



A case study of cultural transformation barriers in an Educational company in Brazil

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation that I have submitted to Dublin Business School for the award of Master of Business Administration is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, where it is clearly acknowledged by references. Furthermore, this work has not been submitted for any other degree.

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ABSTRACT

The organisational culture management has increasingly been on the top executives' agenda because it can have a powerful impact on the strategy execution. In other words, nowadays, corporate culture has been dealt as part of the strategy.

This research aimed to investigate the link between business strategy and corporate culture in an educational company in Brazil. The objective was to identify the gaps between them that can prevent the company from achieving its goals.

This case study used a qualitative method, and semi-structured interviews were carried out with the company's employees to collect data. Then, a thematic analysis was made to evaluate the results.

The findings showed gaps regarding internal communication, leadership, employee engagement and business strategy. This research suggested that in closing these differences, the company can create a more robust culture that can support the achievement of the strategic goals.

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to the dictionary, *Strategy* means a general plan or set of plans intended to achieve something, especially over a long period (Collins, 2020). In a company, it is no different; a strategy is about defining and developing the business model of an organisation to achieve goals, in short, medium, and long-term. Armstrong (2016) described strategy as the approach selected to accomplish specified aims in the future. When taking this view of strategy, strategic management is best described as a process. "It is a process of strategy making, forming and, if the firm survives, of re-forming its strategy over time". (Boxall & Purcell, 2011, p. 46).

If in the one hand there is the strategy, that provides clarity and focuses on decision making based on plans and tools; on the other hand, there is corporate culture, that is an illusory lever because it is set on behaviours, mindset and social patterns that are no written or imposed (Groysberg et al., 2018, p. 46). According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p.120) "organisational culture is concerned with the subjective aspect of what goes on in organisations". A strong culture is essential to attract and retain talent, to have people aligned with the company's objectives and to serve customers well. Both strategy and culture have a considerable impact on the organisation, for better or worse.

According to business guru Peter Drucker, "culture eats strategy every day for breakfast." It means that there is no point in having a good strategy if professionals do not embrace the values or have the right habits. Strategy and culture must walk together to keep organisational efficiency. Groysberg, et al. (2018, p.45), stated that "strategy and culture are among the primary levers at top leaders' disposal in their never-ending quest to maintain organisational viability and effectiveness". In a highly competitive world, the company's

culture is its identity, capable of propelling the business to success or in the case of mismanagement, generating internal crises. When the culture is left out, the business strategy plan can be uncontrolled (Groysberg et al., 2018, p. 46).

For these reasons, this research aims to investigate the link between business strategy and corporate culture in an educational company in Brazil. The objective is to identify the gaps between them that can prevent the company from achieving its goals. This study is divided into four steps. The first one is to cover concepts, and theories about corporate culture, business strategy and the key variables analysed in the study: leadership, internal communication, and employee engagement. The following one is the application of qualitative research through semi-structured interviews among the company's employees. The third is about data analysis and presenting the findings. The last step is the conclusion and recommendations.

1.1 Research context

The Santo Antonio Educational Group (SAEG) was set up in 2017 and is a family-owned company composed of 3 faculties (higher education) in Brazil. However, the current managers have already worked - for more than ten years - to the same family in another educational company. In other words, despite being a new company, managers could have likely brought - even if unconsciously - the culture of the previous company.

Any company needs a strategy. Thinking of that, the President of SAEG hired a consulting company specialised in business strategy to build the group's strategic planning (detailed in chapter 4). Defining purpose, vision, values, and objectives is a way the company is directed to achieve goals. The new strategy was based on the pillars of digital

transformation and the concepts of innovation. After the new strategic business plan has been developed, the CEO understood that a cultural shifting was needed in order to achieve the ambitious goals of enrolling 25,000 students until 2025. “Executives who wait for organisational cultures to change organically will move too slowly as digital penetration grows, blurs the boundaries between sectors, and boosts competitive intensity” (Goran et al., 2017).

After building the strategy, the next step was to share this direction between the employees. The challenge now is how to engage the employees of the three units in this new context. At this point, the SAEG can find difficulty to link culture and strategy, because the company wants to implement a new strategy, but it has a management culture based on previous experiences in the old company. Therefore, this research can help to understand the changes needed to achieve the aspirational culture and how to align the workforce with the new strategies to attain the company’s goal.

1.2 Rationale

According to Armstrong (2016, p. 28), a business model innovation is a process followed by an organisation to introduce a new business model or change an existing one to improve performance. Achieving the goals of a new business strategy requires a change of behaviour and mindset to engage the employees in the new challenges. Consequently, it means a shift in culture. “Shifting the culture of any organisation takes time, effort, and commitment. But it begins with precise, visible changes in behaviour, especially by the leaders of that organisation” (Fuchs & Shehadeh, 2017).

This research will investigate the transformational culture challenges in an educational company in Brazil. The results will impact directly on the company where it will be performed. Additionally, it may serve as a reference for other companies, which have the same management characteristics and intend to promote a new organisational culture to adapt to market competitiveness. It can bring some inputs on how to engage employees during the process of transformational culture to achieve strategic goals in a family-owned company.

1.3 Research aim

This study aims to identify the gaps between the current corporate culture and the business strategy of the Santo Antonio Educational Group.

1.4 Research objectives

The next steps will be followed to answer the research question:

- To present the business strategy of the company.
- To map the main aspects of the current corporate culture related to leadership, communication, and employee engagement.
- To correlate the gaps between corporate culture and business strategy.

1.5 Research question

What are the gaps between business strategy and corporate culture that can be a barrier in the cultural transformation of Santo Antonio Educational Group?

1.6 Dissertation structure

This study is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research, including the context, its rationale, research aim and questions and objectives. Chapter 2 shows a critical review of the existing literature about organisational culture, business strategy, and the key variables: leadership, communication, and employee engagement. Chapter 3 details the research methodology of the study. Chapter 4 presents the business strategy of the company. The results are shown in Chapter 5. Lastly, Chapter 6 reports a discussion about the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review is based on two key themes, business strategy and corporate culture, and three key variables: leadership, communication, and employee engagement. The first theme is about business strategy and how it defines and develops the business model of an organisation. The second one is about organisational culture and how it impacts on the companies' performance. The three key variables are interconnected and help to understand the corporate culture traits and the impacts on business strategy.

2.2 Business strategy

There are many definitions of strategy, but there is no universal agreement between them. Even Igor Ansoff - a business strategy pioneers – cited by Burnes (2004, p. 207) advised that strategy is an elusive and somewhat abstract concept. Johnson et al. (2015), stated that strategy is the long-term direction of an organisation. Rigby (2011) agreed and completed saying: “strategy is shaped by knowledge, experience, relationships and competencies; it is also shaped by vision and values. A strategy is always emergent, responsive to market conditions and customer needs and altered by fresh opportunities and threats”.

A Company statements should have three main ideas: the fundamental goals (mission, vision or objectives) that the organisation pursues; the scope or domain of the organisation's activities; and the particular advantages or resources it has to deliver all of these. According to Johnson et al. (2015, p.7), a mission statement aims to provide clarity to internal and external stakeholders about what the organisation is fundamentally there to do. A vision

statement is concerned with the future the organisation seeks to create. Objectives are statements of specific outcomes that are to be achieved. Statements of corporate values communicate the core 'principles' that guide an organisation's strategy and define how the organisation should operate. David Collins and Michael Rukstad (2008, p.84) said that companies should identify three critical components in its strategy statements: objective, scope and advantage (see appendix A).

Johnson et al. (2015, p.7) also suggested that strategy should be divided into three primary levels: corporate-level strategy, business-level strategies and operational strategies. The corporate-level strategy is concerned with the overall scope of an organisation. The business-level is about how individual businesses should compete in their markets. Operational strategies are concerned with how the components of an organisation deliver the corporate and business-level strategies effectively in terms of resources, processes, and people. The operational-level functions need to be linked to business-level strategy, that needs to be connected with the corporate level. As Lynch (2018, p. 443) claimed: "the corporate objectives are translated into functional objectives that are each designed to contribute to the whole". Employees' goals and metrics must be aligned from top to bottom, so people will understand how the organisation's strategy is translated into objectives and how they are supposed to meet the targets at the individual level (Fuchs & Shehadeh, 2017).

According to Lynch (2018, p.9), strategic business management can be described as the identification of the organisation's purpose and the plans and actions to achieve that purpose. However, some authors mentioned a gap between strategy formulation and strategy execution. A Kaplan and Norton's research (2005, p.74) of HR and IT managers revealed that the strategy of fully 67% of those organisations was not aligned with business unit and corporate strategies; more than 90% of frontline employees have no link to the

success or failure of strategy implementation. Periodic management meetings, corporate communication, and knowledge management are similarly not focused on strategy execution.

The biggest challenge is in how to manage strategy. Michael Porter (1996) explained that the root of the problem is in balancing operational effectiveness and strategy; the managers became specialists in management tools and techniques leaving strategy behind:

after decades of impressive gains in operational effectiveness, many companies are facing diminishing returns. Continuous improvement has been etched on the manager's brains. But its tools unwittingly draw companies toward imitation and homogeneity. Gradually, managers have let operational effectiveness supplant strategy (Porter, 1996, p. 64).

On the other hand, Kaplan and Norton (2005, p.76) defended that management tools can help to operationalise strategy and suggest the creation of an Office of Strategy Management (OMS). It would help to link strategy with the management process. On both ways, strategic management invariably involves change for people working in organisations, as Lynch (2018) said:

Sometimes they resist such proposals and make strategy difficult to implement; sometimes they are enthusiastic and make a significant contribution to the proposed developments. It depends on how people deal with changing in the organisation. Understanding and exploring the impact of change on people is therefore important for strategy implementation (Lynch, 2018, p. 498).

Strategic change involves significant adjustments beyond the regular routines of the company. Such activities include the induction of new patterns of action, belief, and attitudes among employees". (Lynch, 2018, p. 502). It is not just a casual drift through time but a proactive search for new ways of working which everyone will be required to adopt.

To summarise, a strategy is fundamentally concerned with moving organisations forward. As Groyberg et al. (2018, p.46) said, the strategy gives direction and clarifies the goals to guide the company's decision-making process. It relies on plans and sets of choices

to mobilise people and can often be enforced by both concrete rewards for achieving goals and consequences for failing to do so.

2.3 Organisational culture

The significance of corporate culture is a relatively new trend. Organisational psychologists developed theories of organisational behaviour during the 1950s and 1960s. However, it was in the 1980s that organisational culture was recognised as a critical factor of behaviour and effectiveness (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2016). Most organisational scholars now recognise that corporate culture has a powerful effect on the performance and long-term effectiveness of organisations (Encyclopedia of Management, 2009).

Some authors defined organisational or corporate culture as the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that may not have been articulated but shape how people in organisations behave and things get done (Dawson, 2010; Flamholtz & Randle, 2011; Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Schein, 2016). Culture is an abstraction, but the forces that are created in social and organisational situations that originate from culture are powerful. If these forces are not understood, the company becomes a victim of them, and it can harm the strategy implementation (Schein, 2004 cited by Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 331). Company's internal culture is its identity and represents the way of thinking, acting, and perceiving the world around it and how passes it on to its employees and customers.

Edgar Schein - who has made a notable mark on the field of organisational management - has identified three levels in defining culture: artefacts, espoused beliefs and values, and underlying assumptions (appendix B). It was cited by Beardwell & Thompson (2017, p.332) and it is detailed below:

- **Artefacts:** are the characteristics of the organisation which can be easily viewed, heard, and felt by individuals collectively. These are the visible organisational processes, for example, the dress code of the employees, architecture, office furniture, rituals, and ceremonies.
- **Espoused beliefs and values:** reflect the members shared opinion and are closely related to the 'way we do things around here'. The values help the organisational members classify situations and actions as either undesirable or desirable.
- **Underlying assumptions:** There are certain beliefs and facts which stay hidden but do affect the culture of the organisation. The inner aspects of human nature come under the third level of organisation culture. It is a kind of belief that is taken for granted as a fact and so it is never challenged.

There have been many attempts to classify or categorise organisational cultures as a basis for analysis and for taking action to support or change them. Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p.123) cited Edgar Schein's theory classification that is divided into:

- **Power culture:** in which leadership resides in a few and rests on their ability and tends to be entrepreneurial.
- **Role culture:** in which power is balanced between the leader and the bureaucratic structure. The environment is likely to be stable, and roles and rules are clearly defined.
- **Achievement culture:** in which personal motivation and commitment are stressed and action, excitement and impact are valued.
- **Support culture:** in which people contribute out of a sense of commitment and solidarity.

Culture is hard to measure but brings a significant impact on the organisations, whether negative or positive. While strategy guides the whole company through its objectives and goals, culture expresses such goals through beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in wide-ranging and durable ways. Cultural norms define what is encouraged, discouraged, accepted, or rejected within a group (Groysberg et al., 2018, p. 46). According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p.120), organisational culture offers a shared system of meanings which is the basis for communications and mutual understanding. If these functions are not fulfilled satisfactorily, culture may significantly reduce the effectiveness of an organisation. The benefits of a strong organisational culture range from increasing employee productivity to strengthening the brand. Also, the corporate culture is crucial in retaining talent, as it motivates employees to align their values with the company's purposes. Strong organisational cultures can maximise performance and reduce turnover. (London & Mone, 2014).

A good cultural fit between employees and the organisation contributes to employee retention, organisational productivity, and profit. Cultural fit is essential, but what predicts success most is the rate at which employees adapt as organisational culture changes over time (Corritore et al., 2020, p. 79). However, there are also benefits of not fitting in. People who see the world differently and have diverse ideas and perspectives often bring creativity and innovation to an organisation (Corritore et al., 2020, p. 80). A strong culture may be less adaptive to change, may create barriers to diversity, and may create obstacles to successful acquisitions and mergers, for example. (Encyclopedia of Management, 2009). Companies that have more adaptable culture are more likely to succeed.

Barney (1986, p.660), suggested that firms that are successful at obtaining productivity through their people usually have an organisational culture that supports and values the worth of the employee. The result is professionals who see the company's goals as

if they were their own life goals, who dedicate themselves much more and are proud of their jobs. In times of central human capital appreciation, companies gain an immense competitive advantage with organisational culture - and transform engagement into profitability.

2.4 Leadership and the challenge in dealing with culture

Leadership means inspiring people to do their best to achieve the desired result. It involves developing and communicating a vision for the future, motivating people, and securing their engagement (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Tracy, 2014). Despite all research about the theme, conceptualising leadership is still challenging. As Meindl et al. cited by Armstrong (2016, p. 642) commented: "It has become apparent that, after years of trying, we have been unable to generate an understanding of leadership that is both intellectually compelling and emotionally satisfying. The concept of leadership remains elusive and enigmatic". This is because leadership involves many variables, such as personal experiences and personality traits, including how they work and their leadership styles.

Edgar Schein (2016, p.127) stated that a culture born from the founders' mentality. The essence of the organisational culture lies in the mindset and worldview of the company's founders, who determine new values based on their personal beliefs. However, with the current complexity of organisations, many leaders lose control of internal movements and end up having to deal with various cultures that arise in the same environment.

Lynch (2018, p.535) mentioned that "strategic leadership is the ability to shape the organisation's decisions and deliver high value over time, not only personally but also by inspiring and managing others in the organisation". It is a crucial element in developing the purpose and strategy of the business. Earlier studies have shown that a good leadership vision

helps the organisation succeed. A good leader encourages the followers to achieve higher performance; shares knowledge, values, purpose and goals; gives meaning to organisational life, and leads to the accomplishment of collective goals (Wanasika & Krahnke, 2017). Strategic leadership is, therefore, a crucial component to gaining and sustaining the competitive advantage, where appropriate, of the organisation and to adding value to the organisation's activities (Lynch, 2018, p. 531).

Leadership goes together with strategy development, and most leaders understand the fundamentals. Culture, however, is a more tenuous force, because much of it is pinned in unspoken behaviours, beliefs, and social patterns. As Groysberg (2018) stated, for better and worse, culture and leadership are inextricably linked:

it is far common for leaders seeking to build high-performing organisations to be confounded by culture. Indeed, many either let it go unmanaged or relegate it to the HR function, where it becomes a secondary concern for the business. They may lay out detailed, thoughtful plans for strategy and execution, but because they do not understand culture's power and dynamics, their plans go off the rails. (Groysberg et al., 2018, p. 46).

Corporate culture is an elusive concept, and it is challenging to comprehend because individuals bring their own perceptions, traits, strengths, weaknesses, and eccentricities to the workplace. All this combines to create a very amorphous environment. Otherwise, failure to understand and appreciate culture will obstruct a leader's capability to lead an organisation successfully and, transformational change will be nearly impossible. A leader cannot control the culture, but a leader can contribute to and hopefully direct the culture to create a positive working environment (Farrel, 2018, p. 865).

Culture strengthens as organisations mature and cannot be operated with quick solutions, such as revising a mission statement (Schein & Schein, 2019, p. 53). Before trying to change the culture, the leaders must first understand why the culture should be changed

and then, after finding a reason and a specific goal, they should move forward. It is not enough to reduce a particular characteristic of culture, but that attribute must be substituted with another behaviour (Farrel, 2018, p. 866).

Leadership is then associated with the purpose of the organisation. The essence of this aspect of leadership can be seen as influencing people so that they will strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of the group's mission (Lynch, 2018, p. 536). However, leaders have to deal with the ambiguities and complexities that arise from tensions in their position in the organisation, dealing with the different aims, expectations and interests of those they manage and those who set their goals (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 262).

Leaders need to go beyond defining the purpose of the organisation. Successful leaders will communicate and generate trust, enthusiasm and commitment amongst all those involved in the organisation (Lynch, 2018, p. 539). Schein and Schein (2019, p.54) stated: "We can now think of leadership as the creation and implementation of a new and better way of doing something, whether that be a new strategy, a new product or service, or a new way for a group to run its meetings and make decisions". The leader must understand the company's culture so that it can be used as a driving force to achieve the objectives set out in the strategy.

2.5 Employee engagement: a critical factor for a company's success

Despite the vast literature, there is still no agreement about engagement definition. What some authors agreed was about the psychological involvement between individual, company and job; and that there is a link between performance and employee engagement

(Harter, 2008). According to Watson Wyatt Worldwide survey, companies with highly engaged employees have a 26% higher revenue per employee (Dessler, 2017, p. 53). The individual's psychological approach in the engagement definition is what makes this concept different from commitment, job satisfaction and retention (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014, p. 196).

According to Dessler (2017, p. 53), employee engagement refers to being psychologically involved in, attached to, and dedicated to getting one's jobs done. It is also the extent of an employee's positive or negative emotional attachment to their job, colleagues and organisation, which profoundly influences their job satisfaction and their willingness to learn and perform at work (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 391). In the same line, the work of Nelson and Simmons cited by Beardwell and Thompson (2017, p.392) encompasses engagement as being primarily concerned with the relationship between the individual and the actual job, proposing that engagement is identified when employees feel positive emotions towards their work, find their work to be personally meaningful, consider their workload to be manageable, and are hopeful about the future of their work.

In contrast, Kahn cited by Beardwell and Thompson (2017, p.395) defined disengagement as the uncoupling of selves from work roles. In disengagement, people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances. He identified three psychological conditions related to disengagement at work: meaningfulness, safety and availability. An engaged workforce is more likely to deliver higher performance than one that is disengaged. Also, engaged employees are the ones who understand the objectives and goals of the company and work hard to accomplish them.

There is a discussion about employee retention being a key performance result of the engagement. Engagement and retention are linked because there is a correlation between

employee engagement and high employee retention rates. Commonly, disengagement leads to resignations (Torrington et al., 2017, p. 267). At the same time, the motivation factor in engagement is intrinsic. Macey cited by Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p.196) commented that when the work itself is meaningful, it is also said to have intrinsic motivation. It was also pointed out that engaged employees feel that their jobs are a valuable part of what they are.

Cross (2020, p.38) claimed that it is a common misunderstanding, both in businesses and in management articles and books, that a sense of purpose is what matters most when it comes to engaging employees. In his work with more than 300 companies over the past 20 years, revealed that purpose is only one contributing factor; the level and quality of interpersonal collaboration actually has the most significant impact on employee engagement. Thus, it is possible to conclude that only the connection between employee and company's purpose it is not enough to motivate and engage the employee, the whole work environment matters in this process.

Job satisfaction was defined by Locke cited by Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p.196) as a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job and job experiences. Job satisfaction, as well as commitment, is seen as an antecedent of engagement. Saks cited by Beardwell and Thompson (2017, p.398) explained there is a similar parallel between commitment and engagement, suggesting that organisational commitment differs from engagement in that it refers to a person's attitude and attachment towards their organisation. Commitment is defined as a positive connection and a willingness to exert energy for the success of the organisation. Engagement is not an attitude; it is the degree to which individuals are attentive and absorbed in the performance of their roles.

In general, organisations must work to engage the employee, who in turn has a choice about the level of engagement to offer the company. Each reinforces the other. An engaged

employee experiences a blend of job satisfaction, organisational commitment, job involvement and feelings of empowerment. The company's role is to create policies to make the employees feeling valued and involved (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 404). In 2010, Gallup research confirmed that engagement is associated with a range of positive outcomes at the individual and organisational levels, such as better performance, higher levels of personal well-being, employees are become more innovative, among others (Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 393). It cannot help mentioning that a weak culture does not favour employee engagement, and it less likely that disengaged employees can transform the culture.

Finally, it is essential to understand the leaders' role in the employee engagement process. Many organisations fail to remember that engagement really lies with the leaders in the business, and that those leaders need to be guided to truly understand how to get their people inspired and energised to achieve common goals. Macey and Schneider cited by Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p.197) argued that when leaders have clear expectations, are fair, and recognise good performance they will have positive effects on employee engagement by engendering a sense of attachment to the job. Engaged employee brings unquestionable outcomes for a company.

2.6 Internal communication: putting all organisation on the same page

Communication is the sharing or exchange of thought by oral, written, or nonverbal means (Encyclopedia of Management, 2012, p. 119). Till and Bovee (2017) described communication as bellow:

Communication is the process of transferring information and meaning between senders and receivers, using one or more written, oral, visual, or electronic media. The principle of communication is sharing, providing data, information, insights, and inspiration in an exchange that benefits both you and the people with whom you are communicating. (Thill & Bovee, 2017, p. 51).

This process is more complicated than it seems. When communicating, the sender encodes the message through a chosen means, and the receiver, decodes that message, finding meaning in it. Yet, the signs used in messages have no inherent meaning; the only meaning in the message is what the sender or receiver attributes to it (Encyclopedia of Management, 2012, p. 120).

The advancement of technology in the means of communication (e.g. e-mail, Internet, intranets, blogs, social networks) has led to the amount of information in modern organisations to increase enormously. The advantage is that the information is more accessible than before and thereby produce new understanding and knowledge. On the other hand, a large amount of information may lead members to spend too much time to sort, read and manage information. (Falkheimer, 2014, p. 127). Communication barriers (often also called noise or static) complicate the communication process. A communication barrier is anything that hinders the communication process, such as biases, emotions, and different word connotations. In companies, even small barriers can drastically alter a message as it passes from person to person. (Encyclopedia of Management, 2012, p. 121).

As internal communication continues to be a central part of business, the most successful companies are those that can master corporate communication. Information, the lifeblood of any organisation, needs to flow freely to be effective. Successful management requires downward communication to subordinates, upward communication to superiors, and horizontal communication to peers in other divisions. To function effectively, managers

need to know, and apply strategically, a variety of communication skills that match varying managerial tasks (Encyclopedia of Management, 2012, pp. 119, 120). Kaplan and Norton (2005, p.77) suggested that “effective communication to employees about strategy, targets, and initiatives is vital if employees are to contribute to the strategy. According to Mazzei (2010), internal communication is considered a challenging process which strengthens the connection between an organisation and its stakeholders, particularly employees. Iyer and Israel (2012) identified internal communication as a key driver of employee engagement.

Zerfas *et al.* (2012) claimed that strategic communication has become a valuable organisational asset and, in many cases, a valued dimension of strategic management processes. Hallahan *et al.* (2007, p.27) stated that strategic communication is a multidisciplinary field of knowledge, defined as purposeful communication that an organisation plans and executes to fulfil its overall mission concerning different internal and external stakeholders. Strategic communication is considered to contribute to the organisation’s effectiveness, and trust and legitimacy are supposed to be essential for efficiency (Falkheimer, 2014, pp. 125 - 130).

Already In 1938, Chester Barnard cited by Falkheimer (2014, p. 125) wrote that “communication is fundamental to an organisation and that leadership and communication are closely linked”. To translate strategy into organisational actions will need to communicate it well. Successful implementation will, therefore, come down to leadership style and the effectiveness of managing a team (Rigby, 2011). Contemporary, Heide and Simonsson, also cited by Falkheimer (2014, p.125) said managers in the post-bureaucratic corporations are supposed to be strategic communicators of visions, values and goals as well as facilitators of organisational change. One reason for the increased element of communication in leadership training is the demands on managers to communicate complex phenomena such as values,

norms, visions and overall goals, organisational identity and culture to a variety of recipients, both within and outside the company (Fuchs & Shehadeh, 2017).

Strategic communications are motivated by organisations as a tool for enforcing, enhancing, or changing the organisation's identity among employees and the corporate culture. Good communication is assumed to lead to a positive community around core values, which in turn supports the organisation's vision and strategy. According to Falkheimer (2014, p. 131) critical scholars also pointed out that culture is hard to change by management techniques, but it is possible to assume that strategic communication has an important role to play for cultures of organisations if one develops systems and practices based on a ritual communication approach.

To summarise, communication is a critical success factor to strategic management, because it works in three fronts: it is fundamental to the business results, it is a humanising factor of work relations, and it consolidates the organisation's identity with the stakeholders. If used strategically, it can be a great ally in aligning the strategy with the culture.

3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology is the set of techniques and processes necessary to achieve the research objectives. This research methodology followed the Research Onion model created by Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2015, p. 124). It is divided into research philosophy, approach to development, methodological choice, strategy, time horizon and technique and procedures (see appendix C).

3.1 Research philosophy

Before defining a research strategy or method, it is fundamental to understand the research philosophy and paradigms. It is essential to reflect on the worldview and knowledge construction that underpins research. It implies understanding and making clear the ontology, the epistemology and, consequently, the research paradigm that underlie the research method used. Saunders *et al.* (2015, p. 124), defined research philosophy as a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. In other words, the reason why research is being done, that is developing understanding in a specific area.

The research is related to determined beliefs and assumptions about reality, about how things are (ontology) and about how we believe human knowledge is built (epistemology). Firstly, it is necessary to understand the ontology considered by the researcher. According to Saunders *et al.* (2015, p. 127), ontology refers to assumptions about the nature of reality. Ontology works as a basis for defining a research problem, as well as helping to establish an epistemology and, consequently, the research method to be adopted. The ontology defines how the world is perceived. The phenomena (physical or social) is being

investigated as two opposing views: a realistic perspective, and an idealistic view of how things are. A realistic ontology assumes that "there is a world out there", regardless of the perceptions and mental constructions that we may have about it. An idealistic or nominalist ontology assumes that an object only comes into existence as it is perceived by an observer, in a mental construction, where thoughts and feelings are the primary reality. The world exists from our perceptions about it. (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 130)

After the ontology, it is necessary to understand the epistemology, that it is related to how knowledge is generated. Saunders et al., (2015, p.127) stated that "epistemology concerns assumptions about knowledge, what constitutes acceptable, valid and legitimate knowledge, and how we can communicate knowledge to others. Whereas ontology may initially seem rather abstract, the relevance of epistemology is more obvious". This belief is strongly linked to the ontological assumptions (about how things are).

If on the one hand, there is an objectivist epistemology that assumes that meanings and knowledge about all objects and entities exist independently of human mental operations, and it can be transmitted rationally and objectively; on the other hand, there is the subjectivist approach, and it presupposes that meanings are imposed on objects by the subjects, by the thinking beings. Thus, meanings are the result of our mental constructions, that is mentally elaborated (Saunders et al., 2015, pp. 128, 129).

Because of the nature of the study, which is all based on people experiences, feelings, and meanings, this is research followed a nominalist ontology approach with a subjectivist epistemology. All this analysis also led to an interpretivism research philosophy. The interpretive perspective emphasises the importance of subjective and socio-political meanings, as well as symbolic actions in the form of how people build their reality. The reality

is reproduced using social interactions; it is not something 'given', waiting for discovery.

Saunders et al. (2015) described interpretivism as:

Interpretivism emphasises that humans are different from physical phenomena because they create meanings. Interpretivists study these meanings. (...) interpretivists are critical of the positivist attempts to discover definite, universal 'laws' that apply to everybody. Rather they believe that rich insights into humanity are lost if such complexity is reduced entirely to a series of law-like generalisations. The purpose of interpretivist research is to create new, richer understandings and interpretations of social worlds and contexts (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 140).

Interpretive research methods assume that the knowledge of reality is a social construction by human actors and that this also applies to researchers. Thus, there is no objective reality to be discovered by researchers and replicated by others, in contrast to the assumption of science positivist. Theories about existence are always ways to make sense of the world.

3.2 Approach to theory development

The next step was to explore the approaches to conduct of research. This research followed a mix of deductive and inductive approach. Deductive because there are many theories about business strategy, organisational culture, and the key variables studied: leadership, internal communication, and employee engagement. These theories were used to pre-determine the themes and were used as a guide to creating the interview questions (see appendix D). Another characteristic of a deductive approach is the search to explain causal relationships between concepts and variables (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 146). Therefore, if research started with theory, and the researcher wanted to test this theory, it

can be regarded as a deductive approach. However, this study was not trying to test any theory; that is why it cannot be considered only a deductive approach.

There are also some characteristics of an inductive approach because of the collecting qualitative data to gain an understanding of the humans' meanings involved in actions. "If deduction has a 'top-down' flavour, then induction suggests a 'bottom-up' approach to theory development. Inductive reasoning moves from specific observations to broader generalisations and theories" (Saunders & Philip Lewis, 2014, p. 109). This is an empiricist method, which considers knowledge as based on experience; the generalisation derives from observations of cases of concrete reality, and it is elaborated from findings.

3.3 Research design

Research design is defined as the methods and techniques chosen by the researcher, who, when combining them in a reasonably logical manner, have the purpose of treating the research problem efficiently. Also, it is a guide on how to conduct a study using a specific methodology.

In the most elementary sense, the design is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions. It means that a research design is a logical plan for getting '*from here to there*', where '*here*' may be defined as the set of questions to be addressed, and '*there*' is some set of conclusions about these questions (Yin, 2018, p. 60).

3.4 Methodological Choice

The main difference between qualitative and quantitative method is that quantitative is used in numbers and mathematical calculations. In contrast, qualitative research is based on subjective characters, using written or spoken narratives. Quantitative research is commonly used to collect large amounts of data, extracted from a large number of people, to be collected and analysed. On the other hand, in qualitative research, it is possible to obtain more subjective data, permitting to know more about the individual. It is more used with small samples, and often opens new options and ideas, which would not be achieved with quantitative research, due to its closed nature. "Qualitative research methods are those investigative approaches whose outcomes are summarised as textual information, in contrast with quantitative methods where results are usually summarised in number" (McMillan & Weyers, 2014, p. 127). The qualitative approach requires a broad study of the research object, considering the context in which it is inserted and the characteristics of the group to which it belongs.

This study took a qualitative approach due to the research character. The theme (organisational culture) is subjective, and it was done in a particular company. Hence, a qualitative approach fits better because it is the one that studies the subjective aspects of social phenomena and human behaviour. Qualitative techniques rely more on language and the interpretation of its meaning; so data collection methods tend to involve close human participation and a creative process of theory development rather than testing (Walliman, 2006, p. 37). Data collection can be done in several ways, such as through focus groups, in-depth qualitative interviews and test observation. A sample is usually small, and respondents are selected for a specific quota. Qualitative research helps to understand the group's

motivations and interpret configurations and trends, discovering the opinions and expectations of individuals.

3.4.1 Purpose of research design

Descriptive, exploratory, explanatory, and evaluative research are classifications that may vary according to the objective intended by the researcher. Different research methods are used to meet the research objectives. They can be carried out in a combined way, to obtain a better analysis of the collected data. In this study, the descriptive approach was used.

In descriptive research, the theme is known, and there is a lot of bibliographic references available on the subject. Once the base is established, the newly explored field needs more information. It is at this point that descriptive research stands out because it attempts to examine and explain about a given topic, providing additional information about it. According to Walliman (2006, p.38), descriptive research counts on observation as a means of collecting data. It tries to examine conditions to determine what is the pattern, that can be predicted to happen again under the same events.

The descriptive research carries out a detailed study, collecting information through the collection techniques (questionnaires, interviews, etc.). After gathering these data, the researcher must analyse and interpret them to obtain the results. In the end, the research aims to describe what is happening in more detail, filling in the missing parts and expanding our understanding. The primary use of this type of research is to define better an opinion, attitude, or behaviour of a group of people on a given subject.

3.5 Research strategy

There are many strategies that research can be taken to collect and analyse data. Each type of strategy shows the advantages and disadvantages, for this study was evaluated some strategies aiming to identify the most suitable, that led to the case study as the best option.

3.5.1 Case study

A case study is a research method that consists of a way of delving into a specific subject. It helps to understand better the individual phenomena, organisational and political processes of society. The case study is a method that is useful when the event to be studied is broad and complex and cannot be considered outside the context where it occurs naturally.

The Yin's scope definition of case study helps to distinguish case studies from other investigation modes. "A case study is an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the "case") in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2018, p. 45). It means that the reason to do a case study is to understand the world reality and that understanding entails essential contextual circumstances relevant to the case.

3.5.2 Time horizon

This study was cross-sectional. It roses and analysed data at a time defined as observational. Its goal was to collect data to study a population at a given point in time. Moreover, the study did not consider what happened before or after. In comparison, the

longitudinal study is the one in which data from the same sample are collected repeatedly over an extended period.

3.6 Ethics

The participants' recruitment was made via email, that was sent to all the employees that fit in the requirements explaining the research objectives and inviting them to participate voluntarily. After having the participants selected was sent another email with a detailed information sheet ([appendix E](#)) and consent form ([appendix F](#)). In these documents were explained the aims of the study, all steps of the interview, and the most important, was ensured the anonymity of the respondents. A foundation of research ethics is that respondents should be offered the opportunity to have their identity hidden in a research report. Promises of anonymity could make them feel sufficiently confident to be objective in their views. The anonymity frees them to express their true feelings (Oliver, 2003, p. 77). The interviews were not done during the employees' working time so they could be more comfortable, and they were not concerned with time.

They also knew that the recording was used just for transcription reasons. During transcription, the participants were de-identify by giving each person a different number; they were identified as "Participant 1, 2, 3", etc. There is no need for further identification, such as gender, age, etc. Even the position is not necessary for the research purpose. The company did not know who the selected employees were. All data was stored on the researcher's personal computer under password protection. After graduation, all recordings will be deleted; however, it is necessary to keep the transcriptions and data files under

password protection for at least five years. Finally, there is no conflict of interest in this research, and this project did not involve any non-disclosure agreement with the company.

3.7 Research population

Every research needs to serve a target audience because it is based on this set of people that data is collected and analysed according to the principle of research. This target audience is called population and is a group of people who have their characteristics. The sample concerns a subset of the population, fraction or part of the group. According to Saunders *et al.*, (2005, p. 272) "sampling techniques enable you to reduce the amount of data you need to collect by considering only data from a subgroup rather than all possible cases or elements".

The Santo Antonio Educational group counts with 61 administrative staff, 16 of them are in the strategic or leadership position. The lecturers were excluded from the research because their employment bond is different. Because the leaders were involved in the building of the strategic plan, in this research were interviewed just the staff on the bottom line, so it was possible to analyse how the strategy is reaching the base of the company. Thus, the population was reduced to 45 employees. The sample was nine employees - 20% of the population - 3 of each business unit, from the frontline operation.

The research sample was got through probability stratified random sampling. This technique is a modification of random sampling in which you divide the target population into two or more relevant and significant strata based on one or some attributes (Saunders *et al.*, 2015, p. 290). The aim was to divide into groups according to the company's departments. In

this way, interviews could be conducted with people from different sectors and positions, thus providing a broad view of the topic investigated.

3.8 Data collection

There are different ways to collect data to do research. The data can be obtained through primary and secondary data. The primary data is that which is identified directly by the researcher using his own instruments and experience. These are selected in order to address the phenomenon of the study. The secondary data is the set of information that has already been collected by someone else during a different investigation process.

This study used books and articles as secondary data. The chosen process to gather primary data is through online interviews, using the digital platform zoom, which allows recording. Greenfield and Greener (2016) described an interview:

A personal interview is an interaction between two persons: an interviewer and a respondent. In its classic form, this interaction takes place face-to-face in real time. (...) Fortunately, modern information and telecommunication technology support more cost and time-efficient derivations of a personal interview in the form of a telephone interview, Skype interview, email facilitated interview or web interview. (Greenfield & Greener, 2016, p. 218).

However, it is essential to mention that there is a different type of interviews. A structured interview is a set of pre-determined questions with pre-determined responses administered in a specific order. A semi-structured interview is a method of data collection in which the interviewer asks about a set of themes using some pre-determined questions but varies the order in which the themes are covered, and questions asked. The interviewer may choose to omit some topics and questions and ask additional questions as appropriate (Saunders & Philip Lewis, 2014, p. 151).

In this study, was used a semi-structured questionnaire (see appendix D) with prepared key questions to cover the three key variables: leadership, engagement, and communication. The interview was conducted in a friendly way to make the interviewee comfortable to foster interaction to get more inputs.

For this research, it was not used any existent survey or protocol. The researcher created her own questionnaire. The questionnaire was based on what the literature says about building a strong culture. After in-depth research to conceptualise the key variables, the questions were validated with the supervisor, to ensure they were aligned with what was wanted to measure. Then, the questionnaire was validated between colleagues and with an ex-employee of the company to provide clarity. Validity and reliability are critical steps for the researcher to check the accuracy of the findings by employing specific procedures to check if the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects (Creswell, 2009).

3.9 Data analysis

After the interviews, the transcription was made. As the conversations were in Portuguese, it was necessary to translate into English. Then, a thematic analysis started with the data analysis, reading the transcription and creating codes.

The data analysis was done in five steps: compiling, disassembling, reassembling (and arraying), interpreting and concluding, according to Yin's five phases of analysis and their interactions model (see appendix G). This method is similar to the one proposed by Braun and Clark (2010). Yin's model (Yin, 2011, p. 178) is described below:

1. *Compiling* and sorting the field notes from data collection.

2. *Disassembling* means breaking down the compiled data into smaller fragments or pieces. The second phase is followed by using substantive themes (or even codes or clusters of codes) to reorganise the disassembled parts into different groups and sequences than might have been in the original notes.
3. *Reassembling* rearrangements and recombination may be facilitated by depicting the data graphically or by arraying them in lists and other tabular forms.
4. *Interpreting* using the reassembled material to create a new narrative, with accompanying tables and graphics where relevant, that will become the critical analytic portion of the draft manuscript.
5. *Concluding* calls for concluding your entire study.

3.10 Research Limitations

Every study has its limitations which can impact on the research outcomes. Since this study is specifically within a company, some bias can be found in the responses, which may compromise the findings in some way. Some of the limitations are:

- As only 20% of employees were interviewed, it is not possible to describe the company's culture accurately.
- The fact of having to talk about the weaknesses of the company creates a certain discomfort for employees, who do not feel free to share their feelings spontaneously.
- Two weeks before the interviews, there were several layoffs at the company, and the sense of instability may have interfered with the participants' responses.
- As it is a qualitative research that has a subjective approach, the fact that the researcher's interpretation may have some biases should not be disregarded.

4. THE SANTO ANTONIO EDUCATIONAL GROUP'S STRATEGY

Before writing about the results and findings, it is important to briefly understand the company context again. In 1998, was created the *Bom Despacho Faculty*, a family-owned company located in the countryside of the state of Minas Gerais, in Brazil. In 2016, the Anima Educational Group, one of the largest educational groups in Brazil, bought the *Bom Despacho Faculty* for 46 million *reais* (approximately 10 million euros). In 2017, the former owners of the *Bom Despacho Faculty* founded the Santo Antonio Educational Group. The Santo Antonio Educational Group (SAEG) is composed of 3 faculties, about 128 employees between teachers and administrative staff, and approximately 3,000 students. Currently, the main managers of SAEG are the same managers of the *Bom Despacho Faculty*, who have worked there for at least ten years. Along with the old managers, there was also the old 'the way we do things around here', but that way does not fit in the new strategy anymore.

When founding SAEG, the CEO with the managers, developed a new business strategy. This new strategy was supported by the concepts of digital transformation, a need for the new company. The company's strategic statements are described below:

- Purpose/Mission: To be a meeting point for all dreamy people who want to connect, develop their potential and transform lives.
- Vision: To be the institution of innovative solutions that transform society.
- Values:
 - We are part of the same purpose.
 - We always act ethically.
 - We work boldly to create and freedom to innovate.
 - We generate management productivity.

- We maintain consistency in everything we do.
- We are passionate about people.
- Objectives: to have 25 thousand students by 2025 through organic growth and acquisitions.

According to what it has already said so far, a strong culture is necessary to achieve the company's strategic objectives. For this study, three critical pillars for the creation of a high-performance culture were analysed in the company, which were: leadership, engagement, and communication. The analysis of the results is presented in the next topic.

5. RESULTS

After gathering data through the chosen instruments, the researcher needs to organise to analyse them. Analysing the qualitative data means working with all the material obtained during the research, that is, the reports of the observations, the transcripts of interviews, the analysis of documents and the other available information.

Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, interpreting, and reporting patterns (themes) from qualitative data. The thematic analysis process begins when the researcher searches the data for trends of meanings and points of possible interest to the research. The coding process is part of the analysis, and it is how the information is organised into groups that bring meaning together. Then, these codes are grouped into themes; it means classifying the different codes and grouping all relevant extracts in those themes that are being built and considering how different codes can combine to form an overarching theme.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine employees from different sectors in the three business units of the group. It was used prepared key questions to cover the three key variables: leadership, employee engagement and internal communication. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated. Then, the data were inserted into the Nvivo tool, which was used in the analysis and coding process. After analysis, 14 codes were created; they were:

1. Lack of feedback.
2. Lack of goals alignment.
3. Leadership support.
4. Commitment.
5. Teamwork.
6. Job meaning.
7. Retention.

- | | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| 8. Communication channels. | 10. Business statements. | 13. Listening |
| | 11. Company's goal | 14. People access. |
| 9. Overall alignment. | 12. Company's purpose | |

As the themes were pre-defined for the research, and the questions were structured to investigate each theme, the codes were grouped as bellow (see map in the appendix H):

- Theme leadership: lack of feedback, lack of goals alignment, leadership support.
- Theme employee engagement: commitment, teamwork, job meaning, retention.
- Theme communication: communication channels, overall alignment.
- Theme business strategy: business statements, company's goal, company's purpose.

The objective of this study was to understand the link between business strategy and corporate culture in a company. Besides having the group of questions crated according to the three key variables (leadership, internal communication and employee engagement), some questions were asked to verify the interviewees' understanding of the company's strategy, so arose the need to add the business strategy as a theme separately. The analysis is detailed in the next paragraphs.

5.1 Theme leadership

A company's organisational culture comprises its identity, its values, rules, and actions. It is a way of acting and thinking that guides the decisions made in the corporate environment and the company's interactions with stakeholders. When well defined, the organisational culture can direct the steps of an organisation and its team. The organisation's

culture is shared by the actions of leaders. If the principles are proving to be dysfunctional, the leadership is the way to help the team unlearn certain inefficient cultural assumptions and absorb new standards. Otherwise, without the figure of a leader, the sectors cannot adapt to the necessary changes. Schein's claimed that leadership is the management of culture (Schein, 2016).

In this stage, the aim was to understand how the leader works in professional development and the alignment of the company's strategy with its team. One of the questions was about feedback because it is known as a tool that helps the company and the employees to correct failures, thus aiming at growth and performance improvement. If done well by leaders, feedback can be essential for learning and improving performance. When asked if the employees received feedback and how often, Participant 2 said: "I ask for feedback. In general, we do not have much feedback. We do not have much positive feedback; we have more when something is wrong. We do not have constant feedback. It is rare". Participant 3 answered: "We get feedback at the end of a sales period, twice a year. It is usually a meeting to talk to everyone, so it is usually for the whole team". Also, Participant 5 stated: "I had feedback 4 months ago when I led a project, but always informal and punctual. This lack of feedback is not just my pain; it is also other's people in the group". Participant 6 said: "Very rarely. We talk a lot among the team. But other than that, no, very difficult". Lack of feedback was mentioned by all participants, whether it was done only informally or without a standard process. In other words, it can be said that there is no feedback culture in the company.

Another vital leader role is to help to guide employees, resources, and systems towards strategic objectives. A way to do that is setting goals. Goal alignment is crucial because it helps to assess employee performance. When asked how the goals were aligned, the answers were superficial, not being possible to understand what the goals were, how they

were defined, evaluated, and measured. Participant 1 replied: “My goal is to finish the day’s demands, and answer the students in the communication channels”. Participant 3 said: “They (leaders) always talk about the importance of delighting the customer”, but this participant could not explain how it is measured. When it comes to sales, it is easier to see a goal set: “we actually have a certain number of leads to generate in each campaign”. Participant 9 affirmed: “I do not have a goal; I do not have a boss who gives me a certain activity, and I have to meet a deadline, for example”.

The leader is responsible for indicating the goals and objectives to be achieved by the company through its team. But, for that, they must be able to support and organise their teams, besides demanding improvements when necessary. When asked about the support they have from their leaders, some people evaluated it well and others not so much, which is reasonable, considering that each leader has a management style. But this topic is still blurry; for example, Participant 3 said: “She (leader) has a good leadership (style). She is very opening to listening; she always communicates very well with us; she is cautious when needs to share more complicated news. She always wants to be transparent”. Participant 4 has the same feeling: “I learn a lot from my leader. He teaches me about the importance of solving problems correctly, to not face the same problems again in the future. I learn about management in general because he has a lot of experience in that area. He always believed in my potential”. However, Participants 2 and 7 do not have the same viewpoint about their leaders. Participant 2 said: “Sometimes I think it is hard for leaders to work with their employees because usually, people in managerial positions spend a lot of time in meetings. In my role today, I have more autonomy, but this autonomy came with lack of direction”. Participant 7 said: “I think the goals could be more monitored by my leader over time”.

5.2 Theme employee engagement

Having an engaged team is essential for every company that wants to reach its space in the market. After all, employees are primarily responsible for delivering a quality product or service, dictating business productivity. Engaged employees are those who identify themselves to the company's goals and values, feeling fulfilled when performing their activities in the work environment. When the employees identify themselves with the company's purpose, an affective connection is created that increases the sense of belonging. In this way, the organisation's goals also end up becoming the employees' goals, as they find themselves working day after day for something they really believe. Also, engaged professionals stay longer in the company.

In this phase sought to understand employee engagement and their feelings about the work they do, about their impacts on the company's results, the collaboration between teams, and if they see themselves in the organisation in the future. When asked if they found their job meaningful, in general, the responses were positive. Respondents find their job significant for the company, as is it possible to see in the next quotes. Participant 1 said: "It is very significant because we are the bridge between the college and the student". And Participant 8 stated: "Our department is the heart of the company. We are the first contact with future students. Besides being an employee, I am also a student fulfilled of dreams. It makes easier to see the same feelings in the eyes of our future students too". They also believe that the company positively impacts their development, as can be seen in the statements of Participants 4 and 7. Participant 4 answered: "This is something I cherish; the company gave me this opportunity, and I learn a lot from everyone I work with. I learn from all students too, and I learn more every day". And Participant 7 said: "I think that the

experience I have when living the company's values contributes a lot. I think it contributes to my professional development; it is a great benefit".

Besides finding the work meaningful, most of the employees who were interviewed clearly understand how their work impacts on the company's results and they are committed to the deliveries they have to make. For example, Participant 1 said: "If we do not give a good return to the students, they will be dissatisfied with the institution and may even want to leave the college. So, we must do a good job so that they will be satisfied with our services". Participant 3 replied: "My job is important because I work with lead generation, I mean, lead conversion more precisely. So, I am in direct contact with the future students who will start college. I have to know how to attract, convince and delight them and show that the college is different, that is worthy of study". Also, Participant 9 said: "We are all depending on online platforms when working from home. So, a greater commitment is required, we have to work close to employees, teachers and students. The company also understand that our work is of paramount importance".

Teamwork was a subject that received unanimous positive responses among the participants. Respondents were very satisfied with this matter. Participant 1 said: "The team is very cohesive, always helping each other. I am satisfied; I am happy, especially for the team. I have never seen a team so close". Participant 3 stated: "Our team works very well together, we have the same goal, the same purpose". And Participant 8 said: "We have always helped each other, pointing out how we can improve, sharing what has worked and what has not. The teamwork is great, and I can always count on the girls (team) regardless of the time".

Despite the good evaluation in terms of job meaning, teamwork and commitment, one point that caught the attention were when they were asked how they see their future in the company. The vast majority do not see themselves in the company in the long-term.

Participant 3 said: “It is not my dream; my dream is to study psychology”. And Participant 5 answered: “There is the point about belonging, but I do not feel aligned. I think my future is not too long here, and I can see an end”. Also, Participant 7 stated: “Inside the company, I do not see a future. I have a dream that goes beyond that”.

5.3 Theme internal communication

Besides building a strong culture or strategy, it is vital to share it with employees. It cannot work if the manager has it in mind or just on paper. That is why communication is so relevant because if the culture already exists and was developed through the values, beliefs, and habits that leaders share, communication helps to transmit these characteristics to all employees. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p. 438), employee communications are essential for three reasons. Firstly, it is a vital part of any change management. Resistance to change often arises because people do not know what the change is or what it implies for them. Secondly, commitment to the organisation will be enhanced if employees understand what the organisation is trying to achieve and thirdly, generates trust because organisations take the trouble to explain what they are doing and why.

In this regard, the questions were to understand the communication channels, whether employees were aligned with strategic planning, and how was the daily basis communication. The company's main communication channel is meetings, which was cited by all participants. Participant 1 said: “We have online meetings once a week during the quarantine. But before it was in person. We also have meetings with all sectors”, and Participant 3 answered: “It has always been this way: meetings”. However, other communication channels were also mentioned, as Participant 8 said: “We use several

communication channels: email, Slack, WhatsApp". Finally, respondents believe there is still room for improvement. Participant 7 said: "I think the channels are effective. But there are still points to improve", and Participant 9:" I think that the communication channels exist, it only lacks to be used more. For example, we have corporate communication channels, such as Slack. But I believe we can improve".

After the home office model implemented by the companies due to the coronavirus pandemic, including by the SAEG, most of the participants said that communication improved a lot after this new model of work. Regarding communication as a way for general alignment, it means, how information is exchanged, Participant 6 stated: "after the pandemic, I believe that our communication has improved a lot. Because in person, we had a few meetings, and now, we practically have a meeting every day, and now the information flows. Participant 5's testimony portrays this process well: "It has improved a lot in these five months that we are in social isolation. It was a pain for all employees because we used to get to know things after everyone knew. For example, many events I discovered because I follow the page on social media. What if I didn't follow? Would I have known? I kept asking myself. I feel that a lot still has to be aligned; I know that this is what we seek constantly. And then what happened was that the social isolation kicked everything. Before, I think it was about many talks on what to do and how to do it. And then, with social isolation, we had to do in the way we knew. In five or four months of social isolation, I received more institutional email than when I joined the company. I think that before they assumed that people knew everything because people were meeting and talking to each other, but now they need to make sure that everyone knows. After social isolation, I can say that it has improved a lot; but there is still a lot to improve".

5.4 Theme business strategy

The questions about business strategy were asked within the themes of leadership and internal communication. However, the need to analyse it as a theme separately arose because it is linked to the main subject of the research. This theme addresses the interviewees' understanding of the business strategy. When asked about the mission, vision, and values, it was not possible to identify a consensus in the speech of the participants. Regarding the values, they were one of the most significant weaknesses in this topic. For example, Participant 1 said: "I know that the company has the mission, vision and values, they even have it on the website. I do not know by heart yet, but I know that the company follows it". Participant 2 stated: "I think that there is a certain misalignment concerning this. We have a slogan of values and everything, but they are not very aligned with the employees in general". Participant 5 answered: "I should know. We had a meeting we talked about it. I do not know exactly the words, but I think the group wants to be a meeting point for dreamy people, willing to connect, learning and teaching. It is even a delicate question because many times I feel that the values of the group are one, but sometimes I see others being exercised".

When the business statements were discussed, it was asked about the company's purpose. There were different answers, but the words: 'to become reference'; 'to transform lives'; 'making dreams come true' and 'innovation' appeared frequently. Participant 1 said: "to be a reference in the region, to be a well-recognised faculty". Participant 2 declared: "I imagine it is forming professionals for the world and not for the job market. Participant 3 answered: "Innovation! They want to have a radical change in the business model". Participant 5 answered: "The purpose revolves around being a space where people dream and make their dreams come true through connections with other people and places".

Participant 6 stated: “I believe it is about transforming the future, people’s lives, people’s future”. The point is, it was possible to see during the interviews that the respondents understand some of the business statements. Although there may be confusion about what purpose, vision, values are, it was possible to realize that they have a general understanding.

When asked about the organisation goals, there is a general idea about the company’s vision, which is to become a reference in the region where the faculties are located. It was also said that the company wants to grow. Participant 1 said: “to be a reference here in the city and the region”. Participant 3 answered: “to become a reference in the region (...), this is what I see, a great expansion, a desire to grow, and to become reference”. However, the interviewees did not know to answer questions about how many students they want to reach in the next years or what has to be done to become a reference. In general, they failed to quantify the objectives. Participant 8 said: “The number I do not know because our goal is to enrol all of them (students)”. The point is, everybody knows that the company wants to become a reference and to grow, but no one could say how. How will they become a reference? How will they grow? How do they measure that? Only participant 5 gave a number: “the goal is to reach 30 thousand students in 5 years”.

5.5 Extra codes

Other codes also appeared but were not grouped into the themes already mentioned. The codes were ‘listening’ and ‘people access’. Respondents said that the company is open to hearing opinions and that they have access to anyone in the company, regardless of position. It was also noted that there is no rigid hierarchy, as mentioned by Participant 1: “we have access to everyone from all sectors and all leaders. The old hierarchy model does not exist

here; we are up to date in this regard.” Also, by Participant 3: “We are free to talk to everyone, all the people are always available”. It was also said that leaders are open to hearing new ideas. Participants 7 and 8 said respectively: “We have the opportunity to meet the CEO every week, it is a moment that we have just to bring ideas, and all ideas are very welcome by top management”. “They are very open with us. Whenever we have a new idea, they like to listen to it”. It was essential to talk about these codes as they are also an important factor to build a strong culture. It was not grouped into any theme because these points were mentioned in spontaneously, in several approaches.

To summarize, the role of leadership still needs to be better developed, considering that the leader is responsible for sharing the company's culture and aligning the strategy. Internal communication, despite the improvements that have already happened, still is a point of attention cited by all respondents, and it has room for improvement. On the employee engagement theme was possible to see that people are committed; they understand the importance of getting the job done; they value the teamwork. However, there is still a point about retention that needs to be analysed further. One last point is about how the strategy is being aligned. Perhaps, this is the point of most significant attention. All these points will be discussed in the following chapter.

6. DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to identify the gaps between the current organisational culture and business strategy that need to be developed to achieve the Santo Antonio Educational Group's goals. The need for cultural transformation is a company demand, as it has already been reported. The development of these gaps can help to strengthen the culture and align it with the business strategy at the same time. According to London & Mone (2014), a strong culture is an important factor to achieve strategic objectives and maximize performance. Gaps were found in all evaluated themes. It was identified that there is still space to improve internal communication; that although engagement has been positively assessed, there is an issue regarding retention. Furthermore, the most significant gaps were concerning leadership and strategy alignment, which are somewhat related to each other.

6.1 The leadership gaps: Feedback e goal setting

The leader has the role of inspiring, motivating, and influencing the people to work enthusiastically to achieve the goals of the company. It is the role of the leader to empower and engage the team, so they can achieve the best performance (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Armstrong & Taylor, 2014; Tracy, 2014). The leader is likewise responsible for sharing the mission, vision and values of the company, also for managing a culture (Farrel, 2018, p.865).

The role of leadership in the Santo Antonio Educational Group is perhaps one of the main barriers to cultural transformation. Problems such as lack of feedback and lack of goals setting were identified. Moustafa and Leonard (2016) stated that feedback helps to improve performance what lead to the achievement of departmental and organisational goals.

Feedback and objectives set are considered important tools to measure employee performance in an organisation. Armstrong (2017) affirmed that performance management improves the organisational performance that only happens with the improvement of individual performance. Additionally, feedback is one of the means that the leader has to shape the team and make them aligned with the company's culture and with the strategy.

The lack of definition and alignment of the goals, one of the gaps identified, makes it difficult to measure results, and manage performance, whether they are individual or team. The establishment of goals at the operational level is crucial because they will provide support to reach tactical objectives, as stated by Johnson et al. (2015, p.7). According to Armstrong (2017), performance management is the continuous process of improving performance by setting individual and team goals which are aligned to the strategic objectives of the organisation. Putting performance management into practice is difficult because it requires strategic planning to be aligned with business goals.

Feedback and performance management are two essential tools that can help leaders to manage their team, encouraging and motivating them to achieve great performance. When it is identified that feedback and goals setting are leadership gaps in the organisation, it can be said that there is a lack of strategic leadership, which is an important element to gain competitiveness and add value to the organisation's activities (Lynch, 2018, p.531). Without strategic leadership, it is difficult for the company to be able to align its vision, values, purpose, and goals, and thus, promote a high-performance culture. As Corritore et al. (2020, p. 79) said, an excellent cultural fit between employees and the organisation contributes to employee retention, organisational productivity, and profit. When closing these gaps, it can help the company to reinforce its values of 'manage productivity' and 'passion for people'.

6.2 Employee engagement and retention

As stated by Harter (2008), engagement is essential because it is an emotional precursor to performance. However, before these positive emotion feelings that generate engagement, Armstrong and Taylor (2014) pointed out commitment and job satisfaction as steps before engagement. In this sense, it can be said that the company is on the right path to has an engaged team; some positive points were mentioned, such as teamwork, commitment and job meaning. According to the Global Study of Engagement (Hayes et al., 2018), teamwork and know what is expected is a way to engage the team. An engaged team reinforce the company's value 'we are part of the same purpose'.

According to Torrington et al. (2017, p.267), another outcome of engagement is retention. Bussin (2018) stated that are two meanings for the definition of retention: "to hold or keep in possession" and "to contract the services of". High-value employees and those with "hot" skills want to be "engaged" and not "kept". Perhaps the focus should be to involve people for as long as possible, instead of trying to retain them as much as possible. In other words, retaining is an effort expended to keep the talents satisfied and committed to the results of the organisation, being motivated not to leave them. Here there was a point of attention, considering that most of the interviewees do not intend to continue working at the company.

There are several retention drivers, such as competitive pay, career advancement opportunities, work-life balance, overall work environment. However, if the employee is not engaged, there is no point in trying just to add more perks. Engagement is linked to commitment and alignment based on everyday purposes, values and interests (Bussin, 2018). The reasons expressed by the employees for the desire of leaving the company seems not to

be related to any dissatisfaction with the organisation. However, it was also not possible to conclude whether the company is failing at any point that is generating this lack of attachment. Engagement is not something that happens overnight; it is something to be built into the corporate culture.

6.3 Internal communication: a strategic tool to align culture and strategy

Internal communication is essential to maintain a good corporate culture and engaged employees (Iyer and Israel, 2012). Beside internal newspapers, newsletters and suggestion boxes, the new means of digital communication improve employee access to organisational information (Falkheimer, 2014, p. 127). Furthermore, according to Kaplan and Norton (2005, p.77), effective communication is vital to align the strategy.

Although respondents mentioned that many improvements have happened after the home office model set during the pandemic period, they also said that it has always been a critical point in the company and that there is still room for improvement. Internal communication is an indispensable element in times of changing, in which development depends on cooperation and reciprocity between individuals in the organisation. Through communication, transformations are introduced, implemented, and carried out. According to Falkheimer (2014, p. 131), organisations should develop a strategic communication system to help culture to play its role.

Regarding the moment of creating and sharing a new strategy which SAEG is going through, internal communication becomes a crucial factor in achieving the results. Effective communication is a challenge for business leaders; however, it is a key success factor for

improving engagement and sharing culture. As Rigby (2011) said, effective communication is one that helps to translate strategy into organisational actions. As mentioned in the analysis, there are still confusion between the purpose, vision and values and, if managed successfully, internal communication can help to reinforce the business statements. Additionally, in doing that, the company could be more aligned with its value of 'maintaining consistency in everything we do'.

6.4 Business Strategy

The success of an organisation goes beyond its ability to develop a good business strategy; it is necessary to ensure that its plans are aligned with employees. According to Lynch (2018), strategic management can be summarized as a plan to achieve the company's purpose.

What was seen in the interviews is that the team is already aligned with some points of the purpose, vision and some values. However, it was also possible to identify that the concepts are not yet fully settled; they still need to be developed. Business statements need to be strongly reinforced because the understanding of this topic still seems vague among the employees. As seen in the hierarchy of Collins and Rukstad (2008) company's statements, the mission statement is the loftiest guiding light - and the least specific.

As you work way down the hierarchy, the statements become more concrete, practical and ultimately unique. The mission statement spells out the underlying motivation for being in business in the first place - the contribution to society that the firm aspires to make. Regarding the mission and vision, it is possible to see that the company has been developing this matter satisfactorily. It can be improved, as already stated, but it exists in

some way. The gap found was at the bottom of the hierarchy, regarding strategy and how it unfolds into objectives. As Collins and Rukstad (2008) said, the strategic objectives should be precise, quantifiable and time bound.

As someone said: "If you can't measure, you can't manage". What was understood from the interviews is that the company has somewhat aligned where they want to go (vision), but it does not make clear how it will do to "get there", or what the role of employees in helping that. It seemed that nowadays, it happens more in a conceptual than in an operational way. For example, it is clear that the company wants to expand, grow, like any other company. However, the employees were unable to explain how the company wants to do this, besides attracting more students. It has been said repeatedly that the company wants to become a reference in the market. However, for that to happen, the answer to the question: "how will we be a reference in what we do?" needs to be more elaborate than just saying: "we will sell more". Being a reference involves other factors, which should also be included in the strategy.

According to Lynch (2018), the general goals of the company need to be translated into targets for each of the areas. Then, these objectives need to be transformed into an action plan with tasks that need to be accomplished by the frontline. But this is not a problem faced only by SAEG, according to a Kaplan and Norton's (2005, p. 74) research, 90% of frontline employees have no link to the success or failure of strategy implementation. In closing this gap about goals measurements, the company can provide a better understanding of the vision, and the plans can be clearly to the employees.

Additionally, it is possible to understand why business strategy is linked to communication and leadership, as appeared in the results. Chester Barnard cited by Falkheimer (2014), reinforced that leadership and communication have a strong connection. The leader has a vital role in ensuring the excellent performance of the strategy by developing

the team and aligning the company's culture. For that, the leader should make effective use of communication; as Zerfas et al. (2012) stated, the strategic communication has become a valuable organisational asset and, in many cases, a valued dimension of strategic management processes.

Kaplan and Norton (2005) affirmed that efficient communication is necessary so that employees can contribute to the strategy. Finally, Lynch (2018) stated that successful leaders are those who know how to communicate, generating trust and commitment among all employees. That is why leadership and communication are so crucial to strategy alignment.

6.5 Strengths and weakness of the research

Strengths: One of the advantages of the research was the number of studies in the area. It was possible to find a vast literature on the themes. As a case study, another advantage was the possibility to narrow the research, facilitating the application. The access to the employees and the company's support in conducting the research was also a positive point.

Weaknesses: Although the research seeks to understand how frontline employees see the strategy, one of the vulnerabilities was the non-participation of the leaders, so it is not possible to know if they are part of the root of the problems. Another gap was that the research was not carried out with all employees; some findings may be just assumptions, leading to generalizations that may not represent reality. The study would be more accurate if it were done with all administrative employees.

6.6 Future Research

A point raised during the research that could be investigated further is related to retention. According to the reports, the team seems to be engaged. However, if retention is one of the outcomes of engagement and most respondents reported that they do not intend to stay in the company for a long time, a further study on retention would be recommended.

Although employees expressed different reasons for wanting to leave the company, it would be interesting to try to identify how and if the company is failing to retain its employees. It is not possible to say that the same happens at the tactical and strategic levels, as the research was not extended to them. However, it would be ideal that this new research was extended to all employees so that it would be even more evident.

6.7 Application of research

The results of this study light up an alert on the gaps found. The company can use the results of the research as a guideline and carry out a more in-depth analysis of the topics (gaps mentioned). From there, the company can develop strategic planning in order to close these gaps and improve its performance. Due to the limitations already mentioned, the results should not be taken as absolute truth, that is why it is recommended more analysis by the company.

6.7.1 Recommendations

To support strategic planning to close the gaps, the researcher made some recommendations. The first recommendation is regarding the business strategy, and it is

related to the creation of key performance indicators (KPIs). Through the creation of performance indicators, it is possible to identify and quantify the results of a specific action or strategy based on predetermined objectives by the company. Therefore, KPIs show whether the company is on the right track or not. It is not being said that there is no monitoring of the performance indicators. Any company needs to monitor its various indicators, such as sales, financial, or processes. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that in the company (SAEG), these indicators seem not to be deployed to reach the operational level. They may be missing a great opportunity to improve competitiveness through the monitoring of KPIs.

Another recommendation would be to create a leadership development program. With this program, the company could train its current and future leaders. A leadership development program can help to develop the primary skills required by the company to achieve its goals. This program can even be designed to address the gaps needed to link business strategy and culture. Thus, the leaders would feel more connected to the business, understanding how their work adds value to the company. They would also be able to develop their team so they can get the best performance, and the company can take advantage of this.

Finally, it is recommended to develop a Strategic Human Resources Management (SHRM) area. According to Armstrong and Taylor (2014, p.546), the term SHRM was popularized by Ulrich and Lake (1990). They argued that to ensure management practices become a means for gaining a sustained competitive advantage; human resource professionals need to become strategic business partners and gear their activities to improving business performance. To do this, they require a good working knowledge of the organisation and its strategies. The SHRM helps the company to align HR strategies with business strategy and hence corporate culture. It is seen as a partner in the organisation's

strategic management team. It works alongside senior executives and other management professionals to determine the best way to fit human resources initiatives into the company's entire planning. It would be the perfect fit for SAEG in putting the human capital in the centre of the business.

6.8 Conclusion

The objective of this research was to understand the gaps between current corporate culture and business strategy in a company in the educational sector in Brazil. For that, three concepts were analysed: employee engagement, communication, and leadership. These three concepts are interconnected and were chosen to be investigated due to their relevance to align culture and strategy. The leader is responsible for generating engagement and for aligning culture and strategy. Engaged employees are those who identify themselves with the company's values and goals, bringing more results to the company. Internal communication plays a strategic role in aligning the company's strategic objectives with employees and enhancing engagement. Employees become more committed when they know what the organisation wants to achieve. When closing the gaps found, a stronger culture is likely to be developed.

Organisational culture is a set of characteristics that distinguishes the company from its competition and connects employees to values, mission, and vision. It can leverage the business strategy and operational model, having a substantial impact on its execution capacity and, consequently, on financial results. Companies that cultivate a distinct culture, which gives them a competitive advantage, are more likely to grow and profit more than the average. Gartner's research (2019) showed that on average, 69% of employees do not believe

in the cultural goals set by their leaders, 87% do not understand them, and 90% do not behave in ways that align with them. By closing these gaps, Gartner says, companies are 9% more likely to meet or exceed their annual revenue goals. This research corroborates the relationship between the topics investigated, communication, employee engagement and leadership.

The leadership theme is important because the leaders have the role of sharing and managing the company's culture with their teams. In SAEG, it was identified that there is a gap in the leader role; this role is not exercised appropriately. Respondents reported a lack of feedback and lack of goals setting, these tasks being important for improving team performance. If the leader fails to fulfil this role, the task of achieving the company's results becomes more arduous, because these results are directly linked to employee performance. The leader takes centre stage when it comes to maintaining a cohesive and orderly team because leadership is a fundamental aspect in creating a pleasant work environment and in achieving effective results. Therefore, a leader has the central role of managing, engaging, and keeping the team aligned.

Internal communication is a critical factor in organisations, and it should be used strategically to align culture and organisation, whether in a corporate way or as a tool for leaders. Although communication has improved a lot in SAEG, all respondents said that it was always a critical factor and that there is still room for improvement. Respondents felt aligned, but considering the other gaps found, communication can be used more strategically. Thus, the employees can know if they are on the right track to achieve the expected results or not.

One last gap found refers to the topic of employee engagement. Respondents were committed and said they understood the importance of their work for the company. Yet, the majority of them also said that they do not intend to stay in the company for the long term.

As seen, some authors identify retention as an outcome of the engagement. And if the engagement is an emotional bond between the employee and the company/job, probably there is a gap that needs to be analysed more deeply to understand the retention issue. Consequently, to understand the real reasons why employees do not want to stay in the company because at some point, this link seems to be missed.

Culture develops over time and strengthens as values, behaviours, practices, and ideas are exchanged from person to person until they eventually become part of the organisation. Once the culture is ingrained, it can be powerful, but it can also be difficult to change (not impossible). However, SAEG can take advantage of it because it is a new company, and it can be easy to put into practice the changes necessary to transform the current culture and make it stronger. In other words, the culture will be raised as a good asset for the company. The turning point in the culture transformation is to identify gaps and seek improvements as proposed in this work. Due to its importance, it is clear that organisational culture can harm the strategy if it is not correctly aligned with what is projected for the future of the company. That is why nowadays, culture has increasingly been an issue treated carefully by companies.

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8. APPENDICES

Appendix A – A hierarchy of Company Statements

A Hierarchy of Company Statements

Organizational direction comes in several forms. The mission statement is your loftiest guiding light—and your least specific. As you work your way down the hierarchy, the statements become more concrete, practical, and ultimately unique. No other company will have the same strategy statement, which defines your competitive advantage, or balanced scorecard, which tracks how you implement your particular strategy.



Figure 1: A Hierarchy of Company Statements by David J. Collis and Michael G. Rukstad available at the article: "Can you say what your strategy is?" for Harvard Business Review

Appendix B - Schein's three levels of culture

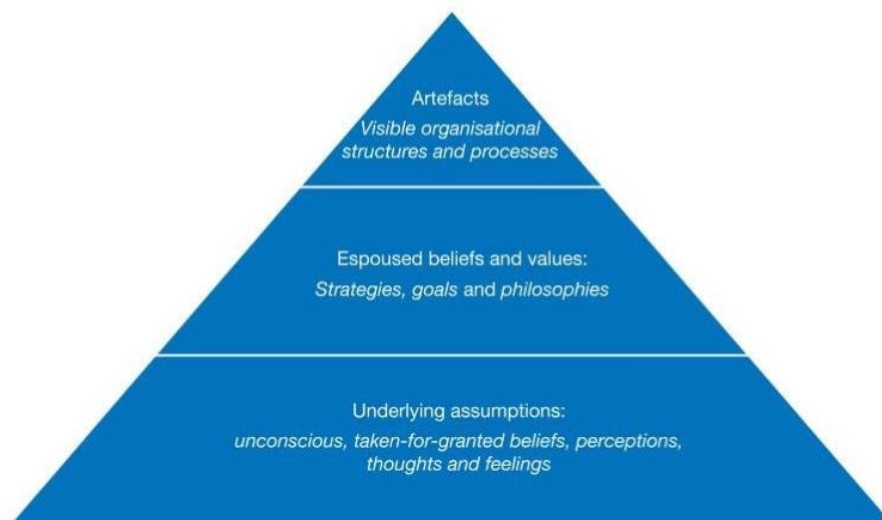


Figure 2: Schein's three levels of culture. Source adapted from Schein 2004. Available at the book: Human Resources Management. A contemporary approach, Beardwell & Thompson, 2017, p. 332.

Appendix C – The research onion

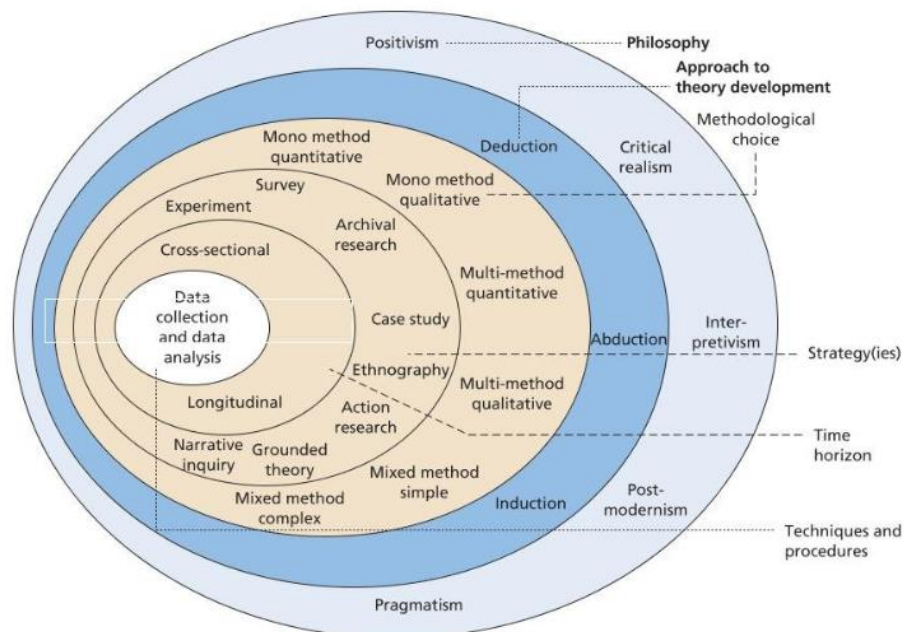


Figure 3: The research 'onion' by Mark Saunders, Philip Lewis and Adrian Thornhill in *Research Methods for Business Students* (2015).

Appendix D - Interview questions

Group of questions 1 - Leadership

1. How does your leader align the goals with you? How does he/she support you to achieve your goals?
2. Does your leader provide feedback about your work? How often? How does it work (formal, informal)?
3. Does your leader contribute to your development? How?

Group of questions 2 – Employee engagement

1. Do you consider yourself having a meaningful job? Why?
2. Do you know what is expected of you at work and how your work impacts the company's goals?

3. How do you feel about your future in the company?

Group of questions 3 - Communication

1. Can you say what are the company's goals / strategic objectives/values?
2. In your own words, how do you explain the purpose of the company? What does it mean for you?
3. How are you communicated about the company's decisions?

Extra questions (used when needed)

1. Which aspects of the organisation can be improved to make it a better place to work?
2. Are there any additional questions you would like to add to this survey?

Appendix E - Information sheet

Research project title: A case study of cultural transformation barriers in an Educational company in Brazil

Student Researcher: Fernanda Liberman – 10533657@mydbs.ie

Research Supervisor: Ray Whelan

About the Project

I am a master's student at Dublin Business School, and I am carrying out my thesis project under the direct supervision of Ray Whelan on the subject of organisational culture and business strategy.

The project aims to identify the gaps between current corporate culture and the business strategy in the Santo Antonio Educational Group.

I would like to invite you to take part in a recorded interview. As a participant in the study, you would be required to share your experiences/feelings about the following topics: leadership, internal communication and employee engagement, in your company.

Data Protection

Interviews/Focus groups will be recorded for the sole purpose of facilitating later transcription of the data. Precise transcripts are important in research to ensure that data is recorded accurately, to allow the interviewer to be more present in the conversation and, importantly, to support greater accountability and scientific integrity. During the transcription phase, your data will undergo de-identification involving the removal of all personally identifying information thereby rendering them anonymous for retention. The original recordings will be digitized and kept under password protection. Upon graduation, all recordings will be permanently deleted. Your data will be used strictly for academic purposes and will not be shared with users or shared with anyone for commercial purposes. The researcher will adhere to strict ethical guidelines and principles and will not anecdotally share any personally identifying information about you with anyone.

What are the risks and benefits of taking part in this study?

In addition to providing much-appreciated assistance to the student researcher, the main benefit of taking part in this study will be your contribution to academic research, which aims to expand knowledge and generate new insights. There will be no risks posed to you as a

participant in this study, either physical or psychological, beyond that which is typically expected of day-to-day activities.

If you are interested in taking part, please review the information provided in the consent form and if you are happy to proceed with the study, then please indicate your willingness to take part by ticking the appropriate box / signing your name where applicable.

You are under no obligation to take part in this study or to provide a reason if you decide not to take part. You may choose not to take part without fear of penalty. If you agree to take part, you have the right to cease participation and withdraw your data at any time for any reason without fear of penalty. The data will not be used by any member of the project team for commercial purposes.

Appendix F - Consent Form

I _____ voluntarily agree to take part in this research study.

I understand that I am not obliged to take part in this study and that my participation in the study is entirely voluntary.

I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any question without the need to provide a reason and without fear of negative consequences.

I understand that digital recordings will be stored under password protection for some time until the approval of their dissertation by the examination board. At this point, records will be permanently deleted.

I understand that my data will undergo de-identification during transcription and will be rendered anonymous for retention and the purpose of subsequent publications.

I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the meeting, in which case the material will be deleted.

I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.

I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

I understand that signed consent forms will be retained for some time until the exam board confirms the results of their dissertation.

I confirm that I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study with satisfactory answers provided.

I confirm that I have read and fully understood the information provided and statements above.

Name & Signature of research participant

Date

Name & Signature of researcher

Date

Appendix G – Robert Yin’s model of thematic analysis

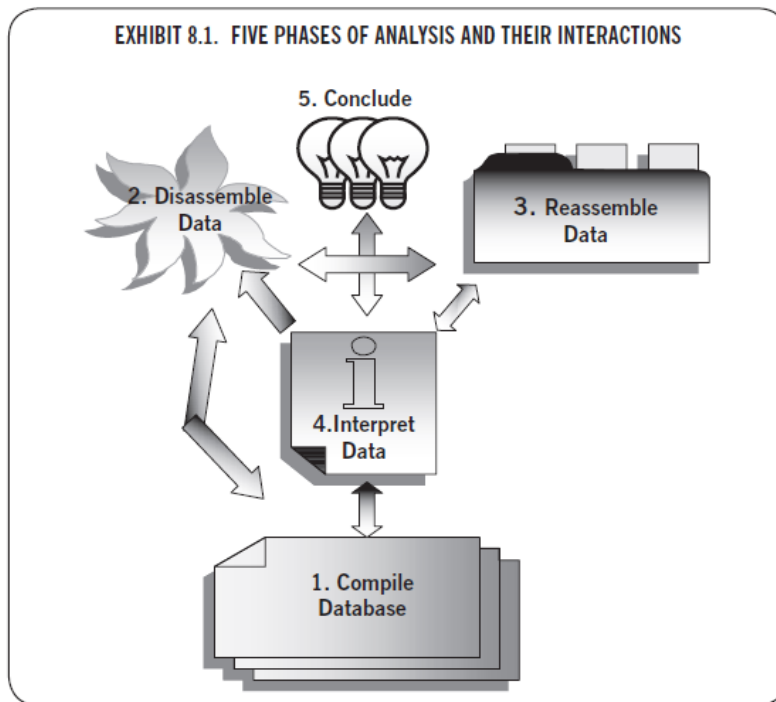


Figure 4: Robert Yin’s (2011, p. 178) model of thematic analysis for qualitative research.

Appendix H – Thematic Analysis map

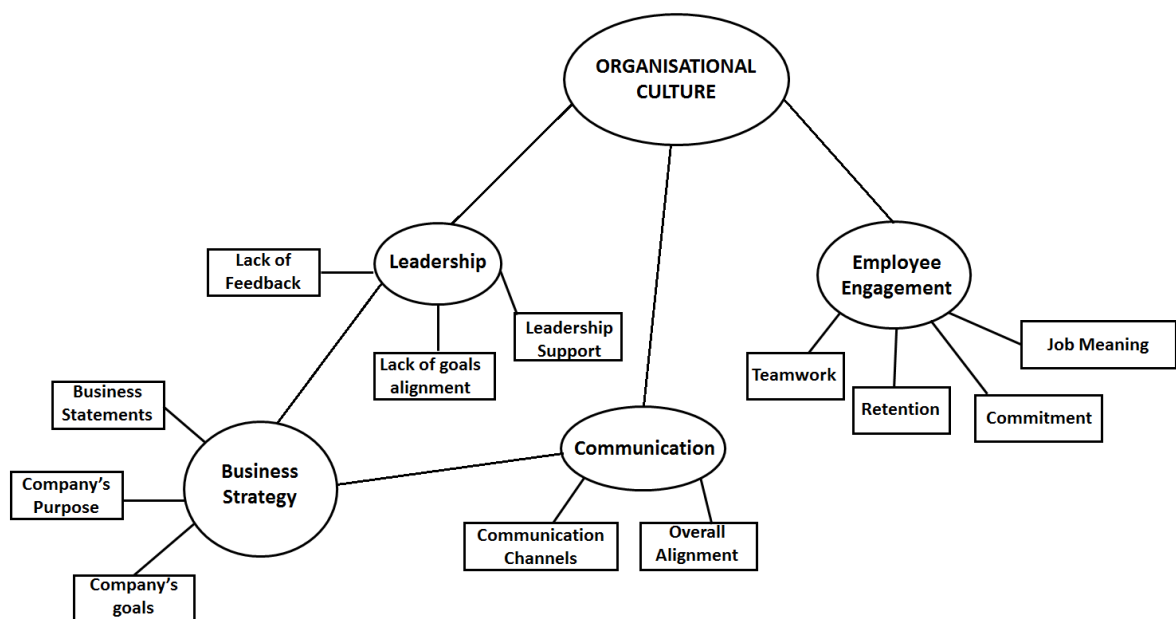


Figure 5: Thematic Analysis map created by Fernanda Liberman after data analysis using the Nvivo.

Appendix I – Dissertation meeting reports

Dissertation Meeting/Progress Monitoring Report

Name of Student: Fernanda Liberman

Student No.: 10533657

Name of Supervisor: Ray Whelan

Meeting No.: 1

Date of Meeting: 08/06/2020

Location of Meeting: Via Zoom

Review/Comment on Progress Made (since the last meeting):

Topics/Issues discussed/addressed at the meeting: Action Agreed/Progress expected before next meeting:

Lots of reading and Lit review and introduction, excellent planning and ideas

Overall Summary/Conclusion of Meeting:

Excellent progress

Dissertation Meeting/Progress Monitoring Report

Name of Student: Fernanda Liberman

Student No.: 10533657

Name of Supervisor: Ray Whelan

Meeting No.: 2

Date of Meeting: 22/06/2020

Location of Meeting: Via Zoom

Review/Comment on Progress Made (since the last meeting):

Making excellent progress

Topics/Issues discussed/addressed at the meeting: Action Agreed/Progress expected before next meeting:

Excellent Lit review and Introduction, has a great plan with time and dates

Overall Summary/Conclusion of Meeting:

Excellent progress

Dissertation Meeting/Progress Monitoring Report

Name of Student: Fernanda Liberman Student No.: 10533657

Name of Supervisor: Ray Whelan Meeting No.: 3

Date of Meeting: 06/07/2020 Location of Meeting: Via Zoom

Review/Comment on Progress Made (since the last meeting):

Making excellent progress

Topics/Issues discussed/addressed at the meeting: Action Agreed/Progress expected before next meeting:

To work on the questions and Metrology

Overall Summary/Conclusion of Meeting:

Excellent progress

Dissertation Meeting/Progress Monitoring Report

Name of Student: Fernanda Liberman Student No.: 10533657

Name of Supervisor: Ray Whelan Meeting No.: 4

Date of Meeting: 27/07/2020

Location of Meeting: Via Zoom

Review/Comment on Progress Made (since the last meeting):

Making excellent progress

Topics/Issues discussed/addressed at the meeting: Action Agreed/Progress expected before next meeting:

Making excellent progress all areas

Overall Summary/Conclusion of Meeting:

Excellent progress

Dissertation Meeting/Progress Monitoring Report

Name of Student: Fernanda Liberman Student No.: 10533657

Name of Supervisor: Ray Whelan Meeting No.: 5

Date of Meeting: 17/08/2020

Location of Meeting: Via Zoom

Review/Comment on Progress Made (since the last meeting):

Making excellent progress

Topics/Issues discussed/addressed at the meeting: Action Agreed/Progress expected before next meeting:

Making excellent progress all areas

Overall Summary/Conclusion

Excellent progress