The role of employees’ commitment to “Must-wins” strategy implementation

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Helsinki

2013
Title of Thesis:
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Abstract:
Strategic management academics and practitioners are increasingly aware of the value of looking at strategy practices such as those involved in strategy implementation, because strategies are ultimately implemented through people and their actions. Commitment to strategy implementation can yield action, motivation and sticking with efforts to implement organizations’ chosen strategies. However in the strategy implementation context, commitment has previously been studied mainly on an organizational level or tangentially as it relates to employee identification. This thesis thus aims to examine and clarify commitment on an individual level that is applicable to specific strategic targets and practices.

To this end, Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield’s (2012) workplace commitment model is linked to making sense of commitment in the implementation of a set of strategic goals termed “Must-wins” at a large Finnish industrial technology and service provider.

Grounded theory analysis of the qualitative interview findings yielded further understanding of the role of commitment on an individual level and how it can be strengthened in MNC’s strategy implementation. The analysis particularly points to managers’ responsibility to be steadfast rather than faltering in the strategy process, and to provide sensegiving communication; the need for employees to reach cognitive clarity about the strategy, through understanding the strategy content and big picture, but also concretizing it to their day-to-day work, and the value of simplification therein; and ultimately also to individuals’ own responsibility and choice in creating commitment.

The wider significance of the thesis rests in its clarification of employee’s commitment in a way that can be increasingly practical and relevant to strategy implementation, and in exploring some of the principles and practices involved in individuals choosing to be committed to implementing a strategy in an MNC.

Keywords:
Workplace commitment; strategy-as-practice; strategic management
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Thank you Ina, Timo, Lauri, Laura, and Wille for caring no matter what.

Thank you to the friends, classmates and professors at Hanken who made the past year and a half such an engaged and rewarding learning experience. Particular thanks to Henrika Franck, my thesis supervisor, for encouraging me along with the thesis, and Saku Mantere, who made strategy interesting and learning inspired.

Thank you to my colleagues at Metso’s Group Strategy. You are an uplifting, fun bunch. Particular thanks to Kalle Reponen for letting me choose a topic I’m interested in and supporting me in the thesis process, to Eva Halla for encouraging me and keeping me accountable with deadlines, to Michael Hoven and Hutan Vesuna for giving me the flexibility to take care of both work and school, and to Ville Kuusela for the coffee and reflection breaks that helped me keep moving forward.

I’m also very grateful to all the interviewees. Thank you for giving of yourselves and your time.
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1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis aims to demonstrate the link of individuals’ commitment, which has mostly been researched in organizational behavior literature, to the practical work of strategy implementation, a subset of strategic management. When looking at the actions and practices of employees in implementing strategies, commitment is interesting because it leads to effort and motivation on behalf of, and sticking with, what one is committed to (Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield 2012). Individual employees being committed to implementing a given strategy, then, would influence the effort expanded on behalf of that implementation. It can therefore play a powerful background role in strategy implementation. Having established the link theoretically, the thesis then empirically explores commitment in the implementation of a particular strategy at a particular multinational organization. Doing so starts to open up further understanding about how individual commitment works in this context within strategic management.

This opening chapter strives to impart the reader with an overview of the context of the research. It is structured in three parts. In the first part, I discuss the background underlying this research. In the second, I lay out the research aims that guided the study. Finally, I present an overview of the structure and flow of the thesis.

The personal motive for this thesis rests on the confluence of two factors. First, during my studies I became enthusiastic about strategic management research. The emergent strategy-as-practice stream of research especially caught my attention, with its practical role of giving credence to what it is that strategy practitioners actually do. I am interested in what people are and do in large multinational organizations. Second, I started working as a trainee in the Group Strategy department of a large Finnish industrial machinery MNC prior to setting out on this research. The organization had been engaged in implementing a strategic approach termed “Must-wins” for the past year. While I was not directly involved in the strategy’s implementation, I was kindly afforded a wonderful opportunity in terms of research access.

1.1. Background

At the time of writing this in 2012, by perusing the annual reports or ‘Investor Relations’ web-pages of most any modern, large publicly-listed multinational corporation, one will be faced with statements regarding ‘mission’, ‘vision’, ‘targets’ and ‘values’, etc. These tend to be artifacts or phenomena of strategic management.
Indeed, concepts from strategic management have increasingly become embedded in the management of large for-profit organizations. One might wonder, though, what the deeper reality beyond such artifacts is: what are people in organizations actually doing in terms of orienting themselves to such strategy phenomena, or in terms of putting them into practice?

In strategic management literature – an increasingly significant area of academic research especially since the 1980’s (Johnson, Langley, Melin & Whittington 2007) – the sheer volume of research on the role of strategy formulation and strategic planning has overshadowed that of implementing strategies. Yet academics in the field, starting with Mintzberg (1971a), have made seminal contributions that have directed attention to the significance of the practice of strategy, strategies’ implementation/execution, and what actually happens in organizations, including the processes engaged in at multiple levels of the organization (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel 1998). The work of these scholars has contributed a welcome broadening of research focus and sample selection beyond e.g. top management.

Strategy-as-practice, a more specialized stream of strategic management research still, has emerged in recent years. It has at its core the idea of researching what actually is done by strategy practitioners. This pragmatic approach returns strategic management to its process traditions. Strategy is thus re-conceptualized as being concerned with what managers do, rather than something which organizations statically have (Johnson et al., 2007). Strategy can then relinquish its impersonal role as a property of an organization and instead be seen as an activity. Researchers can zoom in on an organization from the macro level to the micro level, where an unending array of action is always going on. Strategy stops being exclusively interested in the fate of a company as a whole, but also takes an interest people’s practical performance as they engage with strategies (Johnson et al. 2007). Strategic management research thus “recovers the old sensitivity to the real predicaments of people in their strategy making”, thus concretizing researchers’ role and wider responsibility to not only “aid managers in their strategic thinking, but to help improve strategic management practice” (Johnson et al. 2007: 6).

A significant way in which people at multiple levels of organizations engage with strategies is in their efforts to implement strategic goals, directions, programs, initiatives, etc. By striving to understand how people are engaging in such ways, research might contribute by illuminating and understanding potentially preferable
and less-preferable practices. By examining why people are engaging in such ways or alternatively but also significantly, not engaging, an understanding of appropriate conditions might emerge that could potentially inform strategy implementation practice. Such conditions might include for example structural, attitudinal, behavioral, etc. factors, across many organizational levels, such as individuals, groups and whole organizations. While organizations are often seen as unique and evolving process-oriented entities, perhaps practitioners can nevertheless somewhat influence the relevant conditions if they come to know some of the underlying operating principles.

For this thesis, I conduct an exploration on the role of commitment in implementing strategies. Specifically, I conduct the study at Metso Corporation, a Finnish organization that is using the “Must-wins” approach in order to drive its strategy and its implementation.

Johnson et al. (2007: 57) suggest that “if a researcher is short of ideas for good research questions, strategy practitioners can undoubtedly contribute useful suggestions”. After discussion with Metso’s senior VP of strategy (personal interview 2012), reading interviews and presentation slides regarding KONE’s implementation of Must-wins, Killing & Malnight’s (2005) emphasis on driving emotional commitment in their “Must-Win Battles” book, discussion with my thesis supervisor, and based on my personal research interest, commitment to implementing Metso’s Must-Win strategies emerged as the focal point of research.

“Must-Win Battles” as an approach generally consists of choosing three to five key strategic goals or programs to focus on, and galvanizing the organization to participate and engage in achieving them, in approximately the following two to three years. It was first used in Finland in 2005 by KONE Oyj’s CEO, Matti Alahuhta. Alahuhta learned of the concept in 2004 while hearing a presentation by IMD professors Peter Killing and Tom Malnight, who also originated the concept through a 2004 book by the same name (Talouselämä 2011). The approach has worked for KONE1, becoming the “core of KONE’s leadership system” (Talouselämä 2011). At KONE, the Must-Win Battles are often referred to as ‘development programs’ in external communication. At Metso, the

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1 Since 2005, KONE has steadfastly improved in terms of better-than-market financials, customer and employee satisfaction, and sustainability (Talouselämä 2011). The CEO, Mr. Alahuhta has received recognitions such as the “European Manager of the Year 2009” (European Business Press 2010) and number one business thinker in Finland (Kauppalehti 2012).
“Must-Win Battles” are referred to as ‘Must-wins’ both internally and externally. Since top management at Metso had made a conscious choice to drop the “Battles” part of the term, this thesis will hereafter refer to the concept simply as “Must-wins”.

Commitment can be powerful. Generally defined as “the act of committing, pledging, or engaging oneself; engagement; involvement” (Collins English Dictionary), it is something which allows people to strive for excellence and mastery even when the going gets tough in any field of human endeavor, such as athletics, arts, or the marketplace. In the often tumultuous world of business and commerce, where sometimes it seems like “the only constant is change”\(^2\), committed and dedicated employees might provide an enduring advantage.

More specifically, workplace commitment refers to “a volitional bond reflecting dedication and responsibility for a target” (Klein et al. 2012). In this case, the target is “Must-Win”. In the context of strategy implementation, commitment has been studied from a few perspectives. The discourse lens has been utilized to understand the role of language in constricting or enabling engagement, participation, commitment, etc. (e.g. Mantere, Vaara 2008). Others have studied identification – which seems to be highly related to commitment – in strategy (e.g. Fiol 2001).

Within management sciences as a whole, perhaps the most voluminous portion of research on commitment has been conducted within the arena of organizational behavior. Organizational behavior research into commitment has its roots in the mid-20\(^{th}\) century, when research into ‘organizational commitment’ started populating the field. However, organizational behavior’s often-psychological perspective on commitment has not—to the best of my knowledge—been previously applied to strategy. Yet within organizational behavior it has been suggested for a long time that commitment is applicable not only to organizations, but also e.g. careers, work itself, teams, individuals, decisions and goals (Simon, Smithburg & Thompson 1950, Reichers 1985). Not only can OB research on commitment be borrowed and applied to strategy implementation, but that prolific body of work is thus also available for grounding understanding about commitment in strategy implementation.

\(^2\) Saying first attributed to Heraclitus, c. 500 BC. Quoted in e.g. De Wit & Meyer (2010: 179).
Recent developments in the organizational behavior field have clarified the commitment construct to the point that it can now stand alone, *a priori* to its target/object. It has a generalizable, distinguished meaning which is applicable regardless of the workplace target(s). While it has previously been clear that commitment can occur to different targets, in the past the commitment concept has often been inclusively stretched to the point of concept redundancy and imprecision: if it covers everything, it probably covers nothing. This might in part explain the multiple conceptual papers over the last few years addressing and even seeking to redress commitment, such as Cohen (2007); Fornes, Rocco & Wollard (2008); Gonzalez & Guillen (2008); Johnson, Chang & Yang (2010); Solinger, Van Olffen et al. (2008); and Klein et al. (2012). The conceptual papers culminated thus far in Klein et al.’s (2012) article that pulls the pieces together, addresses the problematic underlying assumptions, and reconceptualizes commitment with clarity. While Klein, et al. (2012) provide researchers with the best cohesion and direction about workplace commitment thus far, the authors admit that the whole picture is not clear. They state that there is still a need to more fully articulate their nomological network (i.e. interrelation of theoretical ideas with empirical evidence; Cronbach, Meehl 1955). Further, variation is expected across targets and suspect phenomenological differences between commitments to entities, such as organizations; individuals, such as specific coworkers or supervisors; and actions, such as strategic goals. Therefore, by undertaking a qualitative study into the role of commitment in the implementation of a set of strategic goals, current theoretical understanding might be elaborated and/or extended.

Neither is it unheard of to utilize an organizational behavior perspective within strategic management. In fact, many concepts originating from organizational behavior already populate strategic management. Examples include leadership and social influence (e.g. Hambrick 2007 for overview, Chaganti, Sambharya 2006), decision-making (Eisenhardt, Bourgeois III 1988, Eisenhardt 1989b), organizational justice (Kim, Mauborgne 1991, Korsgaard, Schweiger & Sapienza 1995), organizational learning (Fiol, Lyles 1985), managerial communication (Barry, Elmes 1997), team processes (Narayanan, Fahey 1982), and conflict resolution (Baysinger, Hoskisson 1990).

Strategic management might be informed by commitment too. Commitment is often alluded to or even underscored in material intended for strategy practitioners, in frequent exhortations to encourage (emotional) commitment to the organization’s
strategy, to commit to implementing the strategy, and so on. Yet it remains unclear what exactly it means. Neither has it been completely overlooked in literature that studies strategy implementation. Although a relatively scarce field, strategy implementation research tends to study either ‘hard’ institutional factors, such as organizational structures and administrative systems; ‘soft’ people-oriented factors, such as communication activities or consensus about the strategy; or ‘mixed’ factors which contain hard and soft factors alike, such as the strategy formulation process and relationships among different units or departments.

Perhaps through increased study of strategy implementation in general, and particular aspects of it such as commitment, strategic management’s roots of offering real insight to academics and practitioners alike can be honored, and the field’s purpose can be rescinded from a tendency to theorize or conceptualize for the sake of theorizing or conceptualizing, i.e. ‘missing the forest for the trees’. Understanding how employees become dedicated, out of their own volition, to implementing business strategies might, then, present a step in the right direction. Indeed, further understanding the role of commitment in strategy implementation has the potential for informing theorists and practitioners alike: it would seem highly prudent – essential even – to have employees that, of their own will, are dedicated to and take responsibility for implementing the organization’s strategy.

1.2. Research Aim

This thesis seeks to contribute toward an understanding of commitment’s role in the practical work of strategy implementation.

Commitment is said to enhance strategy implementation by academics (Mantere, Vaara 2008) and practitioners (e.g. Walton 1985, Kotter 1995, Sull 2005) alike. In strategic management literature, commitment has shown up where it has been related tangentially to other research interests such as organizational identification. Where commitment has been related to strategy implementation, it has mainly been studied on the organizational level, i.e. organizational commitment. Yet in the academic literature on strategy implementation, more study and clarification is needed on individual-level commitment, preferably on a level that could incorporate the daily activities of managers at varying organizational levels (Noble 1999). The first aim of this research is thus to establish and explain the natural linkage between individual-level commitment and the practice of strategy implementation:
• Show the connection between individual-level commitment and strategy implementation literature

When the linkage has been established theoretically, it will be possible to start examining the role of commitment in the implementation of a particular — “Must-wins” — strategy at a particular organization. The second research aim is thus to uncover:

• What role does commitment play in the implementation of ‘Must-wins’?

By uncovering the role of employees’ commitment, I might also induct or abduct ways to enhance individuals’ commitment to implementing the organization’s strategy and at the very least generate feasible suggestions for directions of future research. While ‘Must-wins’ are not particularly different from any other strategic goals or priorities typically used in MNCs, there is value in looking at what the strategy process actually is like in organizations, as demonstrated in the works of e.g. Henry Mintzberg (1971b, 1978, 1990) and the emerging strategy-as-practice stream of research in strategic management.

1.3. Scope and Delimitations

This study is positioned as a qualitative study of a firm in the industrial machinery sector. The scope is neither on the firm’s strategy (“Must-wins”) nor the firm’s commitment to it (as in e.g. top manager commitment to continue with the chosen strategy) per se, but rather on employees’ commitment to implementing the strategy.

The focus is on the role of commitment in strategy implementation, yet strategy implementation is not limited to commitment. There seem to be many other issues that affect strategy implementation, such as consensus about the strategy, organizational structure, relationships between units or departments, reward and recognition factors, etc. This thesis seeks to situate and understand the role of commitment on the practical, individual level. Providing a holistic view of strategy implementation as a whole is beyond the scope of this study.

In addition, strategy implementation is likely to depend on the business context: some firms have fairly static strategies, while others are in sink-or-swim mode, striving to complete radical transformations swiftly. I briefly describe the case organization. I report findings inducted from a particular case. This research homogenously concentrates on a mature, large technology company in the industrial machinery sector.
The transferability of the results might be hampered by heterogeneity, e.g. a small or mid-sized start-up technology company might not contend with common issues of MNCs such as organizational silos or an established corporate culture – ‘the way we always do things around here’ – but it might be challenged by lacking funds or not having established itself in a market. Such factors might influence what actors do in practice to execute strategies, and how, why and to what extent they commit to executing the strategies.

There are also a few fields of knowledge that border on the present area of study. Strategic decision-making would seem to be relevant inasmuch as it tends to define what should be implemented. However, interviewees did not introduce this perspective, except when generally speaking of the characteristics of strategy’s content, which I do address in the findings and results section to the extent that it relates to the research aims. Another related aspect could be strategic consensus, which has to do with organization members operating under similar goals and objectives. If consensus is lacking, it can be assumed that managers might still choose to be committed although to different, even autonomous or self-serving, goals and objectives. However this thesis examines the role of commitment as it relates to a particular strategic goal. Two other, somewhat pessimistic perspectives that might be viable but not introduced in the empirical data are those of agency theory and workplace politics. Agency theory examines principal-agent relationships where the actors may have partly differing goals and risk preferences (Eisenhardt 1989c). Agency problems could influence the creation of commitment in individuals. Workplace politics refers either to certain behaviors associated with the use of power or influence, or individuals in the organization engaging in self-serving behaviors at the expense of others (Gandz 1980). It could affect individuals’ choices regarding to what, and to what extent, they commit.

1.4. Structure and Flow of the Thesis

Section 1 (Introduction): Provided a contextual backdrop and motivation for the thesis.

Section 2 (Theoretical Framework): Creates and elaborates a link between strategic management and workplace commitments, so that the role of commitment in the implementation of strategies might subsequently be grasped.

Section 3 (Research Methodology): Discusses the content and process of the research methodology that was used to collect and analyze data.
Section 4 (Empirical Findings): Provides a descriptive analysis of the essential empirical findings.

Section 5 (Discussion and Conclusion): Discusses what this thesis contributes to theoretical understanding and practice of implementing strategies in MNCs in a way that involves and creates personal commitment, what the study's most significant limitations are, and what directions for future research it opens up.

Finally, the Bibliography lists references and the Appendices provide additional clarifying information.
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Strategic management and the well-established concept in organizational behavior of workplace commitments have remained mostly as separate islands within management research. Many concepts from organizational behavior have established outposts in strategic management, such as decision-making, organizational justice, learning, and identification, but commitment has thus far only made the journey as an adjacent afterthought of other concepts, particularly organizational identification.

Section 2.1 focuses on strategic management, creating an understanding of how workplace commitment is not that different and exotic after all, and that it could find a safe harbor in strategic management. Section 2.2 focuses on clarifying workplace commitment in such a way that it could be familiarized to and welcomed by strategic management. The overarching aim of the theoretical framework, aligned with the thesis’ first research aim, is to build a bridge between employees’ workplace commitments and strategic management, so that the two might discover how well they can work together and contribute to each other.

The theoretical framework thus starts off on the most general level by giving an overview of strategic management and its ten schools of thought (section 2.1.1).

The strategy process is presented thereafter (section 2.1.3). Within the strategy process, which includes strategy implementation, if one looks at a micro and individual level it becomes clear that practices—i.e. what is actually done by individuals in relation to strategy—are significant (section 2.1.4). Additionally, at the micro level some aspects of the process become particularly salient, such as members’ identification with the strategy and the organization (section 2.1.5).

However, identification has tended to occupy a somewhat unpragmatic role in strategic management literature. On the other hand, commitment, which has been linked to identification in strategic management literature yet is primarily grounded and established in organizational behavior literature, is more suitable and relevant for looking at strategy micro-practices (section 2.2). Reviewing commitment literature reveals that the outcomes of commitment are to continue with and be motivated on behalf of whatever one is committed to. The outcomes, taken together, are linked to action (Klein et al. 2012). There exists therefore a natural link to the practice and practitioners of strategy. Commitment is not the only relevant aspect of strategy micro-
practices, but it is a significant one because micro-practices are about what organizational members do, and commitment leads to doing. Section 2.2 seeks to present employees’ workplace commitment theoretically so that it can hereafter be understood and applied in the general context of strategic management and in the particulars of strategy implementation and strategy-as-practice.

While workplace commitments are a well-established theoretical concept, open questions remain. For example, in relation to unexplored contexts and types of targets—such as the implementation of a strategy—it is unclear how salient different antecedents are or what practical form they can take. The empirical analysis part of the thesis will thus explore the role of commitment in a large MNC’s strategy implementation context.

2.1. Context for Workplace Commitments: Linking commitment to strategy implementation

2.1.1. Strategic Management: The ten main schools of thought

Strategic management is an eclectic field, but nevertheless it has been dominated by some schools of thought. These schools of thought are typically represented as distinct perspectives or lenses. For example, Johnson et al. (2008) keep it simple and discuss strategy as three perspectives: design, experience, and ideas. Mintzberg (1998), in his tour de force covering the field, synthesizes strategic management research into ten recognized schools of thought.

The schools of thought are best described as perspectives or lenses because they take different views of the strategy process. Each tends to concentrate on a specific, major aspect of the strategy process and provide a unique perspective. Therefore the schools of thought tend to be insightful but also narrow and not necessarily holistic. The ten schools of thought are listed below in Table 1 below together with single adjectives that best describe the corresponding school of thought, based on the school of thoughts’ focal interest.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School of Thought:</th>
<th>View of Strategy process:</th>
<th>Concerned About:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Design School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a process of conception</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Planning School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a formal process</td>
<td>Prescribed—how strategies could or should be formulated rather than how they necessarily do form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Positioning School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as an analytical process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Entrepreneurial School</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a visionary process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Cognitive School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a mental process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Learning School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as an emergent process</td>
<td>Description—how strategies do, in fact, get made</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Power School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a process of negotiation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cultural School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a collective process</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The Environmental School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a reactive process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Configuration School:</td>
<td>Strategy formation as a process of transformation</td>
<td>Integration—combining the other schools of thought</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The first overriding current of thought in strategic management as we know it today, listed in the first three rows of Table 1 above, consists of different streams of thinking based on a rational perspective. These schools of thought seek to contribute prescriptive insights. The first emerged in the 1960s, concentrating on strategy formation as a process of design and conception. Simultaneously in the 1960s, and peaking in the 1970s, a research and practice stream formalized the perspective by conceiving of strategy formation as a detached and systematic process of planning (Mintzberg 1998). Strategic management looked like a veritable holy grail for businesses: an implicit and enticing promise was that managers might follow a linear strategy planning formula and reap extraordinary profits. Strategic planning departments and management consultants’ services proliferated modern corporations, especially in the United States. A significant landmark event happened for strategic management with the publishing of Michael Porter’s work on competitive advantage and the “five forces” (1980), which combined the economics field of industrial organization with strategic management (Porter 1981). Within this school of thought, the focus of research and practice was on choosing strategic positions within the market structures in which organizations operated. This approach somewhat displaced the prior focus on the process of strategy formation, and rather focused on the actual content of strategies. Despite its popularity, it did not bring a sense of finality to the field of strategic management: some companies in supposedly terribly positioned industries succeeded abundantly, such as Southwest Airlines in the airline industry. A different reflection on this group of views is showcased by the thinking around the Resource Based View and core competences, where instead of looking out to the environment, strategizers look within the company for unique, inimitable resources or competences that might provide a sustainable competitive advantage (e.g. Barney 1991, Prahalad, Hamel 1990 respectively).

Within the prescriptive schools of thought, then, the process of strategy was thus depicted as ideally being a deliberate, formalized process consisting of designing or formally planning strategy, or seeking a superior position in the marketplace together with competitive advantage. Yet such analysis cannot produce synthesis (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel 1998). The downside was that the formalized processes typically, by their very nature, discouraged creativity, intuition, comprehension and, ultimately, synthesis. Thus they did not produce, much less develop, novel strategies. Perhaps more damagingly, strategic planning has been espoused as strategy making itself, thus implicitly replacing intuition and the myriad intangibles one might call ‘the human
touch’. It might be more helpful to think of strategic planning as a potentially supporting facet for strategy making and the naturally occurring managerial processes therein, including processes that are not necessarily bounded by rationality such as intuition.

A second stream of research took a different approach to studying strategy: instead of studying what companies theoretically and ideally ought to do, the focus was on describing what kinds of things were actually happening in organizations in terms of strategy making. To use the above mentioned example of Southwest Airlines, the downside of the prescriptive schools was that they analyzed the company’s actions in hindsight and deduced post hoc that what occurred was deliberately intended all along, while ignoring what actually happened within the company and in its interrelated environmental context. Therefore, descriptive-minded researchers would instead have looked for patterns in a stream of decisions, often even going in and seeing how strategies were being formed through one-off or constant decisions by actors. In the case of Southwest Airlines for example, it might have been a more appropriate approach. The company’s founder and CEO famously commented that Southwest’s strategic plan is called doing things. Prescriptive schools of thought have indeed sometimes been criticized for inaccurately rationalizing after-the-fact, thereby creating ‘strategic thinking’ that sounds good but does not necessarily match up to the experience and practice of reality.

The six descriptive schools of thought that follow looked at particular aspects of the strategy formation process and made clear that formation does not always necessarily mean formulation. The entrepreneurial school examined the often visionary nature of strategy, i.e. that of a leader having a personalized vision. A personalized vision is a psychological phenomenon, and thus the small but significant cognitive school utilized the perspective of cognitive psychology as an attempt to understand what happens in the strategist’s mind. In researching how strategies get made, it was also observed that strategy making did not necessarily involve only the top leader(s), as might usually be implicitly assumed in the prior schools of thought, but also other forces and actors. It was noticed that strategies were not always deliberate. Rather, sometimes they emerged from the incremental interplay of the organization and its environment. Indeed, the learning school examined strategy formation as a process that emerged rather than as a singular vision or plan created at a specific point in time. Hence the perspective was that strategy was formulated in an iterative process of small steps where the
organization continually adapted and learned. The power school had a different take on the emergent process: they considered strategies to be formed in a negotiation process, between conflicting groups within the organization and in organizations’ confrontation with their external environments. In contrast to the conflict-based view of the power school, and to some extent the general competitiveness-centricity of prior schools, another school of thought considered strategy formation to be grounded in the culture of the organization. Strategy formation was thus considered a cooperative and collective process. Some organizational theorists did not even consider the strategy making process to occur internally within the organization at all per se, but rather in reactions to pressures from the organization’s external context or environment.

The preceding nine schools of thought tend to look at particular aspects of strategy making. Some scholars have attempted to synthesize or combine them to create a more holistic view. The elements of strategy making, including the strategy-making process, the strategy content, organizational structures and their contexts, have been delineated into distinct stages. Stages include e.g. entrepreneurial growth or stable maturity. This is typically called the configuration school, which was started by and has centered on the work of scholars from McGill University (e.g. Miller 1987). It describes strategy as a relatively stable process, punctuated by occasional leaps to new strategies and/or stages. It is therefore characterized as a process of transformation. The strategic leaps or transformations would tend to occur in accordance with processes prescribed or described by other schools of thought, e.g. through planning, positioning, learning, culture, etc. A shortcoming of the configuration school is that it does not describe how such quantum transformations occur. Some have therefore argued that it, together with the environment school, is not describing strategy at all but rather organizational change (Tsoukas & Knudsen, in Whittington, Thomas & Pettigrew, 2002).

Ultimately, none of the ten discussed schools of thought are exhaustive. Their application and popularity has often waxed and waned over the years as research in the field has evolved. Neither is it a complete picture, but thinking of strategic management in terms of streams of thought provides a succinct description of the academic context in which strategy process and implementation have been held.
2.1.2. **Strategy implementation: Its role in the strategy formulation-implementaiton interface**

Most primers or introductory textbooks would tend to depict strategy as static and neat, dividing strategic thinking into two aspects: the formulation of strategy and its implementation. The purpose of doing so is usually to ease rational understanding. However, strategy implementation is an integral aspect of strategic management. To completely detach it from strategy formulation in an abstract way is not practical because formulation and implementation are interdependent in practice.

In general, strategy formulation refers to strategy making, a process that may occur and/or be seen in multiple ways, as described in section 2.1.1. The prescriptive schools of thought, espousing deliberate strategy-making, are more aligned with this static strategy formulation-implementation division. The idea is that once a deliberate strategic intent is arrived at, the next necessary step is considered to be its implementation. This includes actions and processes such as allocating resources, communicating, assigning responsibility and ownership appropriately, and generally managing the process through monitoring, evaluation, reporting structures, making adjustments, and so on. A parallel to the formulation-implementation interface from everyday life might be e.g. an individual or sports team first setting a goal and then taking action with strict training schedules and plans to achieve it.

Strategy implementation has historically been the less studied aspect of the strategy formulation-implementation interface. It seems that strategic management researchers, similarly to many of the historical practitioners such as management consultancies, have tended to focus more on the content and creation of strategies from a variety of perspectives instead of considerations about implementation. The most famous have perhaps been the positioning and competitive advantage approaches of Porter (1980, 1985), but there have been many other ones with significant clout, such as Prahalad & Hamel’s core competences (1990) and Barney’s resource-based view (1991). Such research essentially sought for the ‘holy grail’ of strategic management, namely some recipe for ensuring that companies will succeed abundantly. The inherent, attractive idea is that superior strategies would tend to result in superior results. Thus the focus of activity has been on dissecting, understanding, creating, formulating etc. brilliant strategies. Yet there is a huge, implicit gap therein: what happens between the formulation and the delivery of results? Formulating a brilliant strategy is unlikely to bring about a brilliant result by itself. This is where strategy
implementation comes in, for it is here – in actually putting strategies into practice, in the ‘doing’ – that the gap between formulation and producing results might be bridged.

The design, planning, and positioning schools would tend to keep the ‘heads’ of strategic planning detached from the action and the details, thus producing a strong divide between formulation and implementation. A more balanced view is for the ‘heads’ to be nonattached to the action and the details, i.e. aware but not bogged down with them, instead of being removed from them.

Other schools, e.g. the entrepreneurial or learning school, conceive of the process as more interactive. In this view organizations and the people therein attempt and do things, and what works tends to converge into patterns. Such patterns become strategies. This is strategic learning, whereby the formulator may also implement or the implementers formulate, which corresponds to the entrepreneurial and learning schools respectively. Thinking of strategy formation as ‘strategic planning’ might then be bypassed altogether in these views and it might be more appropriate to speak of strategic thinking that is connected to acting.

Dichotomous division between formulation and implementation is an untenable and unnatural assumption. The abovementioned sports team would make sure that their goal is feasible and implementable. It is the implementation that brings results. To use an example from military planning, in which strategic management has roots, the formulation of a campaign can hardly be completely separated from the realities of implementation. For example, Napoleon’s 1812 military strategy in St. Petersburg failed miserably, with at least half a million Frenchmen dying, because implementation was not adequately considered during formulation. The suggestion that implementation does not need to be considered in formulation is out-of-touch. The two are intricately connected. Formulation and implementation are part of the same process. For those studying the content of strategies, the division has often eased rational understanding, but especially researchers studying the process of strategy have looked past the assumption.

2.1.3. **Strategy implementation: A part of the strategy process**

Many scholars — with e.g. Mintzberg (1978) as a spearhead — have not bought into the abovementioned static, dichotomous formulation-implementation assumption. In Figure 1 below, both the descriptive and integrative schools of thought would tend to
consider strategy more in terms of a dynamic process. In these views, not only does strategic change consist of forming content for a new strategy, but also managing the context and process (Pettigrew 1987).

**Figure 1 Strategy Process**

![Strategy Process Diagram](image)

Figure 1 above depicts the process of strategic change. The content might be said to the “what” of the strategy. The context is the “why”, i.e. the intentional or emergent reason for strategic change based on e.g. the external context or environment in which the firm operates, and the inner context of organizational structure, culture, and possibly politics. The process is the “how” consisting of actions, responses, and interactions of relevant individuals when they strive to move the organization from the present state to its future state.

For example, Mintzberg (1985) researched the actual processes of what happens in organizations regarding strategy. The image he paints is not as linear as a planned formulation-implementation conceptualization might suggest. Rather, it is argued that strategy making tends to happen on a continuum ranging from deliberate to emergent.

The classic prescriptive schools might be said to address deliberate or intended strategies, i.e. ones that are explicit, consciously and intentionally developed, and formulated *a priori* to decisions to which they are applied (Mintzberg 1978). Yet intended plans do not always actualize as intended. Rather, the realized strategy is an observable pattern in a stream of decisions and actions (Mintzberg 1978). The description-based schools, which recognize such emergence of strategies, have been more concerned with realized strategies. They consider a strategy to have been formed when there is a consistent stream of actions and/or decisions over time. For example, leading up to the 2012 U.S. presidential elections, President Obama seemed to consistently avoid and/or reframe questions related to religion. As a result, media and
even scholars claimed that his religious strategy in the election was clearly to “lay low of the religion stuff” (Berlinerblau 2012). Even though President Obama did not expressly state an explicit intention, media did what process-oriented strategy researchers tend to do, i.e. they noticed an evolving consistency in decisions and behavior and labeled it a strategy.

Figure 2  Deliberate and emergent strategies, adapted from Mintzberg (1985:258, 1998:12).

Figure 2 above demonstrates the real-world strategy process as described by Mintzberg, subsequent to substantial in-field descriptive research with the underlying intention of understanding how strategies form in organizations. The essential idea is that firms may start with a clear intended strategy, such as a strategic plan or vision. However, managing the implementation of an intended strategy is a challenge (Mintzberg 1985). In the process of enacting it some aspects of it might fall away and/or not be accomplished (unrealized strategy). Other aspects may be realized as planned (deliberate), and there may also be some unexpected occurrences (emergent), i.e. surprises, that play a part in what the realized strategy is. The strategy that actually gets realized thus tends to be a mix of deliberate and emergent strategy.

Based on the above, if strategic intentions do not always linearly actualize and realize in the form of that initial vision or plan, how might they be described then? Specifically, how might the real-world process of strategies and their implementation be situated and described if a rigid, planned formulation-implementation division is not adequate?

Again, the work of Mintzberg and process researchers is informative. If strategies can indeed be conceived as lying on a continuum between the poles of deliberate and emergent strategies, one need but identify the main characteristics. Strategies along the continuum have been labeled e.g. planned, entrepreneurial, ideological, umbrella,
process, unconnected, consensus and imposed (Mintzberg 1985). In the empirical findings of section 4.1.3, I thus visually depict the strategy process of the ‘Must-wins’ strategy of Metso Corporation.

2.1.3.1. “Must-wins”: An example of the strategy process

Managers at the case organization, Metso Corporation, have decided to structure and implement strategy through a particular, somewhat standardized process. Must-Win Battles, or ‘Must-wins’ as they are called in internal and external communication at the case organization, is a practitioner-oriented approach to strategy development and implementation that is used somewhat visibly by several public companies.

The main tenets of the ‘Must-wins’ approach are described below so that its background and general process can be understood. On the whole, it is not a new or innovative approach to strategic management. Rather, it is a non-academic concept that provides general guidelines and direction for leaders who prefer to conduct the strategy process in a focused way. The purpose of describing the concept in a general way below is so that the visualization of Metso’s ‘Must-wins’ process in section 4.1.3 will be more comprehensible.

The Must-wins concept has its roots in the practitioner-oriented material of IMD business academics Thomas Killing and Peter Malnight, who wrote an eponymous book in 2005. The work has not been subject to academic rigors. Must-wins are a pragmatic approach. The authors state that the “idea evolved and developed over time as we worked with managers who were frustrated with their organizations’ performance and wanted to drive real and sustainable change, while delivering concrete bottom-line impact” (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2005: vii).

The approach seeks to respond to the malarkey and drudgery of what seems like new initiatives every month (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2006), where the organization might have an abundant, expanding amount of ‘strategic’ initiatives but a lack of excellent results. In order to break such a stalemate, the authors propose prioritizing the organization’s resources and energy on three to five critical development areas that the organization must win in order to achieve its most significant goals (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2006). According to the authors, the approach is purported to tackle the challenges of combining strategic focus and emotional commitment to the organization’s goals.
As such, the Must-wins can be seen as an approach that strives to focus and prioritize the organization’s efforts in a particular direction. It is argued that the resulting focus and prioritizing derive to a large extent from the ethos that the “heart of [the] must-win battle approach is instilling the discipline to do fewer things, better” (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2006).

According to the book – which is written to an audience of leaders and thus seeks to speak to their perspective – the idea tends to be implemented in three steps: first, ‘prepare the journey’, involving a close look at the starting conditions of the business and the leadership; second, ‘engage the team’, where “the journey usually starts with the management team debating and selecting the battles”; and third, ‘make it happen’ where “shared priorities become real when people across the organization ... give full commitment to the battles ahead” (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2006: 2-3).

While the process can generally fitted within the general strategy process (e.g. Mintzberg & Waters 1985), the ‘make it happen’ step corresponds most closely to strategy implementation: that complex set of decisions and actions which fills in the picture between intended strategies and realized strategies. The managerial processes and debates involved in developing and formulating the Must-wins are beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, this thesis focuses on examining commitment in implementing and making these strategic goals happen.

2.1.4. Strategy-as-practice: The process-based view that strategies are implemented through the actions of individuals

In order to make the Must-wins, or any other strategy, happen, it is necessary for individuals to be engaged in action of some sort. Nothing happens without action. Strategy-as-practice, as a research direction, turns its focus to what people do. It looks at the strategy process not as something that happens detachedly to the organization, but rather as something that occurs as a consequence of action. There is therefore often an emphasis on doing and verbs, such as strategizing, implementing, etc. Of interest is how people go about the process of making or implementing strategy (Johnson et al. 2007). This view also implies that people and their actions are significant, as the verbs can only be fulfilled through people.

Practices in strategy are defined as that which people engage with, such as strategic planning, tools of strategic analysis, and events or episodes such as strategy away-days.
Practices are also defined as what people actually do in relation to strategy, such as people’s specific actions and routines (Johnson et al. 2007). Similarly to the wider topic of strategic management, strategy-as-practice includes prescriptive and descriptive research: it is concerned both with ideal action or routines, and actual, specific actions and routines.

There is an underlying implication, then, that it is not the organization in some abstract way that implements strategy — implementation is not a given – but rather that people who make up the organization have the role and responsibility in striving to realize strategies. It is likely that being committed could enhance and support that very striving.

2.1.5. Organizational members’ identification: The link connecting strategy process and implementation literature to commitment

In general, commitment improves the implementation of strategic plans (Mantere, Vaara 2008; Korsgaard et al. 1995; Klein, Sorra 1996; Kim, Mauborgne 1998). Yet the four references in the previous sentence have not focused their research on commitment, but rather through researching other topics within strategic management, commitment has also emerged as noteworthy enough to be mentioned. However, the area of research that has a clear link to employees’ commitment(s) is that of identification with the organization and/or strategies.

Identification refers to an individual’s “sense of oneness or belongingness with an organization”, which “regulates the extent to which organizational members are emotionally and cognitively tied to their organization” (Fiol 2001:694). Strategic management research has linked identification to strategically salient issues, namely creating competitive advantage and strategic change (see e.g. Fiol 2001, 2002 for overview).

Commitment and identification in the workplace are distinct but related concepts. For example, similarly to organizational commitment in organizational behavior literature, member identification in strategy literature has been positively linked to performance and retention, even amid disruptions of work conditions (Fiol 2001). The treatment of identification in strategy literature coincides with Klein et al.’s (2012) organizational behavior-based conceptualization of identification as a psychological bond or attachment reflecting the merging of oneself with the target. It is, however, not the
same as commitment. Commitment is a separate bond, not reflecting identification with the target but rather volitional dedication to and responsibility for it, as will be showcased in the next chapter.

Identification and commitment are positively related. According to Fiol, the weaker the identification with the present organizational identity, the lower the shared commitment to a common future will tend to be (2001). Further, low member identification with a new organizational identity will not result in competitive advantage due to “organizational member apathy and lack of commitment in the absence of a personal sense of meaning” (Fiol 2001: 695). Identification develops based on trust alone and it is impossible without it (Fiol 2002). On the other hand, trust is only one of four perceptual processes through which commitment bonds form (Klein et al. 2012). Therefore identification and commitment share an antecedent but they do not have the same antecedents. They can inform but not replace each other in researching strategy practices.

Commitment leads to engagement (Klein et al. 2012). One can expect identification to also be related to engagement since the underlying actions are similar: identification refers to psychologically merging with the target, and engagement to investing one's complete self in a role. The more one identifies with one's organization, the more one would tend to psychologically and emotionally engage in one's role within the organization too.

While the downside of commitment seems to be problems related to escalation of commitment, the downside of identification is that the stronger the identification with a particular identity, the stronger the motivation to resist identity changes will tend to be (Fiol 2001). In other words, companies' leaders might have trouble in remaking, reinventing and/or redefining the company when members with strong identification bonds seem rigid and continue defining the company in terms of the old identity to which they are attached.

Identification has primarily been studied with the organization as the target, as in ‘organizational’ identification. However, identification may also be grounded in identification with an unchanging set of values and outcomes (Fiol 2001). For example, GE’s culture and identities changed radically since the 1980's, but member identification with a sense of excellence and devotion to some outcomes remained
steady (Fiol 2001). While identification with a target is significant and may often influence what actions are taken, it does not need result in action.

Identification with organizational identity or values is also not necessarily practical. Commitment, however, can be highly practical in the sense that the target of commitment can be on a micro level — such as commitment to personal actions or goals for the strategy’s implementation — and still be significant. Commitment typically results in action so it is relevant to examine when looking at strategy issues that involve doing, such as strategy implementation or the general strategy-as-practice research perspective. Researching commitment in strategy implementation does not displace existing identification research, however, because they are separate concepts as will be elaborated in section 2.2.2. Rather, commitment can fill in gaps especially on the micro, practice level.

2.2. Commitment: Developing an understanding applicable to any workplace target including strategy implementation

The purpose of this section is to arrive at a definition and understanding through which commitment can be viewed and analyzed in relation to the implementation of strategic goals. I borrow heavily from organizational behavior-oriented research, particularly Klein et al. (2012) to accomplish this end.

Commitment generally refers to intending to continue in a line of action (Agnew 2009). More specifically, commitment to an object in the workplace denotes “a volitional bond reflecting dedication and responsibility for a target” (Klein et al. 2012: 131). The simplicity of the definition gives no indication, however, of the significant variation in how commitment has been conceived by theorists through time.

Commitment has been studied in various fields, such as marketing, interpersonal counseling, political science, religion, and philosophy. Within management research, commitment has shown up in different forms. Indeed, confusion and even concept redundancy has been apparent because the commitment construct has been so widely and inclusively stretched from the original research which simply asked why people stay with organizations (Klein et al. 2012).

Historically, five major forms of work commitment have been promulgated, namely Protestant work ethic, career salience as in how important one’s career is in one’s life, job involvement as a central life interest, organizational commitment, and union
commitment (Morrow 1983). While the other forms have their merits and place, based on my empirical findings only the theory and practice of organizational commitment seems applicable to this study of commitment in implementing a specific strategic program, and thus I also strive to avoid concept redundancy.

Further, organizational commitment requires clarification and elaboration for the present theoretical review. Many organizational commitment researchers have not relied on existing approaches to commitment, but rather formulated their own definitions and measures (Morrow 1983) thus requiring some additional sensemaking of the topic. To further complicate things, within management, commitment to the organization is where the study of commitment started. Yet nowadays one can speak more generally of ‘workplace commitments’ in the sense that commitment in management research spread and evolved to include not only commitment to the organization, but various facets of work in general. Commitment directed to other targets also exists, e.g. to goals, in which case commitment would denote an intention to maintain dedication to and responsibility for the goal. Indeed commitment is not exclusive to organizations: researchers have applied theories of commitment to targets such as romance (as in ‘committed’ relationships), commitment to sports teams, policy positions, friendships, and organizations. Within organizations, targets have included for example organization itself, teams, goals and decisions.

Indeed, the present empirically examination is conducted in an organizational context but does not explore commitment to the organization, but rather commitment to implementing a specific strategy. It is therefore more appropriate to say that this thesis focuses on a workplace commitment rather than organizational commitment.

**2.2.1. Organizational commitment in organizational behavior research**

The commitment target most studied in management science is the commitment to one’s organization. Organizational commitment denotes the intention of an employee to maintain employment in an organization. The concept of organizational commitment was introduced to the field of organizational behavior research in the early- to mid-20th century by the Human Relations movement (Baruch 1998). It emerged from studies on employee—organization linkages, where it was a “revelation” that employees actually had feelings toward the organization they worked for, such as identification with the goals or aims of their employer (Baruch 1998).
Initial studies suggested that commitment was preferable and strengthened an employee’s linkage to the organization, thereby potentially contributing to better performance and reduced absenteeism and turnover (Mowday 1998). The hundreds of articles that have been published in the field tend to rest on that very notion: the assumed connection with performance and turnover.

Yet there seems to be a lack of unity in the results on organizational commitment. To illustrate, even views about the results themselves tend to run the gamut from negative to positive. Benkhoff (1997) seems to assert that the state of research on employee (organizational) commitment remains relatively ignorant:

“After 30 years of research on employee commitment the results are disappointing. So far there is no evidence of a systematic relationship between commitment and its presumed consequences – turnover and job performance – even though these links are almost implied by the definition of the concept. Nor do we know very much about the factors that explain the phenomenon.” (Benkhoff 1997, pp. 114)

Baruch (1998) is more neutral, criticizing organizational commitment for lack of practicality and scientific support, but affirming that plenty of studies have explored the relationships between various phenomena and organizational commitment with impressive results.

Others, such as Mowday (1998) are altogether more positive:

“Although a great deal has been published on organizational commitment ... it’s important to ask whether these publications represent substantive progress in our understanding of the concept, as well as its antecedents and consequences. I believe that answer is clearly yes.” (Mowday 1998, pp. 389)

Indeed, literature has consistently shown that organizational commitment is related to (1) employee behaviors, such as job search activities and turnover, (2) attitudinal, affective, and cognitive constructs, such as job involvement and job tension, (3) characteristics of the employee’s job and role, such as autonomy and responsibility, and role conflict and ambiguity, and (4) personal characteristics of the employee, such as need for achievement and job tenure (Bateman 1984).

However, some problematic underlying assumptions and “construct clarity concerns” (Klein et al. 2012) in organizational commitment, especially as it has been applied to other targets than the organization itself, ought to deter some confidence in the observed patterns of relationships and outcomes, thus necessitating a more precise and delineated definition of workplace commitment than organizational commitment in general, as will be presented below in section 2.2.2.
2.2.2. An understanding of personal commitment applicable to any workplace target, including strategy implementation

The present section defines and clarifies commitment such that it is not only applicable to the organization but to any workplace targets, as a particular type of psychological bond reflecting volitional dedication and responsibility for a target (Klein et al. 2012).

Indeed, commitment might seem an unclear concept based on the lack of unison in section 2.2.1. It was conceptualized in many ways by early scholars to address different reasons people stayed with organizations. It is not sufficient to directly stretch organizational commitment to also cover commitment to other workplace targets, such as the implementation of strategies. There are a few assumptions that must be relaxed, and some aspects of commitment that must be specified, in order to have a clear and working definition of commitment which can be applied to multiple workplace targets. The rationale for doing so is that “although commitments to different targets may serve different purposes for individuals, there is a generalizable and distinctive meaning, and commitment operates in a similar manner and has similar antecedents and consequences, regardless of context or target” (Klein et al. 2012: 136). Indeed, workplace commitment can simply be defined as “a particular type of bond reflecting volitional dedication and responsibility for a target” (Klein et al. 2012: 130). I now walk through the problematic assumptions, each aspect of the present definition, and also open up Klein et al.’s (2012) process model for understanding commitment to workplace targets.

Distinguishing workplace commitments from organizational commitment is necessary due to two inherently problematic, implicit assumptions in organizational behavior research on commitment. The first assumption is that organizational commitment would be generalizable to all targets. Commitment always has a target, i.e. an object or focus to which it is formed. Indeed, we tend to say that a person is committed to something. That something is referred to as the target of commitment. This distinction was already proposed by Simon et al. (1950) and later by e.g. Reichers (1985). In the organizational context, possible targets include at least work itself, job, career, organization, and unions. Targets may also refer to a more micro level, including decisions and specific goals, such as “Must-wins” (Baruch 1998). The problem is that organizational commitment is essentially a specific construct with the organization as the target. The original research started with seeking to understand why individuals stay with companies. However, the target of commitment is no longer always the whole
organization. It is increasingly normal that people are not committed to their employers in the long-term in terms of job or career. People do tend to change organizations more than in the middle of the 20th century when organizational commitment research blossomed; increasingly, employment is transient (e.g. contract or project work) and organizations do not always expect loyalty. Indeed, for a temporary, contract, or joint-venture worker, commitment to a goal, project, or team may be more crucial than organizational commitment (Klein et al. 2012). Thus some have even argued that organizational commitment is no longer significant or to be expected (Baruch 1998). Yet commitment as a concept can stand alone, independently of the target.

Further, generalizing organizational commitment – with the attendant idiosyncracies when the organization is the target – has resulted in a somewhat stretched construct. To illustrate, Klein et al. (2012) cite a study where, when the target was changed, the item “I do not feel like ‘part of the family’ at my organization” was replaced with “I feel little admiration for my supervisor”. ‘Feeling part of the family’ is not relevant for all targets at the workplace, thus making the organizational commitment ‘stretched’ in this case. A similar challenge occurs with the organizational commitment item of desiring to belong: it is not applicable to all targets. By releasing the assumption that commitment refers to organizational commitment, and embracing Klein et al.’s (2012) definition applicable to any target instead, criticisms about the relevancy of commitment are bypassed and the concept does not become inappropriately stretched to cover implementation of strategic goals.

A second problematic assumption is that all bonds would be commitment. People establish multiple psychological bonds in the workplace. Many of these workplace bonds have often been lumped under the term commitment in the past 50-odd years of research. Yet in addition to differentiating bonds in terms of target, bonds can also be discerned in terms of type. Bond type refers to how the bond is experienced. For instance, bonds have been differentiated by the underlying mindsets, i.e. continuance (awareness of costs of leaving or abandoning the respective entity; “have to”), normative (feeling of obligation or pressure to continue membership with the entity; “ought to”), and affective (attachment to, identification with, and involvement within

3 Interchangeably referred to as psychological attachments in commitment literature (Klein et al. 2012).
respective entity; “want to”) (Klein et al. 2012). Not all of these mindsets are necessarily related to commitment bonds.

Further, organizational commitment research started with seeking to explain why employees stay with organizations. If commitment equals ‘staying’, then examining and including all the bonds that hold employees to a target would be appropriate. Yet if commitment is not limited to retention or staying, it is inappropriate to regard commitment as staying only. Indeed, retention is not synonymous with commitment (Klein et al. 2012). For example, Singh and Vinnicombe (2000) observed that when people are asked about their commitments rather than ‘why they stay’, they do not explain their commitments in terms of “have to”, thus providing additional fuel for the argument that continuance, i.e. “have to”, ought not to be included in conceptualizations of commitment.

Rather than staying or retention, a general outcome of commitment is sticking with the target, which makes commitment interesting for strategy implementation research. Strategic management researchers may look at sticking with strategies in the face of environmental pressures (Mintzberg 1998) or mounting but psychologically denied evidence that strategies should be changed, i.e. hubris and the so-called Icarus effect. For strategy-as-practice this aspect of commitment is interesting in terms of explaining organizational actors’ sticking with certain practices and behaviors.

The assumption that all bonds are commitment becomes an impasse when one considers the unique ways in which bonds can be distinguished. For example, as became clear from looking at identification research in strategic management, there is a difference between commitment and identification bonds. Bonds can be differentiated both in theory and practical experience. They are experienced differently. Dealing with all of them under ‘commitment’ results in confusion and does a disservice to understanding their unique characteristics and operational features. Nevertheless bonds are related and best represented on a continuum, as per o below, which is adapted from Klein et al. (2012). By asserting commitment as a particular type of bond, the muddled elements and indistinctiveness of the commitment construct can be transcended.
### Continuum of psychological workplace bonds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bond Differentiators</th>
<th>Acquiescence</th>
<th>Instrumental</th>
<th>Commitment</th>
<th>Identification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Defining feature</strong></td>
<td>Perceived absence of alternatives</td>
<td>High cost (or loss) at stake</td>
<td>Volition, dedication, and responsibility</td>
<td>Merging of oneself with the target</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. How bond is experienced</strong></td>
<td>Resignation to the reality of the bond</td>
<td>Calculated acceptance of the bond</td>
<td>Embracement of the bond</td>
<td>Self-defined in terms of the bond</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Corollaries of experiencing bonds differently</strong></td>
<td>Low internalization</td>
<td>Indifference</td>
<td>Psychological withdrawal</td>
<td>Low intrapersonal significance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brickman (1987)</td>
<td>● ‘Have to’</td>
<td>● ‘Have to’</td>
<td>● ‘Want to’</td>
<td>● ‘Want to’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Adapted from Klein, Molloy & Brinsfield (2012)

In the above, the distinguishing characteristics of four bonds that have sometimes previously been labeled as ‘commitment’ are presented. Bonds other than commitment are not examined in this thesis, except to point out that not all bonds are commitment, and that bonds which are not volitional cannot be commitment. Indeed, commitment bonds are unique in that “the individual does not psychologically merge with the target but does make a conscious choice to care about and dedicate him/herself to the target” (Klein et al. 2012: 137).

Making a distinction between commitment and identification bonds is relevant because their defining features are different, and psychologically merging with the target seems
to have significant consequences not connected with commitment bonds. For example, Boivie, Lange, McDonald & Westphal (2011) recently showed that CEO organizational identification, as in CEOs thinking in terms of ‘we’ rather than ‘me’, influences the extent to which firms incur agency costs. The key distinction here is that identification refers to merging and identifying with a target, while commitment refers to choosing to be dedicated to a target. Further, the underlying mindset of both commitment and identification has previously been lumped together as ‘wanting to’. Yet differentiating commitment as a bond reflecting volition suggests that it might be more appropriate to refer to commitment’s underlying mindset as ‘choosing to’ rather than ‘wanting to’.

Acquiescence and instrumental bonds are also different, in that they are about ‘having to’ rather than ‘wanting to’, and there is no choice to be dedicated to or embrace the target. Rather, individuals form these bonds because they perceive that there are no alternatives or that the cost of not taking the target on is too high. Unlike in commitment, there is thus not a caring about the target per se. In strategic management, if one were operating under the assumption that all bonds are commitment, problems relating to agency costs in strategy implementation where the will of principals and agents is conflicting might be considered commitment problems. Yet distinguishing bond types makes the problem clearer. To overcome agency problems, agents are often sought to be incentivized to act in the principal’s interest and against their own volition would be commitment. Yet volition is a central tenet of commitment. In fact, agency problems may arise where principals may be committed to a target but agents are not. Typical efforts in agency problems include trying to incentivize agents with rewards to act in the principal’s interest. Agents may calculatedly accept, seeing that the rewards are worth taking or the loss would be too great otherwise, in which case they form a bond to the target, but an instrumental bond rather than a commitment. Distinguishing bond types, then, allows for the insight in regards to overcoming agency problems that it might be more fruitful to strive for practices that enhance commitment rather than instrumental or acquiescence bonds.

Distinguishing between bond types might prove useful for strategy implementation research, as for example sometimes strategies might get implemented by some employees due to a perceived absence of alternatives—not out of choice, dedication or responsibility—which thus denotes an acquiescence bond. In that case the dynamics of acquiescence bonds, such as higher turnover and lower psychological involvement, would be relevant, rather than those of commitment bonds. In addition by
distinguishing bond types, if desired practitioners might gain tools for understanding the portfolio of required psychological bonds, i.e. for identifying which bonds are preferable for certain targets. This thesis, however, only examines that bond which reflects volitional dedication and responsibility, i.e. commitment.

The second row demonstrates that the bonds are experienced differently by individuals. One needs to embrace or choose to accept “responsibility for and dedicate oneself to the target” (Klein et al. 2012: 137) in order for a bond to be commitment. Volition is essential. It does not matter whether the choice is private and/or public. It is also not relevant whether the commitment is intentionally made or if an individual notices him- or herself becoming committed to a target (Kiesler 1971). It is also within the individual’s domain to volitionally choose to not be responsible for a target anymore. By doing so, one ceases to be committed to the target. This may also happen intentionally or emerge gradually without notice. Once the absence of dedication is noticed, the bond may still remain but it is no longer commitment.

Identification is not characterized by volition in the same way as commitment. This suggests that problems related to changing identifications would not be incurred to the same extent if the individual instead had a commitment bond, which better permits volitional choice and change if needed. Therefore, in a high-velocity environment requiring adaptation identifying with strategy practices might be less preferable than being committed to them. Naturally, such possible rigidity, resistance to change and attachment would depend not only on bond type but also on the strength of the identification, and to some extent commitment, bond.

The strength of the bonds is not reflected in 0. The strength of bonds — e.g. how committed or identified one is — varies within each column rather than in moving horizontally along the table. In other words, the strength of the attachment can vary within the bond type. Bond type by itself does not signify the strength of the bond.

What bond type is experienced depends on how individuals make sense of their bonds, e.g. for instrumental bonds there is a perception of high cost/loss if the bond were broken, whether or not such cost or loss actually exists. Perception is ongoing and results in the formation of different types of bonds. Indeed, bonds are subjectively constructed, i.e. emanating from individuals’ perception and interpretation of their own situation.
Since individuals’ perceptions and interpretations are ongoing and dynamic, psychological bonds are also dynamic and malleable. By implication, psychological bonds can change with or without changes in the individual’s own objective situation. The bond type can change if the perception of a situation or target changes. For example, if an employee finds out about a gross breach of trust and ethics by a supervisor, the employee may stop being dedicated to the supervisor but stay with the situation anyway because of an evaluation that there is more to gain than lose. The bond then shifts, through a shift in perceptual evaluation, from a commitment to an instrumental bond.

Changes in perceptual evaluations also change bond strength. In the above example, perhaps the employee remains dedicated to the team but to a lesser degree, i.e. strength of commitment decreases. Bond duration also varies. To illustrate, an employee might remain dedicated to their career or organization for 40+ years, while commitment to a particular strategy implementation initiative might only last for the duration of the project.

The malleability of bonds in terms of type and strength suggests that commitment to strategy implementation practices can develop and/or strengthen, but also that it can end. The governing mechanism is individual’s perceptual evaluations.

The malleability of bonds is also encouraging for managers who are responsible for implementing strategic goals. Malleability enables proactive action regarding bonds by allowing managers to deem the preferred and appropriate portfolio of psychological bonds and then doing their best to create suitable conditions. Managers can engage in sensegiving about strategic target and situation (e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991) so as to optimize the chances for the formation of the right types of bonds. It is not appropriate however to say that managers could force or control the formation of commitment in team members, employees, etc., because bonds are individually created, i.e. it is not feasible to encroach on people’s volition to create commitment bonds. Yet it can be possible to influence or encourage the creation of certain types of bonds. Further, an exciting insight is that since commitment is created through one’s perspective or how one sees things, to a large extent one has the power to create commitment independent of others or external factors. This can help to explain why some employees, working in the same external context – e.g. team members – can exhibit highly different levels of motivation to engage in certain strategic practices.
The third row in Table 2 plots the corollary of psychological involvement across the bond types. Psychological involvement is a continuous construct, i.e. its presence could be likened to occurring on a gradual scale. One might categorize levels on the scale as e.g. ‘low’, ‘medium’, and ‘high’, but these would be simplistic labels not really corresponding to the inherent gradual variation within the scale. Psychological involvement is not segmented into clearly delineated stratum based on bond types, because it depends not only on bond type but also on strength of the bond (Klein et al. 2012). In other words, the corollaries vary across and within bond types. Generally, however, one can expect higher psychological involvement the further one moves horizontally to the right in Table 2. For example, on average it can be expected that committed individuals would expand more effort for the target than would acquiesced ones, and among the committed ones, the greater the commitment, the greater the effort. It is naturally the same with the other listed corollaries of psychological involvement, e.g. autonomous motivation: employees with commitment bonds are more likely to be autonomously motivated to act on behalf of the target than ones with acquiescence bonds, and the more committed they are, the more they are likely motivated. Higher psychological involvement, then, would tend to be mostly constructive for having employees engage in strategy implementation practices, suggesting that both commitment and identification are worth studying and understanding in strategy implementation.

By looking at the first and second row of Table 2, i.e. the defining features of bonds and how they are experienced respectively, one can see that the four psychological bonds are clearly different. It is notable in the fourth row of Table 2 that many previous conceptualizations of commitment do not fit commitment bonds cleanly. Sometimes the one’s that do fit are not exclusive to commitment: they also characterize identification bonds. Yet they are clearly distinguishable. This further concretizes the need to define commitment as a specific bond rather than an amalgamation of the four bond types listed in the table, as has previously been done due to lack of construct clarity about commitment (Klein et al. 2012). This has implications for strategy-as-practice research, in that commitment and identification ought to be regarded as separate psychological bonds.
2.2.2.1. Is commitment an attitude, behavior or practice?

In addition to being defined as a psychological state, commitment is sometimes labeled an attitude (e.g. Solinger, Val Olffen & Roe 2008) or behavior (e.g. Hrebiniak, Alutto 1972).

While commitment and attitudes have a reciprocal relationship, they are not the same. Attitudes refer to summarizing evaluations of the overall favorability of a target (Ajzen 1991). Attitudes toward a target, such as seeing the target as good/bad, preferable/unpreferable, pleasant/unpleasant etc. are not the same one’s dedication to the target. Affective constructs reflected in attitudes, such as satisfaction, do however have a reciprocal relationship to commitment since one is more likely to commit to positively evaluated targets (Klein et al. 2012). Being committed to a target, in turn, biases future affect and evaluation positively toward the target.

Commitment results in continuing a line of action – i.e. a behavior – but it is not a behavior per se. According to Klein et al. (2012), prior actions could also lead to continuing in a line of action, because of sunk costs or desiring not to ‘lose face’ by reversing course. These motives do not, however, necessarily reflect volition, dedication and responsibility. Actions can create a bond to the target. The bond may take the form of commitment, but not necessarily. While commitment may be demonstrated in actions, the actions or behavior itself is not commitment.

Similarly to behaviors, practices, being defined as what people engage with or do (Johnson et al. 2008), can be construed to be related to commitment but not the same. A practice may create commitment, and commitment may lead to continuing with a practice. However a practice is not the psychological bond of commitment.

2.2.2.2. Process model of commitment

As might be surmised from learning that workplace commitments is conceptualized as a dynamic, malleable, sensemaking-related psychological state, a model of workplace commitment would tend to be depicted as a process model. This chapter describes such a model which can be applied to understand the workings of individual’s commitment when the target is related to strategic management, such as implementing Must-wins or engaging in strategic practices.
Figure 3 below presents Klein et al.’s (2012) model. It seems prudent to affirm that this model is for the specific type of workplace bond termed ‘commitment’ which this thesis focuses on. The other psychological bonds were explicated in order to clarify commitment. A process model also showing the workings of acquiescence, instrumental, identification or other bonds individually and interdependently might be interesting and an avenue for further research, but it is decidedly beyond the domain and scope of the present research and thus it is time to move forward with commitment’s process model alone. Klein et al.’s (2012) model in typifies the process of commitment as it relates to any object or target, including but not limited to implementing strategic goals.

**Figure 3  Process Model of Commitment for Any Workplace Targets**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commitment antecedents</th>
<th>Cognitive and affective processes</th>
<th>Degree of target commitment</th>
<th>Commitment outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual characteristics</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td>Personality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target characteristics</td>
<td>Nature</td>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpersonal factors</td>
<td>Social influence</td>
<td>Social exchange</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational factors</td>
<td>Culture</td>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>HR practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal factors</td>
<td>Economic</td>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceptions of target and environment
- Salience
- Affect
- Trust
- Control

Commitment

Commitments to other targets

Continuation

Action

Motivation

Source: Klein, et al. (2012)

Each of the above columns in Figure 3 are dealt with in more detail below, starting with the cognitive and affective processes through which commitment comes about. In
summary, Figure 3 shows that if, and to what extent, commitment bonds are formed depends on perceptions of the target/object and the environment. Those perceptions are based on a system of individual, target, and environmental factors. Commitment, in turn, tends to result in certain outcomes and may lead to action. The outcomes include both continuation, i.e. intending to continue with the target and behaviorally stick with it, and motivation, i.e. putting forth effort toward pursuing, supporting, or participating in that target; which to some extent denotes engagement (Rich, Lepine & Crawford 2010). The nature of the effort is depends on the context and level of commitment. Sticking with the target and giving effort on behalf of it form a feedback loop that again influences the level of one’s volitional dedication to and sense of responsibility for the target, i.e. commitment. The model also recognizes that commitment bonds do not tend to be singular or exist in vacuums: both the formation and influence of commitment to a particular target may be affected or moderated by one’s commitments to other targets. Individuals can also dynamically form many commitment bonds and they might have interrelated effects. For example, in the process of dedicatedly putting forth effort for the completion of an organizational goal, one might be presented – intentionally or emergently, directly or indirectly – with opportunities for embracing additional responsibilities which one may or may not choose to accept.

**Column 2: Perceptions of target and environment**

I start with Column 2 from Figure 3 above because the individual’s perception about the target and environment is key in the formation of psychological bonds. One’s subjective thinking- and feeling-based processes result in perceived bonds with targets, and also dictate the type and strength of the bond that is experienced. Objective events of themselves do not have any subjective meaning to them, except the one ascribed to them. One gives ‘objective’ events the meaning that they subjectively and personally have, thus also determining how they are experienced. For example, a layoff or divorce can ‘objectively’ be described by multiple people with agreement to a great extent, i.e. termination of work contract or annulling a marriage and/or separating, respectively. However, subjectively the events can be perceived as e.g. terrible tragedies or welcomed, previously hoped-for releases into freedom and something new.

Looking at perceptions of target and environment is not foreign to strategy-as-practice, although the process is typically examined through a different but mutually supportive perspective. In strategy-as-practice and strategy implementation, influencing perceptions of target and environment have been researched to some extent previously,
in research focusing on sensemaking and sensegiving (e.g. Bartunek 1984, Gioia, Chittipeddi 1991, Balogun, Johnson 2004), and also sensebreaking (Pratt 2000, Mantere, Schildt & Sillince 2012). The sensemaking process has to do with understanding intended strategic changes in a way that makes sense or fits into the employee’s system of meaning (Bartunek 1984, Gioia, Chittipeddi 1991). The sensegiving process involves attempts to influence others’ sensemaking towards a preferred organizational reality (Gioia, Chittipeddi 1991). Sensebreaking refers to negating meaning and established interpretations (Pratt 2000). The implied logic of sensebreaking is that it creates a void or a fertile ground where sensegiving can emerge or sprout more freely. Indeed, sensebreaking on an organizational level “is practical when organizations need to reestablish the commitment of their members to a new strategy” (Mantere et al. 2012). The typical model employed in implementing strategic change is the process of sensebreaking-sensegiving-sensemaking, i.e. unfreezing evaluations of the strategy and environment, changing them, and then re-freezing them. However, top-down sensebreaking is a choice rather than a necessity; it tends to somewhat exclude the option of reversing strategic change, and unfreezing is nevertheless often induced without sensebreaking externally or through ambiguity, yet sensebreaking may yield more immediate commitment at the cost of retaining flexibility in strategic direction (Mantere et al. 2012). When examining the concept of commitment specifically, sensebreaking, sensegiving and sensemaking can be understood to be processes that influence organizational members' cognitive and affective processes, i.e. the perceptual evaluations of commitment target and environment, that create and affect commitment.

Based on extant research on commitment, the four most significant perceptual evaluations for forming commitment bonds for a given target, in no particular order, are affect, salience, trust and control.

Having a positive affect, i.e. feeling, about a target results in a greater likelihood that one is willing to be dedicated to and care about the target. This is based on the simple notion from biology and psychology that people tend to be attracted to approaching pleasurable situations and averse to painful situations. In addition, affective commitment has been strongly and reciprocally linked to target satisfaction (Vandenberg, Lance 1992, Vandenberghe, Bentein & Stinglhamber 2004).

Salient elements of a target or environment are those that are most noticeable or important. Psychological proximity influences people’s reaction to their environments,
as laid out in field theory (e.g. Lewin 1943). Psychological proximity makes elements more salient in one’s perceptual field. Salience is a key perceptual evaluation in the sense that targets and environmental factors with salience are likely to be given more weight in the individual’s sensemaking, and thus it also has an influence on the strength of the experienced bond (Klein et al. 2012).

In order for people to reciprocate with some level of dedication to and responsibility for a target, prior research indicates that a certain level of trust is required (e.g. Costa 2003, Hrebinak, Alutto 1972). Trust refers to a positive expectation of the intentions of others and to the ensuing willingness to accept vulnerability (Klein et al. 2012). Perceptual evaluations also tend to be more positive for trusted targets (Dirks, Ferrin 2001), thus making commitment more likely.

Based on social cognitive theory (Wood, Bandura 1989), planned behavior theory (Ajzen 1991) and research on prior commitment conceptualizations (Hollenbeck, Williams & Klein 1989), perceived control increases the likelihood of dedicating oneself to a target. A sufficient subjective sense of control allows individuals to have the confidence to take action towards achieving chosen/preferred/desired outcomes (Klein et al. 2012). This sense of control also expresses itself as having some sense of control over a situation. To draw an illustrating parallel, in everyday life we occasionally come across individuals who are feeling so helpless and powerless over a situation in their life that they seem unable, by themselves, to take any meaningful action or move forward. Similarly, then, some degree of perceived control or power in regards to the target is necessary for individuals to be willing to commit and take responsibility for the target. Thus it is likely in strategy implementation that only if employees perceive that they can affect or contribute to the strategy’s implementation in some way that they will choose to commit.

**Column 1: Commitment antecedents**

Perceptions of target and environment create commitment bonds, and they in turn are created through the commitment antecedents presented in the first column of Figure 3. In fact, numerous antecedents to commitment in the workplace have been identified over the years. However, as identified in the model, there are five categories of antecedents that influence commitment to any workplace target. Some previously identified antecedents that predict “staying” with the organization rather than commitment are excluded (Klein et al. 2012, pp. 141). While all the commitment
antecedents listed in the first column are expected to be relevant independent of targets, the relative influence of each is expected to differ depending on the target.

First, one’s perceptual evaluations are linked to one’s individual characteristics. Two ways of describing individual characteristics are through values and personality. Embedded values such as work ethic (Mirels, Garrett 1971) and how central work is to one’s life (Dubin, Champiloux & Porter 1975) are likely to influence one’s propensity to be dedicated to workplace targets. One’s individual traits, such as conscientiousness or risk aversion, also influence the likelihood of forming commitment bonds. Specifically, individual traits linked to the key perceptual evaluations include affect as a dispositional tendency (Watson, Clark 1984) i.e. one’s habitual styles of emotion, propensity to trust, and perceptions of control (Rotter 1966, Rotter 1971).

Second, target characteristics refer to the ways in which targets can be differentiated, e.g. by target type or specificity. For example, salience tends to be influenced by psychological proximity and specificity. Psychological proximity can be affected by spatial, physical, cognitive and/or temporal proximity (Klein et al. 2012). Specificity refers to the finding that greater concreteness of a target leads to greater commitment (e.g. Reichers 1985). Further, according to Klein et al. (2012), target characteristics such as legitimacy and reputation may yield trust, while perceived similarity to the target can achieve positive affect.

Third, interpersonal factors are also relevant in the formation of commitment bonds. Examples of ways in which social exchanges and influences precipitate commitment bonds include influencing group membership salience through interactions within groups, and the relationship between building social capital and increasing levels of trust (Klein et al. 2012). Social exchange refers to the interplay between individuals and the environment. According to Klein et al. (2012) relevant social exchange constructs include exchanges between leaders and other members of the organization, perceived organizational and supervisor support, and mutual, informal beliefs and perceptions between employers and employees, i.e. psychological contracts. Constructs relating to social influence speak to human beings tendency to wittingly or unwittingly be influenced by one’s social environment. Significant social influence is exerted by social comparisons (Festinger 1957), for example others’ degree of commitment to the target and how much the target is valued by others. The influence of social pressure, as in expectations and norms, is not an antecedent per se (Klein et al. 2012) because while it
may enhance the likelihood of forming a bond, it will not necessarily result in a commitment bond.

Fourth, factors in the organization itself influence perceptual evaluations. Perceptions of control are linked to organizational factors (Leifer, Mills 1996). Some of the organizational factors would seem to be related more extensively to certain targets. For example, while Klein et al. (2012) cite HR practices as being capable of creating workplace bonds, including commitment, it might be observed that HR practices are more likely to create bonds to certain targets. HR practices such as training, flexible work hours, rewards, and socialization efforts may certainly increase the propensity of committing to various workplace targets but it might be argued that they would tend to be most relevant when the target is the organization itself. Other organizational factors related to commitment tend to be somewhat intangible and holistic in their impetus. Such phenomena include organization and/or group culture and climate. While culture tends to be fairly stable, the prevailing climate would tend to be easier to change (e.g. Belle 1998). It could be said that an organization that lacks an implementation or execution culture might be more amenable to first creating a climate conducive to implementation than a full cultural transformation. Perceptions of the corporate, department, or group climate can be a positive or negative influence on commitment; for example, productivity climate is related to higher employee commitment while burnout climate tends to lower organizational commitment (Klein et al. 2012).

Finally, societal factors including cultural and economic are even more general factors in creating perceptual evaluations that lead to commitment. Since cultural considerations have a role in shaping meaning and perception, they are included in the model as a factor that influences perceptual evaluations (Klein et al. 2012). For example, the requisite level of perceived control needed to form commitment bonds may be higher in high uncertainty-avoidance cultures since there tends to be a higher need for control in general (Hofstede 1983, 1993), and trust (probably including procedural justice; e.g. Kim, Mauborgne 1991) may be more significant in high power distance cultures (Lind, Tyler & Huo 1997). Macroeconomic features potentially influencing target salience include the region’s market system and labor market features (Klein et al. 2012). Growth and unemployment rate have previously been identified as commitment antecedents, but they might be more relevant to acquiescence, i.e. not having other alternatives, and instrumental, i.e. having a high cost at stake, bonds. In addition, the relevance of societal factors might be more
pronounced for multinationals where there may be greater variability in subsidiaries’ cultural and economic factors.

**Column 3: Commitment to other targets**

One can have high levels of commitment to multiple workplace targets, and commitments do not operate in a vacuum. They are therefore presented as a mitigating factor in Figure 3. They are a mitigating influence because a person has a given amount of personal resources such as time, energy, and attention. If the demands of commitments to different targets are compatible, multiple commitments do not necessarily result in conflict (Angle, Perry 1986). For example, commitment to a strategic decision may accentuate, rather than detract from, the subsequent formation of commitment to practically implementing the decision. Klein et al. (2012) cite the example that in an adversarial industrial relations climate, workers tend to express commitment to either the organization or union, whereas in a cooperative climate commitment is expressed toward both, which illustrates the dynamic and malleable way in which previously existing commitment(s) may influence the creation of commitment to other targets.

**Column 4: Outcomes of commitment**

Two outcomes of commitment that are independent of the target have been identified, namely continuation and motivation. Similarly to the commitment antecedents, specific outcomes may be more or less relevant depending on the target. They might also be positive or negative for the individual, target, or both. For example, escalation of commitment (e.g. Mowday 1998, Sleesman et al. 2012) may have a negative influence if flexibility and a change in direction become required.

**Continuation.** Continuation refers to an intention to continue with the target and “stick with” it (Klein et al. 2012: 143). A committed individual is more likely to stick with the target for the length of its duration. The expected duration can vary, e.g. for a project team it might be relatively brief. Other expressions of continuance as a result of workplace commitments include unwillingness to abandon the goal or decision, and decreased turnover, absenteeism, and tardiness (Klein et al. 2012).

**Motivation.** Motivation is an outcome of commitment because commitment results in either efforting for, participating in, or supporting the target, depending on the target (Klein et al. 2012). If one is committed to a workplace target, it tends to be prioritized
when allocating one’s personal resources such as time and attention (Klein et al. 2012). There is therefore a willingness to make trade-offs on behalf of the target. However, commitment is not the only determinant of motivation: other factors such as needs and incentives may at times be more salient for determining motivation than commitment.

A significant motivational outcome of commitment is engagement. Commitment and engagement are distinct but positively related (Klein et al. 2012). Engagement refers to investing one’s individual complete self in a role, and job engagement is often sought after by managers because it enhances both task performance and organizational citizenship behavior (Rich, Lepine & Crawford 2010).

**Action.** One of the reasons workplace commitments are powerful is because they may lead to sustained action. It will not always do so however, because action is a second order outcome of commitment; based on reasoned action theory, there is a distinction between intentions and behavior. However, continuation and motivation tend to result in action. Performance, in turn, is not included in the model per se as it is a later outcome of action and not relevant to all targets. The implication, then, is that commitment does generally lead to performance but not directly; performance is mitigated by the closer outcomes and action. This is also of high interest to strategy-as-practice, as the research direction ultimately strives for linking of practices to performance (Johnson et al. 2007).

**Feedback loop**

Further, as discussed under behaviors and practices, one’s actions can influence commitment to the target, and vice versa, thus suggesting a reciprocal influence as depicted by the feedback loop running between action and commitment.
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter lays out an account of how the empirical material is processed in order to answer the research questions. What follows are discussions of the case study design, the research context, the variation of utilized purposeful sampling strategies, the collection of primary and secondary data, the procedures and practices used to analyze the data, and finally the integrity and reliability of the research method.

3.1. Research Design

Employee commitment as a whole has received considerable study in research fields such as organizational psychology, organizational behavior, and to some extent management, yet how it relates to specific aspects or practices of strategic management, such as strategy implementation, is less clear. Indeed, a review of past research indicated a somewhat limited understanding of commitment as it relates to the implementation of specific strategies. A well-framed starting point from which to launch a quantitative approach was therefore not apparent, because the role of the phenomenon being studied was uncertain. While the theoretical framework in section 2 gives some clues, it is by no means exhaustive. A qualitative method was therefore chosen as a suitable means for exploring this particular factor in strategy implementation. The inductiveness of the method stems from the notion that no existing theory seems to offer a completely feasible answer for the present research question (Eisenhardt 2007).

The utilized methodology is aligned with grounded theory. Langley (1999) recommends grounded theory as a strategy for sensemaking when theory does not already exist. The purpose of this research is to explore and understand an unclear phenomenon empirically. Grounded theory is related to discovery – i.e. theory generation rather than theory validation – and is concerned with grounding theory in reality (Glaser, Strauss 1967). Due to my research access situation (in-depth within one organization), grounded theory enables meaningful research since individual cases can be feasible within the method and the evidence proceeds from unique incidents. Grounded theory is sensitizing in that it is capable of presenting a particular phenomenon or situation, so one might thus understand relationships and perspectives anew. When done correctly it always explains as well as describes (Strauss, Corbin 1990), thus giving insight.
The study used a single case design and was strongly reliant on an inductive component. First I started with the specific – capturing data about commitment to implementing ‘Must-wins’ at Metso Corporation – and then proceeded to build toward general patterns and conclusions that are likely, but not certain (Patton 2002). While inductive reasoning is unable to yield certain conclusions, it can increase human knowledge, i.e. it is ampliative.

However, to some extent the research also has deductive and abductive components to it. By examining the extant literature prior to field work I was able to initially formulate an aim and research questions, thus exhibiting deductive reasoning. Due to the plurality of possible units and levels of analysis (Patton 2002), the wide possibility of results depending on what epistemological and theoretical perspective is applied (Johnson et al. 2007), and above all the constant comparison and analysis of my data in concert with its collection, it is likely that my reasoning will also have an abductive component: hypotheses can appear at every level, and the data’s interpretation is not finalized at an early stage but new codes, categories, patterns and themes can be developed and redeveloped as necessary (Reichertz 2007). Indeed, the logic of discovery in grounded theory is both abductive and qualitatively inductive.

3.2. The Research Setting

The case study was conducted at Metso Corporation, a large public Finnish MNC. In 2011, the company had EUR 6.7 billion in revenues, EUR 572 million in operating profit (EBIT) and over 30,000 employees (Metso Corporation 2012b). It “is a global supplier of technology and services to customers in the process industries, including mining, construction, pulp and paper, power, and oil and gas.” (Metso Corporation 2012a). The company’s operating structure consists of three segments: Mining and Construction (41% of net sales in 2011); Automation (12%); and Pulp, Paper and Power (40%) (separate entities account for the remaining 7% in net sales).

The setting was conducive to the study of strategy implementation because in 2011, a new CEO was internally appointed and a new strategy was launched. According to the annual report (2011: 8), the “strategic challenges that affect our businesses are crystallized in five must-wins: strong development of the services business, strengthening our presence in growth countries, retaining our technology leadership and developing our offering for local needs, developing a global operating model, and creating a working environment that enables our people to succeed.” Further, “Must-
wins are key strategic measures that we must implement to achieve our ambition and our most important targets” and “Each segment implements the must-wins in accordance with their own segment priorities, and thus they directly impact the growth of our business” (Metso Corporation 2012b).

Employees’ commitment in relation to the implementation of the “Must-wins” was a feasible and manageable unit of analysis. Strategy practice research allows for more plural levels of analysis (Johnson et al. 2007). Indeed, this research setting allows for examination of how ‘Must-wins’ – a tool and practice originating from outside the firm – are enacted by people in the organization and what the role of commitment therein is.

3.3. Sampling

The sampling was conducted in a mixed purposeful manner. Orthodox grounded theory calls for purely theoretical sampling. However, grounded theory has some methodological adaptability “in which not all steps can be carefully planned (sampling is one example)” (Jonsen 2009: 128). Indeed, pragmatism is often a guiding principle since researchers are required to adjust to their environments. I stuck to tried-and-tested principles such as theoretical saturation (Glaser, Strauss 1967) and taking field notes, yet I also adapted to the realities of the situation. Patton (2002) and others aligned with philosophical pragmatism advocate methodological appropriateness, and indeed pragmatism typically underpins mixed methods (Maxcy 2003, Greene, Caracelli 2003).

I started with a consideration of my research aim. I had chosen to study an aspect of strategy implementation, so I went where strategy was being implemented – as recommended by Corbin & Strauss (1990) – by interviewing people about their experience at different levels of the organization.

Some purposeful way of limiting the sample was necessary, while still seeking to glean significant and meaningful results, because the qualitative approach at hand is both time- and resource-intensive. The problem facing me was to select a sample that was wide enough that it might explain and explore the situation as it seemed to be holistically in the organization as much as possible, rather than in a specific isolated unit. From a pragmatic perspective the organization’s strategy was formulated and intended to be implemented throughout the organization, rather than in some isolated or specific units. Therefore when studying this strategic program, it seemed preferable
to design for some level of universality within the organizational since that was aligned with the purpose of the strategy implementation. Concurrently, I faced the very real limitation of my primary data consisting of semi-structured interviews with a limited number of individuals. The problem was seemingly further compounded when considering that there might be a wide divergence between units.

To start off with, in conducting background research about the usage of Must-wins in Finland, I gained insight into the phenomenon by following exceptional case sampling and arriving at KONE Oyj through a discussion with a senior manager at Metso and by perusing articles about ‘Must-wins’ in the Finnish business and economics press. The CEO of KONE seemed like the most ‘critical case’ in Finland for understanding some of the principles at work in Must-wins, so the opportunity that presented itself to conduct a one-hour interview with him was highly fortuitous and interesting.

I started off with an opportunistic sampling strategy at Metso by first conducting unstructured conversations with top and middle managers from the Group Strategy department, and then conducted four recorded pilot interviews in the first six weeks of field work. There was significant heterogeneity in the pilot interviewee sample (including entry-level engineering, business development manager, vice president, and top management, from different business segments). When it became apparent after transcribing and analyzing the interviews that some essential, universal themes were emerging from across the sample regarding the “Must-wins” at large and aspects of commitment to strategy implementation in particular, I decided to continue sampling for maximum variation (Patton 2002, Johnson et al. 2007).

The maximum variety, i.e. heterogeneity, purposeful sampling strategy involves selecting very divergent examples and aims at “capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation” (Patton 2002: 234-235). It fit well with my intent of exploring and describing essential themes and patterns that employees tended to experience in the practice of implementing the organizational strategy. This strategy directly addresses a justified concern in such a small sample, namely, that of transferability between individual cases. The data collection strategy’s logic is that any common patterns which emerge from “great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (Patton 2002: 235).
The data collection and analysis pursuant to maximum variety sampling might thus be expected to yield two types of results: first, detailed descriptions of particular cases, which enables documentation of uniqueness; and second, shared patterns and themes that derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity (Patton 2002).

To maximize variation in the sample I identified diverse characteristics or criteria. Two main criteria emerged from a discussion with an experienced, well-situated person (5+ years in the organization) and upon reflection on my own six-month experience within the organization. The first criterion was business segments (due to the segments’ unique histories and possible “organizational silos” [interview #1, 2012]). By including the different business segments I aimed to capture a variety of perspectives and practices in regard to the strategy. The second criterion was employees’ level or position within the organization. Different positions suggest different responsibilities and perspectives in terms of the strategy’s implementation. ‘Top manager’ here refers to executives and/or senior vice presidents. ‘Middle manager’ refers to titles such as director, vice president, etc. ‘Manager’ refers to employees with titles such as business development manager, R&D manager, etc.

The final sample consisted of eight semi-structured interviews, representing different levels within the organization, and different continents (Europe and North America). Table 1 below provides an overview of the sampling criteria and interviewee distribution.

Table 3  Interview respondent distribution broken down by sampling criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Level:</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Middle manager</th>
<th>Top manager</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N=</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>N=8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For collecting secondary data the overarching intention was relevance to my topic. I was kindly advised and assisted by people directly involved in different aspects of the strategy, such as formulation, communication programs, reporting, intranet postings, and human resources follow-ups. This purposeful and often emergent sampling process went on during the three months of field research but also informally during the
preceding five months when I was working in the Group Strategy department as a trainee.

3.4. Data Collection

The underlying intention driving the data collection was to obtain rich information that might start to provide a holistic and integral understanding of the role of commitment in the case. I thus collected data from numerous sources. I divide the empirical research data into the categories of primary and secondary data. I now elaborate on the data in more detail.

3.4.1. Primary data

In order to answer the research questions I primarily collected rich, insight-generating qualitative data through eight semi-structured interviews.

I chose to pursue semi-structured, one-on-one interviews because it appeared most appropriate given my research questions and design. In fact, a company-wide survey with a 76% response rate, out of 31000 employees, had been completed a few months prior to field work. It gave background information relevant to the study about commitment, but additional qualitative data was necessary to make meaningful sense of commitment in this context. Indeed, Johnson et al. (2007: 52) argue that “in-depth and largely qualitative data are a central requirement for developing the Strategy as Practice perspective”.

Interviews were appropriate due to the somewhat exploratory nature of the case and the desire to create information-rich data. It was necessary to access a personal aspect of managers, i.e. commitment, which might not open itself easily to mechanical measures such as questionnaires. It was in being close to the phenomenon in an interview setting that I could empirically access and capture interpretations that employees ascribed to the strategy, and its implementation (Johnson et al. 2007). Given the relative lack of precedent research, the interview approach also served the function of allowing me to better understand the nature of the problem.

I chose to conduct the interviews one-on-one, rather than in groups or units, because I intended to explore something personal and considered that confidentiality would motivate informants to provide accurate data (Huber, Power 1985). By collecting semi-
structured interview data I was also followed the precedent of previous insightful inductive work aligned with strategy-as-practice, including e.g. Eisenhardt (1989b), Langley (1989), and Balogun & Johnson (2004).

Prior to interviews at Metso I typically sent a short email or verbally affirmed my gratitude for their agreeing to an interview; that I was researching the role of commitment in Must-wins, more specifically commitment to its implementation/execution, and that I would very much like to hear how the Must-wins show up in the interviewee’s day-to-day work, and their thoughts on how commitment in ‘Must-win’ implementation might be enhanced. I also affirmed the interviewee’s anonymity in the research.

I created an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions, the wording and usage of which could be slightly tweaked so as to be appropriate to the level/position of the interviewee (Eisenhardt 1989a). These open-ended questions were supplemented by supporting questions that were asked when it seemed fruitful to do so in the interview. The questions were designed to capture employees’ perceptions that relate to commitment, within the context of implementing ‘Must-wins’. The interview guide can be found in Appendix 2. The language for the interview guide and the interviews was English. English is also the official company language.

At the start of interviews, prior to asking open-ended questions, my intention was to facilitate the best possible conditions for openness, so I shortly introduced the topic and purpose of my research, and then asserted that I was there to learn and understand the current situation – that there were no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers – and then I again affirmed the interviewee’s anonymity in the research when requesting permission to digitally record the interview.

In the interviews, my intention was uncover the interviewee’s personal relationship to and perception of their role in the implementation of the ‘Must-win’ programs. I thus started by requesting the interviewee to describe “how the Must-wins show up in your day-to-day work”. This targeted both the perceptions that result in commitment and incorporated the practical, practice view of strategy. Especially fruitful follow-up questions related to asking the interviewees for examples and then pursuing the implications of the example. The purpose was to hone in on the interviewee’s own experience right away, rather than encouraging cerebral citation from official strategy communication materials. This part of the interview typically resulted in a rich
exposition, and the discussion often steered itself in a direction of the core of what interviewees considered relevant and significant. In the final part of the interview, depending on the direction and duration of the interview, I tended to elicit suggestions for improving commitment to strategy implementation. In some cases I waited until the end and then asked more focused and/or clarifying questions, thus not compromising the integrity of the semi-structured approach.

Within 24 hours of interviews’ completion, I also recorded field notes in my research diary. The notes tended to follow the schema of 1) who, 2) when, 3) why, 4) what, and 5) significance/my interpretation.

3.4.2. Secondary data

The primary data was backed up by secondary data, such as unstructured conversations with key organizational members, and internal external documentations and presentations.

Secondary data played an integral in allowing me to conduct the research. Prior to collecting primary data, secondary data allowed me to gain an understanding of Must-wins in general and of Metso’s strategy and its history in the organization. It also allowed me to gain a ‘headquarters’, almost bird’s-eye, view on the progress of the strategy’s implementation. It did not, however, provide rich insight into the actual state of Metso’s strategy implementation, which in fact was a crux of the logic and argument of collecting qualitative interview data in the first place. Nevertheless, familiarity with the organization, strategy, and key actors helped me prepare for interviews, and respond as well as follow-up appropriately during the semi-structured interviews.

During the beginning of the research project it was first vital to have informal, unstructured conversations with knowledgeable and relevant internal actors in the organization. Towards that end I had at least seven informal one-on-one discussions (there were more, naturally occurring discussions that tangentially touched on my research topic but were not directly about it) with members of the Group Strategy department who were significantly involved in or exposed to the strategy, namely two business development managers, one director, and the senior vice president of strategy and M&A at the organization. I did not record these interviews. Instead I took notes in a research diary, typically right after the discussions but always according the “24-hour rule” as espoused by e.g. Eisenhardt (1989b) which requires completion of interview
notes and impressions within one day. I took care not to over-think or censor the notes but rather simply jotted down impressions and reflexive considerations as they occurred to me at the time.

I also researched ‘Must-wins’ more widely by first reading practitioner-oriented material about the phenomenon including a book (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2005), sections on Must-Win Battles in a monograph (Antonakis, Hooijberg 2007, Malnight, Keys 2007), and articles intended for managers. Through deviant case sampling, I had arrived at KONE Oyj as a stand-out in successfully utilizing Must-wins since 2005 in Finland, so in order to find out more about the approach I collected three long newspaper articles (Lauren, Eilertsen 2010, Mäntylä 2011, Ruokanen 2012), two public ‘Must-win’ related presentations by KONE Oyj, and conducted a 45 minute semi-structured interview with KONE’s CEO to better understand the background and KONE’s principles regarding the Must-wins. External documents also included annual reports.

At Metso, I collected or was shown internal documents such as the “strategy story”, reviews to the board and/or senior management, intranet postings such as the CEO’s blog and discussions about the results of a company-wide survey measuring employee engagement, presentations including strategy communication, strategy performance follow-ups by management, and various Board presentations. When documents were highly sensitive and confidential, it was more prudent to simply jot down relevant notes in my research diary after having been shown them, rather than collecting them for the purpose of usage in the research.

Table 4  Data source overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data type</th>
<th>Item name</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Usage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semi-structured</td>
<td>Audio recordings</td>
<td>With the interviewees’ permission, interviews were recorded electronically in their entirety. The recordings were treated as primary data sources.</td>
<td>The audio recordings were used to create interview transcripts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interviews</td>
<td>Full verbatim</td>
<td>All interviews were transcribed verbatim from recordings. Completed within a maximum period of two weeks from interview date. After transcription, self-memos and research diary</td>
<td>The verbatim interview transcript data were the most significant primary source of data for the analysis. They were key for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data type</td>
<td>Item name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-memos</td>
<td></td>
<td>entries relating to the interviews were collated.</td>
<td>the data analysis process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Self-memos regarding emergent observations about ideas, categories and themes were written spontaneously while in the process of transcribing interviews. Self-memos were stored separately, dated and cross-referenced to the appropriate places in the transcripts (as per Miles and Huberman 1994, cited by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2009).</td>
<td>The self-memos supported the analysis process. They also served as a facilitating tool in remembering insights and situating them into the existing analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research diary</td>
<td></td>
<td>I recorded additional contextual information, and observations regarding interviews prior to and within 24 hours of completing interviews in a research diary. The research diary's focal point was on (i) developing non-attached reflexivity and (ii) keeping track of ideas, impressions and thoughts so as to support understanding, creativity and analysis.</td>
<td>While the self-memos pertained to specific ideas and reflections around the ideas, the research diary was an on-going collection that included self-memos but also observations; ideas; reflections around interviews, ideas, analysis, and reflexivity. I thus used it as an analysis and sensemaking aid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archival communication material</td>
<td>Strategy communication overview</td>
<td>Group Strategy department’s background material regarding compilation and communication of “strategy story”; variety of PowerPoint presentations regarding the strategy from both corporate and segment-specific perspectives.</td>
<td>Developing an understanding of the process and content of Metso’s strategy; facilitating readiness to engage in semi-structured interviews and naturally flowing discussions; aiding in the design of interview guide, helping to create theory-based questions relevant to the organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data type</td>
<td>Item name</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Usage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field notes</td>
<td>Unstructured conversations</td>
<td>I kept records in the on-going research diary after informal and/or unstructured conversations with both (i) Metso employees and (ii) discussion with two chief executives from other firms who have been involved in implementing “Must-wins battles” in their organizations.</td>
<td>I used the field notes in the analysis section to understand the case better and to triangulate analysis findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal documentation</td>
<td>Internal survey</td>
<td>Full report &amp; segment-specific intranet postings on the results of an extensive internal survey (21,300 respondents out of 28,078 employees in the organization; 76% response rate) conducted by Kenexa Corporation. The survey was administered in May 2012 and measured ‘Performance Excellence’ (about “getting the work done”) and ‘Employee Engagement’ (concerning “the employment relationship”).</td>
<td>Used as supporting background material in interviews together with “Must-win” strategy story slide. The most informative survey items included “Employee Engagement” as a whole, and the dimensions of “Strategy”, “My Work” and “Involvement”. In “Strategy” the most pertinent questions included “I have a clear understanding of the Metso Strategy Story”, “I can see a clear link between my work and Metso’s long-term objectives” and “I believe Metso has an outstanding future”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slide (Powerpoint) materials</td>
<td>Slides relating to strategy communication, strategy reporting and strategy progress reviews in quarterly management reviews.</td>
<td>Developing a general understanding of the organizational structure, reporting and review in relation to organization’s strategy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other materials</td>
<td>Internal information in the company intranet related to strategy communication (presentations, updates relating to strategy, CEO’s blog) and to</td>
<td>Understanding of organizational context, supporting analysis.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.5. Data Analysis Procedures

In analyzing the primary and secondary data, I followed procedures of grounded theory as laid out by Corbin & Strauss (1990, 2008) and Glaser & Strauss (1967). Rather than waiting until all data was collected, I treated data collection and analysis as two somewhat iterative and interlinked processes. To give an example of the consequence of doing so, initially I down-played the significance of the “Must-wins” phenomenon as an engaging name for a ‘normal’ strategic intent, but when collected and analyzed data directed focus and attention towards the characteristics of the phenomenon repeatedly, it was given more significance as meaningful.

To analyze data, I transcribed interviews in their entirety manually (total of 143 pages) and combined transcripts with relevant information, including field note entries and memos when applicable. In order to understand the raw, transcribed primary data, I started with line-by-line microanalysis (Corbin, Strauss 2008, Patton 2002). I started this process two weeks after the first pilot interview, i.e. when I had transcribed it. The process remained similar throughout the data collection and analysis period.

First, on paper, I highlighted what appeared to be meaningful bits of data in relation to “a volitional bond reflecting dedication and responsibility for a target” (i.e. commitment; Klein et al. 2012: 131) and placed in-vivo or first order codes, i.e. language used by interviewees, in the margin next to the data (Patton 2002). When sufficiently descriptive in-vivo labels were not available in the bit of data, I labeled it with a simple descriptive phrase, as has been done by e.g. Corley and Gioia (2004). The aim of such ‘open coding’ was to identify and label phenomena, and categorically group them (Strauss, Corbin 1990). During the process, it was necessary to continuously question and compare emerging labels (Strauss, Corbin 1990).

I kept track of labels and the corresponding bits of data, such as a sentence, a few lines, or a paragraph from an interview (Patton 2002), in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet table. I was thus able to sort, group, and filter labels and data categories. This procedure corresponds to keeping ‘code notes’ (Strauss, Corbin 1990). I grouped concepts that
related to the same phenomenon. Then, through reflection and abstraction, I sought to observe where the essence of concepts pertained to similar phenomena, and thus categorized concepts under the broader heading of “categorical themes”. I checked that themes were internally cohesive. For example, the themes of needing to ‘understand strategy content’ and needing to ‘making sense of strategy content’ were combined. I then considered if the essences of different categorical themes might be similar, cohesive and consistent, thus allowing me to gather themes into multiple overarching dimensions. Gathering themes into overarching dimensions laid the groundwork for the emergent understanding.

In practice the process incorporated both logic and creativity. When engaged in open coding, the process was mostly structured and orderly: it involved working with the papers and poring through them again and again, comparing, contrasting, and refining. In contrast, axial coding was often imaginative, non-linear and creative: insights regarding relationships between and among categories sometimes came on suddenly when transcribing a new interview, but at other times while engaged in something completely unrelated, such as jogging or eating.

That I received ideas while jogging or eating speaks to the constancy of the analysis process: as old data was analyzed and fresh data was collected and analyzed, concepts and relationships could continually be elaborated and made more precise (Corbin, Strauss 1990). In fact, the analysis was consistently on my mind and I continued collecting and analyzing data as long as the analysis seemed subjectively ‘unfinished’ and unsaturated. In addition, the processes of open and axial coding are described here as linear but the distinction is somewhat ‘artificial’ (Strauss, Corbin 1990): To understand how codes and categories related, especially as new empirical data was gathered, it was necessary to iterate between open and axial coding. During microcoding, i.e. identifying and labeling themes in the content, the processes are combined (Corbin, Strauss 2008).

The data analysis procedures were undertaken to enable and facilitate a process of abstraction. The empirical data, of itself, is not sufficient to create understanding. I engaged in the procedures to identify and categorize phenomena in the data, and then built a yet more abstract data structure. The analytical approach is akin to the one utilized by Corley and Gioia (2004), in that the data is structured by first-order conceptual labels, second-order categorical themes, and aggregate dimensions. Figure 4 below shows the general hierarchical or structural flow of the data analysis, Figure 5
below presents the content of that data structure, and Table 5 below presents more detailed results of the coding analysis, including excerpts from interview transcripts that shows grounding of the data (as espoused by e.g. Eisenhardt 1989a).

Figure 4  Flow of data structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual labels (Σ=25)</th>
<th>Categorical themes (Σ=7)</th>
<th>Aggregate dimensions (Σ=3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>


Figure 5 Data structure

Conceptual Labels

- Need for management to be consistent with strategy and not deviate
- ‘Sitting on fence’, expecting strategy to be a fad, waiting to see what management does
- Need for steadfast, temporal consistency in communication
- Individual- and group-need to receive simple acknowledgment, attention & recognition for implementing strategy

- Need to understand before committing
- Not giving logic and big picture of strategy
- Not giving concretization
- Lack of communication
- Ways to encourage sensegiving communication

- Need to understand significance of chosen Must-Win Battles
- Need to understand how it can be applicable to own work

- Making Must-wins more tangible/concrete
- Focus on organic strategy and actions
- Need to see how own actions/efforts for Must-Win Battles contribute to the whole

- Simplification as a principle that facilitates implementation
- Focusing on essentials
- Simplifying complexity so that it can be understood/assimilated
- Clear communication and presentation of Must-wins

- Must-Win Battles metaphor as positive; “enabling focus”
- Must-Win Battles metaphor as neutral; “development areas”
- Must-Win Battles metaphor as negative; “the downside of battle and war”
- Process of reframing for shifting interpretation

- Must-Win Battles as guidance (“direction”, “themes”, “buckets”)
- Must-Win Battles and underlying initiatives often coming about through dialogue and consensus
- Must-Win Battles as umbrella strategy together with other aspects (Mintzberg & Waters 1985)

Categorical Themes

- Need for steadfastness rather than faltering
- Need for sensegiving communication
- Need for understandable strategy content
- Need for a link between strategic program and individual/team action
- Value of simplification
- Emotional interpretation of Must-Win Battle metaphor and shifting it through reframing
- Rational interpretation

Aggregate Dimensions

- Responsibility of Higher-ups
- Cognitive Clarity
- Value of simplification
- Subjective experience of commitment target
- Rational interpretation
- Emotional interpretation of Must-Win Battle metaphor and shifting it through reframing
- Need for a link between strategic program and individual/team action
- Need for understandable strategy content
- Need for sensegiving communication
- Need for steadfastness rather than faltering
- Responsibility of Higher-ups
- Cognitive Clarity
Table 5  **Data categorized by themes and dimensions**

**Key for Table 5**

*Table 5 shows how each dimension consists of multiple themes, and those themes in turn are based on primary data from interviews. The provided quotations are extensive. The purpose is to show that the analysis was grounded in the data rather than selectively based on the researcher’s pre-understanding. All quotes are from the case organization, unless otherwise specified in the reference.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categorical themes</th>
<th>Interview quotations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Need for Steadfastness rather than Faltering** | "People have to see that it's [Must-wins] there consistently and you have to focus on the same things all the time. You don’t want a message coming out six months from now that says 'hey we’ve changed our Must-wins and they’re five different ones'... Tell people now, continue telling them, this is what we're gonna be doing and then we're good, they're committed, they're engaged.” (Top manager)  

"I hope this communication strategy is not one where we start going out over the next month or two communicating to them, and then we don’t go back and reinforce them [Must-wins] again ... It has to be a consistent thing.” (Middle manager)  

“Constant, consistent, if somebody tells you or me 'do something', when I’ve heard it the third time and I see that you’re not deviating from that. Because the other thing that people have always said is that ‘aah’ (resistant noise). There are people sitting on the fence with this strategy. They’re saying ‘hey, let’s wait, this is the new "must-win strategy" approach that we have. Don’t worry about it. In six or twelve months it’ll be some kind of other strategy-type of document’. That’s been the way we’ve maybe approached it in the past. Now I think [new CEO] has looked at it, taken over from [ex-CEO], and has said 'Must-wins is how we're going to grow, step-by-step.” (Top manager)  

“’There is a big risk that it [Must-wins] becomes flavor of the month rather than something substantial. Thank God that we now have kept the structure. Hopefully we..."
are going to keep it for a third year so that people see that these are important. Because strategy sometimes means that there are things which you do in there which take two, three, four, or five years to be successful in. ... I think the guys who are doing this stuff on the ground, they might not have even been able to implement half of what they said and if all of the sudden [Market A] isn’t important then we all know that then there are no resources for [Market A]. Or resources for [Market A] will be put to [Market B], so what about the [Market A] stuff that was important, is it still important? Do we do it or don’t we?” (Middle manager)

“The thing now that I like about the strategy is that we’ve identified these Must-wins, we’ve put together initiatives that are going to support these Must-wins. Now we can’t deviate from those Must-wins. ... Here you’ve got five Must-wins, very simple, easy to understand, easy to communicate, and now the good thing is that let’s stick with them. Let’s stick with those top initiatives that we have to support those Must-wins and let’s not deviate too much between 2012 and 2016. Obviously I’m not saying that something may not come up that’s more important, but what’s more important? I mean this is sort of an all-encompassing group of categories. If something happens it’s still going to fall into one of these buckets.” (Top manager)

 “[Must-Win Battles] is a way to continuously develop the company. Some companies start development projects eagerly and continue with them for six to twelve months, but then it starts to drop, they start something new, and nothing in the more permanent development of competitiveness takes place. At KONE we really manage this. We have a regular follow-up in the Executive Board, in the Must-Win Battle teams, and also naturally the concrete initiatives throughout the organization. So that we know what is happening, what progress we are making, what we are not, and what additional actions we have to take.” (CEO, KONE)

Need for sensegiving, communication

“From the strategy implementation point of view, communications is really important if you want to reach each of the 30 000 Metso employees within about 350 units worldwide.” (Manager)

“The one thing that I think we can always do a better job with – and I think the [internal survey] results say that – we should have more communication to our people ... We don’t talk about things very well and communicate down what the strategies are.” (Top manager)

“Before you commit to something you would like to understand what you’re committing to [loud laughter]. If the strategy is just a number of colorful Powerpoints full of empty Powerpoint language, then you might say ‘that’s nice’. But then you’re closer to flavor of the year strategy, rather than something where you get a buy-in and commitment. ... I think we could still improve on our communications. A lot of stuff might not be comprehensible. It’s still on a corporate language Powerpoint thing.” (Middle manager)
"One of the things which was lacking when this was launched in 2011 was that before we all [business segments and lines] were asked to restructure our strategy, the communication in, at least to my understanding, wasn’t there. It was just: ‘These are the Must-Win Battles. These are the new templates. We expect your stuff back in X months or weeks from now’. That of course meant that all the businesses were like ‘Well, what are we going to do with this?’ So you basically restructure what you already have and bring it into a new format. ‘I have this initiative which was useful last year. I don’t know should we do that now. Well I’ll stick that under [one of the five Must-wins]’. That probably might mean that a new introduced structure might not actually have led to a change of strategic focus but rather a re-shuffling of our ongoing activities; you just put them in different drawers.” (Middle manager)

"Maybe the top leaders had an agreement there but at least it didn’t come to my level when I was responsible for strategy development in [Business Line]. ... Is that what we wanted to achieve, using this structure only for the purpose of clarity of communication, I don’t know. That’s one way of doing it. But I come back to my earlier point, then you have to show the logic of why these five [Must-wins]. How are they connected, how are they supporting each other. I don’t think that has been too successful and also in all the other communication material, I’m not entirely sure whether that’s the best of possible jobs we have been doing there. I think you could use this Must-Win concept much better.” (Middle manager)

"I think we have failed—failed is maybe too big of a word, but I think there’s a gap there between expectations of management and the understanding of the people. I think we have to narrow that gap and bridge that gap right now. This is an important process from a communications standpoint.” (Top manager)

"My view is that we communicate and use these things [Must-Win Battles] as separate streams, as parallel activities. I think they must not be. There must be a clear perspective that they are interlinked and that they are supporting each other.” (Middle manager)

"It’s about getting it down to that level where you have to have these small group town hall meetings, one-on-one discussions in some cases, to explain to the group what’s going on. I think where we fail with strategy sometimes, is that there’s a layer of people that know what’s going on and they need to drive it and they’re driving it, but there’s also a layer of people that don’t know what’s going on and what the significance to their day-to-day activities are.” (Top manager)

"If we give something also in our strategy which is meaningful and it feels good for the guys when they read it. We should not underestimate the intelligence of our people. This Must-wins slide is not only a document for senior management. As I said if you can’t communicate it, then so what? Then it stays at the level. But what does it mean for us? That, to my understanding, would certainly improve the dedication.” (Middle
“We went through our Technology [Must-win] and went through cases where we need to handle more so that we will cope and succeed in the future. And yes, clearly, the ones we are currently concentrating on are ones that are vital. But this manager is not the kind of guy who would read exactly what’s on some strategy Powerpoints word-for-word. Of course the talk had the guy’s own perspective, well in a positive way that the strategy had a good message. Basically we were probably being communicated to what the essential areas are for us to handle and why.” (Manager)

“That could have been a very good example actually, cook that down to a set of five- to-ten pictures as a kind of introduction to the strategy story... You know why are we doing that. Like in a James Bond movie they have this great pre-title sequence all the time—you get into the mood. So that could be a very nice thing, that everyone in the company gets the big picture before we tell them how” (Middle manager)

“Of course we have a lot of communication in all our internal communication, like our internal magazines and our own net pages, but that’s not enough. It has to be more human and include this face-to-face opportunity. ... In order to get everyone involved, it is not enough to talk about Must-Win Battles, but they have to be put into the bigger picture. ... We always communicate about how everything starts from understanding the megatrends.” (CEO, KONE)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Reaching Cognitive Clarity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Need for understandable strategy content</td>
<td>“You have to show the logic of why these five [Must-wins]. How are they connected, how are they supporting each other. I don’t think that has been too successful” (Middle manager)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>“The challenge is that if we invent something on a segment- or corporate-level, can we put that idea or huge strategic growth area in the context that our blue-collars, workers and service technicians can understand it, across borders and in different cultural contexts. That might be a very challenging task.” (Manager)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Link of strategic program with team action</td>
<td>“There’s also a layer of people that don’t know what’s going on and what the significance to their day-to-day activities are.” (Top manager)</td>
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<td>“It’s good for us to talk about it but now how do we get it down to the next level to the people who can actually impact those ‘Must-wins’ or feel that they can participate and make those Must-wins achievable and successful. This is the next step and it’s very important. It’s very important here that not only do we say what we’re aiming at but we have means of engaging everybody to feel that they’re part of this as well.” (Top manager)</td>
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| | “People want to be seen that what they’ve done as supporting the success of the
whole, and if you start doing that with some kind of measured display and you have a consistent communication plan, then that’s excellent.” (Top manager)

“When we first started this, we were thinking ‘ok we have to buy these guys, that guy, those and we’re gonna be where we need to be’. … We decided to take those away, because otherwise people are living in a dream world, and we just say ‘hey, it’s back to basics, you have to grow by improving day-to-day type of things that you’re doing, expanding your offering, think a little bit outside the box – think as much as you can outside the box but don’t think so much outside the box that you’re thinking about acquisitions’ (Top manager)

“Inorganic actions cover only part of the businesses, some specific niche or strategic growth area that we have been able to identify. I think from the communication point of view, I think it’s really important that the organic actions are more relevant because most of the guys are doing the daily tasks. Daily tasks are part of the organic growth strategy, or organic actions to implement something that is in the strategic agenda.” (Manager)

“We have different specific actions and each one of those engages a different group of people … You ought to tie that into sort-of ‘What do I do on a day-to-day basis that impacts this year’ … And make it so that it becomes at a global level, where somebody says ‘that’s great, it’s good that Metso’s growing, that’s good’, but also make it where in the shop-level – whether you’re in a small shop in the corner of the world – you could tell the guys ‘hey our target here in this location as part of these Must-wins was to grow the business, to improve our quality, was to have common ways of operating’, put some kind of indicators for the groups of people out there so they could see that ‘hey we’ve been doing a good job’ … people want to be seen that what they’ve done as supporting the success of the whole, and if you start doing that with some kind of measured display and you have a consistent communication plan, then that’s excellent.” (Top manager)

“[Facilitators network] which is a network of high energy, communicative people across the world that take care so that the communication of the new set of Must-Win Battles goes through the organization. So that every boss takes his team and tells all of this strategy story and what is new, why it is new, and tries to help every KONE person in his or her team see how these Must-Win Battles — maybe one or two — is related to the work they are doing. That helps them to understand that ‘this is the direction we are moving. These are the reasons why. Now in order to get here, these Must-Win Battle initiatives are essential and my own work relates to this initiative.” (CEO, KONE)

Value of simplification

“I really believe that simplification is very essential. For example, Must-Win Battles is a very simple and clear way to develop the competitiveness of our company. I say to our people ‘always remember that if the decision to be done does not sound simple,
you don’t get that implemented’. But if you come to a crystal clear decision which is very simple, there is a very high probability that it will get implemented. This is so that you don’t have to explain; when people realize that ‘this is it’, then it gets done.” (CEO, KONE)

“[Must-wins] covers all the groups and makes it very simple to understand what are the basic elements” (Top manager)

“That’s <looking at Must-Win Battles slide on paper in front of him> a clear one, not too many and easy to understand. They haven’t used complex word forms, no need.” (Manager)

“I remember being in meetings in the past where it was just too many items. … if you have too many initiatives going on, and you have 70+ locations around the world, and they all in a way have their own initiatives and things they want to do. When you start grouping and combining them and you start coming up with—as we have—sort of our top 8 or 9 initiatives that satisfy those Must-wins, it gives very clear direction that these are the big ticket items that we need to focus on. … If you have too many things on your plate—yourself and myself—then it becomes which one do I start? Instead of doing a 100% good job on five initiatives you start doing a sort of 65% good job on 25 initiatives.” (Top manager)

“Well these themes have circulated for a long time in some action plans but we’ve had so many of these development projects or ‘tasks’ that they haven’t been moved forward, they’re such big entities that they need so many resources. With such a small team as we had it was not executable … I see that something has happened. So the leaders have now decided to change their approach and decided to concentrate on those essential or most essential things; let’s rather take a few projects that we take care of very well, than a lot hither and thither.” (Manager)

“The strategy itself is quite complex thing. At the end we need to formulate it in a quite simple format. Understanding the big picture but not losing the connection to the details. Because as a long-time journey we really need to be able to do the roadmaps and really a sort of practical action-level tasks as well, and understanding that big complex phenomena in a particular context of strategy is quite a difficult task.” (Manager)

“Clarity is extremely important, it needs to be simple enough. If we are too engineering and technology company, I think we can’t really reach the simplicity and clarity. Clarity is actually a very good word. It’s impossible to reach because we count with the details and we put it to the too small. I’m not saying it’s not important to put it into the small context, but if we really split it up into one thousand dimensions, we can’t formulate the big picture, we really can’t find the cause and effects, and the strategy loops there, because it’s too challenging.” (Manager)
“There’s also this word discipline, to make it clear. We call it in growth countries, we call it emerging markets, it might be the same. But when you come to understanding strategy, you should not use different words for the same thing.” (Middle manager)

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<tr>
<th>Dimension ⇒ Subjective experience of commitment target</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rational interpretation</td>
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<tr>
<td>“I think what &lt;Must-wins&gt; does is that it gives us guidance as we move forward.” (Top manager)</td>
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<td>“Must-Win Battles are mainly thematic” (Manager)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Obviously we have to cover these Must-wins and I think these Must-wins cover the basic drivers that we have in terms of growth, both services, growth in growth countries, operating excellence, development and people. For us to be successful those are the basic things that we have to make sure that we’re covering. So I think what it does is that it gives us guidance as we move forward.” (Top manager)</td>
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<td>“Must-win battle thinking fits excellently with the ‘umbrella’ thinking because Must-win battle is the theme or umbrella. After that we strive to get the doing and action from the corporate and business level under it, together with our [corporate] communication, and monitoring or management of it although without extreme detail … “Must-wins bring the topics to focus on, determine resourcing, and bring the leadership platform” (Manager)</td>
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<td>“some sectors may be very unconnected … for example in some country in some unit, business, or technology, they may be doing their own thing and sticking to it. It might be a very large thing that they are pursuing resolutely” (Manager)</td>
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<td>“Most [actions under the Must-Win umbrella] are based on consensus because they are done over time in groups and teams … consensus is developed through mutual dialogue, understanding and learning” (Manager)</td>
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<td>“The strategic direction may not be found initially during the strategic design and planning. Then through enough iteration and debate the direction has been found and what we actually want to drive has become clarified … consensus happens during the doing and in the end we have coherent action that brings results under that particular umbrella” (Manager)</td>
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<td>“Competitive situation changes or shocks us significantly then we might go fundamentally back to the umbrella itself and choose new Must-Win Battles to focus on” (Manager)</td>
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<td>“In the real world shocks do come, the question is how big or small they are, and therefore to what extent that narrowing happens” (Manager)</td>
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| “What’s the reality? Reality against the concept. That’s extremely important, if you
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don’t have any connection to the reality, only the growth plan, the concept, the strategy and the macro, there’s not any points to reality.” (Manager)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Emotional interpretation of Must-Win Battle metaphor and shifting it through reframing</th>
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<tr>
<td>“You can call it our most important focus areas or strategic development areas” (Middle manager)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Personally, I hate the choice of words” (Middle manager)</td>
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<tr>
<td>“... Objectives, which I can sort by Must-win battles or balanced scorecard perspective―doesn’t matter.” (Middle manager)</td>
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3.6. Reliability of the Data

I took several steps to ensure the integrity of the empirical research and cope with limitations.

There is the possibility of ‘going native’ (Johnson et al. 2007) when a researcher is an employee or otherwise embedded in the organization. To prevent this I took field notes in my research diary prior to and after interviews, in order to enhance reflexivity and gain a more detached perspective on the research. The field notes served as supplementary material during the analytical process, helping with retrieval of elements and circumstances of interview sessions, thus increasing the rigor and validity of the qualitative research (Patton 2002). I had also worked at the organization for only four months before launching the research, thus not giving me enough time to become enmeshed in the culture and practices of the organization. Being an insider, however, had significant advantages such as having great access and support, high levels of trust and comfort when interviewing employees about strategy, and being able to use appropriate references and words that made sense to interviewees, which in turn improves the quality of data obtained from interviews (Patton 2002). Another significant benefit, brought to my attention by an organizational member prior to my conducting interviews, was that my position as a ‘trainee’ was non-threatening and likely to elicit more honest and transparent responses than what e.g. a higher up, more established headquarter employee might receive.

For the interviews, I took care to facilitate openness. Prior to conducting interviews, I discussed the interview guide with more experienced colleagues and made four iterative
revisions, striving to combine wording and questions appropriate to the organization while incorporating theory, before it was complete. During interviews, I attempted to avoid introjecting my own views. I took care to ask singular, open-ended questions. I strove to allow the interviewee to be in the driver’s seat and lead the discussion. I sought to listen and not introduce theoretical concepts, instead trusting that subsequent analysis would uncover the significant aspects of the data.

Prior to finishing the work, I utilized the technique of member checking to triangulate and enhance the robustness of the results. Member checking is one of the central and most recognized triangulation techniques for validation and credibility (Jonsen 2009). It involves showing informants the major findings of the study and allowing them to evaluate them, thus effectively letting them act as judges. Two organizational members who have responsibilities within strategy and business development in the organization read the thesis a month before I finished it. The analysis was approved of and discussed. New relevant data relating to the strategy’s communication and the usage of the term ‘Must-wins’ instead of ‘Must-Win Battles’ at the organization was introduced. This new data was then incorporated into the findings and discussion.
4  EMPIRICAL FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. The Three Dimensions of the Data

The significant themes of the empirical data can be synthesized into three dimensions. All of them have to do with the cognitive and affective/emotional processes, i.e. the perceptions of target and environment, which result in commitment bonds (as reviewed in section 2.2.2.2). What follows is a presentation and analysis of the dimensions with abundant usage of citations for illustrative and verifiability purposes.

The first dimension, responsibility of higher-ups (section 4.1.1), relates to the finding that managers who are higher-up in the organization than the particular individual have a responsibility due to their influence in creating commitment bonds. The second, reaching cognitive clarity (section 4.1.2), refers to the need to have sufficient understanding of the target, i.e. strategy – both on a big-picture and concretized, day-to-day activities level – before choosing to commit to it. The third dimension, subjective experience of commitment target (section 4.1.3), on the surface speaks to the possible variation in cognitive and emotional perspectives on Must-wins, yet at the heart of it is the implication that people can empower themselves to change bond types and/or bond strength because a volitional change of perspective is possible.

4.1.1. Responsibility of Higher-Ups

The findings indicate that higher-ups managers can support the formation of individuals’ commitment bonds. In the context of creating commitment to the Must-wins’ implementation, it seems that the social influence of higher-ups, i.e. managers hierarchically above oneself potentially all the way up to top management, is significant. This was a theme that permeated all three levels of sampling, i.e. managers, middle managers, and even top managers themselves. Indeed, the interviewed top managers tended to signal awareness of their own responsibility to be committed in driving the implementation of the Must-wins.

In implementing Must-wins there seemed to be two essential needs in creating commitment that higher-ups could speak to, namely needs for higher-ups to be steadfast rather than faltering through the process, and to provide sensegiving communication. I now illustrate and explicate the findings of each of these needs.
4.1.1.1. *Need for steadfastness rather than faltering*

Being steadfast refers to “not being subject to change” or being “firm in belief, determination, or adherence”, while faltering refers to “moving waveringly or hesitatingly; hesitating in purpose or action; losing drive or effectiveness” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2012).

Companies often change their strategies. This was a concern among respondents in the research, perhaps largely influenced by historical factors at Metso, as showcased in the following quote:

“There are people sitting on the fence with this strategy. They’re saying ‘hey, let’s wait, this is the new “must-win strategy” approach that we have. Don’t worry about it. In six or twelve months it’ll be some kind of other strategy-type of document’. That’s been the way we’ve maybe approached it in the past. Now I think [new CEO] has looked at it, taken over from [ex- CEO], and has said ‘Must-wins is how we’re going to grow, step-by-step.’” (Top manager, 2012)

The risk with being faltering about strategy — e.g. implementing it in fits and starts, changing it often, wavering — is that the businesses may end up placating headquarters’ strategy requests without making relevant changes in operations, thus potentially leaving the strategy in the domain of formulation-without-implementation. Such faltering would make individuals likely to create acquiescence or instrumental bonds to placate higher-ups, at best, but dedication and caring for the strategy, i.e. commitment, is unlikely to result.

Another related aspect which could deter sticking with the strategy’s implementation, i.e. commitment, and which encapsulated an aversion to faltering and a preference for steadfastness was the concern that the Must-wins might be a strategic “flavor of the month”:

“There is a big risk that it [Must-wins] becomes flavor of the month rather than something substantial. Thank God that we now have kept the structure. Hopefully we are going to keep it for a third year so that people see that these are important. Because strategy sometimes means that there are things which you do in there which take two, three, four, or five years to be successful in. ... I think the guys who are doing this stuff on the ground, they might not have even been able to implement half of what they said and if all of the sudden [Market A] isn’t important then we all know that then there are no resources for [Market A]. Or resources for [Market A] will be put to [Market B], so what about the [Market A] stuff that was important, is it still important? Do we do it or don’t we?” (Middle manager, 2012)

While there is the above-mentioned risk of “flavor of the month”, it need not become so. A top manager in the line business appreciated the progress in the Must-Win implementation thus far:

“The thing now that I like about the strategy is that we’ve identified these Must-wins, we’ve put together initiatives that are going to support these Must-wins. Now we can’t deviate from those
Must-wins. ... Here you’ve got five Must-wins, very simple, easy to understand, easy to communicate, and now the good thing is that let’s stick with them. Let’s stick with those top initiatives that we have to support those Must-wins and let’s not deviate too much between 2012 and 2016. Obviously I’m not saying that something may not come up that’s more important, but what’s more important? I mean this is sort of an all-encompassing group of categories. If something happens it’s still going to fall into one of these buckets.” (Top manager, 2012)

It may be recalled from section 2.2.2 that “sticking with” something, which the top manager is referring to above, is a prime outcome of commitment. The top manager above is expressing a preference for the company’s leadership to be committed to the Must-wins and stick with them.

While being steadfast instead of faltering is perhaps a more illustrative way to relay the idea, it would seem that the need is essentially selfsame as managers, higher-ups or leaders in general being committed to the Must-Win approach and its continued implementation. When higher-ups are observably committed to the approach, and exhibit the attendant actions and indications, it would seem that employees are also more willing to take responsibility for committing to the necessary actions to develop the company in accordance with the guidelines of the Must-wins. This idea was affirmed by a top manager with fifteen years of experience in the company: “to me, commitment is a two way street” (2012). In a general way, then, if an individual’s higher ups do not care about the Must-wins, why should the individual be particularly inclined to do so?

Encouragingly for organizational members at Metso, at the time of writing the CEO seemed to be signaling his commitment to the strategy and Must-wins in moving forward:

“A strategy that’s working doesn’t need to be changed every year. We have made small business-specific adjustments as needed. The strategy implementation is advancing accordingly.” (CEO’s intranet blog, “Strategy as our compass in a changing world”, 2012)

Indeed, when another member of the Metso Executive Board informally asked me some three months into the research about findings thus far, and upon responding with needing to stick steadfastly with the Must-Win approach, the response was in effect that top management will stick with the Must-wins, unless there would be some unanticipated, unlikely change of management.

This principle of sticking steadfastly with the implementation and process of the Must-wins was also echoed by the CEO of KONE:

Author: It seems there’s a lot of commitment, even from you, and I imagine the top leadership, to be saying that these are the Must-wins and what we’re focused on, period.
CEO: Yes actually the management of this starts from me. That is very clear.

Author: Yes and in fact I think you launched the first Must-wins in 2005 [seven years ago] and you’ve already had many cycles now. It seems to work for you.

CEO: Yes and we will continue. It has been working. It is a way to continuously develop the company. Some companies start development projects eagerly and continue with them for six to twelve months, but then it starts to drop, they start something new, and nothing in the more permanent development of competitiveness takes place. At KONE we really manage this. We have a regular follow-up in the Executive Board, in the Must-Win Battle teams, and also naturally the concrete initiatives throughout the organization. So that we know what is happening, what progress we are making, what we are not, and what additional actions we have to take.

For individual practitioners an encouraging implication is that one seems to have choice about being steadfast instead of faltering. Just as commitment is a volitional choice (as described in section 2.2.2) it can also be a personal, inner choice to be a steady leader rather than a faltering one.

4.1.1.2. Need for sensegiving communication

In creating commitment to the Must-wins’ implementation, in addition to the need for perceiving that higher-ups were steadfastly committed to it, the findings also indicate a need to personally understand and make sense of the Must-wins.

Sensemaking and sensegiving are usually treated as interrelated concepts. Sensemaking refers to understanding the intended change in a way that ‘makes sense’ or fits into a system of meaning (Bartunek 1984, Gioia, Chittipeddi 1991). Sensegiving involves a process of disseminating a ‘vision’ or otherwise attempting to influence the sensemaking of others toward a preferred organizational reality (Gioia, Chittipeddi 1991). In strategic change, sensemaking is the corollary of sensegiving (Gioia, Chittipeddi 1991). Having made sense of the intended strategic change, it can then be communicated further to others, i.e. cascaded through the organization; to borrow Mintzberg’s (1990) simile, sensemaking follows sensegiving the way the right foot follows the left.

Before committing, or choosing to be dedicated, people generally seemed to have a need to understand the Must-wins in a way that made sense to them:

“Before you commit to something you would like to understand what you’re committing to [loud laughter]. If the strategy is just a number of colorful Powerpoints full of empty Powerpoint language, then you might say ‘that’s nice’. But then you’re closer to flavor of the year strategy, rather than something where you get a buy-in and commitment.” (Middle manager, 2012)
To disseminate understanding of the Must-wins to the level of concrete implementation and action in the organization, communication was seen as the necessary enabling process:

“From the strategy implementation point of view, communications is really important if you want to reach each of the 30,000 Metso employees within about 350 units worldwide.” (Manager, 2012)

Yet such communication is not without its challenges. A company-wide survey regarding employee engagement and performance had recently showed that there was general room for improvement in communications. Managers at the middle and top levels also echoed this finding:

“The one thing that I think we can always do a better job with – and I think the [internal survey] results say that – we should have more communication to our people ... We don’t talk about things very well and communicate down what the strategies are.” (Top manager, 2012)

“I think we could still improve on our communications. A lot of stuff might not be comprehensible. It’s still on a corporate language Powerpoint thing.” (Middle manager, 2012)

The following quote speaks to incomplete sense-giving communication when the Must-wins were launched at Metso, and to the necessity for communication that helps people make sense of it, if the strategy is to be implemented in practice:

“One of the things which was lacking when this was launched in 2011 was that before we all [business segments and lines] were asked to restructure our strategy, the communication in, at least to my understanding, wasn’t there. It was just: ‘These are the Must-wins. These are the new templates. We expect your stuff back in X months or weeks from now’. That of course meant that all the businesses were like ‘Well, what are we going to do with this?’ So you basically restructure what you already have and bring it into a new format. ‘I have this initiative which was useful last year. I don’t know, should we do that now? Well I’ll stick that under [one of the five Must-wins]’. That probably might mean that a new introduced structure might not actually have led to a change of strategic focus but rather a re-shuffling of our ongoing activities; you just put them in different drawers. Maybe the top leaders had an agreement there but at least it didn’t come to my level when I was responsible for strategy development in [Business Line]. ... Is that what we wanted to achieve, using this structure only for the purpose of clarity of communication, I don’t know. That’s one way of doing it. But I come back to my earlier point, then you have to show the logic of why these five [Must-wins]. How are they connected, how are they supporting each other. I don’t think that has been too successful and also in all the other communication material, I’m not entirely sure whether that’s the best of possible jobs we have been doing there. I think you could use this Must-Win concept much better.” (Middle manager, 2012)

A year after launching the Must-wins, a top manager in a business line recognized the continuing presence of the challenge and, in fact, the team was about to launch more comprehensive and consistent communications:

“I think we have failed—failed is maybe too big of a word, but I think there’s a gap there between expectations of management and the understanding of the people. I think we have to narrow that gap and bridge that gap right now. This is an important process from a communications standpoint.” (Top manager 2012)
The problem with lack of sensegiving seems to be that what the Must-wins imply for one’s own work and in terms of the development of the organization may remain unclear. For many, enough sensegiving and sensemaking may have occurred, yet there was room for improvement:

“It’s about getting it down to that level where you have to have these small group town hall meetings, one-on-one discussions in some cases, to explain to the group what’s going on. I think where we fail with strategy sometimes, is that there’s a layer of people that know what’s going on and they need to drive it and they’re driving it, but there’s also a layer of people that don’t know what’s going on and what the significance to their day-to-day activities are.” (Top manager, 2012)

Without the requisite sensegiving it may also be hard to integrate the Must-wins into a personal system of meaning – which is necessary for commitment – as exemplified in the following quote:

“My view is that we communicate and use these things [Must-wins] as separate streams, as parallel activities. I think they must not be. There must be a clear perspective that they are interlinked and that they are supporting each other. ... If we say that we are a technology company, then I would see that whatever we want to do for Services [Must-Win #1] and Growth countries [Must-Win #2]—if these are our main markets so to speak, the customers we want to serve or what we want to serve them with—then Technology [Must-Win #3] has to have a clear link to these things, whatever we say for example in Services.” (Middle manager, 2012)

Being able to integrate the organization’s Must-wins cohesively into one’s personal system of meaning would likely make it easier to care about them, which thus increases commitment (Klein et al. 2012).

Generally, sensegiving communication might be provided in a way that is both cognitively and affectively (i.e. emotionally) fulfilling:

“If we give something also in our strategy which is meaningful and it feels good for the guys when they read it. We should not underestimate the intelligence of our people. This Must-wins slide is not only a document for senior management. As I said if you can’t communicate it, then so what? Then it stays at the level. But what does it mean for us? That, to my understanding, would certainly improve the dedication.” (Middle manager, 2012)

By meeting the need for sensegiving communication, sensemaking is naturally improved, thus affecting the perceptions of target and environment that can create commitment bonds.

A manager pointed out that there is one group of employees where sensegiving communication is unlikely to be initially available: the leaders who are forming the strategy. For them it is probably particularly significant to engage in free discussion, dialogue or even debate about the strategy during its formation so that their own sensemaking and commitment can be solidified. Without that initial sensemaking and commitment, providing subsequent sensegiving communication and direction
steadfastly is likely to be particularly challenging and inauthentic. If the implementation of the Must-wins does indeed start from top managers in the company, it is particularly relevant for them to be enabled and choose to commit to the Must-wins. By doing so they might steadily inspire commitment and help to cascade the sensegiving communication through the organization.

In the long run, if Must-wins are stuck with for years, an additional source of interest and commitment to Must-wins from top and middle management can be if the leaders have observed that the Must-wins receive on-going attention and action in the organization. If they do, leaders are more likely to care about the process and be readily engaged in formulating the on-going initiatives under the Must-wins, and, when relevant, in choosing new Must-wins. They would be more likely to strive to introduce initiatives and actions that they care about into the Must-wins structure because they are aware that, whatever the Must-win, it will be implemented strongly. By having Must-wins that are cared about, commitment is strengthened. In addition, this would also help in encouraging dialogue, discussion and possibly debate among leaders when forming Must-wins, which could help with sensemaking.

What other implementation principles can be utilized to aid sensegiving communication of the Must-wins? The findings suggest three, and there are probably many more, as yet uncovered. One is to encourage face-to-face communication of the Must-wins and what they mean for ‘us’ holistically but also practically, e.g. on department, unit, and/or team level; the second is to situate the Must-wins into the ‘bigger picture’ of the organization and the organization’s context (e.g. relevant mega-trends, company values, or similar), and third to encourage personally making sense of the Must-wins in terms of implications to one’s own work.

Indeed, the findings suggest communicating the Must-wins face-to-face as much as possible throughout the organization is helpful. Further, it is not enough to talk about only the Must-wins themselves, but they need to be put into the bigger picture and also how they are related concretely to one’s own work. These principles were for example evident in KONE’s way of communicating the Must-wins. There is the encouraging of face-to-face communication: “of course we have a lot of communication in all our internal communication, like our internal magazines and our own net pages, but that’s not enough. It has to be more human and include this face-to-face opportunity” (CEO, 2012). Communication tends to start with contextualizing: “In order to get everyone involved, it is not enough to talk about Must-Win Battles, but they have to be put into
the bigger picture. ... We always communicate about how everything starts from understanding the megatrends” (CEO, 2012). Further, “the objective being to include dialogue between every KONE person, so that in face-to-face discussions everyone would understand and internalize that ‘this is how my work relates to this bigger thing, and bigger purpose, of all of our efforts” (CEO, 2012). Contextualizing the Must-wins into the bigger picture of megatrends and also the relatedness of Must-wins — or particular Must-Win initiatives — to one’s own work can be facilitated, for example, through a so-called ‘facilitators network’:

“which is a network of high energy, communicative people across the world that take care so that the communication of the new set of Must-Win Battles goes through the organization. So that every boss takes his team and tells all of this strategy story and what is new, why it is new, and tries to help every KONE person in his or her team see how these Must-Win Battles — maybe one or two — is related to the work they are doing. That helps them to understand that ‘this is the direction we are moving. These are the reasons why. Now in order to get here, these Must-Win Battle initiatives are essential and my own work relates to this initiative.” (CEO, 2012)

These principles were also evident at Metso to some extent. For example, on the company intranet there were some posts spreading awareness about good managerial practices for communication of the Must-wins: “Besides having individual discussions with his team about their new roles, [team leader] sat them down to go over the strategy. ‘I had prepared an interpretation of what the strategy means to us, but it was open for discussion. The way I see it, the team leader’s role is to activate a discussion, not to bring ready-made answers to the team. It is only through participation that people will make the matter their own’, explains [team leader].” (Metso intranet, 2012).

The principle of team and department leaders making sense of the strategy both for themselves and their team/department, and then disseminating the understanding further, was also evident in practice, as a research & technology development manager relates in the following:

“[during a department dinner and evening] we went through our Technology [the Must-Win most relevant to this department] and went through cases where we need to handle more so that we will cope and succeed in the future. And yes, clearly, the ones we are currently concentrating on are ones that are vital. But this manager is not the kind of guy who would read exactly what’s on some strategy Powerpoints word-for-word. Of course the talk had the guy’s own perspective, well in a positive way that the strategy had a good message. Basically we were probably being communicated to what the essential areas are for us to handle and why.” (Manager, 2012)

The principle of handling and connecting to the big picture was not always apparent at Metso. For example, a Metso middle manager had concrete suggestions for including the bigger picture in the Must-Win communications:

“We had of course these very nice things a couple years earlier, this ‘World Around Metso’ [internal book on megatrends and business environment] which for me was an excellent document which described the macro perspective very very well. That could have been a very
good example actually, cook that down to a set of five-to-ten pictures as a kind of introduction to the strategy story... You know why are we doing that Must-wins. Like in a James Bond movie they have this great pre-title sequence all the time—you get into the mood. So that could be a very nice thing, that everyone in the company gets the big picture before we tell them how.” (Middle manager, 2012)

One way to achieve this, then, might be compressing the Must-wins message and underlying logic to pictures and steadily communicating it.

To wrap up the findings on the role of higher-ups in creating commitment to Must-wins, it seems higher-ups do have a responsibility. Higher-ups themselves can choose to be committed to the implementation of Must-wins (thus creating more commitment directly and indirectly through the process of social influence) and they can provide sensegiving communication that influences perceptions of the Must-Win Battles and their context. Yet there seems to be more to creating commitment. The choice of whether to be committed or not still rests within the individual. I next explore a related individual need in creating commitment, namely reaching cognitive clarity.

4.1.2. Reaching Cognitive Clarity

Almost as a corollary to the findings on the need for sensegiving communication, there was also an exhibited need for the organization’s strategy content to be clearly understandable in the first place so that it could be implemented. The data indicates three salient aspects for reaching cognitive clarity: (1) the need for the content of the strategy to be understandable; (2) need to understand how one’s individual/team action can be informed by the strategy and how individual/team action can impact the bigger objectives of the strategy program; and (3) the value of simplification as an aid in the strategy’s implementation and in achieving (1) and (2) above.

4.1.2.1. Need for understandable strategy content

The data indicates that there is a need for the strategy content to be understandable in order to reach cognitive clarity. This seems like an obvious, almost moot point. Yet, in MNCs, considering the variety of work tasks done by employees and their global geographic spread, the challenge of having understandable strategy content in the employees’ context is apparent:

Manager: Our organization structure is quite deep. And the real happening happens on a factory and customer front line, customer face around different parts of the world.

Author: Ok, and do you think it would be important to even on that level have an understanding of strategy?
Manager: For sure, it’s extremely important. But the challenge is that if we invent something on a segment- or corporate-level, can we put that idea or huge strategic growth area in the context that our blue-collars, workers and service technicians can understand it, across borders and in different cultural contexts. That might be a very challenging task.

While especially top managers involved in creating the strategy content can usually debate and discuss the strategy content at least to the extent that it is understandable to them, what about employees in general? In order to create commitment, in addition to being provided communication that makes sense to them, it seems to matter that employees can understand how the strategy relates to their day-to-day work, and also that their efforts matter and are contributing in the bigger strategy picture. A top manager in a business line puts the practical goal in the following way:

"And make it [constant reinforcement of strategy and consistent, e.g. quarterly, updates on progress] so that it is at a global level. Where somebody says 'that’s great, it’s good that Metso's growing, that’s good', but also make it where in the shop-level—whether you’re in a small shop in the corner of the world—you could tell the guys ‘hey our target here in this location as part of these Must-wins was to grow the business, to improve our quality, was to have common ways of operating’. Put some kind of indicators for the groups of people out there so they could see that ‘hey we’ve been doing a good job’, because whichever way you want to look at it, people are competitive, people want to see what they’ve done as supporting the success of the whole, and if you start doing that with some kind of measured display and you have a consistent communication plan, then that’s excellent. (Top manager, 2012)

The need to concretize the strategy was so significant that I next present it in more detail.

4.1.2.2. Need for link between strategy program and individual/team action

It has previously been established that the more concrete the foci to which a bond is formed, the greater the commitment (Klein et al. 2012, Reicher 1985). Concretizing the strategy program so that one can have cognitive clarity about how it fits in with one’s day-to-day work actions seems to aid in creating commitment.

In line with the earlier discussion of needing to give and make sense of the Must-wins both in terms of the connection to the bigger picture and to one’s own work, there was indeed the perceived need for a practical link between the strategy and one’s own actions. In the words of a manager, “maybe there is a big room for improvement regarding the focus ... we need to put the Must-Win stuff, the real roadmaps and actions, in a more tangible context”. A nicely formulated strategy without implementation is unlikely to make a big impact on business or operations. It was extensively recognized that it is the people in the organization that ultimately are capable of making the strategy come to life in practice. For example:
It’s good for us to talk about it but now how do we get it down to the next level to the people who can actually impact those ‘Must-wins’ or feel that they can participate and make those Must-wins achievable and successful. This is the next step and it’s very important. It’s very important here that not only do we say what we’re aiming at but we have means of engaging everybody to feel that they’re part of this as well. (Top manager 2012)

Making people feel part of the Must-wins seems to have to do with linking their work to the Must-wins themselves or some aspect under them, such as key initiatives, targets, actions, and/or sub-actions (these are the hierarchical levels used in Must-Win reporting at Metso). In addition to the sensegiving communication — with face-to-face and townhall meetings that encouraged participatory discussion about the Must-wins — there was for example an interesting idea for concretizing the strategy in the field. Based on a manager’s previous positive experience with concretizing, there was an on-going project to extend it to Must-Win implementation too:

“What we started doing at the same time – we started putting some graphs up in the shop. The guys would look at it and say, ‘we’re supposed to do a million a month, we’re at 500 million right now. Don’t worry about it [boss] we’ve got two weeks, we’re gonna get that barbeque again.’ They started getting committed and getting engaged. We don’t do that enough. I’ve been to many of our shops now, and we have great things going on everywhere but the consistency is lacking ...

We’re working for example on a project now, we’re talking about taking these Must-wins and creating sort of measure-and-display material at every location. So whether you’re for example at a roll shop in Asia Pacific or in North America, you have a common set of KPIs that support these Must-wins, something that the guys can see on a board at how their productivity has been.” (Top manager 2012)

From a management point-of-view, in linking Must-wins to practice, a communicative focus on organic, day-to-day action — as opposed to M&A activity — was considered helpful.

“Inorganic actions cover only part of the businesses, some specific niche or strategic growth area that we have been able to identify. I think from the communication point of view, I think it’s really important that the organic actions are more relevant because most of the guys are doing the daily tasks. Daily tasks are part of the organic growth strategy, or organic actions to implement something that is in the strategic agenda.” (Manager 2012)

“The good thing is that we’ve been very focused on organic growth. When we first started this we were thinking ‘ok we have to buy these guys, that guy, those guys, that guy, and we’re gonna be where we need to be’. So we decided to take those away, because otherwise people are living in a dream world. We just say ‘hey, it’s back to basics, you have to grow by improving day-to-day type of things that you’re doing, expanding your offering, think a little bit outside the box’ ... When we started the process six-twelve months ago we were thinking if we need to get to 1.4 or 1.5 billion, we need to buy this company, that entity. That’s ok, those will happen when they happen—corp will support those when there’s the right time to do it—but if we start thinking that way then we start losing focus of the day-to-day activities.” (Top manager 2012)

Indeed, this may be a wise choice because commitment and its result of engagement is more likely to happen when the Must-wins are somehow related to people’s daily tasks.
The findings indicate that the link also goes the way of individual/team action to strategy. The link can be strengthened by recognizing people for their efforts on behalf of the strategy:

I think what people are saying is that ‘we wanna be recognized’, you know a barbeque, a little cake party, something very simple. Just saying ‘hey guys thanks, we did it, we hit the objectives this quarter, that quarter, this month, that month, this six month period’. I think people will start appreciating more and getting more engaged. It’s little things like that that really make a difference sometimes.” (Top manager 2012)

In other words, people seem to appreciate that their caring about and day-to-day contributions to the strategy’s implementation are recognized, even if it is done in simple ways. Indeed, this brings us to the principle of simplicity as a valuable tool in creating commitment to the Must-wins implementation.

4.1.2.3. Value of simplification

Simplifying is defined as “to reduce to basic essentials; to diminish in complexity; to make more intelligible: clarify” (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2003). The findings suggest that simplification, with its attendant function of clarifying, can be potent in helping people reach cognitive clarity.

The value of the principle of simplicity in general and in Must-wins is crystallized in the following quote by KONE’s CEO:

I really believe that simplification is very essential. For example, Must-Win Battles is a very simple and clear way to develop the competitiveness of our company. I say to our people ‘always remember that if the decision to be done does not sound simple, you don’t get that implemented’. But if you come to a crystal clear decision which is very simple, there is a very high probability that it will get implemented. This is so that you don’t have to explain; when people realize that ‘this is it’, then it gets done. (CEO, 2012)

At Metso, the current and potential value of simplification was also evident. The findings suggest that simplification is applicable in all three aspects of the word’s definition. The first, of reducing to basic essentials, is applicable to people’s work tasks related to the Must-wins:

“Well these themes have circulated for a long time in some action plans but we’ve had so many of these development projects or ‘tasks’ that they haven’t been moved forward, they’re such big entities that they need so many resources. With such a small team as we had it was not executable ... So the leaders have now decided to change their approach and decided to concentrate on those essential or most essential things; let’s rather take a few projects that we take care of very well, than a lot hither and thither.” (Manager 2012)
Reducing to basic essentials on an organizational level can also be an inherent value of the Must-wins approach, as it provides focus on the most essential areas for the organization’s continued development:

“I remember being in meetings in the past where it was just too many items. ... One part of the process is that if you have too many initiatives going on, and you have 70+ locations around the world, and they all in a way have their own initiatives and things they want to do... When you start grouping and combining them and you start coming up with – as we have – sort of our top 8 or 9 initiatives that satisfy those Must-wins, it gives very clear direction that these are the big ticket items that we need to focus on. ... If you have too many things on your plate – yourself and myself – then it becomes which one do I start? Instead of doing a 100% good job on five initiatives you start doing a sort of 65% good job on 25 initiatives.” (Top manager 2012)

The value of diminishing complexity seems to be in making the strategy more understandable and meaningful. It was touched upon above in the sections of sensegiving communication and reaching cognitive clarity. Indeed, this simplification is applicable in the strategy formulation itself:

“The strategy itself is quite complex thing. At the end we need to formulate it in a quite simple format. Understanding the big picture but not losing the connection to the details. Because as a long-time journey we really need to be able to do the roadmaps and really a sort of practical action-level tasks as well, and understanding that big complex phenomena in a particular context of strategy is quite a difficult task.” (Manager 2012)

The final element of simplifying, that of clarifying and making more intelligible, also seems to help with understanding the Must-wins. For example, there were Powerpoint presentations about Must-wins using similar-sounding but differentiated language, bringing about some confusion:

“There’s also this word discipline, about making it clear. We call it in growth countries, we call it emerging markets, it might be the same. But when you come to understanding strategy, you should not use different words for the same thing.” (Middle manager 2012)

In fact, ‘growth countries’ referred to countries that were likely to provide growth for Metso specifically, while emerging markets was referring to nations that are rapidly growing and industrializing, but this information had not reached the interviewee. Simplification could have helped in using clear language in the first place or clarifying the used language. Using nuanced, complex terminology can have the upside of providing precision of meaning, but the downside is often a lack of understanding unless additional explanation is given. This may be particularly challenging in complex technology organizations, but it would also imply that there can be extensive opportunities to simplify where appropriate.
As Metso is a technology company with a large proportion of engineers on its workforce, a manager with responsibilities within strategy development and follow-up expressed some concern about being “too engineering and technology” focused:

“Clarity is extremely important, it needs to be simple enough. If we are too engineering and technology company, I think we can’t really reach the simplicity and clarity. Clarity is actually a very good word. It’s impossible to reach because we count with the details and we put it to the too small. I’m not saying it’s not important to put it into the small context, but if we really split it up into one thousand dimensions, we can’t formulate the big picture, we really can’t find the cause and effects, and the strategy loops there, because it’s too challenging.” (Manager 2012)

It might be pointed out that the findings do not suggest that the inherent complexity of engineering and technology need be removed, or that there ought to be a preoccupation with simplification because that might lead to oversimplification. Rather, awareness of the value and possibility of simplification and its appropriate implementation is likely to be more appropriate.

To recapitulate, simplification, by helping to facilitate understanding of the strategy, would seem to help in having understandable strategy content and seeing mutual links between one’s day-to-day work and the strategy. It thus contributes to reaching cognitive clarity. Managers can utilize the principle of simplification in simplifying tasks and ways of working; discerning and focusing on the essentials in e.g. Must-wins, key initiatives, actions, and sub-actions; and in clarifying within multiple processes such as strategy formulation and communication. Doing so seems to aid in reaching cognitive clarity and thus, as an extension, is also helpful in creating commitment bonds to the implementation of Must-wins.

4.1.3. Subjective Experience of Commitment Target

Section 2.2.2 presented commitment as being created through perceptions, so it may be informative to look at some of the ways in which the Must-Win concept or metaphor itself was interpreted. While the content of the Must-wins implemented at Metso have already been discussed in terms of the need for ‘making sense’ of them, concretizing them, etc., the findings also indicated a couple of ways of interpreting the concept or metaphor of ‘Must-Win Battles’ itself independently from the organization’s context and situation. The findings indicate both a rational and affective, emotional way of interpreting the concept. Analysis of these two ways follows below.
4.1.3.1. Rational interpretation

Section 2.1.3 described realized strategies as existing on a continuum ranging from deliberate (strategies realized as intended; see e.g. Mintzberg 1994 for overview) to emergent (consistent patterns realized without, or in spite of, intentions; Mintzberg & Waters 1985). Must-wins, as utilized at the case organization, can be visually depicted on the basis of Mintzberg & Waters (1985) description of real-world strategies. However, Must-wins are not limited into any one of the strategy processes, but rather seem to be a combination as shown in Figure 6 below.

Figure 6  “Must-wins” as a strategy process on the basis of Mintzberg & Waters (1985)
At the case organization the “Must-wins are mainly thematic” (Manager 2012) guidelines that provide common guidance for the segments and businesses. They provide the themes to focus on in the strategic initiatives of business segments and lines. A top manager also described them as “five buckets” into which key initiatives fall. The same top manager thought of the Must-wins as general or basic guidelines that need to be met:

“Obviously we have to cover these Must-wins and I think these Must-wins cover the basic drivers that we have in terms of growth in both services, growth in growth countries, operating excellence, technology development and people. For us to be successful those are the basic things that we have to make sure that we’re covering. So I think what it does is that it gives us guidance as we move forward.” (Top manager 2012)

In Mintzberg & Waters’ (1985) terms, the intended strategy, i.e. the Must-wins, seem to take the form of an umbrella rather than a specific plan. After discussing the Mintzberg & Waters (1985) article in its entirety together, a manager involved in strategy development and follow-up said

“Must-win thinking fits excellently with the ‘umbrella’ thinking because Must-win is the theme or umbrella. After that we strive to get the doing and action from the corporate and business level under it, together with our [corporate] communication, and monitoring or management of it although without extreme detail ... Must-wins bring the topics to focus on, determine resourcing, and bring the leadership platform” (Manager 2012).

While the pattern of strategic action is broadly governed by the thematic guidelines of the Must-wins, what happens under the umbrella as we move downward in o does not always seem to be a straight-forward arrow into realized strategy. The various arrows are simplifications of Must-Win strategic initiatives. At Metso, a Must-Win has many initiatives, an initiative has actions under it, and an action has sub-actions.

There are elements of consensus and unconnected strategies under the Must-Win guidelines or umbrella, and there is also an environmental factor that influences the realized strategy.

Within the case organization some some strategic initiatives may be unconnected. Some “sectors may be very unconnected” (Manager 2012) and keep doing their own embedded initiatives and actions fairly independently. Indeed, “for example in some country in some unit, business, or technology, they may be doing their own thing and sticking to it. It might be a very large thing that they are pursuing resolutely” (Manager 2012). This is typified by the long single, unconnected arrow in o. Such unconnected strategy initiatives may turn out problematic if they start going in a direction unconnected from the general themes or umbrella. Lack of cooperation and/or
flexibility may also have other attendant problems. On the other hand, pursuing unconnected strategies under the umbrella may be efficient and wise in some cases where the particular strategic opportunity ought to be followed, no matter what.

However “most [actions under the Must-Win umbrella] are based on consensus because they are done over time in groups and teams” and “consensus is developed through mutual dialogue, decision-making, understanding and learning” (Manager 2012). Indeed, since members of management teams forming their Must-Win initiatives “have different views and practices, the strategic direction may not be found initially during the strategic design and planning. Then through enough iteration and debate the direction has been found and what we actually want to drive has become clarified” (Manager 2012). Yet it is not static but an on-going process, as “consensus happens during the doing. In the end we have coherent action that brings results under that particular umbrella” (Manager 2012).

As these Must-wins happen over a relatively long time period, changes in the firm’s environment (e.g. business, legislative, etc.) may precipitate responses or changes in terms of what is pursued under the Must-wins umbrella. Indeed, there is the potential that if the “competitive situation changes or shocks us significantly then we might go fundamentally back to the umbrella itself and choose new Must-wins to focus on” (Manager 2012). This would be bordering on a partially imposed strategy, yet it was only an unlikely occurrence as it had not happened at the case organization in relation to the Must-wins.

Yet the environment the organization was operating in was recognized to exert an influence on the options available to the organization, because “in the real world shocks do come, the question is how big or small they are, and therefore to what extent that narrowing [of the environment] happens” (Manager 2012). Therefore the thick line on the right in 0 depicts how the range of acceptable actions under the umbrella is bounded and possibly influenced by the environment, e.g. through what customers are contracting the firm to provide for them at various times.

While the environment may constrain the process, such constraining may necessitate creative action and responses that end up expanding the strategic boundaries again as time goes on. For example, as the industry that one of the business segments was engaged in had a declining and pessimistic outlook, the segment was willing to seriously look toward innovative options. If innovative, unexpected options were
captured, the bounds of the strategy ‘umbrella’ would be somewhat expanded. To capture this potentiality, the environment is depicted as exerting a constraining influence, but then the boundaries start slightly expanding again in the figure.

The opportunity that strategies will emerge during the process (‘Emergent strategy’ arrow) also exists since the Must wins, like most other real-world strategies (Mintzberg & Waters 1985), do not embody the somewhat unrealistic possibility of controlling that a plan gets realized exactly as planned. In the case organization, since it is an R&D-intensive technology and service provider, a prime example of this would be that research and technology development engineers may end up innovating something highly viable and significant business-wise, yet initially unaccounted for under the Must-wins themes.

The orange arrow reaching back from realized strategy to Must-wins denotes that in practice, the Must-wins tend to run in cycles of approximately 2-4 years. New areas to develop in the organization are chosen as old Must-wins are completed or abandoned.

Yet there are limitations to conceptualizing Must-wins along these lines. Ultimately, the Must-wins are a concrete way of putting strategy into practice. It may be well to remember that focusing on conceptual abstraction such as this would not necessarily be effective in creating commitment in large-scale, practical implementation of the Must-wins. It may be wise to keep in mind the value of simplicity because such conceptualizing may increase the scope and complexity of the Must-wins rather than clarify and simplify them. A manager speaks to this aspect of strategy implementation, where there is a need to stay in tune with what is actually happening, in the following quote:

“What’s the reality? Reality against the concept. That’s extremely important. If you only have the growth plan, the concept, the strategy and the macro view, there’s maybe not any connection to practical reality.” (Manager 2012)

The implication is that in the practice of strategy implementation, cerebral theorizing alone is unlikely bring intended strategies into realization.

4.1.3.2. Emotional interpretation of “Must-Win Battles” metaphor and shifting it through reframing

Discussing “Must-Win Battles” as a general concept, independent of Metso’s implementation of Must-wins, provided some interesting insights.
Most people tended to speak of the Must-Win Battles in a pragmatic sense as a strategic tool. However, when looking at people's emotional interpretations of the Must-Win Battle metaphor perhaps the most interesting observation in terms of commitment and psychology was that people could reframe their perspective. Reframing provides an explanation of how bond types shift, change, or converge toward commitment. Reframing how one sees the target (e.g. Must-Win Battles), or an integral aspect of it, seems to directly alter the perceptual evaluation of the target, consequently altering psychological bond type and/or strength.

From an affective (i.e. the word used in psychology literature for emotional) perspective, the “Must-Win Battles” metaphor may provide a conundrum. On one hand they can be seen to imply potentially energizing or emboldening employees because they allow targeted focus in the same way that a battle is fought. Such focus might mobilize people in the sense that it cuts through confusion and complexity.

However, the Must-win Battles can provide a negative affect/emotional response to some people due to the concept itself and the inherent metaphor. While some can be enthused about the possibility of being enabled to fight a battle, others are averse to language or metaphors related to war, strife, and battles in the workplace. In fact, they may exhibit a negative affect response to it. For example, “personally, I hate the choice of words” (Middle manager 2012). Battles may carry a negative connotation for some people, which translates into negative affect. The same middle manager continues later on: “you can call it whatever you like, I mean there is the unfortunate term ‘Must-win battle’. You can call it our most important focus areas or strategic development areas or whatever you want to call it” (Middle manager 2012).

People are often capable of adapting: to handle having to deal with the Must-Win Battles as part of their work, some people may personally reframe or recontextualize the Must-Win Battles and thus not be attached to it. It seems to allow them to handle such internal affective conflicts in a healthy way. The person might for example start viewing the Must-wins in terms of some other concept that is more suitable to the person’s preferences. For example, one interviewee personally found a similarity between Must-wins and the concept of the Balanced Scorecard (Kaplan, Norton 1996). The interviewee was able to personally make sense of the Must-wins and connect the interlinkages through the lens of the Balanced Scorecard: “Strategic targets are then broken down in to objective, which I can sort by Must-win battles or balanced scorecard perspective—doesn’t matter” (Middle manager 2012). By detaching from the
battle and war metaphor, and instead seeing Must-wins through a perspective that was preferable in terms of their individual affect and reason, perhaps a more affectively balanced state could be reached internally.

Therefore some people are unlikely to choose to be committed to the concept’s languaging as such. However for them, commitment remains possible to the content of the Must-wins and the practical implementation of it. Further they can personally sensitize the Must-Win goals for themselves in such a way that the focus is not on the metaphor.

The Must-wins were also often depicted in terms of neutral language such as “(strategic) development areas”. For others the concept’s languaging might be attractive precisely because of its poignant, intuitive and evocative metaphor. It might be experienced as a rousing call to arms and action. The findings are not strong enough to provide a consensus view, as there seemed to be an underlying mix of negative, neutral, and positive responses, but the available data is limited since I did not specifically pursue questioning about the emotional interpretation of the concept itself in the interviews. A quantitative study might be more suited to measuring the scope and scale of affective responses to the concept itself.

The above has implications from a psychological analysis point-of-view. The above initial observations suggest that the reframing process seems to be a self-regulating mechanism that can start to explain how individuals can personally shift the type of psychological bond they hold about a target, without external interference. Reframing suggests a change in perceptual evaluations. Changes in perceptual evaluations are exactly what creates or modifies psychological bonds. Such reframing could allow individuals to creatively shift an acquiescence or instrumental bond into a more affectively agreeable commitment bond. Leveraging an extant commitment bond can help. In the above example, if a commitment bond already existed to the Balanced Scorecard concept, and then the negatively perceived attributes about the Must-wins were reframed in terms of fitting in with the Balanced Scorecard, the person would be more enabled to start creating a commitment bond to the new Must-wins concept too. Thereby one might postulate that there is a personal, intrinsic framing and re-framing process through which psychological bonds may be created, shifted or transferred onto other targets. The presence of previous commitment bonds can therefore influence the creation of new commitment bonds. Not only can commitment bonds be malleable internally, in terms of strength, but they can actually exert an influence or set in motion
an attraction for transmuting other bonds into commitment. Whether this response is volitional or happens of its own is as yet unclear.

Possible motivations for the reframing mechanism include that commitment bonds tend to be more positively experienced than a bond e.g. based on acquiescence or instrumentality. Another explanatory factor may be the nature of commitment itself, which has responsibility as an integral aspect of it (Klein et al. 2012). Through the personal ownership inherent in that responsibility, the employee may be capable of translating and making sense of targets in such a way that commitment can be self-perpetuating and preserved in the long-run within-person even across targets. An employee who has chosen to be committed can be expected to stay committed in general because they would tend to be committed to commitment as a style of working, unless they choose again and discard commitment. This suggests that just the property of being committed to a target or targets may have a potentially subtle yet integral influence on how subsequent phenomena are perceptually evaluated in real-time as they unfold. Further, other bond types seem to be capable of shifting into commitment bonds through the cognitive shift of reframing. It seems like the impetus for the reframing response can be within or outside the person, or as a mix of the two. In other words, internal and/or external information may potentiate reframing, which in turn can shift psychological bond types and strength.

4.1.4. Relation to theoretical framework

The dimensions of the findings can be contextualized into the five commitment antecedents, as identified by Klein et al. (2012) and presented in the theoretical framework (section 2.2.2). The responsibility of higher-ups (section 4.1.1) corresponds mainly to interpersonal factors, particularly the process of ‘social influence’ theory through which commitment can spread both implicitly through higher-ups’ own commitment and explicitly through their sensegiving communication efforts. Reaching cognitive clarity (section 4.1.2) relates to target characteristics, both to ‘nature’ of the Must-wins in terms of them being understandable, ‘closeness’ in terms of how the Must-wins are linked and concretized to one’s work, and simplifying relates to individual and organizational factors, as it can be part of individual ‘values’ and ‘personality’ but also as part of organizational ‘culture’, ‘climate’, and ‘practices’. Finally, personal experience and interpretation of the ‘Must-wins’ target (section 4.1.3) relates to the cognitive and affective processes involved in interpretations of the target.
Out of the five commitment antecedents, then, only societal factors were not observed in the empirical data. However it can be assumed that an even more global sample or other cases might bring up data relating to this, so generalizing that societal factors do not have a role in creating or maintaining individuals’ commitment to implementing strategies is not feasible. In general, as called for by Klein et al. (2012), the present research thus sheds light on individuals’ workplace commitments in a new management context, anecdotally corroborates some of the expected variation in commitment antecedents’ presence, and gives specific form to some of the ways in which they may be present in a particular case.
5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is now time to tie the pieces together and conclude the present research.

The results are encouraging for practitioners and researchers alike. Having employees who are committed to strategies’ implementation will not solve all problems related to strategy formation and implementation, but it can help organizations. Such employees will be motivated, stick with and generally contribute to strategy implementation. On the basis of this thesis, practitioners can better understand how to create commitment in themselves and help individuals in their organizations be more committed to implementing strategies. Strategic management researchers can integrate commitment research to research on essential, individual aspects of the strategy process, such as concrete efforts and actions on behalf of the strategy, communication, and even in formulating strategies.

Below, I elaborate on the understanding obtained through the thesis (section 5.1), discuss some of the practical implications (section 5.2), discuss the handling of empirical limitations of the research (section 5.3), suggest creative and exciting avenues for future research (section 5.4), and provide concluding remarks (section 5.5).

5.1. An Enhanced Understanding of Employees’ Commitment in ‘Must-wins’

The findings suggest that commitment to implementing the organization’s chosen strategy helps with enlivening the strategy in general and internalizing it into the practice of employees’ own day-to-day work. For the ‘Must-wins’ strategy’s implementation three specific dimensions seemed to be particularly salient.

First, managers and higher-ups in general have a responsibility: to be steadfast rather than faltering through the strategy process, and to provide sensegiving communication (which is a strategy implementation practice that influences employees’ consequent strategic understanding; Gioia, Chittipeddi 1991). Higher-ups acting in this manner can help in fulfilling the second main dimension of the data, which is reaching cognitive clarity.

Second, if employees are requested to personally commit to contributing to the strategy’s implementation and do their part, they would prefer to reach a cohesive understanding of both the big-picture intended strategy and how it connects in
practice, concretely, to their own work. This finding is similar to Balogun, Johnson (2004) in that it highlights the necessity of sensemaking for employees at the organization, yet in contrast to Balogun & Johnson the present research also highlighted some of the relevant aspects that top management can pay attention to when sensegiving. Balogun & Johnson (2004) focused on middle-manager sensemaking as an activity mainly independent from top management, because the research was conducted in the context of shifting from a hierarchical to a decentralized organization, which is likely to represent more of an exception than a rule since top management often has a role in MNC’s strategy implementation. In addition, this finding is in line with prior commitment research that purports that specificity and concreteness of the target enhances commitment (e.g. Reichers 1985). The findings also suggest that attaining cognitive clarity about the strategy to be implemented may be faster and more effective if the tool of simplification is used in any overcomplicated strategy practices and processes, which may include strategy decisions, communication, etc. Simplification helps in terms of reducing to basic essentials, diminishing in complexity, and clarifying.

Third, given that commitment is an individual, volitional choice, there is the process of reframing whereby an employee may choose to adapt a different, more agreeable perspective on the Must-wins so as to facilitate a more positive psychological bond, such as commitment or identification rather than acquiescence or instrumental bonds. Doing so lets the employee have a mindset of ‘wanting-to’ implement the Must-wins instead of ‘having-to’ (mindsets described in Brickman 1987, cited in Klein et al. 2012). In fact, in the case of commitment, the individual, experiential mindset could be more precisely referred to as ‘choosing-to’ because of the volitional nature of commitment. Why people would autonomously make this shift, without the necessity for external interference or cajoling, can be simply explained in that people are generally motivated to move in the direction of pleasurable situations and to avoid unpleasurable situations (Klein et al. 2012). Satisfaction is linked to commitment (Vandenber, Lance 1992), and it particularly makes sense to choose to be committed at the level of action and practices: feeling that one is choosing to take an action or implement a practice, rather than having to, would tend to be more satisfying and pleasurable.

Commitment, instead of identification, may be more appropriate and helpful for strategy implementation researchers and practitioners. Previously, the line between identification and commitment in strategic management literature has been somewhat
muddled. The present empirical framework delineated between the two, clarifying that they are separate bonds yet closely related (Table 2). Such discernment is particularly beneficial on research conducted at the micro level such as this, because the defining features of people committing or identifying are different. Commitment to the strategy may be more preferable than identification because strategies often change or evolve, especially in MNCs. While commitment is a choice that can be made and unmade, identification involves defining and merging oneself with the target which is why making changes in the target of identification often causes such destructive consequences (e.g. Fiol 2001), including resistance and apathy. Certainly it can be tough to let go of what one was committed to, but one can choose again; giving up a part of one’s self-definition is usually much more severe and fraught with resistance. Further, strategies may not always have such form that many employees would be willing to define themselves in terms of the strategy. Strategies are not always amenable to the wishes, preferences and decision-making of all employees in the organization. Yet influencing people to choose to commit may be a more realistic and workable objective than inducing people to be personally identified with the strategy.

An essential problem of commitment in strategy that this thesis speaks to is how to make commitment more workable, practical, and relevant to business managers and leaders. Managers and leaders who are willing to incorporate and pay attention to the practices and principles highlighted in the findings of the thesis may end up with a workforce that is more committed and thus engaged in the organization’s strategy. Individuals’ commitment is relevant because the principles and practices such as those highlighted here are not laden with expenses, but the benefits, by definition, include employees who choose to implement the strategy and give continuous efforts in a motivated way towards its fruition.

In addition, the thesis can inform strategic issues identified on the basis of the empirical framework. The empirical framework laid out ten schools of thought on strategic management. A key question is whether any one school of thought dominates in real world organizations. The empirical results herein suggest that none of them dominated per se at Metso. Employees in the organization, among all their other tasks and responsibilities, were in the process of implementing a centrally-formulated strategy. While there was planning involved in the strategy and its implementation, it was not formed according to the planning school of thought alone. A strategic intention had been set, i.e. the five Must-wins, yet the implementation of them was an on-going
process. When looking at the process rationally, elements of e.g. rational design, learning, environment, and cognition schools of thought were observable. Indeed, illustrating the strategy process at Metso was only possible through using multiple strategy conceptualizations (Figure 6). Any one of the established schools of thought could have been deployed to better understand the case, but it cannot be assumed that any of them would fully describe the strategy process. Similarly, this thesis utilized the concept of workplace commitments from organizational behavior to look at a strategy’s implementation. If categorized, the concept and this thesis’ contribution would best fit in with the cognition school of thought because commitment is a psychological state. Commitment is significant and worth researching because it helps employees and thus organizations implement strategy, yet it cannot be expected to explain all of the strategy process. Similarly, it would be difficult to assume that any one of the current schools of thought on strategy alone could explain the whole process.

Another common, relevant assumption highlighted in the empirical framework is that strategy formulation and implementation would be separate. Actually, formulation was highly relevant to implementation at Metso and in terms of the role of commitment. A key finding was that for employees to commit to implementing the strategy, cognitive clarity about the strategy was required. To reach it, the content of the strategy needed to be understood both in terms of the big picture and pragmatically in the sense that there needed to be practices that helped link the strategy to one’s own work on a concrete level. Since formulation has do with creating the content of the strategy, and the content plays such a key role in the strategy’s implementation and employees’ possible commitment to it, formulation can hardly be claimed to be disconnected from implementation. The findings thus suggest that to improve implementation of an intended strategy, feasibility of implementation can and ought to be considered during strategy formulation or formation. Formulation and implementation are interdependent, not independent, when companies are looking toward realizing their strategies.

Describing how the strategy process works has laid the groundwork for many of the key articles on strategy process (e.g. Mintzberg 1971b, Pettigrew 1992). The present thesis illustrated how the strategy process at the case organization was a mix of the strategies described by Mintzberg (1985). This finding was interesting from a strategic management point of view in that it describes the multiple aspects of the strategy process that can be involved and considered. From the perspective of commitment, the
implication is that employees’ commitments to implementing particular initiatives may often be tested or even broken if there are external environmental shocks or internal dialogues and decisions that result in significant adjustments, changes or cancellations of strategic goals, initiatives, programs etc. It is likely to be challenging for employees to change course when they have already committed to something (Mantere et al. 2012). Simultaneously, member checking about the results brought forth the notion that in a large, global, somewhat diverse MNC such as the case organization, it can be highly challenging when one gets to a practical level to have and do strategies that are simultaneously very wide and holistic in a big-picture sense, pragmatic enough to be concretizable to all employees of the organization, and fortuitous enough that no changes or deviations are required to the strategies for many years.

On the question of who implements strategies and how, as per strategy-as-practice, the present research suggests that most employees have the potential to commit to the strategy and its implementation, if it is concretized to their own work and they choose to embrace that concretized strategy. The volitional aspect of commitment is key here. Even if e.g. all the practices suggested in the findings are undertaken, it is still not certain that employees will commit because it is still ultimately their own choice. Yet being the kind of managers and organization that has the described practices in place is likely to increase employees’ propensity to commit.

5.2. Implications for Multinational Corporations

The findings have several implications for practitioners in multinational corporations. Having employees who are committed to implementing strategies seems vital to large corporations contesting for leadership in their markets.

Managers tend to have a responsibility in the implementation of strategies, whether it is personally and subjectively acknowledged or not. Managers can hardly expect strategies to be committedly implemented based on e.g. printed-out strategy communication posters and other such secondary activities alone. Rather, strategies need to be driven by employees at various levels of the organization. Managers tend to have a role and responsibility in doing and facilitating that.

In pursuance with social influence theory, managers themselves need to be dedicated, i.e. committed, in order to drive and encourage dedication in other employees. The idea is that managers can inspire commitment when they themselves are committed. As a
corollary, you cannot give or inspire something you do not already have. An illustrative every-day example would be that only a person who has money can give money. This commitment is necessary especially because practitioners in MNCs often have many things on their plates – strategy implementation is typically not their first or only responsibility – and thus commitment that enables willingness to take action and stick with the strategy is necessary. The concretized, observable way in which this dedication or lack thereof showed up is in managers’ either being steadfast or faltering about the strategy implementation.

Some MNCs are unsteady and faltering in their strategy implementation, which may have the negative consequence of deterring commitment. Striving to be steadfast instead of faltering about various aspects of the strategy process can be helpful. For example, leaders can especially make sure that both communication and follow-up about the strategy’s implementation are steadily implemented, lead and managed. Potential examples of being faltering are e.g. implementing and communicating in sporadic fits and starts, starting with enthusiasm but then letting the strategy’s implementation peter out, changing the strategy often before the organization even has enough time to really implement it, being opaque or hesitant about what the strategy is and how it relates to employees’ work, etc.

Communication has an important role in strategy implementation (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991), and it also plays a role in creating commitment. The findings suggest that communication can support formation of commitment to implementing strategies when it provides sense to employees both on a big-picture, organizational level, i.e. ‘where, why and how we are heading where we are’, and on the level of day-to-day, concrete, practical work, i.e. ‘how our day-to-day work is connected to the strategy and how we are contributing and doing so far’.

Some managers may also find it helpful to be steadfast about simplification throughout the strategy process so as to facilitate implementation. For example, complex strategic decisions and communications can be made simple enough so that they are easy to understand, implement, and cascade appropriately through the organization. Simplification does not mean needing to dumb things down: for example, Eisenhardt (1989b) demonstrated that in strategy, fast decision makers use more information than slow ones, develop more — not less — alternatives, and simplify by integrating decisions with other strategic and tactical decisions such as budgeting, instead of treating each decision as a discrete process conducted at an abstract level. By
simplifying, it can be easier to pass by crippling hesitation and faltering, and instead be steadfast.

Psychological bonds including commitment might also be managed as a portfolio. It is possible to keep it simple and consider what would be the most preferable bond, such as instrumental, commitment, or identification, for a given target such as the organization, team, decision, goal, etc. Given that it is possible to influence both bond type and strength (Klein et al. 2012, Fiol 2002), practitioners might consider where e.g. commitment bonds would have the most critical effect and then institute practices and processes that would tend to encourage the formation of commitment bonds. Out of the psychological bonds, only commitment bonds are explored in this thesis. Although not a complete and final picture, the ways for creating and strengthening commitment bonds in strategy implementation as outlined in the findings and previous discussion include being consistent and steadfast with the strategy implementation and its communication; making and communicating the strategy in an understandable way both in terms of the big picture and day-to-day practice; simplifying the strategy process including decisions and communications where possible; and, if applicable, on a personal level, practitioners can see if they would be willing to see the strategy from a helpful perspective, e.g. as some kind of opportunity or challenge rather than some burden or impediment.

Making this practical may still seem unclear. To give an example of such management, if the organization’s strategy calls for increasing service and after-market sales, practitioners might identify two aspects where it would particularly powerful to have committed individuals: e.g. first, people who can and will communicate steadfastly to employees involved in services and after-market sales about the strategy, and second, it might be advisable to set a goal to increase employee commitment to the organization and the strategic goals in the organization’s customer-facing departments, since long-standing employees may be more likely to establish enduring relationships with customers. The two aspects might be combined, for example one might enroll energetic customer-facing ‘old-timers’ to act as a globally communication network of facilitators for the strategy. In large global organization, top managers’ available time for communicating strategies is often limited. A network of facilitators would enable e.g. small town-hall meetings all around the world in the organization’s customer-facing units, teams, and departments. Doing so would represent higher-ups taking their appropriate responsibility – delegation, instead of striving to do it all by oneself, is
often a responsible thing to do – and also helping to facilitate the attainment of cognitive clarity for the relevant employees.

Another helpful exercise for managers might be to think through the commitment antecedents as outlined by Klein et al. (2012) and see how they might be addressed and dealt with to increase commitment, to strategy or otherwise. To give an example, relevant reflection questions per antecedent might be (1) individual characteristics e.g. ‘What kind of people should primarily be engaged and/or recruited to this effort?’; (2) target characteristics e.g. ‘What’s the simplest or most practical way we can continually make the commitment target more clear, concrete, and visible?’; (3) interpersonal factors e.g. ‘Am I myself willing to choose to be committed to this target?’ or ‘Can we first identify and involve well-connected boundary spanners who can then help us cascade the program through the organization?’; (4) organizational factors e.g. ‘For our internal leadership training programs, can we incorporate training about what example and climate we prefer our leaders to set day-by-day?’; and (5) societal factors e.g. ‘Can we take our different global locations into account by having localized facilitators with responsibility and accountability for their own areas?’. Alternatively, one could seek to influence the more general perceptions of the strategy and environment, seeing to it that intentional strategy implementation practices encourage a sense of trust, control, positive affect, and that the strategy is salient in employee’s day-to-day work. The form of the questions is not prescriptively rigid and ought to be customized to fit the organization’s needs, but the underlying point remains to look at some or all of the significant aspects involved in creating commitment and proactively addressing them in the relevant context such as strategy implementation.

Finally, while commitment does seem positive and helpful for successful implementation of strategies, practitioners in multinationals might also remember that the potential downside of excessive workplace commitments can be taking on too much work and escalation of commitment (Mowday 1998, Sleesman et al. 2012). Since personal time and resources are limited, and commitment can occur to a multitude of targets, it is not advisable to try to promote commitment across the board for all employees to all relevant and irrelevant targets. In light of this, it might be more helpful to simply encourage employees to commit in those areas where they personally could make the most valuable contributions to the organization, which in many cases would include the strategy’s implementation.
5.3. Limitations of the Study

The scope of this examination can be seen to have two main limitations. The first limitation of the empirical portion relates to the data collection sample, as primary data was collected from eight respondents yielding seven hours of recorded data. The second is that the primary and secondary data were collected at a single case organization with the exception of one interview which was conducted with the most ‘critical case’ respondent one could find in Finland, i.e. a CEO who was the first to implement Must-wins in Finland some eight years prior and continued to run the process with considerable success. These two limitations can be seen to pose difficulties for possible generalizations of the thesis’ findings.

Measures were taken during both the research design and empirical research stages to confront difficulties resulting from the limitations. To provide reasonable and reliable data, multiple sources of information were used in order to allow data triangulation. I also strove to overcome this limitation by letting the proposed dimensions and themes emerge from multiple respondents and data sources, making sure that each dimension and theme had sufficient, cohesive support from multiple data points and that they were internally consistent according to guidelines of grounded theory (Strauss, Corbin 1990). Choosing to use heterogeneous sampling further helped with “capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (Patton 2002: 235).

To ensure reliability of the analysis, accepted procedures were followed (Strauss, Corbin 1990, Patton 2002). Further, after writing up the analysis, member checking was utilized for additional triangulation as per guidelines for triangulating qualitative analysis effectively (Jonsen 2009).

The obtained results are within the specific context of a large, mature, Finnish, global industrial technology machinery and service provider. However, the fact that the research setting consisted of a global business organization that was a bit over one year into the process of a Must-wins strategy’s global implementation gave further relevance to the study, because the data were collected from a representative case organization.

5.4. Avenues for Future Research

Using the conceptualization of individuals’ commitment that is applicable to any commitment target, future research investigating multiple targets of commitment could
be undertaken. This would prove fresh and innovative in the sense that here is a clear opening for comparatively studying relationships between multiple, concurrent commitments. To illustrate, in the context of strategy implementation it might prove illuminative to study commitments to multiple simultaneous foci such as the strategic goal, the social group, and the organization, and to conduct comparative analysis thereof. For example, to what extent do employees commit to their leader’s strategic goals because they are committed to the leader?

For a more micro-level understanding of commitment creation processes, a longitudinal, in-depth study based on e.g. observational, interviewing, and other qualitative data collection methods could be conducted to research a team responsible for implementing a specific initiative or action under the umbrella of a strategic direction. Focal commitment targets might then include e.g. team members, decisions, strategic initiative, strategy itself, and the organization. As strategy implementation is a process, and commitment is dynamic and malleable, observable differences in levels of commitment may be expected over time. Striving to explain these differences would provide informative research as it would give further insight into the process of commitment creation.

Additionally, quantitative measures of commitment might be designed to match the definition of commitment as a particular type of bond reflecting volitional dedication and responsibility for a target (Klein et al. 2012). In the case of Must-wins as the target, items might for example include “How dedicated are you to the Must-wins?” and “To what extent have you chosen to be committed to the Must-wins?”. In addition to ‘Must-wins’, other relevant, concurrent target(s) could be included, thus enabling comparison between multiple targets. Quantitative data could also provide evidence for which commitment antecedents are most relevant in strategy implementation. Qualitative research could be supported by quantitative methods, enabling pegging of the interviewed people’s level of commitment and other psychological bonds, thus allowing better categorization and contextualization of interviewee’s comments in terms of their prevalent psychological bond type and strength.

Variations in levels of employees’ commitment to the strategy may also influence, and be influenced by, involvement in the strategy process. Wooldridge & Floyd (1990) report that middle-level managers’ involvement in strategy formation is associated with improved organizational performance, and that strategic understanding and commitment are related to such involvement. Using the above-mentioned
quantification of commitment, such lines of research could be pursued with more vigor and precision.

Further, a background factor in enabling some of the presently identified practices that enhance commitment, such as leading strategy implementation in a steady way and providing sensegiving communication, may be strategic consensus, i.e. strategic understanding (Wooldridge, Floyd 1989). There seems to be a need to more clearly understand the relationship between individuals’ strategic consensus and commitment.

Since this qualitative study relied heavily on people’s perceptions to understand commitment to a specific target, if an opportune research setting is available it might be interesting to study the extent to which influencing perceptions of the target might be more effective in enhancing commitment than changing the target itself, i.e. the target’s objective features. Perceptions tend to be fleeting and provisional, thus in order to have explanatory power such a study might also best be conducted longitudinally.

In the empirical framework, psychological bonds are differentiated on a continuum as per Klein et al. (2012), with commitment being a characteristic stratum on the continuum. This thesis only examined commitment. Future research examining how psychological bonds transform and shift, e.g. from ‘acquiescence’ to ‘commitment’, or ‘commitment’ to ‘identification’, might prove informative and practical. An initial clue might be that the continuum’s bonds can be differentiated in terms of the degree to which psychological involvement is present, i.e. acquiescence has low psychological involvement; identification has high. Therefore ways to enhance psychological involvement might also be involved in enhancing commitment, and vice versa.

For anyone interested in encouraging workplace well-being, distinguishing psychological bonds on a continuum, as done in the present research and by Klein et al. (2012), might open up exciting directions for future research, primarily based on the malleable and dynamic nature of bonds. To reiterate, bonds can clearly be discerned based on their defining features and how they are experienced, yet they are malleable in the sense that a bond such as commitment can change not only in terms of strength but also by type. For example, not only can commitment increase, but a commitment bond may start to converge to an identification bond if, during the process of e.g. dedicatedly working for a team, the person gradually or suddenly starts psychologically merging or identifying with the team.
The exciting part of this opportunity is that the psychological bonds are experienced differently. The emotional payoff is different. For example, if an instrumental bond is changed to a commitment or dedication bond, the same activity may be done out of enjoyment rather than obligation. Instead of grim satisfaction, there may be joy. One does it because one 'wants to', rather than because one 'has to'. It might even therefore take less energy to do it. Future research might thus examine how such changes in bond type occur and how they can be influenced. Future research could start by identifying the different bonds that exist, clarifying the interrelated boundaries of bonds, and strive to further understand in more detail and practice what causes such changes in perceptual evaluations that bond types do indeed change and/or shift. Ultimately, having pragmatic and simple tools applicable both personally and collectively in managing the required portfolio of psychological bonds might be of great value, in terms of on-the-job effectiveness, enjoyment, and well-being.

A conducive sample and setting for such further research into psychological bonds could for example relate to the currently emerging theme of 'stress reduction' or 'well-being' initiatives in large organizations. The Financial Times recently reported that approximately a quarter of large US companies have some kind of 'stress reduction' initiatives, and many of the large Western companies are embracing yoga, meditation and 'mindfulness' (Gelles 2012). It would be a particularly interesting sample for understanding changes in perceptual evaluation and the resultant psychological bonds because the experientially verifiable result of engaging in 'mindfulness' consistently is often described as seeing things differently, i.e. it seems to induce a systemic, typically positive experiential change in one’s perceptual evaluations. It is common that where there was stress and strife, the issue might now be seen as no big deal and calm relaxation can prevail. There is indeed strong evidence that it tends to influence one’s cognitive and emotional processes in a positive way. For example, neuroscientists have proven that 'mindfulness' meditation reduces cortisol, a stress-related hormone (Sudsuang, Chentanez & Veluvan 1991); increases positive affect (Davidson et al. 2003) which is also a key antecedent for commitment bonds; may lead to autonomous, positive attitudinal shifts (INSEAD 2007); has an effect on short- and long-term perceptual faculties (Brown, Forte & Dysart 1984, Tloczynski, Santucci & Astor-Stetson 2000); and even has long lasting effects on brain activity, and physical structure through plasticity (Lazar et al. 2000). Since changes in perceptual evaluations can change both bond types and strength, and e.g. ‘mindfulness’ meditation/reflection programs seem to demonstrably enhance perceptual evaluations, longitudinal within-
person studies of voluntary participants before, during, and after participating in such workplace meditation programs might yield highly informative data regarding both the processes involved in changing or shifting psychological bond types in the workplace, as well as the results of such changes and shifts.

Another possibly conducive sampling and research approach more related to strategy would be similar to e.g. Gioia & Chittipeddi (1991) and Mantere et al. (2012). It would involve studying changes in perceptual evaluations and the resultant psychological bonds through the lens of sensegiving, sensemaking, and possibly sensebreaking, specifically during periods of strategic change. The success or failure of sensegiving and -making processes could be framed in terms of the resulting changes in type and degree of psychological bonds. Such research could also serve in helping to delineate how commitment can emerge or be strengthened as a response to specific practices or routines.

There are also further areas of study within MNCs. There are research opportunities pertaining to the unique challenges of implementing strategies in MNCs in a way that creates commitment, such as the difficulty of having MNC-level strategies that are still concretizable to employees’ individual work. In addition, the processes, practices and/or principles that allow top managers to initially commit to implementing strategies are important. This is particularly interesting because top managers are often almost expected to be committed to the strategy quickly, so activities such as strategy away-days may have particular significance and criticality from this perspective.

5.5. Concluding Remarks

MNCs can seek an edge by striving to be excellent at strategy implementation. Strategy implementation is so related to what individuals do and their activities that it makes sense to examine the individual level in more detail. From a psychological and/or organizational behavior perspective, what individuals do is bounded by how they see the strategy and the larger context. These thoughts and feelings — i.e. perceptions — create attachments/bonds. Such bonds run the gamut from negative to positive. A mostly helpful bond for strategy implementation, which this thesis focuses on, is that of commitment. Commitment refers to choosing to be dedicated to and take responsibility for a target, such as the Must-wins strategy implementation examined here.
The literature review established a link between strategy implementation and individuals’ commitment, and indicated what is generally involved in such workplace commitments, including antecedents, cognitive and emotional processes, and outcomes.

The findings revealed that some processes and practices were especially salient in regards to individuals’ commitment in the context of strategy implementation. On a general level, it was found that being steadfast instead of faltering with the process and practices involved in strategy implementation, such as decision-making, communication, follow-up, recognition and rewards etc., is likely to enhance employees’ commitment to the strategy. In addition, through the process of social influence, the responsibility of higher-ups to be committed themselves and also to give sensegiving communication was magnified. In order for anyone, particularly employees, to commit, having some cognitive clarity about the target of commitment, i.e. clearly understanding the strategy on both a big picture and practical level, was found to be relevant. Simplification – of routines, decisions, processes and language – emerged as a valuable general tool or principle for helping to facilitate such cognitive clarity. In addition to rational understanding and clarity, emotional perception originating in the meaning ascribed to the strategy was also found to be relevant in the creation of commitment. Within MNCs, on a wide scale, rational and emotional perceptions can be practically influenced through e.g. communication practices.

For practitioners, the thesis presents some of the individual dynamics inherent in creating commitment to the strategy’s implementation and can serve as a reminder that strategy implementation ultimately happens through the people in the organization. For researchers interested in strategy implementation or strategy-as-practice, or organizational behavior, the thesis points out how cognitive and emotional phenomena, such as the psychological bond of commitment in this piece of research, may be subtly yet influentially involved in the background of strategy implementation and generally in what people do and contribute in the workplace.
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APPENDIX 1  SAMPLE CONTACT LETTER

Contact Letter:

Helsinki xx.y.20xx

Hello X,

I’m contacting you regarding my Master’s thesis. I’m a trainee at the Group Strategy department and a Master’s student at Hanken School of Economics in Helsinki at the department of Management and Organization. I’m writing my thesis about how our Must-wins have been received among managers, and what kinds of things can help managers participate in and encourage the implementation of the Must-wins. I would very much like to interview you about how you see that your work is connected to the Must-wins.

The interview would take max. one hour, and the anonymity of the persons interviewed will be guaranteed in the research. If you would be available to participate and help out, I plan on making the interviews in week 39 and 40 (24.9.–5.10.2012). I will contact you on Thursday 13.9.2012 to schedule a potential meeting.

I am very flexible regarding time and place.

If you have questions regarding my thesis or the interview please contact me via email or telephone, djingis.nykopp@metso.com or 040 7254542.

Thank you.

Kind regards,

Djingis Nykopp
## APPENDIX 2  SAMPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion theme</th>
<th>Interview question</th>
<th>Support questions - Clarification items</th>
<th>Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-Introduction</td>
<td></td>
<td>Please explain your area of responsibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-Explain purpose of research (to understand current situation; no right or wrong answers)</td>
<td></td>
<td>What does commitment mean to you?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-Affirm interviewee’s anonymity in research</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewee’s personal perception of Metso’s Must-wins strategy</strong></td>
<td>How do the Must-wins show up in your day-to-day work (or do they?)</td>
<td>How do the M-W’s affect your job?</td>
<td>Perception/ sensemaking</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Please explain/Can you give me an example?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Have you personally participated in creating or choosing initiatives or actions for the Must-wins?</td>
<td>If so, in what ways?</td>
<td>Commitment – exploring possible role of participation &amp; involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you consider that you have a meaningful or significant role in implementing the Must-wins?</td>
<td>Please explain</td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>How do you choose to support the implementation process?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What would be necessary for you to be more dedicated in implementing the Must-wins?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Commitment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is there something you think I’ve missed? Or that we as a company have missed?</td>
<td>Please give me an example</td>
<td>Exploratory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there anything else you’d like to add?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Is there something you think Metso has missed in implementing Must-wins?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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APPENDIX 3 “MUST-WIN BATTLES” IN BRIEF

“Must-Win Battles” is a term coined by IMD professors Peter Killing and Thomas Malnight (with Tracey Keys) in their 2005 business book *Must-Win Battles: Creating the focus you need to achieve your key business goals*. The authors purport that the work is not based on intellectual abstraction but rather that the “idea evolved and developed over time as we worked with managers who were frustrated with their organizations’ performance and wanted to drive real and sustainable change, while delivering concrete bottom-line impact” (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2005, vii).

The concept has been met with enthusiasm by many leaders who have been determined to improve their businesses through a focused strategic direction and initiative. Specifically, many leaders interested in conducting turn-arounds or driving significant organizational change have been attracted to the “must-win” approach to strategy formulation and implementation. If a business chooses to undertake such a “must-win battle” journey, it sets out to eschew ‘business as usual’ in favor of galvanizing the organization to move forward with energy and to confront challenges. In Finland, numerous CEO’s of large companies (e.g. Kone, Metso, and Evli Bank) have launched sustained “must-win battle(s)” initiatives and spoken publically in favor of the approach.456

In formulating ‘Must-win battles’, i.e. strategic goals, the following guidelines are recommended. Criteria for formulating ‘must-win battles’ include at least:

- Significant (they make a real difference to the organization when accomplished),
- Mainly market-focused (interdependency is magnified; in order to win, people must unify their agendas, transcend organizational barriers, and work together as a team),

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Exciting (in order to release the energy and commitment needed for the challenging work of implementing the strategic direction),

Specific and tangible (i.e. specific to the business, market(s), and organization, with a reasonably short time frame. The “time to victory” timeframe is typically two years or less in order to imbue the initiative with the appropriate level of urgency and focus.

Winnable, i.e. possible to win or achieve, even when considering likely responses from competitors and other stakeholders.

The strategic areas are aligned with, and even dictate, the organization’s strategic direction. An individual “battle” typically lasts two-three years, in line with the connotations of the battle metaphor: a team coming together for swift and decisive action, implying a sense of urgency and full engagement. In implementing it, people are “committed to doing their part in ensuring victory in the battles with which they will be most immediately involved” (Killing, Malnight & Keys 2004). New battles will tend to be defined as the previous ones are completed.