broad agreement on planning, in some cases the issue of inclusive deliberation is resolved politically. This planning model helps the democratic process to generate equitable benefits by attempting to reduce the systematic influence of power relations bias on dialogue-determined recommendations (Sager, 1994). Healey (1993) argues that communicative planning is not only innovative, but has the potential to change where in the end the transformative potential of communicative action lies in the power embodied in better arguments.

2. Collaborative Planning

Described by Healey (1998) that collaborative planning is the result of a decision-making process by incorporating a strategic point of view, involving various stakeholders with their respective desires, meeting to discuss problems and find solutions by building ways of thinking and acting collectively by changing and organizing re-plan in a new post together. Collaborative planning is communication-based planning where consciously or unconsciously the negotiation process takes place in discussing mutual agreements. Friedmann (2003) then concludes that Sager (1994), Forester (1989, 2017) and Healey (1998) collaborative planning have shifted the discourse of planning theory from planning as a means of control to one of innovation and action, which in turn, raises questions. about what values to follow, what strategies to use and how to continue community and/or stakeholder participation?

3. Participatory Planning

Habermas' theory of communicative rationality is the basis for the emergence of participatory planning. The rationale is that strategic action, especially in social science phenomena, can be explained by referring to the communicative action of Jari I. Niemi (2005, 2018). It can be noted that the success of the action largely depends on the communication capacity of the actor. Forester (1982) in his article discusses how strong information is linked to the planning process and claims that misinformed and manipulative actions can result from: 1) information that is unclear and incomplete, 2) is not sincere and cannot be trusted, 3) is not inappropriate and invalid, and 4) Inaccurate or even false.

While Marxists in their argument believe that there is great value in community participation and planning must accommodate the needs of the wider community (Klosterman,

1986). According to Arnstein (1969) public participation - where he uses the terms of citizen participation - provides space for citizens who do not have the right to take part in the political and economic process. Furthermore, he described community participation in a ladder pattern that corresponds to the level of involvement, namely: 1) Manipulation, 2) Therapy, 3) Informing, 4) Consultation, 5) Placation, 6) Partnership, 7) Delegated power, and 8) Citizen control.

One of the plans that requires a very large involvement of actors is participatory planning because it not only requires planners, the government to prepare the planning process but also involves citizens. Participatory planning is a critique of planning systems that only occupy certain levels of society, therefore, some communities are left behind.

4. Advocacy Planning

Advocacy Planning was put forward by Davidoff (1965), where Davidoff thinks that planners must be able to participate in the political process as advisors of every interest both for the government and other groups, organizations and individuals who care about the policies proposed for community development in the future. The benefits of this approach, based on Davidoff (1965), are: 1. Planners will provide better information to the public on the alternative choices offered to them; 2. Urge councils to compete with other planning groups to win political support; 3. Force those who have criticized the council's plans to better prepare their plans.

Transactional Planning Friedmann (1973) has challenged the planning model as a form of rational decision making in his book "Retracking America; A Theory of Transactive Planning". Where in his book Friedmann argues that the rational model has worked itself out, and that a new way of thinking about planning is needed that will emphasize the relationship between knowledge and action (Friedmann, 2003). Transactive planning itself is a bridge that fills the communication gap between technical planners and their clients. Friedmann concludes that there is a need for a decision-making method based on a shared learning process as a response to the growth of technocrats. Thus, interactive planning allows planners and clients to learn from each other, both regarding the client's experimental abilities and the planner's technical knowledge, until the two knowledges merge and change the perceptions of both parties.

5. Consensus-Building

Innes (1996) Innes, JE, & Booher, DE (1999) in his writing entitled "Planning through Consensus Building a New View of the Comprehensive Planning Ideal" which is a response to Alan Altshuler's criticism of the legitimacy of comprehensive planning, states that the emergence of consensus as a method of deliberation has provided an opportunity to reformulate the concept of comprehensive planning. Consensus building has emerged together with the idea of "Communicative Rationality" in planning which adopts the basic idea of Habermas (1984), and then related to policy making developed by Dryzek (1990, 2006), and applied in planning by Forester, (1989); Sager, (1994); Innes, (1995), and others.

CONCLUSION

Before a team can commit to a strategy, team members need to know and understand the strategic vision. Thus, we argue that research on strategic consensus, a shared understanding of organizational strategy, forms an important starting point in developing an understanding of how team managers' visionary leadership can influence team strategic commitment. The rich research tradition in strategic management supports the central role of strategic consensus in strategy implementation. This is because strategic consensus reduces the pursuit of subunit goals over organizational goals and facilitates communication, collaboration, and coordination focused on strategy realization.

Several strategic consensus studies looking at the top management team consider strategic consensus and strategic commitment as two dimensions of consensus. These studies of top management teams converge on the idea that as these top-level decision makers develop agreement about the importance of certain strategic priorities, they also develop a commitment to the realization of their own decisions. However, as the strategic process field evolved to focus on actors other than top managers, strategy research abandoned this approach and considered consensus and commitment as distinct constructs. Shared understanding, and thus validation among team members gives them confidence in strategy; Strategic consensus leads to strategic commitment by influencing the perceived desirability and viability of the strategy. In addition, strategic consensus is a positive influence on strategic commitment because it can reduce the uncertainty associated with strategic change. Uncertainty about the (strategic) change process and the associated loss of control and fear of failure can invite negative responses to change. In contrast, reduced uncertainty is associated with greater support for change. By reducing uncertainty and increasing perceptions of the feasibility and desirability of strategic objectives, strategic consensus can build strategic commitment.

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