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Emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation

A management perspective

International Business

Master's thesis

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We live in an era of constant change, in which technology and society evolve so fast that they challenge organizations to rethink their ways of adapting their businesses to meet rapidly changing needs and remain competitive in the market. In recent years, the world has been shaken by major, globally influential events, which together with the fourth industrial revolution have placed great uncertainty in the operating environment of organizations. In the spring of 2020, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) forced most countries in the world to go into lockdown, and two years after that, in February 2022 Russia invaded Ukraine with military forces. These events have influenced the way current management models are perceived and led to the review of new standards for management, in which emotional intelligence has been identified as one component.

A constantly changing environment has affected the working life and competencies that individuals are required to have to succeed at work. Changes in working life have challenged organizations' management to reconsider, which competencies organizations need to achieve excellent performance and competitive advantage in the market. Achieving superior performance relative to its rivals requires developing a detailed plan, a strategy, by which an organization determines its goals and mission. Sometimes changes in the operating environment require a radical change from the organization, which may imply engaging in strategic change, and successfully implementing a new strategy requires certain skills and competencies from management.

The purpose of this study is to examine what is the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation. The research topic is examined from a management perspective to better understand whether managers' emotional intelligence is a relevant skill when implementing a new strategy. In this qualitative interview research, the research data was collected through five semi-structured interviews with participants who either work themselves in managerial positions or work closely with the organizations' management. The data were transcribed, coded, categorized, and synthesized through data analysis, which was conducted as an inductive process. To assess the trustworthiness of the research results, they were discussed with the existing literature, and their managerial implications were presented.

According to the study results, emotional intelligence was seen as an important skill in working life in general and for individuals in managerial positions. The results of the research showed that emotional intelligence was considered a skill that promotes the implementation of strategy, which is manifested in communication. In a qualitative study, the conclusions are not based on the generalizability of the research data, but the aim is to better understand the phenomenon being studied by focusing on the quality of the research data instead of the quantity. However, to improve understanding of the role of emotional intelligence in a business context, especially in a situation of change, future research could broaden the focus from emotional intelligence to competencies that managers need to manage emotional issues in their work and how they could benefit from them.

Keywords: Emotional intelligence, Strategy implementation, Communication, Strategic change, Management

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Elämme jatkuvan muutoksen aikakautta, jossa teknologia ja yhteiskunta kehittyvät erittäin nopeasti, haastaen organisaatioita miettimään, miten niiden tulisi mukauttaa liiketoimintatapojaan vastaamaan nopeasti muuttuvia tarpeita sekä säilyttämään kilpailukykynsä markkinoilla. Viime vuosina maailmaa ovat ravistaneet suuret, globaalisti vaikuttavat tapahtumat, jotka yhdessä neljännen teollisen vallankumouksen kanssa ovat aiheuttaneet merkittävää epävarmuutta organisaatioiden toimintaympäristössä. Keväällä 2020 koronaviruspandemia, COVID-19, pakotti useimmat maat sulkeutumaan, ja kaksi vuotta tämän jälkeen Venäjä hyökkäsi Ukrainaan sotilasvoimin. Nämä tapahtumat ovat vaikuttaneet tapaamme tarkastella nykyisiä johtamismalleja ja johtaneet uusien johtamisstandardien tarkasteluun, jossa tunneäly on tunnistettu yhdeksi komponentiksi.

Jatkuvasti muuttuva toimintaympäristö on vaikuttanut työelämään ja taitoihin, joita yksilöiltä vaaditaan työssä menestymiseen. Muutokset työelämässä ovat haastaneet organisaatioiden johdon pohtimaan, mitä osaamista organisaatiolta vaaditaan tulevaisuudessa erinomaisen suorituskykyyn sekä kilpailuedun saavuttamiseksi markkinoilla. Kilpailussa pärjääminen edellyttää yksityiskohtaisen strategian laatimista, jonka kautta organisaatio määrittää tavoitteensa ja tehtävänsä. Joskus ympäristön muutokset johtavat radikaaliin muutokseen yrityksessä, mikä voi tarkoittaa strategiseen muutokseen ryhtymistä. Uuden strategian onnistunut implementointi edellyttää johdolta tietynlaisia taitoja ja osaamista.

Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena on tarkastella tunneälyn roolia viestinnässä strategian implementoinnissa. Tutkimusaihetta tarkastellaan johdon näkökulmasta, jotta ymmärrettäisiin paremmin, onko johtajien tunneäly merkityksellinen taito uutta strategiaa implementoidessa. Tässä laadullisessa haastattelututkimuksessa tutkimusaineisto kerättiin viiden puolistrukturoidun haastattelun kautta, joihin osallistuneet työskentelevät joko itse johtotehtävissä tai läheisessä yhteistyössä organisaatioiden johdon kanssa. Tietojen analysointi suoritettiin induktiivisena prosessina, jossa tutkimusaineisto litteroitiin, koodattiin, luokiteltiin ja syntetisoitiin. Tutkimustulosten luotettavuuden arvioimiseksi niitä käsiteltiin olemassa olevan kirjallisuuden kanssa ja esiteltiin niiden vaikutukset johtamiseen.

Tutkimustulosten mukaan tunneäly nähtiin tärkeänä taitona työelämässä yleisesti sekä johtotehtävissä toimiville henkilöille erityisesti. Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat, että tunneälyä pidettiin strategian implementointia edistävänä, viestinnässä ilmenevänä osaamisena. Laadullisessa tutkimuksessa johtopäätökset eivät perustu tutkimusaineiston yleistettävyyteen, vaan tavoitteena on ymmärtää paremmin tutkittavaa ilmiötä keskittymällä tutkimusaineiston laatuun sen määrän sijaan. Kuitenkin parantaakseen ymmärrystä tunneälyn roolista liiketoiminnassa, erityisesti muutostilanteessa, tuleva tutkimus voisi laajentaa painopistettä tunneälystä kompetensseihin, joita johtajat tarvitsevat käsitelläkseen emotionaalisia ongelmia työssään ja miten he voisivat hyötyä niistä.

Avainsanat: Tunneäly, Strategian implementointi, Viestintä, Strateginen muutos, Johto

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction 9

1.1 Background and motivation 9

1.2 Research purpose and questions 12

1.3 Structure of the thesis 13

2 Literature review 14

2.1 Emotional intelligence 14

2.1.1 Concept of emotional intelligence 14

2.1.2 The five components of emotional intelligence 15

2.1.3 Emotional intelligence in organizations 19

2.2 Strategy implementation 23

2.2.1 Concept of strategy implementation 23

2.2.2 Strategy implementation frameworks 24

2.2.2.1 A framework to implement strategies 25

2.2.2.2 Strategy implementation effectiveness framework 29

2.2.3 Successful strategy implementation 33

2.3 Emotions and emotional intelligence in strategic management 37

2.3.1 Emotions in strategic management 38

2.3.2 Emotions and strategic change 39

2.3.3 Management's emotions and emotional intelligence in strategy implementation 42

2.4 Synthesis of the theory section 45

3 Research methods 51

3.1 Research approach 51

3.2 Data collection 55

3.2.1 Data collection in qualitative research 55

3.2.2 Selecting and collecting the interview data 59

3.3 Data analysis 62

3.4 Trustworthiness of the study 68

3.5 Research ethics of the study 71

4 Results 75

4.1 Emotional intelligence in strategy implementation 75

4.1.1 How emotional intelligence is present in organizations 75
4.1.2 Emotional intelligence as manager's skill 77
4.1.3 The role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation 80

4.2 Strategy implementation 82

4.2.1 How strategies are implemented in organizations 82
4.2.2 Elements of strategy implementation in practice 84
4.2.3 Who performs strategy implementation? 85

4.3 Strategy implementation from management's perspective 87

4.3.1 Management's responsibilities in strategy implementation 87
4.3.2 Two levels of management in strategy implementation 90
4.3.3 Issues preventing management from implementing the strategy 93

4.4 The connection between strategic communication and emotional intelligence 95

4.4.1 Strategic communication in practice and the role of emotional intelligence in it 95
4.4.2 What is the relationship between strategic communication, strategy implementation and emotions 98
4.4.3 How organizations succeed in strategic communication and how emotional intelligence can contribute to it 101

5 Conclusions 104

5.1 Discussion 104

5.2 Theoretical contribution 107

5.3 Managerial implications 109

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research 111

6 Summary 113

References 117

Appendices 126

Appendix 1 Interview questions 126

Appendix 2 Operationalization table 127

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Strategy implementation framework 26
Figure 2. Strategy implementation effectiveness framework 30
Figure 3. Theoretical background of the study 49
Figure 4. Categories developed during the data analysis and their relationships 68

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. The five components of emotional intelligence at work 16
Table 2. Summary of the interviews 62
Table 3. Coding process in data analysis 65
Table 4. Seven most relevant categories 67

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and motivation

In recent years, the world has been shaken by major, globally influential events. In the spring of 2020, the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) hit the globe forcing each of us to put our normal lives on hold and endure the uncertainty caused by a new and unknown force. The two-year pandemic-focused era ended when Russia invaded Ukraine on 24 February 2022. The ongoing war has affected the world multidimensionally, caused uncertainty, and changed the world in many areas, such as the economy, energy, food markets, and the mobility of people and goods (European Council 2023; NPR 2023). The pandemic forced organizations to find new ways to cope with radical changes in the operating environment, and it triggered a rethinking of existing management models that have not considered the current era of constant change (Kao 2020). In addition to the pandemic and the war between Russia and Ukraine, a significant force affecting the environment is the current environment of the fourth industrial revolution.

The fourth industrial revolution has challenged the traditional way of thinking about work and managing people, and affected the competencies required in working life (Aalto Leaders' Insight 2018; Lindinger 2020). Previous industrial revolutions were triggered by the advents of factories, electricity, and the computer, but the fourth industrial revolution goes beyond technological innovations and blurs the boundaries between the digital, physical, and biological worlds (Aalto Leaders' Insight 2018). Changes resulting from the fourth industrial revolution are a combination of digitalization and globalization, and the relationship of work to time, place, and employment is in transition globally. The increased use of automation and artificial intelligence is changing the skills required from the work force and managers are required to be more sensitive and dialogic to find out what works in different work cultures. (Aalto Leaders' Insight 2018; World Economic Forum 2016.) So, instead of just leading organizational processes or the introduction of recent technology, managers also need to manage the emotions caused by changes taking place in working life. (Aalto Leaders' Insight 2018; World Economic Forum 2016.) When it comes to leadership, perceptions of what qualities are required from managers have also changed in recent decades. In the 1970–1980s leadership was largely based on authoritarianism and leaders gained power through their titles. However, times have changed and in the 2020s, instead of authoritarianism, softer approaches are valued in

leadership, like emotional leadership, which can also be considered emotional intelligence. (Helsingin Sanomat 2020.)

In 2020, Sitra's (The Finnish Innovation Fund) publication discussed the five most influential megatrends and metatrends shaping the future. Metatrends comprise forces that are still undertaking shapes, giving their spice to the interplay and tensions between megatrends. The publication identified three metatrends, one of which is the emphasis on the importance of emotions. The world is becoming an increasingly complex, contradictory and even chaotic place, which can arouse strong and negative emotions in people, such as anxiety, fear and anger. With this, when considering models of human activity, it is even more important to pay attention to the importance of emotions. (Sitra 2020.) World Economic Forum (2020) has listed emotional intelligence as one of the most important working life skills of the 2020s and Deloitte's report of Human Capital Trends (2020) has acknowledged emotional intelligence as one of the qualities required for a business to succeed. In general, the ability to connect with others on an emotional level is today considered an important skill in working life because it helps people understand each other better (Lindinger 2020). Importance of emotional intelligence as a competence also applies to an organization's management. When considering the current era and the demands that it sets for leadership, Kao (2020) has identified six intelligences that drive smart leadership, one of which is emotional intelligence. To lead an organization successfully, managers need to understand the emotional connections that customers and employees have with the organization and with its services and products. Managers with a high degree of emotional intelligence are usually capable of recognizing how people respond, observe, and behave. In addition, emotional intelligence helps one to react as the situation requires, which promotes creating a pleasant experience with the people around. Emotional intelligence can be applied in organizations in several ways, for example to improve organizational performance or organizational culture. However, in order to do so, it is necessary for the organization's management to first understand what emotional intelligence is and secondly to know how to employ it in their work. (Lindinger 2020.)

The world has become a complex and demanding place, where continuous and rapid changes are inevitable, and globalization is a major influencing factor. To survive and remain competitive in dynamic and unstable markets, companies are required to constantly evaluate and develop their businesses. (Huy 2002; Murthy 2007, 2–3; Stroh

2014.) Sometimes, changes in the operating environment can cause the need for changes in the company's strategy. Implementing a new strategy successfully is crucial for an organization, yet it can be a challenging process (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 415–416). Many organizations are said to succeed in strategy formulation but fail in implementing the strategy (Markiewicz 2011, 259–264). The reason organizations fail to implement a strategy is said to be due to a lack of management training, unclear roles and responsibilities, the treatment of strategy formulation and implementation as individual elements of the strategy process, project longevity, and complexity. (Hrebiniak 2006, 12–15.) The success of the implementation of the strategy is influenced by several factors, one of the most important of which, however, is communication (Noble 1999, 120; Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 415–416; Markiewicz 2011, 264–266; Hill & Jones 2012, 9–10). In connection with changes affecting their business, organizations should consider not only their operations but also their personnel and the emotions that the changes may arouse in them. Changes tend to evoke negative emotions in people, such as resistance. Thus, in addition to having to figure out how to cope with radical changes in their operating environment, organizations need to find out how to deal with people's emotional reactions in situations of change. (Huy 2002; Murthy 2007, 2–3; Stroh 2014.)

In business, decision-making has typically been based on facts, numbers, and rational thinking, and emotions have not been given much weight. However, since people with emotions perform a large part of the operations of modern organizations, it is difficult for companies to completely ignore the importance of emotions in business. Emotions, for instance, affect decision-making, especially in tough situations when the pressure is on. One example of an organization that has understood the importance of emotions is Nokia whose executive team exploited emotions as leverage in its strategy work. It is said that one of the reasons why Nokia collapsed was the atmosphere of fear, created by the former director of Nokia. Due to fear the staff at Nokia did not feel safe speaking up their mind and the communication between top and middle management was poor. (Fredman & Siilasmaa 2018.) In their study, Vuori and Huy (2016, 9) found out that the shared emotions of Nokia's top and middle managers, especially fear, caused behavior that harmed the smartphone innovation process and its outcome. The top management's fear was caused by the company's external factors such as shareholders and competitors, while middle management was afraid of the company's internal stakeholders, including

superiors and colleagues. Because of fear, top management put pressure on middle management without being fully transparent about the seriousness of external threats and they interpreted middle management's communication biasedly. Middle management's fear in turn raised the threshold to report challenges and raise red flags to the top management, which resulted in the top management having a distortedly optimistic perception of the company's technical capabilities. (Vuori & Huy 2016, 9.) As Nokia's example shows, emotions can affect organizational processes, their outcome, and decision-making. Perhaps Nokia could have avoided some problems if the shared fear and the resulting challenges had been recognized in the organization and the management had been able to resolve the situation. This view is supported by Camilla Tuominen (Valtiolla.fi 2019), who has stated that management plays a key role in leading emotions at the workplace which in turn leads to improved performance of an organization. Thus, organizations can benefit from improving emotional intelligence skills (Valtiolla.fi 2019).

In this study, I am interested in the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from management's perspective. In the business context, emotional intelligence has received attention when studying the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership, and the impact of managers' emotional intelligence on their followers (Gardner & Stough 2002; Arvisais 2003; Antonakis et al. 2009; Clarke 2010; Görgens-Ekermans & Roux 2021). However, in this study, I want to find out if emotional intelligence has a role to play in strategy implementation. More specifically, I look at the research topic through the lens of individual skill, meaning that I am interested in whether the emotional intelligence of a person in a managerial position is relevant to the implementation of a strategy. Individual managers form company management and hence their emotional intelligence skills can contribute to the management of the company. To discuss the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation at the organizational level, the research questions presented in the next section have been prepared to examine the research topic from the perspective of company management instead of an individual manager.

1.2 Research purpose and questions

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from management's perspective. Thus, the main research problem to study the purpose of this thesis is *what is the role of emotional*

intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from management's perspective? To investigate the research problem and to guide the research process, the following three research questions have been formed:

- **RQ1:** How does the management view emotional intelligence?
- **RQ2:** How does the management view the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation?
- **RQ3:** How does emotional intelligence manifest in communication?

The first research question aims to provide information on how individuals in managerial positions understand and perceive emotional intelligence. The second research question seeks to provide information about the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation and delves into the management perspective on the topic. Finally, the third research question focuses on how emotional intelligence manifests itself in communication.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters in total. After the introduction, the literature review is dealt with in the second chapter. The literature review introduces the most relevant literature for research, which the researcher has become acquainted with during the research process. From the literature review, the thesis continues to first describe the selected research methods and data collection, and then the third chapter is finalized with a discussion of the trustworthiness and ethics of the study. The fourth chapter discusses the results of the qualitative empirical study through four subsections, and the fifth chapter discusses the conclusions drawn from the research results. Finally, the sixth chapter finishes the thesis with a summary.

2 Literature review

This section discusses the literature review that provides a basis for the study. First, emotional intelligence and its role in the organization are discussed. After that, the concept of strategy implementation is described, two frameworks for strategy implementation are presented, and factors for successful strategy implementation are discussed. Lastly, the section ends with a discussion on emotions and emotional intelligence in the context of strategic management.

2.1 Emotional intelligence

A great deal of research has indicated that an individual's intelligence quotient (IQ) does not predict performance success as well as competencies that combine cognitive, social, and emotional skills, which can be referred to as emotional intelligence. Although an individual's cognitive abilities are relevant to the success of the top performance, for instance when applying for a high-quality university, the IQ is not of much importance when a person tries to surpass his or her peers. What is more important is the ability to come along with colleagues and to push forward through challenging times. Especially when viewing performance in middle- and upper-level positions, the distinguishing factors are related to emotional intelligence and competencies that separate top performers from moderate performers rather than IQ. Although emotional intelligence is not itself a strong predictor of success at work it provides the foundation for competencies required in social interactions, which are crucial for success. (Webb 1984, 33–34.)

2.1.1 Concept of emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence refers to the collection of social and personal management skills, which contribute to success in the workplace and in life in general. It covers matters such as character, intuition, cohesion, motivation, good relationships, and communication skills. (Sterrett 2000, 2.) In addition, emotional intelligence describes a capacity, ability, skill, or self-perceived capability to recognize, assess and control the emotions of oneself, of the group, and of others (Serrat 2010, 168). The ability to manage feelings and deal with stress is a key element of emotional intelligence. Empathy and the ability to understand how and when to express emotions and how to control them are other important aspects of emotional intelligence. (Webb 1984, 34–35.) Emotional intelligence

is considered as an individual skill that helps a person in social adaptation, learning, and change, and affects how a person can identify, express, and regulate emotions (Huy 1999, 325). An emotionally intelligent individual is highly aware of his or her own emotions, even the discreet ones, and can identify and manage them. In addition, emotionally intelligent individuals are particularly attuned to understanding the emotions experienced by others. (Alzoubi & Aziz 2021, 132.)

Originally, the term emotional intelligence was introduced by Mayer and Salovey (1990), who defined the term as: a shape of intelligence which includes the ability to monitor other's and one's own emotions and feelings, to make a distinction between them and to exploit this information to direct one's thinking and actions. Later, these authors further developed the definition of emotional intelligence as follows: the ability to notice emotion, to access and create emotions to facilitate thought, to comprehend emotions, and manage emotions to enhance personal growth. (Mayer & Salovey 1997, 22.) As defined by Huy (1999), attributes of emotional intelligence include empathy, sympathy, hope, emotional authenticity, love, and playfulness. How emotional intelligence is perceived in working life context, is largely based on the definition developed by Daniel Goleman (Hill & Jones 2012, 21). In 1995, Goleman published the book "Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ", which has played a significant role in further study on emotional intelligence (Dulewicz and Higgs 2000, 341). The book has challenged the way to view human intelligence, emphasized the role of emotions in individual success, thought, and decision making, and introduced the concept of emotional intelligence to the wide audience (Goleman 1995). In addition to introducing the term to the public, Goleman was the first who applied the concept to business and brought the concept into working life (Goleman 1998a; 1998b). This study uses Goleman's definition when discussing emotional intelligence because it has been applied in business, especially in cases dealing with leadership, and because the definition has been acknowledged in working life. Although this study does not focus on leadership, it however touches on related topics by considering management's perspective of the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation. Thus, Goleman's model of emotional intelligence is discussed in more detail next.

2.1.2 The five components of emotional intelligence

In his attempt to bridge the gap between the social skills that are required for top job performance and emotional intelligence, Goleman (1998a) has made a difference between

emotional intelligence and emotional competence. According to Goleman (1998a, 24), "emotional competence is a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work". Emotional intelligence is defined to consist of five emotional competencies, which can be divided into categories of personal competencies and social competencies. Personal competencies comprise competencies of self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation, which are said to determine how we manage ourselves. Social competencies include empathy and social skills, which in turn dictate how we manage relationships. (Goleman 1998a, 26–27.) In the work context, emotional intelligence can be recognized, for instance, in situations where an employee has provided good customer service or embodied trustworthiness. Being able to provide good customer service is an emotional competence that is based on empathy, and trustworthiness is a competence based on self-regulation, including the ability to manage emotions and impulses well. (Goleman 1998a, 25.) Table 1 presents the five components of emotional intelligence and describes their main characteristics, considering the work environment (Goleman 1998b, 95).

Table 1. The five components of emotional intelligence at work (Goleman 1998b, 95)

	Definition	Characteristics
Self-Awareness	the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others	self-confidence realistic self-assessment self-deprecating sense of humor
Self-Regulation	the ability to control or redirect disruptive impulses and moods the propensity to suspend judgement-to think before acting	trustworthiness and integrity comfort with ambiguity openness to change
Motivation	a passion to work for reason that go beyond money or status a propensity to pursue goals with energy and persistence	strong drive to achieve optimism, even in the face of failure organizational commitment
Empathy	the ability to understand the emotional makeup of other people skill in treating people according to their emotional reactions	expertise in building and retaining talent cross-cultural sensitivity service to clients and customers
Social Skill	proficiency in managing relationships and building networks an ability to find common ground and build rapport	effectiveness in leading change persuasiveness expertise in building and leading teams

The first component of emotional intelligence is self-awareness which consists of emotional awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence (Goleman 1998a, 26). Self-awareness comprises having a profound understanding of one's emotions, needs, drives, strengths, and weaknesses. (Goleman 1998b, 95–96.) "Hallmarks of self-awareness are self-confidence, realistic self-assessment, and self-deprecating sense of humor. People with strong self-awareness are honest – with others and themselves – and they are not too critical or unrealistically optimistic." (Goleman 1998b, 95–96.) Being able to recognize how one's feelings affect both oneself, other people, and the work performance, is typical for people who have a high degree of self-awareness. For instance, when having a tight deadline, people with strong self-awareness tend to organize their time carefully in order to finish work on time and manage their emotions under time pressure. In customer work, a high level of self-awareness is useful, as it helps to understand what effect the customer's actions can have on one's own work, and to understand customers and their feelings better. In addition, it promotes an understanding of one's values and objectives. A person with strong self-awareness acts in accordance with their values and goals and makes decisions that support them. A lack of self-awareness can lead to making decisions that conflict with a person's values and cause inner turmoil. In practice this can mean, for instance, accepting a well-paid job which a person, however, finds very boring. (Goleman 1998b, 96.)

The second component of emotional intelligence, self-regulation, can be regarded as an ongoing inner conversation that prevents us from being captured by our feelings. Self-regulation allows one to control emotional impulses and even to channel them in beneficial ways. (Goleman 1998b, 98.) Self-regulation comprises attributes of self-control, conscientiousness, trustworthiness, innovation, and adaptation (Goleman 1998a, 26). "Hallmarks of self-regulation are trustworthiness and integrity, comfort with ambiguity and openness to change" (Goleman 1998b, 95). As individuals with strong self-regulation are in control of their impulses and feelings, they can create an environment of trust and justice. In such an environment, productivity is often high and internal conflicts are reduced. In addition, self-regulation can be regarded as a competitive advantage as it facilitates dealing with uncertainty and constant changes, which are common in business. People who can control their feelings do not usually panic about the changes but are able to deal with them. Self-regulation is an important attribute for

management as it improves integrity that is not only an individual advantage but an organizational strength too. (Goleman 1998b, 98–89.)

If one needs to name one trait that drives individuals to successful performance, it is motivation. Motivation consists of commitment, achievement drive, optimism, and initiative. (Goleman 1998a, 26.) Motivated individuals are driven to achieve their goals and beyond them. Often people are motivated by external factors, such as a big wage or an impressive title. In contrast, some people's motivation is based on a profound embedded ambition to achieve something for the sake of achievement. (Goleman 1998b, 99.) "Typical hallmarks of motivation are strong drive to achieve, optimism and organizational commitment" (Goleman 1998b, 95). Motivated people are often enthusiastic about their work since they are driven by factors that go beyond status or money. Their drive to do things better is natural and they also desire a way of tracking improvements whereas people with low motivation tend to be ambiguous about their goals and results. When highly motivated people confront tough situations, for instance in matter of results, they typically remain optimistic. In such situations, motivation for achievement is combined with self-regulation, which helps to overcome the depression and disappointment caused by a setback. (Goleman 1998b, 99–100.)

Out of all components of emotional intelligence, empathy is the most easily identified. Empathy is a feature that people are familiar with from their personal life. For instance, seeing a sad friend awakens in us a feeling that makes us want to comfort our friend. That feeling is empathy. (Goleman 1998b, 100.) Empathy allows us to understand others, help others to develop themselves, be oriented to serve, advance diversity, and be politically aware (Goleman 1998a, 27). "Empathy's hallmarks are expertise in building and retaining talent, cross-cultural sensitivity and service to clients and customers" (Goleman 1998b, 95). However, in business empathy is seldom considered as an admired feature and the tone of the word itself sounds not suitable for tough business environment. It is often thought that hard business decisions and empathy cannot go hand in hand. Nonetheless, instead of treating empathy as a sentimental nonsense, it should be regarded as thoughtful consideration of others' feelings. As an example, to make smart decisions, a manager needs to understand employees' feelings, but not try to please everyone or adopt the feelings of others. Another noteworthy point is that globalization imposes a requirement to do well in intercultural communication and to prevent misunderstandings by understanding the message behind the spoken words. (Goleman 1998b, 100.)

The fifth component of emotional intelligence is social skill which characteristics, especially in the workplace, are: "effectiveness in leading change, persuasiveness, and expertise in building and leading teams" (Goleman 1998b, 95). Social skills embody the ability to elicit desired responses in others and includes attributes of communication, influence, leadership, conflict management, collaboration and cooperation, team skills, change catalyst, and coalition builder (Goleman 1998a, 27). Though social skill could be imagined as a simple attribute of friendliness, it is not just that. Social skill means friendliness with a purpose: guiding people in the desired direction. This can be, for instance, directing people towards agreeing on a fresh marketing strategy. Social skill can be considered as the culmination of the other components of emotional intelligence because social skill, which is managing relationships, is enhanced when a person is capable of being empathic, is able to manage and understand their own emotions, and is motivated. Since social skill is the outcome of the other components, it is easily recognizable in the workplace. For instance, socially skilled people are good at managing teams because they know how to exploit empathy at work. Briefly, socially skilled people know how to apply and combine all components of emotional intelligence to act socially well according to the situation. (Goleman 1998b, 101–102.) This section has focused on emotional intelligence at the individual level and how individuals manifest emotional intelligence in the work context through its five components. To better understand the relevancy of emotional intelligence at the organizational level, the next section discusses how organizations can benefit from emotional intelligence and what factors affect it in organizations.

2.1.3 Emotional intelligence in organizations

The importance of emotional intelligence has been recognized in many professions as a key factor for effective work performance (Cherniss 2000, 433–434). Several studies have indicated that an individual's emotional intelligence predicts high performance at work (e.g., Webb 1984; Mount et al. 2006, 64; O'Boyle et al. 2011; Chao et al. 2017; Kaur & Sharma 2019). In their study, Kaur and Sharma (2019) deduced that emotional intelligence positively affects work performance and organizational commitment. According to research involving several organizations, almost two-thirds of the competencies associated with superior performance were emotional or social features like flexibility, self-confidence, empathy, persistence, and the ability to have a good relationship with others. (Cherniss 2000, 433–434.) In organizations, not only individuals

but also teams benefit from the competence of emotional intelligence. Teams that are emotionally intelligent are likely to bond faster and have stronger social networks than emotionally unintelligent teams. The bond between team members promotes high team performance and faster project completion compared to teams with lower emotional intelligence. (Caruso et al. 2006, 196.) In addition, the literature review shows that emotional intelligence has been recognized as a factor that contributes to managerial effectiveness (e.g., Webb 1984; Dulewicz & Higgs 2003; Shipper et al. 2003). As stated by Goleman (1998b, 84), 90 percent of the competencies needed in leadership positions are related to emotional and social features. In similar vein, Hess and Bacigalupo (2013) indicate that emotional intelligence competence is especially important for every leader as it enhances the quality of decision-making and attainment of organization's goals. In addition to promoting organizational leadership, emotional intelligence also affects other areas in organizations. Kannaiah and Shanthi (2015) state in their study that the role of emotional intelligence in organizations is crucial as it facilitates the organization to develop a competitive advantage, adapt to changes, make decisions, understand colleagues better and improve leadership qualities.

Goleman (1998a; 1998b) has investigated how emotional intelligence is applied at work and the connection between emotional intelligence and effective performance, specifically in leaders. Goleman (1998b, 82) has stated that one thing that unites the most effective leaders is the high degree of emotional intelligence. Leaders' IQ and technical skills, like analytical mind and innovativeness are also important in business, but they are regarded as the entry-level requirements for executive positions. Emotional intelligence facilitates leaders to outperform in their work and it is seen as a prerequisite for good leadership. (Goleman 1998b, 82.) In his research, Goleman's (1998b, 84) objective was to identify which personal capabilities promoted superior performance within 188 organizations taking part in the research, and to what extent they did so. These capabilities were divided into three groups: technical skills (e.g., business planning and accounting); cognitive abilities (e.g., analytical reasoning); and competencies of emotional intelligence (e.g., ability to work with others) (Goleman 1998b, 84). In order to develop some of the competency models, lists of competencies representing organization's superior leaders were collected from senior managers of organizations taking part in the research. As a result, a list of attributes for highly effective leaders was created, which included attributes such as strategic vision and initiative. Analysis of the research data showed that technical skills and cognitive abilities promote excellent performance and are particularly

important. However, the results indicated that for jobs at all levels, skills of emotional intelligence are twice as important as the others. Additionally, the results proved that the role of emotional intelligence is increasingly important in positions at the highest level of the organization. (Goleman 1998b, 84.)

When examining the factors affecting emotional intelligence in organizations, the importance of culture emerged in the literature. The influence of culture on emotional intelligence seems to be significant. For example, cultural background affects the way of communication. In United States, managers can use emotions in communication to underline their message and even exaggerate their emotional expressions whereas Japanese managers tend to apply a non-emotional approach when communicating organizational issues. (Gunkel et al. 2013, 260.) In their research, Gunkel et al. (2013) studied the effect of cultural dimensions on emotional intelligence by using a sample of 2067 people from nine different countries. In analyzing the research data and identifying differences between cultures, Gunkel et al. (2013) utilized Hofstede's (2001, 29) cultural dimensions, consisting of five dimensions: power distance; collective versus individualism; masculinity versus femininity; uncertainty avoidance; and long-term versus short-term orientation. The research results indicated that cultural dimensions of collectivism, long-term orientation, and uncertainty avoidance affect emotional intelligence positively. As one practical example, the study suggested that individuals in culturally highly collectivistic countries are better able to understand their own emotions and express them, than individuals in countries with high individualism. (Gunkel et al. 2013, 268.) Scott-Halsell et al. (2013) examined the effect of culture on the emotional intelligence of undergraduate students and their research findings showed that there is a remarkable difference in the level of emotional intelligence depending on students' cultural background. The difference was especially significant between students from Western and Eastern cultures. Students from Western cultures, which are typically individualism oriented, scored better in evaluating the level of overall emotional intelligence than students representing Eastern culture which are typically collectivistic. (Scott-Halsell et al. 2013, 348.)

The results of these two studies are contradictory in how they present the effect of collectivism on emotional intelligence. Gunkel et al. (2013) suggest that collectivism has a positive effect on emotional intelligence while the research results by Scott-Halsell et al. (2013) indicate that collectivism is linked to lower levels of emotional intelligence. However, Scott-Halsell et al. (2013, 349) also discuss that the results scores in their study

may indicate students' lack of experience with emotional responses, leading to poorer performance in emotional intelligence. In addition, another likely reason for contradictory in research results might be due to differences in selected components of emotional intelligence to be measured. This idea is supported by the observation made by Schlaegel et al. (2022, 1569) in their research, according to which not all dimensions of emotional intelligence affect job performance and job satisfaction equally. Although this study is not focused on cultural issues and their impact on emotional intelligence, the author nevertheless sees that it is important to consider the influence of culture in discussion about emotional intelligence in organizations, because multiculturalism is part of the everyday life of many organizations, especially those doing international business. Thus, it is important to be aware also in the context of this study that cultural factors have an impact on emotional intelligence, its application and manifestation.

Based on the literature review, it seems that the most significant benefits of emotional intelligence in the organizational context are the promotion of individual and teamwork performance, and the improvement of leadership (Webb 1984; Goleman 1998a & 1998b; Dulewicz & Higgs 2003; Shipper et al. 2003; Caruso et al. 2006, 196; Mount et al. 2006, 64; O'Boyle et al. 2011; Chao et al. 2017; Kaur & Sharma 2019). To flesh out the discussion about emotional intelligence in organizations, the author wanted to highlight the influence of culture on emotional intelligence. Internationality and multiculturalism are commonplace for many companies in the 2020s. Managing employees from diverse cultural backgrounds can pose challenges to the management, and navigating between different cultures requires management to find a suitable balance and approach to management. The author sees that understanding and knowledge about the effects of culture on emotional intelligence can improve leadership in organization for two reasons. First, acknowledging the cultural differences and their effects on emotional competencies and behavior can contribute to the collaboration within management team. Second, recognizing diverse cultural backgrounds within the organization and understanding their effects on personnel's emotional competencies can facilitate management in adjusting the appropriate leadership style and interpreting the emotional climate of the organization. This section has discussed the concept of emotional intelligence, its components, and application in organizations. When examining the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, it is important to comprehend what is meant by strategy implementation in addition to the concept of emotional intelligence. Thus, the following

section discusses the concept of strategy implementation and how strategies can be implemented successfully.

2.2 Strategy implementation

Although strategy implementation is considered a crucial factor in organizational success, little attention has been paid to it in strategic management research. Most of the attention in strategic management research has been paid to strategy formulation, yet the greatest challenges in strategy process are typically encountered in implementing the strategy. (Noble 1999, 132; Hrebiniak 1990, 74; Hrebiniak 1992, 392; Greer et al. 2017, 137; Amoo et al. 2019, 445.) A lack of research on strategy implementation and inconsistency in conducted research has been noted in the academic field by several authors already for quite some time (e.g., Noble 1999, 119; Okumus 2003, 871). However, despite previous attention to the limitations of the research, the situation does not appear to have changed significantly as recent studies have made similar observations (e.g., Greer et al. 2017, 137; Amoo et al. 2019, 445; Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 22).

2.2.1 Concept of strategy implementation

Noble (1999) suggests that one reason for inconsistency in research on strategy implementation may be due to a variety of perspectives on the concept and a lack of clear models on strategy implementation. This view is supported by Hrebiniak (1990, 74), according to whom the definition of strategy implementation is ambiguous, but it involves a range of factors and what is considered important in the implementation process depends on the organization. Some organizations may focus on organizational structure when pursuing to meet their strategic objectives, other firms may apply techniques of incentive plans and management motivation while some focus on matters of coordination and control in implementation process. In his study, Noble (1999) collects and combines various perspectives on strategy implementation and presents differences within the academic field on the topic. According to Noble's (1999) study, research done by then could have been classified into two main groups: structural views and interpersonal process views. Research taking a structural view has focused on studying the impacts of organizational structure and control mechanisms on strategy implementation whereas studies taking interpersonal process views emphasize the importance of interpersonal processes in strategy implementation. Research emphasizing interpersonal processes has

dealt with topics such as strategic consensus in organization and among the management (commitment), autonomous strategic behaviors (what happens when there is a lack of consensus and commitment), trickle down process in implementation, leadership styles, and communication and interaction. (Noble 1999, 120–131.)

Although the concept of strategy implementation comprises different perspectives and priorities depending on the organization and situation, a few definitions, and examples of basic elements for strategy implementation are provided next to help the reader to form an overview of the concept. Based on his extensive study, Noble (1999, 120) defines strategy implementation as communication, adoption, interpretation and drawing up strategic plans. Hill and Jones (2012, 9–10) consider strategy implementation as putting strategies into action, which requires taking actions at the corporate, business, and functional level. In practice, strategy implementation can comprise, for instance, adjusting the way a product is designed, market segmentation and expanding through mergers and acquisitions, and planning the best organization structure, culture, and control systems. (Hill & Jones 2012, 9–10). This view is supported by Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002, 415–416) and Markiewicz (2011, 264–266), who have proposed that strategy implementation can be considered a process that transforms strategic plan into actions and ensures that these actions are executed in a way that supports achieving the strategic goals defined in the plan. As proposed by Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002, 415–416), the elements of strategy implementation are communication; interpretation; action; and adoption. For the sake of achieving an organization's vision, it is important that the interaction between these elements is effortless. Markiewicz (2011, 259–264) suggests companies consider the questions who, where and how in connection with strategy implementation. The following section discusses two frameworks to provide an overview of how strategies are implemented.

2.2.2 Strategy implementation frameworks

Many well-known models and tools published in the field of strategic management have focused on strategic planning and strategy formulation and the literature offers a variety of different models and tools for these phases in strategy management process, such as SWOT analysis that is mostly credited to Albert Humphrey and his research team at Stanford University in the 1960s (Bergman 2014), Porter's Five Forces (Porter 1979),

Blue Ocean Strategy (Chan & Mauborgne 2005), and Five Ps for Strategy (Mintzberg 1987). However, a lack of commonly agreed framework for implementation of the strategy has been recognized by several authors who have indicated the importance of process and framework in strategy implementation (Noble 1999; Okumus 2003; Hrebiniak 2006; Tawse & Tabesh 2021).

This study presents two frameworks for strategy implementation. The decision to choose these frameworks to be discussed in this study has been influenced by the information they provide about the key factors of strategy implementation and the effectiveness of strategy implementation, as well as the importance of management's human competencies and capabilities in strategy implementation. The first framework to be discussed is by Okumus (2003), which provides a good overview of strategy implementation by presenting the key factors of strategy implementation in organizations, and their interrelatedness. The second framework describes strategy implementation effectiveness. The framework by Tawse and Tabesh (2021) is based on Noble's (1999) thorough work on different perspectives on strategy implementation and provides a comprehensive view of factors affecting strategy implementation effectiveness. The framework by Tawse and Tabesh (2012) helps to better understand the importance of management's human competence for strategy implementation and is therefore interesting for this study.

2.2.2.1 A framework to implement strategies

In the framework developed by Okumus (2003), strategy implementation is seen as a process taking place in the strategic context, in which each factor is interrelated. Several other authors support this view, such as Hrebiniak (1990; 1992; 2006), Pettigrew (1987), and Schmelzer and Olsen (1994). In total, Okumus (2003, 875) has identified 11 key factors in the implementation of the strategy: strategy development; environmental uncertainty; organization structure; organizational culture; leadership; operational planning; resource allocation; communication; people; control; and outcome. These factors are further grouped into four categories (strategic content; strategic context; operational process; and outcome) that form the main elements of strategy implementation framework (Figure 1).

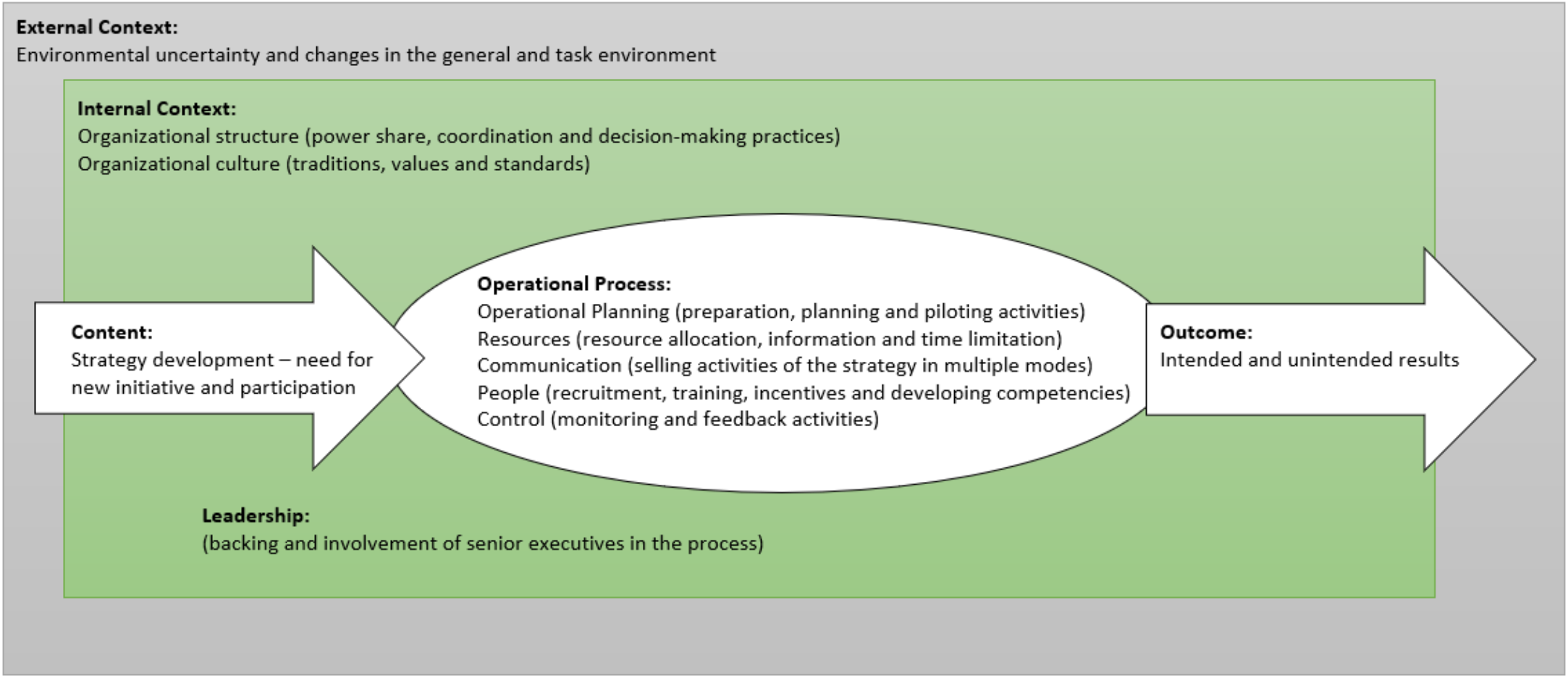

Figure 1. Strategy implementation framework (Okumus 2003, 876)

Strategic content comprises the development of a strategy and explains why and in what way a strategy is established (Okumus 2003, 875). Pettigrew (1987, 657) also presents formulation of a new strategy as a content. When developing a strategy, it is important to consider the following matters: consistency between the new strategy and the strategic direction of the organization, clear goal setting, required competencies and knowledge of strategy developers, effective participation of all levels of management, the possible influence of current and future activities on the new strategy, and the possible influence of the new strategy on current strategic activities. (Okumus 2003, 875–876.)

In connection with a strategic change, formulating a new strategy inevitably involves managing its context and process (Pettigrew 1987, 657). The context is divided into two parts, external and internal context. The first of these comprises the environmental uncertainty, and economic, social, political, and competitive operating environment of the organization. Internal context includes the organizational structure, organizational culture, leadership, and political issues within the organization. (Pettigrew 1987, 657; Okumus 2003, 876.) The key issues to be considered in relation to external context involve developments and changes in the environments surrounding the organization that require the development of a new strategy, considering the prevailing market situation, developments, and trends. Organizational structure, which is included in internal context, comprises the distribution of power, coordination, and decision-making practices within the organization. In connection with the new strategy, the following issues related to the organizational structure should be considered: the possible changes in roles, responsibilities, decision-making, and reporting relationship; choice of suitable structure that enables the effortless flow of information, cooperation and coordination across organizations; the possible influence on politics, informal networks and main shareholders; the experienced attitudes of powerful groups towards the new strategy; and the potential problems due to the usage of existing structure when applying process variables such as resource allocation, communication and operational planning. Organizational culture consists of traditions, values, and standards, and it reflects the collective understanding of how things are done in the organization. Issues to be considered regarding organizational culture include the culture and subcultures existing in the company and their potential effects on the implementation process; the effect of organizational culture on cooperation, communication and coordination between all levels of management and different functions; the effects of the new strategy on the

culture and subcultures within the company; and the attempts and activities to change the overall culture and subcultures in the company and possible challenges. (Okumus 2003, 876–877.) Viewing organizational culture is interesting from the point of view of the research topic because culture defines how the organization relates to the issues of emotional intelligence. Lastly, leadership in the internal context refers to the chief executive officer's (CEO) participation and support in strategic action. Leadership plays a crucial role in both applying process factors and manipulating the internal context to build circumstances open to change. Herewith, issues to be considered in regards with leadership comprise the level of involvement of the CEO in the development of the strategy and implementation process, the level of support from the CEO throughout the implementation process, and the CEO's communication on the project and its significance. (Okumus 2003, 876–877.)

The last two categories of Okumus's (2003, 877) framework are operational process and outcome. The operational process consists of five factors (operational planning; resource allocation; people; communication; and control and feedback), which are described next shortly. Operational planning refers to initiating a strategic project and operational planning of the activities and tasks required in the implementation process. In addition to initiating and planning, developing operational plans and activities for implementation require active participation and feedback from the management and operating areas. To ensure that a company has all the prerequisites to implement a new strategy, such as time, funding, knowledge, and skills, it needs to go through a resource allocation process in close conjunction with operational planning. In regards with resource allocation, a company should, in addition to previously described resources, consider cultural and political issues within the firm and how they can influence resource allocation. Operational planning and resource allocation have a direct effect on the people factor. This factor comprises the recruitment of required personnel, and the acquirement and development of new knowledge and skills to implement the strategy. In addition, consideration of people factor involves providing training for managers and employees and ensuring that incentives spur the implementation activities. (Okumus 2003, 877–878.) In the strategic management literature, the importance of communication in strategy implementation is apparent (Noble 1999; Hrebiniak 1990; Hrebiniak 1992; Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002; Okumus 2003; Hrebiniak 2006). Communication consists of techniques that share the information, both informal and formal, of the new strategy. When

communicating its strategy, it is important that a company puts effort on sending clear messages both inside and outside the organization. As its communication materials, a company can utilize operational planning, incentives, and training programs. In addition to these issues, a company should consider in which ways it wants to communicate its strategy. (Okumus 2003, 877–878.) This is one point where the author sees the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation as apparent. Harnessing emotional intelligence in communicating strategy enables the organization to deliver its message in a way that considers the emotional climate of the organization affecting recipients. The last factor in the category of operational process is control and feedback. This factor deals with those techniques that are used to monitor the progress of strategy implementation process and compare the achievements with predetermined objectives. Factors that are central to control and feedback comprise communication and operational planning. Lastly, the category of outcome in the framework refers to the result of implementation process, both intended and unintended as well as tangible and intangible. When considering a factor of outcome, a company should figure out if the implementation has been conducted according to the original plan and whether predetermined goals have been achieved. If not, it should find out the reasons for this. In addition, a company should consider what it has learned during the implementation process and how it could benefit from the lessons learned in the future. (Okumus 2003, 877–878.)

In the framework by Okumus (2003), all factors are considered to play a vital role in the implementation process and each of them can influence the dynamics of the process. Thus, the implementation process should be examined and assessed from the holistic point of view over an extended period of time, which is also referred to as the contextual and processual approach (Okumus 2003).

2.2.2.2 Strategy implementation effectiveness framework

The framework by Tawse and Tabesh (2021, 25) described in Figure 2 consist of three components: actions through which managers influence on the process of strategy implementation; conditions that are necessary for effective strategy implementation; and dynamic managerial capabilities required for constituting the best possible consolidation of conditions through managerial actions.

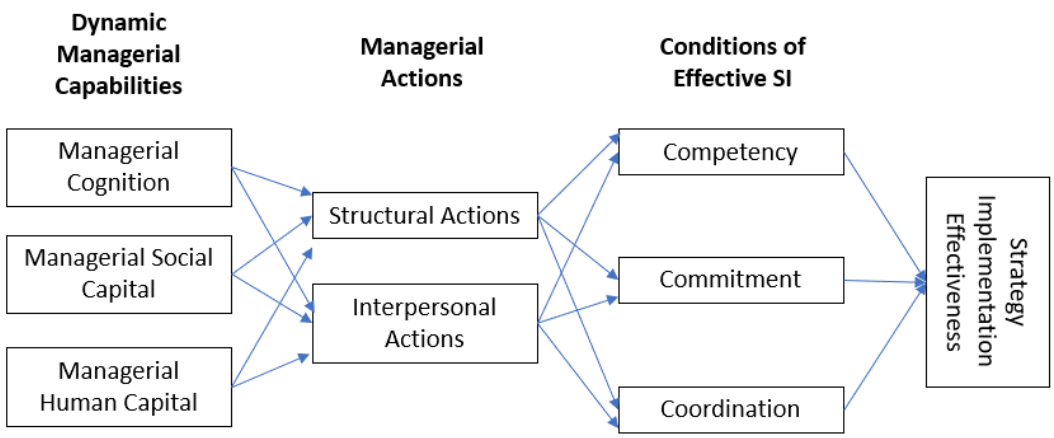

Figure 2. Strategy implementation effectiveness framework (Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 25)

In the middle of Figure 2 is described two types of managerial actions influencing effectiveness of strategy implementation: structural actions and interpersonal actions. Managerial actions comprise the ways through which managers can influence the implementation process, and which are used to adopt, communicate, and execute a strategic initiative or a strategy. (Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 23–25.) The classification of managerial actions is based on Noble's (1999) comprehensive study of the implementation of the strategy and existing perspectives on the subject. As described earlier in this thesis, structural view focuses on investigating the impacts of organizational structure and control mechanisms, and interpersonal view emphasizes the importance of interpersonal processes in strategy implementation (Noble 1999).

According to Tawse and Tabesh (2021, 26), significant components of the structural view include the employment of goals; tools for visualization purposes; and the Balanced Scorecard. These components can facilitate the definition of responsibilities, planning and monitoring of activities related to the implementation of the strategy, and the causal integration of group and individual activities into strategic objectives. In addition, the importance of policies and reward systems as managerial actions is emphasized since they can have a remarkable impact on strategy implementation effectiveness (SIE). (Tawse & Tabesh 2021. 26.) Structural actions can be employed to promote behavior supporting strategy implementation and identify achievements in strategy implementation. In addition to structural actions, an individualized touch is required to achieve SIE, which is presented as interpersonal actions in the framework. Interpersonal actions comprise informal or formal human interactions affecting emotions and actions of others. Activities included in this category are influencing, facilitating, championing, discussing, selling, team building, coaching, and supporting. An activity that is considered a core managerial

action and is included in all activities described above is communication. The importance of communication, both top down and bottom up, and across organizations, to strategy implementation success is emphasized and poor communication has been identified as the major obstacle to strategy implementation. (Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 26.)

On the right-hand side of Figure 2 are described three conditions (competency; commitment; and coordination) which define required components for effective strategy implementation (SI) and explain how managerial actions affect SIE. Instead of representing actions performed by managers, conditions describe the emergent state resulting from managerial actions and reflect three significant components required for SIE. The condition of competency refers to skills, abilities, and the knowledge that are required for performing tasks supporting strategic objectives. Commitment refers to the extent of determination in which organization members are prepared to fulfill their responsibilities in strategy implementation and to support strategic goals. Finally, coordination comprises harmonization of activities across all levels within organizations. To implement the strategy effectively, all three conditions must be met at a sufficient level and any deficit in them will lead to some form of failure in implementation. (Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 27–28.)

Lastly, the last part of the framework comprises dynamic managerial capabilities consisting of three categories: managerial cognition; managerial social capital; and managerial human capital. Dynamic managerial capabilities (DMC) demonstrate why some companies succeed better in strategy implementation than others and reflect the underlying managerial capability to build the most appropriate combination of conditions through suitable managerial actions. (Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 28–29.) Study findings show that the level of managerial cognition, social capital, and human capital, which are achieved through managerial actions, define the level of competence, commitment, and coordination attained. Managerial cognition determines how well managers predict and master the process through which actions affect SIE. (Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 29.) This may mean, for instance, adjusting the way decisions are made in accordance with the feedback received regarding the implementation process. Managerial social capital refers to the capability to influence others. In addition to enabling managers to communicate strategy in effective manner, managerial social capital helps managers to identify with the most important individuals in strategy implementation process and to connect with their perspectives. In case there is no connection, it is possible that the social-emotional

identities take over and impair efforts of strategy implementation. The third category of DMC, managerial human capital, comprises the knowledge, skills, education, and experience of managers. Together, components of DMC determine how competent managers are to collect information, understand problems, and effectively select and manipulate managerial actions in such a way that they have a positive effect on the effectiveness of the implementation of the strategy. (Tawse & Tabesh 2021, 28–29.)

According to Okumus (2003), strategy implementation is a process that takes place in a strategic context. In addition to providing information on the key factors in strategy implementation, Okumus's (2003) framework explains the relationships between them, and their effects on the dynamics of the strategy implementation. From the Okumus's (2003) framework, the internal context factors organizational culture and leadership, and operational process factor communication are particularly interesting for this study because they are related to the discussion of the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation. By combining the information regarding emotional intelligence and its features with the key factors in strategy implementation, one can recognize how the role of emotional intelligence manifests itself and is connected to strategy implementation. Thus, the Okumus's (2003) framework facilitates to understand what the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation is. The framework by Tawse and Tabesh (2021) in turn enables a better understanding of the factors affecting the strategy implementation effectiveness with an emphasis on managerial capabilities and actions. As this study deals with human skills, emotional intelligence, and its impact on strategy implementation, the framework by Tawse and Tabesh (2021) is of interest to this study, especially because of its Dynamic Managerial Capabilities (DMC) section, which demonstrates the importance of cognitive, social, and human capital of management in strategy implementation. In this manner, this framework demonstrates how human competencies are related to and important for strategy implementation. More importantly, it enables a deeper understanding of factors influencing strategy implementation, especially in terms of human competencies, in which emotional intelligence is included. Elements of strategy implementation will be discussed more in the next section when looking at the factors affecting the success of strategy implementation.

2.2.3 Successful strategy implementation

Despite strategy implementation may sound a straightforward process, it is however quite a complex and challenging exercise. Implementing strategies successfully is especially important for every organization as without successful implementation, even an excellent strategy is useless. The success of strategy implementation requires a comprehensive understanding of both the content of the strategy and the context in which the implementation takes place. (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 415–416.)

Several authors (Noble 1999; Hrebiniak 1990; Hrebiniak 1992; Okumus 2003; Hrebiniak 2006; Cândido & Santos 2015) have discussed the difficulty of implementing strategy. According to Markiewicz (2011, 259–264), many organizations succeed in the constitution of vision and strategy, but fail executing the strategy, which is often due to the gap between strategy formulation and strategy implementation. As noted by Cândido and Santos (2015, 237), "it is often claimed that 50-90% of strategic initiatives fail". Hrebiniak (1990, 74) states that strategy implementation is difficult because the process involving several variables and decisions is complex, shared decision making and interdependence are challenging to manage, organization may be lacking ability to set up adequate control and monitoring systems, and quirks due to the social or human nature of organizations. Although the factors complicating the process are situation-specific and may vary, there are some issues that organizations typically need to consider implementing strategy successfully. In his earlier work Hrebiniak (1990; 1992) has defined key implementation issues, which include strategy formulation; organizational structure; coordination and controls; incentives; culture and politics; technical feasibility; and the CEO's commitment. Later, Hrebiniak (2006) defined some general issues that inhibit strategy implementation. These include lack of training for managers in strategy implementation (education typically focuses on strategy planning); managers' assumption that it is the responsibility of top management to plan strategy and implementation is to be performed by lower-level employees; treatment of formulation and implementation as a separate parts of the strategic management process; the longer time frame of implementation process than the time required for strategy formulation; and a high amount of people involved in the implementation process compared to planning phase. (Hrebiniak 2006, 12–15.) The key implementation issues defined in

Hrebiniak's (1990; 1992) earlier work are discussed in more detail in the next paragraphs and some issues are complemented by views by Markiwicz (2011).

First, successful strategy implementation requires a well-formulated strategy and that all strategies (corporate, business, and functional) within the organization are coherent. Strategy implementation is affected by the definition and features of the strategy, which is why it should be ensured that the strategy is clear, and easily understood and communicated. (Hrebiniak 1990; 1992.) According to Markiewicz (2011, 259–264), one reason for failing in strategy implementation is the organization's inability to realize its mission and strategy. Secondly, Hrebiniak (1990; 1992) sees the role of organizational structure as critical for strategy implementation. For instance, if an organization aims to get closer to its customers, focus better on market, products, customers, and geographical areas, and respond to changes in its business environment, it should employ so-called vertical structure instead of functional structure that typically requires a lot of lateral coordination. Organizational structure in turn affects coordination needs as structure determines what level of interdependence and joint decision making are required. Coordination problems are often encountered by global actors who must simultaneously balance the demands of the global and local market. (Hrebiniak 1990; 1992.)

Despite careful planning, organizations cannot be prepared for all situations that occur in their external environment or inside them, which is why controls are needed in strategy implementation. Controls provide feedback and valuable information on customers, markets, and performance, and help organizations to adapt to changes. (Hrebiniak 1990; 1992.) The role of incentives is also crucial for strategy implementation efforts. Incentives should always be defined in accordance with strategic objectives. If incentives support the maintenance of the status quo, they will not contribute to the achievement of strategic outcomes that require a change in performance. (Hrebiniak 1990; 1992.) Similarly, Markiewicz (2011, 259–264) has addressed the importance of coherence between objectives defined in the planning phase and strategy implementation activities, and that a lack of compatibility between an organization's long-term strategic objectives and goals of organization units, teams and employees can lead to failure in strategy implementation. Cultural and political issues should be considered in efforts for strategy implementation as they deal with the organization's needs, values, and distribution of power. Strategy implementation often involves changes that may be opposed. The company's cultural and political prejudices affect the implementation of

the strategy, and thus identifying and understanding these is important for the success of the strategy implementation. Having required resources, competencies, and technical skills to implement strategy means that a strategy is technically feasible. In short, technical feasibility refers to the possibility and practicality of a strategy. (Hrebiniak 1990; 1992.)

Top management's, especially CEO's, support and commitment is crucial for strategy implementation efforts. How strategy is perceived in the company is affected by the CEO's example and commitment to the success of strategy implementation. If the CEO demonstrates commitment to strategic success, it can have a positive impact on the commitment of other managers in the company and thus promote consensus on the chosen course of action. To implement strategy successfully, all key implementation issues described above should be concerns of the company's CEO. And what the CEO should first and the foremost consider when implementing a strategy, is communication. (Hrebiniak 1990; 1992.) The importance of communication is also acknowledged by Markiewicz (2011, 259–264) stating that a lack of strategic communication and feedback on the progress of the process can harm implementation of the strategy. In his list of key implementation issues, Hrebiniak (1990; 1992) has not included human resources. However, he has made a reference that people are central to the success of strategy implementation and thus they are assumed to influence the entire process (Hrebiniak 1992, 396).

Hrebiniak's (1990; 1992) remark on the importance of communication when implementing the strategy is in line with the study results of Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002). Their study revealed that a remarkable number of challenges related to strategy implementation were linked to communication and one of the greatest obstacles in strategy implementation was a lack of understanding of the strategy. This became apparent when strategic issues needed to be applied in daily decision making. (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 416–417.) Another remarkable obstacle to the implementation of the strategy, which was reported by the managers of middle and top management participating in Aaltonen and Ikävalko's (2002) study, was actions that were inconsistent with the strategy implementation and diverted the attention of organization members from relevant activities. A lack of management's commitment to strategy implementation activities can hinder the implementation process and affect it negatively (Hrebiniak 1990; 1992). In addition, the lack of alignment between organization's compensation system

and the strategy were identified as a significant problem for successful implementation in Aaltonen and Ikävalko's (2002) study findings, which agrees with Hrebiniak's (1990; 1992) view on the importance of the right incentives in implementing the strategy. Although organizations often use an extensive amount of material, oral and written, to communicate the strategy, it does not guarantee that the strategy will be understood and interpreted as intended among the members of the organization. The study findings also emphasized the role of middle managers in communicating strategies. Often middle managers are responsible for continuous sharing of strategic information and ensuring that the strategy is understood within the organization. (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 417.)

According to Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002, 417–418), "the three elements of successful strategy implementation are: strategic communication and acting; identification and support of strategic actors; and structures and systems aligned with the strategy". In strategic communication and acting, the role of middle management and importance of two-way communication are emphasized. Companies that participated in the study of Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002), reported employment of a linear, top-down type of communication. However, to understand the strategy, it is required to have an opportunity to comment, inquiry or question the communicated strategy. This is enabled by two-way communication comprising giving and receiving feedback, and management's reaction to bottom-up messages. The way how strategy process is communicated should be considered carefully – instead of typically used annual report, it is recommended for organizations to consider more comprehensive way to present the strategy process. In addition, to promote the success of the implementation of the strategy, all organization members should be clearly informed about how the new strategy may change current practices and why. (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 417–418.) When informing about the effects of the new strategy, the management should pay attention to how the information is perceived among the organization members and what reactions the information may arouse in people. The author sees that this is another clear point where the importance of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation practices emerges. Identification of strategic actors contributes to understanding the roles and responsibilities in strategy implementation. Strategic actors, also referred to as strategists, are traditionally those who do strategic planning and represent key factors in strategy implementation. However, sometimes strategy is something that is not planned but emerged in the company, and from this point of view strategic actors can also be found

on other levels of the organization. When it comes to the consideration of organizational structures and systems, organizational structure is not recognized as a problematic factor for strategy implementation. (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 417–418.) This contradicts with the view of Hrebiniak (1990; 1992) described above about the importance of organizational structure in the implementation of strategy. In terms of systems, Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002, 417–418) state that it is important that goal-setting systems are connected to strategy. Personal objectives that organization members have created for themselves should be considered as they affect members' day-to-day decision making at work. Also, the compensation system should be in line with the strategic objectives to support the successful implementation of the strategy. (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 417–418.) Findings by Aaltonen and Ikävalko (2002, 417–418) on compensation systems support Hrebiniak's (1990; 1992) view of appropriate incentives as a critical success factor in successful implementing the strategy.

To sum up, successful implementation of the strategy requires consideration of several issues concerning different organizational parts and functions, of which the typical ones have been discussed above. There are some inconsistencies among the researchers regarding factors affecting strategy implementation success, but what they have in common is emphasizing the importance of communication and management's commitment.

2.3 Emotions and emotional intelligence in strategic management

Many different concepts related to emotions have been addressed in the strategic management literature, some of which, in the author's own opinion, refer in part to emotional intelligence, although they are not referred to as emotional intelligence. Emotions are represented in the strategic management literature from several different perspectives, such as group-focus emotions (Huy 2011a), emotional balancing (Huy 2002), emotional aperture (Sanchez-Burks & Huy 2009), emotion management and emotional capacity (Hodgkinson & Healey 2011), group emotions (Sloan & Oliver 2013), and collective negative and positive emotions (Huy 2011a). To better understand how emotional intelligence is viewed in the contexts of strategic management and strategy implementation, and due to the scarcity of literature directly related to the topic, the researcher wanted to figure out how and in what terms emotions are addressed in strategic

management literature, and ultimately what similarities they may have with the concept of emotional intelligence.

2.3.1 Emotions in strategic management

In their study, Brundin et al. (2021) have examined a variety of emotion constructs discussed in the strategic management literature and have sorted their findings according to major strategic activities, including strategy implementation as one. As a result of their analysis, Brundin et al. (2021, 1) have identified three themes addressing how emotions affect strategic management: the nonconscious influence of emotions; collective emotions; and emotion regulation. The first one, the unconscious influence of emotions, deals with the notion that emotions can also be involved in those automated processes that require less conscious attention. Emotions can either support or hamper the process and happen in any phase of it. They can precede strategic decisions and actions, or they can be an outcome or a mediator of strategic management. As emotions can occur in any place and time, and they take place at the individual level, it is not always easy to predict their emergence or change of them, and it can be challenging to identify them. By being aware of this, managers can better understand the influence of their personal emotions on strategic management, even if they are unconscious. (Brundin et al. 2021, 9.)

The theme of collective emotions indicates that when several people experience an emotion, it has the potential to develop as a driving force in strategic management (Brundin et al. 2021, 12). Collective emotions develop for several reasons, like similar experiences, interpretations, identities, a common organizational culture, or emotional contagion (Huy 2012, 244). Sources of collective emotions can be viewed through top-down or bottom-up approaches. According to top-down approaches emotions first emerge at a group level as a group emotion, after which group members join with the emotion and experience it at the individual level. In the bottom-up approach, the source of collective emotions is the opposite, and according to it, emotions first emerge at the individual level, and when other group members share the same emotion with each other, the group's collective emotion begins to develop. (Brundin et al. 2021, 12.)

Lastly, the third theme, emotion regulation, shows that emotions can be managed and expressed in an appropriate way, and used as a tool for strategic management. Emotion can be applied as a regulative mechanism to rationalize and justify the outcome of strategic initiative. Through rationalization managers can protect themselves from emotions that a failure of strategic initiative can trigger. Emotion regulation discusses

strategic managers' ability to cope or manage with both their own emotions and others. It can mean masking one's own emotions, showing a fake emotion, or displaying an emotion that is regarded as an appropriate for the situation. Masking and suppression of managers' emotions can affect the success of the strategic initiative negatively when causing misinterpretations and impairing open communication among parties. (Brundin et al. 2021, 10–11.) The author sees that there is a connection between emotion regulation and self-regulation, a component of emotional intelligence, and that they mostly mean the same thing. This is one point where, in the author's opinion, emotional intelligence has been discussed in the context of strategic management, although the term emotional intelligence itself has not been used.

2.3.2 Emotions and strategic change

In strategic management literature, emotions have been explored extensively in the context of change (Huy 1999; Huy 2002; Huy 2005; Huy 2011a; Huy 2011b; Sanchez-Burks & Huy 2009; Vuori & Huy 2016). Changes typically evoke different emotions in people, out of which resistance is quite common. Why people experience resistance to change is often due to feelings of insecurity, fear over personal loss, and skepticism about the need for change. One way to manage resistance to change is communication. (Murthy 2007.) This section focuses on emotions in strategic change, as it provides an overview of how emotions are addressed in a situation of change in organization that is strategically significant and may include strategy implementation.

Huy (2011b, 811) defines strategic change as a distinct form of organizational change that is especially extensive, disruptive, and evokes a broad range of strong emotions among employees. Changes may cause uncertainty in an organization and when combined with unclarity, it can trigger challenging emotional reactions among organization members, such as resistance and anxiety (Voola et al. 2004; Chrusciel 2006). One way to interpret change is to view it as a factor that alters an action and influences change actors, such as people, structure and technology used to enhance an organization's performance (Murthy 2007, 2–3). The way how an organization deals with the behaviors caused by the emotional reactions of personnel can affect organization's ability to perform strategic change and its competitive advantage. To enable effective strategic change, managers need be able to understand their followers' emotional reactions in

addition to being able to relate to them at cognitive level. (Voola et al. 2004; Chrusciel 2006; Murthy 2007, 2–3.)

Manager's ability to reflect their own emotions during change facilitate them with understanding subordinates' emotions and their resistance to change (Huy 2002, 33). Emotionally savvy managers are important to organizations because they can regulate and influence employee emotions and make sense of strategic projects for others, as well as influence control over the change process through emotional expressions. Expressing high emotional energy, showed as commitment, frustration, or satisfaction, is more likely to lead to increased control over the change process whereas low emotional energy, expressed as sadness or withdrawal, can lead to the decreased power and status, and detachment from decision-making and discussion. (Brundin et al. 2021, 12.) The impact of emotional abilities in a situation of change is not limited to the relationship between managers and employees but also within the management. For instance, if the top management prevents middle management from showing emotions of anger or fear during an implementation, it can lead to disappointment among middle managers and, over time, questioning the authority of top managers (Huy et al. 2014). Or else, a lack of trust and a shared emotion of fear can inhibit cooperation within the management and distort the view of the company's situation (Vuori & Huy 2006, 9).

In response to the need to explore more the interaction of emotion and strategic action, Huy (1999) has developed a model that describes the relationship of emotions to the three dynamics underlying radical change. According to Huy (1999, 328), radical change can fundamentally alter the organization's core identity or philosophy, which can affect strategic relationships outside the organization. Radical changes usually arouse strong emotions among organization's members because they challenge individuals' fundamental perceptions and assumptions of the organization. Through these perceptions and assumptions, individuals are emotionally committed to the company, which is why the proposed change threatens not only the identity and core values of the organization but also its members. (Huy 1999, 328.) Though Huy's (1999) model focuses especially on radical change, it however provides a good overview of the role of emotions in strategic change and is thus discussed in more detail next.

The model and how emotions affect radical change are easier to outline if the change process is divided into smaller, more manageable sections. Huy (1999) divides the process for radical change into three analogous parts, which together are referred to as

change dynamics: receptivity; mobilization; and learning. These three dynamics are the most important parts of the change process as they lead to change (Huy 1999, 328). They are affected by emotional dynamics that are actions for emotion management constituting an organization's repertoire of emotional capabilities (Huy 2011a). The change process starts with receptivity that refers to the willingness of individuals to consider the proposed change and evaluate its legitimacy (Huy 1999, 328). Receptivity to the strategic change and individuals' ability to react in constructive way to it is expected to increase through emotional dynamics of experiencing and reconciliation. Empathy demonstrates well emotional dynamic of experiencing as empathy is about understanding someone else's emotions and being able to re-experience them. Sympathy precedes the development of empathy and refers to the ability to understand another's feelings without re-experiencing that person's feelings and is thus less demanding emotional process than empathy. (Huy 2011a, 815–816.) The second important phase is mobilization, which comprises concrete actions taken towards the change (Huy 1999, 329). Emotional dynamic of encouragement is expected to increase the degree of mobilization for strategic change. Encouragement is demonstrated well through hope as it binds people together during strategic change. (Huy 2011a, 816–817.) The third part of the process is learning. Organizational learning happens when its members' learning is transferred to the shared belief system of an organization (Huy 1999, 331.) During strategic change, organizational learning is facilitated through the emotional dynamic of display freedom that refers to the organization's ability to promote the legitimate expression of authentic emotions during strategic change (Huy 2011a, 817). As the result of change process, organization's members may experience instability and insecurity, and they may feel that their core values and assumptions about the organization are under threat. Thus, changes can evoke even quite strong emotions in the members of the organization. To succeed in radical change at the organizational level and to promote personal adaptation and change at the individual level, emotions need to be considered during the change process. (Huy 1999.)

In the situation of radical change, the ability to facilitate emotional experiencing is central to an organization. The ability of emotional experiencing allows an organization to recognize the variety of emotions aroused during radical change, to accept and internalize them, and to act to understand them in depth. By allowing members of an organization to openly express their feelings, both positive and negative, the emergence of innovative ideas can be promoted, which is valuable during radical change. In addition

to enhancing creativity in the organization, openness to emotion also prevents the emergence of resistance to change and unwanted attitudes among employees, such as cynicism, which in turn can limit the progress of change. (Huy 1999, 335.) In his study, Huy (2002) concluded that the role of middle managers during radical change has been seen as less important compared to executives. However, since middle managers are structurally closer to their subordinates than executives, it is likely that middle managers are more aware about the emotional needs of employees than the top management of an organization. In addition, as executives are usually busy dealing with external demands that an organization encounters, middle managers have more time to communicate with their subordinates. Therefore, it can be suggested that in radical change, middle managers play a vital role, at least in emotion management. (Huy 2002.)

2.3.3 Management's emotions and emotional intelligence in strategy implementation

How emotions are managed among management members and what their level of emotional intelligence is can influence strategy implementation. Huy (2011a) has investigated how middle managers' emotions affect strategy implementation and found out that as middle managers are closer to their subordinates than top management, their emotions are likely to affect their subordinates' thinking, behavior, and emotions, which in turn can influence on strategy implementation. In addition to influencing strategy implementation through their emotions, the approach that managers use in their role has an impact on the success of strategy implementation. When interviewing middle managers for his study, Huy (2002) discovered that to succeed in strategy implementation, organizations need middle managers who are assertive and use a pushy approach to managing employees as well as middle managers who apply an empathic approach. According to the Huy's (2002) study, managers who were assertive and pushy, did not pay attention to employees' emotions, such as anxiety, but rather focused on getting employees to meet the job demands and act in accordance with the new strategy. Managers applying an emphatic approach in turn were not that interested in the job requirements but were more concentrated on listening to employees' troubles and helping them overcome them. When applied alone, neither of these approaches contributed to the success of the strategy implementation. (Huy 2002.) The first of these is not in line with the basic idea of emotional intelligence, which is understanding the emotions of others

whereas the latter can be seen as clearly related to emotional intelligence, as one component of emotional intelligence is empathy.

Negative emotional dynamics among top management team can inhibit discussion of the most urgent and important strategic issues and thus hinder the implementation of strategic change (Liu & Maitlis 2014, 204–205). In their study, Edmondson and Smith (2006) found out that executives' negative feelings, such as frustration and helplessness, hinder the important discussion about the future. Brundin and Nordqvist (2008) discovered that emotions of anger and irritation displayed by board members reduce emotional energy of the CEO and as a result lead to his or her exclusion from the debate. Contradiction between CEO's showed and experienced emotions may confuse other top management members and thus hamper the process of strategic change (Brundin & Melin 2006). Negative emotions expressed by the CEO result in decline in top management team participation and herewith contribute to the failure of implementing change (Kisfalvi & Pitcher 2003).

In addition to hampering the performance of top management, negative emotions can inhibit cooperation between top and middle management and thus affect the strategy implementation. For instance, a middle manager who has been promoted by executives to perform a powerful position in strategic change, can feel angry because executives have treated other middle managers unfairly and thus act against them (Huy 2011a). In their study, Huy et al. (2014) found out how middle managers' negative feelings about the CEO led to resistance to change and disobeying the CEO, which manifested itself in a decline in the execution of change projects. According to Huy (2011a, 1388), top executives may not consider emotions as a crucial factor in strategy implementation, but they are more task focused, even in situations where they encountered difficulties in implementation. However, top executives can adjust their actions related to strategy implementation and to promote the chances of success of strategic change in case they attempt to understand and address middle managers' emotions. Executives' focus on task achievement, usually within a limited time, may cause a gap between executives' speeches and actions. In case the top management do not or behave according to their words, they do not demonstrate the example of the desired organizational culture. If this happens, middle managers may question the authenticity of executives and thus act in a disrespectful manner towards top management. Even if the intentions of top executives were good and they would try to act in good faith and in a way that enhances the corporate

culture, middle managers may interpret these actions as disrespectful, which in turn can generate challenges to strategy implementation. To avoid friction and misunderstandings between top executives and middle managers, to enhance the communication between these groups, and to promote the success of strategy implementation, it is therefore important that the emotional states in the company are properly identified and managed. (Huy 2011a.)

By enabling one to understand and influence other emotions, emotional intelligence can enhance a manager's ability to implement changes in the organization (George 2000, 1044). A study by Alzoubi and Aziz (2021) that focused on the importance of management's emotional intelligence in the banking sector revealed that managers' emotional intelligence contributes to the quality of their strategic decisions. A study highlighted the importance of managers' self-awareness, self-management, and relationship management to the quality of strategic decisions. Often managers' emotions influence their decision-making and having a proficient level of emotional intelligence can protect them from experiencing anxiety when making decisions. (Alzoubi & Aziz 2021, 132). In addition to being able to manage their own emotions, emotionally intelligent managers can understand their subordinates' emotional concerns and to interpret the emotional climate in the organization (Ashkanasy & Daus 2002, 82). According to the study results, managers who are in control of their emotions and can make rational decisions are more successful in their work. (Alzoubi & Aziz 2021, 136). Huy's (2002) study finding on required approaches in management of strategy implementation raises the question whether emotional intelligence has downsides and can hinder strategy implementation? If the management, especially the middle management, focuses too much on considering the emotions of member of the organization, it is obvious that the implementation of the strategy suffers because there is no such change situation where everyone would be satisfied. This is something we all recognize from school, work, or any occasion involving a group of people, decision-making and changes. However, emotional intelligence is not only about re-experiencing emotions of others, but includes other elements too, such as controlling one's own and others' emotions, social skills, and motivation. Thus, the author sees that instead of questioning the importance of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, one should consider the ways and levels of utilizing emotional intelligence and identify situations in which the importance of emotional intelligence is highlighted and where there is no need for it.

2.4 Synthesis of the theory section

The theory section began with a discussion of the concept of emotional intelligence to provide the reader with information of what emotional intelligence is, which elements it consists of, and how it manifests in organizations. In this study, viewing emotional intelligence in organizations is based on research by Daniel Goleman (1998a, 1998b), because he has introduced the concept and applied it in business and working life. Emotional intelligence is an individual skill that allows a person to recognize, control and regulate their emotions and understand emotions experienced by others that is also called empathy. It consists of five components, which are self-awareness; self-regulation; motivation; empathy; and social skills. In the theory section dealing with the definition of emotional intelligence, the most important characteristics of each component were discussed, which helps the reader to understand the manifestation of emotional intelligence in general but also in working life. The main characteristics of emotional intelligence include, for instance, self-confidence; openness to change; organizational commitment; cross-cultural sensitivity; and effectiveness in leading change.

The section on emotional intelligence was concluded by a discussion about emotional intelligence in organizations and especially why it should be applied in organizations. According to the literature, emotional intelligence promotes effective work performance through social features like self-confidence, flexibility, empathy, persistence, and the ability to have a good relationship with others. Such features can be taken for granted in the working life of the 2020s, but it is important that these features are expressed so that they are more visible and appreciated in the work context. Among the components of emotional intelligence, especially motivation, self-regulation, and social skills contribute to success at work. For instance, lack of motivation can hamper one's performance at work. In addition to influencing on an individual level, emotional intelligence has a positive effect on the organization's commitment and the attainment of the organization's goals, and it contributes to the development of companies' competitive advantage, helps organizations and their members adapt to changes, and improves the quality of decision-making, effective leadership, and mutual understanding between organizational members colleagues better. In addition, when discussing emotional intelligence in organizations, the influence of culture on emotional intelligence emerged from literature. Cultural background affects emotional intelligence and its manifestation, which is why cultural

differences should be considered when evaluating emotional intelligence in organizations.

It can be summarized that emotional intelligence affects organizations through their members, groups, and culture. The key thing is that emotional intelligence is connected to humanity and despite the result- and number-centeredness of organizations, it cannot be ignored that many of the essential functions of organizations require consideration of the human side, such as management and communication. For example, a supervisor who understands how her or his subordinates experience a strategic change that has an impact on the person's job description, can adapt her or his management style to suit the situation and thus contribute to the implementation of the strategic change. Emotional intelligence therefore helps organizations to perform better, and thus it is beneficial for organizations to invest in emotional intelligence skills.

Since the topic of the study is to examine the role of emotional intelligence withing communication in strategy implementation, it is important to understand what strategy implementation is about. Thus, the second section of the literature review deals with strategy implementation in an organizational context – what strategy implementation means, which elements it consists of, which factors affect it, and what is needed for the successful implementation of the strategy. Although strategy implementation is acknowledged as a crucial factor in organizational success, it has received little attention in academic literature compared to formation of the strategy. There is inconsistency in strategy implementation research, and the definition of strategy implementation is ambiguous, which may be due to different perspectives on the matter and lack of models on strategy implementation. The inconsistency can also be influenced by the fact that the implementation of the strategy can be conducted in many ways and the related practices and factors vary from case to case. However, despite the inconsistency, there is a consensus in the literature about which elements typically belong to strategy implementation. Strategy implementation is considered the realization of strategies on a practical level, where communication has an emphasized importance.

To provide understanding of factors influencing strategy implementation and to better understand the importance of management's human competencies and capabilities in strategy implementation, two strategy implementation frameworks were discussed in this study. Okumus's (2003) framework, presented in Figure 1, defines 11 key factors in strategy implementation, which are grouped into four categories, regarded as the main elements of strategy implementation. The framework describes factors that are typically

included in strategy implementation and thus provides reader an overview of what strategy implementation often consists of. Okumus's (2003) framework is included under strategy implementation in Figure 3 together with Tawse and Tabesh's (2021) framework as they together help to form a picture of the basic elements of strategy implementation and which factors affect strategy implementation effectiveness. Tawse and Tabesh's (2021) framework discusses strategy implementation effectiveness through components of dynamic managerial capabilities, managerial actions, and conditions of effective strategy implementation. The framework is particularly interesting for the study as it helps to understand the importance of managerial capabilities in strategy implementation and the influence of managerial actions and conditions for effective SI. According to the framework, the core managerial action, which is included in all other activities, is communication. Communication is crucial throughout the organization and in terms of the success of strategy implementation. Dynamic managerial capabilities comprise situational decision-making, influencing others, knowledge, skills, education, and experience. These together describe the competence of the management to collect information, understand problems, and adjust actions to promote effective strategy implementation. Managerial actions are divided into structural and interpersonal actions of which the latter refers to formal and informal interactions that influence on others' emotions and actions. The framework defines three conditions that are required for effective strategy implementation, and which explain how managerial actions affect SIE: competency; commitment; and coordination. Competency comprises skills, abilities, and knowledge required to perform strategic initiatives. As emotional intelligence is considered an individual skill, the author contemplates that it could be seen as included in the condition of competency in the framework.

As strategy implementation is putting plans into practice, one might think it is a straightforward process. However, after getting familiar with the factors and variables affecting the process, strategy implementation does not seem so simple anymore. Quite often organizations succeed in forming a strategy and vision but fail to implement it. Challenges in strategy implementation are typically related to the complexity in the process including various variables. A few challenges in strategy implementation are linked to poor communication. Other typical obstacles are decentralized decision-making, lack of management's commitment, inconsistency in activities, and inappropriate incentives. To implement the strategy successfully, the organization needs to understand the content and the context of the strategy. The requirements of successful

implementation include well-formulated and communicated strategy, appropriate organizational structure, controls, and incentives, coherence between objectives within the organization, organizational culture and politics, CEO's commitment and support, two-way communication, well-determined roles and responsibilities, and the people. The role of the middle management in the successful strategy implementation is significant as middle management is typically responsible for sharing information between the top management and the operational level and ensuring that personnel understand the strategy.

The last section of the literature review deals with emotions and emotional intelligence in strategic management. Because emotional intelligence has been scarcely discussed in the strategic management literature, the author familiarized herself with how emotions have been managed in the context of strategic management and compared this with the literature on emotional intelligence. According to the literature, emotions affect strategic management through the themes of unconscious emotions, group emotions and emotion regulation. Of these, emotion regulation is one component of emotional intelligence and can be used as a tool in strategic management to rationalize and justify strategic initiatives.

Typically, the implementation of a new strategy implies some degree of change in the organization's operations. Thus, the last section of the literature review discusses management's emotions and emotional intelligence in the context of strategic change. Often in situations of change, organizations encounter resistance to change from members of the organization, which can be caused by emotions that are typically evoked by change such as insecurity, fear, anxiety, and skepticism. The key tool for managing resistance to change is communication. Although communication is not defined as part of emotional intelligence in the literature, the author however sees that emotional intelligence can be interpreted as a factor that promotes communication in the organization. With the help of emotional intelligence, management can read the emotional climate of the organization and adjust their actions accordingly, such as the way they communicate about strategic issues. Of the components of emotional intelligence, social skills facilitate acting appropriately in social situations, and communication, on the other hand, is an important part of social interactions in organizations.

Emotionally intelligent managers are better able to identify the reasons for resistance to change than those managers who ignore emotions and their impact on strategy implementation, because through emotional intelligence, especially through empathy,

managers can understand the experiences and emotions of others. By understanding emotions, both their own and others, managers are in turn better able to manage change and influence the people involved in strategic change. In addition, emotional skills not only facilitate the cooperation between management and subordinates but also between the middle and top management. Thus, it can be concluded that implementing a new strategy is often accompanied by emotions which can be understood and dealt with the help of emotional intelligence. Communication plays a crucial part in strategy implementation. Although communication is not considered a part of emotional intelligence, it can nevertheless be seen as related to emotional intelligence, because it helps the management to adapt the communication to suit the emotional climate of the organization, which in turn promotes strategy implementation.

Figure 3 summarizes and illustrates the theoretical background of the study discussed in the literature review. Conecpts discussed in the literature review are grouped into three main groups: emotional intelligence, strategy implementation, and emotions and emotional intelligence in strategic management.

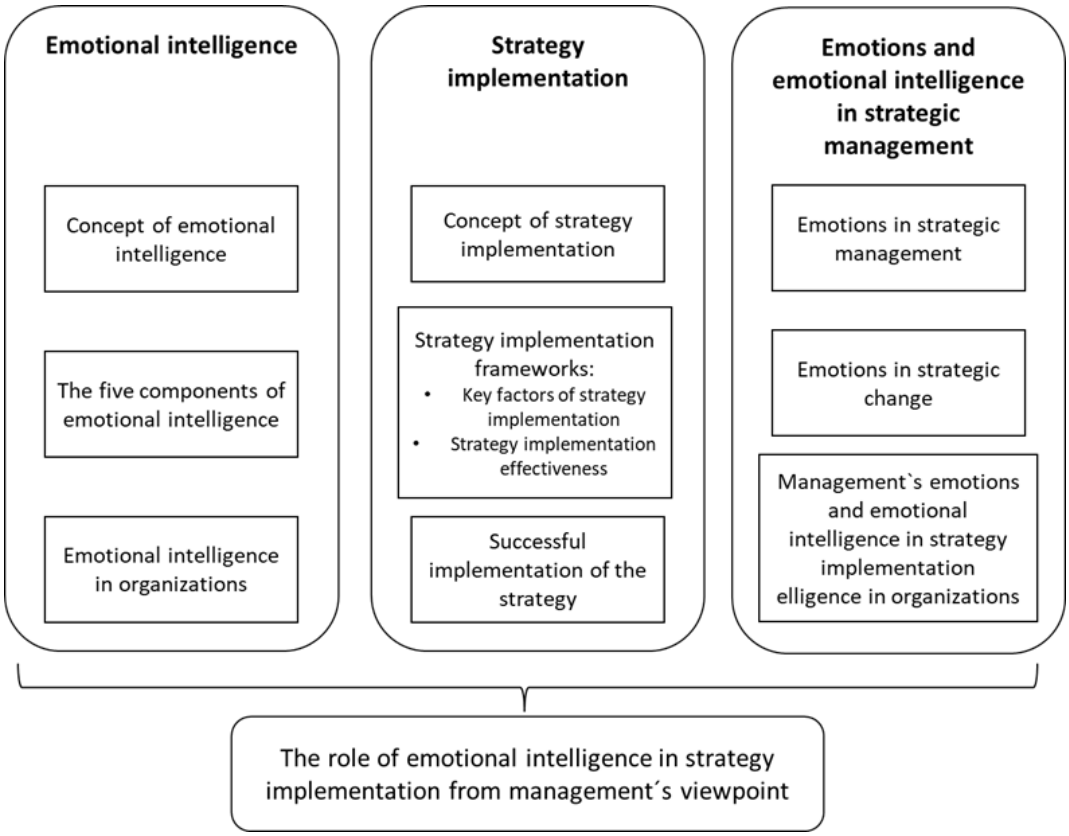

Figure 3. Theoretical background of the study

Taken together, the concepts described in Figure 3 give the reader an understanding of what factors are involved when pondering the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation from a management perspective.

3 Research methods

In this chapter, the research approach, data collection and data analysis methods are described. At the end of the chapter, the trustworthiness of the study is evaluated.

3.1 Research approach

When conducting research, an appropriate research approach should be decided at an early stage of the research. The decision is influenced by researcher's choices about philosophical worldview applied, the design of the research, also called the research strategy, and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. In addition, the choice of research approach is influenced by the nature of the research problem, researcher's subjective experiences and the audience of the study. (Creswell 2014, 3.) There are three approaches to research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, of which the last one includes elements of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The main difference between qualitative and quantitative research is the type of research data they use. In qualitative research, data consists of interpretable information, like words, whereas quantitative research deals with measurable data, typically numbers. (Creswell 2014, 3–4.)

The research approach applied in this study is qualitative. As described by Creswell (2014, 4), "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem". The choice of a qualitative research approach is justified by the nature of research purpose, which requires exploring on a topic about which little previous research is available and examining individuals' views on the phenomena. Indeed, the consideration and interpretation of individuals' subjective experiences are central to this exploratory study, speaking in favor of choosing a qualitative approach. Exploratory research seeks to find something new and interesting by exploring a research topic and it is usually applied when the research problem is not clearly defined or when little is yet known about the research topic (Elman et al. 2020, 17). Qualitative research involves some typical philosophical assumptions, research strategies and methods, of which selected for this study are discussed in the following (Creswell 2014, 17). However, before this, the purpose of the study and the research questions are reviewed.

The purpose of the study is to understand the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation. The study aims to find out how emotional

intelligence manifests within communication in strategy implementation, and to provide management's perspective on the topic. Three research questions have been formed to guide the study and to ensure that the research purpose can be fulfilled. The three research questions are:

- **RQ1:** How does the management view emotional intelligence?
- **RQ2:** How does the management view the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation?
- **RQ3:** How does emotional intelligence manifest itself in communication?

Qualitative research methods are common in the social and behavioral sciences, which focus on the study of human behavior, but they are also suitable for the study of organizations, groups, and individuals. Qualitative research is an appropriate approach when the study seeks to better understand phenomenon about which little is yet known, or which requires viewing individuals' experiences and interpretations. In addition, when the phenomenon or social process is difficult or even impossible to study with quantitative research methods, for example, if previous information does not exist in the form of facts and variables, it is reasonable to apply qualitative methods as they provide a holistic and comprehensive understanding on the research topic. Qualitative methods are often used in exploratory research since they can help in finding explanations and building hypotheses, while quantitative methods are applied when the research is descriptive in nature and focused on testing hypothesis. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2020, 97–98.) Metsämuuronen (2006, 88) has proposed that qualitative approach is particularly well suited to research when interested in the detailed structures of events or the role of individual actors in certain events, when the aim is to study natural situations which cannot be organized as an experiment or in which influencing factors cannot be totally controlled, or to obtain information on cause-and-effect relationships in specific cases that cannot be examined experimentally (Metsämuuronen 2006, 88).

The main three components of qualitative research are: information (typically collected through interviews and observations); interpretative or analytical procedures (techniques for understanding and analyzing the information gathered); and reporting (oral or written) (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 87). Methods applied in qualitative research seek to answer the questions of what, why and how. They comprise several distinct types of methods which are used to explore, explain, and better understand the phenomenon under study, and to learn issues affecting it, such as the key influencing factors and possible cause-and-effect relationships. (Attest 2017.) Qualitative research process

typically involves developing questions and procedures, collecting data in participant's setting, conducting inductive data analysis, and presenting researcher's interpretations of the data. What is also typical for qualitative research is its focus on individual meaning and the importance of clarifying the complexity of the phenomenon. (Creswell 2014, 4.)

The fundamental idea of the research topic is that reality is built on the experiences and perceptions of individuals. Investigating the research topic, emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, commits to examining the knowledge and reality constructed by the human mind since emotional intelligence, as well as its understanding and experiencing, are tied to humanity and subjectivity. A philosophical paradigm considering individuals' subjective experiences as a key factor in forming reality, is constructivism (Davis et al. 1990). Constructivism is therefore considered an appropriate philosophical paradigm for the research and the investigation of its purpose.

The applicability of constructivism to the study can be viewed through the problem setting of the research, as the meaning of emotional intelligence in the organization cannot be examined objectively, but the research empirics is based on individual's subjective experiences and observations. In this study, emotional intelligence is viewed as an individual's skill. As the study aims to increase understanding of the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, especially from a management's perspective, the research focuses on the skills of individuals in management positions. The applicability of constructivism can also be considered through research questions, for example, by viewing **RQ2**: How does the management view the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation? To answer the question, it is first necessary to define what is meant by emotional intelligence and what kind of meanings individuals give to it, after which it is possible to consider the significance of emotional intelligence at the general level in organizations, which in turn is affected by individuals working for the organization. Once this reflection is done, it is possible to move on to the consideration of the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation and why it should be considered in strategy implementation.

According to constructivism, the source of information is the human mind, which together with subjectivity, binds this philosophical positioning to people (Guba & Lincoln 1994). The constructivist approach to thinking is relativism, according to which everything is relative, and no absolute and objective reality exists (Guba & Lincoln 1994). As interpretation of reality is based on subjectivity in relativism, it fits well with the fundamental assumptions of constructivism. Moreover, the way how relativism relates to

individual's past experiences, perceptions, and assumptions and how they affect to individual's perception of reality, supports constructivist thinking (New World Encyclopedia 2019). In constructivist thinking, reality is perceived as subjective and individual knowledge is considered to be built on individual experiences, perceptions, and meanings given to things. As the meanings given to things or how they are perceived and experienced are subjective, objective evaluation is excluded from constructivism. (Davis et al. 1990; Dubovskiy 2019.)

The word constructivism itself describes the philosophical paradigm well, as it refers to the English verb construct (Davis et al. 1990). In constructivism learning is seen as an active and social process of knowledge building rather than transferring knowledge from one person to another (Fosnot & Perry 2005). In addition, constructivism considers an individual's prior knowledge, experiences and perceptions in learning and knowledge construction, each of which contributes to the construction of the subjective reality of an individual (Mathison 2005). Themes describing constructivism are the individual's perception of oneself, one's own activity, order, lifelong development, and the individual's socio-symbolic relationship with the environment. (Mahoney 2004).

Although the approach of constructivism has not been quite common in business research, its use has increased in Finnish strategy research in recent years as it helps to look at things from new perspectives (Mir & Watson 2001; Perheentupa 2013, 91). The increased use of constructivism in strategy research supports its application in this study addressing topics related to strategy. Another notion justifying the application of constructivism in this study is that business economics often looks specifically at the subjective experiences of individuals from which conclusions are drawn. In addition, when investigating a topic that has been researched little, information is formed during the research process itself.

Examining emotional intelligence, communication, and strategy implementation from the perspective of company management encompasses getting familiar with current perceptions related to them. Because individuals and their subjective experiences play a significant role in constructivist research, the researcher seeks to rely as much as possible on these views and make sense of them when studying the phenomenon, while acknowledging the impact of personal background on interpretation. (Creswell 2014, 8.) To gather information on the research topic, at the heart of the research empirics are the experiences and views of different individuals, which are often collected through interviews in qualitative research. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 100; Eriksson &

Kovalainen 2008, 78). Thus, the research strategy applied in this study is qualitative interview research in which the phenomenon under study is viewed through a constructivist lens. The research strategy encompasses some characteristics and procedures, which are described in more detail in the next section.

3.2 Data collection

The purpose of data collection is to produce the latest information to explain the research question (Walliman 2011, 80). There are several different options for gathering empirical data in qualitative research, like observation, interviews, documents, and audio-visual materials. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 111; Walliman 2011, 80; Creswell 2014, 189). To collect relevant empirical data for the research, the researcher must decide which methods are used. The choice of a suitable method is influenced by the type of material needed for research and the question to which the researcher seeks to answer. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2020, 95.)

3.2.1 Data collection in qualitative research

In qualitative research, the idea is to purposefully select individuals or sites for the study that will best help to understand the research topic being studied. Compared to quantitative study, which typically involves many participants and random sampling, qualitative research usually involves a small number of participants which are selected purposefully. There is no collective agreement on the right number of individuals or sites in qualitative research, but often sample size is between one and thirty, depending on the research strategy being used. Alternative strategies comprise, for instance, narrative research, case study and phenomenology and interviews. (Creswell 2014, 189.)

In this research, the applied data collection method is qualitative interview, which is a very popular method, and some even consider it as the best data collection method in qualitative research (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 100; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 78). The choice of interviews as the data collection method is based on the remark that interviews provide an opportunity to gather diverse insights and subjective experiences of individuals on the topic that is little researched, which in turn helps to better understand the research topic as a whole and allows to include views from the field. In addition, the selection of qualitative interview as a data collection method is justified by its suitability with the research strategy applied in the study.

The purpose of qualitative interviews is to generate empirical data for the research. In preparation for a qualitative interview, the interviewer plans at least some of the interview questions and, after the interview, analyzes and reports the results. In the interview, the researcher sets the focus of the discussion on specific subjects concerned with the research topic. Generally, an interview is a conversation that is arranged in a sequential form consisting of questions and answers. Typically, the interviewer first addresses the question for which interviewee then provides an answer. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 78–79.) There are separate ways to conduct an interview, such as, face-to-face in-person interview, e-mailed internet interview, focus group interview, telephone interview or survey. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 111; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 78; Creswell 2014, 191). In business studies, interviews are often conducted between two people, but interviews done in groups are also common (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 78). In this study, interviews were conducted in-person between two people. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were not conducted in-person but as a remote meeting using a digital platform.

By its nature, the qualitative interview is exploratory, theory-based and collaborative. In the qualitative interview, the rules or expectations of the interviewer are informal, and the interviewer has more freedom to address topics, form questions and steer the discussion in the desired direction, than for example when applying a survey type of interview. Typically, a qualitative interview focuses on specific topics, but the method is also characterized by a flexible and comprehensive approach to other issues emerging during the interview process. The qualitative interview focuses on the quality of interviewee's experiences and, instead of gathering facts, the aim is to form an overall picture of the significant factors affecting the interviewee's life. When evaluating the information collected through qualitative interviews, it is assumed that the quality of the data is diverse since the experiences of interviewees on the research topic are personal and thus likely to differ. The aim of the qualitative interview is to find out the characteristics of these subjective experiences and their social organization. (Gubrium & Holstein 2001, 58.)

Interview studies can be divided into three distinct types according to which kind of research questions they focus on: positivist, emotionalist, and constructionist. As these three types of interview study focus on distinct types of research questions, they also require different kinds of interview questions. Positivist interview study approaches,

which are also called realist or naturalist, focus on the so-called facts which is why they often involve a lot of information questions. For instance, an interviewer can be interested in figuring out how a particular process is conducted in an organization. To explore this, the interviewer asks the same questions, usually the what-questions, from each participant so that eventually the interviewer can form a picture of what happens in the process by putting together the information gathered. Emotionalist, also referred as subjectivist interview approaches, sees interviews as a way to get familiar with participants' subjective experiences. When investigating an organizational change, for instance, the interviewer in this case would be interested in what the staff thinks about the process of change, what are their opinions, perceptions, and emotions. So instead of focusing on the information related to the process, the interviewer is interested in the experiences of participants involved. Lastly, constructivist interview approaches consider how meanings are constructed in the interplay of the interviewer and interviewee. Although the interaction is central, the interviews however often resemble everyday conversations, in which researcher's level of activity can differ from the other party of the conversation. If the interviewer is passive, like usually is the case in structured and standardized interviews where interviewer uses preplanned, often the how-questions to initiate the conversation, it is obvious that there is also less interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 79.) Since the purpose of the study is to understand the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation, in which people's experiences about the phenomena play a significant role, is emotionalist interview study approach considered the most appropriate type of interview.

Interviews are used in business research since they are an efficient and practical way to collect current information for the study. In addition to selecting the appropriate interview study type for the research question, the research approach and the purpose of the research should be considered when pondering the appropriate type of interview for the research. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 81.) There are three distinct types of qualitative interview: structured and standardized, guided, semi-structured, and unstructured and informal. Depending on the type of interview, the interview can take from couple of minutes to several days. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 111-112; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 81.) In this study, a semi-structured interview was used to collect empirical information on the phenomenon under study.

Interviews consisting of positivist what-questions, are usually structured and standardized by their nature. In this type of interview, the interviewer follows a preplanned structure according to which questions are asked and there is typically little flexibility in dealing with the questions. Structured and standardized interviews are regarded as qualitative when they consist of open-ended questions. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 81.) Structured interviews can be conducted through questionnaires in which questions and their order are the same for each interviewee. Structured interview is convenient method when the number of interviewees is high, and interviewees represent similar kind of group. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 114–115.) These types of interviews are effective in collecting facts and can also be useful in situations when there is a need to reduce variety caused by various interviewers involved, the interviewer is unfamiliar with the topic or inexperienced, and when it is important that the information obtained from the interviewees can be systematically compared with each other. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 81.)

Many qualitative interviews that use what and how-questions, are guided or semi-structured in nature. In these types of interviews, the interviewer is prepared by getting acquainted with the topic and making the plan for the interview. Semi-structured interview focuses on pre-defined themes but the interview itself is flexible in nature since it allows deviation from the plan as the interview progresses, such as changes in the order of interview questions. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 114–115; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82.) Semi-structured interview is an appropriate method when the research topic involves sensitivity or intimacy, or seeks to examine poorly acknowledged things like values, ideals, and justifications (Metsämuuronen 2006, 114–115). The major advantage of guided or semi-structured interviews is that though they are organized and comprehensive, their tone is rather informal and conversational. Through a conversational interview, the interviewer can obtain a wide range of information, even outside the subject of the interview, and it is thus important that the interviewer does not follow the designed interview structure too rigidly. However, freedom to deviate from the designed structure can pose challenges for the interviewer, such as conducting the interview in such a way that all the necessary topics are certainly addressed during the discussion or comparing potentially very varied interview materials with each other. Variation in materials is likely as interviewees respond to questions according to their own experiences and they may interpret the same questions in different ways. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82.)

Often qualitative interviews are unstructured which are open, informal, and narrative in nature (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82–83). Unstructured, an open interview has also been termed as a free, deep, and informal interview. By its nature, an open interview can be near to conversation and the interviewer does not necessarily direct the conversation but the change in discussion's direction is initiated by the interviewee. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 114–115.) This type of interview is especially useful when the topic is studied intensively and extensively and from the perspective of the interviewee. In addition, it suits well in situations when experiences of interviewees vary a lot, the subject to be discussed is poorly recalled (the past), things are poorly acknowledged, when there is a limited number of participants or when the topic is sensitive and the relationship between interviewer and interviewee is positive. (Metsämuuronen 2006, 114–115; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82–83.) Compared to structured interviews, unstructured interviews are significantly more flexible in nature. Although some questions and concepts guiding the discussion may have been prepared for the unstructured interview, the formal and structured interview protocol is not used. In addition, in unstructured interview the discussion is free to move in direction that participants find interesting, or the direction can be changed. These types of interviews rely remarkably on what the interviewee is telling, and their main purpose is to produce a story, a narrative. The advantage of unstructured interviews is their individuality, contextuality, and relevance to both the interviewee and the researcher. In addition, they enable us to gain new and unexpected insights about the research topic. Conducting an unstructured interview requires good social skills from the researcher as well as a significant amount of time resources to analyze and draw up conclusions from versatile interview material. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 82–83.)

3.2.2 Selecting and collecting the interview data

In this study, a semi-structured interview was selected as a data collection method to gather empirical information from the field on the research topic. Semi-structured interview was selected as a data collection method since it provides a structure for a discussion that is however not too rigid but leaves room for deviation from the interview plan. Justification for the choice of method was also that a semi-structured interview allows obtaining diverse, detailed, up-to-date and experiential research data from

participants. As the researcher has little previous experience in conducting research, a semi-structured interview was considered a method to ensure that all necessary themes were addressed in the interviews, while maintaining a conversational nature. The body of the interview consisted of 17 questions (see Appendix 1), which the researcher had divided into three themes formed based on the literature review: emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, management's role in strategy implementation, and strategic communication in strategy implementation. The theme related to communication was named strategic communication because the author wanted the interviews to focus specifically on communication related to strategy implementation instead of discussing more the organization's communication in general. In total, five semi-structured interviews were conducted for the study and each interview was conducted between two individuals, the researcher, and the participant.

To ensure that interviewees have personal experience and relevant information about the research topic, participants for the study were selected purposefully. The idea behind the purposeful sampling strategy is to intentionally select participants who are best suited to help the researcher to better understand the phenomenon being studied. The aim is therefore to find those participants who have first-hand experience of the phenomenon and who can provide relevant information on the research topic. (Creswell 2007, 118; Creswell 2014, 189.) As the purpose of the research is to study emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from management's perspective, potential participants were seen as those who represent company management either by working in the company's management themselves or by collaborating actively with the company's management, like management consultants. The reason why working with the company management was seen as one important criterion for potential interviewees was that strategy work and planning strategy implementation usually takes place at the management level. So, to gain information about strategy implementation from management's perspective, it was valuable that the participant has worked on the strategy either in a management position or collaborated closely with the company management who is working on the strategy process. In this study, interviewees were considered as experts who contribute to the research by sharing their firsthand experiences and insights about the research topic and providing empirical information on how organizations perform strategy implementation, what factors influence it and what role individuals, especially those in management positions, play in its success.

Since the study was conducted in Finland and the researcher's goal was to meet the interviewees in person, the researcher focused on companies operating in Finland. Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection was conducted by first identifying organizations that offer expertise in strategy, strategic change, or strategy implementation. The focus was on organizations providing expertise in these areas, as such companies were expected to have a high and diverse range of expertise in the field of strategic management and thus relevant information to provide on the research topic. Internationality of the organization was considered as a virtue, but not as a necessary factor. Once potential organizations were identified, interview invitations were sent to 22 representatives of seven different companies on 25th of March 2021 by email. Invitation introduced the thesis topic and its purpose, estimated duration of the interview, proposal on the date of the interview and the way interview is conducted, as well as a privacy note and a promise of anonymity. In addition, a possibility to get familiar with the interview questions in advance was provided to participants.

Four of the interested participants replied within a week to the invitation and a fifth participant two weeks after the invitation was sent. Together these five participants represented four different companies. My intention was to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants, but due to COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted through a business communication platform called Microsoft Teams. Booking interview times with participants was easy and they were scheduled to take place soon after accepting the invitation. Questions for interviews were prepared for both Finnish and English but as all participants were Finnish, interviews were conducted in Finnish to ensure fluent discussion and to promote relaxed atmosphere. Two of the participants asked to receive interview questions in advance to prepare for the interview. All interviews started with reviewing the purpose of the thesis and introducing themes of the interview, after which the participants were asked for permission to record the interview for transcription purposes. The researcher and all participants had the camera on during the interview, which facilitated the fluency and interactivity of the conversation as the researcher and the participants were not familiar with each other in advance. The structure of the interview was the same for all interviewees excluding some minor changes in the order of questions that occurred as the interview progressed. After all interview topics were covered, the recording was stopped and interviewees were informed that if they had any additional questions or comments on the topic, it is possible to point them out without being recorded. No remarkable additional comments or questions came out after the

recording was stopped but each interviewee was interested to be informed once the thesis is finished and ready to be read. Table 2 summarizes all interviews including participants, their titles, represented company, date of the interview and duration. Information about the participants and the companies they represent is described in Table 2 so that the promise of anonymity given to the participants is fulfilled.

Table 2. Summary of the interviews

Participant	Title	Company	Date	Duration
Participant A	Consultant	A	12.4.2021	52 minutes
Participant B	Strategy partner	A	12.4.2021	49 minutes
Participant C	Senior Advisor & Account Director	B	14.4.2021	50 minutes
Participant D	Country Leader	C	14.4.2021	52 minutes
Participant E	Partner	D	16.4.2021	38 minutes

As presented in Table 2, duration of the recordings varied from 38 minutes to 52 minutes and interviews were held within one week, between 12th and 16th of April 2021. Interviews for participants A and B were held on the same day and they represented the same company A. Company A is one of the largest accounting companies operating in Finland, in which participant B is the leader of strategy functions and has a comprehensive experience in strategy and change management. Participant C represents company B which considers itself as a change agency providing services in strategy and communication. Company C is a management consulting company in which representative participant D is a country leader and participant E is a partner in company D providing management consulting services. Participant E has a background in psychology which was seen as a potentially beneficial addition to the interview material.

3.3 Data analysis

The main purpose of qualitative research is to better understand and comprehend the phenomenon being studied. Interpretation plays a particularly important role here, because understanding the phenomenon requires the ability to interpret the research data. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2020, 130.) Data analysis is one of the main elements in empirical research and plays a key role in the interpretation of data. It is a process through which the collected data is compiled and organized. The purpose of data analysis is to benefit from the collected information and create a meaning for it. Processing the research data

aims to present scientifically valid information about the research problem. (Ghauri & Grønhaug 2002, 122; KOPPA 2010.)

In this study, the applied method for data analysis is content analysis, which is a broadly used technique in qualitative research (Hsieh & Shannon 2005). Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1278) define qualitative content analysis as a "research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns". This definition is supported by Weber's (1990, 10) idea of qualitative content analysis as a research method that focuses on the content or contextual meaning of the text by looking at typical features of communication and seeks to make assumptions from the text data by using different procedures. Text data may have been collected from interviews, narrative responses, observations, focus groups, open-ended survey questions or print media, like books, manuals, or articles (Kondracki et al. 2002, 224–225). Key idea of content analysis is that extensive amounts of text is classified into reasonable number of categories which consist of different units of text, such as phrases and words, and are assumed to have alike meanings (Weber 1990, 12).

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1277), there are three different approaches to qualitative content analysis: conventional content analysis, directed content analysis and summative content analysis. The limitation of existing literature and theory regarding the researched phenomenon and the inductive way of examining the data justify why, of these three approaches, conventional content analysis is the closest to the type of data analysis used in this study. Conventional content analysis is typically used in studies which aim to describe phenomenon, in this study the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation, and when research literature or existing theory on phenomenon is limited. In conventional content analysis, category development is inductive by nature which means that instead of using preconceived categories to analyze the data, categories and their names are derived from the data. If the material is collected through interviews, open-ended questions are used. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005.) Principles of content analysis suit well with the fundamental ideas of philosophical positioning of this study, which is constructivism. As in content analysis the category development takes place inductively, it allows new and unanticipated categories or themes to emerge from the interview material consisting of participants' individual experiences and perceptions about the phenomena. Thus, conventional content analysis

facilitates the researcher to recognize emerging insights and connect them with the existing theory and this way to contribute to knowledge building. This in turn is in line with constructivism, according to which things are built on individuals' subjective experiences and meanings given to things. (Davis et al. 1990; Hsieh & Shannon 2005; Dubovskiy 2019.)

Data analysis of the study was conducted by following the procedures and steps presented in the process of inductive coding by Thomas (2003, 4–5). According to Thomas (2003, 2), "The inductive approach is a systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data where the analysis is guided by specific objectives." Inductive approach for qualitative data analysis is usually applied when the raw material is extensive and needs to be summarized, when links between the research objects and findings derived from the data needs to be verified and when there is a need to develop a theory or model of the underlying structure of processes or experiences that emerge in the raw data. In general, the purpose of inductive approaches is to make sense of complex data through data reduction, resulting in development of themes or categories from the raw data. (Thomas 2003, 2–3.) As a technique, inductive approach enables to process the data without trying to fit it into some theoretical framework or the researcher's analytical assumptions. Instead, it allows findings to arise from the research data freely and gives the researcher the freedom to form themes or categories without theoretical limitations. However, it is good to bear in mind that while the inductive approach brings freedoms to data analysis, no data is processed in a vacuum, and researchers are always tied to their epistemological and theoretical obligations affecting interpretation of the data. (Thomas 2003, 3; Braun & Clarke 2006, 84.) Table 3 illustrates the phases of the coding process in data analysis (Creswell 2012, 244), which is consistent with the stages of Thomas's (2003) inductive coding.

Table 3. Coding process in data analysis (based on Creswell 2012, 244)

Phases of analysis	Initial reading the textual data and its formatting	Familiarizing with the content and identifying segments of information	Labelling the segments of information with codes to create categories	Reducing overlap and redundancy of codes, combining of codes	Revising categories and identifying the most important categories
Resulting amount of data	Several pages of text	Several segments of text	30-50 categories	Categories reduced to 20	5–7 categories

As suggested by Thomas (2003, 5) the first phase of data analysis begun with formatting the files of raw data in a common format by transcribing all five recordings into separate Word documents, resulting in one document per recording. Transcripts of recordings were done in detail, and interviews were transcribed word for word although this method was identified as a time-consuming practice. Transcribing consisted of two phases of which the first one was done by using Microsoft Word's voice-assisted "Dictate" feature, through which raw versions of the recordings were created in written form. In the second phase, after the program had transcribed all five recordings, the researcher re-listened all recordings while editing the transcripts made by the software by making text edits like corrections, additions, punctuations, and completion of sentences. Although the software had made the first version of transcripts, this phase required close reading of the raw text and was laborious. However, having a raw version of transcripts enabled the researcher simultaneously to focus on the content of recordings while editing the text and this way to begin preliminary analysis at the level of thought instead of just writing recordings down. This is in line with the second stage of Thomas's (2003, 5) process where the researcher gets familiar with the content and increases an understanding of the details and latent themes in the text. In total, transcription of recordings took about one month, and they were done between 19th of April and 19th of May 2021.

The next phase of data analysis was about labeling relevant pieces in transcripts. Labeling, that is also referred to as coding, was done by using qualitative data analysis

software called NVivo12. Each transcript was treated as a separate document in NVivo12, and no preconceived categories or themes were developed for data analysis as the researcher wanted to promote the free emergence of codes from the material and not to limit this by creating any restrictive factors. Coding, which Thomas (2003, 5) refers to creation of meaning units, was started while reading the transcripts by highlighting all pieces of text that seemed relevant to the research problem, such as words, sentences, and phrases, and that might concern different kind of things such as activities, actions, opinions, processes, or concepts. The highlighted pieces were given codes and they could have more than one code. The first round of coding was conducted between 20th of May and 13th of July and resulted in a total of 439 codes.

Once the first round of coding was done, it was time to proceed in the process to the phases of "Creation of categories" and "Overlapping coding and uncoded text" (Thomas 2003, 5). In practice this meant that coded transcripts were first re-read, and it was then decided which codes were the most important and could be combined into a category. Organizing codes was done in NVivo12 software by first setting codes in descending order to review how many times each code was used and to identify the most used codes in transcripts. Then, those codes which represented the same idea but were worded slightly differently, were reformatted, and merged. Codes which were considered discrete from the context and could not be grouped together with other codes, were left outside the scope at this point. Finally, once all codes were reviewed and organized, categories were developed by grouping those codes together which were considered to relate to each other and represent the same theme. This resulted in 46 initial categories of which the number of references varied from two to 148. Number of references indicates how many times each code has been used in transcripts and when grouped into one category, the number of code references grouped to same category is summed. The category which included the highest number of references was "Strategy" with 148 references. Since the number of 46 categories was too high, categories were reviewed, organized according to their number of references, and evaluated according to their relevancy to the research topic and relatedness to each other. As a result of the re-evaluation and merging of categories, 20 categories remained.

In the previous phase initial categories were formed and named. Once the number of preliminary categories was reduced to 20 categories the next step was to decide which are the most relevant ones and how they are connected to each other. Thomas (2003, 5) calls this phase "Continuing revision and refinement of category system". At this phase, the

names of categories were re-checked, merged, and possible modifications were made. As a result of revision, seven most relevant categories for the study were identified. Their relevance was evaluated based on the number of references in the categories and the researcher's own view. Table 4 presents categories developed as a result of data analysis, their number of references, and themes they are linked to.

Table 4. Seven most relevant categories

Category name	Number of references	Theme(s)
Strategy, strategy implementation and strategic communication	426	Strategy implementation and strategic communication
Organizational culture, personnel, and individual skill	204	-
Communication	149	Strategic communication
Management and the role of the management	126	Management's role in strategy implementation
Emotional intelligence and emotions in organizations	120	Emotional intelligence in strategy implementation
KPIs and performance management	55	-
Change process, the effects of change on individuals	51	Strategy implementation

Category name describes the topics covered in the interviews and which the author combined into one according to their interrelatedness to each other. Number of references indicates how many times the topics within the category were referred to during the interviews in total and Theme describes under which interview theme the researcher has included the category. 17 interview questions that were developed to collect the research data were classified under three themes: emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, management's role in strategy implementation, and strategic communication in strategy implementation. Two of the categories could not be associated with any themes: Organizational culture, personnel, and individual skill, and key performance indicators (KPIs) and performance management. These categories were considered relevant due to their number of references and importance to the research topic. However, as they could not be linked to any of the interview themes, they are considered outside the research scope and are not addressed in the results.

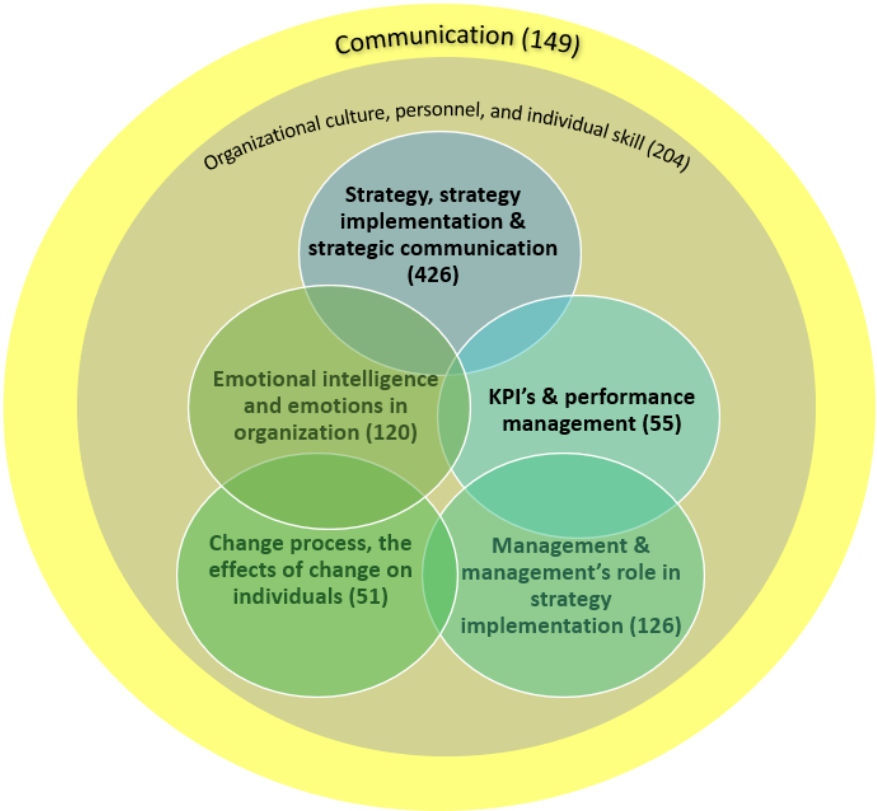

Figure 4. Categories developed during the data analysis and their relationships

Figure 4 illustrates the categories developed as a result of the data analysis and how they are positioned in relation to each other. Communication is considered a factor enabling organizational activities and, together with the category of organizational culture, personnel, and individual skill, a factor that affects all the other five categories in the background. These remaining five categories are considered equal in relation to each other. The number of categories is a good indicator of the breadth of the discussion in the interviews, although on the other hand, it can also be interpreted as reflecting shortcomings in the limitation of the research. The large number of categories may partly indicate the sprawl of the discussion in the interviews, but it may also imply the diversity of the discussions and, on the other hand, how many subject areas the research problem affects in organizations.

3.4 Trustworthiness of the study

In this chapter, the trustworthiness of the study will be evaluated. The fundamental issue in relation to trustworthiness is how the researcher can assure his or her audience of the research findings, and their quality and importance in scientific manner (Guba & Lincoln 1985, 290). Concepts of reliability, validity and generalizability are the classic criteria for

evaluating the trustworthiness of the research. Reliability refers to the degree of consistency of a study by looking at how well another researcher can repeat the experiment and produce similar results. Validity then refers to how accurately the study findings explain or describe what happened. Lastly, generalizability describes the extent to which research results can be extended into a broader context. (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 292–294.)

The criteria of reliability, validity, and generalizability are well suited to establish trustworthiness in quantitative research, but their applicability is however controversial in qualitative research. Some researchers even dispute their applicability for qualitative research. (Ghauri et al. 2008.) In qualitative research, reliability cannot be evaluated by viewing the reproducibility of the study like in quantitative research nor can qualitative interpretation be paralleled with the relevance of a statistical model that is typical in quantitative research. Thus, it is needed to consider other, more suitable criteria to evaluate trustworthiness in qualitative research. (Mäkelä & Apo 1990, 47.) Eriksson and Kovalainen (2008, 294) have suggested that if the research relies on relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, and when doing constructionist qualitative research, it is recommended to consider replacing the traditional criteria of validity, reliability and generalizability with alternative criteria that is developed to fit better these philosophical foundations in research. As the study relies on relativist ontology by suggesting that there are various realities and subjectivist epistemology by emphasizing that understandings are jointly created, it is justified to seek for alternative criteria to establish trustworthiness in this research.

Alternative criteria to reliability and validity that have been suggested to better demonstrate trustworthiness in qualitative research consist of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Guba & Lincoln 1985, 290; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294; Ghauri et al. 2008). When pondering credibility of the study, the researcher should evaluate his or her level of familiarity with the research topic, the adequacy of the data to justify the claims presented in the study, and whether the conceptions made by the researcher match with informants'. In addition, the researcher should evaluate whether connections between observations and categories are logical and strong. (Eskola & Suoranta 1998; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294.) According to Guba and Lincoln (1985, 296) implementation of the credibility criterion involves two tasks. First, the study needs to be conducted in such a way that enhances the probability that the findings of the

study are considered credible. Second, the study findings need to be approved by the representatives of the phenomenon under study. Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007, 28) has proposed that to promote the credibility of the study, interviews should involve a number of informants with high level of knowledge who look at the phenomenon from different perspectives. Informants can consist of, for example, actors belonging to different hierarchical levels of the organization, different functions, as well as different organizations. Nummela et al. (2016, 57) suggest that having key decision makers as informants promotes the credibility of the study. In this study, credibility was enhanced by having informants with diverse backgrounds representing several different organizations and positions. However, the unifying factor of the informants was that they either work in management positions or work with the company management. In addition, a technique called member checking, in which interpretations, findings and the data are shared with the participants, was used to promote credibility of the study (Guba & Lincoln 1985, 301, Thomas 2003, 7).

The way researcher has provided information to the reader and whether the research process has been logical, documented, and traceable, are described through dependability (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). A technique to assess dependability of the research consists of two main tasks: examining the research process and examining the data, interpretations, findings, and recommendations. Through the first task, the researcher seeks to demonstrate the dependability of the study by determining its acceptability and by requiring consistency in the latter task, the researcher establishes confirmability of the study. (Guba & Lincoln 1985, 316–317.) Dependability can be promoted by considering, as well as possible, the unpredictable preconditions affecting the research (Eskola & Suoranta 1998). To establish dependability in this study, the researcher has reported the research process as traceable and as logically as possible and has strived for unbiased in interpretations and findings.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985, 300) confirmability of the study refers to how plausible the results of the study are. Eskola and Suoranta (1998) have proposed that confirmability means that the interpretations made by the researcher are supported by other studies investigating similar research topics. Confirmability demonstrates how well researchers have succeeded in connecting research findings and interpretations to the data in such ways that can be effortlessly understood by others (Guba & Lincoln 1985, 319; Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). The theoretical framework of the study was

multidisciplinary as it consists of literature familiar in business, economics, and psychology. Estimates of the possible findings of the study based on the theoretical framework proved to be fairly accurate. It can be therefore concluded that the researcher succeeded in connecting outcomes of the empirical research to the data, which increases the confirmability of the study.

Transferability refers to the similarity of the contexts in which different studies are conducted. It does not mean that research should be generalized in such a way that it would apply to all similar contexts but in case research is conducted again by another researcher, findings would be to some extent the same. (Guba & Lincoln 1985, 298.) Transferability is not about replication but finding out whether there are connections between researcher's study and previous research, and whether some sort of similarity exists in other research contexts (Eriksson & Kovalainen 2008, 294). Gathering empirical evidence on the contextual similarities of the studies is recommended to assess whether there is a link between the previous study and the study being conducted. It is that researcher's responsibility to clarify the contextual similarity, who is making an application as the researcher of the original study cannot know the occasions to which transferability might be sought in the future. (Guba & Lincoln 1985, 298.) If this study is conducted again by another researcher, the similarity of results cannot be forecasted as the empirical research is based on individuals' subjective experiences and viewpoints. However, the empirics and methods of the study have been reported as carefully as possible so that a similar study can be conducted again.

3.5 Research ethics of the study

Qualitative research focuses on exploring and describing people, and their natural environments (Orb et al. 2000, 93). In qualitative research, people's ability to feel and perceive things prevents examining the research topic objectively and emotionally detached (Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012, 71). The purpose of qualitative research is to describe the phenomenon under study from the viewpoint of the participants by interviewing or observing them. By listening to or observing the participants in their natural environments, the researcher can collect their subjective experiences of the phenomenon under study and make interpretations of them. (Orb et al. 2000, 93.) When studying people, qualitative research seeks to capture the subjective experiences, meanings, and voices of individuals. (Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012, 76).

According to Aluwihare-Samaranayake (2012, 71), in qualitative research, representing the voice of the participants requires a shared dialogue and critical consciousness in terms of research ethics as they promote describing participants' voice and experiences in an inter-subjective way. Studying individuals' experiences and representing their voices can pose ethical challenges for both the participant and the researcher. With the help of critical consciousness, which is presented as a mechanism reflecting the critical understanding of reality, the researcher can reduce the emergence of ethical challenges in research as critical consciousness involves awareness of the inequities and differences in privilege and power embedded in social relationships. When dealing with individuals' experiences, it is important that the researcher commits to principles of justice, respect, beneficence, and nonmaleficence through lens of dialogue, critical consciousness, and inter-subjectivity. (Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012, 76.)

The basic starting point for qualitative research is the relationship between the researcher and the participant, where trust plays a central role. The trust between the researcher and the participant promotes conducting qualitative research as participation in the research depends on whether the participant is willing to share his or her experiences on the phenomenon under study. (Orb et al. 2000, 93; Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK 2019). In addition to the willingness of the participants, it is in accordance with ethical principles that the participants give their informed consent to participate in the research. When approaching potential participants for the first time by email, they were given information about the research topic, the purpose of the research, the interview language (presumably the participants' native language), and an estimate of the duration of the interview. To create the foundation for the building of trust with the participants, the researcher provided the participants the possibility to familiarize themselves with the interview questions in advance, to address questions before consenting to participate in the research, and to participate in the study anonymously. In addition, no time limit was set for the potential participants to confirm their participation in the study, so that it would be possible for them to return to the researcher when it suits them. (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK 2019.)

To promote trust building with the participants and to act in accordance with the duties of the data controller, the researcher informed the participants at the beginning of each interview how the collected data will be processed, stored, and disposed of. Before starting the interview, the participants were asked for permission to record the interview and were informed that the researcher would use the recordings for research purposes and

that only she would have access to the recordings. In accordance with the principle of beneficence, the participants were told after the interview that if they wished, the research results could be delivered to them for review (Orb et al. 2000; Aluwihare-Samaranayake 2012). Each participant indicated that they would be interested in seeing the thesis when it is completed. When processing the material, the researcher complied with the guidelines of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Each interview transcript was saved so that its file name and the content of the transcript itself do not contain any personal data, and the data was stored in secure Seafile cloud storage service, provided by University of Turku. (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity TENK 2019.)

When preparing for the research, the researcher should try to consider the possible ethical issues that she or he may encounter during the research process. Although it is difficult to predict ethical dilemmas arising from interviews, the researcher should however be aware if the themes discussed in the interviews are sensitive or may trigger conflicts. (Orb et al. 2000, 94.) In this study, the researcher assumed that the discussion about emotional intelligence can be perceived as sensitive, especially when the participants share their own personal views and feelings on the matter. However, the discussion on the topic turned out to be less sensitive and reserved than the researcher had prepared for, and participants shared their experiences openly. On the other hand, some participants requested that their participation should be treated anonymously, which may have promoted the open atmosphere in the interviews. Although part of the participants did not request anonymity, the researcher pseudonymized all the interview data according to the principle of beneficence. A pseudonym protects the identity of the participant and is recommended in qualitative research. Although qualitative research requires confidentiality and the possibility of anonymity, it also requires confirmability that takes place through documentation, which can nevertheless pose challenges to the principles of trust and anonymity (Orb et al. 2000, 95.) The researcher considers that the research documentation has been conducted in a way that meets the requirements for confirmability while respecting the trust between the researcher and the participants and the research ethics principles of qualitative research. Since all the interviews were held in Finnish, the author has translated the interview material from Finnish to English, which can pose challenges in terms of interpreting the research results. Some of the meanings and nuances may be lost in the translation process, and on the other hand, some may be born. To ensure the quality of the translations, the author has paid particular attention to

the fact that the translation does not affect the content of the interview material and has used language consultancy.

4 Results

This section presents the results of the collected and analyzed empirical data. Originally, interview questions (Appendix 1) were categorized under three themes: emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, management's role in strategy implementation, and strategic communication in strategy implementation. However, as some of the questions of the theme of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation were purely about the strategy implementation (interview questions from five to eight), the researcher wanted to divide this theme into two separate sections for the sake of clarity when discussing the results: strategy implementation and emotional intelligence in strategy implementation. Thus, the results are discussed in four sub-sections, each addressing a theme covered in the semi-structured interviews. Themes and their related interview questions are presented in the operationalization table (Appendix 2). Communication is discussed in the results under the heading of strategic communication because the author wanted to tie the discussion related to communication to strategy implementation.

4.1 Emotional intelligence in strategy implementation

4.1.1 How emotional intelligence is present in organizations

Emotional intelligence as a concept is not unambiguous and well recognized in the business context. Therefore, when discussing the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, the researcher wanted to map out how participants understand the concept of emotional intelligence in the first place and whether it matches with the definition described in the literature. According to participants, emotional intelligence is largely about the ability to understand emotions and experiences of others.

Above all, it is an understanding of emotions. (Participant D)

It is the ability to step into the boots of others and thereby understanding others' experience. (Participant A)

To me, emotional intelligence means understanding the manifestation of people's emotions. It probably is about awareness of emotions, and the ability to identify and regulate them. In addition, I believe that emotional intelligence is also about regulating

emotional responses that may not be as constructive and appropriate to the situation. (Participant B)

I see emotional intelligence as a sensitivity to understand the emotions of the staff, members of the team, other people, and being capable of discussing them. (Participant C)

The basic idea of emotional intelligence is considered the ability to recognize one's own and others' emotions and take them into account in different situations. When viewing emotional intelligence, it is seen as a two-way ability. One side of emotional intelligence comprises the ability to read, recognize and understand emotions of others as well as to comprehend the perspectives of others. This side is considered outwardly directed. Another side is about being able to be aware of one's own emotions and recognize, regulate, and understand them, which is considered inwardly directed.

It is the ability to understand one's own and others' emotions and to be able to take them into account in different situations. These situations may involve emotions that may be related to working life, but they also may originate from a person's private life, which is reflected in the work. The better you understand these different situations and take them into account, the better your emotional intelligence will be, that is how I understand it. (Participant D)

If I define it in my own words, concisely I think that outwardly it (emotional intelligence) means that I understand the feelings of others and what is appropriate behavior in a particular situation. And when directed inward, it is about being able to recognize and regulate my own feelings. (Participant E)

Emotional intelligence is considered the ability to recognize and understand emotions and their manifestations. In addition, emotional intelligence is seen as the ability to discuss emotions and is seen to be related to empathy.

Emotional intelligence is not just the ability to recognize emotions, but also the ability to discuss them and engage in empathic conversations. (Participant C)

...so, when someone is sad, the ability to feel empathy for this comes from emotional intelligence... (Participant B)

The researcher expected that the concept of emotional intelligence may be a slightly new topic for the participants as they represent business management professionals rather than psychologist experts. In addition, the researcher was a bit doubtful about how willing the participants are to discuss emotional issues, so-called soft things. However, the researcher's hesitations turned out to be wrong and participants were very open discussing the topic. In addition, the responses regarding emotional intelligence were very similar and had in common that emotional intelligence was seen to be related to emotions and their understanding.

4.1.2 Emotional intelligence as manager's skill

In this study, emotional intelligence is viewed as an individual's skill. As the research topic is examined from the perspective of management, the emphasis is on the competencies of individuals working in management positions. Emotional intelligence as a manager's skill is demonstrated when the manager can understand others' perspectives and consider which leadership style is suitable for subordinates instead of leading others the way he or she would like to be led.

A manager's emotional intelligence is thinking about how others would like things to be handled, trying to understand others' perspective and how the others should be led – not like how I would like to be led. (Participant A)

Emotional intelligence is seen as an important skill for an individual in a managerial position. The individual's ability to apply emotional intelligence in management is reflected in the consideration of other views and their differences. In addition, emotional intelligence helps those in management positions to face and deal with difficult and sensitive situations, which may include, for instance, impaired performance of a coworker or subordinate that is due to personal challenges outside of work.

Emotional intelligence is an important skill in the skill repertoire for a person working in management. (Participant D)

Emotional intelligence probably appears in the skill palette of individual leaders or individuals. Or there it should show up, but I have seen ones that are good in so-called emotional intelligence and then ones that have no idea about the whole concept. (Participant B)

In principle, everyone in a supervisory position should be able to cope with the difficult civilian situations of their own subordinates and colleagues, and to understand their implications – for example, that they may not be able to work to their full potential and should be supported in some way. (Participant B)

When considering an appropriate leadership style, the question that should be pondered is whether the organization prioritizes people or efficiency. The question is not only considering the appropriate leadership style, but it also considers the organizational culture. The leader may not be emotionally intelligent to all members of the organization, but emotionally intelligent leadership should be reflected in the organization culture and company values.

Maybe it is also reflected in the organizational culture. After all, it probably shows up there at the top level of the organization, in terms of how you talk, how you take people into account and these types of things. It comes to cultural matters and what values are reflected in leadership, for example, whether people or efficiency are given priority. (Participant A)

Those in top management cannot be emotionally intelligent for everyone, but their emotional intelligence should somehow be reflected in the organizational culture, and even in that what kind of people are promoted as leaders or what kind of people are making progress in the organization. (Participant A)

In addition to being responsible for the group's activities, leaders are required to understand the group dynamics, the collective feeling of the group and as well as the feelings of individuals. Because emotional intelligence facilitates understanding emotions and experiences of others at both the individual and group level, it can also be used to build team spirit.

Every group leader has a big responsibility because he or she is responsible for the activities of the group. Of course, everyone takes responsibility for themselves, but ultimately the group leader is responsible for the actions of group members. If the leader does not react in any way to the actions of group members, he or she may go unnoticed if there is any activity in the group that is detrimental to the group spirit. (Participant D)

How emotional matters are perceived in an organization is largely determined by organizational culture. Organization's management plays a significant role in shaping organizational culture and hence the management's ability to apply emotional intelligence and emotion management skills are strongly associated to how emotional intelligence is manifested in organizational culture. Management's demonstration of the application of emotional intelligence in leadership may involve opening a dialogue about emotions and managing the emotional climate by acting as a valve for the emotions of teams. In addition, the organizational culture is reflected in a way how organization responds to issues in general, which in turn is affected by management's emotional intelligence and emotion management skills. Through emotionally intelligent management, emotions related to employee experience can be identified and responded to, and challenging issues such as work stress can be dealt with.

Emotional intelligence manifests itself in the way managers lead in an organization, in the way employees consider each other and act in a team, as well as in culture – what values determine an organization's leadership and organization itself. (Participant A)

Management and supervisors have a crucial role in creating an open culture of communication in the organization and encouraging members to express their feelings openly and discuss feelings of frustration. (Participant C)

Management, especially supervisors, act as valves for the emotions of their teams. I see this role as very important and supervisors should somehow, especially today, be given more support with questions related to emotional intelligence and its importance. And how they can identify issues related to employee experience, and at the same time respond to them appropriately as well as open discussions. I consider that very important. (Participant C)

Management's capabilities, and skills of emotional intelligence and emotion management affect how emotional issues are dealt within the organization and thus they are linked to organizational culture. (Participant E)

In addition to regarding emotional intelligence as an important skill for an individual in management position, emotional intelligence is seen as a factor affecting organizational culture by facilitating open discussion and collaboration among members of an organization. Participants did not point out reasons why emotional intelligence would not be a beneficial skill.

4.1.3 The role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation

Strategy implementation implies change, which typically raises emotions and questions in people. Types of emotions and questions are affected by the extent of change and how it is managed and communicated. As the research topic is viewed through the lens of individual skill, the researcher focused on examining the relevance of emotional intelligence skill of a person in management position in the implementation of strategy.

Understanding experiences that organization members are going through during change, responding to them appropriately and giving support embody emotional intelligence in the organization. In a situation of change, emotional intelligence, which one participant (A) also associated with purpose thinking, helps to create a participatory experience in the organization meaning that members of the organization can feel that they have an opportunity to influence and be active actors in change. By giving organization members the opportunity to influence matters concerning themselves, the organization gives individuals the opportunity to be heard and understood, which demonstrates emotional intelligence.

When you want to implement a strategy with emotional intelligence, you might want to talk about purpose thinking – that is, what is the purpose of my contribution in what the company does. In my opinion, emotional intelligence can be manifested through meaning and values, and when implementing the strategy, one should think about how the implementation is executed, whether the actions applied are participatory, whether ideas of the staff are considered, and whether the contribution of the organizations is involved and appreciated. (Participant A)

Yes, I claim that understanding people's experiences and responding to and supporting them in the right way it is quite an accelerator in implementing the strategy. (Participant B)

Implementation of a strategy may imply changes in roles and positions of organization members. Emotional intelligence facilitates the management to understand how organization members see and experience their role in the work, how changes may affect them, and what emotions change can cause, such as fear. Emotional intelligence can be used to anticipate the effects of strategy changes on the emotional curve of different organizational groups and to initiate discussions on the topic.

We have tried to figure out how people see their role at work, what is valuable to them and how they experience change. If there are any such fears or anxieties, it would be important to bring them up immediately and discuss them. (Participant C)

Emotional intelligence could be applied in strategy implementation by anticipating how change and strategy affect the emotional curve of different groups in the organization and opening open discussion. (Participant C)

In case the situation of change means unpleasant things, such as layoffs, it is important to involve emotional intelligence in communicating change. Emotional intelligence helps to make sense of how change and its extent should be communicated in the organization.

The skill of emotional intelligence is crucial especially in unfortunate situations, for example, if the organization must lay off staff. In situations of layoffs, it is important that a person with good emotional intelligence communicates with people who receive nasty news. (Participant D)

The importance of emotional intelligence in situations of change is seen evident, especially in situations where the organization needs to deal with the negative issues caused by change. In addition to helping with handling issues, emotional intelligence contributes to understanding the experiences and views of the organization's members and the perception of the collective emotional climate.

4.2 Strategy implementation

4.2.1 How strategies are implemented in organizations

Strategy implementation is related to change, and it can have various meanings depending on the situation and the extent of change. To understand the meaning of strategy implementation, one needs to first internalize what strategy stands for. Strategy reflects the company's vision and goal, which consist of different level choices through which the organization strives to achieve its objectives and competitive advantage in the market. Strategy implementation is execution of choices to activate the strategy and it demonstrates the gap between the status quo and the company's target status. It comprises business choices supporting each other, which are realistic to execute. Strategy implementation is part of the strategy process and begins in the planning phase when the company considers what it and its resources are capable of.

To understand what strategy implementation is about, one must first understand what strategy means. In short, strategy is about making choices at different levels to achieve company's goals and outperform its competitors. (Participant B)

Strategy demonstrates the position chosen by the company, its market products and so on. Then, the company has also chosen how it will activate the strategy, which is regarded as implementation. In a way implementation of the strategy is execution of activation choices. And then what that means in practice varies a lot depending on the situation. (Participant B)

Strategy implementation can mean very different things depending on the extent of change. In my opinion, it can mean the execution of those actions agreed in the strategy, or then it can mean making changes to the mindset or service path based on new insights about the customer group and segment being in transition. (Participant C)

Well, strategy implementation often involves various things and details. I think that strategy is a vision and a goal towards which an organization is going. And then implementation is about moving from the status quo towards company's objectives. Activities required for strategy implementation depend on the type and the extent of

change. However, it comprises execution of things, introducing new ways of working, and communicating strongly in the organization. (Participant D)

Personally, I think that strategy is best implemented when it is defined as an activity, and it contains clear and well-measurable goals that can be broken down into scheduled activities. If the activities are not on the calendar, I see it very unlikely that the strategy will be implemented. (Participant E)

Strategic projects, priorities, strategic goals, introduction of new practices, and communication are all concrete actions related to strategy implementation. Basically, any action that takes a company towards a new direction determined by the strategy, can be considered as an action of strategy implementation. To succeed well, changes require continuous discussion and interactivity. Thus, communication is key, but it is not enough on its own, and the strategy must be fleshed out through projects, goals, and measurements.

When an organization starts to implement the strategy, it typically communicates its objectives at a high level. The implementation of the strategy is demonstrated through projects or very important priorities, as well as through objectives and performance management. (Participant A)

It is very holistic – I think strategy implementation comprises all business actions that occur after the new direction of an organization has been agreed upon. (Participant D)

To implement them successfully, changes require constant communication in the right place and at right the time. (Participant C)

The definition of strategy implementation is multidimensional, and people give it various meanings, also in the academic field. According to the participants, the best way to implement a strategy is to define it as actions, to set measurable concrete objectives, and to set a schedule for implementation.

4.2.2 Elements of strategy implementation in practice

When implementing a strategy, an organization needs to have a clear state of mind about its strategic goals, how they will be achieved and how the activities will be managed. As stated by the participants, there are various ways to implement the strategy and practices depending on the situation. However, to form a general overview of practices related to strategy implementation and to see whether the participants share similar perspectives on the subject, they were asked to describe the typical elements of strategy implementation.

It is difficult to find a specific formula for implementing the strategy, but there must be a clear state of mind about what you want to do and then think about where you need to go to achieve the goal and how to run the project. (Participant B)

Strategy implementation typically consists of strategy articulation, communication, the concretization of the strategy (projects, practices, development activities), performance management and measurement, engaging the organization and stakeholders, and introducing new practicalities. Of all activities related to strategy implementation, the participants stressed the importance of the role of communication throughout the process. Open discussion and good communication enable one to identify the opportunities and constraints of an organization and its operating environment.

One aspect of strategy implementation is strategy articulation, meaning that the strategy is communicated in a way that it is easily understood. Another aspect is concretization of the strategy, which involves the design of concrete projects or development actions to implement the strategy or improve current operations. The third aspect is related to performance management and measurement – which factors can be measured and contribute to the achievement of the strategic objectives. (Participant A)

Components of strategy implementation are communication, articulation, project planning, and performance management and measurement. (Participant A)

Strategy implementation consists of communication, engaging the organization and stakeholders, and introducing new operations. Communication is major and it is important already in the very beginning when the strategy is planned. Communication

and discussions with the organization and possibly with the customers too help to identify and understand the company's prospects and potential constraints. Thus, the implementation plan can be made much more concrete and realistic when the whole operating environment is understood. Communication is also important in that sense that it promotes engagement. The more people know about the status quo and the goal, the better they will be committed to putting it into practice in pursuing the organization's goals. (Participant D)

When planning the concretization of the strategy, in which management's contribution is crucial, an organization needs to consider activities and practicalities through which the strategy would be best implemented, as well as the resources and capabilities that are needed to put the implementation into practice and share ownership of the process. Companies often face challenges in completing strategic projects, requiring help outside the organization, such as from consultancy firms. Process-wise, strategy implementation often involves the following phases: recognizing businesses' strategic drivers, defining strategic goals, and determining projects, KPIs and actions. Strategy processes are treated as technical in the literature, but the implementation of the strategy in practice is strongly about the people and their reactions caused by the change process. As stated by participant B, a large part of strategy implementation, 60-70 percent, is about the facilitation of change in people's minds and the right kind of leadership.

Strategy has certain priorities for which operational objectives have been defined. Strategy implementation is about considering suitable projects, what are the practicalities related to them, and which are the required capabilities to materialize and internalize the project. (Participant C)

Although there are many situational differences in practicalities when implementing the strategy, the importance of communication applies in every situation. Especially, the role of management and the ways to communicate the change have a significant impact on the success of strategy implementation.

4.2.3 Who performs strategy implementation?

To understand the roles and responsibilities related to strategy implementation, the researcher wanted to ask the participants if it is possible to determine who performs

strategy implementation or who is responsible for it in the organization. Participants agreed that the implementation of the strategy belongs to everyone in the organization and harnessing some roles only for strategy implementation is not a common practice.

I would not say that there is a specific role for implementing the strategy. Sure, there are some roles in the management that are responsible for articulating the strategy and what does it mean in practice, but in general everyone in the organization takes part in strategy implementation. (Participant A)

It depends a lot on the situation, there is no specific role for that (strategy implementation) in organizations. (Participant B)

On a large scale, implementing the strategy is the responsibility of the whole company, but management is responsible for planning and communicating it. Ultimately, the CEO is responsible for the whole project. (Participant D)

Each member of the organization is involved in the implementation of the strategy. (Participant E)

However, what was said about the roles was that management is an important factor in initiating and ensuring the implementation of the strategy. In addition, the success of the implementation of the strategy was ultimately seen as the responsibility of the CEO and the board.

Management must share ownership and responsibility for projects to the organization with sufficient clarity. (Participant C)

Ultimately, the implementation of the strategy is the responsibility of the CEO's, and the board looks after it. And the CEO then, of course, uses the entire management team and organization to support it, starting with the company's communications. But yes, it is the responsibility of the management to think about how to implement the strategy successfully. (Participant D)

I see that kicking off the strategy implementation is heavily on management's duty. The way management communicates about the change and motivates the organization in the project has a great impact on how the implementation of the strategy will succeed. (Participant E)

As stated by the participants, strategy implementation is the responsibility of every member in the organization and there is no such a role that would be specifically harnessed for strategy implementation. However, to succeed, the implementation of the strategy needs to be linked to day-to-day management system, objectives, and incentives.

4.3 Strategy implementation from management's perspective

4.3.1 Management's responsibilities in strategy implementation

Management's role in strategy implementation is vital. It is the responsibility of the management to ensure that the various stages of strategy implementation are carried out according to the plan. Management's responsibilities in strategy implementation are diverse, but in short, they mainly comprise various tasks related to leadership and monitoring.

It is important for the management to determine, of course, the priorities that what will be done and in what order. And then the other thing is to be able to communicate the strategic message in such a simple way that it is understandable for everyone. They are probably the most important ones, being able to show a clear direction and communicate it in a way that is concrete enough for people to understand it, and to be able to set priorities for action. (Participant A)

Management must lead it (strategy implementation), be an example to others, represent an anchor for a strategic goal, and be on the front line. If management does not have a strong belief in the strategy to be implemented when it is called into question, the strategy is already dead at that point. There is no such an option that business management or chief of officer, or anyone titled as a leader, can externalize themselves from implementation of the strategy. (Participant B)

Management's responsibility in strategy implementation consist of tasks of different levels and types. Participants mentioned a variety of tasks for which management is responsible such as showing the direction of the organization and the strategy, clear communication, demonstrating leadership and leading by example, motivating organization members, creating meaning, setting priorities, demonstrating active search for solutions, identifying required actions, establishing an organizational action plan, explaining the big picture, and reporting to the board. When implementing a new strategy, one of management's tasks is to define strategic objectives for the organization. Setting goals can happen on different levels within the organization but they all should, however, be in line with the overall strategic objectives. To ensure that the defined strategic objectives are met, management monitors KPIs that are typically determined to measure the achievement of the objectives, establishes a schedule for implementation, and allocates resources.

Briefly, management's responsibilities consist of communication, showing a direction, opening discussion, creation of meaning, engaging the staff and sharing ownership, monitoring projects, and monitoring the "pulse" of the organizational culture and employee experience. (Participant C)

Management's responsibility is to set goals for the execution of strategy implementation, set new strategic objectives on a concrete level so that they mean something for everyone. In large organizations, this often breaks down into several different levels of management and if the management fails in engaging all different levels of organization with the set objectives, it is likely that implementation of the strategy fails. It is important to set goals and to monitor their execution through set KPIs. (Participant D)

Of course, management needs to oversee the progress of strategy implementation and make corrective actions if the direction is not right. Also being the decision maker since many times doing strategy implementation includes making tough decisions. If a decision cannot be made elsewhere in the organization, the management is responsible for making it in such a way that supports the implementation of the strategy. In addition to decision-making, management must report to the board on the situation, be up to date

on what is happening in the organization, form a big picture of the situation and report it. (Participant A)

The most important tasks of management are the ability to plan strategically, regular reflection of the strategy, and responsiveness to the operating environment and changes in it (competitors, raw material prices, etc.). Management's responsibility is to ensure that the strategy is up to date and if needed, adjust it. (Participant B)

In a situation of change, management should monitor the state of the organizational culture and employee experience. By staying up to date on the pulse of an organization, management is better able to respond to any possible issues that may occur throughout the process of strategy implementation. Indicating support for organization members and demonstrating the commitment of different levels of management to the implementation process demonstrates the contribution of the entire management to organizational culture. By creating a participatory experience in the organization and sharing ownership, management can foster the commitment of members to the organization at the time of change.

Management is responsible for initiating discussions on what this means and asks teams and staff how they see it. Instead of just identifying project owners and authors, management should pursue to engage people in the strategy by sharing ownership. In addition, management's responsibility is to keep an eye on the progress of projects, identify if changes need to be made to the direction of the organization, and constantly sense the "pulse" of the employee experience and organizational culture, and whether everything is well there if some radical changes are taken. (Participant C)

If management does not seem to be interested in a new direction or project, or an initiative that is being carried out, the organization may not be enthusiastic about it either. Management's visible support is important. (Participant D)

Communication was regarded as one of the most important responsibilities that management has. In addition to sharing information and showing direction, communication reflects management's commitment to the strategic project.

Yes, the main responsibility of the management is to keep the direction and big picture of the organization under control and communicate clearly so that all levels of management understand what is expected from them and their organizations and can convey the message in their own organization. (Participant A)

I think that communication is massively important. Communicating the direction of the organization and the strategic message clearly and constantly, and in a strongly emotional way if the change is significant, is crucial. Not every strategy needs to make a big move, but if it does, then it is important to communicate it clearly and that the top management itself is involved in ongoing communication. (Participant C)

The main task of the management is communication. When a new project is launched or a new organizational direction is defined, strong management support is needed. The more management can show commitment to the project, the better the chances of project implementation and organizational commitment. (Participant D)

Communication, communication, communication. In communicating strategy, it is important to talk about the big picture, what the organization is doing, what milestones we have and what have we achieved so far. (Participant E)

Management's responsibility for implementing the strategy is wide-ranging and includes several different tasks. The implementation of the strategy requires management to be able to plan the strategy, set strategic objectives, monitor, and reflect on the implementation of the strategy, take corrective actions if needed and be responsive to events occurring in organization's operating environment. Yet all these responsibilities were considered important, participants however emphasized the importance of certain responsibilities, in particular communication.

4.3.2 Two levels of management in strategy implementation

Participants recognized different roles of management in strategy implementation. In interviews, the discussion focused on two different levels of management, top management and middle management. Although the tasks related to the implementation of the strategy are rather similar within the whole management, there may be some nuance differences depending on the person.

In general, matters related to the implementation of the strategy such as communication, planning, drawing a road map, setting goals and staff engagement apply to all levels of the management. However, their content may vary depending on who is performing the task and what goals and KPI's are set for him or her. (Participant D)

Together with the CEO, the top management is responsible for setting the organization's strategic direction and making it clear to the rest of the organization. Communicating the mission statement and why everyone's contribution is important in it, is an important responsibility for the top management. The role of the top management is not to focus on the operational details of the business, but to oversee the big picture of the company's performance, identify potential risks that the company may face and make decisions. Middle management then is responsible for overseeing the organization's operations and the progress of on-going projects at the operational level and report them to the top management. In addition to basic status reporting, the middle management needs to be able to identify those issues that the top management should be aware of and ensure that they are taken to the top management. Thus, the role of the top management is more strategic compared to middle management.

Middle management has more role to play in strategy implementation at the operational level. It is middle management's responsibility to oversee that strategy implementation proceeds at operational level according to the plan, report the progress of the project, and to identify those matters that should be taken to the top management. Then, the top management typically focuses on the big picture, strategic decisions, risk evaluation and high-level decision making and prioritizing. Also, the top management must be able to rely on the ability of the middle management to take practical actions forward. (Participant A)

It is the responsibility of the middle management to concretize the direction of the organization for the personnel and at the same time to assess whether the personnel understand and approves it. Trying to put top management's strategic goals into action and at the same listening and responding to the needs of the personnel puts middle management in a difficult situation. The role of the middle management is to navigate between the top management and personnel and to find a balance between their

requirements. Ensuring that implementation of the strategy takes place on a practical level and monitoring the progress on operative level is middle management's responsibility and requires a lot of communication between internal stakeholders. For the planned strategy to materialize, its implementation must be part of the day-to-day work of middle management.

Well, strategy implementation should be part of middle management's day-to-day work. If the tasks related to strategy implementation are unattached from the day-to-day work, then the daily tasks will always take precedence. But if your day-to-day work includes strategy implementation tasks, then the strategy will be implemented. (Participant B)

Top management and the CEO should be actively communicating what is the direction of the organization, what is the purpose of organization's actions, why it is relevant and why everyone's contribution is important. And then supervisors (middle management) should be very strongly involved in concretizing this to the staff and observe how it is perceived, understood, and accepted. The top management monitors the big picture, and the middle management looks after how things fit into a company's daily life. (Participant C)

Yes, often the middle management is between a rock and a hard place, as it gets to look at both realities of the organization. If there is not enough communication with the middle management, the risk is that it slips into the perspective of employees and forgets its role as an employer, or then it gets tired with the employee perspective so much that it becomes absorbed by employer's role so strongly that stops for caring what people feel like. (Participant E)

Based on discussions with the participants, differences between roles of middle and top management in strategy implementation are clear. Top management focuses on monitoring the big picture of the company, making strategic decisions, identifying risks and upper-level prioritization whereas the middle management supervises organization's performance at the operational level and implements top management's plans in the day-to-day operations of the company.

4.3.3 Issues preventing management from implementing the strategy

There may been some issues that prevent management from performing strategy implementation effectively. Potential issues raised by the participants concerned communication, trust, roles, skills, resistance to change and commitment.

Things that make it difficult for the management to implement a strategy are lack of communication, lack of trust, failure of management system, obscurity of roles and responsibilities and competition within the management team. (Participant A)

If there is no commitment to it (strategy), then nothing will happen. If it is imagined that the CEO is not committed to the strategy, it will not be implemented no matter how good the strategy is or how well it is tried to be implemented. Its CEO's own actions and lack of example that will dilute all the activities that are being done for implementation. (Participant B)

I often find the biggest challenge is that the strategy is not clear enough. If the strategy is not clear enough, there is no understanding or knowledge of how to take responsibility and engage in discussions that inspire, share ownership, and provide insights into how the strategy can be further refined and supported. (Participant C)

There is always a group of people who do not accept change because, for example, their own job may be under threat. The bigger the change, the more certain it is that there will be resistance. (Participant D)

Lack of open communication and discussion between different levels of management is one preventing factor. In case different levels of management do not invest in mutual communication, it may limit information sharing within the management and coordinating activities of strategy implementation. An issue that may harm open communication between parties is lack of trust. For instance, if middle management is afraid to report top management challenges that have been identified in strategy implementation, there is no trust between middle and top management.

If the dialogue between the levels of the management does not work and because of a lack of trust or fear of being stigmatized as a failure, one does not dare to report risks or problems to top management, it may be too late to respond to things that are taking the organization in the wrong direction. (Participant A)

To perform strategy implementation effectively, it is important that everyone in management knows their roles and responsibilities, and goals and KPI's through which their performance is evaluated. If the roles and responsibilities are not clear, it is likely to hamper management's performance in strategy implementation. In addition, the highly competitive atmosphere within the management and lack of team spirit are issues that likely prevent management from performing strategy implementation seamlessly.

If there are obscurities in roles and responsibilities, it is possible that the implementation of the strategy falls between the responsibilities. Management's duty is to ensure that roles and responsibilities in the organization are clear and that it is known who is responsible for what and how things are managed. (Participant A)

The management team should work together for a common goal and not so that everyone is working to their own advantage. (Participant A)

Individuals in management positions are typically highly skilled and knowledgeable. However, if there are shortcomings in the management's own skill level, this may be detrimental to the implementation of the strategy. For instance, being able to manage organization's development portfolio is a skill which lack may limit strategy implementation.

Management's own skill level has a significant impact. There may be areas that the manager does not master, but this does not have to be an obstacle if she or he is able to identify gaps in her or his own skill level and knows how to search for people who know these areas. Problems arise if one does not recognize one's own skills or shortcomings in them, and thus does not know how to apply for expertise elsewhere. (Participant E)

Lastly, though management's role is to be a driving force in strategy implementation, it is good to notify that also individuals in management can experience change resistance

and lack of commitment to the new strategy. These issues are very likely to affect an individual's motivation to perform responsibilities related to strategy implementation properly.

4.4 The connection between strategic communication and emotional intelligence

4.4.1 Strategic communication in practice and the role of emotional intelligence in it

Communication within the organization, both internal and external, in connection with strategy implementation is referred to as strategic communication. In addition to opening dialogues on the strategy, strategic communication comprises storytelling, communicating important issues and goals to the organization, sharing information on the strategy progress and milestones, and describing what strategy implementation means at a concrete level and what is expected from the members of the organization in this regard. Sharing information on milestones along the way creates visibility into the development of the process and motivates organization members. Thus, communication helps organizations to track the progress of the implementation process at a higher level and see which direction the organization is heading.

It requires repetition and visibility as well as storytelling. When something is achieved in the strategy implementation process, the efforts are highlighted and explained how they helped in implementing the strategy. This provides concrete examples of how things have progressed and how they relate to each other. (Participant A)

Strategic communication is in the first instance communicating the agreed strategy to the organization. (Participant D)

I think that strategic communication is first describing the big picture and then explaining where we should get to. And then describing how do we get there. (Participant E)

In a way, all communication within the company can be regarded as strategic communication. The main idea of internal strategic communication is to communicate to

the organization what is the company's purpose – what it wants to achieve and what are its goals. This is often implemented through multiple channels, such as by using a unified power point presentation to communicate the strategy to the staff, personnel information, management blogs, or the company intranet. Internal strategic communication aims to activate personnel in pondering the strategy and how it manifests in one's work. In addition to communicating strategy-related matters inside the company, strategic communication comprises external communication too. The main purpose of external strategic communication is to brighten the image of the company in the market.

In a sense, all internal communication is strategic communication. (Participant C)

All listed companies have two directions in communication: external and internal. The purpose of external communication is to clarify an organization's image and tell the market what the company does. When communicating its business and plans to the market, the company still needs to be careful not to over-disclose its activities and protect its competitive advantage. Internal communication then means communicating to the organization what the company does and what are its goals. This can be done through several communication channels, such as intranet and newsletters. (Participant B)

The role of the management in strategic communication is to act as spokespersons and concretize the strategy for the organization. To deliver a strategic message effectively, all levels of management must communicate the strategy in a similar vein. In practice, strategic communication can mean communicating the progress of strategy implementation, which milestones have been achieved and which ones should be actively pursued, opening dialogues, for instance, between subordinates and supervisors, engaging organization with strategic communication, and communicating the organization's significant achievements to external stakeholders. In all these activities, management plays a key role.

Management should continually activate the staff to ponder the meaning of the strategy and vision from different angles, and what is inspiring about them, and in addition to describing company goals, the tool palette by which strategy will be played should be explained. I feel that often top management assumes that internal

communication takes place without a plan, which is when an organization's strategic communication is usually quite thin. (Participant C)

With the help of emotional intelligence, management can better understand the emotional reactions of their subordinates and colleagues, as well as the dynamics between groups in the organization. Emotional intelligence is manifested by the ability to understand how the organization's members experience the strategy and possible changes related to it, the ability to react to them appropriately and provide support when necessary. One concrete way to express these abilities is communication. When communicating the strategy, an emotionally intelligent leader can interpret the emotional climate of the organization, identify how to motivate personnel and adapt his or her communication style according to the situation. An emotionally intelligent leader is also able to perceive what kind of emotional reactions the message arouses in the personnel and to anticipate them. In addition to helping leaders to detect emotional reactions in the organization, emotional intelligence facilitates them to interpret how communicated strategy is perceived in the organization and whether it is accepted by the personnel. Sometimes strategic communication can include handling and bringing up difficult issues, such as layoffs, and especially in these situations the importance of emotional intelligence is recognized because emotional intelligence helps to adapt the way of communication to suit a sensitive situation.

The management should check whether the strategy is understood and accepted and start discussions in which the worlds of management and personnel are reconciled. (Participant C)

The management should be able to interpret the atmosphere of the organization, detect how personnel is inspired and motivated, and choose a smart and situationally appropriate way to communicate the strategy – whether to emphasize the change or to communicate that hardly anything will change. (Participant E)

In such situations (layoffs), it is of course good that the person who communicates the bad news to those who are to be dismissed is emotionally intelligent. (Participant D)

In a nutshell, strategic communication is communicating an organization's agreed strategy both internally and externally. The way the strategy is communicated is determined by the strategy itself. Through strategic communication, the organization visualizes the overall picture of its business and describes its position in the market today, where it is heading, and how it will get there. Strategic communication touches every member of the organization, but the company management is responsible for its content and implementation. Emotional intelligence enables the management to communicate about the strategy in accordance with the organization's emotional climate and situation, as well as to detect and interpret the emotional reactions evoked by the strategy in the personnel.

4.4.2 What is the relationship between strategic communication, strategy implementation and emotions

There was a consensus among all participants that strategic communication and strategy implementation are mutually reinforcing and intertwined activities. Thus, it is difficult to draw a clear line between implementation and communication-related activities. As stated by participants, if there is no strategy implementation, there is no strategic communication, and vice versa.

They of course (strategic communication and strategy implementation) support each other but they are fluid and can overlap because the implementation of a strategy through KPIs and activities is communication itself. Thus, strategic communication is not a separate activity from other activities related to the implementation of the strategy, but whenever things are taken forward, it involves communication. (Participant A)

Communication plays a significant role in strategy implementation. To begin with, if the strategy is not communicated, then what can the organization do – they have no idea which direction to go. If nothing is communicated, then everyone will just continue what they have been doing so far and nothing changes. Communication of course is important, and it takes place at different levels in the organization. It should be that concrete that everyone will understand their role in the new setting after the change. (Participant D)

I consider communication to be talking, so it plays a central role. Without deeds, the strategy will not materialize, but there are no preconditions to proceed if there is no communication, discussion, and talking. (Participant E)

If one wants to distinguish between strategy implementation and strategic communication, one can think of strategic communication as a kickoff for the implementation of a strategy. Strategic communication informs the organization about the status of the strategy and reviews strategic goals and priorities. However, the relationship between strategic communication and strategy implementation is integral and implementation of the strategy takes no place without strategic communication.

The official part is that when a new strategy is launched, a communication plan is drawn up which determines the actions, like events, blog posts, or publications on the intranet and websites, through which the new strategy is communicated within the organization, but also outside it. In a way, these actions give impetus to the implementation of the strategy and people will know what the strategy is about and how its implementation will start. (Participant A)

It is integral, there is no strategy implementation without communication. If one wants to make someone responsible for strategy implementation and someone else for strategic communication, then things are wrong from the very beginning. (Participant B)

They (strategic communication and strategy implementation) are inseparable functions. (Participant D)

Strategic communication and strategy implementation are interrelated matters. (Participant E)

The importance of communication in the implementation of the strategy is vital. Communication prevents strategic projects from being buried in everyday life and gives direction to action. If there is no communication, people do the wrong things in terms of strategy in the worst case and the organization does not have a clear direction.

The big picture and strategic projects are easily forgotten under the everyday ballast. New priorities for work set by the strategy are buried under a mundane hurry, which is why constant communication and direct and courageous discussions on issues around the strategy, such as resourcing, are very important. (Participant C)

If no one says anything, people will continue doing wrong things for many years in the worst case. If the communication does not work, then there is a great risk that money is wasted as wrong things are done. It is almost better if nothing was done than doing the wrong activities. (Participant D)

Often, strategy implementation implies change and the requirement to adapt to changes, which typically evokes emotions and questions in people, and even resistance. What the emotions are like is affected by the extent of change, how it has been communicated, and how the organization members are heard.

There has been talk of resistance to change, but the point is that some may feel that their position or job will become less pleasant with the change. In such cases, discussion should be opened at an early stage and solutions to the situation should be sought. (Participant C)

It is not like people are against the change, but more like that, they experience that they are not treated well. In that case, the experience is often that I have not been listened to and that they do not understand what this work is all about. (Participant C)

The role of communication and ongoing dialogue in strategy implementation is apparent. As stated by all participants, strategy implementation and strategic communication are intertwined and cannot be considered separately because there is no strategy implementation without communication. Since the implementation of the strategy often involves changes, which in turn typically evoke emotional reactions in the organization's members, it is important to consider emotional aspects when planning strategic communication.

4.4.3 How organizations succeed in strategic communication and how emotional intelligence can contribute to it

According to the participants, there is variation in how organizations succeed in strategic communication. It is very typical that in the beginning management puts effort into strategic communication, but along the way enthusiasm for sharing information and success stories with the organization may wane. If not actively invested, there is a risk that strategic communication will be forgotten and buried under other everyday activities after the initial enthusiasm.

It is difficult to say how strategic communication is performed in general, quite variably for sure. (Participant A)

I believe it varies sector by sector. For instance, companies operating in the metal industry, such as KONE, Cargotec, Konecranes, Metso, Outotec, and Valmet, have, in my opinion, succeeded quite well in communicating, both internally and externally, what their purpose is. KONE has been able to make quite big changes and it is still doing very well, so its strategy must be in very good shape and as it has been successfully changed, communication has had to be successful. (Participant B)

I think that excitement at the beginning of the project is very common. Typically, when a new strategy is drawn up or the old one is updated, there is enthusiasm around the strategy, and actions are taken to communicate the strategy, such as a speech or a slide set. However, there is a great risk that the strategy is forgotten after a while. If projects are successfully planned and scheduled, communication and storytelling are often forgotten. I see that there is a lot to improve. (Participant E)

The contribution of management, especially top management, and the CEO, to strategic communication greatly determines the level of strategic communication within the organization and outside. As stated by participant D, strategic communication is often performed at its best at the general level and when communication is directed outside the company. One example of an external communication activity that provides clear and well-communicated information about a company and its strategy is an interim report. In

interim reports companies typically clearly state their strategic goals, they show what they have achieved, and demonstrate the steps to finalize the project according to the schedule.

I think strategic communication is best performed at a high level and outside the organization. I think the best way to get information about the company and its strategy, especially when talking about a big, listed company, is to take part in an investment event, like Capital Markets Day, which is directed to investors and analysts. I think there you can get the best picture of companies' strategies because for those events companies prepare their storyline very carefully. It is rare to see that company management communicates even within a company as well as in these events. (Participant D)

Emotionally intelligent management knows how to plan and implement strategic communication with emotional intelligence, as well as feel the pulse of the organization and interpret the emotional climate prevailing in the organization. In addition to affecting the quality of strategic communication, emotional intelligence influences the organizational culture by promoting open discussion and collaboration within the organization, and by determining how emotional matters are handled in the organization.

If there are enough emotionally intelligent people in the management, then over time they can build an organizational culture that determines how emotional reactions are handled in the organization. For example, if someone loses their temper, it is not customary in the organization to start shouting, or if someone is sad, it is customary to listen and comfort them. (Participant E)

When discussing with the participants about who in the organization is usually good at doing strategic communication, the answer is those who often do communication a lot, are usually good at it too. Unfortunately, many times management leaves internal strategic communication to the organization's responsibility and trusts it to handle it. There is room for improvement in strategic communication, especially when significant changes are made that also affect people.

Many times, internal strategic communication is left for the organization. Management prepares the strategy and then passes it to the organization to be implemented. At that time management trusts that the organization will implement it,

which is not the case usually. Or it may implement partially, and partially not. (Participant D)

I think there is room for improvement. Especially when remarkable changes affecting people's work and professional identities are made. There should be conversational leadership. (Participant C)

How well a company implements strategic communication seems to depend on whether the company is accustomed to making strategic communication and has the resources to invest in it. The contribution of the management is important for the success of strategic communication and based on the perspectives of the participants, it may be that often management succeeds better in external than internal strategic communication. In addition to affecting the implementation of the strategy, strategic communication influences the development of organizational culture, and its quality in turn can be promoted by emotional intelligence.

Encapsulating the findings, it can be stated that strategy implementation and strategic communication are intertwined functions that cannot be treated separately from each other. The role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation is to contribute to the success of the implementation by bringing an understanding of the emotions and experiences evoked by the change in the organization's members and to promote high-quality communication. The conclusions drawn from the research results will be discussed further in the next section.

5 Conclusions

This section discusses the research results through the research questions and presents the conclusions drawn from the results. In addition, theoretical contributions and managerial implications are discussed. The section is concluded by discussing the limitations of the study and providing practical suggestions for further research.

5.1 Discussion

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from management's perspective. Thus, the main research problem to study the purpose of this thesis was *what is the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from management's perspective?* To investigate the research purpose and ultimately answer the research problem, three research questions were formed:

- **RQ1:** How does the management view emotional intelligence?
- **RQ2:** How does the management view the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation?
- **RQ3:** How does emotional intelligence manifest itself in communication?

To answer the **RQ1**: *How does the management view emotional intelligence?* participants were asked to explain how they understand and perceive emotional intelligence. One of the key determinants of the concept of emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and regulate one's own emotions as well as to understand the emotional states of others (Webb 1984, 34–35; Mayer & Salovey 1990; 1997, 22; Huy 1999; Serrat 2010, 168; Goleman 2004; Alzoubi & Aziz 2021, 132). Although some of the participants felt a bit insecure about the definition of emotional intelligence, the responses when asking what is meant by emotional intelligence were similar among all participants. Participants shared the idea that emotional intelligence is formed by identifying and understanding one's own and others' emotions, understanding other people's experiences and viewpoints, being able to regulate one's own emotions, and being able to empathize. Thus, it can be concluded that even if the participants were not so familiar with the definition of emotional intelligence, it nevertheless evoked similar ideas in them. This was good for the research, because if the participants had understood emotional intelligence in very different ways, it would have posed challenges to solving

the research problem. The study results indicate that emotional intelligence is considered an important skill for an individual in a managerial position. Emotional intelligence was seen as contributing to managers' ability to adapt their leadership style to their subordinates and the ability to understand their perspectives and differences. In strategic change, emotional intelligence is considered a factor that improves managers' performance, the quality of decisions, the ability to protect oneself from anxiety, and the ability to understand one's own and others' feelings in change, as well as the organization's emotional climate (George 2000, 1044; Ashkanasy & Daus 2002, 82; Alzoubi & Aziz 2021). In addition to understanding their subordinates and other colleagues better in in work context, a skill of emotional intelligence was seen as a helping factor when managers need to cope with the difficult civilian situations of their subordinates and colleagues and their consequences on job performance. Despite the importance of emotional intelligence skill for an individual in a managerial position, it is also good to note that managers may not be able to be emotionally intelligent for everyone on an individual level, but emotionally intelligent leadership should be part of an organizational culture and behavioral models. Since the role of management includes embodying the organizational culture through one's own example, it is therefore important for the management to master emotional intelligence and emotion management so that they could be embedded in the organizational culture.

Change and its effects on individuals were also important aspects that were discussed in conjunction with strategy implementation. Change can be seen as a factor that shapes the organization's structure, people, and technology (Murthy 2007, 2–3). Strategic change can be considered a form of organizational change that arouses strong emotions (Huy 2011b, 811). It is typical that changes evoke emotional reactions in people. When an organization goes through change, organization members may experience challenging emotions such as uncertainty, resistance to change, and anxiety. (Voola et al. 2004; Chrusciel 2006; Murthy 2007). Why people experience resistance to change is often due to feelings of insecurity, fear over personal loss, and skepticism about the need for change. One way to manage resistance to change is communication. (Murthy 2007.) According to the research results, strategy implementation implies change and change in turn typically arouses emotions in individuals and generates questions about the future. Emotions and their intensity are affected by the extent of the change and the way it is communicated to the organization. To answer the **RQ2:** *How does the management view*

the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, the participants were asked to share their experiences and views on the role of management in a change situation and how, in their opinion, emotional intelligence could be applied in it. Discussions with the participants showed that emotional intelligence is considered a facilitating factor in strategy implementation for several reasons. First, emotional intelligence helps management to create an experience of participation for organization members. The experience of being part of an organization's operations and being able to make a difference is important to people and has a detrimental effect on resisting change. Second, emotional intelligence enables management to better understand how organization members experience the change and what emotions they may evoke in individuals, respond to them appropriately, and provide support when needed. Emotionally intelligent managers are skilled at interpreting the emotional climate of the organization and understanding the emotional concerns of their subordinates (Ashkanasy & Daus 2002, 82). In addition, emotional intelligence allows management to understand how organization members experience possible changes in their job role and what emotions it may cause, such as fear and insecurity. Herewith, emotional intelligence makes it easier for the management to stay on the pulse of the organization, which is important for the successful implementation of the strategy. Third, according to the study results, emotional intelligence can help management to anticipate how strategic change affects the emotional curve of different groups in the organization and promote communication by opening dialogues between members of the organization.

To answer the **RQ3**: *How does emotional intelligence manifest itself in communication,* the researcher investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and communication. The results indicate that communication is an integral part of the organization, touching every aspect of its business. In connection with strategy implementation, communication is often referred to as strategic communication, which is why, and to ensure that the discussion in the interviews focuses on communication in strategy implementation, the author wanted to discuss strategic communication with the participants. The emphasis on the importance of communication in the research results supports the literature. If there is no communication, there are no prerequisites to share information within the organization, understand the pulse of the personnel and their competencies, as well as the organizational culture in general. (Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002; Hrebiniak 1990; Hrebiniak 1992; Markiewicz 2011.) As can be deduced from the remark on the importance of communication for an organization's business, naturally a

lack of communication also hampers the successful implementation of the strategy (Markiewicz 2011, 259–264). The research results show that the importance of emotional intelligence in communication can be seen especially when the organization is going through challenging change situations, such as layoffs. In a change situation, emotional intelligence creates a situational awareness of how change and its extent should be communicated in the organization. Emotionally intelligent management knows how to interpret the organization's pulse and emotional climate and taking these into account, adjust the way it communicates about strategic issues. The way emotional intelligence manifests itself in communication is understanding the context in which the message is communicated, knowing the recipient of the message, and choosing the most appropriate communication method for the situation.

5.2 Theoretical contribution

How people in managerial positions perceive and define emotional intelligence support the definition of emotional intelligence described in the academic literature (Webb 1984, 34–35; Mayer & Salovey 1990; 1997, 22; Huy 1999; Serrat 2010, 168; Goleman 2004; Alzoubi & Aziz 2021, 132). As identified by Goleman (1998b, 82), "components of emotional intelligence at work include self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skill". When discussing the concept of emotional intelligence and its application in strategy implementation with the participants, reference was made to all these five components of emotional intelligence. The research results have contributed to the definition of emotional intelligence in the literature by providing management's views on the role of emotional intelligence in the work context, as well as practical examples of different situations where emotional intelligence can be applied.

Even though strategy implementation is known to be a critical and challenging part of the strategy process, the topic has received relatively little attention in the academic literature compared to strategy formulation (Hrebiniak 1990, 74; Hrebiniak 1992, 392; Noble 1999, 132; Greer et al. 2017, 137; Amoo et al. 2019, 445). Strategy implementation is noted to consist of different factors depending on the extent of the change and situation. However, the main elements in the strategy implementation that have emerged in the literature are the transformation of strategic plans into actions and communication. The importance of communication as an element in strategy implementation is especially emphasized. (Noble 1999, 120; Aaltonen & Ikävalko 2002, 415–416; Markiewicz 2011,

264–266; Hill & Jones 2012, 9–10.) This study has contributed to the field of strategic management by giving information about the criticality of strategy implementation in the strategy process, its complexity, and challenges related to it. Remarks on the challenges in strategy implementation and the importance of communication in the strategy process were highlighted in the research results. In discussions with the participants, the importance of communication was often emphasized, which supports the literature's emphasis on the importance of communication in the strategy process.

The findings of the study speak in favor of managers' emotional intelligence skill in change situations which are typically included in strategy implementation. How emotions and emotional dynamics affect strategic change and strategy implementation have been explored in the academic literature quite comprehensively (Kisfalvi & Pitcher 2003; Brundin & Melin 2006; Edmondson & Smith 2006; Brundin & Nordqvist 2008; Huy 2011a; Liu & Maitlis 2014). In strategic change, emotional intelligence is identified as a factor that promotes leadership and helps management succeed in their work (George 2000, 1044; Ashkanasy & Daus 2002, 82; Alzoubi & Aziz 2021). Discussions with the participants showed that although organizations may not be familiar with the concept of emotional intelligence, or it is not addressed by using the term of emotional intelligence, the topic is nevertheless familiar and some things related to emotional intelligence are taken almost for granted in business life, such as social skills. This study contributes to the literature by providing an organization's management insights on how the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation is perceived and information on how management can benefit from the skill of emotional intelligence in change situations.

The research results support the definitions of both emotional intelligence and strategy implementation in academic literature. In regard to strategy implementation, research results especially emphasize the importance of communication which has also been noted as crucial element in strategy implementation in the literature. In addition to supporting the literature, the research results complement it by increasing the understanding of how emotional intelligence can be applied in strategy implementation, especially from a management perspective. The next section discusses what the research results mean in action.

5.3 Managerial implications

The results show that the significance of emotional aspects in conjunction with strategy implementation has been noted in the strategic management field, which supports the remark of the academic literature on the meaning of emotions and importance of management's emotional competencies in situation of change (George 2000; Huy 2002; Ashkanasy & Daus 2002; Kisfalvi & Pitcher 2003; Brundin & Melin 2006; Brundin & Nordqvist 2008; Huy 2011a; Huy et al. 2014; Liu & Maitlis 2014; Alzoubi & Aziz 2021). When organizations face change, they benefit from emotionally intelligent managers who are able to identify, reflect and regulate their own emotions according to the situation yet also understand the emotions that the change may arouse in other members of the organization. Thus, when looking at the selection of skills and competencies needed in managerial positions, based on the research results, it would be recommended that organizations consider emotional intelligence as one of the important required skills.

As the study findings indicate, the organization's management has a significant influence on the success of the strategy implementation and the whole management can benefit from the skill of emotional intelligence when implementing a strategy. In discussions on management and management's role in strategy implementation, it became clear that one of the most important tasks that management has is communication. The importance of communication as management's responsibility is reflected in several different aspects related to strategy implementation, such as communicating the strategy and organization's direction, communicating goals, priorities, and concreteness so that people know to do the right things to achieve goals, communicating achieved milestones so that people stay motivated and up to date and on the progress, opening dialogues, and reporting to the board. Together, the communication of these points comprises strategic communication.

Study also shows that the roles and responsibilities related to the implementation of the strategy differ between the top and middle management and correspondingly there are differences between top and middle management in which areas the benefits of emotional intelligence are most visible. The role of top management is more strategic compared to middle management and they are responsible for reviewing business at the top level, identifying risks, and making business decisions. In addition, it is the responsibility of management and the CEO to define the direction of an organization, what is relevant for organization's operations, and why everyone's input is important. The most significant

tasks of top management in strategy implementation include drawing up an action plan, communicating the strategy to the organization (strategic communication), setting priorities, evaluating risks, responding to changes in organization's operating environment, and the upper level follow up. Emotionally intelligent top management is skilled to interpret organization's emotional climate, collaborate effectively, and choose the appropriate way to communicate when informing personnel about the organization's things. Middle management's role is in turn to follow up the progress of strategic initiatives on the operative level and report the situation to the top management. Middle management acts as a link between the top management and the personnel, which requires navigating between the requirements of both parties. Emotional intelligence helps middle management to understand the needs of both parties, to act as a messenger and in this case to adapt the way of communication to suit the recipient and to coordinate the needs of top management and personnel. According to the study results, middle management is largely responsible for ensuring that the strategy is implemented at the operational level and thus it is important that the tasks related to strategy implementation are part of the middle management's daily work. In addition, middle managers are responsible for ensuring that the new strategy is compatible with everyday life and possible to implement, and at the same time being able to listen the reactions of their subordinates – whether they understand what changes imply for them and how they experience them. As it can be concluded, the skill of emotional intelligence is important for top management, but middle managers especially benefit from it in their work.

How members of an organization perceive, and handle emotions affects how the organization deals with emotional issues, like resistance to change, and reflects the organizational culture. When assessing the level of emotional intelligence of an individual, it should be noted that a person's own assessment of his or her level of emotional intelligence is based on his or her subjectively constructed reality. The way things are experienced and perceived is individual and subjective, and everyone has constructed their own unique reality, which affects how things are handled and what kind of meanings they are given. Although it can be discussed how things are experienced among individuals and state that individuals can experience things in similar way, individuals' knowledge and reality are still different from each other because they are subjective. Thus, when assessing an individual's emotional intelligence, it must be considered that the individual's own assessment of his or her emotional intelligence skills

is influenced by the person's own experiences, views and understanding of emotional intelligence as a concept.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for further research

This research showed management's perspective on what is emotional intelligence is and what is the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation. Due to the nature of the research topic, the empirical research data cannot be objectively verified, and it cannot be proved whether it contains absolute facts. Instead, empirical information is largely based on the realities constructed by individuals according to which emotional intelligence is typically seen as a skill of an individual and belonging to an individual's personal, subjective reality.

In qualitative study, the conclusions are not based on the generalizability of the research data, but the information obtained from the study and the interpretations made from it, which may be useful in the investigation of other similar phenomena. Since qualitative research often involves an in-depth examination of a phenomenon, it provides an opportunity to understand the phenomenon being studied and its significance at a deeper level than in quantitative research, where sample sizes are typically larger than in qualitative study. In addition, when it is understood what is significant in the phenomenon being studied, it is also possible to look at the topic at a more general level and generalize it. (Puusniekka & Saaranen-Kauppinen 2006.) However, it is worth noting that the generalizability of the results would require the research to be conducted on a wider scale, selecting a larger and more diverse sample. By having a larger sample size and including participants in different managerial positions from several sectors and different nationalities would provide a more solid basis for the generalizability of the results.

A subject that emerged from the research results was the meaning of organizational culture in change situation. This was out of the research scope, but it became clear during the discussions with the participants that organizational culture has a significant influence on how emotional issues are handled in the organization. As described in discussion above, the research results indicated that managers cannot be emotionally intelligent towards everyone, but emotional intelligence should be embedded in leadership style and organizational culture. Another subject that emerged from the research data was the importance of KPI's and performance management for the success of strategy implementation. These were also outside the research scope but when discussing factors

affecting successful strategy implementation, the importance of KPI's and performance management became apparent.

However, when looking at the role of emotional intelligence in an organizational context from a broader perspective, the future research could focus on what competencies managers need to handle emotional issues in their work, and especially in a situation of change, and how managers could benefit from these. The term emotional intelligence may be difficult to internalize in an organizational context and integrate into the day-to-day operations of the organization. Thus, in future research, the focus could be, for instance, on the emotional skills of managers, which may be clearer as a term and easier to comprehend. In addition, to promote diversity in the research topic, participants from different cultures and nationalities could be included in future research.

6 Summary

In this thesis, I have studied emotional intelligence in strategy implementation. The purpose of the study was to understand the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from the management's perspective. I looked at the research topic through the lens of individual skill, meaning that in this study I was interested in finding out whether the emotional intelligence skill of a person in a managerial position is relevant in terms of implementing a strategy. The research problem was examined through three research questions, of which the first one aimed to provide information on how individuals in managerial positions understand and perceive emotional intelligence. The second research question aimed to provide information about the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, focusing on management's perspective, and through the third one the researcher wanted to increase the understanding on how emotional intelligence demonstrates in communication. The research was conducted in the context of strategic management.

As the research problem was examined through the research lens of emotional intelligence as an individual's skill and the focus was especially on the management's perspective on the subject, persons who participated in the interviews represented organization's management either by acting in a management position or by cooperating closely with the management of the organizations. In addition, participants were purposefully selected on the assumption that they would have experience in strategy implementation. The assumption was made by first exploring companies that are specialized in strategy, strategic change or strategy implementation and then approaching potential participants according to their profile and title on LinkedIn or the organization's website. Participants were considered experts whose personal experiences and insights about the research problem and ability to provide empirical information on how organizations perform strategy implementation, contribute to the research.

As can be summarized from the research results, the concept of emotional intelligence was understood similarly among the participants and their perception of the concept supported the literature. All participants considered emotional intelligence to be related to emotions and their understanding, and an important skill for a person working in management positions. None of the participants recognized why emotional intelligence would not be a beneficial skill for a person working in management. As emotional intelligence helps to understand people's emotions and experiences, and also to interpret

the emotional climate in the organization, its importance was seen as obvious in change situations, especially when the change has unfavorable consequences. In addition, emotional intelligence was seen as a factor affecting the organizational culture, promoting open discussion and collaboration among members of the organization.

What emerged both from the literature and discussions with the participants is that there is no one specific definition for strategy implementation. Strategy implementations consist of different elements, the composition of which may vary depending on the situation. However, based on the discussion about the organization's strategy with the participants, it can be concluded that typically the implementation of the strategy consists of communicating the strategy, concretizing the strategy and strategic initiatives, and performance management. Setting appropriate KPI's and performance management were also considered important factors in ensuring the successful strategy implementation. Of all elements, communication was seen as the most important, which is always involved in strategy implementation. Originally, the author did not intend to include communication in the research scope. Nevertheless, the literature review showed how central role communication plays in strategy implementation, and thus researcher wanted to include strategic communication in the empirical part of the study as its own theme. This was supported by the participants who indicated that strategy implementation and strategic communication are intertwined and cannot be addressed in isolation. When there is strategy implementation, there is always strategic communication too and vice versa.

The strategy itself defines how it should be communicated and the company's management is responsible for communicating the strategy. Every member of the organization has a role in the implementation of the strategy, but the role of the management and especially the CEO was considered very important and essential. Management can be divided into top and middle management, of which the former focuses on the big picture when implementing the strategy and the latter on operational activities. Out of all management's duties in strategy implementation, the participants emphasized the importance of communication. In terms of the success of implementing the strategy, the management's role in communication and the management's way of communicating was considered decisive. Especially the importance of the role of middle management in communication is central because middle management is closer to the employees and is responsible for the implementation of the strategy to the operational level. From the perspective of management, the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation is manifested in communication. With the help of emotional intelligence,

management is able to understand how strategy and changes are experienced among the organization members and what kind of emotions they arouse in people. In this way management is able to consider the organization's emotional climate in strategic communication and to interpret the reactions of the organization's members in change situations, which may include, for instance, resistance to change. The participants stated that one of the factors preventing the implementation of the strategy is resistance to change, which can be experienced both among the employees as well as within management. Through the interpretation and understanding of the experiences and emotional reactions of the organization members, the management can adapt its actions and communication methods to suit the situation and thus contribute to the internalization of the strategy in the organization.

The study proved the author's assumption to be incorrect, according to which the term emotional intelligence is not necessarily very familiar in a business context and may cause some uncertainty in people in the business field. In fact, the participants were very willing to talk about the topic and their understanding and belief of the term were similar. The study showed that individuals working in management, with respectable experience in their field, considered emotional intelligence as an important skill in managerial positions and in working life in general. In addition, the role of emotional intelligence was seen as a valuable skill when implementing the strategy, especially because it promotes the quality of communication within the organization. The study also showed that there is no one way to perform strategy implementation nor there is a structure that applies to all cases, but every strategic project is different and required actions to implement the strategy are viewed case by case. However, what became apparent was that communication plays a crucial role when implementing the strategy, and strategy implementation and strategic communication are intertwined elements that cannot be handled in separation. Finally, the study demonstrated the importance of emotional intelligence in the different roles of management in implementing the strategy, of which the role of middle management was highlighted for the success of strategy implementation. In order to deepen the understanding of the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation, the author would suggest for the future research to investigate in which occasions emotional intelligence is not necessarily needed so much, and to find out the possible disadvantages or risks that follow from the application of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation or change situation. In addition, the author sees that it would be useful to consider whether emotional intelligence is terminologically the

best option when discussing about the emotional competence of individuals in working life, especially in managerial positions, or whether it would be better to apply some other term, such as emotional skills.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview questions

Theme: Emotional intelligence in strategy implementation

1. How do you define or understand the concept of emotional intelligence?
2. How does EI manifest in organization and how can it be identified? Who recognizes EI?
3. What does strategy implementation mean from your experience?
4. How do you think EI can be applied in strategy implementation?
5. What do you think strategy implementation consists of?
6. Who does strategy implementation?
7. Based on your experience, how strategy implementation is performed?
8. How the success of strategy implementation can be evaluated from your experience?

Theme: Management's role in strategy implementation

9. What activities management performs in strategy implementation from your experience?
10. How should company's management be involved in strategy implementation?
11. What are the most important tasks that the management has in strategy implementation?
12. Are there any issues that can hamper the management from performing strategy implementation?

Theme: Strategic communication in strategy implementation

13. How would you define strategic communication?
14. When you engage in strategic communication, what do you do?
15. What is the role of strategic communication in strategy implementation based on your experience?
16. What kind of relationship there could be between strategic communication and strategy implementation?
17. Based on your experience, how strategic communication is performed?

Appendix 2 Operationalization table

Research problem	Research questions	Concepts	Concepts in literature	Themes	Interview questions
What is the role of emotional intelligence within communication in strategy implementation from management's perspective?	How does the management view emotional intelligence?	Emotional intelligence (EI)	2.1.1 & 2.1.2	Emotional intelligence	1
		Emotional intelligence in organizations	2.1.3		2
		Management's emotional intelligence	2.3.3		1, 3
	How does the management view the role of emotional intelligence in strategy implementation?	Management's role	2.2.2, 2.2.3, 2.3.2 & 2.3.3	Management's role in strategy implementation	9-12
		Strategy implementation	2.2.1, 2.2.2 & 2.2.3		3, 5-8
		Emotional intelligence in strategy implementation	2.3.1 & 2.3.3	Emotional intelligence in strategy implementation	4
	How does emotional intelligence manifest in communication?	Emotional intelligence (EI)	2.1.1 & 2.1.2	Emotional intelligence	1
		Communication	2.1, 2.2 & 2.3	Strategic communication	13-17