Using Graphical Techniques to Communicate Strategy: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

This paper looks at a current management consultant driven "fashion" for using graphical techniques to communicate strategic direction within larger organisations. Recent literature shows that many strategic change programmes fail through poor or miscommunication of the organisation's strategic objectives, suggesting there is a need in the market place for new communication techniques. This research evaluates the use of one graphical technique within three organisations to explore how it is being used and what the benefits of using this technique are. These new graphical techniques are felt to be more effective than traditional strategy communication techniques. Our research suggests that this is because they consider both the communication medium and the content and presentation of the information in the strategic message. In particular, these techniques use pictures or graphics with embedded metaphors to communicate clearer strategic messages, they encourage dialogue and inclusiveness from all employees within the process, they show connectivity of information, they facilitate the ability to remember the strategy and they are novel.

Introduction

Graphical techniques or graphic facilitation are increasingly being used by large companies such as Hewlett Packard, General Motors, Barclays, The Post Office and British Telecommunications, as part of their strategy programmes. Graphic facilitation involves using business-oriented graphic artists and consultants to help develop the strategy and then to communicate it to employees through rich pictures. One such technique is the Root Learning Inc consultancy's RootMap©, which is a poster-sized (three feet tall by five feet wide) visual picture that metaphorically represents the key elements of the organisation's strategy. The technique also includes strategically directed questions about key issues that are illustrated on the picture. The picture, and associated questions, are designed for use by six to ten people in sessions lasting about 60 to 90 minutes. Despite increasing practitioner uptake of this and similar techniques, there is little empirical research on how these techniques are being used and what the benefits of their use are.

Exhibit 1

Most of BeverageCo's workforce are lorry and van drivers delivering their products (27,000 out of 35,000 employees). They had a long competitive history with another beverage company, and were often seen as coming second to their main rival. The lorry drivers had a tradition of overestimating and overstocking products to be delivered and customers were less and less likely to store excess product which they did not need. However, the real issue was that BeverageCo's forecasting system was based on taking next week's order when this week's order was delivered. That system worked when BeverageCo only had 4 primary products. It did not work with a complex beverage line and BeverageCo was experiencing severe problems. These problems included 40% of all invoices were wrong, 55% of the stock that went out on lorries every day came back, and yet drivers were out of stock at their stops about 20% of the time.

The lorry drivers were upset because they felt that their jobs had become much harder, due to the increasingly diverse and complex products. They were sceptical about the new products and felt that management were simply trying to make employees work ever harder to increase profits. The employees felt that BeverageCo should stick to their core competence of carbonated soft drinks and stop playing with "faddish" and "unsustainable" new products.

The facts and figures collected by BeverageCo analysts showed otherwise. Carbonated soft drink sales were slowing year on year and newer beverage categories (such as teas, waters and wellness drinks) were experiencing higher sales growth. The baby boomer category of consumer was getting older and weekly carbonated soft drink consumption decreases with age. Consumers were also becoming more heath conscious and seeking heathier alternatives to these sweet fizzy drinks. Overall, BeverageCo's prices were flat and inflation was eroding profit margins. Other companies were entering the market and undercutting BeverageCo on price in their core product ranges. Consumers were also changing their purchasing and shopping habits. To save time, they were switching from weekly shopping trips at the supermarket to shopping at more local stores and Warehouse Clubs, as well as impulse buying at petrol stations. The main competition had ceased to be their main rival and was increasingly from private labels and other beverages. Local stores were sourcing their products from warehouse clubs, which were cheaper than direct from BeverageCo.

BeverageCo engaged Root Learning to develop a **Root***Map*® which could be used to communicate the changes to their employees and to show why change and diversification was needed. By rolling out the **Root***Map*® to all employees, BeverageCo turned employee resistance to change into understanding and buy-in and noticed improvements in employee and customer satisfaction as a result.

A second **Root***Map*® application explored the entire process of making and delivering BeverageCo products, including the costs associated with each step and the breakdowns that often occur in the process. This helped BeverageCo to uncover several misunderstandings or misperceptions throughout the process. One example is a lorry driver, who had always overestimated his product needs, realising that the accuracy of the routing slips he filled out each day had a tremendous impact on planning, forecasting, workload, profitability, and customer satisfaction. Now, each year BeverageCo roll out their annual operating plan using a new **Root***Map*® application.

The illustration shows the RootMap developed for BeverageCo, and shows how a graphical representation of Beverage Street was used to show the history of the

industry and the changing sales and demographic figures and changing consumer purchasing patterns.
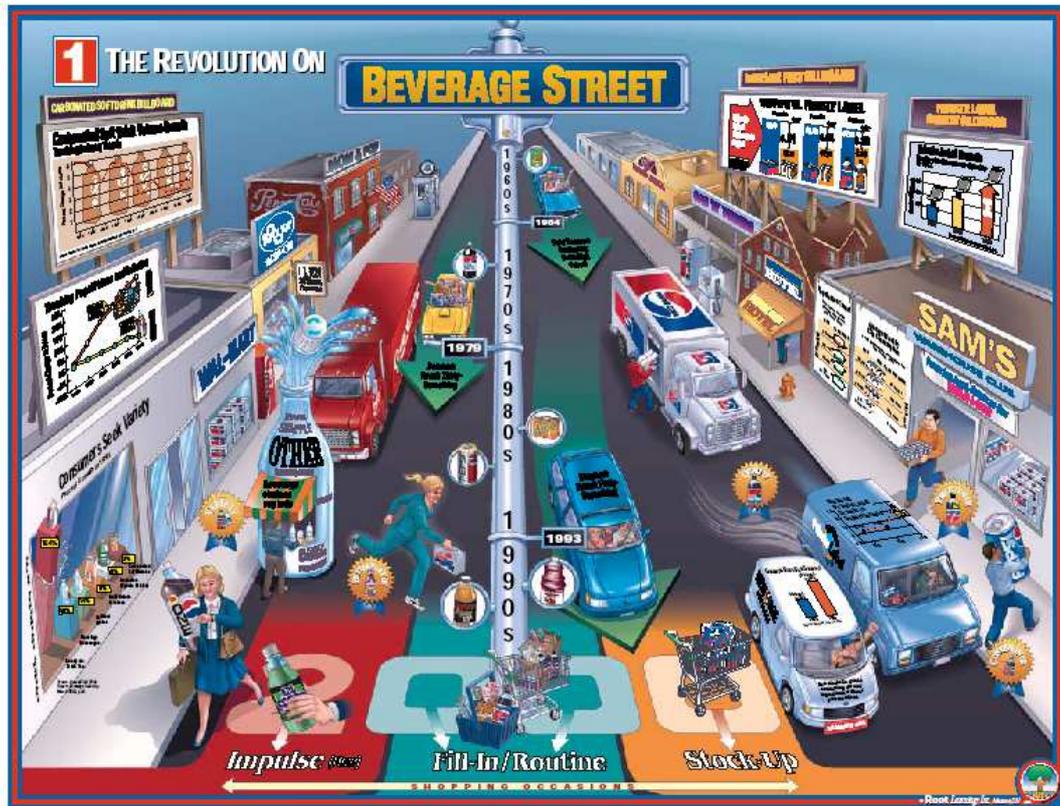
This paper presents literature that discusses why strategy communication is important, discusses research studies that have evaluated the effectiveness of different communication media and studies that have focused on the effectiveness of media for strategy communication in particular. Using nine semi-structured interviews and a questionnaire survey with 201 respondents, we explored one graphical technique, the RootMap and its implementation within the strategy communication process in three organisations. We identified six themes that explain why this graphical technique appears to be better at communicating strategy than other more traditional communication media used. The paper concludes with implications for practitioners and suggestions for further research in this emerging field.

Theoretical Background

Importance of Communication in Strategy Implementation Success
A recent survey (Corboy and O'Corrbui, 1999) found that 70% of business strategies fail to get implemented. A review of why reveals many reasons, ranging from strategies that are not worth implementing to inappropriate senior management style (Beer and Eisenstadt, 2000), and to unanticipated market changes or competitor responses (Sterling, 2003). However, the focus of this paper is on one common reason, which is poor or miscommunication of the organisation's strategic objectives. Roos, Victor and Statler (2004) found, in their research into the strategy making

process, that social and emotional modes of experience are generally repressed in favour of cognitive elements. Yet all are relevant to the strategy process. This can also be true for strategy communication and manifests itself in two ways. The first is a failure to communicate the strategy at all (Autry, 2003). Based on a study of electric corporations, Autry (2003) found that often the people responsible for developing strategies forgot or failed to communicate them to employees. Employees would then fill the void with their own beliefs or rumours, which would undermine the strategic intention of the organisation. The second is that the strategic message is too intricate and detailed and is therefore perceived to be incoherent. Employees, as a result, do not understand the strategy and are unable to act upon it, or see how it should impact their daily decisions and actions (Thompson, 1997). Lee (2001) states that "The fundamental purpose of communication in an organization is to enable and energize employees to carry out its strategic intent. Organizations need the capability to rapidly identify, send, receive, and understand strategic information that is credible, sensible and relevant."

Communication Media

Communication is defined as "the exchange of information between a sender and a receiver and the inference of meaning between organisational participants." (O'Reilly and Pondy, 1979).

Moenaart and Souder (1996) found that information transmitted across functions through oral, as opposed to written, channels is less comprehensible. Maltz (2000) conducted research in which the effects of the communication media on Perceived Information Quality (PIQ) between marketing and non-marketing managers were assessed. PIQ is based on credibility, comprehensibility, relevance and timeliness and was assessed across four communication media:

1. Written communications, which is broken down into formal written communications (such as reports) and ad hoc written communications (such as memos).
2. Electronic (comprising e-mail and transfer of electronic documents).
3. Telephone, categorised into scheduled phone calls and impromptu phone calls.
4. Face to face communications, which consists of scheduled meetings and 'hall talk'.

He found that e-mail transmitted with supporting documentation, such as tables and graphs, improves PIQ. It signals to the receiver that the sender has taken care in formatting the information prior to transmission. Thus, the receiver is more likely to focus their attention on the subject and process the information. However, written reports seem to reduce PIQ, with information overload playing an underlying role. He found that managers provided examples of reports they received that were either totally irrelevant for their job or had a lot of irrelevant information. He found that formal meetings can improve PIQ due to the richness of information exchange. However, too many meetings will reduce PIQ as managers do not have time to prepare for them and will not be in a position to exploit their potential. He also concluded that e-mail has become a prime contributor to information overload.

In terms of the ability to quickly comprehend and subsequently remember information, early experimental research (e.g. Paivio, 1971; Bower, 1972; Atkinson,

1975; Paivio, 1986) had shown that pictures or images improved memory for arbitrary lists and paired-associates, which was hypothesised to be because visual concepts are "bushier" than verbal concepts and as such are a more effective means of learning and retaining information (Baggett, 1984, 1989). Mayer chose to look at more meaningful learning in real life contexts. He found that by adding visuals to words, learning improved by 23% (Mayer, 1993). In another group of studies, he found that adding visuals to words improved transfer of learning by 89% (Mayer, 2001).

A number of scholars have empirically validated a strong link between the perceived quality of information and degree to which it is actually used to make decisions (Deshponde and Zaltman, 1982; Maltz and Kohli, 1996; Moenaart and Souder, 1996).

The implication of such research is that even if the information being transmitted is accurate and useful, if the receiver's Perceived Information Quality is low, then the information will not be used. Adding to this, and highlighting the difference between developing information and communicating it, Gray and Robertson (2005) believe that "Information is the raw product that is used in the communication process to create an output or result which is shared understanding and meaning… Communication is a much more sophisticated process than transmitting or disseminating information because it seeks to produce a cognitive, and/or emotional, result and then determine how well it was achieved by acquiring feedback from the listener/receiver… In other words, 'if it hasn't got feedback, it isn't communication'".

Strategy Communication Media
Within the domain of strategy communication, transmission of information occurred through a variety of media such as slide presentations, flyers, memos and briefings. Miniace and Falter (2006) have categorised media for strategy communication in terms of the efficiency and effectiveness of the exchange of information. They compare the media in terms of how rich or lean they are, as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Rich and Lean Communication Channels
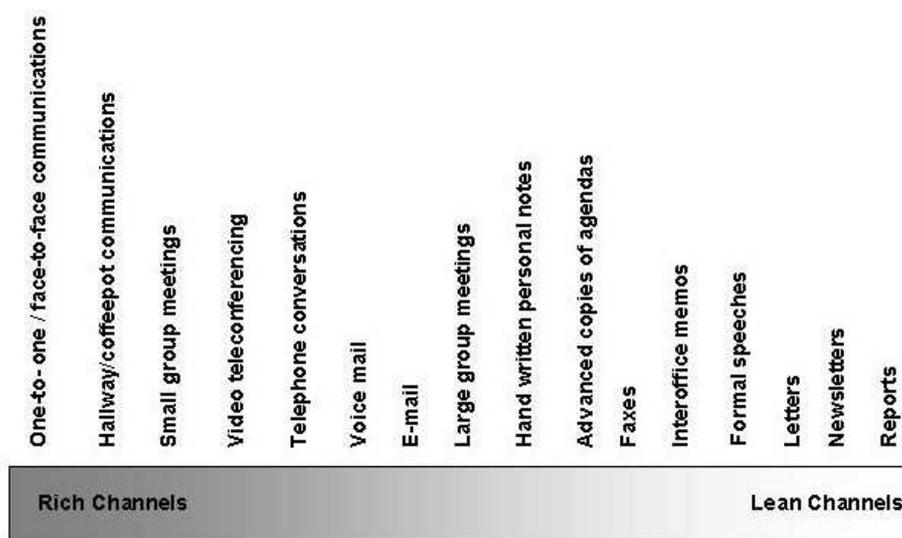
Lean channels or media of communication are one-way, slow and are document and text based, and include reports, newsletters and letters. Rich channels or media of

communication encourage two-way conversations and dialogue and are oral based, and include face-to-face meetings, corridor chats and small group meetings. From their research, they believe that organisational members should have the opportunity to pose questions and have discussions with senior management using rich channels of communication, which promote two-way, top down and bottom up communication. Guffey and Nienhaus (2002) found, from an employee survey in one textile company, that only 56% of the employees were able to correctly identify the organisation's strategy. This is despite the company sending a large number of messages and using multiple media to communicate the strategy. For example, video messages were played from the CEO, plant managers and supervisors related the strategy through meetings with employees, and notices were put on bulletin boards and in the company newsletter. This suggests that these media are not as effective as management assume. Guffey and Nienhaus (2002, p29) suggest that "it would be interesting to see what knowledge levels would be in a future study for a similar client firm, where message enrichment techniques were used". These studies focus on the communication medium and do not consider the content, or Perceived Information Quality, of the message. Balogun and Jenkins (2003) also argue that there is a need for more rich forms of communication, such as conversations and discussions, within the strategy process. They state that individuals need to work out what the implication of the change is for them. They believe an organisation's strategy communication should be used to trigger debate about where the organisation is going and what it means for each individual. They believe that such ideas "have resonance with the importance being placed in the change management literature on the use of 'symbolic' communication which involves the use of signs, signals, metaphor, new language …to get across an understanding of what the future is about".

There has been increasing research interest into understanding and developing new techniques for improving the strategy making process and communication within that process. For example, Eden and Ackerman (1998) offer a handbook with a creative outlook to strategy making and offer techniques for mapping strategic thought. Roos, Victor and Statler (2004) have used LEGO© with managers to facilitate the development of innovative strategy content by using multiple modes of communication and three dimensional, tactile media to challenge the use of traditional text-based and verbal media. Huff and Jenkins (2002) recommend the use of cognitive maps to graphically represent an organisation's current strategic position. Despite this increase in attention to strategy making tools that use new media and more creative techniques, little research has considered the use of different media for **communicating** this strategy, once developed.

Research Study
The researchers found that a graphical technique, called the RootMap was being used by an increasing number of large organisations to facilitate communication of their strategy to employees. The aim of this research was to explore whether this technique had improved strategy communication in organisations that had used it. If this was the case, then to explore why participants in the strategy communication process felt it had been a better communication medium than others used previously. The research was not initiated or funded by Root Learning, the company that deploys these techniques. Root Learning was approached by the researchers and asked for their co-operation with the research. Initial contact was made with a founding member of the consultancy, which ensured that commitment to the research was achieved at a senior

level. He facilitated access to interview Root Learning consultants and three of their client organisations. These three organisations were selected as they were all large multinational organisations of a similar size, with headquarters based in the UK, who gave consent to being involved in the study. Each of the organisations was from a different industry sector. Senior managers in each of the organisations were involved, which ensured good and timely access to relevant employees.

Data Collection and Analysis
The data for this research was predominantly collected by semi-structured interviews. A total of nine interviews, each lasting approximately one to two hours, were conducted in 2002. Three of these were with consultants from Root Learning. Two interviews were conducted in each of the three client organisations, with employees who had used the RootMap to have the new corporate strategy communicated to them. These employees were at different levels in the hierarchy of the company, representing senior managers and more junior staff.

The questions asked during interviews were undirected and open, so that the themes which emerged were not as a result of interviewer prompting. The questions were varied slightly depending on who the interviewee was. For all interviewees (consultants and users), they were asked whether they felt the technique had been successful and if so, why and if not, why not; what were the benefits of using the technique (over other techniques or media they had experienced) and what were the drawbacks or limitations of the technique (over other techniques or media they had experienced). The information obtained through these interviews provided the researchers with a rich, qualitative data set about the use of the RootMap as part of the strategy communication process within each of the three organisations. The consultants provided a wider perspective across many organisations and implementations of the technique.

All of the interviews were audio-taped, transcribed fully and checked for factual accuracy. The interview data were analysed manually by one researcher who coded and themed the data, word by word. The question of researcher bias and issue of individual interpretation was addressed by having a second researcher to analyse the interview transcripts separately to ascertain if the themes identified were consistent with those identified by the primary researcher. Some minor adjustments were necessary, but on the whole the themes were consistent. Once the themes were identified and coded, a table template was set up for each interview, to assist data analysis and to ensure ease of cross comparison between interviewees and the different organisations.

In addition to the interview data, the results from an organisation survey were provided to the researchers by one of the participating organisations. The survey was carried out in RetailCo, directly following the implementation of the RootMap process in its financial department. The survey, completed by 201 employees, focused on the impact that the RootMap had had on the employee, in terms of whether it had enhanced understanding about the business and its market and whether it had helped them feel more confident about the future strategic direction of the company. The questionnaire used a five point Likert scale, asking participants to respond to statements about the RootMap session. There was a 100% response rate to the questionnaire and the responses were anonymous. The questionnaire was designed by

RetailCo and they also analysed the data and then the results were later provided to the researchers. The researchers were not given access to the completed questionnaires. This data provided views on the use of the RootMap across a larger sample of employees and so was included in the research to complement the interview data.

The findings of the research presented in this paper are limited in their generalisability, due to the small sample size from just three large multinational organisations and consultants from just one organisation. However, the study was exploratory in nature and intended to identify themes for deeper investigation in subsequent studies and research.

Findings

A review of the RootMaps used by the three organisations in our research study revealed that each RootMap was unique to the organisation and their particular strategy. What was similar across all of the RootMaps was the use of a visual metaphor or rich picture. Examples included a boxing ring, where the organisation was depicted as having to fight off its rivals, a mountain that the organisation was climbing to reach the top, and a road that the organisation was travelling down. Embedded in each rich picture are boxes with detailed data about, for example, trends in sales, trends in profit, trends in customer purchasing habits, and data on key competitors. Each RootMap has a series of questions that accompany it. These questions are designed to encourage the participants to discuss what they see in the picture. Typical questions include what they think the metaphor means and how they think they can personally respond to the situation described in the picture.

Traditional Strategy Communication

We asked the interviewees how the RootMap strategy communication process compared to other strategy communication processes that they had encountered in the past. One manager commented that:

"We used to go off with the senior executives to these retreats and do strategic plans. And at the end, we'd sort of say 'we're brilliant' and toast that at the bar. But what would happen was that we'd put it in the binder and take it back to the organisation and it would be stillborn and the binders sat on the desks."

Effort had been focused on making strategy, but once the session was over, it was difficult to find ways to communicate that strategy to the rest of the organisation, or the need to communicate the strategy more widely was forgotten.

This is possibly being exacerbated by a workforce that has higher expectations of involvement. One of the RootLearning consultants felt that there had been a change in many organisations, and that a failure to communicate strategy and involve employees could lead to quite negative consequences:

"There's an expectation now in the workforce that they will be involved and consulted...and if you haven't done that, then they'll be disengaged."

Interviewees also felt that in the past the strategic message had often been too complicated to understand. In addition, the way in which the information had been

presented to them had not always been engaging. In such large organisations, there was a need to get the message to as many people as possible as quickly as possible. This had led to presentations from senior executives to large audiences, with a question and answer session at the end. For example, one interviewee stated:

"If we wanted to communicate, I don't know, our strategy or something, we'd have probably a 30 slide presentation that by the 14th slide, everybody had just switched off and couldn't remember anything"

Another commented that their organisation:
"Would typically have a big presentation...you would go to an arena and have a huge presentation. And most people do that because how do you reach a large group of people? So they do a series of road-shows maybe of a particular presentation that would go around the country or countries."

Because the three organisations in our research were all large multi-nationals, this need to communicate the strategy to a large number of employees was similar and mentioned by all interviewees. The best medium for doing this, for many years, had appeared to be by the Chief Executive, or one of the company's directors, using presentation slides delivered on a large screen to many employees. The aim had been to deliver a consistent message, but unfortunately, in many instances, the participants felt that the message had not been clear or understandable enough.

Using Rich Pictures to Communicate Strategy
This was in contrast to the RootMap technique. The interviewees were all in agreement that the RootMap had improved the way in which strategy was communicated within each of their organisations and had generally enhanced their understanding of the history of the business and its future strategic direction. They also felt that the RootMap had been effective at representing information and encouraging discussion.

The results from the questionnaire survey reveal how 201 employees in one organisation, RetailCo, perceived the implementation of the RootMap strategy communication process, as summarised in Table 1.

The first question focused on gaining feedback about whether the RootMap session had improved the participant's understanding of past business performance and future strategic direction. For those responding that their understanding had improved an exceptional amount or a good deal, 72.1% of the respondents felt that the session had enhanced their understanding of historical business performance, 96% felt they had a better understanding of how the business was going forward, 93.5% felt that their understanding of the organisation's vision, mission and values had been enhanced, 89% felt that they had a better understanding of their part in the business going forward, and 94% felt that they had an enhanced understanding of the organisation's strategic themes for the year.

Table 1: Result of Survey on RootMap implementation in RetailCo

Q1. How much has today's session enhanced your understanding of:					
	An exceptional amount	A good deal	Somewhat	Not very much	Not at all
Historical business performance?	10.4%	61.7%	22.9%	4.5%	0.5%
How the business is going forward?	40.8%	55.2%	3.5%	0.5%	0.0%
Our Vision, Mission and Values?	39.8%	53.7%	6.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Our part in the business going forward?	34.3%	54.7%	8.5%	1.5%	1.0%
Our themes for the year?	42.8%	51.2%	5.5%	0.5%	0.0%
Q2. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements about this session?					
	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Hard to decide	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree
Participating in this session has made me feel more confident about the direction of the business	53.2%	40.3%	6.0%	0.0%	0.5%
Participating in the session has helped me feel more energised and excited about the direction of the business	46.3%	43.3%	8.5%	1.5%	0.5%
The RootMap session was effective and engaging in representing information	52.7%	40.3%	4.5%	2.5%	0.0%
The session generated good discussion that helped everyone to understand and learn better	48.8%	44.3%	4.5%	2.0%	0.5%
I would recommend these sessions to my colleagues	50.7%	40.8%	5.5%	2.5%	0.5%

The second question focused on more general statements about the RootMap session. For those that strongly agreed or tended to agree with the statements, 93.5% felt that participating in the session had helped them feel more confident about the direction of the business and 88.6% felt that it had helped them feel more energised and excited about the direction of the business. 93% of respondents felt that the RootMap session was effective and engaging in representing information and 93.1% felt that the session generated good discussion that helped everyone understand and learn better. Finally, 91.5% strongly agreed or tended to agree that they would recommend these sessions to their colleagues.

Although the questionnaire results do not provide a direct comparison with other strategy communication media, the results suggest a very positive response to the RootMap communication medium by a large majority of the respondents.   The interviews provided a deeper exploration of the RootMap and highlighted aspects of the technique that those that had participated in the sessions felt had made it more successful. The data themes presented have been selected due to their high thematic frequency and the importance bestowed on them by research participants. Individual quotes were selected for inclusion in this paper based on the insight they provide and/or the expression of the statement. The themes with the highest frequency of mention were: graphics (70), dialogue (64), inclusiveness (55), remembering information (31), connectivity of information (18), and novelty (11).

Graphics
Every interviewee mentioned the graphic and visual nature of the RootMap as being important to the success of the technique. This was an overarching theme, and the

visual or rich picture used by RootLearning was what tended to drive the other themes.

In one example, a RootLearning consultant had been involved in launching a new store card. A RootMap had been created to try to help employees to understand the importance of trying to cross sell the store cards. The consultant felt that being able to see the picture had had a big impact:

"An example would have been that the same store people begin to realise the difference in how people purchased from cash to a third party credit card to our credit card. And all of a sudden, they realised [through the RootMap process] that if it was a third party credit card we made 2 cents and if it was our card, we'd made 8 cents. And the dramatic difference in terms of cash made, because of cash flow….. Those things cause people to say, I guess, what we're asking them - if they want one of our credit cards, it's not just to win a bear or to win a trip – it has a massive impact on the business. So, I do think if people can see and understand, they will naturally make some changes."

An employee in one of the organisations commented on the process that:

"the context is usually people talking, meeting and talking. But, you know, if there's some way in which that's also visually represented, people can just understand it better."

Dialogue
The need for two way communication, or dialogue, to help people to understand the past and future of the organisation was felt to be very important by the majority of interviewees. One interviewee commented:

"There's an element of that which is definitely instigated by the graphics. But there's also some other bits that you do to encourage the dialogue…..But the graphics definitely draws out more contribution and more conversation and more discussion."

Another interviewee stated:

"It's interactive and they come to their own conclusions, so they don't feel talked at or talked down to. And what we've found is that the most junior assistant is quite happy to stand his/her ground and argue with a senior manager, because most of the time, it doesn't feel like it's that sort of relationship in the session".

A RootLearning consultant felt that the dialogue was critical to the success of the process. He commented that:

"Dialogue is the oxygen of change…..only with dialogue can commitment occur, because the dialogue is the digestion process of the content."

Inclusiveness
Closely linked to the dialogue, another dominant theme that emerged from the interview data was that the RootMap technique was very inclusive, which helped to

engender a feeling of ownership for and involvement with the strategy. One senior manager stated that:

"If they saw it, then they could actually deal with it. So, by having it on the drawing, rather than having it pointed out verbally from the top table, or from the stage, meant that they could just see it and absorb it and come up with it themselves."

Another interviewee felt that:

"Typically the reason people fall out over organisational change is that they don't feel like they're involved. They get presented with fait accompli and they get told 'we need to become more customer focused, so we're setting up the business in this way'. And you're sitting in this bit, and your job changes, and your reporting structure changes. And nobody likes change, and they don't feel that they've been involved."

Remembering Information
Because of the picture, many interviewees felt that they could remember much more of the strategic message and for a much longer time period. One employee stated that:

"You know, if you went away from a slide presentation and said OK, how many of those slides can you remember? If you actually asked someone to describe this map, they haven't got it now...but you say OK, what was on that map? They go, oh right, oh well over here was such and such, there was a bridge...they could actually do that"

Another commented:

"A year on from that [RootMap session], I still have the pictures in my mind,"
Particularly from the employees' perspective, the clarity of information on the RootMap was impressive. They felt that the strategic message was very clear and therefore easy to remember, with one commenting that *"the clarity of the story is particularly strong."*

Connectivity of Information
Another frequent theme was the ability to have all of the information together on one page, rather than having a presentation of the same information over many slides or pieces of paper. Having all of the information on one page allowed connections to be drawn between key pieces of information, but it also enabled smaller parts of the organisation to see how they fitted into the whole picture. One senior manager commented:

"[The RootMap] actually allowed us to almost get more information on here than we needed, and to try and link it all so it was on one page."

Another interviewee stated that the RootMap allowed *"people [to] start making connections between things that maybe they hadn't realised before."*

Another manager felt that:

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"They need to understand what's happening at the big picture level. And they need to understand what direction the company's going in. They need to understand how their bit fits in."

Another agreed, stating that:

"What the visuals do is they allow people to think in systems of the whole, so that they can also go down to the piece where they play. But without the whole ... the pieces will never allow the whole to make sense. You have to see the whole for the pieces to make sense."

Novelty
Another relatively frequent theme was the novelty of the RootMap technique and process. One interviewee stated that:

"I think it's just so different from anything we'd ever used in the past, and there was a real appetite for something quite creative and innovative". She added *"It was almost as though we needed something new to set us off on a different route, and this did it."*

As mentioned earlier in the paper, within the context of strategy communication studies, the focus of other researchers has tended to be on the communication medium itself and not on the content of the communication. In the strategy making literature, there is more emphasis on multi-modal techniques and media (including graphics) to improve the strategy making process and the communication between those involved. These studies tend not to consider how these strategies, once developed, will be communicated to the rest of the organisation. Our research considered the medium of communication and the way in which information was encoded in that medium within the strategy communication process. Our findings were in agreement that the richness of the channel of communication is important. This was demonstrated by the emphasis placed on dialogue, two-way communication and the inclusion of all employees, in small face-to-face group sessions, in the conversation. Our study also showed that as well as encouraging rich channels of communication, it is important to find ways to make the content of the strategic message more understandable. To improve understanding of the strategy, techniques need to be able to show connectivity between the parts and the whole and from one piece of information to another. In addition, there is some evidence from our research to suggest that the use of visually engaging media improves recall of the strategy some time later, which concurs with studies comparing visual and verbal concepts for improved learning and memory. One theme that had not appeared in the communication literature was the importance of finding new and novel channels and media for communicating. This is linked to the findings on PIQ, whereby the novelty of the medium indicates that a higher degree of care has been put into formatting the information to be communicated.

Managerial Implications
Our findings raise a number of interesting issues for organisations embarking on strategic change programmes. In the past, a lot of emphasis has been placed on new techniques within the strategy making process. However, if equal emphasis is not put on how to communicate this strategy to all employees, then the intended changes are unlikely to be realised.

When a RootMap is created, a large amount of information is collected and distilled, so that only key information is presented on the final picture. This process in itself ensures that care is taken to articulate the strategic message clearly. The use of pictures, with embedded metaphors, text and data help to make the message more memorable and engaging to those receiving it. Because organisations are complex, there are many pieces of information that need to be included in strategy discussions. Being able to show connections between different pieces of information is critical to building a clear understanding of the whole strategy and the role of the individual in achieving that strategy. A move away from media, such as presentation slides, that require information to be spread over many pages is recommended. Representing information on one (albeit large) page seems to facilitate the assimilation of the information in a more meaningful way. Once the RootMap is agreed, the process of communicating the strategy really begins. Engaging and including more people in this process is key to getting the message understood. By allowing people to openly discuss the strategy, facilitated by the visual picture and a series of structured questions about that picture, communication is encouraged. People feel valued by being included and involved in the discussion and debate about the strategy. It also influences them to feel ownership for the strategic direction of the organisation.

Although this study has focused on the RootMap technique as a way of improving strategy communication, it is not the only technique that can be used. Other graphical, or indeed non-graphical, techniques could be equally effective if care has been taken over the presentation of information and the encouragement of dialogue within the process. In fact, our study suggests that it could be important to continually find new ways to communicate strategy, to signal a new strategic direction. Although this paper has focused on the strategy communication process, other steps in the overall strategy process are important and should not be overlooked when embarking on a strategic change programme.

Conclusions

The importance of strategy communication is such that poor or miscommunication of an organisation's strategy is often cited as a key reason for strategy implementation failure. There is a current management consultant driven "fashion" for using graphical techniques to communicate strategic direction within larger organisations. This study is one of the first to examine the use of one of these techniques, Root Learning's RootMap, and does so within three large multinational organisations, with headquarters in the UK. This exploratory study has identified some of the reasons why organisations are choosing to use these techniques and presents six themes which suggest why the techniques are successful at communicating strategic messages. Our work extends that of researchers who have explored the use of graphics and other media in the strategy making process into the strategy communication process. It also builds on the work of Miniace and Falter and Guffey and Nienhaus, who have focused on the communication channel or media, such as face to face meetings versus email, used in the strategy communication process. They show that richer channels encouraging dialogue and two way communication are important. Our research suggests that as well as the type of medium used, the content and presentation of the information is equally important, where emphasis needs to be placed on connectivity of information and making that information memorable. Using large pictures, with embedded metaphors, text and data is one way to achieve this.

We have striven to carry out this research as rigorously as possible. Nevertheless, we need to highlight several limitations. Our sample is limited to three organisations and we only interviewed a total of nine people in our study. These organisations were selected by the consultancy company and so may have been chosen to give a more positive view on the technique. Our interviews provided a snapshot view of the use of the techniques and we were not able to ascertain whether the improvement in strategy communication media and content had led to improved strategy implementation. The company questionnaire was not designed nor the data analysed by the researchers, so we cannot ascertain the validity or reliability of the instrument. However, we believe that the questionnaire survey provided some useful insights into how the RootMap had been perceived by those experiencing the new strategy communication technique. We believe that further research should explore the use of this technique across more organisations. In addition, a longitudinal study would help to understand the overall impact of improved strategy communication on implementation success.

Although we believe that this research provides a good starting point on how strategy communication can be improved in large organisations, by considering both strategy communication media and content, it is only the beginning for understanding more about this important issue.

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