

## Evaluating the Strategy Implementation Gap using the Liabilities Approach

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### Abstract

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study was to investigate the strategy implementation gap in an organization.

**Design/ methodology/ approach:** The approach adopted was a case study with interviews of management which was then analysed through thematic analysis, triangulation and respondent validation.

**Findings:** This study identified three broad sets of liabilities: 'liability of engagement', 'liability of decision-making autonomy' and 'liability of perceived institutional support'.

**Practical / social implications:** The study findings provide an opportunity to address identified Strategy Implementation Liabilities (SILs) using the proposed framework.

**Originality:** The strategy implementation gap remains resilient and reported in the literature on an ongoing basis.

**Key words:** Liabilities; Strategy Implementation Liabilities; Liability Indicators.

JEL Classification: L21  
PsycINFO Classification: 3450  
FoR Code: 1503  
ERA Journal ID#: 123340

## Introduction

Chief Executive Officers who are considered responsible for every action occurring in the organization (Da Silva & Trkman, 2014) have been blamed for failed or poor strategy implementation and have consequently lost their positions. It is often the case that the strategy was not the actual problem instead, the implementation was (Sterling, 2003; Chatain, 2014). Often, it is not the strategy content that was the problem but rather the implementation thereof (Sterling, 2003; Chatain, 2014). According to Hrebiniak (2006), formulating a consistent strategy is a difficult undertaking for any management team and that making the strategy work, as well as implementing it throughout the organization, is even more difficult. The non-execution or poor implementation of strategies continue to be a matter of grave concern in organisations (Aguinis, 2013; Felton, 1959; Barksdale & Darden, 1972; Chimhanzi, 2004; Cooks, 2010). It remains a consistent challenge by which implementation rarely takes-off (Pretorius, 2016). Churchman (1975) has coined this to be 'the implementation problem'.

Strategy is the determination of the long-term goals of an enterprise, adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals (Chandler, 1962). It is a categorizing scheme by which incoming stimuli are ordered and dispatched to achieve organizational goals and objectives (Mintzberg, 1987). While, there is no globally accepted definition of 'strategy implementation', Li et al., (2008:4) postulate that there are three distinct and identifiable definitions of strategy implementation. The first is informed by a 'process perspective' and takes strategy implementation as a sequence of carefully planned consecutive steps. The second identifiable definition pertains to a 'behaviour perspective', which considers strategy implementation as a series of more concerted actions. The third perspective combines the 'process' and the 'behaviour perspectives' into a 'hybrid perspective'. Somehow none of these definitions make mention of the employees (non-managerial) and the vital role they play to ensure strategy success.

A review of the relevant literature on strategy implementation indicates an undue bias towards strategy formulation to such an extent that implementation is often neglected (Piercy, 1989; Noble, 1999; Friesl & Silberzahn, 2012; Syrett, 2013; Wu, Gide & Jewell, 2014). However, there is consensus among strategic management scholars that the literature on strategy implementation has contributed significantly towards the understanding of strategy formulation, irrespective to its detriment of strategy implementation (Floyd & Woolridge, 1992a). The key factors that potentially influence implementation success have been identified, with early involvement of relevant people and enabling structural systems being the most emphasised. There is a tendency for strategists to assume that shrewd strategy formulation is the only necessary element to strategic success (Hambrick & Cannella, 1989). Existing research has enabled us to appreciate how strategy formulation contributes to sustained performance. Unfortunately, this tells half the story since the strategy implementation gap, which contributes to failure, has not been addressed. Recent studies in the strategic management field underscore the lack of academic knowledge regarding strategy implementation and therefore, more research on this topic is necessary (D'Aunno, 2005; Tait & Nienaber, 2010; Sila, 2013; Van de Merwe, 2013; Rajasekar, 2014). More specifically, attention directed towards inabilities, hindrances and preconditions that adversely affect strategy implementation is lacking. Existing strategy implementation literature and its frameworks have thus far ignored the liabilities approach, which has the potential to mitigate the negative factors (liabilities) detracting a firm's performance and greatly enhance the effectiveness of strategy implementation.

Firstly, this study shows that organizations are unaware that they experience numerous liabilities which put them at a disadvantage to successfully implement their strategies. Secondly, as long as these liabilities are unknown and unidentifiable, they cannot be isolated or removed from the beneficial processes of strategy implementation. Thirdly, the inability to determine proper tactics for mitigating their effects remains a serious challenge and an impediment. Lastly, an alternative is considered to have the potential to address the strategy implementation gap - the liabilities approach has not been exploited for solutions. There is, therefore, an apparent and immediate need to investigate, report findings and develop a conceptual strategy implementation liabilities framework to address all these concerns. The conceptual framework can be used by strategy practitioners, management teams and consultants

to devise strategies that may counter certain liabilities. While the liabilities approach has not been previously considered as an alternative solution, it is asserted that this approach may have the potential to address the implementation gap.

## Literature Review

### *The liabilities approach*

It may be true that some organizations fail because they lack superior assets and capabilities (Arend, 2004). The basis of this may be premised if they retain many destructive holdings and processes which they are unaware of, as they only examine the positive influences at strategy implementation on their performance. This act in itself does not address all of the possible explanations and therefore, contends for organizations to also examine the 'negative influences' on organizational performance to properly evaluate strategy implementation. These 'negative influences' are also referred to as 'negative factors' or 'liabilities'. Factors are 'items' and 'means', which can either be positive or negative, that an organization needs to have access to, regardless of whether they contribute or impair/detract it from its performance to generate economic rents. Examples of 'positive factors' include the organizations assets (inventory, capital, land, equipment, and goodwill), its capabilities, strategy, tactics, and relationships, while 'negative factors' include the organization's rigidities, hindrances, and liabilities. Examples of liabilities include lawsuits, bad-will with customers and labour, management incompetence, obsolete technology and inventory (Arend, 2004).

Liabilities are a combination of barriers, disadvantages, hindrances, weaknesses, difficulties, accountabilities and responsibilities, which limit an entity's ability (Henderson, 1999) to successfully strategize, gain competitive advantage and earn superior economic rents (Pretorius & Holtzhausen, 2008). Certain preconditions can also pose as obstacles in achieving effective leadership (Pretorius, 2009:37). Essentially, it comprises of situational deficiencies inherited from previous decision-making in the venture and is often referred to as 'past-decision baggage', which originates from the Resource-Based View (Thornhill & Amit, 2003:500). Examples may include; a dysfunctional culture, inherited consequence of bad decisions and/or misleading data.

The liabilities theory consists of research based on the divergent views on the liabilities approach regarding various fields of study as depicted in Table I. The approach to the literature review of how the liabilities research developed is structured according to four research streams. The first research stream encapsulates how the construct 'liabilities' evolved, and studies within this category, include the constructs: liability of foreignness and liability of newness. The second research stream comprises of; liability of newness; liability of smallness (including age and size); liability of foreignness; liability of adolescence and liability of obsolescence. The third research stream comprises of; the liability of newness and adolescence; liability of obsolescence; liability of foreignness; liability of newness, adolescence and obsolescence. The last stream focused on areas of the liability of foreignness; strategic liabilities; turnaround liabilities; leadership liabilities; liability of outsider ship; liabilities of origin; management consultant liabilities and liability of home.

**Table 1:**  
*Definitions of liabilities constructs identified in the literature review*

Constructs	Definition	Author
a) Liability of newness	In this situation, young organizations have a higher propensity to dissolve than older organizations due to their inability to compete effectively against established organizations as well as their low levels of legitimacy.	Stinchcombe (1965); Freeman, Carroll & Hannan (1983); Carroll (1983); Singh et al. (1986); Hannan & Freeman (1984); Bruderl & Schussler (1990); Hannan & Carroll (1995); Choi & Shepherd (2005); Nagy et al., (2012), Miner et al., (1990), Burgelman (1991), Levinthal (1991)
b) Liability of age, size and smallness	Refers to limitedness in terms of resources and capabilities, and thus its vulnerability to environmental changes. The initial size may be measured by the amount of financial capital or the number of people employed at the time of founding.	Freeman, Carroll & Hannan(1983); Aldrich & Auster (1986); Kale & Arditi (1998)
c) Liability of foreignness	Additional costs incurred by foreign firms when operating internationally, compared to local firms who have better information about their country, economy, laws, culture, politics, related to psychic distance. This is the <i>cost of doing business abroad</i> that results in a competitive disadvantage for multinational enterprise subunits due to additional costs a firm operating in a market overseas incurs that a local firm would not otherwise incur.	Hymer (1960,1976); Johanson & Vahlne (1977,2009); Dunning (1981); Zaheer (1995); Zaheer & Mosakowski (1997); Matsuo (2000); Eden & Miller (2001); Mezias (2002); Zaheer (2002); Boehe (2011); Denk, et al. (2012); Buckley & Casson, (1976); Caves (1982); Dunning, (1997); Hennart, (1982); Rugman, (1981). Kindlerberger (1969)
d) Liability of adolescence	The risk of failure increases for a certain time at the beginning of the life of an organization, reaches a peak, and declines. The risk of mortality is initially low as the organization is buffered from failure due to support by external constituents and initial endowments. When these initial resources become depleted, the mortality hazard rises and then declines following the liability of newness pattern.	Levintal & Finchman (1988); Bruderl & Schussler (1990); Fichman & Levinthal (1991); Freeman, Carroll & Harman (1983); Henderson (1999); Baum (1989); Ingram (1993); Barron, West & Hannan (1994); Ranger-Moore (1997).
e) Liability of obsolescence and senescence	Defined as a situation where a firm's identifiable founding brand and identification wears off, and gets outdated in relation to the changing environment in which it finds itself in. The liability of senescence is defined as a situation where existing, accumulating rules, regulations and processes, routines, and structures place a burden on the efficiency and effectiveness of older firms.	Baum (1989;1990); Ingram (1993); Barron, West & Hannah (1994); Henderson (1999); Abatecola (2012); Barnett 1990; Baum & Oliver, (1991); Baum (1996); Meyer (1991).
f) Liability of outsider ship	Situations where a firm enters a business environment without knowing who the business actors are, and their relationships. Describes difficulties related to the entrance to a new foreign market where the firm does not have any position in business or related networks. Outsider ship status means the organization lacks knowledge in market, business arrangement, language, laws, and rules of a target foreign host.	Johanson & Vahlne (2009); Vahlne et al., (2012); Eriksson et al. (2013); Hilmeresson (2013); Schweizer (2013); Vapola (2011).

g) Strategic liabilities	Defined as resources that damage and destroy a firm's ability to generate rents (profits and earnings) and therefore are rent destroyers. They are costly as they reduce a firm performance and value (actual and potential), supply-restricted (scarce and inconvertible) appropriated. In parallel, Strategic Assets are defined as resources that potentially affect rents in a positive direction; these are scarce, inimitable, non-substitutable, appropriable and in demand.	Arend (2004); Powell (2001); West & De Castro, (2001); Barney (1986, 1989, 1991, 2001); Penrose (1959); Wenerfelt, (1984); Peteraf (1993); Amit & Schoemaker (1993); Mahoney & Pandian (1992); Dierickx & Coll (1989); Kor & Mahoney (2004); Lockett & Thompson (2004); Rugman & Verbeke (2004); Andrews (1971), Christenson & Overdorf (2000); Leonard-Barton (1992); Lieberman & Montgomery (1988).
h) Turnaround liabilities	These are pre-existing conditions which have to be overcome during turnarounds situations in an organization. Each turnaround situation has a unique set of pre-existing conditions that serve as a barrier to overcome.	Pretorius & Holtzhauzen, (2008); Pretorius, (2008); Robbins & Pearce (1992); Cannon & Edmondson, (2005). Ooghe & De Prijcker (2008); Crutzen & Van Caillie, (2007)
i) Leadership liabilities	These are preconditions that act as obstacles to effective leadership, such as a dysfunctional culture, inherited consequences of bad decisions and/or misleading data. These liabilities must be contended with by new managerial appointees, as they have the potential to limit their capacity to lead successfully.	Pretorius & Holtzhauzen (2008); Pretorius (2009); Allio (2006); Shepherd (2005); Le Roux et al. (2006); Pretorius & Stander (2012);
j) Liability of origin	Disadvantages faced by foreign firms in the international markets as a result of their national origins. They arise as a consequence of three inter-related contexts of the foreign firm activities: organizational context, home country context and host country context. Foreign firms (outsiders) are likely to encounter competitive disadvantages as opposed to home firms (insiders) in the host country.	Ramachandran & Pant (2010); Hymer (1960); Buckley & Casson (1998); Zaheer, (2002); Mezias, (2002a); Cuervo - Cazorra, Maloney & Manrakhan (2007); Eden & Miller (2001:01); Zaheer & Monakowski, (1997); Zaheer, (1995, 2002).
k) Management consultant liabilities	Constitute a combination of 'inability preconditions' which act as a barrier to management consultancy success during the process of assisting organizations with strategizing.	Pretorius & Stander (2012); Lippit & Lippit, (1975); Schwenk & Thomas, (1983), Fincham, (1999); Sergio, (2002); Davenport & Early, (2010); Cater et al., (2008)
l) Liability of home	Disadvantages experienced by a firm investing in a foreign country as a consequence of friction caused by attributes of its home country institutions. These are the liabilities faced by MNE due to their country of origin.	Stevens & Shenkar (2012); Scott, (1995), Bilkey & Nes, (1982); Zaheer, (1995); Eden & Miller, (2004); Miller & Parkhe, (2002); Miller & Richards, (2002),
m) Liability of Multinationality	Disadvantages intrinsic to the process of managing and ownership of operations across borders, embedded within the costs of operations within the domestic arena. Inherent in foreign operations due to lack of control of foreign assets inhibiting the firms to appropriate the returns on their business.	Eden & Miller (2001); Zaheer (2002); Hymer (1960); Kindlerberger (1969); Vernon (1977); Sethi & Judge, (2009); Eden & Miller, (2001); Cuervo-Cazorra et al., (2007)

Source: Own compilation

Table 1 highlights that liabilities as a concept is not new and can be relevant for organizations seeking to implement their strategy choices. Effective, efficient and well-orchestrated strategy implementation is a major contributing factor to the success of any organization in achieving its objectives. Unfortunately, organizations are unaware that they experience and retain destructive holdings and processes, referred to as liabilities, which constitute hindrances and inabilities that impede strategy implementation success.

## Design and Methodology

The research for this study was carried out in terms of the components as depicted in table 2: research problem, research aim, research question, context, phenomenon investigated, unit of observation, method, logic linking the data to the propositions and finally the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2003).

**Table 2:**  
*Outline of the summary of the research design*

Component	Description
Research problem	Need for an alternative framework to address 'negative influences' or 'negative holdings' (liabilities) on organizational performance contributing to strategy implementation gap / non-implementation in organizations.
Research aim	To propose a framework to guide strategy practitioners and management teams in the implementation of their strategy choices through focusing on liabilities.
Research question	How can the liabilities approach and insights gained through its views enhance strategy implementation? Secondarily: Are there alternative views on the implementation of strategy forthcoming from the liabilities theory?
Context	Addressing the strategy implementation gap using the liabilities approach.
Phenomenon investigated	Liabilities (negative influences) experienced in strategy implementation.
Unit of observation	Employee narratives/ stories on strategy implementation.
Method	Data were collected as narratives through narrative capture and in-depth interviews. 'Signifiers' and 'indexes' tagging framework using dyads and triads were considered adequate as the objective was to elicit narratives on non-implementation of strategy.
Logic linking the data to the propositions	Narratives/stories shared by respondents about non-strategy implementation are key insights necessary to build the implementation framework.
Criteria for interpreting the findings	To gain a better understanding, new or alternative insight into the liabilities encountered at strategy implementation. Practical application of the strategy implementation liabilities framework to strategy formulation and implementation.

Source: Adapted from Yin (2003)

### Research problem

Organizations need to examine the *negative influences* or *destructive holdings* on organizational performance in order to properly evaluate the strategy with the view to ultimately remove these from beneficial business processes. Organizations retain these *destructive holdings* and *processes* at the expense of *positive factors* (Arend, 2004), which have the potential to enhance strategy implementation success. Implementation has always been regarded as a problem due to its 'weakest link'. Most of the literature focus is on chain links which are strong and the liabilities approach works at fixing the links. The explanation, therefore, may be better explained in terms of the well-known metaphor which states that 'it is clearly a literal fact that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link'. Thomas Reid (1786) qualifies the metaphor by indicating that 'in every chain of reasoning, the evidence of the last conclusion can be no greater than that of the weakest link of the chain, whatever may be the strength of the rest'. The approach in this research is to investigate and potentially address the identified weakest links (*negative influences*, *destructive holdings* and *processes*) through the liabilities approach.

## **Research aims / objectives**

The research objective of this study focused on the identification and description of negative influencers, destructive holdings and processes labelled 'Strategy Implementation Liabilities' (SILs) encountered in strategy implementation, causing the implementation gap. Undertaking to clearly understand how these negative influencers, destructive holdings and processes affect strategy implementation. Developing a theoretical framework for the management of SILs.

The main purpose underlying this study was to map ways in which the strategy implementation gap can be closed by exploring the liabilities approach. Transferability in this context relates to how the findings can be seen as relevant and accordingly applied to other strategy implementation initiatives within organizations experiencing the same challenges. Organizations already battling with the 'implementation problem' in other diverse settings could use these findings to improve their situation.

## **Research questions**

The primary question which this research seeks to answer is: *How can the liabilities approach and insights gained through its views enhance strategy implementation? Secondly: Are there alternative views on the implementation of strategy forthcoming from the liabilities theory?*

## **Research approach**

This study employed an interpretive research approach using qualitative methods. The decision was taken to adopt an appropriate theoretical framework for this research, as it views the world as constructed, interpreted, and experienced by human beings as they interact with others within the wider social systems (Maxwell, 2006; Walliman 2006; Creswell, 2012). Interpretive research has its basis on the view that a person can only experience the world through his or her perceptions, with the influence of preconceived beliefs and ideas, hence the internal view of the situation under study (Walliman, 2006). The interpretations and meaning that individuals assign to the phenomena under study constitute this research approach. This study is descriptive as it aims to understand how strategy implementation is undertaken in organizations and therefore the attempt is to obtain the desired level of understanding, experiences, interpretations and perceptions of respondents within Case Corporation.

## **Research strategy**

The research strategy provided the overall direction of the research and encompassed the research conduct (Remenyi, Williams, Money, & Swartz, 2003; Bryman, 2008:698). 'The general plan of how the researcher will go about answering the research questions' (Saunders et al., 2009:600). This study was undertaken as a case study to facilitate an in-depth investigation of a real-life contemporary phenomenon in its natural context (Woodside, 2010; Yin, 2012). Data were obtained from participants whom were involved in strategy implementation activities thereby fortifying the relevant data to be elicited (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). People normally make sense of their organizational lives through storytelling, where 'organizational members contribute linguistic fragments such as opinions, descriptions, and proto-stories' (Barge, 2004:107).

## **Research setting**

This study was conducted amongst 200 employees of Case Corporation (an organization responsible for providing/reticulating drinking water and sewerage disposal throughout the country), in Gaborone, Francistown, Lobatse, Kanye, Molepolole and Mahalapye, across the cadres of Top Management, Senior Management and Middle Management who are strategy crafters and implementers. From the 200 employees targeted to participate in this research, only 172 confirmed their willingness to participate, with 28 citing various reasons for non-participation. The choice of the case organization was mainly influenced by the critical case sampling method which has been

found to be relevant to this research, mainly because the Case Corporation is currently undergoing transformation to overcome the 'challenges' experienced in the reticulation of water and sewerage.

### ***Unit of analysis***

In this study, the unit of analysis is a person (participant/respondent/individual) who is in the employ of the case corporation, who has an experience of interest to the study. These 'individuals, regarded as respondents, are asked in an in-depth research to share their lived experiences' Julian & Ofori-Dankwa (2008:102) as they are 'experts' and therefore knowledgeable in the implementation of their strategy choice. What is more critical to this research is their individual responses to the questions posed to them.

### ***Case organization***

This Case Corporation was specifically and purposefully selected because for some previous 2-3 years, Botswana, the country where the study was undertaken, experienced challenges with water reticulation, emanating from a long spell of drought that resulted in the drying up of some major dams. Official and informal links proved to be favourable thus yielded referrals for the case organization to be studied (Bryman, 2012). The Case Corporation is a parastatal organization wholly owned by Botswana Government. In the 46 years since its inception, the Corporation's mandate has expanded to supplying portable water to all urban centres and villages in the country, as well as managing wastewater and sanitation. The Case Corporation has identified key strategic objectives to guide its business activities, focus and the allocation of resources for its 2015-2018 planning period. The corporation's strategic intent includes financial growth sustainability, stakeholder management, service delivery and quality assurance, leadership effectiveness, infrastructure development and operational efficiency underpinned by the mission to provide sustainable water and wastewater management services in a cost-effective and environmentally friendly manner to the economy.

### ***Sample frame***

A sample was selected purposefully and subjectively from the population of the Case Corporation as the only corporation providing water resources in the country. This case organization was chosen using a non-probability purposive sampling and according to pre-determined reasons (Noy, 2008). The purposive sampling was used specifically to facilitate the use of 'information rich' cases (Patton, 2002), which are 'vivid and rich' on the basis of their matched criteria in order to answer the research question (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Saunders et al., 2007). A total of 172 employees out of the initial 200 employees across the three cadres of Top Management, Senior Management and Middle Management were purposefully sampled to share their experiences and perception on the strategy implementation process. Efforts to access all the 200 employees across the organization was a challenge with only 172 employees sharing their stories probably due to the fact that strategy is regarded by most organizations as a sensitive, confidential and a competitive tool, despite permission granted by management.

### ***Sample selection and sample size***

In this interpretive research, the number of participants is relatively small (Holloway, 1997). Because of the complexity of the management and analysis of large volumes of data anticipated from the case organization, Yin (2009:162) recommends that researcher's start 'with a simple and straightforward case study' comprising of employees/ individuals who have experience of interest to the study was taken heed of. During the initial planning stages of the research project, I had intentions to cover other areas such as Ghanzi, Maun and Kasane but due to their remote dispersion, the available time and financial resources to sufficiently complete the research did not permit, I decided to limit the sample to 200 employees in areas of Gaborone, Francistown Lobatse, Kanye and Molepolole. The initial 200 employees consisted of samples from Top Management (Chief



Executive and Executive Management), Senior Management (Senior Managers & Professionals) and Middle Management (Line Managers, Supervisors and staff). From the final 172 respondents, the age ranged between 21 years to 65 years. At least 117 story tellers fell between the ages of 31 to 50 years which made a considerable proportion of the workforce (68%). Total contributors of the stories consisted of 99 males and 73 females. At least 52 respondents (30.23%) had experience in strategy implementation of 1 month up to 6 months could be employees newly recruited, 91 story tellers (52.91%) had experience of 24 months and more, while 29 story tellers (16.86%) decided not to share their stories. Participants who are part of Executive Management were 30, Senior Management 74, Middle Management (Middle Managers, Supervisory and Staff) 68.

### ***Data collection procedures***

Data were collected through the use of in-depth interviews, triads and dyads/ polarities. In-depth interviews are qualitative research techniques that allow person-to-person discussion with the potential to obtain heightened insights into people's thoughts, feelings and behaviour on important issues. They facilitate a form of communication with the practitioners to better understand strategy implementation Parker (2003) where respondents, as practitioners in their field, pass on their knowledge to the researcher through narratives during the interview process (Boeije, 2010; Wahyuni, 2010). When selecting research participants for qualitative studies, relevance to the research topic was more important than representativeness Neuman (2003), also realising the difficulty to determine an optimal sample size for qualitative studies (Terre Blanche, Durheim & Painter, 2006). The literature reviewed facilitated the development of a SILs narrative questions utilising dyads and triads with 'signifiers', 'indexes' tagging framework, the objective being to elicit narratives regarding non-implementation of strategy from participants (Meriam, 2010; Ray & Goppelt, 2011). Dyads were designed around Aristotle's concept of the Golden Mean (Snowden, 2007). The concept emphasis is on 'opposing negatives', with the objective being to achieve (value) located at the mid/centre of the continuum with extremes - values 'absent' or the values are taken to 'excess'.

The following topics (Table 3) emerging from the literature provided guidance to the data collection using dyads, triads and in-depth interviews:

**Table 3:**  
*Topics derived from the literature review*

Triads topics	Dyads/polarities topics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experience, perception and understanding of strategy implementation.</li> <li>• Responsibility for strategy implementation.</li> <li>• Perceived strategy implementation alignment issues.</li> <li>• Integrating strategy formulation and implementation.</li> <li>• Resource allocation within the implementation process</li> <li>• Potential benefits derivable from implementation</li> <li>• Implementation decisions making and evaluation</li> <li>• Factors perceived to influence implementation</li> <li>• Key skills and competencies</li> <li>• Essential aspects of the implementation process</li> <li>• Implementation guiding principles</li> <li>• Perception of implementation rules, procedures and processes</li> <li>• Beneficiaries of the implementation process</li> <li>• The future as seen through strategy implementation</li> <li>• The change management process within implementation</li> <li>• Processes undertaken to implement decisions</li> <li>• Employees reaction to implementation instructions</li> <li>• Attitudes displayed towards colleagues</li> <li>• The timing of implementation, relevance and applicability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perception about the level of conversation/ talk on strategy implementation</li> <li>• Concern and commitment about implementation</li> <li>• External factors affecting implementation</li> <li>• Employee trust in the process</li> <li>• Employee information sharing</li> <li>• Employee interrelationships</li> <li>• Managing employee emotions</li> <li>• Managing diverse perspectives</li> <li>• Esprit de corps</li> </ul>
<b>In-depth interviews</b>	
<p>One set of probing narrative in-depth interview questions were directed towards Top Management and Senior Management and others towards Middle Management. The two main probing questions were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Can you tell me about strategy implementation in your organization? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents would basically assess milestones achieved in strategy implementation in terms of their experience and would indicate issues of success or failure.</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Can you share a story on strategy implementation in your organization? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents were at liberty to generally paint a picture on how they experienced and viewed strategy implementation in their organization without any hindrances.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	

Source: Own compilation

### ***Interview process protocol***

Interviews were conducted personally by the researcher and lasted an average of one hour. During the interviews, the interviewer introduced himself to the participants and briefly indicated the aim and objective (sharing experiences, understanding and perception of strategy implementation in your organization) of the interview discussions. It was impressed on participants that their responses would be treated 'confidential' and would solemnly be used for educational purpose only. Permission to record the interview was obtained from the interviewees through a *Consent Form* and it was explained to them that the purpose was to facilitate 'transcribing' and 'analyses' of the interview proceedings. The interview guide enabled the researcher to discuss a range of themes relevant to the study.

### ***Recording of data***

Data in this study was elicited from employees of Case Corporation across the cadres of Top Management, Senior Management and Middle Management. Data were personally collected by the researcher with persistence and observation, through dyads, triads and in-depth interviews, taking notes, and memos, transcribing it to ensure information is adequate and available for reference. Dyads data were collected through narrative capture questionnaires which contain questions with differential scales with both ends being undesirable (in excess and absent). This means that the

'ideal' position would be reflected by marking the centre of the scale. In this instance, a linear scale with two labels provides two filters of analysis and retrieval; the left hand label represents 100% of itself or 0% of its opposite. Triads comprise of a series of triangles, each of which contains a series of dots or crosses representing stories/responses received from research respondents. In attempting to answer the question, the respondent was given the choice to decide between three competing elements described at the apex of each triangle which in their story and experience are considered dominant. Two main probing questions were used to collect data through in-depth interviews: Can you tell me about strategy implementation in your organization? Can you share a story on strategy implementation in your organization? Raw data recorded on dyads, triads and in-depth interview sheets, memos and interview notes comprise adequate trail information showing how conclusions were attained, how interpretations were made, together with recommendations which all could be traced to the source documents.

### ***Analysis of data***

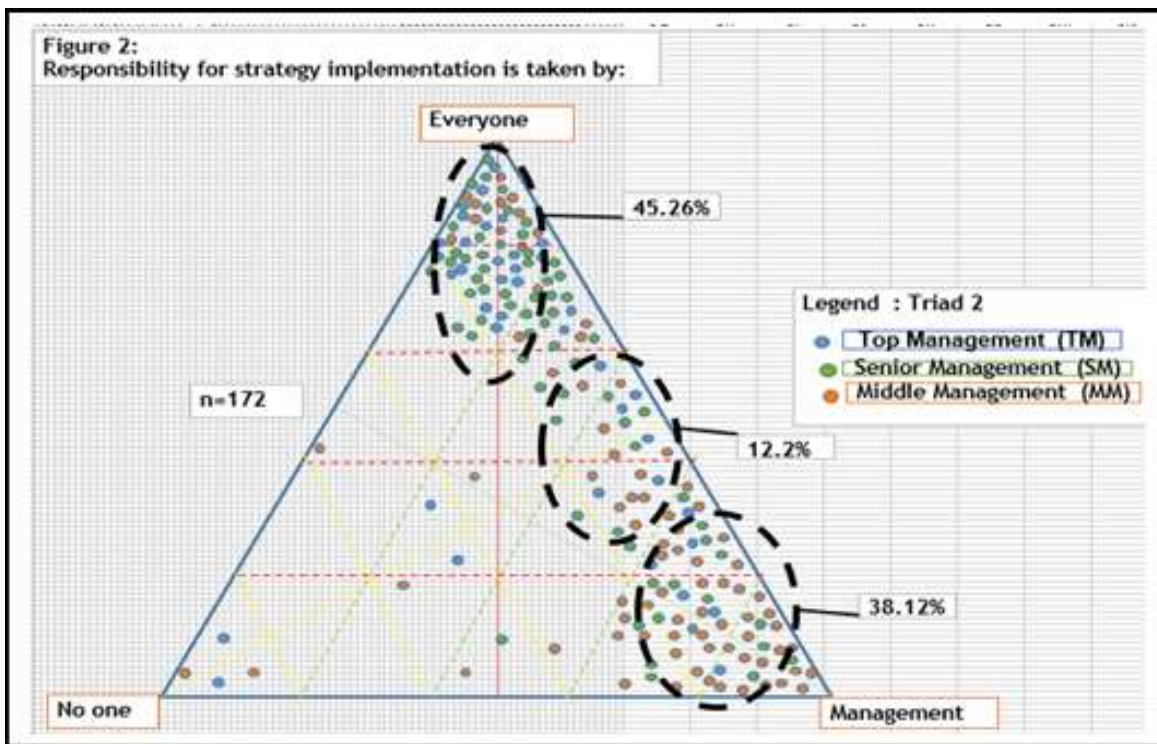
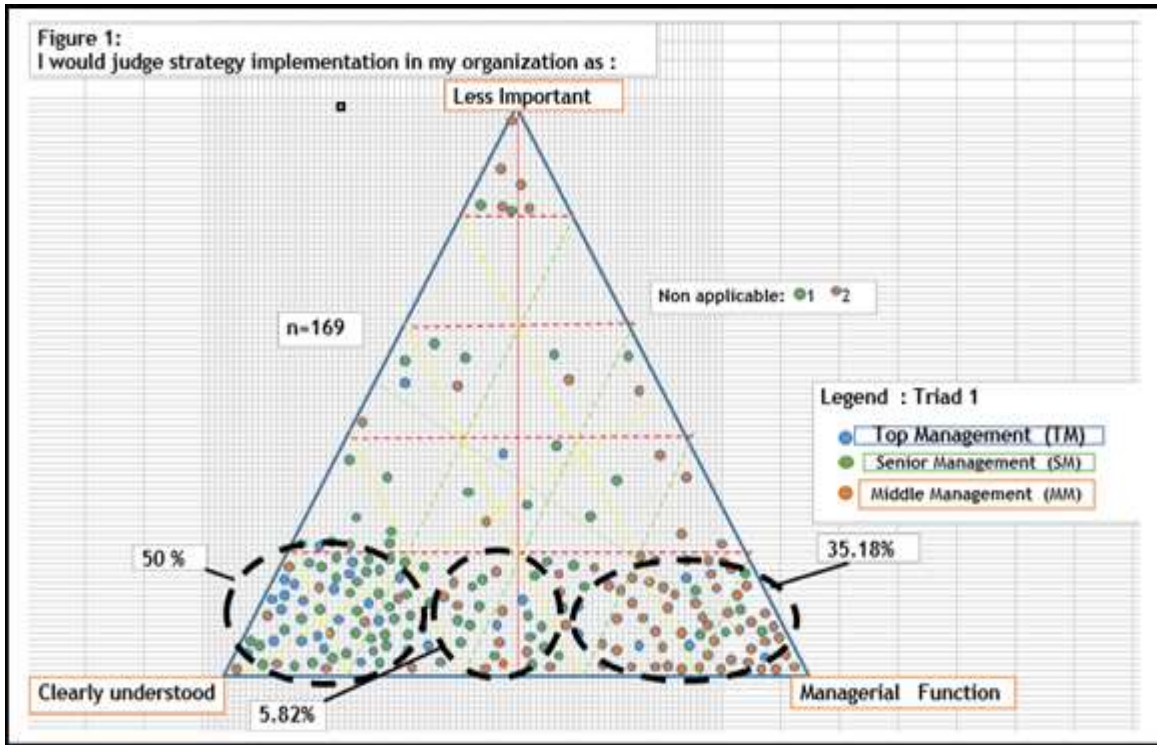
Data were analysed from dyad, triad and in-depth interviews. Saturation was achieved after 100 interviews. These were however allowed to continue well over and up to 172 interviews across the cadres, with the open mind that possibilities exist for uncovering new and different stories. Saturation was operationalized in a way that was consistent with the research question, with similar consideration of the theoretical position and analytic framework adopted (Saunders, Kingstone, Baker, Waterfield, Bartlam, Buroughs & Jinks, 2017:2). Thematic analysis is essentially a method for identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative data (Clarke & Braum, 2013). The study employed thematic analysis through familiarization with data, generation of codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally reporting findings. Certainty and the 'stability of findings over time' are guaranteed as the application of the same/similar research respondents within the same/similar contexts will provide similar results. This means that credible results obtained from this research can be depended on.

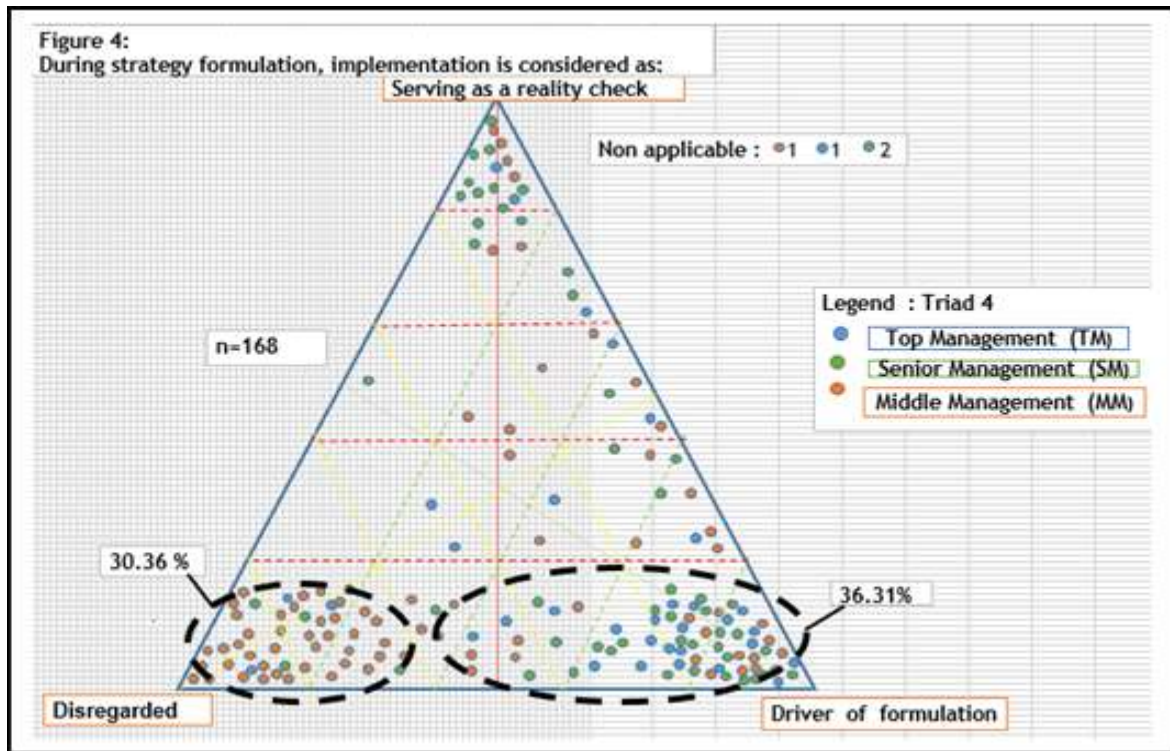
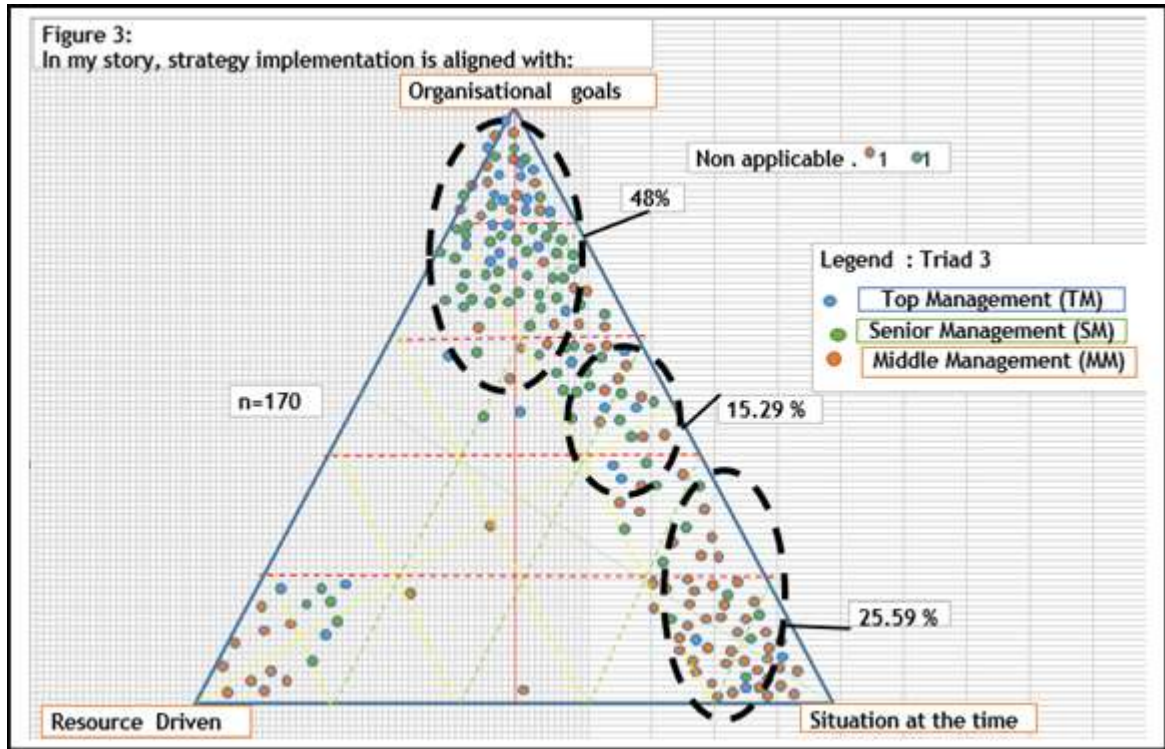
## **Findings and Discussions**

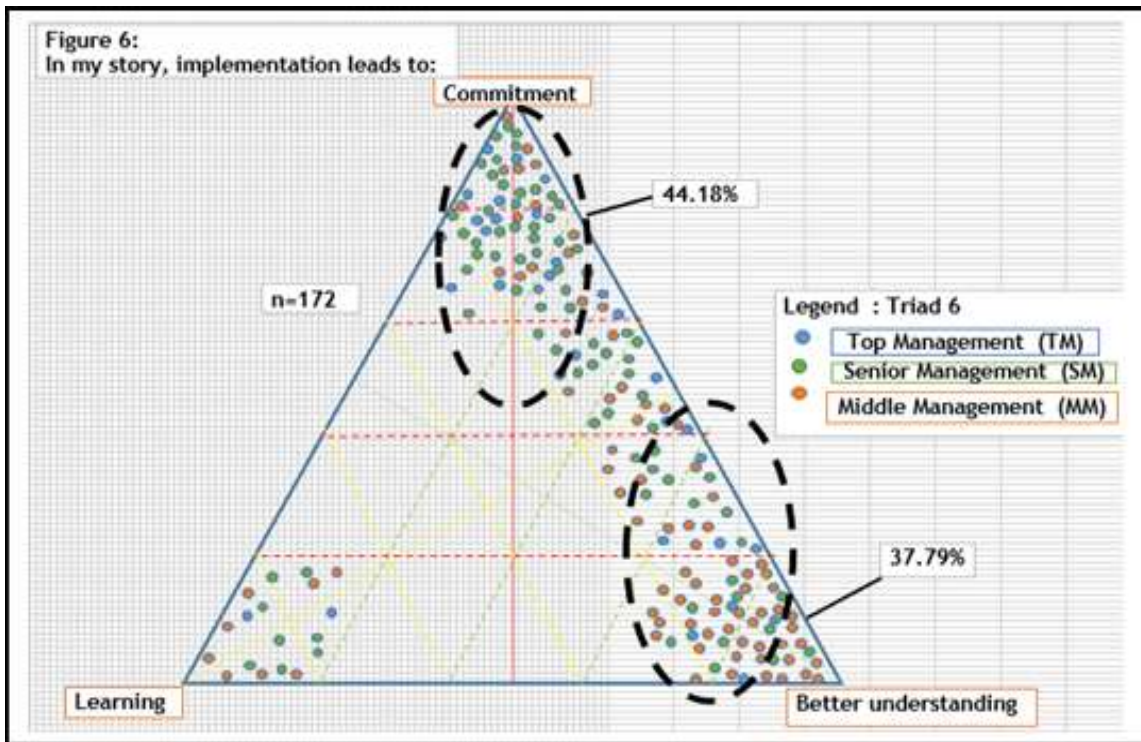
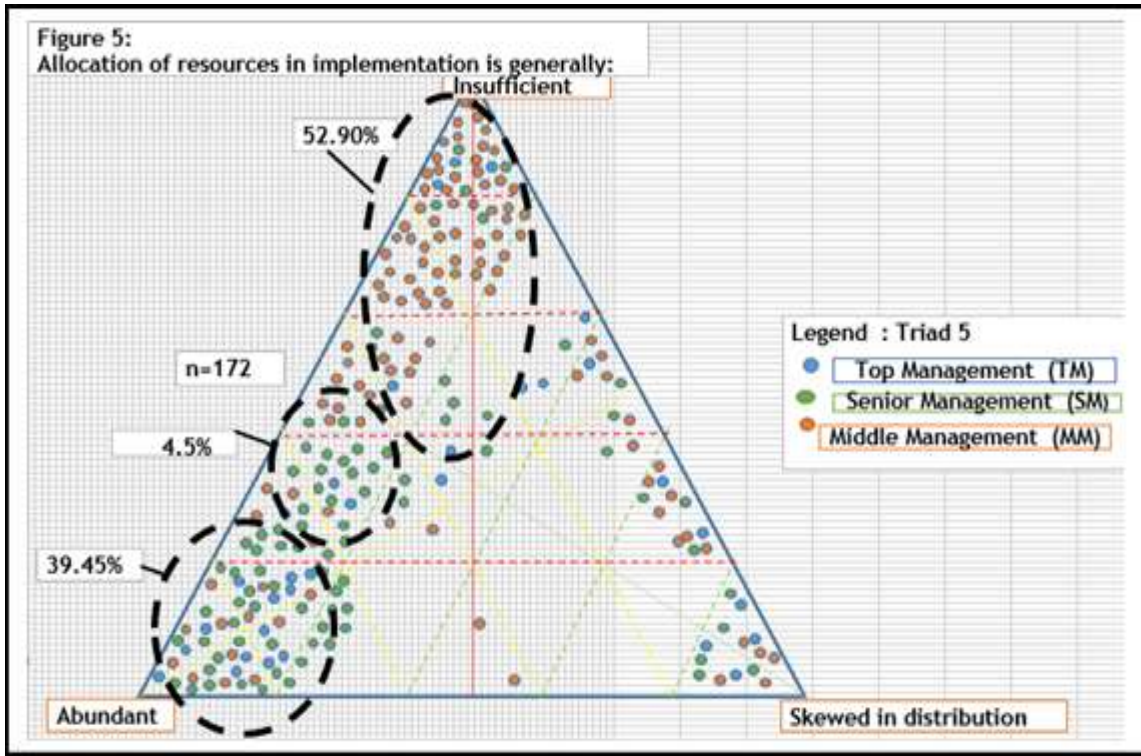
Innumerable findings uncovered from this research provided a deeper understanding of how strategy implementation is undertaken in organizations. It also promulgated the crucial potential that the liabilities approach has in addressing the implementation gap. Themes emerging, following the use of dyads and triads, were presented as findings. In-depth interviews verbatim responses were used to analyse the narratives shared, as the belief is that respondents own spoken words sometimes made more impact than the researcher's narrative in conveying life experiences (Corden & Sainsbury, 2005b).

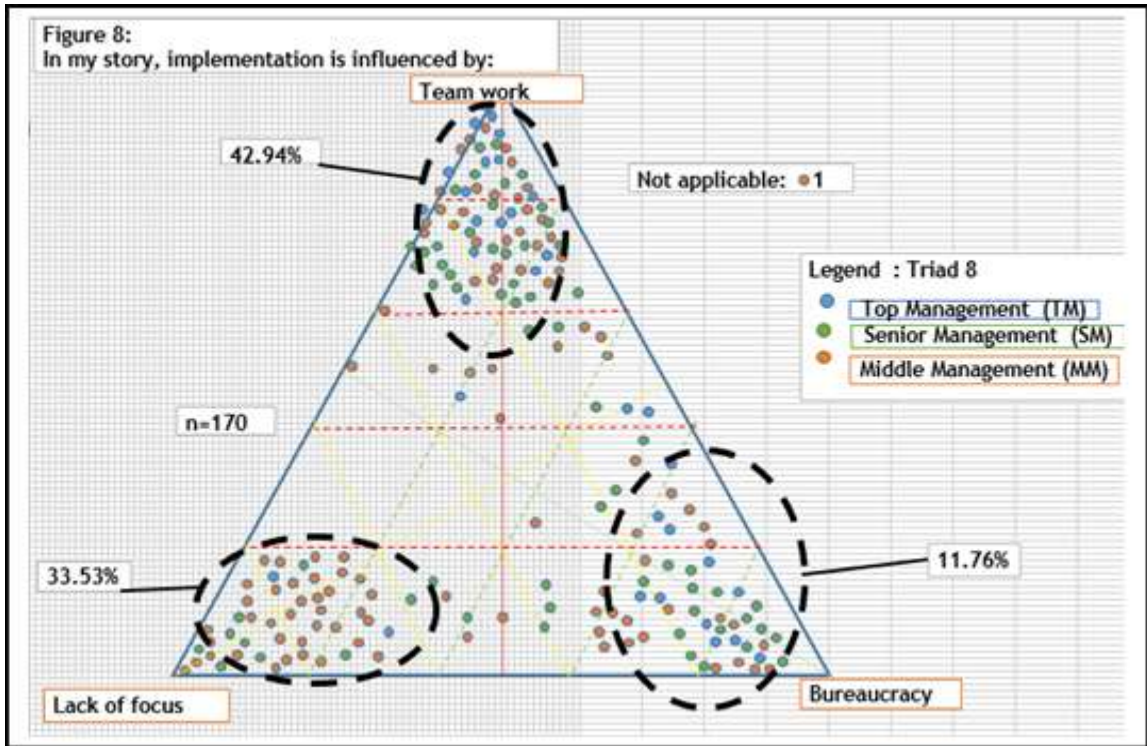
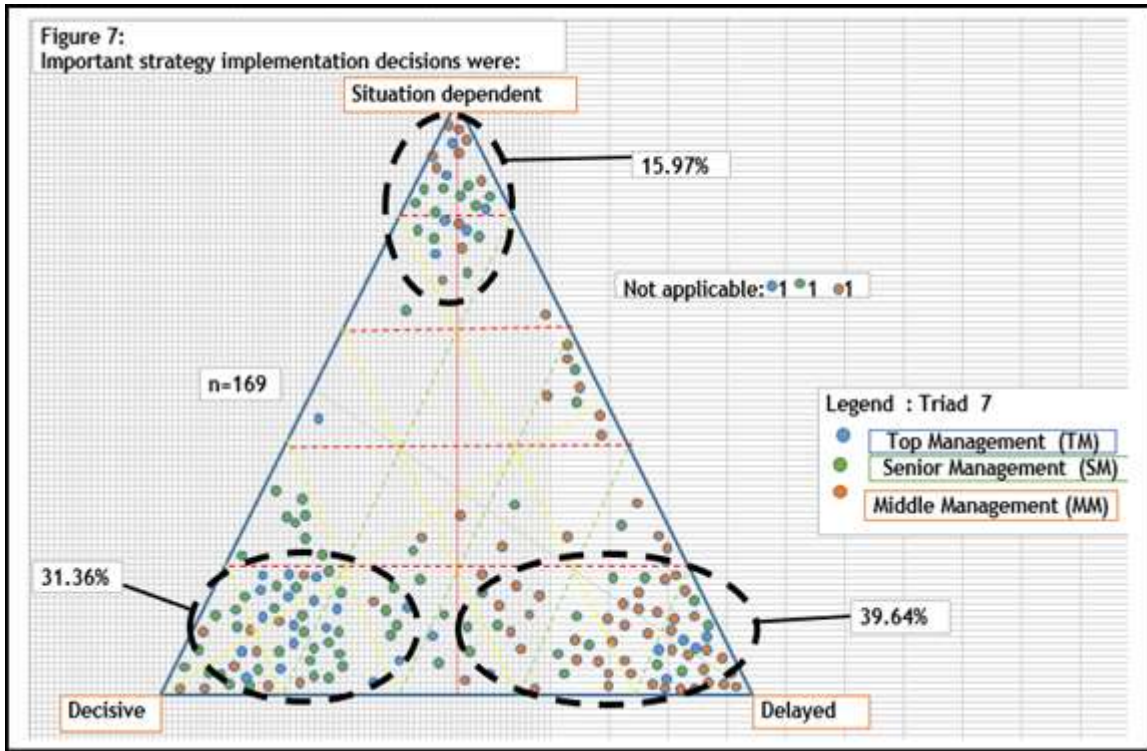
The thematic analysis was guided by themes which emerged during the literature review. Three main broad sets of liabilities were identified: 'Liability of Engagement' (LOE), 'Liability of Decision Making Autonomy' (LODMA), and the 'Liability of Perceived Institutional Support' (LOPIS). These identified liability sets are collectively referred to as 'Strategy Implementation Liabilities' (SILs). Themes which emerged pertaining to strategy implementation practices within each of the liabilities were named 'liability indicators'. These are now discussed in detail. In-depth interviews verbatim excerpts were used in support of the triads (as depicted in figures 1 to 18) and dyads/polarities (figures 19 to 27) findings and thus, added a greater depth of understanding on the stories collected.

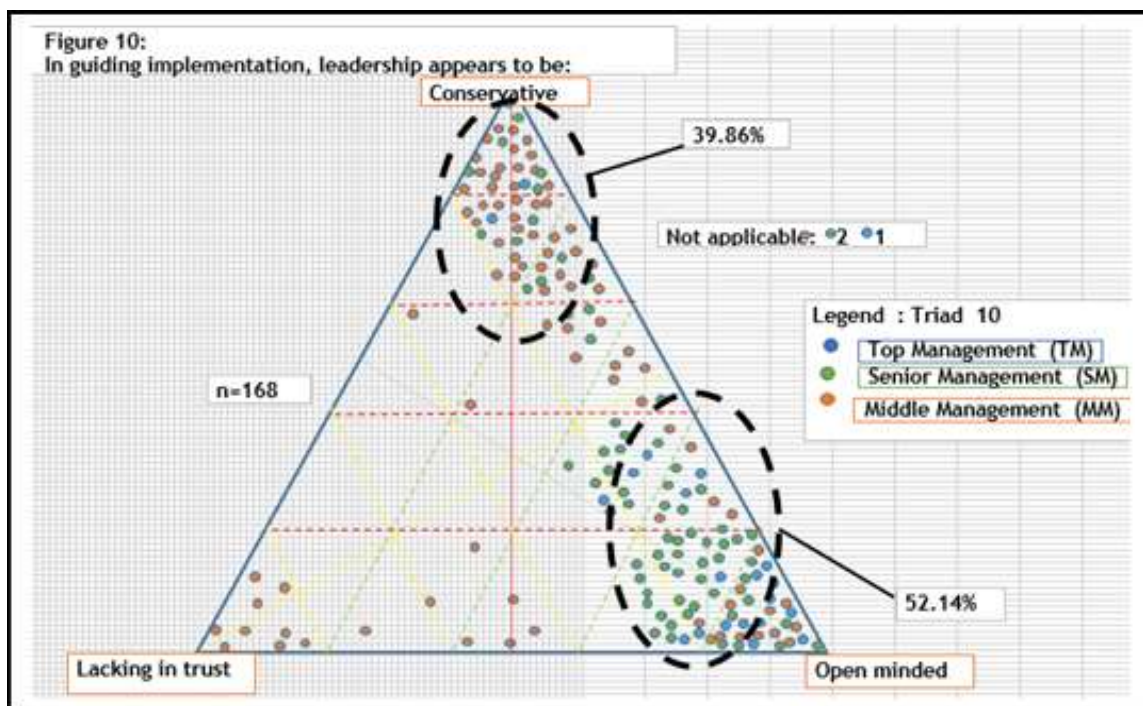
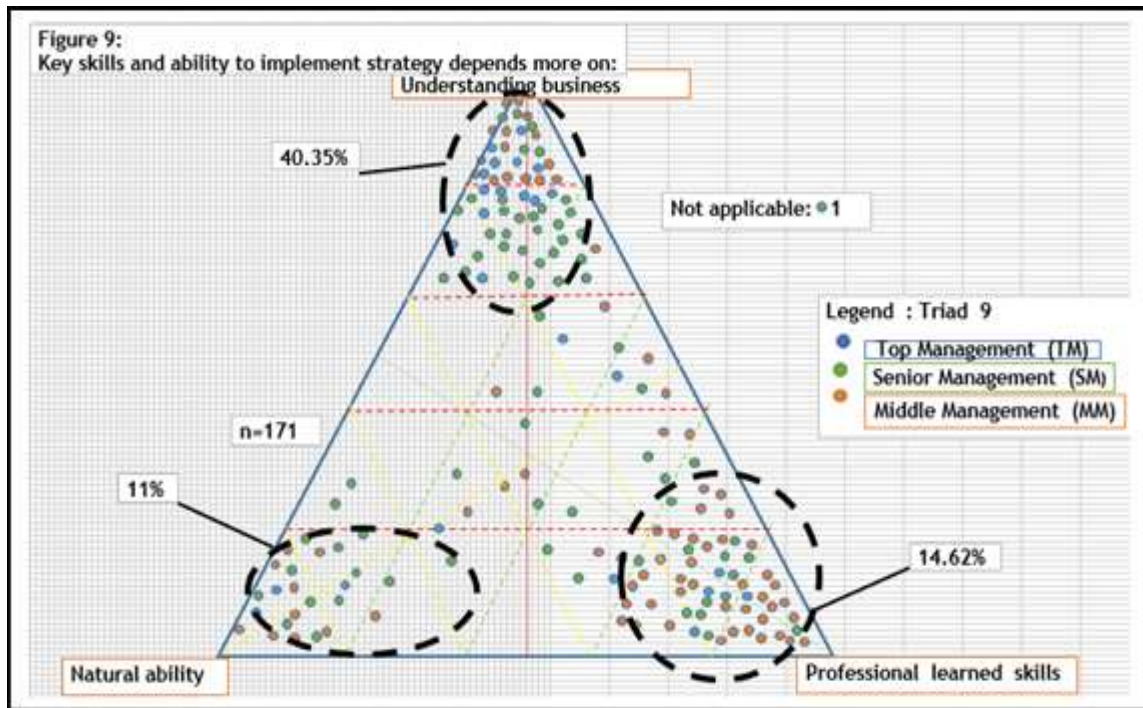
Through peer review from academic colleagues, and having more than one pair of eyes looking and thinking about the data, trustworthiness was enhanced in identifying themes and patterns. The peer review and examination conducted entailed discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations. Adequate engagement during data collection was critical and sufficient time was spent at collection sites with participants to ensure the 'saturated' data involved seeking discrepant or negative cases.



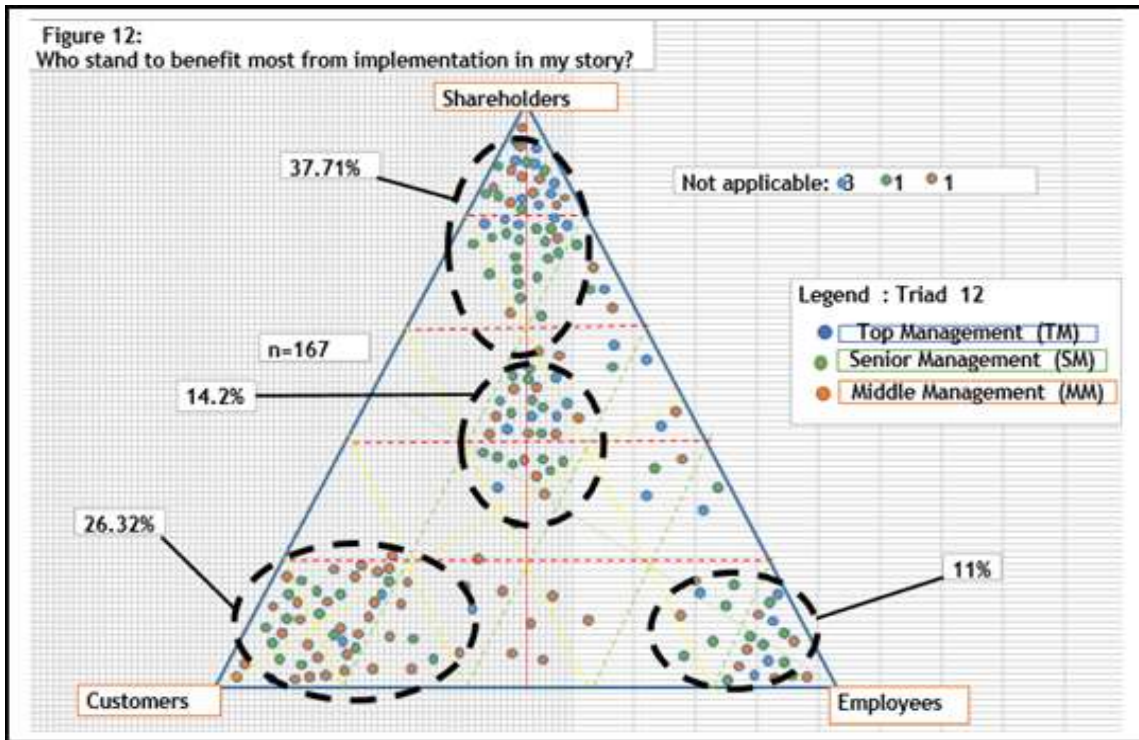
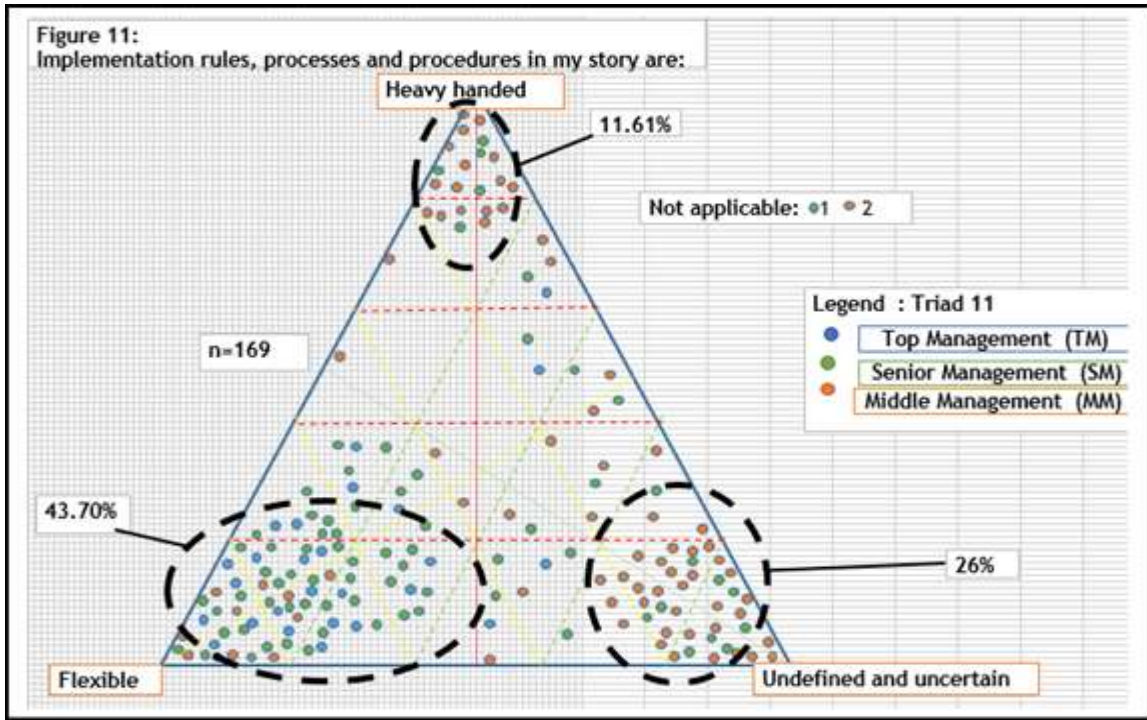


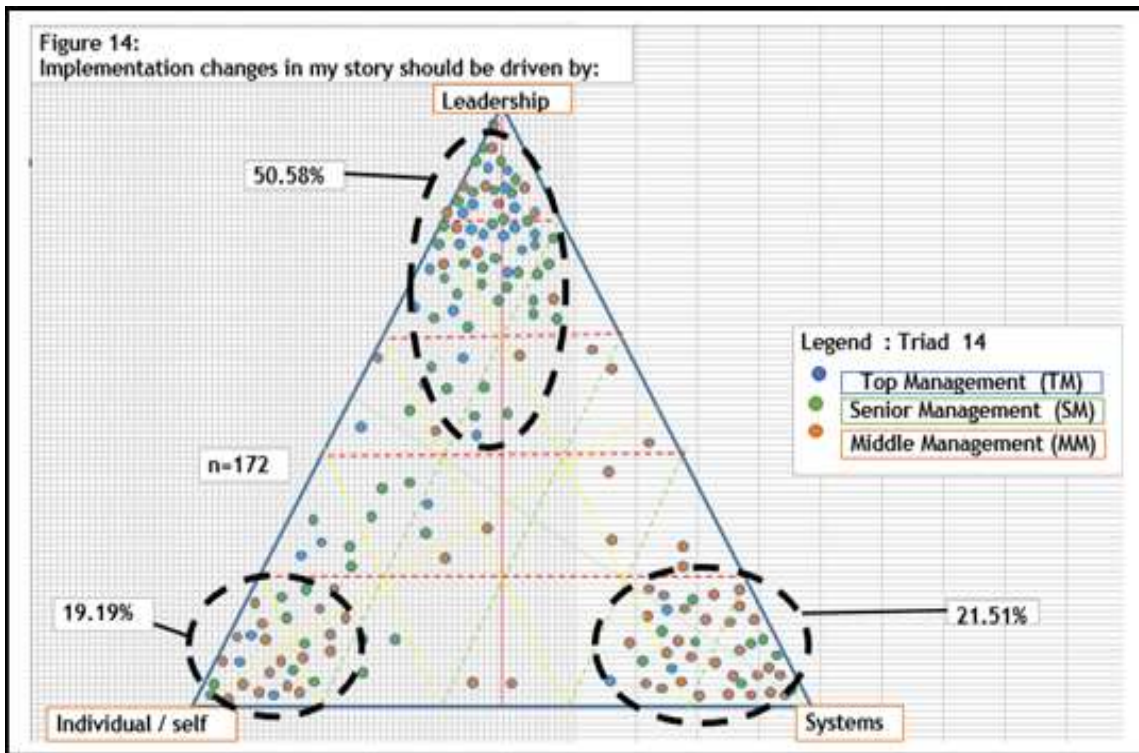
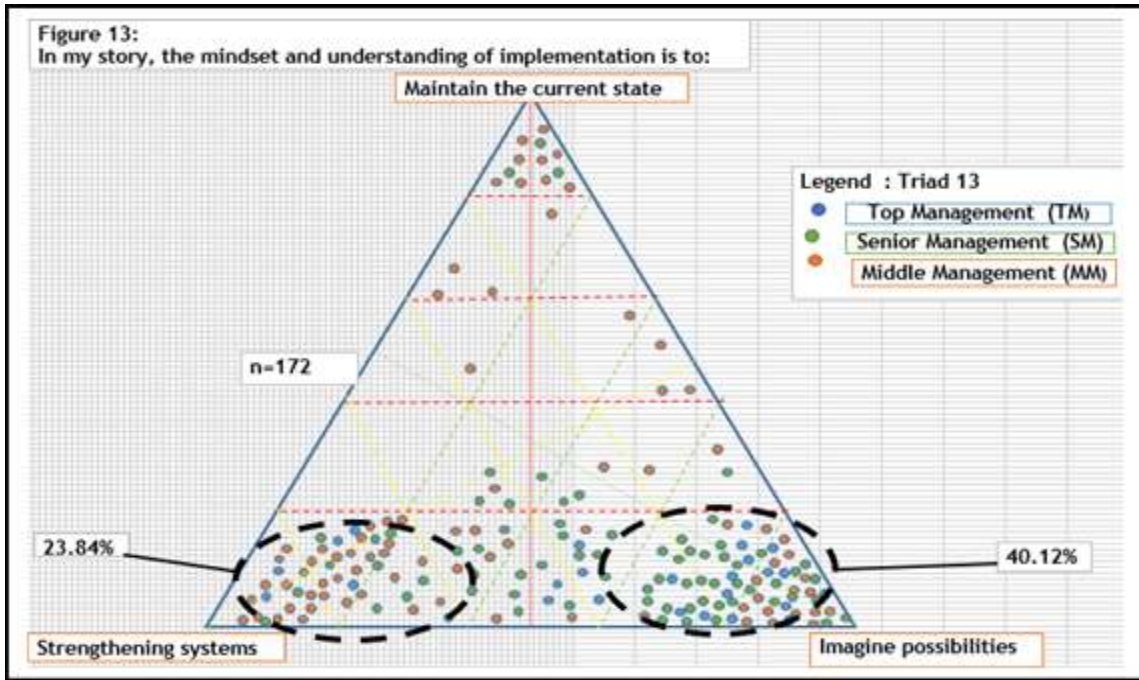


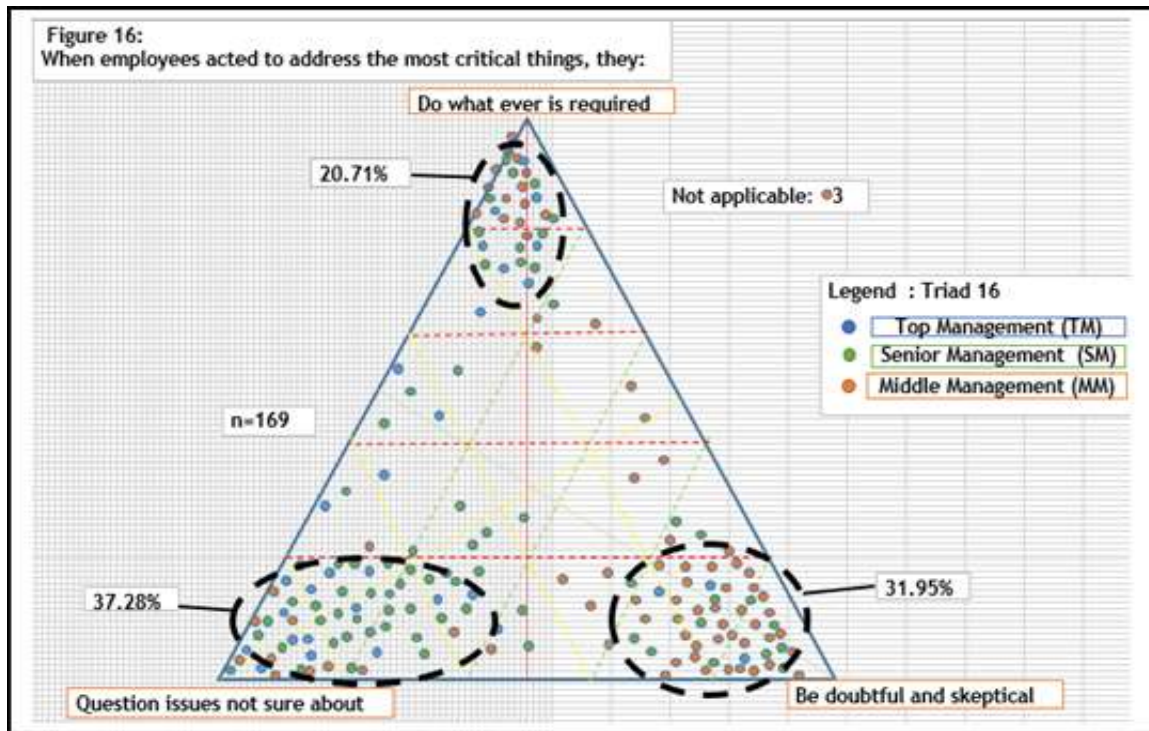
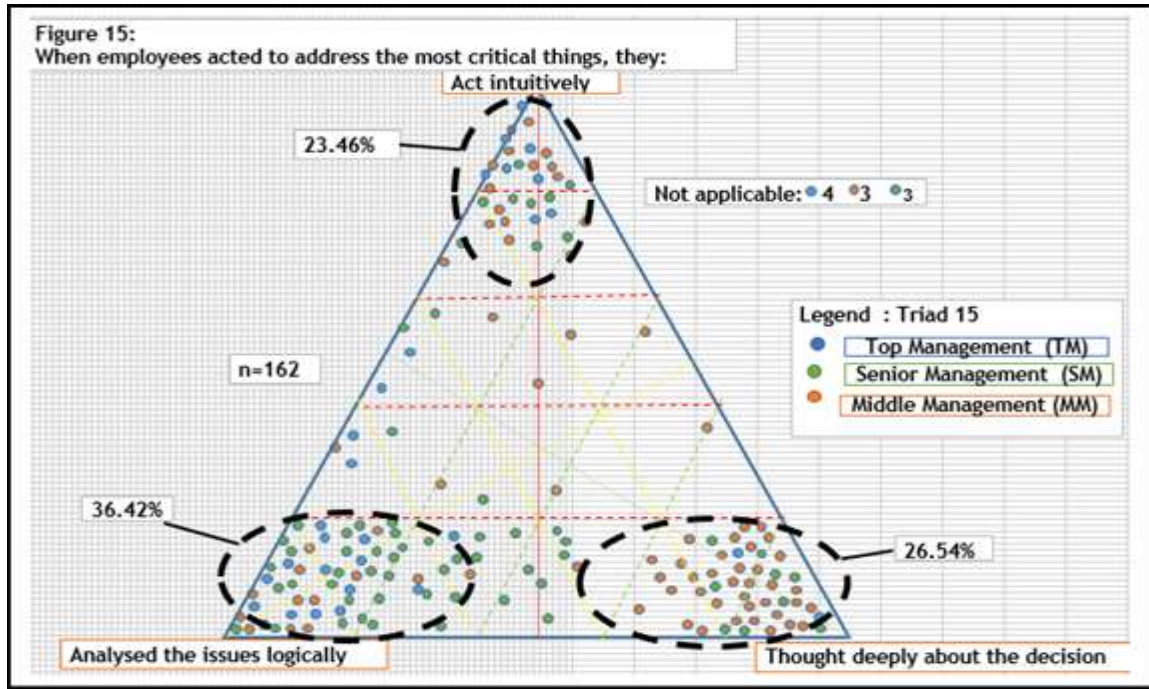


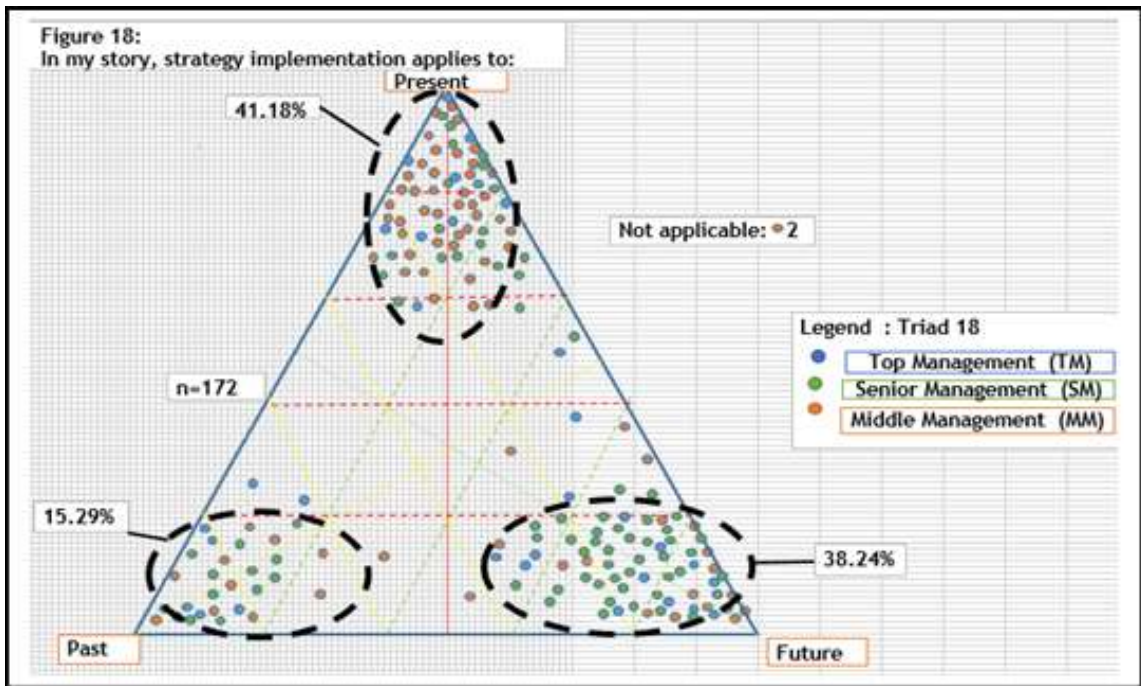
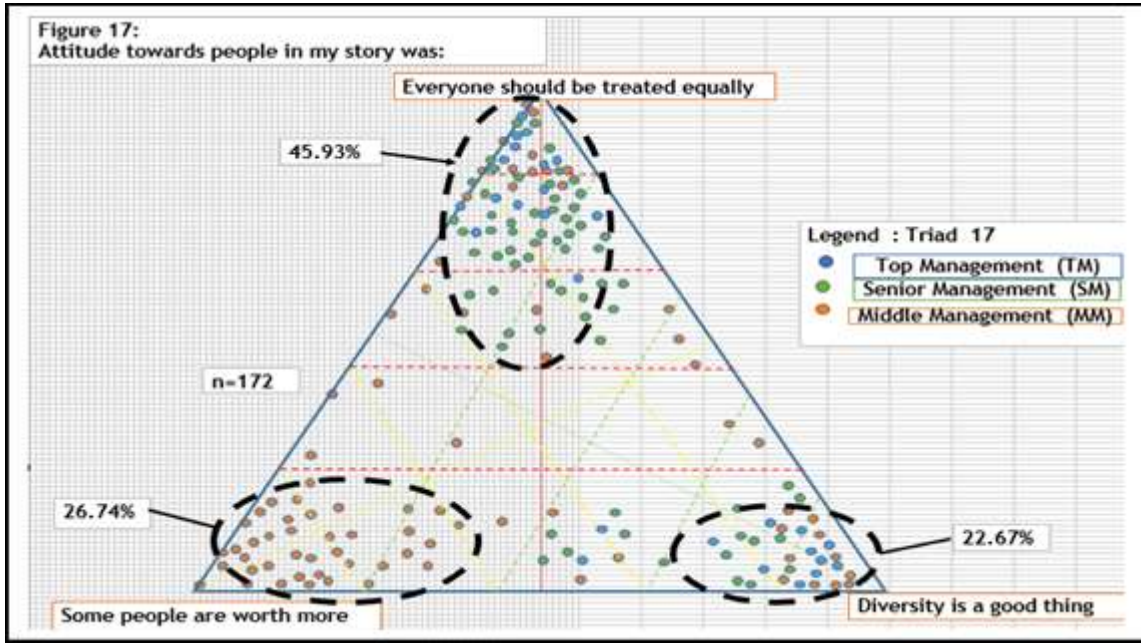


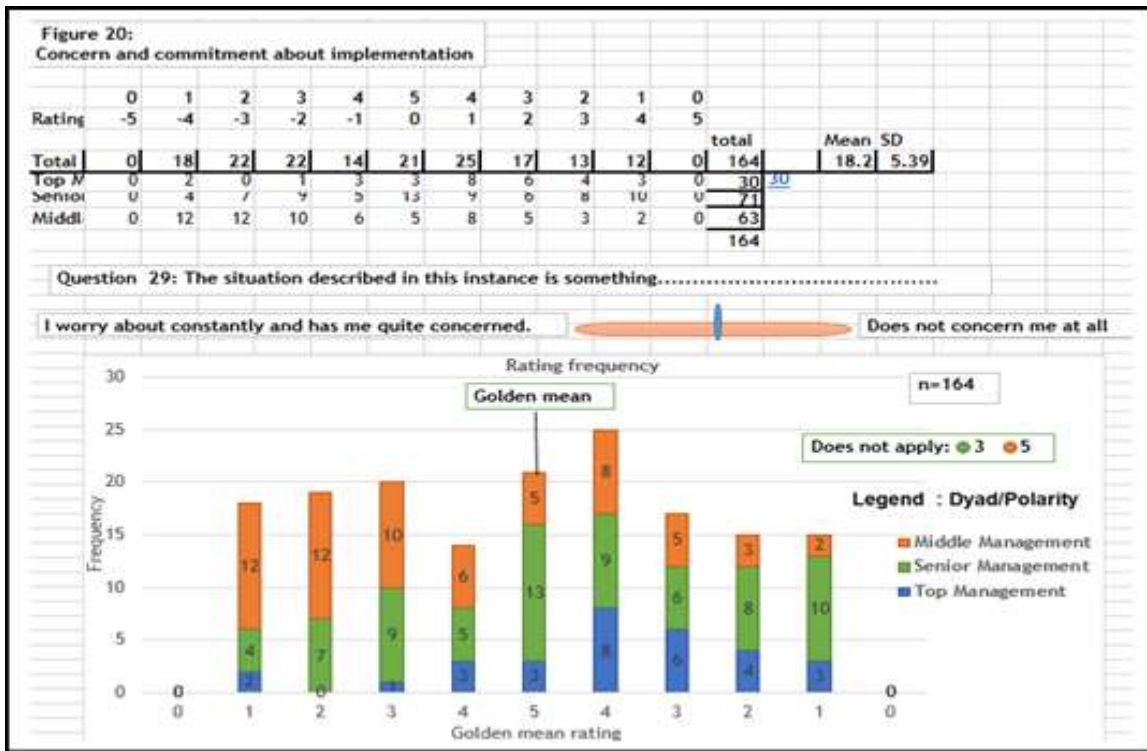
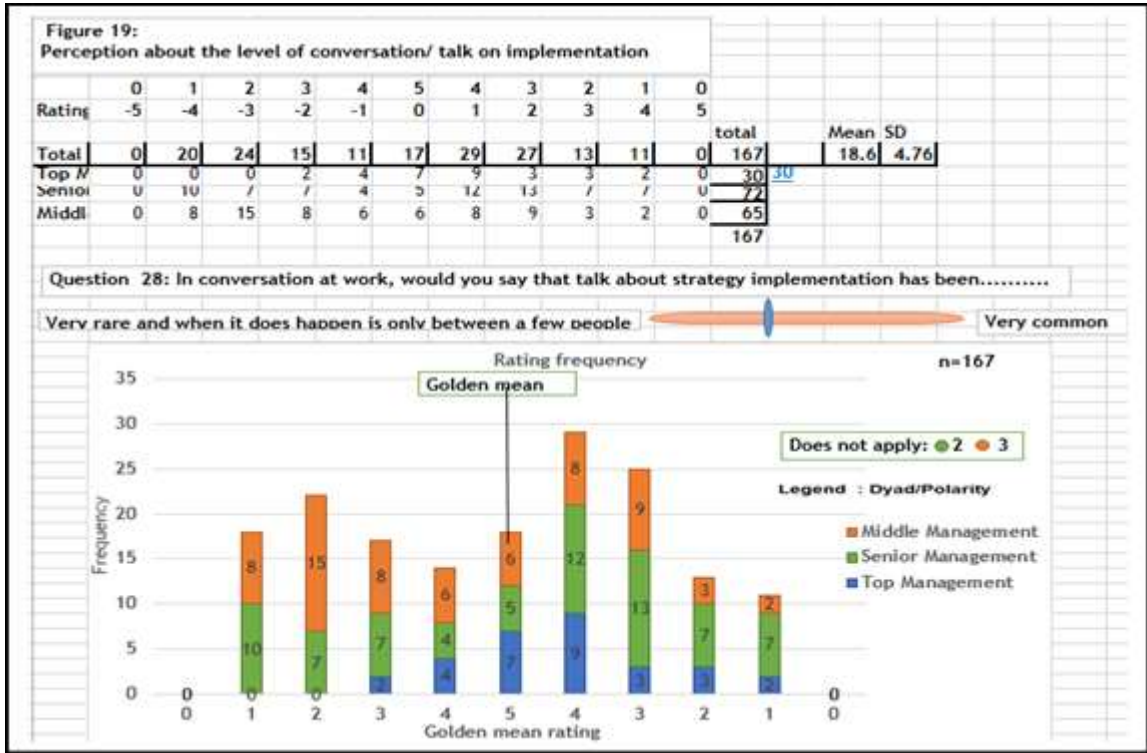


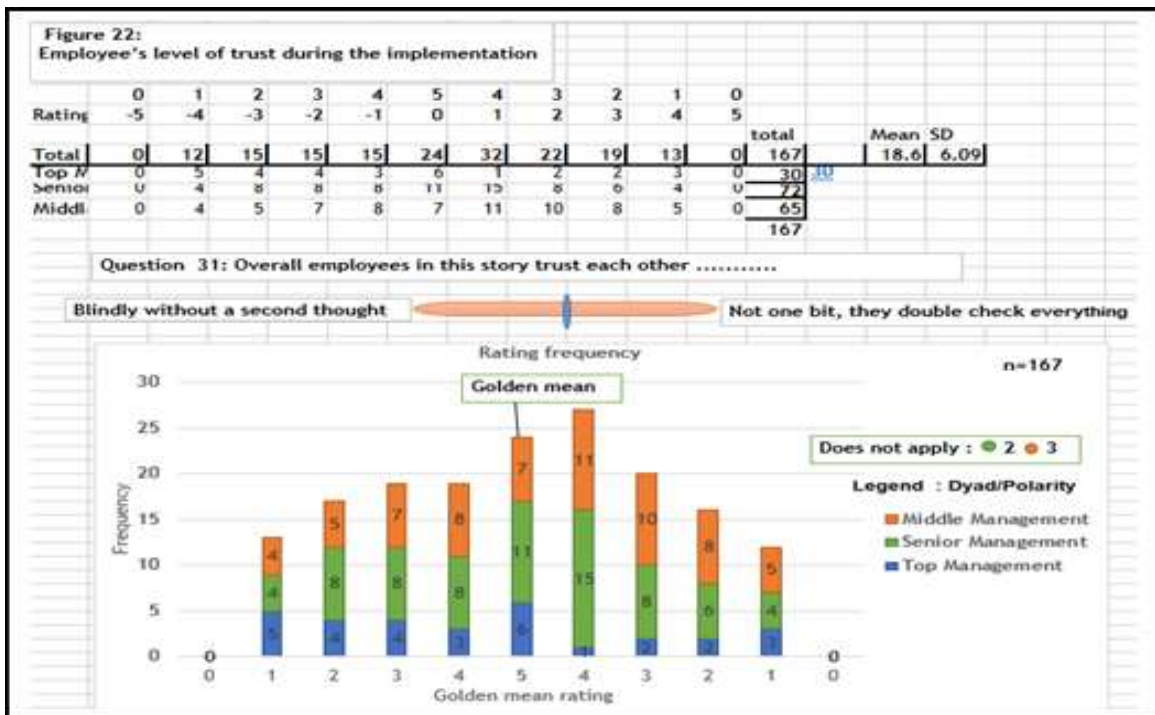
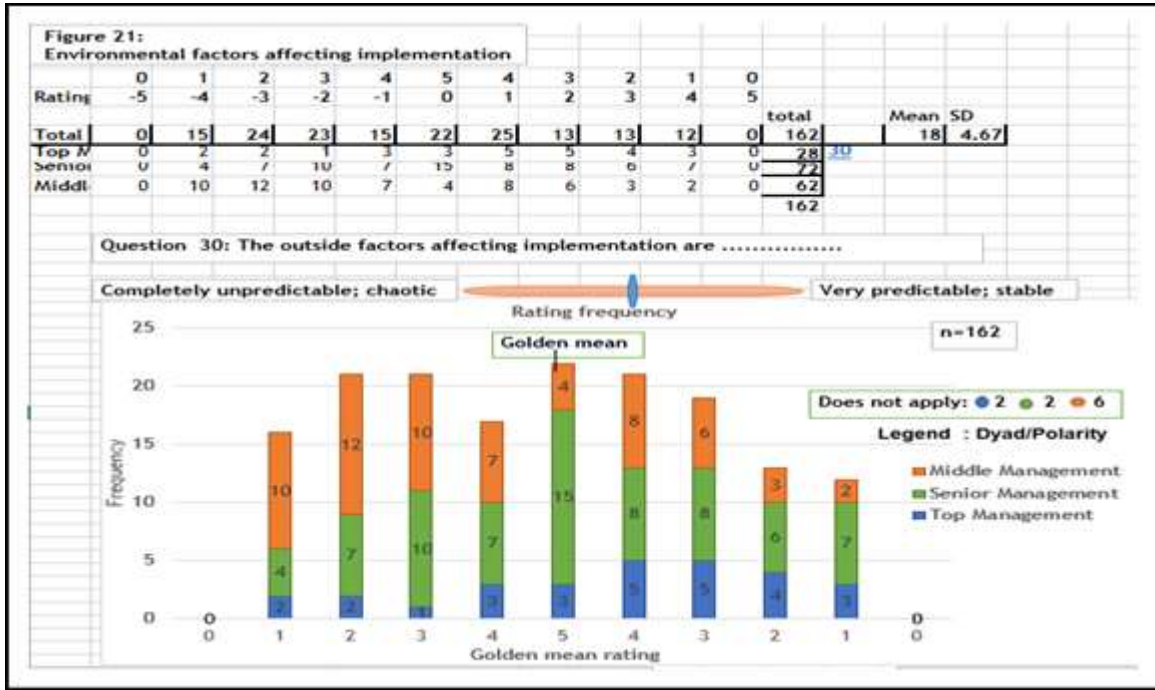


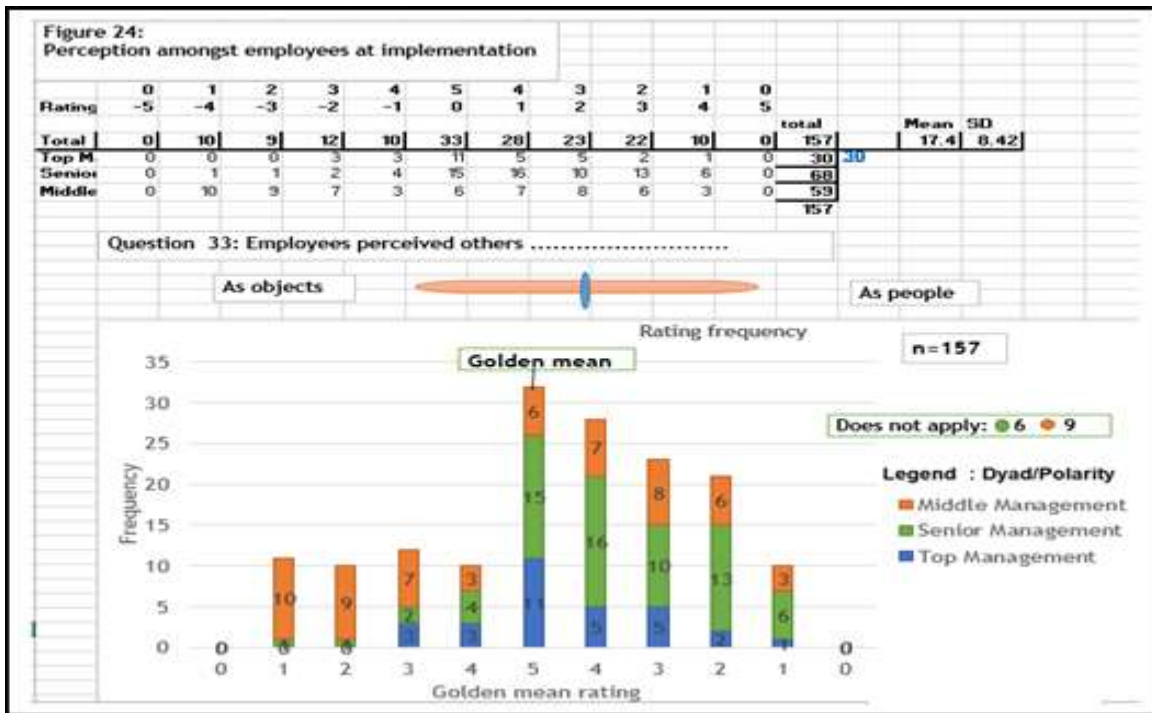
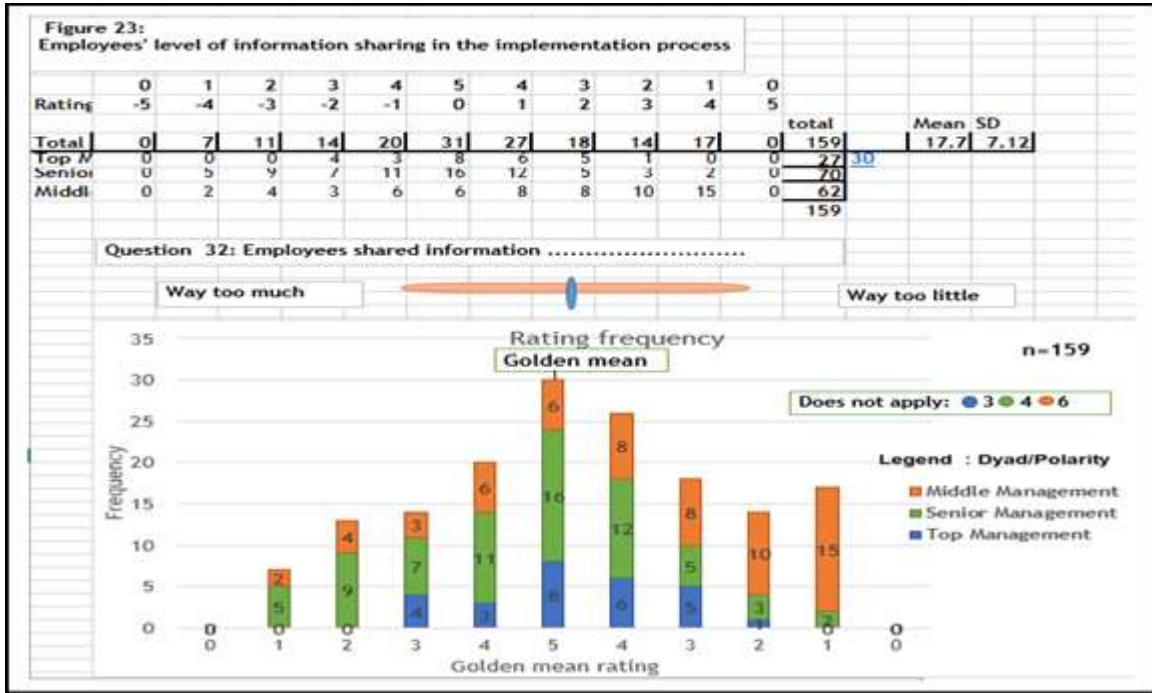


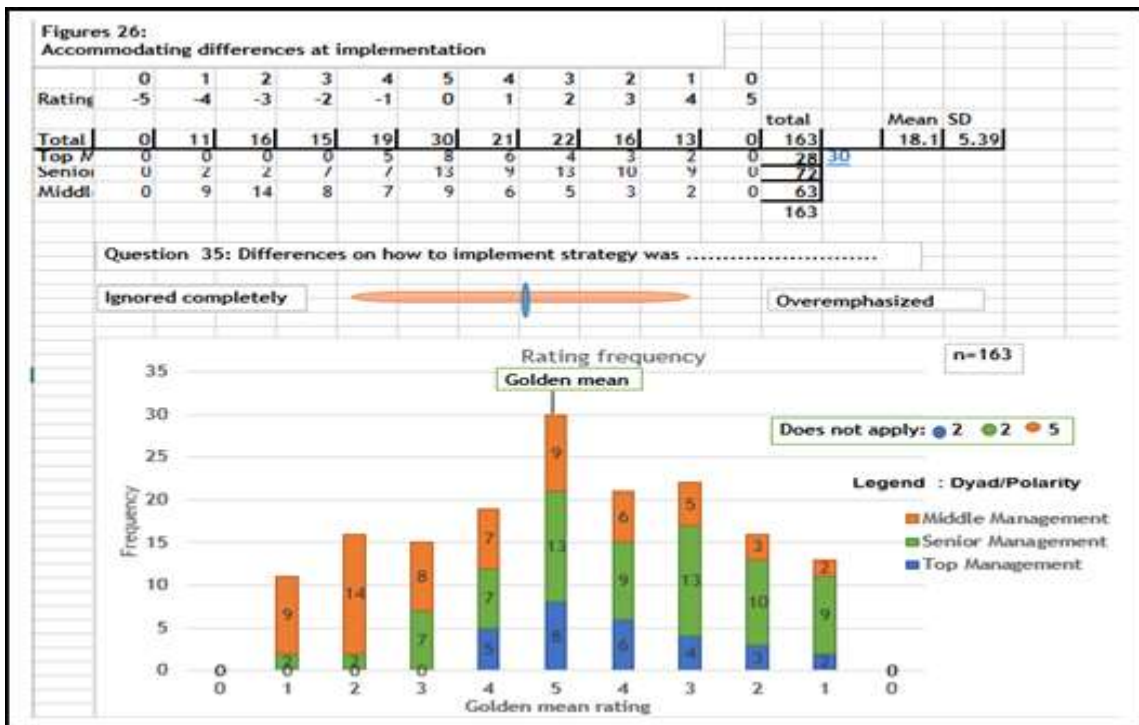
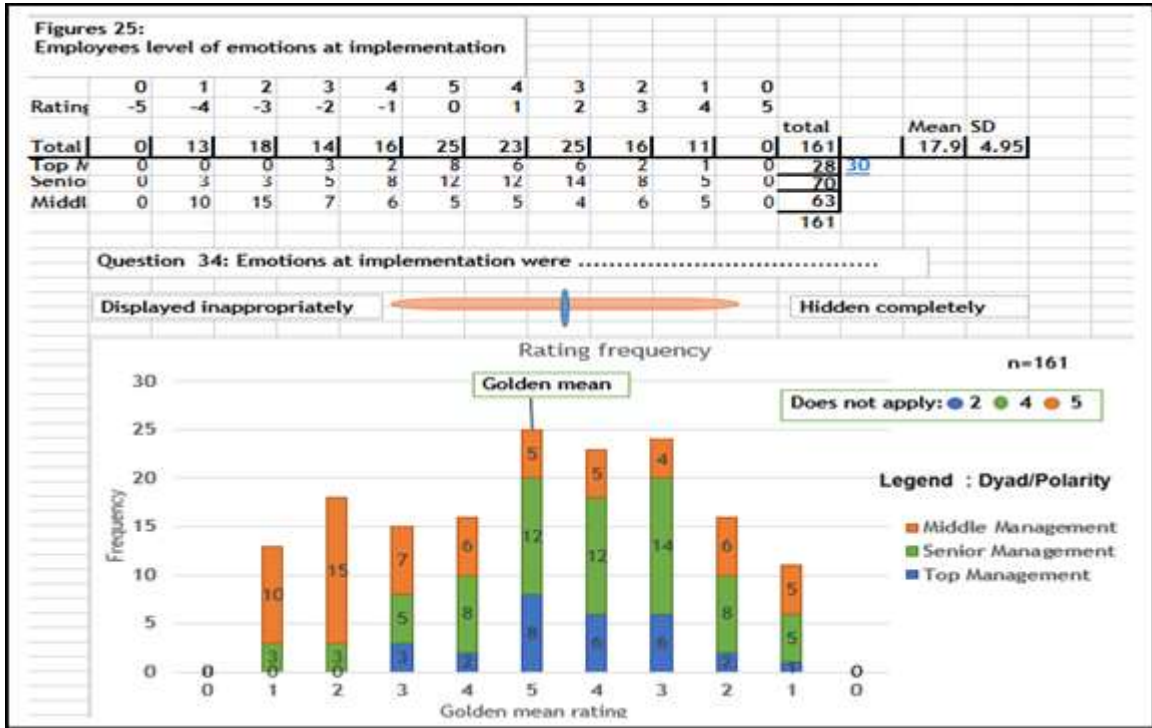




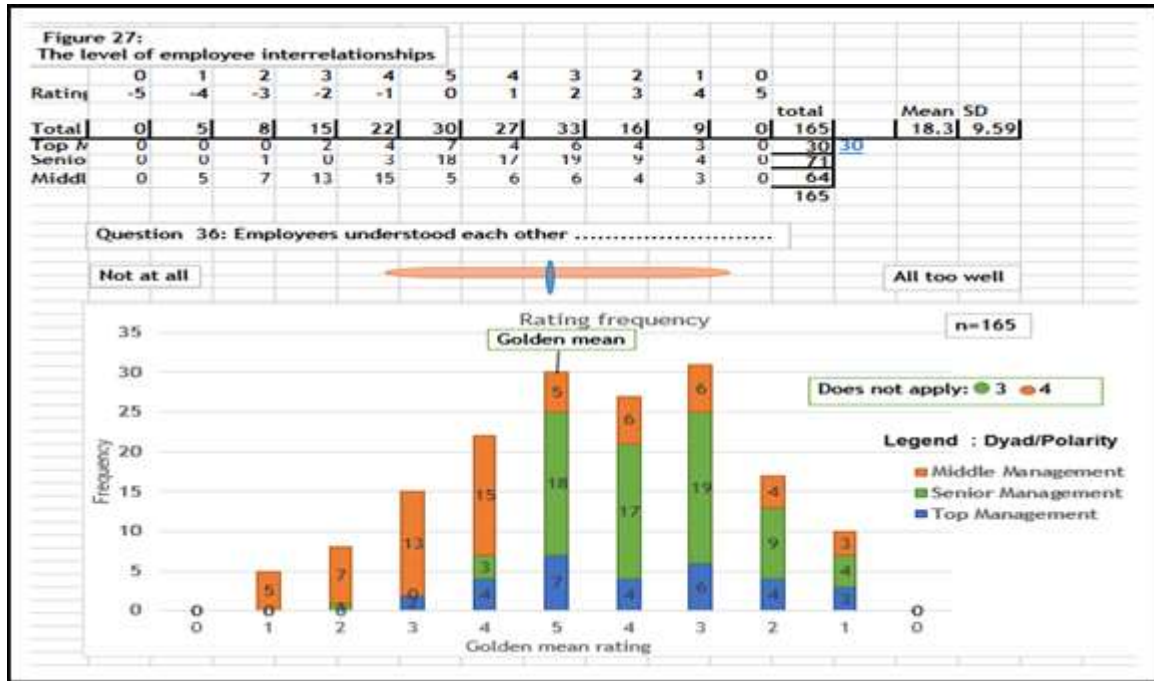












### LIABILITY OF ENGAGEMENT (LOE)

The ‘liability of engagement’, places emphasis on the importance of recognising the emotional, cognitive and physical role strategy implementer’s play in the workplace to enable the organization to achieve its intended goals and objectives. If lack of engagement is experienced, inabilities and hindrances will creep in thus, thwarting strategy implementation.

#### Theme 1: Perception of strategy implementation, conversation/talk as ritual

Top Management and Senior Management’s perception at 50%, as depicted in figure 1, was that strategy implementation in the organization was *clearly understood*, whilst 35% of Middle Management considered it as a *managerial function*. Even though Senior Management ‘perception of strategy implementation’ seemed balanced between these two apices, there appears a clear indication of differences. These differences which might be due to lack of engagement across the organization’s echelons and within the three levels of management. It, therefore, stands to reason that, basic tenets of strategy-as-practice which are concerned with the doing of strategy: who does it, what they do, how they do it, what they use, and what implications this has for shaping strategy might be lacking within the organization (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:69). Therefore, in getting into the ‘bowels’ of strategy-making, employees might develop an interest in the concept of implementation, and might appreciate the differences in the explanation and understanding of the concept as it is multidimensional with varied perceptions (Chia & Mac Kay, 2007; Hambrick, 1983).

Findings in figure 19 further indicate that Top Management confirmed that ‘conversation/talk as ritual’ about strategy within the Case Corporation is not *rare* but *common* and not necessarily *very common* as would be expected. Strategy formulation and implementation ought to be embraced as a culture through continuous conversations and talk across the organization to enhance employee engagement and commitment. Senior Management’s stories reveal that conversation and talk about strategy implementation is quite *rare* and to some extent *common*, this is viewed as a deficiency comparative to Top Management’s response. Middle Management stories shared indicate that strategy conversation and talk is *very rare* and when it does happen it is only between a few people. If strategy conversation and talk are very rare, this might be an indication that the communication and sharing of strategy implementation information might be lacking. Case Corporation could rely on important dimensions such as symbolic actions, such as celebrating

success, rewarding performance, ceremonies, with past success stories being told and retold; these could reinforce employee engagement and cohesiveness (Lorange, 1996).

Excerpts from the in-depth interviews support these themes.

Top Management and Senior Management: W1 “The ideal honesty is that the strategy in place is not owned for it is not understood”. W124: “Strategy implementation initiatives have made considerable progress”. W 145: “Imposition into people without prior engagement to feel and belonging to decisions agreed on the projects seem improper. W13: “The management did not communicate well with employees”. W41: “People should be taken on board right from the beginning”.

Middle Management: W2 “Most employees are aware of it but are clueless as to the proceedings”. W38: “The strategy has been cascaded but the problem is implementation” W152: “Strategy implementation in my organization is only management business, other staff, are just being directed about what is going on.” W51: “Sharing of ideas and ways on how to improve the organization performance was done”. W126: “Generally, discussions on the strategy are infrequent, spending too much time on operations”.

## ***Theme 2: Integrating the differences between strategy formulation and implementation through organizational renewal***

Integration between strategy formulation and implementation has always been a dilemma and a serious challenge for organizations. As shown in figure 4, the experiences of story tellers were sought to share some insights as to whether during strategy formulation, implementation could be considered as *servicing a reality check* (control mechanism), *driver of formulation* (catalyst process) or whether it is unnecessary (fad) and therefore should be *disregarded*. Top Management and Senior Management agreed that implementation is a *driver for formulation* (30.4%). Middle Management held a different view in that, as far as they are concerned, during formulation, implementation is in most cases *disregarded* (36.3%). It, therefore, stands to reason that strategy formulation and implementation should be considered simultaneously to ensure that processes flowing from the formulating stage are captured accordingly during the implementation stage (Ankor, 2012; Garcia, Cortes, Marco-Lajara, & Zaragoza-Saez, 2014). These processes may not be divorced as they are considered to be similar to some kind of ‘liturgy’ with which strategy practitioners perform a ‘quasi-priestly’ role (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

Further experiences were elicited from respondents pertaining to the relevance of *leadership*, *systems* and *individual/self*-changes in strategy implementation in trying to cement the integration. In figure 14, Top Management and Senior Management indicated that they view the role played by *leadership* as critical to the process of implementation for strategic direction (50.6%), whilst Middle Management and some part of Senior Management view *systems* and *individuals* (21.5%) and (19.2%) respectively as also important to enhance and support the process of implementation. However, the most ideal situation could have been the sharing of stories at the centre of the triad which would be considered balanced and favourable and would mean that *leadership*, *systems* and the *individual* are collectively necessary to enhance and support implementation. This calls for the Case Corporation to use *leadership*, *systems* and *individual* to motivate the organizational human resource to drive implementation changes (Sparrow, 2000; Wu, Gide & Jewell, 2014).

The verbatim quotations bear testimony that the integration is necessary through organizational renewal.

Top Management and Senior Management: W30: “Quite discouraging and not necessarily positive”. W112: “We formulate strategy, however when it comes to implementation it is fire-fighting”. W115: “Customers never discussed with fellow employees, a lot of us are learning the formulation and implementation”. W169: “First of all people do not understand our organization’s strategy. They deal with business situations and not necessarily strategy implementations”. W11: “Employee engagement and their willingness to effect the necessary changes is important”.

Middle Management: W41: “People should be taken on board right from the beginning”. W83: “We were only briefed as employees but not really took part in the exercise”. W119: “Our management depends on

consultants when formulating strategies. This affects most of the staff because customer grievances backfire from staff". W171: "Management waits until there is a crisis that is when they start implementing certain changes in strategies".

### **Theme 3: Enhancing commitment, understanding and loyalty through implementation process ownership**

Figure 6 shows more stories were shared between apices *commitment* and *better understanding*, indicating that these are important aspects. Top Management and Senior Management both agreed that *commitment* seems to be the only most essential ingredient than *better understanding* and *learning* and that they may be less effective and not necessarily contribute to better strategy execution in organizations. Middle Management had a different view, in that they maintained that implementation leads to a better understanding of most aspects of the organization. It, therefore, stands to reason that the absence of agreement by all the three levels of management in the aspects of *commitment*, *better understanding* and *learning* are collectively essential to implementation, are an indicator that depicts an anomaly and therefore an apparent imbalance. Education and learning are generally recognised as forms of employee empowerment which enhances engagement (Sila, 2013; Paton & Wagner, 2014). When employees are educated, they understand issues better and embrace organizational commitment.

Furthermore, Top Management and Senior Management shared their stories indicating that the expected reaction of employees during the implementation process was to *question issues that the employees are not sure about*. So that clarity can be advanced to reduce prospects of confusion, uncertainty and to *do whatever is required*, in order to ensure that instructions, directives and plans are followed without fail, as depicted in figure 16. Middle Management indicated that their experience and expectation concerning the 'implementation process ownership' was that, employees appeared to be *doubtful and skeptical*, and that they also had to *do whatever was required* of them. It would appear that Top Management and Senior Management encouraged employees to question issues they are not sure about, facilitating conversations, and thus creating a conducive working environment where employees would develop a sense of 'personal ownership' of the strategy implemented. It would be prudent and to the best interest of the Case Corporation to accommodate, appreciate and recognise dissenting voices during the implementation process to warrant equal and complete work efforts of all employees and management towards goal achievements. Organizational engagement might promote interest and excitement in jobs, while effectively recognising the importance of social interaction and stress reduction (Nienaber & Martins, 2016).

In-depth interviews clearly articulate the stories contributed to enhancing commitment, understanding and loyalty.

Top Management and Senior Management: W2: "Strategy implementation needs to be owned first by those on the level to enable easy of cascading". W 115: "To meet and set day to day goals, activities of customer satisfaction, revenue generation, all these increase efficiency and effectiveness in delivery". W10: "I feel the management most always feel their opinions are reasonable and they don't allow just anyone in the department to employ their ideas". W159: "We are never involved in the strategy formulation, everything will be done and completed and we are expected to be committed".

Middle Management: W 15: "The organization needs commitment, understanding and knowledge derived from education, growth in order to focus on how they educate employees". W18: "It is poor and haphazard there is no commitment and therefore ownership from lower level employees". W38: "Management does not encourage the staff to implement the strategy and this leads to demotivation". W54: "We were only involved after strategy experts had left the CASE CORPORATION and were expected to start work without any clue of expectations from us". W64: The CEO, Heads and managers just agree and implement things without consulting us at the bottom".

### **Theme 4: Facilitating harmonious interrelationships through personal recognition and nurturing employee attitudes**

Top Management stories indicated that employees understood each other *all too well* during the process of strategy implementation. In figure 27, Senior Management also indicated that during this process employees seemed to understand each other *quite well*. What can be inferred from

these findings is that there appears to be a good relationship and interaction between employees as far as the organizational leadership is concerned. Middle Management stories reveal that employees did not understand each other, meaning that the relationships, interrelationships in the process of strategy implementation did not exist. Issues considered to have had an impact on the interrelationships between employees varied; departments operating as silos, some departments considered superior, others inferior. Interrelationships play an important part of group cohesiveness, with teamwork being necessary to pursue and complete tasks. The relationship between units/departments and strategy levels within Case Corporation is vital and ought to be nurtured or else the efforts of strategy implementation become worthless (Slater & Olson, 2001).

Appreciation is a fundamental human need and once employees are recognised, their self-esteem, satisfaction and productivity increases. According to figure 17, Top Management and Senior Management stories shared indicated that employees were *not perceived as objects*, but as people. Thus, indicating that the employee's attitudes displayed during the implementation process were such that everyone should be *treated equally* and that *diversity is a good thing*. Middle Management took a different stand, to indicate that they were not necessarily perceived as people but rather *as objects as some people are worth more*, however, still acknowledging that diversity is a good thing. The ideal concentration of stories was expected between the apices: *diversity is a good thing* and *everyone should be treated equally*, indicating that both aspects are equally important to influence the success of strategy implementation. The clustering of stories at the far ends of the apices is an indicator that there is an imbalance which could be prevalent and therefore needs attention. Human capital must be recognized as particularly important because of the skills, experiences, knowledge and attitudes brought into the organization (Lockwood, 2007; Whelan & Carcary, 2011; Lewis, 2011; Campell, Coff & Krycynski, 2012).

The quotations below support the theme indicating the need for employee recognition.

<p>Top Management and Senior Management: W11: "Moving slowly, still dealing with changing individual attitude towards organizational change". W44: "Constant engagement of staff as the strategy implementation progresses". W 8: "Lack of responding to emails by some staff". W 131: "Communications by email at most times, memos. I do share information". W7: "It will take some time to understand each other". W166: "The interaction was perfect as it was well communicated". W7: "It is a new tool in our organization so it might take time for staff to adapt, but it is good and there is an interaction between staff and management".</p>
<p>Middle Management: W76: "There is no consultation between the organization and employees". W54: "The management should have consulted staff prior so that they could have questioned some issues and probably agreed with them. There were no updates on progress and no follow ups". W69: "This will lead to employees being at different levels of understanding on what strategy implementation is all about". W134: "There is poor interaction as people who are expected to execute strategy lacks direction of what was expected from them as they were not involved from the initial stage".</p>

### ***Theme 5: Employee trust, emotional commitment and negative reactions***

The perceived level of trust across the Case Corporation, which might be a hindrance to strategy implementation, was examined as shown in figure 22. In sharing stories on whether employees trust each other during the process of strategy implementation, Top Management stories appeared consistent across the golden mean rating, indicating that, employees in general trust each other. However, Senior Management had a different view in that, overall employees did not trust each other in the implementation process, and this could result in them having to *cross check and double check things* which are a cost to the organization in terms of time and effort. Middle Management responses were evenly spread within the golden mean rating depicting that employees *did not trust each other, even a bit* and therefore had to double check everything. The level of trust which influences employee's engagement, constitute a leader's ability to achieve with employee's honesty and integrity and this is contingent upon their perceptions (Pretorius, 2009). It is accepted that Middle Managers play a pivotal role in influencing employees' choice to engage or disengage (Nienaber & Martins, 2016). Strategy implementation frustration sets in if harmful elements, notably distrust, are experienced in the organization (Nicholson, 2013).

Emotions seem to be another phenomenon that has received immense attention in organizations for the good reason that they serve numerous functions; as social, communicative function, and as a decision-making function according to figure 25. The perceived level of emotions experienced at strategy implementation were examined, Top Management indicated that emotions at implementation were *displayed appropriately* - employees were less emotional about the process of strategy implementation. Senior Management also seems to agree that emotions were *displayed appropriately* - the process was less emotional. Middle Management stories shared indicated that emotions at implementation were *displayed inappropriately* as shown by employees being most emotional. It would seem that, even though Top Management and Senior Management indicated that the issue of emotions was never a challenge at implementation, however, they would have to contend with and manage emotions, whether pre or post-implementation to establish the root cause of the problems. Emotions are considered important aspects of human nature and they need to be nurtured through engagement with the view to obtain maximum results from people. It would be prudent for the Case Corporation to seriously consider employee emotions and their mental state as they have the potential to significantly influence the quality of thinking and behaviour which in turn, affects organizational engagement, performance organizational settings, and employee engagement (Barsade, 2002; van Zomeren, Xiong & King, 2015).

In-depth interviews excerpts buttress findings that employee trust is important.

Top Management and Senior Management: W118: 'It seems everything which needs to be done is like a directive no involvement with everybody in the organization' W159: "It is very important to involve people, everyone would be on the same wavelength because they were part of the decision that was taken. W106: "Following directives from management on how work will be distributed, a lot of supervisors and some part of management and employees were disgruntled as they were not previously engaged". W127: "We had anticipated that there was going to be counselling of emotions as some employees had to be laid off as they did not fit into the envisaged structures".

Middle Management: W13 "As part of junior management and on the ground, I strongly believe that we should be consulted, with strategy implementation done by consultants without interference from management as legitimacy will prevail". W18: "It is always tense and the management feels staff is accusing them and management always find ways to elude issues of concern". W62: "It built trust between staff and the management". W157: "Restructuring, people were retrenched and not afforded counselling services." W113: "Loss of confidence in management as they had promised to fully consult and engage people during implementation, but nothing happened".

## LIABILITY OF DECISION MAKING AUTONOMY (LODMA)

The *liability of decision-making autonomy* relates to hindrances encountered in organizations by employees when the decision-making process is stifled of discretion, independence, freedom and authority in the execution of their primary tasks consequently rendering strategy implementation unsuccessful.

### Theme 1: Decision making responsiveness and empowerment

Middle Management stories shared reflected in figure 7 indicate that strategy implementation decisions were *delayed*, with both Top Management and Senior Management indicating that such decisions were *situation dependent* (decisions were taken to address a particular situation) and *decisive* (taken at the right time). Strategy implementation decision making is considered to be a process (ongoing) and not an event (once off), therefore the expectation is that, decisions to amend, terminate or introduce new changes ought to occur frequently and in an ordered fashion. It is imperative that whenever changes are anticipated, such information must be shared across the organization to ensure that everyone gets to appreciate any underlying issues and their impact. If decisions are not communicated timely throughout the organization, employees might find themselves pursuing their own agendas, and detracting from decisions necessary to facilitate effective performance and thereby making implementation patchy and sometimes contradictory (Walters et al., 2010). The critical decision-making assessment by the Case Corporation, should not only entail current or existing performance but also an understanding of long-term (Flanagin et al., 2014), assessment of its performance in conformance with its

objectives and modify its tools and strategies accordingly (Jain & Singal, 2014; Papagiannidis & Westlan, 2014).

Similarly, Top Management and Senior Management indicated that when they are confronted with a decision to address critical issues, they *acted intuitively* and *analysed the issues logically* as stated in figure 15. Middle Management insisted that they *thought deeply about the decision* when they acted to address the most critical things. It is generally accepted that the decision thinking and making process of Top Management and Senior Management could differ with that of Middle Management due to managerial intuition, exposure, decision making skills and strategic thinking. When decisions have to be made to address critical issues within the implementation process, these decisions could entail addressing issues of utmost importance in terms of lives, security and risk and this means, immediate action would be required with intuitive action and logical analysis of issues. The Case Corporation needs to have adequate goal definition, high capacity for demanding decision-making, to avoid abandonment of implementation strategies (Cater & Pucko, 2010) as this may produce irrational and unimplementable strategies (Aboutalebi, 2016b).

Additional stories contributed by Top Management and Senior Management collected through in-depth interviews shed more light.

Top Management and Senior Management: W115: "Having to rely or exchange information with fellow staff members who are doubtful and less conversant with the issues". W10: "I believe organizations should consider how strategy should be implemented, to make people feel and find out if they are comfortable working by or on such implementation initiatives". W89: "It is very good to involve people so that they share ideas on different views as we consider diversity important".

Middle Management: W46: "Poorly, the only implementation comes from management who are not whole heartedly interested in the organization, and ignore the input of workers who are well acquainted in the field". W157: "Important organizational decisions such as down-sizing should be conducted in a sensitive manner and such decisions should be communicated in time with those affected". W159: "They are very slow when it comes to dealing with situations they only fix a problem when it is causing more harm to the business".

## ***Theme 2: Balancing incompatible, varied and sometimes disorderly demands***

Top Management and Senior Management at 48% in figure 3, indicated that strategy implementation is aligned with organizational goals, with 25.6% represented by Middle Management indicating that it is aligned with the situation at the time. However, within the three levels of management, *organizational goals* and *situation at the time* were found to be important for strategy implementation. The divergence between Top Management and Senior Management regarding alignment can be viewed from various perspectives. Organizations doing business with multiple stakeholders usually are confronted with challenges to balance the varied and sometimes disorderly requests. At the strategy formulation phase efforts would have been made to align strategy with organizational goals, considering the available and always limited resources only for the influential and major stakeholders to vary the implementation process by seeking to address completely out of plan situations. These frequent incompatible demands, disagreements on governance issues (Da Silva & Trkman, 2014), offensive organizational policies Kaplan & Norton (2008), result in drastic decisions being undertaken which may affect the law and policies. This may ultimately thwart the strategy implementation.

Top Management and Senior Management: W7: "There was need for training to better understand to align strategy to goals for operations". W 15: "Active financial stability and sustainability". W62: "Opened my mind in achieving goals". W126: "Following strategy development, my section was well prepared as individuals were aligned to the organizational scorecard".

Middle Management: W54: "The organization has strategy in place but what seems to be the problem is the organization itself, implementation". W119: "Numerous strategies were implemented and if things were done well, we could be very far when it comes to good service delivery". W121: "When employees (people) are participants they own the strategy, and work hard to make it successful".

### Theme 3: Impairment in focus and timing

Indicators affecting strategy implementation are *teamwork*, *bureaucracy* and *lack of focus*. As depicted in figure 8, these have been found to be more pronounced at 42.9% with stories shared by all the three levels of management, indicating that teamwork is key to implementation. Middle Management stories are more pronounced at 33.5 % at the apices *lack of focus* indicating an anomaly that has to be addressed. Some 11.8% of all three levels of management indicated that *bureaucracy* has an influence on implementation. The Case Corporation may benefit from developing a focus in terms of what they want to achieve throughout their various strategic choices because lack of plan for planning, confusion over planning terms, strategy by numbers, too much detail too soon, and once-a-year ritual planning may frustrate strategy implementation (Mc Donald & Westbal, 2011, Chatain, 2014). Issues of poor preparation of line management, the faulty definition of strategic business units, and excessive focus on numbers could be indicators pointing to the organizational perception of lack of focus, which ought to be fully investigated within Case Corporation (Chatain, 2014; Wang & Shaver, 2014).

During the implementation process, critical changes might need to be made in order to align to the requirements both within the internal and external environment necessitating adjustments into the plans and thereby giving the process an increased life cycle. Timing the implementation process becomes vital in that; reflections have to be made on how we used to undertake the process (past experiences), which informs the present situation giving insights on how best to proceed into the future. In figure 18, Top Management and Senior Management shared stories that strategy implementation is a process which uses experiences and insights of the *past* to determine the *future*, deciding not to share *present* or *current* stories. Middle Management indicated that the *present* experiences and insights are seen as critical to enhance implementation success. However, the balanced or ideal sharing of stories could have been concentrated in the middle of the triads, which would recognise the importance of using *past* experiences and insights, exploiting the *present* condition and further forecasting and make plans into the *future*. Creating a strategy implementation environment for Case Corporation needs a well-ingrained corporate culture within the organization, as well as managerial education for managers (D'Aunno, 2005), and employees with professional education and training to enhance engagement and improve decision-making necessary for strategy implementation to thrive (Paton & Wagner, 2014; Sila, 2013).

In-depth interviews shared important insights and understanding.

Top Management and Senior Management: W1: "Change of goal posts along the way". W124: "Makes it more focused". W7: "Team work influenced the strategy implementation". W46: "Poorly, the only implementation comes from management who are not whole heartedly interested in the organization, and ignore the input of workers who are well acquainted in the field". W1: "Poor implementation timing". W54: "My feeling is that everybody should be involved right from the beginning and throughout the whole process so that we can have a sense of ownership".

Middle Management: W41: "It is very shady and never given the necessary attention as focus seems to be the problem". W149: I feel the implementation is ever changing and therefore a need for continuous re-focus. The objective seem to be more concerned about pleasing certain individuals instead of treating employees as a team". W126: "Generally, discussions on the strategy are infrequent spending too much time on operations". W15: "Customer satisfaction, performance and delivering of products and services is enhanced". W78: "Involvement is key as it leads to buy-in; employees complain that consultation was inadequate. For example, during restructuring, this was arrived at by swinging the strategy development session to management and board".

### Theme 4: Required critical competencies, tactics underpinned by guidance and direction

The question in figure 9 sought to confirm whether the key skills and the ability to implement strategy depends more on *understanding business*, respondent's *professional learned skills* or just *natural ability* or other indicators. Top Management and Senior Management indicated and emphasized the importance of *understanding business* during the implementation process with Middle Management confirming that *professional learned skills* and *natural ability* are similarly important. Effectively, Top Management and Senior Management contributed 69 stories (40.35%)

clustered towards the apex *understanding business*, with Middle Management contributing 25 stories (14.62%) clustering towards the apex *professional learned skills*, with all the story tellers contributing 19 stories (11%) clustering towards the apex *natural ability*. Since all the three levels of Management have confirmed the importance of all the three indicators, it stands to reason that, ideally stories could have been shared in the middle of the triad to signify this. The Case Corporation could unravel the complexity of policy implementation to facilitate direct decision-making authority and participation, improve and expedite communication channels across the organization and further ensure that the working conditions are conducive (MacLenna, 2011; Anderson & Vakulenko, 2014).

Focusing on the effectiveness of leadership, stories shared by Top Management and Senior Management is shown in figure 10, indicated that leadership appeared *open-minded* during the implementation process. Middle Management, however, indicated that the leadership appeared *conservative* and this had the effect of distracting the implementation process. In essence, Top Management and Senior Management mostly contributed 81 stories (48.21%) clustered towards the apex *open-minded*, with Middle Management mostly contributing 43 stories (25.60%) clustered towards the apex *conservative*, with all the story tellers collectively contributing 15 stories (8.93%) clustered between the apices *open-minded* and *conservative*. In-depth interviews shed more light on the role leadership played during the process of strategy implementation. The role of Case Corporation leadership is to ensure that there is clear and effective direction necessary to share the organizational strategy including clarifying important issues relating to strategy formulation and implementation (Park & Jang, 2014).

In-depth interview findings added another layer of new meaning to dyads and triads.

Top Management and Senior Management: W11: "Conversant, I trust my supervisees are not very fluent in English and mostly themes are in English". W124: "The geographical spread of the operations of the corporation requires concerted effort and specialised skills of management". W116: "Through determination and hard work, the water laboratory gained international accreditation". W50: "Challenges include constant feedback top, bottom and celebrating achievement of goals and milestones". W131: "Project supervision for successful completion is seriously lacking". W62: "The new CEO encouraged employees throughout the organization that we adopt and implement the strategic management system in place, even though it took time and with resistance the ball is now rolling".

Middle Management: W15: "Attract develop and retain talent to ensure effective knowledge management to employees". W10: "I feel they somehow leave those staff members who possess the skills and knowledge of what is being implemented". W41: "Unfortunately, we are not empowered to participate in projects and therefore, how are we expected to gain experience". W18: "There is lack of ownership and the organization does not want to pay in order to attract competent and qualified personnel and the best". W18: "It is still not well executed because the CEO and Top Management always present new strategy which never get implemented". W38: "We were only involved during cascading after that, everything stopped maybe the problem is with management".

### **Theme 5: Managing human capital with diverse perspectives**

Normally people would want to be recognised for the work they do, failing which they would disengage due to demotivation. Appreciation is a fundamental human need, and once employees are recognised, their self-esteem, satisfaction and productivity increase. In figure 24, Top Management stories shared indicated that employees were not perceived as *objects*, but as *people*. Similarly, Senior Management also perceived employees as *people*, with Middle Management taking a different stand indicating that they were not necessarily perceived as people but rather as *objects*. There might have been numerous factors associated with this anomaly, some of which could be that normally not all employees participate in strategy formulation, even though a large number of them are required to execute it; lack of engagement in decision making, lack of support, and lack of ownership of the process has the potential to hinder progress. Engaged employees give their organization an edge with greater emphasis on the positive relationship between engaged and recognised employees. The important reasons put forward for enhancing organizational performance find their roots in strategy implementation non-success due to insufficient resources, particularly the required skills and knowledge from the human capital (Nienaber & Martins, 2016).



At the same time in figure 26, Top Management stories confirmed that differences on how to implement strategy were *emphasized*, with Senior Management also concurring with their view. Possibly, there could be strategies in place to ensure that *diversity* is encouraged in the workplace such that during the process of implementation, employees would be afforded the latitude to deal with issues as they saw fit and control on how best they managed their work. Middle Management's stories shared indicated that differences on how to implement strategy were *ignored completely*. There could be several reasons for this variation, either that the implementation process itself was not properly communicated, autonomy and independence to execute the process were centralised, employees were not granted 'ownership' of the projects.

In-depth interviews contributed more narratives which assisted in addressing the human capital question.

Top Management and Senior Management: W10: "I believe organizations should consider how that has been implemented, make people feel and find out if they are comfortable working by or on such implementation initiatives". W46: "Very little unity was achieved, the staff were a very vital part in the functioning of the organization but were not treated with, as much respect as they should have been". W171: "Management was interacting perfectly only other supervisors told the staff to come back to their normal duties". W1: "Proper explanation of the intended outcome of the project in an open discussion form". W10: "Often times it is just delivered and not allowing those who are instructed to voice their opinions".

Middle Management: W72: "Cannot say such because juniors are never involved". W46: "Very little interaction between the staff were just delegated duties to do". W64: "The management at head office do not interact with staff". W76: "People feel very happy and very important". W10: "Often times it is just delivered and not allowing those who are instructed to voice their opinions". W151: "It helps a lot because more people will bring their ideas which may be of great importance to the organization". W151: "It was welcomed and everyone showed interest on offering and having a helping hand in the implementation process".

## **LIABILITY OF PERCEIVED INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT (LOPIS)**

The *liability of perceived institutional support* may be defined as the hindrances, inabilities, uncertainty and the unavailability of resources (economic, financial, expertise, information resources, authority and legitimacy, strategic position and organizational capacity) and any other required support geared towards ensuring that the various activities necessary to achieve strategy implementation are available.

### **Theme 1: Responsibility clarity, information sharing and its availability**

In understanding the story regarding who the responsibility of strategy implementation belongs to in figure 2, most stories were shared towards the apex *everyone*, and these were contributed by Top Management and Senior Management, with those clustered towards the apex *management* contributed by Middle Management. The perception by Top Management and Senior Management is that the *responsibility* for strategy implementation lies squarely with *everyone* in the organization. Some 31 stories (18%) have been shared between the two apices of *everyone* and *management*, which means that some respondents within the three categories above, shared similar stories that the responsibility for strategy implementation is both the work for *everyone* and *management*. The Case Corporation organizational structure constitutes the chain of command for the detailed responsibilities and decision-making levels in the organization, thus has a great influence on the process of strategy implementation as well as articulating the jobs and duties which have to be undertaken (Chatain, 2014; Wang & Shaver, 2014). An inappropriate organizational structure may cause frustration because of the disconnection that might be experienced between the lower and functional levels within the organization (Friesl & Silberzahn, 2012; Martin & To, 2013).

Similarly, Top Management responses, as indicated in figure 23, depicts that information sharing was *sufficient*, while Senior Management indicated that information sharing was generally, *way too much*. Too much information during this process could lead to information overload and subsequent confusion as directives and information memos might not even be understood. Excessive and irrelevant information might delay evaluation and processing of decisions necessary

to enhance implementation capabilities. Employees might have challenges in understanding issues when dealing with more information than they are able to process and make irrational decisions and even make wrong costly decisions. This calls for organizational leadership to create information sources, which are simplified, filtered to make them shorter, written clearly, and focusing on quality information relevant to enhance strategy implementation. Middle Management stories were skewed towards being *more* and *being too little* indicating that *inadequate information* was available to effectively execute the implementation processes. This has the effect of frustrating employees as they would not be empowered to make decisions and this might be an indicator that information sharing across the Case Corporation could be a challenge and therefore a 'grey area' that could have to been investigated and addressed. Case Corporation could rely on important dimensions such as symbolic actions, which may include celebrating success, rewarding performance, ceremonies, and past success stories being told and retold; these could reinforce employee engagement and cohesiveness (Lorange, 1996).

Excerpts from in-depth interviews enriched the dyads and triads.

Top Management and Senior Management: W1: "Implementation needs to be owned first by those on the level to enable easy of cascading". W 145: "Ownership and accountability should be everyone's' business for the success of implementation". W121: "It is not fairly communicated across the whole organization. W136: "There is a gap in the implementation, continuous monitoring and evaluation lacking". W2: "Sufficient information is being shared between the parties involved. W11: "Through briefing, videos and colourful stickers and placards". W 11: "Emails and circulars, yes always sharing". W 8: "Memos, emails". W115: "Yes, effective communication enhanced even by provision of cell phone gadgets". W 141: "Meetings in different localities and internal staff workshop". W 141: "Information flow to lower levels is not always smooth".

Middle Management include: W18: "It is poor and haphazard there is no ownership from lower level employees." W125: "Not all employees were carried on board. There is lack of communication". W134: "Strategy implementation seem to be a concern to management and the rest of the organization is left behind which makes it difficult to buy in and drive the strategy". It is not fairly communicated across the whole organization. W33: "Not much education is done". W83: "A lot of us in the organization need to be educated on strategy and what it means for them and the organization because currently the perception is that strategy is for a certain group of people in the organization".

## Theme 2: Resource allocation, protocol and compliance

In figure 5, the perceived level of allocation of resources during implementation was signified as *insufficient*, *abundant* and *skewed in distribution*. The three levels of management responded differently to the statement regarding the allocation of resources within Case Corporation. Middle Management indicated that the allocation of resources had been *insufficient* at 52.9%, with Top Management and Senior Management collectively agreeing that the allocation was *abundant* at 39.5%, with at least 4.5% of all the three levels of management agreeing that it is *sufficient*. However, Middle Management indicated in their story that the allocation of resources in the implementation process was generally *insufficient*. Existing difficulties within the Case Corporation related to resources, which may hamper strategy implementation, must be fully explored to avoid 'management denial' defined as the failure to acknowledge the existence of challenges facing the organization in respect of any other difficulty including resource allocation (Backer & Barry, 2013; Hathroubi, Peypoch & Robinot, 2014).

Concerning issues of 'protocol and compliance' as shown in figure 11, Top Management and Senior Management indicated that they considered the implementation rules, processes being *flexible* at 43.7%, with Middle Management indicating that they were *undefined and uncertain* with 26%, also shared stories at the apex at 11.6% confirming that they were somehow *heavy handed*. Many possibilities exist to explain the stories shared by Middle Management. The statement sought to confirm the 'lived' experiences of the respondents, in terms of how they viewed implementation *rules, processes and procedures*. The challenge posed regarding the Case Corporation rules and tools for regulation in an attempt to comply, emanates from the principal (Government) regarding policy, which can always be amended as and when conditions arise including legislation which has to be complied with. Effecting changes within the Case Corporation strategy process is of critical importance as conditions might have changed necessitating such; failure to act might lead to non-success (Aurik, Fabel & Jonk, 2015).

In-depth interviews sharing issues on resource allocation, protocol and compliance.

Top Management and Senior Management: W8: "Strategy is available but very limited resources have been committed". W11: "I do not think the strategy project was a success due to financial constraints". W 141: "Lack of funding for effective implementation of the strategy". W137: "One challenge pertains to resource constraints and the strategy is sometimes shelved and focus is on business as usual. W112: "Strategy implementation is reflected in the scorecard, which is to be reviewed monthly". W141: "Balance score card and quality management system at DWA".

Middle Management: W8: "Strategy is available but very limited resources have been committed". W124: "Resource allocation is a challenge". W100: "Slow to act probably due to financial constraints". W 38: "The already limited resources are at times diverted to other issues which are not core to the business." W35: "The organization has to find ways to augment the available meagre resources through other sources. W142: "The roles are not clear and not communicated extensively to the masses". W138: "My experience was with the implementation of prepaid water metering systems strategy for the disadvantaged members of the public in 2013-2014 where procedures and processes were rather inconsistent and confusing".

### **Theme 3: Nurturing and embracing the spirit of selflessness**

Stories shared by the three levels of management as seen in figure 12, seem scattered towards the three apices and the middle of the triad, and this may be an indication of diversity in stories. Middle Management stories concentrated at 26.3% towards the *customer* apex indicating that customers benefit from the implementation process, whilst Top Management and Senior Management indications are that *shareholders* seem to be the preferred candidates to benefit from implementation at 37.7%. Mixed stories contributed by all the three levels of management were realised at the centre of the triad with 14.2%, indicating that the *customer*, *shareholders* and *employees* stand to benefit in the process of implementation. Employees' perceptions differ in terms of how they view their contribution to their organizations and this is underpinned by the understanding of their roles. Many employees are unaware of the vital roles they play in contributing to the achievement of their organizational goals and objectives, neither do they appreciate the role played by other stakeholders within their business such as shareholders and customers and the collective roles each has to play to enhance the prospects of implementation success. In delivering its mandate, the expectation is that the corporation has to ensure that every party is satisfied with the delivery of its products and services to ensure that the purpose of its existence is to offer products and services to customers, as well as create employment and wealth are achieved (Goldman, Nienaber & Pretorius, 2015). Middle Managers as internal stakeholders play a pivotal role during the process of employee engagement when there are disagreements on sub-goals with Top Management, especially where the former might not be aware of confidential information shared with the major stakeholder regarding certain action needed to address an emergent political question (Chang & Wu, 2014).

Stories contributed by Top Management and Senior Management from in-depth interviews enriched both the triad and dyad data.

Top Management and Senior Management: W8: "Strategy implementation within CASE CORPORATION is influenced by the objectives government intends to achieve". W50: "Communication between the various departments and the general public seem to be lacking". W62: "Strategy implementation at my organization has been a great experience since it has opened, minds of both staff and management and the organization serve customer best and most goals are met in time".

Middle Management: W166: "I judge strategy as a cost-benefit process to the organization as it brought efficiency". W64: "It is important because we must work as a team and we at the bottom are the ones who know the operations and interact with stakeholders and customers on daily basis". W64: "The management is quick to blame us at the lower levels. They will not want to consider our views on issue we consider important but rather will be quick to respond, without even considering contributions from stakeholders or customers".

### **Theme 4: Implementation landscape and process systemisation**

Figure 21 indicates that Top Management contention is that external factors affecting implementation seem *predictable* - predictability and stability with outside factors affecting implementation, indicating the no opportunity for complacency and therefore no 'red flags' are

necessary as everything seems to be under control. Senior Management's response was similar to Top Management as they indicated that external factors affecting implementation seem *predictable*. This consensus could be an indication that, they are aware of strategies in place within the organization to mitigate against any uncertainties. Middle Management stories seem to indicate that they are not content with outside factors affecting implementation and therefore consider them *most unpredictable*- reveals an excess of unpredictable and chaotic external factors, so much excessive and dangerous in proportions. To address this seemingly contradictory situation, either Middle Management lack the knowledge and information privy to both Top Management and Senior Management by virtue of their seniority or that action needs to be taken to address this anomaly.

Top Management and Senior Management stories shared reflected in figure 13, which indicate that the prospects and the understanding of implementation into the future entail *imagining existing possibilities*, whilst Middle Management indicated that *strengthening systems* should be the route the organization has to follow. The differences in thinking could be attributed to the levels of job roles and responsibilities, as it is accepted that the role of Top Management and Senior Management entails the management of strategy hence their varied perception into the future by *imagining possibilities*, whilst Middle Management roles are operational in nature, hence inwardly looking into strengthening systems. The ideal scenario could have been in the apex and middle indicator *imagining existing possibilities and strengthening systems* where most stories ought to have been shared to signify the importance and relevance of 'peeping' into the future to see which opportunities could be exploited and simultaneously strengthening the systems already in place. It would not be advisable to retain the *status quo*, except to use story telling and re-telling to reinforce the implementation process. It is critical that the Case Corporation embarks on the process of revising its strategy choices through strong top and line management support, with a convergence in the operational and the strategic planning (Mc Donald & Westphal, 2011), the view being to enhance its administrative and control systems.

Contributions by Top Management, Senior Management and Middle Management seem to tally with information obtained from dyads and triads.

Top Management and Senior Management: W172: "Increase in tariffs- so many complaints from customers because of the bill brought by change in tariffs". W 18: "Financial pressure to undertake projects coming as emergencies as directed by the shareholder". W162: "Political interference where representatives of various political parties would want to be given preference when programmes are undertaken." W138: "Middle managers and line managers were less keen in participating in this implementation exercise. It proved difficult for them to learn new systems that were a major problem". W138: "This is a water utility parastatal- the responsiveness to general business situations is very low due to the size of the organization".

Middle Management: W15: "Development of infrastructure and improving efficiency". W134: "As the organization is providing essential service, business situations are understood well and the challenges coming with them are dealt with accordingly though they are sometimes beyond the organizations control". W136: "The challenges which face the organization mostly are political which deter the organization from implementing the strategy and most of the time will be spent on overcoming the anticipated challenges because of pressure from the public". W18: "If people own the strategy, the company grows, e.g. apple, Facebook, Google etc." W38: "The management consults the staff during cascading. There are no follow ups or updates of progress".

### Theme 5: *Esprit de corps*

Case Corporation employees reacted, by sharing their experiences and stories on the concept of *esprit de corps*- a feeling of pride and mutual loyalty shared by members within the organization, about what they think the future should be regarding the process of strategy implementation. Whether employees should be concerned if the various processes, plans and requirements necessary to attain successful implementation are accordingly discussed and effected within the implementation process. Top Management stories in figure 20 indicated that they were *concerned* when the strategy implementation process was not proceeding according to set out plans. Senior Management stories in overall showed that they were *more concerned* if the plan set

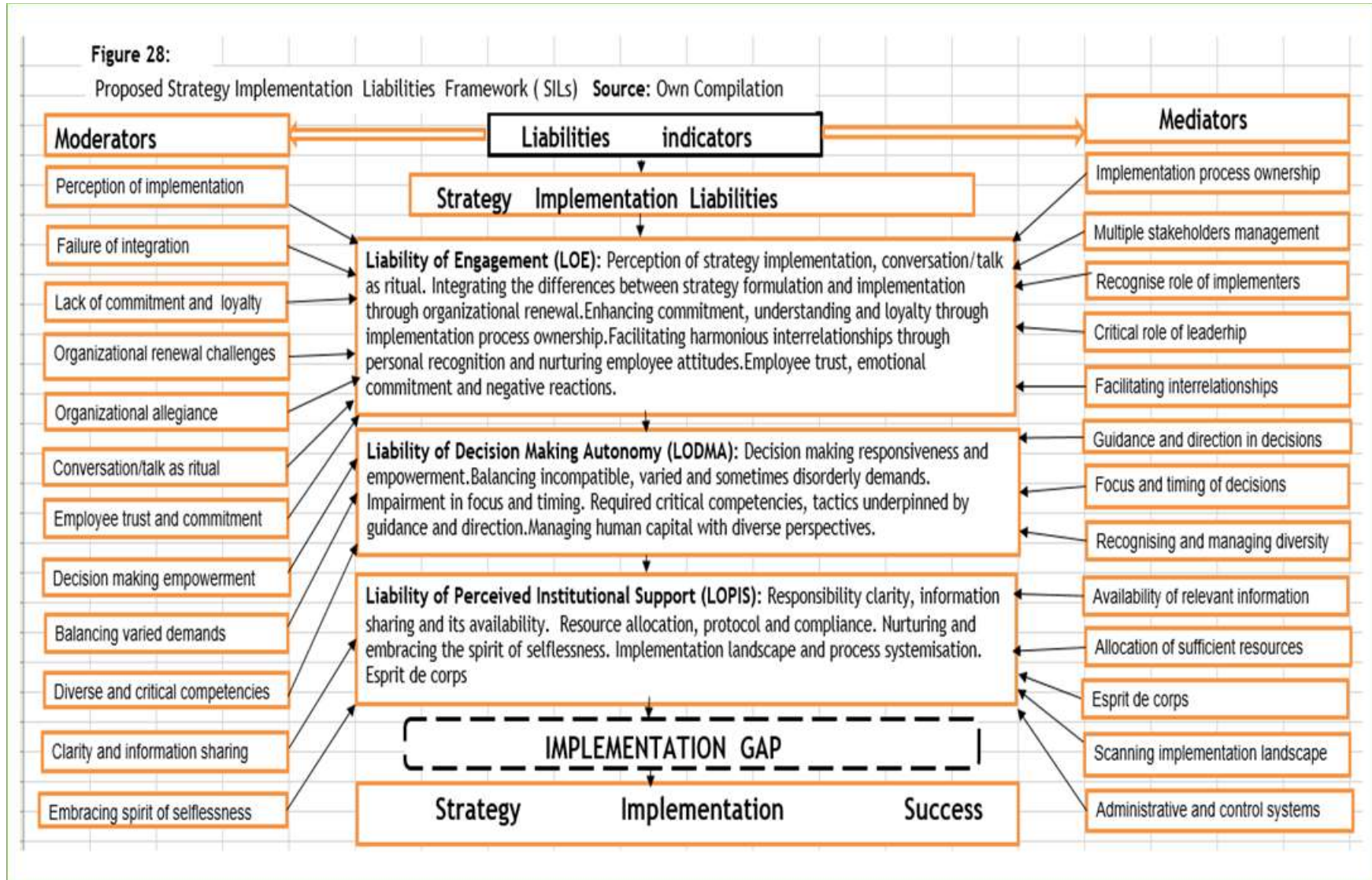
for the strategy choices were not addressed, with Middle Management showing a very *high level of concern*. All these may be taken to be bothering on what might be called organizational allegiance-employees' commitment and loyalty to the cause the organization is pursuing. There are numerous issues affecting Middle Management that have the potential to motivate or demotivate employees in executing their work to achieve success in organizational goals (Shantz, Alfes & Truss, 2012). It is therefore critical that Middle Management is aware of treatment towards the employees, specifically with respect to fairness, providing independence to employees, and clarifying expectations (Nienaber & Martins, 2016).

In-depth interviews shared by Top Management, Senior Management and Middle Management went a long way in trying to bring clarity to the research question.

Top Management and Senior Management: W145: "Audit reports enacting findings and recommendations of how efficiently to improve, and how internal processes are not fully adhered to." W46: "I was allowed to bring forth ideas but nothing came of it even though they were good ideas. There was lack of will to follow through, I ended up being demoralized". W152: "It is very crucial to involve people because after all the strategy being implemented is for their benefit. As south is far from north so is the people and those implementing the strategy?"

Middle Management: W13:" At my workplace strategy implementation is still in progress, it is moving at snail pace because of the numerous reasons experienced in the organization". W38: "The management consults the staff during cascading. There are no follow ups or updates of progress". W41: "Not applicable as we are not empowered to participate in projects and therefore, how are we expected to gain experience". W46: "Some management would get upset when we started looking for employment elsewhere".

All the themes identified from this research which have been discussed were encapsulated into the proposed Strategy Implementation Liabilities Framework (SILs) in figure 28 depicts the three main broad sets of liabilities identified: 'Liability of Engagement' (LOE), 'Liability of Decision Making Autonomy' (LODMA), and the 'Liability of Perceived Institutional Support' (LOPIS).



## Conclusions

Findings and their discussions have highlighted critical issues arising from hindrances and inabilities encountered within the strategy implementation process. *Practical recommendations* and contributions from this research study are now discussed in detail below:

### ***Liability of Engagement***

Organizational leadership ought to consider *engagement* as a driver to enhance strategy implementation. This action must be underpinned by what the organization intends to achieve (purpose) and the ultimate (long-term) goals and objectives in order to avert the liability of engagement. Employee engagement becomes complete if *employee voice policies* are entrenched in an organization as this enables them to effectively communicate to the management, both positive and negative experiences encountered in the work situation. Strategy formulation and implementation ought to be considered simultaneously to ensure that synergy between the two processes are integrated with employees engaged at both levels of decision-making, during goal setting and execution. To improve the effectiveness of employee commitment, The Case Corporation could rely on *affective commitment*, which is an emotional attachment to, as well as identification and involvement with the organization by employees, to enhance antecedents of work engagement. Consultations on the *responsibility for changes* in the work environment must be engaged on and ought to involve a wide array of employees within the organization. These consultations should clarify when the change should be done, why it should be done, by whom, how, and where. Managing attitudes between employees, units and departments pose the greatest challenge in the organization, especially where there is less or no culture of working in teams and group cohesiveness. Strategy formulation and implementation ought to be embraced as the culture of continuous *conversations and talk* across the organization to enhance employee engagement and commitment. Important dimensions such as symbolic actions, which are the most important means of reinforcing strategy implementation could be relied upon. Low levels of *trust* seem to be a daunting task for the organization to tackle and the root cause of this could be emanating from numerous sources such as ingrained organizational culture, lack of consultation, lack of transparency and recognition.

### ***Liability of Decision-Making Autonomy***

The liability of decision-making autonomy ought to be averted through the *decentralisation* of the decision-making process and that organizational members, units, and departments need to be afforded the opportunity to take part in determining the future of their organization. *Responsiveness* to amend, terminate or introduce new changes ought to occur frequently in an ordered fashion. Whenever changes are anticipated, information must be shared across the organization such that everyone gets to appreciate any underlying issues and their impact. Case Corporation similar to public institutions is confronted with numerous, frequent, *disorderly and incompatible demands* from a series of external actors. This calls for a framework within the law and policy to make clear some set of priorities and outcome objectives from which to work with to avert 'destructive noise' and hindrances. The essential, *critical competencies and tactics* of understanding business, professional learned skills, and natural ability are the necessary ingredients for effective strategy implementation. The challenge is now for the Case Corporation management to ensure that these are infused into the work of strategy right from formulation up to implementation as they influence the 'organizational thinking and action' termed 'implementation tactics'. To avert or mitigate the liability of 'decision-making empowerment', Case Corporation might consider autonomous processes, procedures and protocols in decision-making across the organization, and ensure that the procedural justice of strategy formulation is entirely undertaken. Case Corporation could put in place strategies to *encourage diversity* in the workplace where during the process of implementation, employees could be afforded the latitude to deal with issues as they see fit and therefore have control on how best they can manage their work. *Recognition of people*, their treatment with the utmost respect and dignity are key in building self-esteem, satisfaction, increasing productivity and building good working relationships.

## ***Liability of Perceived Institutional Support (LOPIS)***

Case Corporation might have to acknowledge that, organizational *information*, its *availability* and communication plays an important role in training, knowledge dissemination and learning during the process of strategy implementation and the absence of all these is an ingredient for disaster.

To better clarify, simplify and address the issue of *responsibility clarity* of either strategy formulation or implementation, praxis could be explored to provide guidance. These are socially accomplished flows of activity that strategically are consequential for the direction and survival of the Case Corporation. Information on the *organizational resource capacity* and the actual resources at the disposal of the organization should be a subject of discussion when employees are engaged to execute strategy assignments, to enable them to have meaningful participation, appreciate the number of resources at their disposal so that they can be fully responsible for their actions and 'own' the projects knowing quite well what is at their disposal. The strategizing process within Case Corporation needs to go beyond the organization since there are multiple players such as consultants, policy makers, and competitors who might assist with practices applied in the organizations whose strategies they analyze, critique, enact, develop, and change, thereby *infusing plurality of actors*. Organizational engagement within the Case Corporation could be enhanced through the development of what is usually referred to as *high-involvement management* and each partnership sector to show the spirit of selflessness. In addressing the challenges of *unpredictable environment factors*, Case Corporation could rely on the institutional theory perspectives, and appreciate that any strategic choice an organization intends to undertake is limited by a variety of external environmental pressures. The Case Corporation can reinforce *esprit de corps* through employee engagement at three levels namely: organizational contribution- through the creation of an environment with open communication channels, trusted leadership, and promotion of diversity in decision making.

Conclusions enunciated from the above depict that organizations are unaware that they experience hindrances and inabilities in their quest to implement their strategy choices. Strategy implementation is still regarded as an afterthought in the field of strategic management and this is a serious oversight because if these are not removed from beneficial processes of business, organizations would fail to maximise economic rents.

## **Recommendations to the literature**

The Case Corporation employees have not been aware that they may be failing because they retain many *destructive holdings* and *processes*, because in many instances, they may only be examining the positive influences at strategy implementation in their quest to implement their strategy choices. Implementation gaps have been identified through the literature and the research undertaken. This research has established that the experiences shared by story tellers/ respondents through narrative-based research are crucial for better understanding of strategy implementation. The experiences shared culminated in the identification of three set of liabilities; Liability of Engagement (LOE), Liability of Decision Making Autonomy (LODMA) and Liability of Perceived Institutional Support (LOPIS). There is a resounding call to Top Management, Senior Management and Middle Management that these experienced liabilities be objectively assessed to evaluate strategy as they have the potential to negatively influence the organization's performance at strategy implementation.

The assessment and evaluation process could include:

- Identification and definition of these negative implementation factors;
- Evaluation of the identified negative factors interrelationships.
- An in-depth examination of the 'conception' and 'birth' of these factors, to enable organizations better avert or mitigate their impact;
- Facilitation of the exploration of the context-dependency of these identified implementation liabilities and;



- Effective utilisation of this proposed theoretical framework for the management of these liabilities.

## Future research

This research has opened the way for further investigation into strategy implementation utilizing the liabilities approach, to determine the impact of liabilities and how they could be mitigated to achieve positive organizational performance. Academics and researchers could introduce new powerful and pragmatic liabilities frameworks, models and tools to address negative factors (liabilities) experienced during implementation. This study has better identified, described, explained and illuminated the understanding of new insights into these *negative factors, influences, destructive holdings and processes* known as *liabilities*, encountered during implementation, by identifying, describing and developing a Strategy Implementation Liabilities Framework (as shown in Figure 28, page 32). This framework has the potential to enable us to determine why organizations experience non-success or low levels of achievement.

Opportunities to explore the liabilities approach, which has so far been neglected, though with the potential to address numerous strategy implementation challenges faced by organizations, exist and this could be an area of priority for future research in strategic management. The critical area of future research could entail testing of the existence or prevalence of these *Strategy Implementation Liabilities* in other organizational settings and use the proposed theoretical framework as a guideline. The strength of the correlations between these liabilities could be determined in order to identify those liabilities which might be considered to be critical, as this will enable management to address as a matter of priority. This means that the interrelationships between these identified liabilities and the extent to which they may affect the organization should be investigated. The possibility of identifying and recognizing liabilities at the strategy formulation process (strategy formulation liabilities) could be an option, such that these are noted at strategy implementation where processes could be put in place either to remove them or mitigate their strength.

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