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Structure and Language: Effective Communication in Forming Consensus

KELLY CRISTINY CHINELATO SACRAMENTO
FACULDADE DE ECONOMIA, ADMINISTRAÇÃO E CONTABILIDADE DA UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO - FEA

ADALBERTO A. FISCHMANN
FACULDADE DE ECONOMIA, ADMINISTRAÇÃO E CONTABILIDADE DA UNIVERSIDADE DE SÃO PAULO - FEA

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1 INTRODUCTION

The routine of communicating strategic objectives is crucial for the execution of the strategy. Since strategic planning often occurs with senior leadership and implementation is also based on the actions of employees at a lower hierarchical level (Davis et al., 2012), there may be a misalignment about strategic priorities throughout the organization (Galunic & Hermreck, 2012). An assertive understanding of strategic objectives is the basis for forming a strategic consensus, which can be defined as "the extent to which intraorganizational perception converges in the shared understanding of strategic priorities (Rapert et al., 2002, p. 301). However, although there is an emphasis on the positive impact that consensus has on the organization's performance, there is little evidence to attest which elements would stimulate it (Desmidt & George, 2016). At the same time, communication theory signals that different rhetorical structures can lead to different conclusions (Snow & Benford, 1988). Furthermore, it states that the incorporation of visual narrative resources would promote greater collective understanding (Carton et al., 2014).

By relating elements of rhetoric and communication theory to the analysis of competitive strategy, this research proposes to understand "what is the influence of the use of different rhetorical structures and of image-based words in the formation of strategic consensus". Thus, it is expected to identify cause and effect relationships between different elements of the internal communication of strategic objectives with employees. In parallel, this research responds to the calls of Carton, Murphy and Clark (2014) for the evaluation of new variables, on an individual level, that may affect the relationship between the rhetoric of the leader and the performance of the company and Desmidt and George (2016) by empirical insights into organizational conditions that influence consensus building. This research is expected to contribute to the expansion of the theory about communication and strategic implementation; and to indicate new potential communication routines capable of adding efficiency to the implementation of organizations' strategies through strategic consensus and, consequently, their efficiency.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Communication and strategic consensus

Since the implementation of the strategy occurs due to the set of actions of employees at different hierarchical levels, it is essential that everyone share the same understanding about strategic objectives (Prieto & Carvalho, 2018). Such convergence of perceptions within the organization about strategic priorities is what is defined as strategic consensus (Rapert et al., 2002), whose expected result is the agreement between top management, middle management and employees at operational levels regarding of the initiatives that must be carried out for the implementation to be successful (Li et al., 2008). Although there is an emphasis on the positive impact that consensus has on the performance of the organization, there is little empirical evidence to support the methods (Scott et al., 2015) and the elements that would stimulate its formation (Desmidt & George, 2016), under one point holistic view (Prieto & Carvalho, 2018).

However, it is essential to understand not only the reasons that precede the shared awareness of the intended action (Kellermanns et al., 2011).

Kellermanns, Walter, Lechner and Floyd (2005) propose three sets of antecedents that influence the formation of strategic consensus: social cohesion, organizational structure and nature of the decision process. Factors associated with social cohesion include the demographic characteristics of senior leadership, such as experience and age. The social context, that is, the similarities between the members of the group, would lead to higher levels of cohesion and conformity, establishing a positive relationship between the homogeneity of the group and the strategic consensus (Dess & Priem, 1995; Knight et al., 1999; Kellermanns et al., 2005). The organizational structure is composed of variables referring to: centralization, formalization, hierarchical differentiation and specialization of tasks (Kellermanns et al., 2005). In general, organizations with a high degree of centralization and formalization tend to restrict individual autonomy, thus imposing an alleged agreement on strategic priorities. However, such an enforced agreement should not be confused with the real shared understanding associated with strategic consensus (Kellermanns et al., 2005).

Finally, the third set of antecedents refers to the nature of the decision-making process, whose variables of influence on the consensus include: the congruence of objectives, the tools to aid decision-making (for example, planning processes), and understanding the decision (Dess & Priem, 1995; Kellermanns et al., 2005). The positive correlation between such variables and the formation of strategic consensus finds empirical validation (Knight et al., 1999; Rapert et al., 2002) and the understanding of the variables that impact the decision-making process wins relevance in the literature (Elbanna & Fadol, 2016).

The clear articulation of the strategy, for example, provides a boost to the cohesion of employees through a better understanding of strategic priorities and objectives (Rapert et al., 2002). Organizations should encourage routines such as dialogue, sharing and integration (Hossain & Hossain, 2017) to achieve a sense of unity, since it is through communication that individuals develop meaning for the context in which they operate, in such a way that their vision of the organization is socially constructed and shared. Thus, the interpretation and understanding of the decision arise from the organization's communication routines and heuristics (Rapert et al., 2002). In this sense, understanding the internal communication processes can be of great value, since they are intrinsic to the understanding of the decision, which in turn is an important antecedent for the formation of the strategic consensus and, consequently, of the performance.

The communication process for consensus building assumes both the frequency of interactions and the quality of the communications. Although top leadership faces difficulties or does not even communicate with all employees (Schaap, 2006), direct and frequent communication between different hierarchical levels in the organization promotes the sharing of perceptions, attitudes and values (Rapert et al., 2002; Schaap , 2006), which results in a collective understanding of the organization's strategic orientation and its environment (Rapet et al., 2002). However, as strategies are executed by people, other interpersonal and cognitive factors can also be critical (Noble, 1999). Communication quality, in turn, is considered essential to promote insights and consensus (Desmidt & George, 2016), but its attributes are much less understood and studied in the strategic management literature, when compared to frequency (Scott et al., 2015).

2.2 Aristotelian rhetoric and rhetorical structures

By aiming to persuade the audience, Aristotelian rhetoric presents itself as an important theoretical framework to clarify the variables and relationships intrinsic to the quality of communication (Stucki & Sager, 2018) and the formation of strategic consensus. Rhetoric is composed of three complementary elements: the existence of a qualified speaker (logos), the emotional appeals of the message (pathos) and reason and reasoning for the construction of an argument (ethos) (Stucki & Sager, 2018).

In communicating strategic objectives, the company's CEO assumes the role of logos, that is, the qualified speaker, as the greatest representative of the organization's deliberate strategy (Kellermanns et al., 2005). Venus, Stam and van Knippenberg (2013) go further by arguing that communication is the most central of all leader behaviors, as it infuses work with meaning and direction. However, leaders are rarely able to communicate the strategy effectively (Carton et al., 2014), although CEOs often receive professional assistance with image, posture and intonation (Forman & Argenti, 2005). In other words, the rhetorical sophistication of the leader, that is, the ability to translate complex strategies in an understandable and convincing way for different audiences (Forman & Argenti, 2005) is the main skill that determines whether there is a shared understanding of the meaning of the strategy among employees (García-Carbonell et al., 2018).

In parallel, ethos is responsible for structuring communication and logical chain of arguments, in order to favor the understanding of the message (Stucki & Sager, 2018). After all, the communication theory literature signals that different rhetorical structures can lead to different conclusions and that such a choice must be diligent and cautious (Snow & Benford, 1988). Furthermore, it is the framing of the message that aims to shape what people should think about a problem.

In this sense, Snow and Benford (1988) propose three rhetorical structures, according to the desired reaction with the public:

> a) Diagnostic structure, defined as the identification of an event or aspect of a social scope as problematic or in need of alteration;
>
> b) Prognostic structure, defined as the proposed solution to a diagnosed problem, through tactics or tasks to be performed; and
>
> c) Motivational structure, defined as a call to action, as well as the rationale for getting involved in corrective action.

The literature differs on which focus should receive the content of the communication to form a consensus. For example, Rapert, Velliquete and Garret (2002) state that the reasons that led to the selected strategy must be clarified to employees so that there is a shared understanding, which would be compatible with the use of the diagnostic structure, since the focus would be on situations problems that motivated the determined strategic objective (Snow & Benford, 1988). In contrast, the seminal study by Bourgeois (1980) argues that the consensus on the means is preferable in relation to the motivations, since the focus on the purpose would open up too much space for the interpretation of priorities, compromising the effectiveness of the strategy. His proposal would favor the prognostic structure (Snow & Benford, 1988), since the means are associated with the tactics and tasks to be performed to solve the problem in question. On the other hand, Scott, Cavana and Cameron (2015) propose that employees should be able to interpret how to put these objectives into practice within the context of their tasks and

responsibility, so that communication promotes strategic consensus, which would be associated with motivational structure (Snow & Benford, 1988) for favoring the call to action.

In parallel, when assessing the impact of rhetorical structures on the audience's perception of environmental issues, Overton (2018) suggests that diagnostic and prognostic structures can result in awareness, although only the motivational structure would be positively related to the intention of action. Thus, the choice of rhetorical structure will depend on the intention with the audience (Desmidt & George, 2016), although it is reasonable to assume that the intention of the communication of strategic objectives by leadership to employees should be the strategic implementation, and, therefore, the action.

Thus, based on the study by Snow and Benford (1988) and the evidence presented by Overton (2018) and Scott, Cavana and Cameron (2015), it is proposed that:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): when communicating strategic objectives, the motivational rhetorical structure results in greater strategic consensus, when compared to other rhetorical structures.

2.3 Communication and image-based language

Concluding the elements of Aristotelian rhetoric, emotional appeals (pathos) are imbued with the message by stimulating the cognition of the different individuals that make up the audience (Stucki & Sager, 2018). Employees assimilate information and act according to their own interests (McClelland, 1973), motivations (Lindenberg & Foss, 2011) and preferences (Hermann, 1995). Thus, it is essential to understand the cognitive process and its particularities to achieve effective and persuasive communication.

In general, it is possible to identify two dichotomous cognitive systems, although complementary (Epstein et al., 1996). The concrete cognitive system is characterized by sequential and linked thinking, in which information about reality is processed from concrete experiences through the five senses (Hermann, 1995; Carton & Lucas, 2018). Individuals with a tendency to predominantly use the concrete system can be called “efficient thinkers” (Carton & Lucas, 2018), as they are able to visualize unique and clearly outlined scenarios about a specific situation, without dedicating efforts to elaborate and complex analyzes (Kahneman, 2011).

On the other hand, the conceptual cognitive system is characterized by logical processing and active search for the meaning of information or parts of it, using systemic and holistic classifications and associations (Hermann, 1995; Carton & Lucas, 2018). Individuals with a preference for the conceptual system can be called “analytical thinkers” (Carton & Lucas, 2018), since they rely on diligent reasoning and the creation of multiple abstract scenarios, resulting in a high capacity for solving complex problems (Kahneman, 2011).

The "Whole-Brain Model", or Model of the Totality of the Brain, in a free translation, aims to explain how different individuals learn, create and communicate based on the physiological functioning of the brain (Hermann, 1995). This model complements the concrete-conceptual dichotomy by proposing a second categorization that considers the differences between the right (emotional) and left (rational) brain hemispheres, resulting in four clusters of cognitive functions. Individual preference can be accessed and quantified by HBDI - Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument, a validated tool and, like its theory, widely used (de Boer et al., 2011). Although each individual favors a dominant style of cognition, specialized mental models work

together and interactively, making communication and learning easier by stimulating the brain as a whole (Hermann, 1995).

Carton, Murphy and Clark (2014), based on previous studies by Hermann (1995) and Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj and Heier (1996) point out that the incorporation of visual narrative resources into the discourse would promote greater collective understanding, since it would activate both cognitive systems - concrete and conceptual - simultaneously. Image-based communication is that language that uses image-based words, which include: nouns with recognizable physical attributes, verbs that indicate observable actions and objects, people and actions that are very familiar (Carton et al., 2014). Such words influence both the emotions and the impression that employees make about their leaders (Emrich et al., 2001). However, when analyzing the impact of using image-based communication on the transmission of vision and values, Carton, Murphy and Clark (2014) empirically identify that leaders tend to transmit strategy through concepts ("we will make consumers have fun") and not images ("we will make children smile"), making communication inefficient by activating only the conceptual cognitive system.

Thus, based on the studies of Hermann (1995), Epstein, Pacini, Denes-Raj and Heier (1996), Kahneman (2011) and Carton and Lucas (2018), as well as the evidence presented by Carton, Murphy and Clark (2014), it is proposed that:

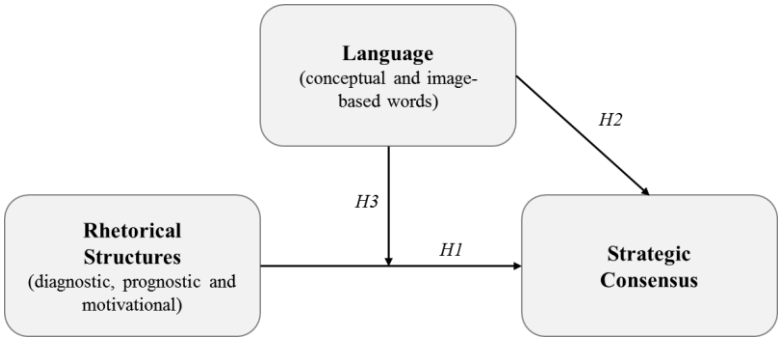
Hypothesis 2 (H2): when communicating strategic objectives, the use of image-based words results in greater strategic consensus, when compared to the use of conceptual words.

Although there is evidence that an isolated analysis of both rhetorical structures and that image-based language may influence the collective understanding of strategic objectives, Aristotelian rhetoric proposes that the proposed elements (logos, ethos and pathos) mutually ratify, expanding the possibility of persuasion and, therefore, of strategic consensus (Stucki & Sager, 2018). Therefore, it is further proposed:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): when communicating strategic objectives, the combined use of image-based words with the motivational rhetorical structure results in greater strategic consensus, when compared to any other combinations of rhetorical structures and language.

This research proposes to examine the quality of communication about strategic objectives for the formation of strategic consensus, through the articulation of communication theories not yet widely integrated into the strategy literature. As shown in Figure 01, this study offers a theoretical model proposed to be tested in the context of communicating strategic objectives. Specifically, this model combines arguments from the theory of rhetorical structures and image-based language to finally measure its influence in forming strategic consensus among employees.

Figure 01 - Conceptual model of the impact of rhetorical structures and image-based communication in the formation of strategic consensus



SOURCE: Elaborated by the author

3 METHODS

To test the proposed hypotheses, an online experiment of 3 (rhetorical structure: diagnostic, prognostic, motivational) × 2 (language: image-based words and conceptual words) was proposed, together with professionals with a complete higher education level or graduate students who have worked in companies for more than 1 year. Consensus is the model-dependent variable and Rhetorical Structure and Language are the independent variables, the latter also being measured as a moderating variable. The case of the experiment is based on the communication of the strategic objectives of a fictitious company, Grupo Saúde SA. As it is a 3 x 2 experiment, 6 different stimuli were elaborated, each one with specific characteristics of rhetorical and language structure.

As proposed by Snow and Benford (1988), stimuli A and B followed the diagnostic structure, that is, the arguments focused on the problematic aspects of strategic objectives. Stimuli C and D, on the other hand, were composed according to the prognostic structure, that is, emphasizing the proposed solutions for the diagnosed problems. Finally, stimuli E and F were written following the motivational structure, in which call to action stood out, as well as the rationale for engaging in such corrective action. Additionally, language stimuli, according to constructs proposed by Carton, Murphy and Clark (2014), were incorporated through the purposeful use of image-based words (stimuli A, C and E) and conceptual words (stimuli B, D and F). Each communication was prepared following the same reading fluency (eg the same source, graphic layout, sequence of arguments and cohesion connectors), as well as following a standardized stimulus protocol. All communications had 5 manipulated paragraphs, with 2 periods each and 4 words or expressions manipulated in each. In total, each of the six stimuli has 10 phrases, two for strategic priority, and 20 manipulated words (image-based or conceptual), two for phrase and four for strategic priority.

The validation of the language stimuli used and the research instrument was carried out in three stages. The first stage of validation consists of identifying image-based words and conceptual words within the same semantic field. Following an approach similar to that used by Carton and Lucas (2018) for the same purpose, a focus group with 4 evaluators was carried out. The second stage proposes to validate the fluency of the language of each communication, after applying the manipulated words, following the three items proposed by Guadagno, Rhoads, and Sagarin (2011), also used by Carton and Lucas (2018), using a 7-point Likert scale, with undergraduate students in the Strategic Planning course. Finally, once the six manipulated

communications (stimuli) were validated, a pre-test of the complete collection instrument was carried out with 12 executives, followed by telephone interview.

Survey participants received general information about the company and a statement written by the company's CEO, containing information about the 2020-2024 strategic plan. They were then invited to answer a questionnaire, divided into two parts, the first on the strategic priorities of Saúde S.A. and the second on the respondent himself. In order to investigate the consensus, through the perception of strategic priorities after each communication, a list was proposed to the participants with the twenty main strategic objectives of the medical-hospital area extracted from the literature, synthesized by Desmidt and George (2016), indicating the importance of each objective for the company, based on a 7-point Likert scale. Through the digital platform SurveyMonkey®, 220 valid responses were collected for analysis. Incomplete responses were disregarded, that is, they did not complete the question about strategic objectives or that, through the control questions, did not meet the pre-defined criteria for sample composition, or even that had internal inconsistency in the Likert scale.

In an adaptation of the method proposed by Desmidt and George (2016), the Consensus variable was calculated from the Euclidean distance between the perception of each participant about a strategic objective (xi) and the answer-intended by the CEO (CEOi) for the same objective, squared. Then, the Consensus of each stimulus is the result of the sum of respondents' Euclidean distances for the 20 proposed strategic objectives of each communication divided by the number of respondents for that stimulus (n). The closer to zero, the greater the consensus in that scenario, that is, the lesser the dispersion of understanding of the respondents in relation to the intended response, which represents the CEO's intention. The three hypotheses of the model proposed were tested using an analysis of variance (2-way ANOVA), with the aid of the statistical software SPSS®, considering a 95% confidence level ($\alpha = 0,05$), with subsequent post-hoc analysis. In addition, for H1, Gabriel and Hochberg's tests were chosen to ascertain through the paired comparison, which of the structures was more significant in relation to the consensus; for H2 a comparative analysis between the averages of the factor levels; and for H3, Sidak analysis was performed

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

By definition, the closer to zero, the greater the consensus result of the stimulus Table 01 indicates that the average Consensus of the press releases that use Image-based language is less than the result of the press releases that use the Conceptual language which can signal an advantage. The same occurs when comparing the rhetorical structures used, in which the reports with motivational structure have a lower average of Consensus than the others.

Table 01 – Dependent variable Consensus by experiment stimulus

	RHETORIC STRUCTURE			
LANGUAGE	**Diagnosis**	**Prognosis**	**Motivational**	**Mean**
Image	122,6	117,2	94,5	111,4
Conceptual	127,7	120,6	121,0	123,1
Mean	125,1	118,9	107,7	117,3

SOURCE: Prepared by the author.

The model's ANOVA indicates that the proposed model is significant (Sig = 0.006) and that the variables Structure and Language would be able to explain 7.3% of the formation of Consensus (R2 = 0.073). Since corporate communication is a complex resource, it would be expected that a complete model of consensus formation would include several other variables, such as the frequency of communication, for example, which are not the focus of this research. Figure 02 shows the main analytical results.

Figure 02 – Confirmation results of the hypotheses tested in the research

Proposed hypothesis		**H1**	**H2**	**H3**
Analyzed variable		Structure	Language	Structure*Language
ANOVA (α=0,05)	F	4,252	5,867	2,322
	Test statistics (Sig.)	0,015	0,016	0,101
	Test results	Do not reject	Do not reject	Reject
POST-HOC (α=0,05)	Test	Gabriel / Hochberg	-	Sidak
	Significant paired comparison	Motivational - Diagnosis	-	Motivacional - Conceito/Imagem
	Test statistics (Sig.[b])	0,031	-	0,002
Confirmation of hypotheses		**Partially confirmed**	**Confirmed**	**Confirmed**

SOURCE: Prepared by the author from information generated by the statistical software SPSS®, from the data of the experiment.

On H1, the ANOVA test indicates that there is significance in the impact of the Structure variable on the dependent variable, Consensus. In multiple comparisons, with 95% confidence, the only significant difference occurs between the motivational structure and the diagnosis (sig = 0.031 <α = 0.05). Associated with the analysis of the means of the Consensus variable for each rhetorical structure, it can be said that the communications with motivational structure had better results than those with diagnostic structure. Such difference does not occur in any matching of the prognostic structure. Its pairing does not reveal significance either with the diagnostic structure (sig = 0.657) or with the motivational structure (sig = 0.281), surprisingly. Thus, H1 can be confirmed only in part. Although there is evidence to affirm that a communication structured in such a way as to highlight the calls to action and the rational to engage in such corrective action (motivational structure), instead of structuring it on arguments that focus on the problematic aspects of the strategic objectives (diagnostic structure), there is no statistical evidence to affirm that the motivational structure produces superior results over the consensus when communication uses the prognostic structure, that is, emphasizing the proposed solutions for the diagnosed problems.

On H2, the null hypothesis of proposed equal variances can be rejected. In other words, the test indicates that there is significance in the impact of the Language variable on the dependent variable. It should be noted that the average number of press releases that use image-based language is lower than that of press releases that use conceptual language. Therefore, the combination of the ANOVA results and the comparison of the means allows us to state that the language that uses image-based words was statistically superior to that based on conceptual words in order to generate consensus on strategic objectives, which confirms H2.

Finally, on H3, the null hypothesis of the ANOVA test cannot be rejected, with 95% confidence, which would indicate that there is no significance in the interaction of the independent variables on the consensus. Therefore, Language would not act as a moderating variable in the communication model, only as an independent variable. However, a deeper analysis of the interaction of factors through the post-hoc Sidak allows to capture more nuances of effects between the paired groups. When the different languages are compared in the diagnostic and prognostic structures, they reveal a non-significant difference (sigb = 0.546 and sigb = 0.672 respectively, both greater than the proposed α of 5%), in line with the general result found by ANOVA. However, when these are compared within the motivational structure there is a significant difference (sig = 0.002 <0.05 = α). This result is interesting because, although ANOVA indicates that the relationship between Language as a moderator of the impact of Structure is not significant, such an enhancer is revealed only in the use of the motivational structure. In other words, although there is no significant interaction between all levels of the two factors, there is statistical evidence that the use of image-based language when associated with the motivational rhetorical structure produces the best results in generating consensus in communicating the objectives strategic., what H3.

The results obtained in the experiment corroborate the view that the quality of the rhetoric of leaders when communicating strategic objectives internally influences the formation of strategic consensus among employees. The joint analysis of the tested hypotheses, summarized in Figure 02, provides evidence and indicates that both the rhetorical structure and the language used can contribute to clarify how such influence occurs.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

The main results identified in the present research, when compared with the studies mentioned in the literature review, show some similarities and many differences that focus on the qualification of the relationship between communication and the rhetoric of the leader and the formation of the strategic consensus.

By demonstrating that there is evidence that both the motivational rhetorical structure and the image-based language can promote greater strategic consensus in the communication of strategic objectives with employees, this research proposes cause-and-effect relationships as required by Carton, Maurphy and Clark (2014) of variables at the individual level that impact the rhetoric of the leader and performance, as well as by Desmidt and George (2016) on empirical insights on organizational conditions that provoke consensus. Furthermore, it contributes to clarifying the link between business strategies and internal communication, highlighted by Zerfass and Viertmann (2017) as one of the main and persistent challenges for companies.

The results also corroborate and offer new evidence to the findings of Carton, Maurphy and Clark (2014) of that leadership's inability to communicate affects understanding of strategic priorities. This research also agrees with that proposed by Rapert, Velliquette and Garretson (2002), by demonstrating that communication stimulates employees' understanding of priorities and promotes consensus. Additionally, this study expands the proposal of Hossain and Hossain (2017) by agreeing that organizations should encourage routines such as dialogue, sharing and integration, but it goes further by bringing evidence that leadership communication can promote strategic consensus not only among managers, but across all hierarchical levels of employees.

However, the hypotheses formulated are also intended to qualify how the relationship between communication and consensus occurs, helping to identify real causes of good performance and improving the understanding of the individual-individual interaction. The three hypotheses of the model proposed (Figure 01) are associated with each of the specific objectives of this research.

Hypothesis 1 was formulated in order to examine how different rhetorical structures in communication can influence the formation of strategic consensus among employees on strategic objectives, the first specific objective of the research.

H1: when communicating strategic objectives, the motivational rhetorical structure results in greater strategic consensus, when compared to other rhetorical structures.

The confirmation of Hypothesis 1 presents new evidence to Snow and Benford's (1988) proposal that different rhetorical structures can lead to different conclusions. Although, when evidencing that the motivational structure seems to produce a better strategic consensus in comparison to the others, this study opposes both the seminal results of Bourgeois (1980), associated with the prognostic structure, and those of Rapert, Velliquete and Garret (2002), associated with the diagnostic structure.

The results also reinforce the argument of Scott, Cavana and Cameron's (2015) stating that communication should favor that employees put strategic objectives into practice within their context and responsibilities. Thus, the study ratifies and expands the empirical evidence reported by Overton (2018) when proposing a new context in addition to environmental issues.

The second hypothesis was established to assess how the use of image-based words can influence the formation of strategic consensus among employees about strategic objectives, according to the specific objective of the research.

H2: when communicating strategic objectives, the use of image-based words results in greater strategic consensus, when compared to the use of conceptual words.

When Hypothesis 2 is confirmed, it meets the reports of Carton, Murphy and Clark (2014) that indicate that the incorporation of visual narrative resources into the discourse would promote greater collective understanding, since it would activate both cognitive systems - concrete and conceptual - simultaneously. The results of the experiment go further by signaling evidence that the positive influence of the use of image-based language on shared understanding is not restricted only to the transmission of vision and values, but can also be applied to the communication of strategic objectives.

The third and last hypothesis is proposed to test how the association between different rhetorical structures and the use of image-based words can influence the formation of strategic consensus among employees on strategic objectives, the third specific objective of the research.

H3: when communicating strategic objectives, the combined use of image-based words with the motivational rhetorical structure results in greater strategic consensus, when compared to any other combinations of rhetorical structures and language.

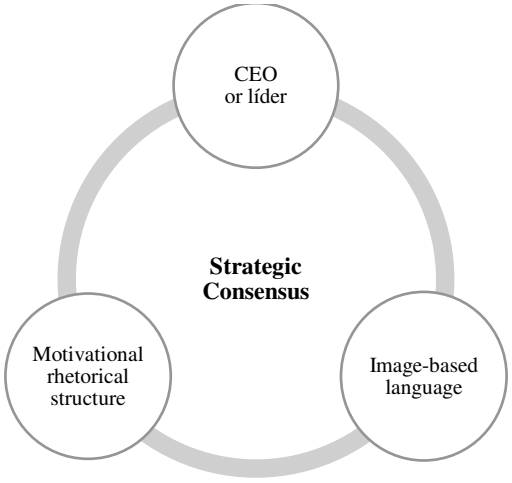
Surprisingly, the results of the experiment indicate that the ratification of the elements (logos, ethos and pathos) proposed by Aristotelian rhetoric is not always confirmed, differently from what was stated by Stucki and Sager (2018), since there was no evidence of interaction between the variables Structure and Language. However, the model indicates statistical significance in the relationship between the motivational structure and the image-based language, a

combination that had the most positive influence on the strategic consensus, which confirms Hypothesis 3.

It is worth mentioning that the proposed experiment model points out that the rhetorical structure and the language used in a statement would be able to explain 5.1% of the formation of Consensus (R2 = 0.051), which corroborates the statement of Zerfass and Viertman (2017) that a single indicator would be as fruitless as inappropriate for measuring communication, a construct as complex as the strategy itself. This study focused on the analysis of the quality of communication, neutralizing frequency elements, for example, since the first is less studied in the literature (Scott et al., 2015). Furthermore, the elements analyzed make up only one of the three antecedents of the consensus proposed by Kellermanns, Walter, Lechner and Floyd (2005), which refers to the nature of the decision-making process. other sets of consensus antecedents. Issues concerning organizational structure and social cohesion were not part of the scope of this research.

Based on the experiment carried out and the confirmation of the proposed hypotheses, a theoretical model of internal communication heuristics is proposed to form a strategic consensus, shown in Figure 03. Thus, it is expected to contribute to the qualification of the relationship between communication and consensus, with new facilitators for the difficulties reported in the literature and, consequent expansion of the theory about the quality of communication and rhetoric of leaders.

Figure 03 – Internal communication heuristic model for forming strategic consensus



SOURCE: Prepared by the author.

Regarding the relationship between communication and consensus, the model proposed in Figure 03 both presents new empirical evidence about elements that form consensus, theoretical gap proposed by Desmidt and George (2016), and integrates them from a holistic point of view, as required by Prieto and Carvalho (2018).

The model proposed in Figure 03 also presents itself as a new facilitator to the difficulties reported in the literature about the implementation of strategies. The generation of greater strategic consensus through a more efficient communication model can be one of the answers

to the inadequate understanding of information and the lack of clarity about priorities, limited understanding of strategic objectives (Desmidt & George, 2016) and misalignment of priorities (Galunic & Hermreck, 2012). Since Carton, Murphy and Clark (2014) state that leaders tend to transmit strategy through concepts, it is not surprising the low level of knowledge of the strategic priorities signaled by employees. The results found in the experiment and the consequent proposed model (Figure 03) may offer a way to mitigate such difficulties.

Finally, it is expected that the proposed model (Figure 03) will contribute to the expansion of the theory about the quality of communication and rhetoric of leaders, when reporting new attributes related to the quality of communication that are less understood and studied (Desmidt & George, 2016; Scott et al., 2015). Furthermore, the study offers a heuristic of dialogue and information sharing, defended by Hossain and Hossain (2017) as the main ones to be encouraged by organizations to reinforce the desired behavior of employees.

It is worth mentioning that the research has limitations such as the development of analyzes on a non-probabilistic sample, not allowing generalizations. Furthermore, because it is based on the respondents' perception, the results imply that they correctly interpreted the questions. It should also be stressed that it was not an objective to discuss whether employees agree with the proposed strategy, nor about its quality, as well as the relationship between consensus and performance. The results found deepen the understanding of the relationship between communication and strategic consensus, providing new research opportunities that continue to contribute to the development of studies on the subject, such as: a new application of the experiment already tested with probabilistic sampling to generalize the results. results; test the proposed theoretical model by applying it to the reality of a company, with communications in real scenarios; test the communication model in other contexts or with different stakeholders such as customers and shareholders; integrate new moderating variables such as the other antecedents of the consensus or from different theoretical frameworks such as environmental symmetry or the situational theory of the public; improve the model between consensus and performance based on shared understanding; or even do a longitudinal study, testing the impact of the proposed communication quality model associated with frequency.

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