

## Strategic Organizational Communication

### The Concept of Strategy - A Literature Review

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**Abstract.** The strategic communication field of study comprises two complex and multifaceted concepts: “strategy” and “communication”. The objective of this article is to review the literature written about the concept of strategy. In this regard, I observed that, starting from the connexion between strategy and army, the studied authors (Pace, 1983; Dolphin, 1999; Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003; Cornelissen, 2004; Moss, 2005; Hallahan, 2005; Gillis, 2006; Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic & Sriramesh, 2007; Paul, 2011; Nothhaft & Schölzel, 2015) are talking about the concept of strategy in relation with the mission, the vision, the objectives and goals of the organization as well as in relation with the organizational plans, ploys, patterns, positions, perspectives and tactics. A good comprehension regarding the strategy concept supports the organizations’ members in creating and upholding superior identities, images and reputations for their companies and businesses.

**Keywords:** strategy; strategic communication; organizational communication

### 1. Strategic Communication

In order to comprehend the nature of strategic communication performed by the organizations, Nothhaft and Schölzel (2015, p. 20) argue that strategic communication professionals have to develop an advanced understanding of the strategy concept, of the feasibility of the idea related to the systems of strategy, and of the relation between art, talent, science, knowledge, craft, expertise, skill, ability.

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The key of the strategic communication performed by a company is represented by the corporate identity. Corporate identities are the straightforward profiles that organizations want to project to all significant stakeholders and the ways in which the companies aim to be known by the stakeholders in regards to the corporate reputations and corporate images that they are owning (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 24).

Furthermore, Zerfass and Holtzhausen (2015, p. xx) say that “strategic” represents a neglected and a contested concept in the studies of communication. One of the explanations for this neglect is related to the strategic communication that could be connected with the persuasion in the greatest negative senses.

In comparison with the above-mentioned authors, Dulek and Campbell (2015, p. 123) state, referring to the strategic communication, that the use of the word strategic in front of the communication changes the focus from the recipient and context to the sender and purpose. Additionally, Marsh and Williams (2017, p. 44) mention that strategic communication is appreciated as something that follows and supports the strategy, and that this is integral to the strategy, is developed alongside the strategy and is inseparable from this.

Since the concept of strategy represents the focus of the current article, I continue to speak further down about the definition of strategy, about the strategies seen as plans, ploys, patterns, positions, perspectives and as tactics as well as about some criteria and examples of strategies.

## 2. The Concept of Strategy

I am starting this section of the present article with the definition of strategy available in the Oxford English Dictionary. Based on the Oxford English Dictionary (available at the link <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/strategy>) *strategy* as noun represents:

- The plans of actions considered, created to accomplish long-term objectives or a general goals, aims, having synonyms like: the proposed actions, the master plans, the game plans, the grand designs, the policies, the schemes, the programs, the schedules, the approaches, the procedures;
- The art of directing and planning the overall military movements and operations in the battles or in the wars, having synonyms like: generalship, military science, military tactic, the art of war.

In addition, I observe that when talking about the concept of strategy there a couple of authors who refer in their studies to the *army, military, enemy, soldiers, war* (Moss, 2005; Nothhaft & Schölzel, 2015).

Daniel A. Moss (2005) mentions that the original sense of the strategy word derives from the Greek word *strategos*, which expresses the role of a general in commanding the army. Then, this represented the “art of the general,” including the skills needed to take on this role. Actually, exist many dissimilar definitions about strategy, to such an extent as there are authors on this theme. (Moss, 2005, pp. 823-824).

In line with Moss (2005), Nothhaft and Schölzel (2015, p. 18) note that the academics concerned about the strategic communication are for sure aware that the concept of strategy is rooted, embedded in the military theory.

Furthermore, Cornelissen (2004, p. 25), referring to the concept of strategy, highlights that strategy represents the way in which the corporate *objectives* and *goals* are to be accomplished and set into results.

The *goals* and the *objectives* represent short-term and precise statements related to the organization’s directions which are aligned to the communicated *mission* and *vision* and which have to be accomplished through the *strategies* and through the *strategic* initiatives (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 24).

Strategy involves communication and action connected with the company’s objectives, and is frequently detailed in the functions - human resources function, operations function, finance function - of the organization. (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 24).

The strategies related to the companies’ operations and the strategies related to the human resources for supporting the workforces and the improvements through various initiatives are usual, normal within the organizations and more and more set in the communication strategies of the companies (Cornelissen, 2004, p. 24).

For exemplifying, Cornelissen (2004, p. 25) extracted from the annual reports published by British Airways the following organizational strategy:

*“Continuing emphasis on consistent quality of customer service and the delivery to the marketplace of value for money through customer-oriented initiatives (on-line booking service, strategic alliances) and to arrange all the elements of our service so that they collectively generate a particular experience - building trust with our shareholders, employees, customers, neighbours and with our critics, through commitment to good practice and societal reporting”.*



**Figure 1. Organizational Mission - Vision - Objectives and Goals - Strategies**  
(Cornelissen, 2004, p. 25)

### **3. Strategies as Plans, Ploys, Patterns, Positions, Perspectives, Tactics**

In this section of the current article I note that Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel, and Quinn (2003) talk in the book "The strategy process: concepts, contexts, cases" about the five P of the strategies, which are the:

- Plans;
- Ploys;
- Patterns;

- Positions; and
- Perspectives.

and that are also referred by Moss (2005, p. 824) in the “Strategies” study presented in the book “Encyclopedia of Public Relations”.

Strategies as *plans* represent the ways in which the leaders create directions for their companies and establish for their organizations predetermined actions. Strategies as plans raise the central issue of cognition, of awareness concerning how the intentions are imagined and conceived. When study the strategies as plans appears the need to enter somehow into the minds of the strategists to find out what they are projecting, what they are envisioning, what they are intending (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003, p. 9).

Strategies as *ploys* take us into the area of direct competition, where the pressures, the fears, the intimidations are engaged to obtain advantages. These place the strategy process in a dynamic position with moves and countermoves. Through these, strategies are rooted not in changes, but in stability - in setting plans as well as in establishing patterns (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003, p. 9).

Strategies as *patterns* focus on actions and emphasize that the concept of strategy is empty if this does not take in consideration the behaviours. Strategies as patterns refer to the convergences, to the achievements of consistencies in the behaviours of the companies (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003, p. 9).

Strategies as *positions* encourage to view the companies in the competitive environment and to look at the ways in which the organization finds a certain position and protects itself for meeting the competitors, avoiding the competition, or subverting the adversaries. Through these, the organization is seen as being an organism in the position of fighting for survival in a world of uncertainties, of ambiguities, of hostilities, of aggressions, of symbiosis, of interactions (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003, p. 9).

Strategies as *perspectives* raise fascinating questions around the behaviours, the intentions in a collective framework. If organizations are defined as being collective actions in achieving common missions, then strategies as perspectives promote the issues regarding how intentions are communicated in a group of individuals to represent shared values and norms, as well as how the patterns of behaviours are rooted in the group of people (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003, p. 9).

Hence, based on the above presented statements, strategies do not represent only notions related to the ways of dealing with the organizational enemies or with the market competitors. Strategies show the organizations as being instruments for collective actions and perceptions (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003, p. 9).

In comparison with Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel, and Quinn (2003), Cornelissen (2004, p. 97) says that *strategy* implies an overall direction and not only *tactics* or *plans*. I observe that the author Cornelissen (2004, p. 97) highlights the sets of manoeuvres as being general and not specific. The sets of manoeuvres that are specific are translating the strategies into tactics or operations. As a result, strategies:

- represent more than *tactics* and *plans* that frequently have a short-term and immediate focus;
- and, more accurately, concern the organizations' direction and companies' positioning on a long period of time in relation with the organizational environment.

Seeing that multiple authors speak about the strategies in relation with the plans and with the tactics, I am also presenting in the current article the definitions for the plan and for the tactic that exist in the Oxford English Dictionary.

A *plan* is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (available at the link <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/plan>) as representing:

- A proposal that is detailed and made in order to do or to achieve something;
- The decision or the intention around what is going to be done;
- A diagram or a map made in detail.

A *tactic* is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary (available at the link <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/tactic>) as representing:

- The action or the strategy that is planned carefully for achieving a specific result;
- The art to dispose armed forces to organize operations or battles, especially during the contacts with the competitors or with the adversaries.

I observe that in line with Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel and Quinn (2003) and Cornelissen (2004), Dolphin (1999) and Paul (2011) also associate the strategies and the plans. Dolphin (1999, p. 61) considers that strategy is basically the organization's process of *planning* on a long-term with reference to the established goals of the

company and that strategy is responsible regarding the organizational priorities, while Paul (2011, p. 24) says that “strategic” denotes “thoughtful” or “planned”.



**Figure 2. Organizational Strategies - Plans**

Moreover, I observe that there are authors who make known the strategies in relation with the *tactics* (Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003; Cornelissen, 2004; Hallahan, 2005; Gillis, 2006; Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic, & Sriramesh, 2007).

Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel, Quinn (2003, p. 11) speak about the differences between the strategies and the *tactics*. Strategies in general occur at multiple and various levels in any major company. For example, companies have multiple strategies from the levels of corporation to the departmental levels within different divisions. The main difference between the tactics and the strategies is represented by the actions scales or by the leaders' perspectives. What seems to represent a tactic for the Chief Executive Officer, this could represent a strategy for the Head of the Marketing Department - this determining the decisive viability of the organizational business, the success of the company. More specifically, tactics could appear at any levels in organizations. These have short-term durations, are adaptive, involve actions-interactions arrangements that the competitive forces practice to achieve particular goals after the initial contacts. Strategies define the continuous foundations to order these adaptations concerning the broadly created purposes.

In a different way than Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel, Quinn (2003), Hallahan (2005, p. 163) points out that *tactics* represent the specifications of the tasks - comprising events, activities, the preparation of the messages and of the materials - for providing the communication strategy.



**Figure 3. Organizational Strategies - Tactics**

In line with Hallahan (2005), Gillis (2006, p. 83) specifies that the *tactics* are the step-by-step, the systematic specifications which have to be done for achieving the strategies. The tactics might represent small things by taking these alone; however, by taking these together the tactics might have great influences in the attainments of the plans. The strategic plans might be unsuccessful because of the inadequate execution of the tactics. Frequently, the professionals in organizational communication concentrate only on tactical executions of different channels rather than on an overall strategic communication plan for their business. In these cases, trainings and courses related to the strategical planning as well as to the development of a strategic approach related to the management of communication are extremely valuable.

In comparison with the above-mentioned authors, Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic, Sriramesh (2007, p. 14) reveal that the concept of emergent strategy is essentially the effective practice which advances the taking of fruitful strategic decisions and that the term strategic has the potential to investigate the contributions and the importance of the *tactical* level of the communication running.

In the next section of the current article, I consider useful to talk also about some criteria and examples concerning the strategies.



#### 4. Criteria and Examples of Strategies

Speaking about the strategies, Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel, Quinn (2003, pp. 15-16) define some critical elements for the strategies, few criteria for effective strategies:

- Strategies will have to manage the efforts concerning the decisive, clear, achievable goals and objectives;
- Strategies will have to sustain the initiatives, to protect the freedom of actions and to improve the commitments;
- Strategies will have to focus the power at the time and at the place projected to be conclusive as well as strategies will have to define the items which will make the company better in power in relation with the competitors;
- Strategies will have to take into account the available capabilities, the barriers concerning the resources and the dimensions for the planned manoeuvres;
- Strategies will have to offer committed, coordinated, responsible leadership for the key goals;
- Strategies will have to run intelligence, speed, surprise, confidentiality, and to attack the unprotected competitors at unpredicted times;
- Strategies will have to protect the organizational resources and the critical operations of the company; strategies will have to implement a system which is intelligent and effective in avoiding the surprises from the competitors.

The above listed criteria are useful for being considered by the members of the companies when completing their organizational strategies.

Furthermore, Pace (1983, p. 225) illustrates and exemplifies four categories of strategies meant to empower the organization and the human performance:

- Strategies about *trainings* for offering knowledge and skills to the workforces in order to do better their works;
- Strategies about *individual development* for offering knowledge and skills to the workforces in order to prepare them for various careers, jobs, positions in the organizations;

- Strategies about *organization's development* in order to produce changes in the systems of the organization, to restructure the rules of working, the norms, the power which impacts the organizational relationships, climate, rewards, plans, management activities;
- Strategies referring to the *technical resources development* in order to produce modifications in the working technologies / methods and in order to restructure the jobs designs as well as the operations of the organization.

In conclusion, the strategic communication field of study involves two complex concepts “strategy” and “communication”. In this article I am talking about the concept of strategy, by reviewing different studies performed by various authors (Pace, 1983; Dolphin, 1999; Mintzberg, Ghoshal, Lampel & Quinn, 2003; Cornelissen, 2004; Moss, 2005; Hallahan, 2005; Gillis, 2006; Hallahan, Holtzhausen, van Ruler, Vercic & Sriramesh, 2007; Paul, 2011; Nothhaft & Schölzel, 2015). As presented above, these authors associate the strategy with the army as well as with the organizational mission, vision, objectives and goals. Moreover, these authors talk about the strategy as being a plan, a ploy, a pattern, a position, a perspective, or a tactic through these revealing the strategy's multifaceted nature. For completing effective and valuable strategic communication, the organizations' members should ensure a good understating of the concept of strategy in order to able to build and maintain outstanding identities, images and reputations for their companies and businesses.

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