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Authentic Strategy – Calling for More than Just Good Strategy

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Abstract:

The rate of strategic failure reported in the literature has been alarming. Many authors attribute strategic failures to the challenge of implementation. One may, however, wonder whether strategizing is done in a genuine way or just in compliance with certain expectations. This paper argues that many organizations are not serious enough about strategy and do it mainly as a signal of good management or in response to institutional requirements. As a result, these organizations do not have authentic strategies. The paper builds on the strategy literature to argue for the need for more authenticity. It aims to contribute both to theory and practice. First, it introduces and develops the new concept of authentic strategy, presents its components, and distinguishes it from the concept of good strategy. Second, it proposes a self-assessment tool that executives can use to assess the authenticity of their strategy. This tool includes authentic mission, authentic vision, authentic values, core of authentic strategy, and implementation. The paper calls for further empirical research to validate and improve on the self-

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assessment tool. It also encourages addressing the impact of authentic strategy on organizational performance as an interesting subject for future research.

Keywords: Authentic strategy, Strategy core, Mission, Vision, Core values, Creativity, Implementation.

Introduction

Despite the huge increase in strategy literature, the rate of strategic failures has been alarming. Some authors estimate a rate of failure between 50 and 90 percent (e.g., Cândido and Santos, 2015; Nutt, 1999; Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Sirkin et al., 2005). Many authors attribute strategic failures to the challenge of implementation which they consider to be more critical than the process of strategy formulation. Hrebiniak (2006) indicated that executing a strategy is a great deal harder than formulating it. Cater and Pucko (2010) argued that although 80 percent of the companies have appropriate strategies, only 14 percent have implemented them well. One may, however, ask if we can really investigate the success of strategy implementation without looking at strategy formulation. For example, several authors consider organizational structure and resources among the main problems in strategy implementation (Kalali et al., 2011; Hrebiniak, 2006; Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Miller, 1997; Allio, 2005), but shouldn't these problems be addressed in the formulation stage and particularly in the diagnosis? In fact, strategy formulation and execution are mutually dependent (Martin, 2010; Wu, 2017). The high failure rate of strategies is not just an implementation failure, it can also be a formulation failure. It may also reflect a lack of seriousness about strategy. Whittington et al. (2003) called for taking strategy seriously. Rumelt (2011, p.35) stated that serious strategy is a very difficult work that may not take place in successful organizations until "the wolf is at the door". Vermeulen (2017) argued that many strategies fail because they are not actually strategies as they do not represent a set of clear choices. Many organizations claim to have a strategy just because they filled "strategy" templates including mission, vision, values, and objectives. Such templates tend to create similarity

rather than uniqueness. Harney (2012, p.127) stated that "the language of strategy (mission, vision, objectives, etc.) has become increasingly empty, promoting convergence and similarity as opposed to divergence and uniqueness". Liedtka, (2008) noted the lack of authenticity in strategy making. She argued that most of the strategy field need to be reformed after the spectacular crash and scandals of giants like Enron and WorldCom at the beginning of the century. Other than her paper (Liedtka, 2008), the authenticity of strategy received little to no attention although it was clear that companies like Enron had a flagrant deficiency in strategic authenticity. The core values of Enron were respect, integrity, communications, and excellence, but these values had little to do with how the company did business (Johnson. 2003). The subsequent mortgage crisis also did not lead to more research on authentic strategy. The first crisis saw increased popularity of corporate governance and authentic leadership (Shamir and Eilam, 2005; Walumbwa et al. 2008; Dnes, 2005) and the second led to increased, yet short-lived, interest in conscious capitalism and shared value (Mackey, 2011; Porter, 2011).

Jabnoun (2023) observed in his consulting career that many universities and business companies have kept setting ambitious targets without ever achieving them. The so-called strategies of those organizations never answered how they could achieve their targets. He has also observed large organizations that spent huge amounts of money on strategy consultants and had beautiful posters about their strategy in their receptions. When asked about their strategy, employees said they knew nothing about it. The failure to communicate the strategy is a mistake for many companies (Sterling, 2003; Cocks, 2010). A study by McChesney et al. (2012) revealed that only one in seven employees was able to name at least one of the major

goals of the organization. Jabnoun (2023) narrated that he has run across many CEOs who failed to remember what their mission statements were about. The statements were available in documents and websites but not in the hearts and minds of CEOs. Such mission statements are simply not authentic. Several employees have openly told him that they had developed their strategy just because it was required by regulators, or accreditation agencies in the case of academic institutions. Organizations that are true to themselves cannot claim to have a strategy if they do not communicate it and implement it, or if their strategy does not answer how they can achieve their goals.

The consulting observations of the authors and the above literature made them conclude that many organizational strategies lack authenticity and realize the need for a new concept to deal with this problem. The paper develops a creative synthesis of related but scattered ideas in the literature to formulate the concept of authentic strategy and propose a practical tool for managers to bring the concept to practice (see the Appendix). The remainder of the paper explains the concept of authentic strategy and presents its components.

Section two of this paper presents the concept of authentic strategy and compares it to the concepts of good and bad strategy (Rumelt, 2011). Section three is devoted to the concepts of mission, vision and core values, and the importance of their authenticity. Section four addresses the core of authentic strategy. Section five deals with implementation, and section six presents the conclusion and implications of this work.

What is Authentic Strategy?

It is unfortunate to feel compelled to add an adjective to strategy at least

to make sure it is "strategy" after all. It is also unfortunate that adjectives like "good" or "great" are not fit for the purpose because they lack certain characteristics as will be seen later. The adjectives that seem fit for the purpose are: "true", "real", and "authentic". Among these, "authentic" seems more fit because in addition of being technically "real" and "true", "authentic" has the further dimension of being "real" and "true" to oneself as a person and as an organization. To be "real" and "true" to oneself, it is imperative to be "genuine" and avoid doing things for "compliance" or mere "political" reasons. To be "genuine" is to be rooted in one's own (inside and outside) reality and to address real challenges in ways that fit that particular reality. And if reality is "socially constructed" (Meckler & Baillie, 2003), then, one needs to be unique and creative because one's (inside and outside) reality is not the same as other organizations.

This description as "authentic" is important because, as Khalifa (2021) argues, there are three phenomena that practitioners and scholars confuse as one: strategy, nonstrategy, and no strategy. Nonstrategy is a new concept describing a misbelief that one has a strategy when in reality what is mistaken as a strategy does not satisfy the definition of a "true" strategy (Khalifa, 2023). Being "authentic" means "genuinely" wanting to make "strategy" when strategy is needed. Ignorance of what "strategy" is, pretention, or compliance does not produce an "authentic" strategy.

There are many of those purported to be strategies lack authenticity, but what do authenticity and authentic strategy mean? The words authentic and authenticity are not uncommon in the business literature, but they have been mostly used in relation to marketing (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022) branding (Beverland, 2006; Keller, 1993), leadership (George, 2003; Walumbwa et al. 2008) and ethics (Taylor, 1991; Boyle, 2003).

Keller (1993) relates authenticity to the concepts of identity while Beverland (2006) associates it with integrity and sincerity. Rudinov (2006) defines it in relationship to the original source. Khalifa (2012, p.242) defines authenticity of purpose as "originality rooted in reality." The term authentic strategy was used by Liedtka (2008) who highlighted the importance of authenticity in organizations, but she focused only on one aspect of strategic authenticity, namely employee participation. Guillotin and Mangematin (2018, p. 481) define the authenticity of a business school "as the specificity of the education and the local embeddedness of a business school", and "Authenticity emphasizes the idiosyncratic nature of the student experience" they added.

To define authenticity in this paper, we first refer to dictionaries. According to the Oxford Dictionary, authenticity means based on facts, accurate and reliable (Authentic, 2020a). According to Merriam-Webster, authenticity means conformance to facts, being truthful to oneself, originality and not imitation (Authentic, 2020b). Being original and staying away from imitation requires a certain level of creativity and innovation. Indeed, the Arabic word for authenticity means independent ownership or intellectual property, good, original, and innovative. Arabs call purebred horses authentic horses. Subsequently, an authentic strategy is a good and creative strategy truthfully developed and implemented by the organization based on a factual and adequate diagnosis of its environment and a theory of how the chosen actions will lead to the desired ends. This strategy is unique to the organization and carries its DNA. Plans that are not based on sound diagnosis cannot be considered strategies, let alone authentic strategies. A strategy based on filling out templates or on just developing a list of goals is not authentic. Targets that are not achievable make a wish list

not a strategy. An authentic strategy is original, yet realistic, credible, and practical. Similarly, imitated strategies or strategies that do not challenge best practices are not authentic strategies. Kaplan (2003) warned against emulating best practices in strategies because strategic practices are best understood as situated actions. An authentic strategy is a winning strategy that is unique to the organization and its environment. Strategy is about winning the competition (Angwin & Cummings, 2017). Khalifa (2020) defines strategy as a theory of winning. A strategy that does not have a logic on how to win in the marketplace is not really a strategy. Strategies that lack the needed creativity to offer a unique customer value and gain competitive advantage are not authentic. A well formulated strategy may not be authentic if it is not intended to be seriously implemented. Implementation is the "raison d'être" of strategy formulation. The importance of strategic implementation has received ample attention of the literature (Bej & Das, 2019; Cater & Pucko, 2010; Hrebiniak, 2006). An authentic strategy is the brainchild of the organization and the creativity of its people. Liedtka (2008) considers the participation of employees to be the condition for strategic authenticity. A good strategy fully developed by consultants or by the strategy/planning department or office is therefore not authentic. This is not to dismiss the importance of the role of consultants (Whittington, 2006) in helping with the strategic process, but this role is supposed to be limited to guidance, facilitation and stimulation. Consultants help but do not replace employees in strategy development. Júnior et al. (2012) concluded that consultants should help clients reflect on their practice, so that they would be able to, independently, diagnose and solve their own problems.

To compare authentic strategy to good and bad strategy (see Figure

1) we need to briefly introduce the two latter ones (Rumelt, 2011). A bad strategy is characterized by: 1) fluff or restatements of the obvious and using flashy buzzwords, 2) Failure to face the challenge because of lack of proper diagnosis, 3) Mistaking goals for strategy, 4) Bad strategic objectives that fail to address critical issues or when they are not practical.

A good strategy is a serious strategy aimed at gaining a competitive advantage. It is not just a set of desired goals or a mere response to requirements from regulators and/or a cosmetic tool of public relations. It is built around its kernel (Rumelt, 2011) which is composed of: 1) a diagnosis that defines or explains the nature of the challenge, 2) a guiding policy or overall approach of dealing with the challenge identified in the diagnosis, and 3) a set of coherent actions that are designed to carry out the guiding policy.

Based on the above we can conclude that a bad strategy is not an authentic strategy. Good strategy, on the other hand, satisfies some of the requirements of authentic strategy as it is a serious strategy that addresses a real challenge facing the organization, making it situation-specific and therefore unique to the organization and its environment. It is also practical and realistic as it includes a set of coherent actions based on a driving policy. A good strategy would, however, not be authentic if it is formulated without the participation of employees (Liedtke, 2008; Liedtka & Rosenblum, 1996). Both authentic strategy and good strategy aim at gaining competitive advantage, but authentic strategy makes creativity and a clear logic of winning explicit requirements to ensure that the strategy provides the needed leverage to gain advantage over competitors. The core of authentic strategy includes the kernel of good strategy plus creativity, logic or theory of winning, and employee's participation (see Figure 1). A

good strategy that is not intended to be seriously implemented is also not authentic. Authentic strategy is a good strategy (Rumelt, 2011), creatively formulated with the participation of employees, with clear logic of winning, and seriously implemented. It differs from good strategy in the fact that the former is explicitly built on organizational culture and identity, that is, on authentic mission, vision, and core values (see Figure 2). Vision and values do not make a strategy on their own (Vermeulen, 2017; Rumelt, 2011) but they can have significant positive impacts on performance when they are truly espoused and acted upon (Collins & Porras, 1994; Lattuch & Dankert, 2018).

Authentic Mission, Vision and Core Values

Authentic strategy is shaped by and rooted in organizational identity and culture. The statements of mission, vision, and values set boundaries, limit the choices, and hence, give focus to strategy. They are great enablers of strategy development, implementation, and evolution. Culture and identity are essential for people's aspirations, inspiration, and commitment (Akerlof & Kranton, 2010; Henderson & Van den Steen, 2015). The most directly related manifestations of culture and identity to strategy are mission, vision, and values.

Authentic Mission

Bartkus et al. (2000) indicate that mission statements facilitate coherence within the organization, provide a guide for organizational decisions, and give meaning to work. Drucker stressed the importance of the mission in business planning. He stated "Only a clear definition of the mission and purpose of the business makes possible clear and realistic business objectives. It is the foundation for priorities, strategies, plans, and work

assignments" (Drucker, 1977, p. 66). Mission statements have a strong influence on perceptions of stakeholders (Campbell et al., 2001). A number of empirical studies have found that the content and clarity of a mission statement significantly influence employees' behavior and organizational effectiveness (e.g., Bart, 2001; Weiss & Piderit, 1999; Brinckwehoff, 2000; Light, 2005; Wolf, 1993). Such statements have a positive relationship with financial performance (Desmidt et al., 2011), employees retention (Kim & Lee, 2007) and satisfaction (Brown & Yoshioka, 2003).

A mission can be defined as an authentic and ambitious purpose (Champy & Nohria, 2000; Ready & Truelove, 2011). Mission is defined by Khalifa (2012, p.242) as "a resolute commitment to create a significant value or outcome in service of a worthy cause – a cause that the members of the organization admire and be willing to exert their attention and energy in its pursuit".

An authentic mission should represent a noble cause that employees are committed to pursuing in their daily work. It is internalized by all employees (Bart, 2001; Wang, 2011). Internalization is what separates a mission that is truly "lived" and one that is merely a phrase published on the company website (Marimon et al., 2015). It should be well communicated to current and prospective stakeholders to help them choose whether or not to be involved with the company (Bartkus et al., 2000). The simplicity of the mission statement makes it easier for stakeholders to understand.

Authentic Vision

Organizational vision was defined as the idea that represented or reflected the shared future to which the organization should have aspired (House & Shamir, 1993). Empirical research showed that organizational

vision has a positive impact on effectiveness in both small and large, simple and complex organizations (Baum et al., 1998; Filion, 1991; Kotter, 1990; Westley & Mintzberg, 1989). Lipton (1996) stated that vision is related to organizational success. He also found that organizations that had a vision had twice as much profit as S&P 500 (Lipton, 2004).

Authenticity is crucial for effective vision development (Lattuch & Dankert, 2018). Visiski (2013) found implementing truthful and authentic vision and mission statements to improve the company brand. An authentic vision is a vision that reflects the passion of the leaders. This passion has positive impacts on followers' outcomes and overall business performance (Kotter, 1996). It increases customer satisfaction, employees' satisfaction and employees' commitment to the vision (Kantabutra & Pisanu, 2009). Lack of top management passion for the vision induces employees not to take it seriously. An authentic vision truly takes the thinking of employees beyond day-to-day activity (Schraeder & Self, 2010), and gives meaning to what they are doing. It is supposed to be simple and idealistic. It is not supposed to be a wishful fantasy, but rather "an attainable future grounded in the present reality" (Beach, 2006, p. 51). Good strategic vision statements that energize employees are focused and realistic (Rahman, 2009). Authentic vision should be well communicated and understood by all employees (Abu-Tineh et al., 2008; Schraeder & Self, 2010; Hastings et al., 2011). It must be shared by employees who should be able to relate their jobs to it. Managers should make sure that employees understand their individual contributions to the vision of the organization. The construction worker who believes that he is building a home for a family in his community, has a better self-image, higher pride and dedication and job performance than another worker who may have the same job but who looks at himself as just a bricklayer (Nanus, 1992).

Authentic Core Values

Values have a positive impact on continuous improvement and customer satisfaction (Jabnoun, 2001; Jabnoun & Khafaji, 2005). Many authors have shown that what distinguished long-lasting successful companies was the fact that their core values have guided their decisions (Kilpatrick & Silverman, 2005; Allio, 2005; Schein, 2009). Macy (2006) directly linked values in management practices with employee satisfaction and trust. Manohar and Pandit (2014) found that core values have a significant and lasting impact on the innovation success of organizations. Jabnoun (2019) stressed the importance of value-based organizations for achieving sustainable excellence. Because of its impact on performance, translating core values into actions has been accepted as one of the main pillars of sustainable business excellence (Brown, 2014; Jabnoun 2005; Jabnoun 2019).

Lencioni (2002) stressed the importance of the authenticity of core values. He mentioned that many companies view a values initiative just like another marketing launch or "a one-time event measured by the initial attention it receives, not the authenticity of its content" (Lencioni, 2002, p. 115). Such a view results in cynicism among employees and undermines the credibility of the top management. Authentic values should be reflected in the strategy, structure, and systems of the organizations (Collins & Porras, 1994; Jabnoun 2017). They should also be reflected in the norms of behavior of employees (Killman, 1981; Jabnoun, 1999).

Lecioni (2002) warned against mistaking core values with aspirational values that organizations wish to have. He also highlighted the difference between core values and permission-to-play values that reflect the

minimum behavioral and social standards required from any employee in any industry. He noted that integrity is claimed as a core value for 55% of Fortune 100 companies. This value is arguably good, but it is permission-to-play value, and its widespread use testifies to the fact that it may not improve competitiveness.

Based on the above, an authentic strategy should have authentic core values that are: 1) relevant to the organization's industry and its competitiveness, 2) truly shared by employees and reflected in their behaviors, 3) translated into strategy, systems, and structure.

Core of Authentic Strategy

Authentic Strategy is intended to have a real impact, it is driven by a real sense of purpose, and it is clearly designed to overcome core challenges and barriers to create the intended impact. This impact is the value the strategy creates for the organization's stakeholders. As such, authentic strategy satisfies Khalifa's (2021) five attributes of strategy. It is aspirational, power-creating, directional, systemic, and intentional.

Authentic strategy is a good strategy (Rumelt, 2011), creatively formulated, with the participation of employees, and seriously implemented. The core of authentic strategy therefore includes components of the kernel of a good strategy – diagnosis, a guiding policy, and a set of coherent actions – in addition to creativity, a theory of winning, and participation.

Diagnosis

There is no dispute among schools and scholars of strategy on the need for diagnosis or internal and external scanning (Mintzberg et al., 2009). SWOT analysis (learned et al., 1969) that identifies internal strengths

(S) and weaknesses (W) and external opportunities (O) and threats (T); has been the most widely used tool of diagnosis (Zakari et al, 2019). Typically, strategies based on SWOT tool build on strengths or eliminate the weaknesses, exploit the opportunities or counter the threats (Wang et al., 2014; Zhang & Feng, 2013). There are many other techniques used in diagnosis such as PESTEL (Yüksel, 2012), Gap Analysis (Brown & Swartz, 1989), Five Forces Analysis (Porter, 2008; Grundy, 2006), and Root Cause Analysis (Toklu et al., 2016).

The diagnosis shall be based on accurate and reliable data. Using inaccurate or incomplete data leads to the wrong diagnosis and thus the wrong strategy. Data integrity is included as an assessment element in most business excellence models (Jabnoun, 2019, EFQM, 2014). Getting Reliable data about the perceptions of stakeholders requires proper collection methods that some companies may overlook. Employees in particular may find it hard to express their true opinions because of fear of getting punished by their superiors.

Rumelt (2011) highlights that diagnosis should be action oriented. The diagnosis needed for strategy formulation is not aimed at predicting the outcomes like the one conducted by social scientists. It is aimed at altering the outcomes or leveraging them. Rumelt (2011) gave an example of diagnosing the challenge of K-12 student performance. A social scientist would address this challenge by studying the impact of social class and culture, while a strategist looks at the impact of decentralization because it is something the organization can address with a policy (Ouchi & Segal, 2003). The impact of social class and culture may be important but the organization can do little about it. No strategy can be authentic without truthful action-oriented diagnosis. Failure to conduct this diagnosis disconnects the strategy from the organization and its environment.

Guiding Policy

Diagnosis leads to a guiding policy that helps the organization select the coherent actions that will lead to competitiveness. Many confuse the term policy with strategy. Policy means the guiding principles and rules that direct the thinking and action of a business company. It limits the decisions that can be taken by excluding other possible decisions (Enea, 2010). Rumelt (2011, p.49) stated "Good guiding policies are not goals or visions or images of desirable end states. Rather, they define a method of grappling with the situation and ruling out a vast array of possible actions". The guiding policy addresses the diagnosed challenges by creating advantage and/or leveraging on existing advantage. The guiding policy should be simple and easy to understand.

Coherent Actions

The core of the authentic strategy also includes a set of coherent actions based on the guiding policy. Rumelt (2011, p. 52) stresses that "strategy is about action". It is important, at this stage, to adhere strictly to the priorities that shall take precedence over others. Coherence of the actions is what provides leverage and ensures that the force of the sum is higher than the sum of the forces. Lafley and Martin (2013) highlighted the importance of integration. They stated that that strategy is an integrated set of choices that create sustainable competitive advantage. The set of actions should not be too complex. Simplicity prevents any confusion or misunderstanding among people at different layers of the organization and therefore ensures better strategic execution (Seitz & Garcia-Huidobro, 2002; Weis, 1998).

The set of coherent activities can take the form of strategic initiatives that push the frontiers of organizational capabilities. Initiatives are not to be

treated in isolation. "They must be viewed as a portfolio of complementary actions (Kaplan & Norton, 2008, p. 11). These initiatives are therefore connected vertically with the guiding policy and interconnected horizontally with one another.

Creativity

Developing the guiding policy and identifying the set of coherent actions does not just require action-oriented diagnosis, it also requires high levels of creativity. Creativity and innovation make up the basic concepts of sustainable business excellence (Jabnoun, 2019). Creativity is necessary to create leverage and gain a competitive advantage. Companies cannot achieve their goals in a competitive environment without creativity (Mihic, 2017). Strategy is about making creative choices not any choices. Lafley and Martin (2013, p. 283) stressed the importance of making "creative decisions about how to win". Liu et al. (2009) found that creativity can improve organizational innovation performance. Innovation, which is essential for creating competitive advantage and a company's subsistence (Urban & Hauser, 1993) and achieving sustainable development (Ayuso et al., 2011), is built on creative ideas (Amabile, 1988).

Creative flashes of insight (eureka) are highly important for building a creative strategy (Dugan, 2015). These flashes require presence of mind and lessons from the past (Dugan 2010) or knowledge of best practices. Best practices are not to be emulated because strategic practices are situated actions (Lave & Wenger, 1991), but it is the combination of ideas learned from best practices together with the current reality of the organization that produces flashes of insight (Dugan, 2015). This combination creates an originality based on reality and contributes thereby to strategic authenticity.

Theory of Winning

Jabnoun (2023) considers an authentic strategy to be a winning strategy that multiplies organizational returns. Khalifa (2021) addresses some of the challenges of defining the concept of "strategy", one of which is the stretching of the meaning of strategy that invites triviality by being all-inclusive and boundless. The proposed definition of the concept of authentic strategy deals effectively with that challenge and gives clear boundaries around the concept.

Bungay (2022) identifies three gaps in the process of strategizing one of which he calls "the effect gap". This is the gap between the outcomes obtained by the taken actions and the planned and desired outcomes. Without clearly thinking in advance about the logic, or theory, linking the planned actions and the desired outcomes this gap is unlikely to be bridged and may come as a regrettable surprise.

Guiding policy and the set of coherent actions as proposed by Rumelt (2011) are usually underpinned by an implicit logic, a theory of winning, linking the two to the stated end. A number of scholars argued that this logic should be made explicit so that it can be subjected to testing and revision (Meiser, 2016). This has the benefit of integrating the strategy formulation and implementation as interdependent processes and, in addition, it gives the organization the capacity to respond to changes in its environment in real time.

Having an explicit theory of winning is a demanding criterion to satisfy. It requires deep and holistic thinking and creativity to reflect on one's assumptions about the mechanisms by which the chosen set of coherent actions may lead to the desired and expected impacts and end results. If

a strategy is a journey as Rumelt (2022) argues, it becomes clear how important it is to fully experience that journey and advance to the chosen destination with alertness to the challenges along the way and with an open mind to respond confidently to them.

Participation

To be authentic, a strategy needs to be credible. People are more committed to a strategy that is aligned with the organization's culture and identity and to which they have contributed (Van den Steen, 2017; Li & Van den Steen, 2021). Authentic leaders empower people in their organizations and enlist their commitment to achieve superior long-term results (George et al., 2007). Productive debate within the organization is needed to develop an authentic strategy and to modify it as circumstances warrant. Engaging in constructive arguments will more likely lead to better strategic analysis, formulation, and execution (Sørensen & Carroll, 2021).

Creativity and innovation cannot take place without employees' participation. Innovative organizations rely on employees' creativity. They encourage employees to take creative approaches to problem-solving (Richard et al., 2003). Innovative organizations often bring together individuals with diverse knowledge, skills, and abilities into work teams and provide them with freedom and discretion in work-related decisions (Amabile et al., 1996). Employees' participation is a pillar of strategic authenticity (Liedtka, 2008). Lack of participation leads to poorly developed strategies (Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000), dissatisfaction among those who are excluded (Westley & Mintzberg, 1990) and difficulties in implementation (Mintzberg, 1994). Participation in the strategy formulation is essential for executors to accept the strategy as "their own" (Giles, 1991). People

participating in the strategic planning discussion will have higher levels of commitment to decisions, which substantially increases the chances of the execution to be successful (Bernardo et al. 2017; Aaltonen & Ikävalko, 2002; Drucker, 2010).

Implementation

Leadership

Strategy is not a mere technique or tool. It is done by people through people to deal with other people. It is an act of leadership. And, as George et al. put it (2007, p. 130): "Authentic leaders demonstrate a passion for their purpose, practice their values consistently, and lead with their hearts as well as their heads." They listen to their associates in a systematic way and, as such, they are more likely to be aware of early signs of threats and to recognize veiled opportunities (Bryant & Sharer, 2021)

Leadership is key to the success of strategy execution (McChesney et al., 2013; Johansson et al., 2014). Leaders champion the core values and make sure they are translated into actions (Jabnoun, 2019; Jabnoun, 2005; Badaracco & Ellsworth, 1989). Effective leaders communicate the strategy to employees and align their behavior with its guidance (Vermeulen, 2012). They empower employees to complete projects and initiatives (Sabourin, 2015). They use diverse methods to motivate their employees (Locke et al., 1991). The Lack of support and feedback of senior management is one of the most significant reasons for execution failures (Bernardo et al., 2017). Leaders allocate the needed skills and resources without which the implementation is doomed to failure (Speculand, 2014; Hambrick & Cannella, 1989; Bower & Gilbert, 2007).

Alignment

Alignment is at the heart of strategic implementation (Srivastava & Sushil, 2017). A strategy should be aligned with structure and systems. Hrebiniak (2008) stressed that aligning structure with strategy is the foundation of successful execution. Coulson-Thomas (2013) mentioned that organizational structure must support the execution of strategies so that the company can manage its daily activities and, simultaneously, explore its competitive advantage. Govindarajan, (1989) proposed the integration of administrative systems with business strategy. Hsieh et al. (2011) highlighted the need to align the reward system with competitive strategy. Nilsson (2000) noted the need to have different control systems for different competitive strategies.

Strategy has to be aligned with operations in order to proactively identify and handle execution problems (Atkinson, 2006). Kaplan and Norton (2006) have come up with the "Strategy Map" to align strategy with an operational execution plan. Lippitt (2007) proposed "execution-planning" to align strategic planning and project management. Operational targets of strategic projects and initiatives should be aligned with the target of strategic indicators. Wu (2017) Noted that many organizations focus on measuring project deliverables, and neglect measures relating to the project process. Project measurement should consider various stakeholders' expectations and key success factors in terms of both the project management process and project deliverables (Jorgensen, 2016). A PMI report (PMI, 2014) showed that only 42% of organizations agree that their projects are highly aligned with their strategy.

Performance Management System

Integrating strategy formulation with the execution process requires an effective performance system (Frolick & Thilini, 2006). Performance Management systems enable an organization to effectively monitor, control, and manage the implementation of strategic initiatives. Performance indicators need to be balanced to address different needs of stakeholders. Kaplan and Norton (2001) developed the balanced scorecard that gives a balanced representation of indicators taking into consideration four main perspectives: financial, external customers, internal processes, and learning. Balancing indicators should go beyond the representation of the above four perspectives in order to make sure that the performance metric does not lead to wrong behaviors (Cuguero´-Escofet & Rosanas, 2017). For example, efficiency indicators should be balanced with quality indicators and objective indicators should be balanced with perception measures. Having one efficiency indicator such as the number of slides examined in a radiology department may, under time pressure, lead employees to fail to detect certain cancer cases. This indicator should therefore be balanced with a quality indicator. Focusing on an objective indicator such as customer waiting time only may lose track of what the customers expect and perceive. This is why we should balance objective and subjective indicators. Balanced performance indicators shall be closely monitored by the top management, otherwise the strategy execution process is jeopardized (Bernardo et al., 2017).

Conclusion

The word strategy sounds good among management practitioners, yet very few organizations truly take strategy seriously. Some have strategic

documents that have little to do with reality. Such organizations may have developed their documents in response to requirements from regulators or accreditors. Such organizations usually fill in templates that often include mission, vision, values, and objectives. Others have plans or lists of goals that they desire to achieve without knowing the set of actions that enable their achievements. These goals are no more than wish lists. Rumelt notes "Most corporate strategic plans have little to do with strategy. They are simply three-year or five-year rolling resource budgets and some sort of market share projection." (Lovallo & Mendonca, 2007, p. 56). The high strategy failure rates (Kaplan & Norton, 2001; Sirkin et al., 2005) and the number of scandals associated with giant companies (Murphy, 2013), which were once known for having sophisticated strategies and clearly stated ethical core values, draws attention to the issue of strategy authenticity. This attention has been reinforced by the lack of authenticity witnessed by the author through his consulting experience. This paper builds on the strategy literature and the consulting experience of the author to introduce the concept of authentic strategy and outline its building blocks. Authentic strategy is seriously developed and implemented to create a lever and gain competitive advantage. It is a winning strategy unique to the organization and its environment. It is an original brainchild of the organization and its creative people. Authentic strategy is built on an authentic mission, vision, and core values. It has a core that includes the kernel of a good strategy (Rumelt, 2011) underpinned by a theory of winning (Khalifa, 2021) in addition to creativity and people participation. The authentic strategy is seriously implemented with strong commitment from leaders who champion core values, allocate resources, align structure, systems, and operations, and monitor balanced performance indicators. A self-assessment questionnaire reflecting the components of authentic strategy

is proposed (see the appendix). This paper is valuable for practitioners who want to develop and implement an authentic strategy. Executives can calculate the average of each section of the assessment tool to see the extent of its authenticity. They can then work on ways to remedy any shortcomings found and to maintain and deepen the strengths of their strategy.

The paper introduced and developed the new concept of authentic strategy and proposed its components in addition to a self-assessment tool for it. There is a need for empirical work to further substantiate and validate the self-assessment tool. The impact of authentic strategy on performance is an interesting subject for future research.

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Figure 1: The Relationship Between Good Strategy and Authentic Strategy



Figure 2: The Elements of Authentic Strategy



Appendix: Authentic Strategy: A Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Please specify to what extend you agree with the following statements:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Component	#	Statement	1	2	3	4	5
Authentic Mission	1	The mission statement expresses a noble cause					
	2	The mission statement is simple and well understood by all stakeholders					
	3	Employees truly believe in the mission of the organization					
	4	Employees relate their daily activities to the mission of the organization					
Authentic Vision	5	The vision reflects a true passion of the leadership					
	6	Employees believe in the vision and are eager to achieve it					
	7	The vision in achievable					
	8	Employees understand the contribution of their work to the vision					
Authentic Values	9	The core values are highly relevant to the nature of business of the organization					
	10	Employees believe in the core values of the organization					
	11	Employees behavior reflects the core values of the organization					
	12	The strategy, structure and systems serve the core values of the organizations					

Core of Authentic Strategy	13	Employees participate in developing the strategy of the organization					
	14	The strategy is based on a sound truthful diagnosis of the organization and its environment					
	15	The strategy includes a guiding policy based on a sound diagnosis					
	16	The strategy includes a set and coherent activities and projects guided by the guiding policy that create advantage					
	17	The strategy is simple and easy to understand					
	18	The strategy is based on creativity and innovation					
	19	The strategic development witnessed at least one eureka moment or flash of insight					
	20	Our strategy is based on a clear logic of how our initiatives and projects will likely lead to the achievement of our objectives.					
	21	We know the assumptions that form the basis of our logic which links our initiatives to the achievement of our objectives.					
	22	We have examined the soundness of the logic and assumptions of our strategy.					
	23	The strategy challenges best practices					

Implementation	24	The leadership is committed to empowering people to complete strategic initiatives and provides the necessary resources.					
	25	The leadership motivates employees to achieve strategic objectives					
	26	Scheduled targets of strategic indicators are aligned with those of strategic projects and key processes					
	27	The leadership regularly monitors the key performance indicators					
	28	The policies, organizational structure, processes, and systems are aligned with strategy					
	29	Key performance indicators are balanced, and their targets are ambitious and feasible					
Authentic Strategy	30	We have a winning strategy unique to our organization and its environment.					
	31	Our strategy is a lever that multiplies our returns					
	32	We have been seriously implementing of our strategy.					
	33	We are monitoring the validity of our assumptions on an ongoing basis.					
	34	We are open to refine our strategy based on our reflection on the underlying logic and assumptions.					
	35	Our strategy is the authentic brainchild of our managers and employees and their creativity.					

الإستراتيجية الأصيلة ـ خلق قيمة حقيقية

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ملخص البحث:

إن معدل الفشل الإستراتيجي المبلغ عنه في الأدبيات ينذر بالخطر. يعزو العديد من المؤلفين الإخفاقات الإستراتيجية إلى التحدي المتمثل في التنفيذ. ومع ذلك، قد يتساءل المرء عما إذا كان التخطيط الإستراتيجي يتم بطريقة حقيقية أم فقط وفقًا لتوقعات معينة. تجادل هذه الورقة بأن العديد من المنظمات ليست جادة بما فيه الكفاية بشأن الإستراتيجية وتقوم بذلك بشكل أساسي كعلامة على جودة و مهنية الإدارة، أو كاستجابة للمتطلبات المؤسسية. نتيجة لذلك، لا تمتلك هذه المنظمات إستراتيجيات حقيقية. تعتمد الورقة على أدبيات الإستراتيجية لبيان الحاجة إلى مزيد من المصداقية. من أجل ذلك ، تطرح مفهوم الإستراتيجية الأصيلة، وتعرض مكوناتها ، وتقارنها بمفاهيم الإستراتيجية الجيدة والإستراتيجية السيئة، وتقترح أداة تقييم ذاتي لها. تتضمن هذه الأداة رسالة أصيلة، ورؤية أصيلة، وقيمًا أصيلة، وجوهر إستراتيجية أصيلة، وتنفيذ. تختم الورقة بالدعوة إلى مزيد من البحث التجريبي للتحقق من أداة التقييم الذاتي وتحسينها، كما تشجع على التركيز على تأثير الاستراتيجية الأصيلة على الأداء المؤسسي كموضوع مثير للاهتمام للبحث في المستقبل

الكلمات الدالة: إستراتيجية أصيلة، جوهر الاستراتيجية، الرسالة، الرؤية، قيم جوهرية، إبداع، تنفيذ

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