The link between Strategic Communication, Strategic Consensus, and Successful Strategy Implementation: Evidence from Higher Education in Malaysia

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Abstract

Successful implementation of the strategy is key to the sustainability of any organization. The implementation of strategy is critical to the organization's success. This study provides an integrated model that explores the effect of successful strategy implementation (SSI), strategic consensus (SCon) and strategic communication (SCom) drawing upon Communication Theory in the context of higher education in Malaysia. An online self-administered survey was filled out by 149 middle-level managers working in different faculties and departments of higher education institutions in Malaysia to fill this research gap. PLS-SEM results showed SCom and SCon to be substantially linked with SSI. A closer look at SCon's mediation effects finds a significant link between SCom and SSI. The findings emphasize the importance of communication and shared consensus across strategic levels for plan implementation effectiveness. This study's findings have significance for future strategic management research and practice. The study is beneficial to strategic-level managers who are striving tirelessly to achieve strategy implementation success.

Introduction

Malaysia's higher education sector is proposed as a key growth engine, a source of global competitiveness and sustainability (Reza, 2016). To preserve academic standards and reputation status, it is vital that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) successfully translate strategies to assure growth and progress in sustaining academic standards for society and the nation (Da Wan, Sirat & Razak, 2018). HEIs are putting up endeavours and efforts toward the successful implementation of the strategies and continuously improving rankings, sustaining global reputation (Antoniuk et al., 2019) as well as initiatives for future opportunities (Ryan et al., 2010). Focuses include cultivating high-quality domestic talent, attracting international students from the region, benchmarking in global rankings, and equipping graduates of higher education with the necessary skills and knowledge. The success of Malaysia's Higher Education System transformation is vital to the country's ability to maintain a sustainable competitive advantage in a disruptive world (Elmassah, Biltagy, & Gamal, 2022; Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021).

Governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), HEIs play a crucial role in transforming the strategic priorities outlined in the National Education Blueprint (NEB) to enhance performance and success, as well as maintain the excellence of the higher education system. The Ministry asserts the value of sound implementation, noting that a well-planned strategy plan would not succeed until the strategy implementation process is successful. It is never easy to roll out the HEIs roadmap for transformation in implementing strategies in Malaysia (Ma et al., 2022; Azman, Sirat & Ahmad, 2014). Strategy implementation requires a lot of time, effort, and resources to meet the strategic goals. HEIs in Malaysia, just like any entities in other countries have undergone and faced tremendous challenges and issues to achieve goals and objectives, performance growth and maintain a competitive edge (Sia & Adamu, 2021; Ghasemy et al., 2018; Shin & Harman, 2009). A study set out by Tham & Kam (2008), reported that institutions faced different challenges in realizing higher education's strategic objectives.

Historically, HEIs in Malaysia executed plans and strategies for internationalisation (Da Wan & Abdullah, 2021; Tham, 2013), teaching and learning (Azizan, 2010), leadership and governance (Inayatullah & Milojevic, 2016), knowledge-based society (Kanji, Tambi & Wallace, 1999) as having successful and effective strategy implementations would substantially improve the HEIs excellence, competitiveness, status, and performance (Parakhina et al., 2017; Sohail, Rajadurai & Rahman, 2003). When a strategic plan is not implemented effectively and successfully, it loses all its value, regardless of how well it was created in the first place. Not only evidence revealed by Cândido & Santos (2015) on the high failure rate of the strategic initiatives, yet the challenges that arise in implementing the strategies are still a concern for researchers and practitioners (Radomska & Kozyra, 2020; Sull, Homkes & Sull, 2015; Lee & Puranam, 2016; Hrebiniak, 2006).

Existing past strategic management literature has focused more on strategic planning and crafting (Sirat, 2010; Ishak & Alias, 2005), and challenges and trends in Malaysian higher education (Mohd Zain et al., 2017; Grapragasem, Krishnan & Mansor, 2014), but lack of studies on strategy implementation, particularly looking at higher education in Malaysia.

Poor and ineffective strategic communication is one of the barriers to strategy implementation in higher education institutions (Abdul Kadir, 2012; Alashloo, Castka & Sharp, 2005). In addition, much available previous studies emphasise the top management team (Bragaw & Misangyi, 2019; Ping, 2019; Haapanen, Hurmelinna-Laukkanen, & Puumalainen, 2020; Liu & Yi, 2022) and a great deal has examined strategic consensus in the context of manufacturing, healthcare and other industries (Veloso Saes et al., 2022; Mirzaei, Fredriksson & Winroth, 2016; Sarmiento, Knowles, & Byrne, 2008). Hence, this shows neglect of strategy implementation studies within higher education in Malaysia.

Several past studies mainly focus on strategic communication among the top management team (Preciado-Hoyos, 2020, Argenti, 2017; Shimizu, 2017) and employees (Andersson, 2019). Nevertheless, there are relatively few studies on the aspect of middle management. Therefore, this study deals with strategic communication among middle management as middle-level managers played a significant role in the strategy implementation in an organization. Furthermore, this study addresses various shortcomings of previous literature which neglected the studies in examining the role of strategic consensus among middle-level managers (Knight et al., 1999; West & Schwenk, 1996).

Furthermore, the prominent study by Dess & Priem in 1995 argued the relationship between top management team (TMT) consensus and organization performance. Likewise, Rapert, Velliquette & Garretson (2002) holds the view that consensus and communication among top management enhanced the organization's performance. Ates et al. (2020) observed the relationships between visionary leadership, strategic alignment, strategic consensus and strategic commitment. Nevertheless, relatively little is known in examining the linkage between strategic communication, strategic consensus and the success of strategy implementation (Aguinis, Edwards & Bradley, 2017), especially among middle-level managers (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992b). For instance, much of the current literature pays particular attention to the role of strategic consensus in improving organization performances (Kellermanns et al., 2011; Ramos-Garza, 2009; Homburg, Krohmer & Workman, 1999) and some studies by scholars showed more concern for the vital role of strategic communication in enhancing organization performances (Walter et al., 2013; Camelo, Fernández-Alles & Hernández, 2010).

Considering all these shreds of evidence, there is a growing body of studies that seeks to explain the relationship and interactions of essential antecedents in addressing the issues of strategy implementation (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Rahimnia, Polychronakis, & Sharp, 2009). This study, therefore, aims at developing a new research model in assessing the relationship between strategic communication, strategic consensus, and successful strategy implementation in the higher education context specifically, among middle-level managers. As such, this research model helps to provide both theoretical and practical contributions to the area of strategic management literature.

Literature Review

Theoretical Underpinning

Building on prior literature (Dess & Priem, 1995; Rapert et al., 2002; Aguinis et al., 2017), this study examines the effects of how strategic communication and strategic consensus play key roles in adding to successful strategy implementation. The Communication Theory proposed by Craig (1999) is employed in this study to explain the linked relationship between the constructs, between strategic communication and strategic consensus as well as strategic consensus towards the success in strategy implementation. Effective and regular strategic communication, when exists, enhances the quality and efficacy of the strategy implementation process, which in turn improves strategic success among HEIs (Zerfass et al., 2018; Welch & Jackson, 2007).

A frequent flow of communication would also help to build strategic consensus because communication was seen as essential to achieving a shared understanding while putting the strategies into action (Rapert et al., 2002). Poor and scant information passing through the institutions may lead to a lower level of shared consensus. The absence of a shared understanding of the plan and strategy causes obstacles to the successful implementation of the strategy (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992a). A strong and common shared understanding between organization members was observed to be important and capable of enhancing the effectiveness of the strategy implementation process, which in turn leads to a better prospect of organizational performance. This was discovered to be possible through regular and effective organizational communication and information exchange (Peng & Litteljohn, 2001).

Relationship between Strategic Consensus and Successful Strategy Implementation

Noble (1999) defined strategic consensus as the organization's shared understanding and commitment to a strategy. Historically, studies claimed the critical role of strategic consensus in the success of strategy implementation (Ates et al., 2020; Tarakci et al., 2014; Schaap, 2006; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992a). It has been suggested that strategic consensus derived from shared understanding enhances the managers' effectiveness in achieving the strategic priorities that drive organizational goals. The presence of a shared understanding among strategic managers is deemed to enhance and secure the success of the strategic priorities. Dooley, Fryxell & Judge (2000) point out that strategic consensus among managers facilitates the success of the strategy implementation process in an organization.

Strategic consensus plays a critical role in the development of organizational strategy and performance (Jabarzadeh et al., 2019; Edh Mirzaei et al., 2016, Walter et al., 2013). Strategic priorities may deviate if there is no strategic consensus, resulting in poor strategy implementation. Several lines of evidence indicated that without the existence of strategic consensus, the initiative planned on the strategic goal and priorities might deviate (Sterling, 2003; Dess & Priem, 1995). Despite the significance of strategic consensus in the field of strategic management studies, some scholars (Bourgeois, 1980; Schwenk & Cosier; 1993; Homburg et al., 1999; Stepanovich & Mueller, 2002; Kellermanns et al., 2011) have postulated the importance of strategic consensus in the area of strategy implementation.

Consequently, the shared consensus among strategic levels is regarded as crucial to the organization's strategic goals (Feger, 2014). Generally, when shared understanding among managers exists, it has an impact on the performance of an organization (Edh Mirzaei, Fredriksson & Winroth, 2016; Ambrosini & Bowman, 2003; Dess & Priem, 1995). The study by Ho, Wu & Wu (2014) described the importance of strategic consensus in achieving effectiveness and success in strategy implementation. Several authors have investigated the effect of strategic consensus on organizational performance (Bao et al., 2015; Gonzalez-Benito et al., 2012; Kellermanns et al., 2005; Rapert et al., 2002). Moreover, studies by Walter et al. (2013) and Wooldridge & Floyd (1989) reported inconsistent linkage to strategic consensus. This paper adds to the line of strategic management literature by examining how middle-level managers' shared consensus influences the success of strategy implementation. Hence, the following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H1   Strategic consensus has a positive relationship with the success of strategy implementation.

Relationship between Strategic Communication and Strategic Consensus

A study conducted by Rapert and colleagues in 2002 reported that greater communication was found to be positively associated with strategic consensus, demonstrating that both communication and consensus are vital in the strategy implementation process. When it comes to strategy implementation, it has been shown that inadequate communication and a lack of shared understanding of the plan make it incredibly difficult (Alcaide-Muñoz, Bello-Pintado, & de Cerio, 2018). Desmidt & George (2016) postulated that organizations that encourage communication and interaction will develop better understanding, in turn, increase involvement in the pursuit of organizational plans. When there is a greater common shared understanding of knowledge among organizational managers, it leads to more effective strategy implementation. Communication is therefore extremely important (Shimizu, 2017). As a result, this study hypothesizes that the presence of strategic communication will influence strategic consensus, bringing to the following hypotheses:

H2   Strategic communication has a positive relationship with strategic consensus.

Relationship between Strategic Communication and Successful Strategy Implementation

According to Zerfass et al., (2018), strategic communication encompassed all communication that is critical to an entity's survival and long-term success. Effective strategic communication is substantial for the success of an organization's goals in the practical world (Andersson, 2019; Ruck & Welch, 2012). Strategic communication contributes to the efficiency of the process of implementing strategic plans. Poor and ineffective strategic communications can contribute to disappointments in achieving strategic plans (Carrière & Bourque, 2009).

Research by Foreman & Argenti (2005) demonstrated the significant link between strategic communication and success in the strategy implementation process. This was then claimed by Rapert et al., (2002) that strategic communication improves shared understanding and could also reduce ambiguity among individual managers. Strategic

communication among strategic managers enhances shared understanding which results in a better flow of information in the realization of the strategic goals and achieves success in the strategy implementation process (Eisenberg, Johnson & Pieterson, 2015).

Traditionally, strategic communication has been postulated as the key factor which contributes to the efficiency and effectiveness of the strategy implementation process (Argenti, Howell & Beck, 2005; Aaltonen & Ikävalko, 2002). In the same vein, Shimizu (2017) and Noble (1999) note the lack of studies looking at strategic communication in the field of strategic management areas. Academic scholars supported the need of looking into the area of strategic communication despite the vast past studies (Heide et al., 2018; Nothhaft, 2016; Thomas & Stephens, 2015). Strategic communication should not be neglected as it allows organizations to continuously achieve the efficiencies and effectiveness of their strategies (Argenti, 2017). Resulting for the discussion above, the following hypotheses will be tested in this study:

H3   Strategic communication has a positive relationship with the success of strategy implementation.

Indirect Relationship of Strategic Consensus between Strategic Communication and Successful Strategy Implementation

Mediation effects, according to Baron & Kenny (1986), arise when a predictor influences the outcome through its effect on or as a consequence of a mediator variable. In the context of managerial behaviour, managers contemplate and perceived consensus to be a form of shared understanding which is vitally important to the success of strategy implementation (Ho et al., 2014; Dess & Origer, 1987). Rapert et al. (2002) found that regular communication was associated with strategic consensus, indicating the importance of both communication and consensus in the strategy implementation process. In this regard, some literature suggests potential studies in assessing the mediation effect on a given model in the field of strategic management (Makadok, Burton & Barney, 2018; Aguinis et al., 2017). In line with this reasoning, this study proposes strategic consensus as the mediator that bridges the relationship between strategic communication and successful strategy implementation.

H4   Strategic Consensus mediates the relationship between Strategic Communication and Successful Strategy Implementation.

Figure 1: Research Model
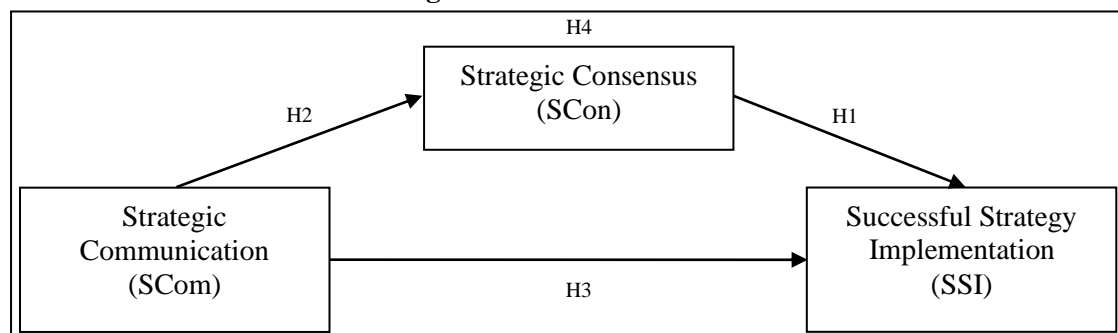
Methodology

Data Collection

The primary data for the current study were collected from the higher education industry in Malaysia. Data were collected through a self-administered e-survey form between January 2020 to June 2020. This study employed non-purposive sampling to select the Malaysia higher education middle managers from different faculties and departments. Potential respondents' information was extracted from the web domain of higher institutions in Malaysia. Email invitation to the survey was sent to 1,388 potential respondents from both public and private higher education institutions. Managerial characteristics such as experience enhance the effectiveness of strategy implementation (Gupta & Govindarajan, 1984). Thus, one key selection criterion was the participant's tenure of at least one year in holding the position of a middle manager in a higher institution.

A total of 149 of 220 respondents were identified as eligible and fit for the study, with three respondents who declined to participate in this online survey. Only individuals with HEI emails were included as respondents. Ambiguity and redundant submissions were omitted for final analysis. For example, only respondents who formerly and currently held the position of middle-level management for at least one year were included in the study. This denotes that only genuine respondents were selected. The response rate of 1.6% from this study is relatively small. Despite the low response rate, Hulland, Baugmgartner & Smith (2017) advocate this is acceptable in empirical studies of theory testing. The minimum sample size was approximated using G*power 3.1.9.2 software with the following parameters: $f2= 0.15$ (small), $= 0.05$, number of predictors $= 2$, and power $= 80\%$. The sample size required for examining the model was 68. Besides, the n=149 is sufficient as it met the suggested threshold of Kock and Hadaya (2016).

Measurement

Seven-point Likert-scale items ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) were used in the study to measure the constructs of the model. Questions related to demographic factors were also included in the questionnaire. The scale measurements were adopted from past works of literature (Elbannaa, Andrews & Pollanen, 2015; Knight et al., 1999; Noble & Mokwa, 1999; Vadenberg, Richardson & Eastman, 1999). Knight et al. (1999) provided 48 scale measurements to assess strategic consensus in a broad context. An in-depth review involving 7 potential HEIs respondents (2 from top management and 2 from middle-level management) was invited for the selections in assessing the scales for strategic consensus. Prior to data collection, another 7 expert panels (6 HEIs and 1 strategic management expert) were invited to assess whether the measurement items are relevant and represented the target construct. These assessments contributed to the improved reliability and validity of the final questionnaire of the study (Kumar, Talib & Ramayah; 2013).

Results

Descriptive analysis was conducted using Ms Excel. Smart-PLS were used for statistical analysis. The demographic profile of respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (n = 149)

Variables	Demographic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	91	61%
	Female	58	39%
Ethnicity	Malay	101	68%
	Chinese	18	12%
	Indian	18	12%
	Others	12	8%
Age	30 - 34 years old	4	3%
	35 - 39 years old	17	11%
	40 - 44 years old	30	20%
	45 - 49 years old	44	30%
	50 - 54 years old	26	17%
	55 years old and above	28	19%
Administrative Position	Assistant Dean	3	2%
	Chief Operating Officer	1	1%
	Dean	36	24%
	Deputy Dean	55	37%
	Deputy Director	3	2%
	Director	16	11%
	Former Director/ Dean/ Deputy Dean	8	5%
	Head of Department / Head of Programme	21	14%
	Manager / Senior Manager	4	3%
	Former Department Head / Head of Programme	1	1%
	Former Director / Dean/ Deputy Director / Deputy Dean	1	1%
Type	Private	64	43%
	Public	85	57%

Measurement Model Assessment

The measuring model in this study was determined based on the operationalization of constructs following the methodological literature. (Hair, Howard & Nitzl, 2020; Henseler, 2020). Strategic communication and strategy implementation success were modelled as reflective measurement models given that the statements measuring the constructs are the manifestation of the underlying construct. The strategic consensus was modelled as a composite measurement model since the construct is fully composed of its indicator (Schuberth, 2021). Subsequently, the model is assessed.

Table 2 and 3 denotes the assessment of the reflective measurement model, which comprise the assessment of convergent validity and discriminant validity. It is observed that both strategic communication and strategy implementation success

achieve desired convergent validity and discriminant validity. All the indicators demonstrate desirable factor loadings, which are higher than the required threshold of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019). Likewise, the discriminant validity issue is not observed as the heterotrait-monotrait correlation (HTMT) did not violate the HTMT.85 threshold.

Table 2: Assessment of Convergent Validity

Construct	Indicator	Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Strategic Communication (SCom) - Vandenberg et al., (1999)	The institution's strategies are clearly communicated to staff.	0.860	0.950	0.793
	The institution gives sufficient notice to the middle management prior to making changes in strategy.	0.869		
	The institution gives sufficient notice to the middle management prior to making changes in strategy.	0.884		
	The channels of strategic communication across the institution are effective.	0.932		
	The institution communicates a clear strategy and how each division contributes to implementing the strategy.	0.905		
Successful Strategy Implementation (SSI) - Elbannaa, Andrews & Pollanen (2015); Noble & Mokwa (1999)	The institution implements its strategic plan effectively.	0.901	0.950	0.792
	Each of the institution implementation task has been well completed.	0.908		
	The institution is satisfied with the implementation of its strategic plan.	0.848		
	The institution strategy implementation effort was very encouraging.	0.894		
	The implementation of the strategy was generally considered a success in the institution.	0.898		

Table 3: Assessment of Discriminant Validity

Construct	SCom	SSI
Strategic Communication (SCom)		
Successful Strategy Implementation (SSI)	0.844 CI.85(0.781;0.894)	

Table 4 presents the results of the formative measurement model assessment. Given that the VIF value indicates that multicollinearity is a concern (VIF > 3.3 for some of the indicators), this study employed correlation weights (Mode A) (Becker et al., 2013; Benitez et al., 2020) in the estimation since the estimation is not affected by multicollinearity issue (Henseler & Schuberth, 2020). The assessment of weights confirms the relative contribution of each indicator toward the composite (p < 0.05). Similarly, the indicators are demonstrating absolute contribution to the composite as the loadings of the indicators are higher than 0.708 (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 4: Assessment of Convergent Validity

Construct	Indicator	Weight	Std Dev	t	p	VIF	Loadings	p
Strategic Consensus (SCon) - Knight et al., (1999)	Middle managements work hard and closely in implementing the institution's strategy.	0.212	0.016	13.495	0.000	2.652	0.809	0.000
	The institution seeks inputs from all the faculties/departments/divisions when making important strategic decisions.	0.254	0.018	14.136	0.000	4.144	0.890	0.000
	Middle-management's input is incorporated into the institution's strategic directions and decisions.	0.239	0.015	15.948	0.000	3.669	0.867	0.000
	Middle managements in the institution are committed to achieving the institution's goals.	0.207	0.013	16.257	0.000	3.226	0.864	0.000
	Middle managements in the institution work closely to reach a decision when evaluating strategic alternatives.	0.240	0.012	19.823	0.000	3.411	0.902	0.000

Structural Model Assessment

To assess the structural model, this study followed the guidelines suggested in prominent works of literature (Hair et al., 2020; Ramayah et al., 2018). A structural model assessment was conducted to examine potential multicollinearity issues in the model. The significance of each structural path is then assessed, followed by the coefficient of determination and effect size (Table 5). As demonstrated, multicollinearity is not evident in the structural path (VIF < 3.3). The 1000 bootstrap subsample bootstrapping analysis result suggests that all the proposed hypothesis is

supported (Table 6). The result suggests that strategic communication is positively associated with strategic consensus (β = 0.797, t = 26.410, R2 =0.635) and strategy implementation success (β = 0.597, t = 6.715). Strategic consensus is also positively associated with strategy implementation success (β = 0.245; t = 2.266). Both strategic communication and strategic consensus explain 65% of the variability in strategy implementation success and the results asserted medium to large effect size on strategy implementation. The assessment of mediation, on the other hand, yields a significant indirect effect (β = 0.195, t = 2.215, [LLCI = 0.060; ULCI = 0.344]) suggesting that strategic consensus mediates the relationship between strategic communication and strategy implementation success. Subsequently, an assessment of the model's in-sample predictive relevance Q2 yields a value larger than 0 implying that the model has an in-sample predictive ability.

Table 5: Assessment of Convergent Validity

Relationship	Beta	Std Dev	t	LLCI	ULCI	VIF	f^2	R^2	Q^2
SCom -> SCon	0.797	0.030	26.410	0.737	0.839	1.000	1.740	0.635	0.467
SCom -> SSI	0.597	0.089	6.715	0.446	0.737	2.740	0.373	0.650	0.505
SCon -> SSI	0.245	0.108	2.266	0.072	0.415	2.740	0.063		
SCom -> SCon -> SSI	0.195	0.088	2.215	0.060	0.344				

Table 6: Path Analysis

Hypothesis	P-Value	Results
H1: SCon -> SSI	0.012	Supported
H2: SCom -> SCon	0.000	Supported
H3: SCom -> SSI	0.000	Supported
H4: SCom -> SCon -> SSI	0.028	Supported

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to create a model to explore the linkage effect of strategic consensus, strategic communication, and successful strategy implementation. Prior studies have highlighted the significance of strategic communication and strategic consensus in driving the success of strategy implementation on organizational performance (Dess & Origer, 1987; Dess & Priem, 1995; Rapert et al., 2002, Shimizu; 2017, Ates et al., 2020). Previous studies so far demonstrated the significance of strategic consensus on the success of implementing organizational strategic priorities (Kellermanns et al., 2005; Dooley et al., 2000; Dess & Origer, 1987). This study reached the following insights as discussed next.

The results corroborate the findings in supporting the positive correlation between strategic communication and strategic consensus (Ho et al., 2014; Rapert et al., 2002) as well as strategic communication towards successful strategy implementation. The results demonstrated that strategic consensus is positively related to the success of the strategy implementation process. Lack of strategic communication in an organization prevents the shared understanding among middle managers in achieving strategic priorities. The results revealed that strategic consensus among HEIs middle managers has a significant influence on the success of strategy implementation. Building shared

consensus is essential to ensuring that strategies are effectively communicated, resulting in the strategies being successfully implemented (Obembe, Mansour & Kolade, 2021).

The findings of this study suggest that strategic communication could be the key prerequisite to establishing the success of strategy implementation in higher education. Poor and ineffective communication creates barriers to successful strategy implementation (Obeidat, Al-Hadidi & Tarhini, 2017; Heide, Grønhaug & Johannessen; 2002). Organizational management in HEIs must play a proactive role in providing effective communication mechanisms that can aid in the strategy implementation process and improve the HEIs' efficiency and performance. This study suggests that strategic-level managers need to leverage reliable and effective communication channels for highly engaging connections among stakeholders to successfully implement the strategy. In terms of implications for practice, middle-level management should consider the need for common shared understanding at all managerial levels during the actions of strategy implementation which will lead to organizational success.

A possible explanation for this result might be that effective communication is an important mechanism in explaining the relationship between strategic consensus and strategy implementation success. In line with Craig's communication theory, it can thus be suggested that strategic communication plays a key role in the strategy implementation process in an organization. As such, this present study demonstrates how strategic communication fosters shared understanding among middle management and turns the strategy implementation success into HEIs. In addition, the mediation result of the strategic consensus was found to be significant in between strategic communication and in the success of the strategy implementation process. The insights gained from this study highlighted shared consensus among the HEIs middle-level managers does have an indirect influence on the strategy implementation process.

Future Research Directions

A limitation of this study is the diversity of the respondents. Future research should include demographic parameters such as servicing duration, area of speciality, and departments/divisions to strengthen the study results. Despite the fact that the respondents were middle managers from both public and private HEIs in Malaysia, the respondents came from a wide range of backgrounds and had varying levels of expertise and dedication to carrying out the HEIs' strategic plan. This study was also limited to using cross-sectional data. As a result, there are still many unanswered questions about the feasibility of doing longitudinal studies in future research. Future studies may look into the degree of strategic communication and strategic consensus as well as a potential construct in extensions to the research model. Moreover, a future study may consider investigating the role of technology and systems in HEIs, as well as how technology and systems may influence strategic communication, strategic consensus, and strategy implementation success among HEIs.

Implications

The present study adds to the rapidly expanding knowledge in the field of strategic management. The findings have numerous significant implications for future practice. Practically, this study helps HEIs in Malaysia realise and implement the strategic priorities set in the National Education Blueprint (NEB). These could also enhance institutions' success in implementing the strategies, as well as maintain the excellence of the higher education system. Even though strategy implementation has been extensively studied over the last few decades, it remains essential. These empirical findings provide a new understanding of the strategic management constructs in the context of Malaysian HEIs.

Theoretically, this new research model contributes to examining the integration of linkage among the strategic management constructs – strategic communication, strategic consensus, and successful strategy implementation. Besides, this study shed new light on the mediating role of strategic consensus in strategy implementation. The results of this study provided empirical support for the hypotheses proposed. The findings will prove useful in expanding insights into the body of knowledge on how strategic communication affects strategic consensus to facilitate successful strategy implementation of HEIs in Malaysia. An implication of this study adds insights to understand that greater communication efforts should not be neglected by any organization in achieving strategic goals. Institutions should make continued efforts in adopting sound governance mechanisms which allow ongoing and continuous communication practices as these are fundamental and strategic advantages toward successful strategy implementation in HEIs. Besides, HEIs should have embedded the culture which drives and encourages communication within the organizations.

Practical Implications for Asian Business

This study's findings have ramifications for Asia's academic progress and growth in sustainable development within higher education (Habib et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2010). In terms of practice, this study contributes to the Malaysian HEIs strategy implementation process in attaining the NEB strategic goals and thus contributes to the competitive and long-term sustainability of the education eco-system in Asia (Maneejuk & Yamaka, 2021; Hallinger, 2014; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013; Huang, 2007; Mok, 2007). As such, this research is useful for assisting Malaysian HEIs in achieving the goals outlined in the country's NEB. This may help institutions better implement the strategies and keep the higher education system at its peak performance. The study's empirical findings shed light on the strategic management constructs relevant to HEIs in the Asian market.

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first research in Malaysia to focus on the direct and indirect effect of strategic communication and strategic consensus on the success of strategy implementation in higher education. Failure of higher education institutions to respond to expectations and changes in the dynamic and complex environment may lead to a phasing out of potential growth and opportunities in the market (Maneejuk & Yamaka, 2021; Sia & Adamu, 2021; Groskovs & P. Ulhoi, 2019). The ideally positioned and powerful strategic-oriented middle managers from the HEIs perceived the presence of the importance of effective and sound

communication, as well as strategic consensus, to play the part in the progress and development of the strategic vision of Asian higher education. When an effective communication mechanism is in place, HEIs can gain a competitive advantage from the success of strategy implementation.

The Asian strategies for academic improvement vary. With the accomplishment and considerable success of the HEIs in the Asia region, cross-border collaboration efforts among HEIs in Asia can create amazing quality and academic environment that rewards productivity and growth to the talent pool in the national and global market. Hence, the successful strategy implementation of higher education institutions towards its strategic goals is imperative to overall performance, culminating in the emergence of success among Asian higher education institutions with sustainable global ranking and positionings. This can be seen in HEIs' representation in the Times Higher Education's World.

The present study suggested the importance of effective communication by the HEIs in Malaysia to the success and impressive progress in the education system. The study reveals the significance of communication in fostering common consensus and ensuring the success of the HEI's strategy implementation. As a result, practitioners, and those in the HEIs should think about and embrace the necessity of having effective communication policies and structures in place. This could strongly imply that policymakers and strategic managers in Asia's higher education sector should enhance communication strategically, which will help the strategic plan grow and succeed even more. Effective communication is essential for the interconnection between organizational levels and the strategic translation of vision and directions between the Ministry and the HEIs.

Most decisions and initiatives necessitate shared consensus. However, not everyone is devoted to reaching an agreement towards a strategic consensus. Different cultures and norms might lead to a commitment against strategic consensus during decision-making. In collectivist societies such as many countries in Asia, the ties between individuals are relatively close and collective goal accomplishments are often sought after. Members of a collectivist society, according to Hofstede (1980), are individuals who are "we" oriented and work together toward the organization's goals, interact with one another in an interdependent manner, and take joint action as a group in a cooperative style, adhering to the moralistic values of joint efforts and group rewards. Although Malaysia is a collectivist country, the fact gathered here implies that the respondents view individuals as separate independent units. The middle managers from the HEI perceived each decision made by each individual as not dependent and viewed individuals as separate independent units. Furthermore, the middle management from the HEIs perceived successful strategy implementation is not always the result of shared consensus.

The present research's outcomes may be of interest and guide to prospective organizations on the need to understand the significant role of the strategic constructs in managing a business and responding to the turbulent environment in Asia at different times, particularly during turbulent and crisis times (Sia & Adamu, 2021). As cultural boundaries differ, it would be important for organizations to recognize the difference and adjust accordingly as cultural boundaries, unlike national boundaries.

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