

Translating Strategic Intent into Sustained Organizational Action: A Strategy-to-Action Framework

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Abstract

Many organizations develop clear strategies yet struggle to translate strategic intent into sustained organizational action. This conceptual study develops a Strategy-to-Action Framework explaining how strategic intent becomes recurring, aligned decisions and behaviors that persist across execution cycles and adapt through feedback. Drawing on contemporary strategy implementation literature and practice-oriented execution principles, the framework distinguishes sustained organizational action from implementation consistency, strategic progress, and organizational performance. It treats five mechanisms as differentiated but mutually recursive. Behavioral translation mediates the conversion of intent into role-specific action; system alignment, accountability, and ownership enable that conversion; execution cadence reinforces action over time; and feedback and measurement support learning and can prompt revisions to execution mechanisms or strategic intent. The study also distinguishes behavioral translation from communication, sensemaking, goal clarity, and managerial capability, and identifies contextual boundary conditions that affect the framework's operation. Five revised propositions specify this causal logic for future empirical testing. Practical implications suggest that leaders can strengthen execution by defining observable behaviors, aligning systems and decision rights, assigning clear ownership, maintaining purposeful review rhythms, and using performance information to adapt. The framework contributes a process-oriented explanation of how implementation mechanisms combine to produce sustained organizational action rather than assuming that visible activity or implementation consistency alone demonstrates strategic progress.

Keywords

Strategy Implementation, Strategy Execution, Strategic Intent, Sustained

Organizational Action, Behavioral Translation, Accountability, Execution
Cadence, Performance Measurement

1. Introduction

Many organizations devote substantial resources to strategy formulation and planning. Yet translating strategic intent into sustained organizational action remains a persistent challenge (Holm et al., 2026). Strategy implementation is a complex organizational process. Its success depends on both managerial capabilities and the organizational mechanisms used to support execution (Holm et al., 2026).

Recent scholarship continues to identify significant implementation challenges. Holm et al. (2026) reviewed 160 peer-reviewed studies on strategy implementation. They found that effective implementation depends on the interaction of managerial and organizational levers. These include structures, internal processes, communication, learning, resource orchestration, and management capabilities. Their findings reinforce the need to examine implementation as an integrated organizational process rather than as a single managerial activity.

The challenge extends beyond the strategy's quality. A strategy may be logically sound and clearly communicated but still fail to influence daily organizational behavior. Implementation depends on how managers and employees interpret strategic priorities and translate them into action. Christie and Tippmann (2024) found that middle managers can shape whether implementation produces intended or unintended strategic outcomes. Their findings demonstrate that operational interpretation plays an important role in how strategy develops during implementation.

Middle-management capability is therefore central to strategy execution. Nguyen Thi et al. (2025) found that managerial traits, knowledge and skills, behaviors, and strategic competencies significantly affected strategy implementation. Their study also identified differences across organizational levels. Behavioral competencies were especially important at the enterprise level, while strategic competencies had greater influence at the functional level.

These findings highlight an important scholarly issue. Strategy implementation does not occur only at the senior-management level. It also depends on the tactical and operational activities through which strategic priorities become organizational practice (Holm et al., 2026). The implementation problem is therefore not simply whether organizations formulate appropriate strategies. It is whether those strategies become embedded in systems, responsibilities, routines, and measurable actions.

This conceptual study referred to this disconnect as the strategy-action gap. The strategy-action gap describes the distance between declared strategic intent and the actions repeatedly performed to advance that intent. Organizations may re-

main highly active without making meaningful strategic progress. Meetings, reports, projects, and completed tasks can create visible activity. However, such activity constitutes strategic execution only when it advances intended organizational outcomes.

This distinction is consistent with the argument advanced by Areguamen (2026) in *The Execution Blueprint: Turning Strategy into Daily Motion*. He contends that execution weakens when organizations possess clear strategies but lack practical systems that convert strategic intent into repeatable action. He identifies systems, accountability, rhythm, feedback, discipline, and visible progress as interconnected mechanisms that sustain execution.

This conceptual study therefore addressed a specific scholarly gap. Existing research has identified many factors associated with strategy implementation, including managerial capabilities, organizational structures, resources, communication, routines, and monitoring mechanisms (Holm et al., 2026). However, a process-oriented explanation of how these mechanisms work together to move strategy from intent into sustained organizational action remains needed.

Accordingly, this conceptual study addressed the following research question:

How can organizations translate strategic intent into sustained organizational action?

This conceptual study examined the mechanisms that support this transition. The study developed a Strategy-to-Action Framework comprising five mutually reinforcing mechanisms: behavioral translation, system alignment, accountability and ownership, execution cadence, and feedback and measurement.

The study contributed to strategy implementation scholarship in three ways. First, it positioned behavioral translation as the immediate link between strategic intent and execution. Second, it integrated established implementation mechanisms into a single process-oriented framework. Third, it emphasized execution continuity by explaining how recurring routines, feedback, and measurement can sustain action after implementation begins.

The practical contribution was equally important. The framework provided organizational leaders with a structured way to identify where execution may be weakening. It focused attention on whether strategic priorities have been translated into behavior, supported by systems, assigned to clear owners, reinforced through recurring routines, and evaluated through meaningful feedback.

The study reviewed relevant strategy implementation literature. It then examined the strategy-action gap and the mechanisms that connect strategic intent to organizational action. The study then presented the Strategy-to-Action Framework and its propositions. The final sections discussed theoretical implications, managerial implications, limitations, and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

Strategy implementation has long been recognized as a central challenge in strategic management. The difficulty does not arise only from poor strategy formula-

tion. It also arises from the organizational work required to convert strategic decisions into coordinated action. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) described strategy implementation as a dynamic and iterative process involving activities by managers and employees to turn strategic plans into reality. Friesl et al. (2021) similarly conceptualized implementation as strategy work involving actors, activities, structures, tools, and temporal arrangements. More recently, Holm et al. (2026) confirmed that implementation depends on interactions among managerial and organizational levers. These findings suggest examining strategy implementation as an integrated organizational process rather than a final stage that follows planning (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

The literature also indicates that implementation remains theoretically fragmented. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) found that strategy implementation research consists of diverse recommendations, empirical findings, and theoretical perspectives that are not always connected. Friesl et al. (2021) reached a similar conclusion and organized implementation research around five practices: structure and process matching, resource matching, monitoring, framing, and negotiating. Holm et al. (2026) extended this discussion by identifying managerial and organizational levers across 160 peer-reviewed studies. Taken together, these studies provide substantial knowledge about factors associated with implementation. However, these studies also reinforce the need to explain more precisely how implementation factors interact to produce sustained organizational action (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

2.1. Literature Selection and Synthesis Approach

The literature base for this conceptual review was assembled through a purposive, concept-driven search rather than a systematic-review protocol. The search logic combined “strategy implementation” or “strategy execution” with terms corresponding to the proposed mechanisms, including “middle manager,” “behavioral translation,” “sensemaking,” “organizational alignment,” “accountability,” “decision rights,” “organizational routines,” “work rhythms,” “performance measurement,” and “organizational learning.”

Studies were included when they were peer-reviewed, addressed implementation processes or at least one proposed mechanism, and offered conceptual or empirical evidence relevant to how strategic intent becomes action. Studies focused solely on strategy formulation or on distal performance associations without explaining implementation processes were excluded. Integrative reviews by Friesl et al. (2021), Tawse and Tabesh (2021), and Holm et al. (2026) provided the initial conceptual categories and guided targeted follow-up searches for mechanism-specific studies. The author’s practitioner monograph served only as applied conceptual input and was not treated as peer-reviewed evidence. Because the purpose was theoretical integration rather than exhaustive effect estimation, the retained studies were synthesized narratively against the five mechanisms, their interactions, the outcome construct, and relevant contextual conditions.

2.2. Strategy Implementation and Execution

Strategy implementation becomes meaningful when strategic intent influences what organizational actors actually do. Merkus et al. (2019) argued that implementation occurs when strategy reshapes organizational practices and routines. Their performative perspective moves the discussion beyond strategy as a written plan. It instead focuses on how strategy is enacted through organizational behavior. Friesl et al. (2021) similarly emphasized the activities, actors, and tools through which strategic intentions are executed. These perspectives provide an important foundation for this study because they locate implementation in recurring organizational action rather than in planning documents alone.

Recent evidence further supports this behavioral interpretation of implementation. Christie and Tippmann (2024) examined 122 strategy implementations reported by 40 middle managers. They found that different implementation activities were associated with intended and unintended strategic outcomes. The finding indicates that strategic intent does not pass unchanged from senior management into operations. Instead, managerial actions influence how strategy is interpreted and enacted. This relationship creates a major challenge in turning strategy into action. Organizations must translate strategic priorities into behaviors that preserve their intended direction (Christie & Tippmann, 2024).

Middle managers play a particularly important role in this translation process. Tawse et al. (2024) found that middle-manager leadership and work-team coordination contribute to effective strategy implementation. Nguyen Thi et al. (2025) also found that managerial traits, knowledge, skills, behavioral competencies, and strategic competencies significantly influence implementation. Their results showed that behavioral competencies were especially important at the enterprise level. Strategic competencies were more influential at the functional level. These findings suggest that implementation depends not only on communicating strategic priorities but also on building the managerial capacity needed to translate those priorities into operational behavior (Nguyen Thi et al., 2025; Tawse et al., 2024).

Wowerath (2026) provides further evidence of this translation process. The study examined how objectives and key results can support middle managers during strategy implementation. The findings showed that goal orientation, reflection, transparency, communication, and feedback can help managers translate strategic objectives into actionable steps. These mechanisms also strengthened coordination, commitment, and competency. Therefore, behavioral translation involves more than communicating strategy. It requires mechanisms that connect strategic intent to concrete actions and responsibilities (Wowerath, 2026).

2.3. System Alignment and Organizational Design

Strategic action also depends on alignment between organizational systems and strategic priorities. Employees may understand a strategy but still face resistance from structures, processes, controls, or resource-allocation practices. Holm et al.

(2026) identified organizational structure, internal processes, resources, performance management, and communication as important implementation levers. Rowe and Nevmerzhytskyi (2025) similarly argued that effective implementation requires internal alignment among strategy, structure, controls, rewards, culture, leadership, resources, and capabilities. These findings indicate that organizations cannot rely on individual effort to compensate for systems that run counter to strategic priorities (Holm et al., 2026; Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025). Alignment matters because implementation crosses organizational levels and functional boundaries. Strategic priorities established at senior levels often require coordinated responses from units with different responsibilities, incentives, and operating routines. Holm et al. (2026) emphasized that managers and organizations should consider managerial and organizational levers together, not independently. This perspective strengthens the argument that system alignment is not merely an administrative support function. It can facilitate or constrain the execution of strategic intent (Holm et al., 2026).

The literature on strategic alignment also identifies misalignment as a recurring implementation problem. Research shows that structures, incentives, culture, and other organizational arrangements can reinforce or weaken execution. Recent reviews identify alignment as a key bridge between strategy formulation and implementation. This implies that strategic priorities require organizational systems that consistently signal what matters, who is responsible, and how to use resources. System alignment therefore provides the structural conditions for sustaining behavioral translation (Iskandar & Ardianto, 2024).

Organizational routines provide one mechanism for making this alignment durable. Merkus et al. (2019) identified routinization as a way to embed strategy in organizational practice. More recent routine research also emphasizes that stable routines do not necessarily produce rigid behavior. Hodgson (2023) argued that organizational routines can support varied behavioral outcomes when they function as organizational capacities. Kesting (2023) similarly demonstrated that routines can change through repeated organizational action. These findings matter for strategy implementation because strategic priorities become more sustainable when embedded in recurring patterns of organizational work rather than treated as temporary initiatives (Merkus et al., 2019).

2.4. Strategic Intent and Behavioral Translation

Organizational actors must interpret strategic intent before it can guide behavior. Employees and managers do not automatically respond to strategic statements. They make sense of priorities through their roles, experience, interactions, and perceptions of organizational conditions. Schuler et al. (2023) found that middle managers develop shared and separate realities about new strategies. These perceptions were associated with their implementation behavior. The findings suggest that differences in interpretation can produce differences in implementation behavior, even when organizational actors receive the same strategic message

(Schuler et al., 2023).

This interpretive dimension helps explain why communication alone may be insufficient. Managers must communicate strategic priorities in ways that clarify expected action. Wowerath (2026) found that sensemaking and sensegiving help middle managers translate goals into actionable steps. Christie and Tippmann (2024) also demonstrated that middle-manager activities influence whether intended or unintended strategies emerge. The evidence therefore suggests that behavioral translation requires clarity about both meaning and action. Strategic priorities must clarify not only what the organization intends to achieve but also what organizational actors are expected to do differently (Wowerath, 2026).

This distinction is central to the strategy-action gap this study examines. An organization may achieve strategic awareness without achieving behavioral alignment. Employees can understand an objective at a general level while remaining uncertain about its implications for daily decisions. The literature on middle managers, sensemaking, and implementation activities indicates that this translation problem occurs between strategic direction and operational behavior. Behavioral translation therefore represents a distinct implementation mechanism that connects strategic intent to executable organizational work (Holm et al., 2026).

Behavioral translation can also be distinguished empirically from adjacent constructs. Communication concerns the transmission and exchange of strategic messages; sensemaking concerns how actors interpret those messages; goal clarity concerns the perceived specificity and understandability of desired ends; and managerial capability concerns an actor's capacity to interpret, coordinate, and execute. Behavioral translation concerns the observable mapping of a strategic priority into role-specific decisions, actions, and behavioral standards. Future studies could operationalize it through the proportion of priorities linked to explicit role behaviors, cross-role agreement about expected action, and observed congruence between those behaviors and enacted decisions. These indicators would test whether translation occurred rather than merely whether a message was delivered, understood, or supported by capable managers.

2.5. Accountability, Ownership and Decision Rights

Strategy implementation also requires clear accountability. Strategic priorities are hard to sustain when ownership is unclear, or responsibilities overlap without clear decision rights. Holm et al. (2026) found that breaking strategy into clear activities can strengthen accountability and alignment. Their review also emphasized assigning responsibilities and clarifying mandates. These mechanisms reduce uncertainty about who should act and who should be held accountable for progress. Accountability therefore converts broad organizational intentions into clearly assigned responsibilities (Holm et al., 2026).

Accountability is closely related to coordination. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) identified coordination as a condition that supports implementation effectiveness. Tawse et al. (2024) later found that middle-manager leadership and team coordination contribute to effective implementation. Wowerath (2026) also reported

that structured goal systems can strengthen coordination and commitment. The collective evidence suggests that ownership alone is insufficient. Organizational actors must also understand how their responsibilities connect with those of others involved in implementation (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Recurring organizational routines can help maintain this coordination over time. Strategy execution rarely occurs through a single implementation event. It develops through repeated reviews, meetings, decisions, follow-up activities, and adjustments. Friesl et al. (2021) emphasized the temporal arrangements within which strategy work occurs. Merkus et al. (2019) also connected implementation with routinization. These perspectives support the concept of execution cadence, defined as the recurring rhythm through which strategically important actions are reviewed, reinforced, and adjusted (Friesl et al., 2021).

Execution cadence is important because strategic priorities compete with routine operational demands. Without recurring attention, organizations may return to established behaviors even after formally launching a new strategy. Routine scholarship indicates that repeated patterns can provide stability while still allowing adaptation (Hodgson, 2023; Kesting, 2023). Accordingly, cadence should not be interpreted as rigid repetition. It represents structured recurrence that keeps strategic priorities active while allowing managers to respond to changing conditions (Hodgson, 2023).

2.6. Feedback, Measurement, and Organizational Learning

Feedback and measurement give organizations information on whether implementation is producing intended results. Performance measurement connects strategic objectives with operational indicators and makes progress more visible. Micheli and Mura (2017) found that comprehensive performance measurement systems can mediate the relationship between strategy and organizational performance. Holm et al. (2026) also identified performance measurement and management as mechanisms that can improve accountability, coordination, and alignment. These findings indicate that measurement becomes strategically useful when it informs action rather than merely records outcomes (Micheli & Mura, 2017).

Measurement also supports adaptation when organizations use information for learning. Ssekiziyivu et al. (2026) found that knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and organizational memory contributed to strategy execution among transport firms in Uganda. Their findings demonstrate that implementation benefits when organizations capture and use knowledge generated during execution. Wowerath (2026) likewise identified reflection and feedback as mechanisms that support strategy implementation. Feedback therefore links performance information to the organizational learning needed to adjust behavior and systems (Ssekiziyivu et al., 2026).

A learning orientation is especially important in dynamic environments. Implementation conditions can change after strategy formulation, making strict ad-

herence to initial assumptions problematic. Organizational learning allows firms to interpret new information and modify actions without abandoning strategic direction. Ssekiziyivu et al. (2026) found that learning mechanisms helped organizations respond to changing operational conditions during execution. This evidence supports treating feedback and measurement as adaptive mechanisms within strategy implementation rather than as a final stage of control (Ssekiziyivu et al., 2026).

The relationship among measurement, feedback, and action is therefore cyclical. Measures make progress and deviations visible. Feedback supports interpretation of those results. Learning helps organizations decide whether behavior, systems, responsibilities, or priorities need adjustment. This cycle helps explain why sustained implementation requires both control and adaptation. The literature therefore supports treating feedback and measurement as mechanisms that reconnect organizational action with strategic intent (Holm et al., 2026).

2.7. Synthesis of the Literature and Conceptual Gap

The literature reviewed shows that strategy implementation depends on multiple interacting mechanisms. Scholars have identified managerial capabilities, organizational structures, routines, communication, coordination, accountability, measurement, and learning as important elements of implementation (Friesl et al., 2021; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021; Holm et al., 2026). Recent studies also provide stronger evidence concerning middle-manager behavior, interpretation, alignment, goal translation, and organizational learning (Christie & Tippmann, 2024; Nguyen Thi et al., 2025; Wowerath, 2026; Ssekiziyivu et al., 2026). The literature therefore provides a substantial foundation for understanding the individual components of strategy implementation (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

However, the literature remains less explicit about how these mechanisms function together as a continuous process that converts strategic intent into sustained organizational action. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) described implementation research as fragmented and lacking a cohesive framework. Friesl et al. (2021) similarly noted the absence of a unified body of implementation research. Holm et al. (2026) responded to this fragmentation by integrating managerial and organizational levers, but their review also identified opportunities for further research on interactions across levels and implementation contexts. These observations indicate that further conceptual integration of strategy implementation research remains warranted (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Friesl et al. (2021) organize implementation research around five practices—structure and process matching, resource matching, monitoring, framing, and negotiating—thereby describing major categories of implementation work. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) instead integrate conditions for implementation effectiveness with managerial actions that support those conditions. The Strategy-to-Action Framework complements but differs from both contributions: it does not provide

another inventory of practices or success factors; it specifies a conversion process and a proximal outcome. Behavioral translation mediates the move from intent to role-specific action, system alignment and accountability enable that conversion, cadence sustains action across cycles, and feedback recursively updates execution and, when warranted, strategic intent. The framework therefore explains how practices and enabling conditions can combine over time to produce sustained organizational action.

This conceptual study addresses this gap by examining the shift from strategic intent to sustained organizational action. It integrates five mechanisms that recur across the reviewed literature: behavioral translation, system alignment, accountability and ownership, execution cadence, and feedback and measurement. The study does not present these mechanisms as isolated implementation factors. Instead, it examines how they can operate as an interconnected process. This synthesis provides the foundation for the Strategy-to-Action Framework developed in the subsequent sections.

3. The Strategy-Action Gap

The strategy-action gap describes the distance between declared strategic intent and the repeated organizational actions needed to advance it. This gap mattered because organizational activity did not always equal strategic execution. Employees could attend meetings, prepare reports, complete projects, and follow planning routines without making meaningful progress toward strategic outcomes. The distinction, therefore, was not between action and inaction. It was between general organizational activity and strategically aligned action.

Sustained organizational action is the framework's outcome construct. It refers to a recurring pattern of decisions and behaviors that remains aligned with strategic intent across successive execution cycles and is adjusted through feedback without losing strategic coherence. It differs from implementation consistency, which captures the regularity or fidelity of implementation activities; from strategic progress, which captures movement toward interim objectives or milestones; and from organizational performance, which captures more distal results such as efficiency, growth, or service outcomes. Sustained organizational action is therefore a proximal process outcome: it indicates that strategy is enacted repeatedly and adaptively, but it does not, by itself, establish that the strategy has achieved its ultimate performance goals.

Recent research supported this distinction. Christie and Tippmann (2024) showed that middle-manager activities could produce intended or unintended strategic outcomes. Stephenson et al. (2024) also demonstrated that organizational members could adopt, adapt, resist, or only partially sustain new work rhythms introduced during strategic change. Izar et al. (2025) further showed that agile implementation depended on connected processes, communication, information quality, and meeting structures. These findings indicated that movement from strategy to action depended on the quality of the mechanisms that carried strategy

into everyday work.

The interdependence of implementation factors also reinforced the gap. [López-Torres et al. \(2023\)](#) identified reinforcement, commitment, organizational culture, managerial skills, communication, involvement, coordination, and management mechanisms as important to effective strategy implementation. Their findings supported the argument that execution weakened when organizations treated implementation factors as isolated requirements rather than mutually reinforcing conditions.

The strategy-action gap also had a structural dimension. [Rowe and Nevmerzhytskyi \(2025\)](#) argued that strategy implementation depended on internal alignment among structure, controls, rewards, culture, leadership, resources, and capabilities. [Asghar and Obloj \(2025\)](#) similarly showed that delegated decision rights could influence internal capital reallocation. These studies suggested that organizations could understand strategic priorities but fail to act on them when authority, resources, or organizational arrangements reinforced different patterns of behavior.

This study therefore treated the strategy-action gap as both a behavioral and organizational problem. People needed behavioral translation because they had to understand what strategy required them to do differently. Organizations needed system alignment because organizational arrangements had to support those behaviors. They needed accountability and ownership because responsibility had to be visible. They needed execution cadence because they had to sustain attention over time. They needed feedback and measurement because they had to learn whether action advanced strategic intent. These mechanisms formed the basis of the Strategy-to-Action Framework.

4. The Strategy-to-Action Framework

The Strategy-to-Action Framework is the conceptual model developed in this study to explain how organizations can translate strategic intent into sustained organizational action. It organizes the execution process around five mutually reinforcing mechanisms: behavioral translation, system alignment, accountability and ownership, execution cadence, and feedback and measurement. These mechanisms are not isolated implementation factors. They operate as a connected process that makes strategy observable, supported, owned, repeated, and adjusted.

The framework treats the five mechanisms as differentiated but mutually recursive rather than as five equivalent antecedents. Behavioral translation is the mediating mechanism through which strategic intent becomes executable, role-specific action. System alignment and accountability and ownership are enabling conditions that strengthen or constrain that conversion. Execution cadence is a temporal reinforcing mechanism that helps aligned action persist across successive cycles. Feedback and measurement constitute a recursive learning mechanism that can modify the other mechanisms and, when evidence challenges the assumptions or feasibility of the strategy, strategic intent itself. Sustained organizational

action is the framework's proximal outcome, whereas strategic progress and organizational performance are downstream outcomes that may follow when the action remains appropriate to the context.

Behavioral translation is the first mechanism. It converts broad strategic priorities into observable expectations, decisions, and role-specific actions. Research on middle managers supports this position because implementation depends on interpretation, sensemaking, and translating strategic goals into actionable steps (Schuler et al., 2023; Wowerath, 2026). Behavioral translation therefore connects strategic intent with the actions that organizational members can perform.

System alignment is the second mechanism. It ensures that structures, resources, controls, incentives, communication channels, and performance systems reinforce strategically required behavior. Holm et al. (2026) identified organizational levers as central to implementation. Iskandar and Ardianto (2024) also positioned alignment as a key bridge between strategy formulation and implementation. Performance-measurement-system design further strengthens this connection by linking strategy formulation with purposeful use of performance information (Johnsen et al., 2024; Keathley-Herring et al., 2024). Table 1 summarizes the five mechanisms of the Strategy-to-Action Framework, their roles in execution, and the core questions they address.

Table 1. Strategy-to-action framework mechanisms.

Mechanism	Execution Role	Core Question
Behavioral translation	Converts strategic intent into observable expectations.	What must people do differently?
System alignment	Ensures structures, resources, controls, and processes support intended behavior.	Do the systems reinforce the strategy?
Accountability and ownership	Assigns responsibility, authority, and answerability for strategic priorities.	Who owns the result and the decisions?
Execution cadence	Creates recurring rhythms for review, follow-up, coordination, and adjustment.	How often is progress reviewed and acted on?
Feedback and measurement	Connects performance information with learning and correction.	What evidence shows whether action is advancing strategic intent?

Note: The table summarizes the five mechanisms of the Strategy-to-Action Framework and their roles in translating strategic intent into sustained organizational action.

Accountability and ownership are the third mechanism. Strategy becomes difficult to execute when responsibility is ambiguous or when decision rights are separated from expected outcomes. Clear ownership identifies who is responsible for progress, while decision rights determine whether responsible actors have authority to act. Research on coordination, managerial action, and delegated decision

rights supports this mechanism (Asghar & Obloj, 2025; Tawse et al., 2024; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Execution cadence is the fourth mechanism. It refers to the recurring rhythm through which strategically important actions are reviewed, reinforced, coordinated, and adjusted. Strategy implementation rarely occurs through a single launch event. It requires recurring routines and temporal patterns that keep strategic priorities active. Routine research demonstrates that recurring patterns can help implement innovation strategy and transfer strategic transformation across organizational contexts (Frederiksen et al., 2024; Martinsuo et al., 2024). Work-rhythm research also shows that cadence affects how employees engage with strategic change over time (Stephenson et al., 2024).

Feedback and measurement are the fifth mechanism. They connect organizational action to strategic intent by making progress, deviations, and learning visible. Micheli and Mura (2017) showed that comprehensive performance measurement systems can support strategy execution. Johnsen et al. (2024) found that measurement-system design links strategy formulation to purposeful use of performance information. Ssekiziyivu et al. (2026) further showed that organizational learning contributes to strategy execution. Feedback and measurement therefore support adaptation rather than control.

The framework also draws on adaptive strategy research. Laamanen et al. (2025) argued that artificial intelligence can support adaptive strategy creation and implementation by broadening attention, improving transparency, and accelerating feedback loops. This evidence reinforces the framework's emphasis on continuous monitoring and adjustment. Strategy-to-action movement should therefore be understood as a dynamic process, not a one-time conversion of plans into tasks.

5. Conceptual Propositions

The Strategy-to-Action Framework leads to five conceptual propositions. These propositions support future empirical testing. They reflect the study's central argument that sustained organizational action emerges when strategic intent is translated into behavior, supported by systems, assigned to owners, reinforced through cadence, and adjusted through feedback and measurement.

Proposition 1: Behavioral translation mediates the relationship between strategic intent and strategically aligned organizational action.

Behavioral translation is positioned as a mediator because strategic intent is too abstract to shape coordinated action directly. Communication and sensemaking may create awareness and interpretation, but the conversion of strategic priorities into role-specific decisions and behaviors provides the intervening link through which intent becomes executable. Research on middle-manager sensemaking and objectives and key results supports this conversion from strategic meaning to actionable steps (Schuler et al., 2023; Wowerath, 2026).

Proposition 2: System alignment positively conditions the extent to which translated strategic behaviors are repeatedly enacted and sustained.

System alignment is an enabling condition: structures, incentives, controls, resources, and performance systems can strengthen or constrain whether translated behaviors recur. Alignment does not replace behavioral translation; it changes the organizational support available for enacting translated expectations over time (Holm et al., 2026; Iskandar & Ardianto, 2024; Rowe & Nevmerzhytskyi, 2025).

Proposition 3: Clear accountability, ownership, and decision rights positively condition the conversion of strategically aligned behavior into sustained organizational action.

Accountability, ownership, and decision rights form a second enabling condition. They specify who is responsible for strategically aligned action, who owns the outcome, and who has authority to decide. When responsibility and authority are aligned, translated behavior is more likely to convert into sustained action; when they are ambiguous or separated, follow-through is weakened (Asghar & Obloj, 2025; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Proposition 4: Execution cadence reinforces the persistence of strategically aligned action across successive implementation cycles.

Execution cadence supplies the temporal reinforcement required for persistence. Recurring reviews, decision cycles, and follow-up routines reconnect current behavior to strategic priorities and enable timely correction. Research on work rhythms, routines, and routine transfer supports the role of structured recurrence in maintaining strategic change without requiring rigid repetition (Fredriksen et al., 2024; Martinsuo et al., 2024; Stephenson et al., 2024).

Proposition 5: Feedback and measurement create a recursive learning loop that strengthens sustained organizational action by informing adjustments to execution mechanisms and, when evidence challenges strategic assumptions, to strategic intent itself.

Feedback and measurement provide the framework's recursive link. Performance information becomes strategically useful when it reveals deviations, supports learning, and triggers adjustments. Most feedback produces first-order changes in behavior, systems, ownership, or cadence; evidence that challenges underlying assumptions, feasibility, or priorities can produce a second-order revision of strategic intent itself (Johnsen et al., 2024; Laamanen et al., 2025; Micheli & Mura, 2017; Ssekiziyivu et al., 2026).

Taken together, the propositions specify a differentiated causal sequence embedded in a recursive process: intent is translated, enabled, sustained, evaluated, and—when warranted—revised. The sequence is analytical rather than rigid because feedback can alter earlier mechanisms and contextual conditions can change their relative importance. This logic supports empirical tests of mediation, conditional effects, temporal reinforcement, and recursive adaptation.

6. Discussion

This conceptual study aimed to explain how organizations can translate strategic intent into sustained organizational action. The literature indicates that imple-

mentation failure rarely results from a single organizational deficiency. Instead, execution depends on the interaction of managerial capabilities, organizational structures, routines, communication processes, accountability mechanisms, and performance systems (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021). The Strategy-to-Action Framework integrates these elements into a process-oriented explanation of execution. It proposes that sustained action emerges when strategic intent moves through behavioral translation, system alignment, accountability and ownership, execution cadence, and feedback and measurement.

A central implication of the framework is that strategy implementation should not be treated as a discrete stage that begins after formulation. Implementation unfolds through recurring organizational activities and managerial interactions (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026). Strategic intent must therefore remain connected to operational behavior throughout implementation. This position extends the implementation discussion beyond the traditional distinction between formulation and execution. It emphasizes the mechanisms through which strategy becomes embedded in everyday organizational work.

6.1. Behavioral Translation as the First Execution Mechanism

The framework's first contribution concerns behavioral translation. Strategic priorities cannot influence organizational outcomes unless employees understand what those priorities require in practice. Communication is necessary, but communication alone does not ensure execution. Organizational members must interpret strategic priorities and translate them into behaviors, decisions, and actions they can perform.

Recent research supports this distinction. Christie and Tippmann (2024) found that middle managers influence whether implementation activities produce intended or unintended strategic outcomes. Schuler et al. (2023) also showed that managers can interpret the same strategic direction differently. These differences can influence implementation behavior. Wowerath (2026) further found that mechanisms such as goal orientation, reflection, communication, and feedback help managers translate strategic objectives into actionable steps.

These findings suggest that behavioral translation deserves greater attention as a distinct implementation mechanism. Strategic intent may be understood at an abstract level while remaining unclear at the behavioral level. Employees may know the organization's priorities but still lack clarity about what they should do differently. This creates a gap between strategic awareness and strategic action.

The Strategy-to-Action Framework addresses this problem by positioning behavioral translation immediately after strategic intent. This ordering is deliberate. Strategic priorities must first be converted into observable expectations before systems, accountability, routines, and measurement can reinforce them. Behavioral translation therefore provides the operational meaning the remaining mechanisms need to function.

This interpretation is also consistent with Areguamen's (2026) argument in The

Execution Blueprint: Turning Strategy into Daily Motion. Areguamen contends that execution requires organizations to move beyond strategic intention and create practical conditions for repeatable action. The present study develops that argument conceptually by linking behavioral translation to established strategy implementation scholarship.

6.2. System Alignment as an Enabling Condition

Behavioral clarity alone does not guarantee sustained execution. Organizational systems can reinforce desired behaviors or make them hard to sustain. Structures, processes, resources, controls, incentives, and communication mechanisms shape how organizations enact strategic priorities (Holm et al., 2026). Strategy implementation therefore depends on alignment between what the organization intends to accomplish and how the organization is designed to operate.

The framework treats system alignment as an enabling condition rather than as a separate administrative activity. This distinction is important. Employees may understand a strategic priority and remain willing to act, yet established systems may reward different behaviors. Decision processes may slow action. Resource allocation may favor legacy priorities. Reporting structures may create ambiguity. Performance measures may also emphasize activities that are inconsistent with the new strategy.

Research on strategic alignment supports the importance of this relationship. Iskandar and Ardianto (2024) identified alignment as a bridge between strategy formulation and implementation. Holm et al. (2026) similarly found that structures, internal processes, resources, communication, and performance management operate as organizational levers during implementation. These findings indicate that strategy becomes more executable when organizational arrangements support the behaviors the strategy requires.

The framework therefore proposes that behavioral translation and system alignment should operate together. Behavioral translation clarifies what organizational actors should do. System alignment creates conditions that enable those actions to occur consistently. When the two are disconnected, implementation can become dependent on extraordinary individual effort. Such dependence is difficult to sustain.

This relationship also explains why implementation problems should not automatically be attributed to employee resistance or weak commitment. In some cases, organizational actors may understand and support the strategy while operating within systems that constrain implementation. A process-oriented perspective therefore requires leaders to examine both behavior and organizational design.

6.3. Accountability and Ownership as Mechanisms of Execution Discipline

The framework identifies accountability and ownership as the third mechanism connecting strategic intent with sustained action. Once strategic behaviors have

been clarified and organizational systems aligned, responsibility must become visible. Strategic priorities can lose momentum when responsibility is shared too broadly or when decision authority remains unclear.

Holm et al. (2026) emphasize breaking strategy into activities, assigning responsibilities, and clarifying implementation mandates. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) also identify coordination as an important condition for implementation effectiveness. These findings suggest that strategy execution requires both individual responsibility and coordinated ownership.

Accountability in this framework is not limited to evaluating performance after an outcome has occurred. It operates throughout implementation. Actors must know what they own, what decisions they can make, what outcomes they are expected to influence, and when to review progress. Ownership therefore connects intention with identifiable responsibility.

Decision rights are particularly important in this relationship. Responsibility without sufficient authority can create delay and frustration. Authority without clear accountability can produce inconsistent action. The framework therefore links accountability, ownership, and decision rights rather than treating them as separate implementation concerns.

This integration strengthens the framework's process logic. Behavioral translation defines expected action. System alignment supports that action. Accountability and ownership then identify who must act and who is responsible for maintaining progress. Together, these mechanisms reduce ambiguity between strategic intention and operational responsibility.

6.4. Execution Cadence and the Continuity of Strategy Implementation

A major contribution of the framework is its emphasis on execution cadence. Strategy implementation is often discussed in terms of activities, structures, and capabilities. Less attention is sometimes given to the recurring temporal rhythm that sustains those elements. Yet implementation occurs over time and competes with routine operational demands.

Friesl et al. (2021) identify temporal arrangements as part of strategy implementation practice. Merkus et al. (2019) also emphasize routinization in the process through which strategy becomes embedded in organizational practice. Hodgson (2023) further demonstrates that stable routines can support varied and adaptive behaviors. Together, these perspectives provide support for treating recurrence as an important element of sustained execution.

Execution cadence refers to the structured rhythm through which strategically important activities are reviewed, reinforced, coordinated, and adjusted. Examples may include recurring progress reviews, implementation meetings, milestone checks, decision cycles, and feedback sessions. The defining feature is not the meeting itself. It is the regular reconnection of strategic priorities with current organizational action.

This distinction is important because organizations can launch strategic initiatives with considerable energy and still lose momentum over time. Initial communication can generate awareness. Formal plans can establish targets. However, competing operational demands can gradually push strategic priorities aside. Execution cadence helps prevent this drift by creating recurring opportunities to reestablish focus.

Cadence should not be confused with bureaucratic repetition. Repetition becomes counterproductive when routines continue without strategic purpose. Effective cadence should preserve strategic attention while allowing adjustment. [Hodgson's \(2023\)](#) work is useful here because it shows that stable routines can coexist with behavioral variation. Structured recurrence can therefore provide continuity without eliminating adaptability.

The framework consequently treats cadence as the mechanism that converts isolated implementation activities into sustained organizational practice. It provides the temporal connection between accountability, action, review, and adjustment.

6.5. Feedback and Measurement as Adaptive Mechanisms

The final mechanism concerns feedback and measurement. Organizations require information about whether implementation activities are producing intended outcomes. Measurement provides visibility. Feedback provides interpretation. Organizational learning allows the resulting information to influence subsequent action.

[Micheli and Mura \(2017\)](#) found that comprehensive performance measurement systems can support strategy execution by linking strategic objectives with operational performance. [Holm et al. \(2026\)](#) also identify performance measurement and management as important implementation mechanisms. These findings support including measurement within the framework.

However, measurement alone is insufficient. Metrics can record activity without improving execution. Performance information becomes strategically useful when decision makers use it to identify progress, deviations, constraints, and required adjustments. Feedback therefore connects measurement to action.

Organizational learning strengthens this relationship. [Ssekiziyivu et al. \(2026\)](#) found that knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and organizational memory contributed to strategy execution. [Wowerath \(2026\)](#) similarly identified reflection and feedback as important mechanisms within implementation. These findings suggest that execution benefits when organizations use performance information to learn, not merely to evaluate.

The framework therefore positions feedback and measurement as adaptive mechanisms. They do not represent the end of implementation. Instead, they reconnect organizational action with strategic intent. When performance information indicates a problem, the organization can reconsider behaviors, systems, responsibilities, or execution routines.

The framework distinguishes two feedback effects. First-order feedback adjusts behaviors, systems, ownership, or cadence while strategic intent remains stable. Second-order feedback occurs when results challenge the strategy's underlying assumptions, feasibility, scope, or priorities and therefore prompt authorized leaders to revise strategic intent. This distinction keeps the framework cyclical without equating adaptability with unstructured drift: changes to intent should occur through explicit strategic review and then be translated again through the other mechanisms (Laamanen et al., 2025).

6.6. The Interdependence of the Five Mechanisms

The Strategy-to-Action Framework's principal theoretical value lies in the interaction among its five mechanisms. Existing implementation research has identified many important factors. However, examining them independently can obscure their interdependence (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Behavioral translation without system alignment can produce clarity without organizational support. System alignment without accountability can provide resources and structures without clear ownership. Accountability without cadence can create responsibility without sustained follow-through. Cadence without meaningful measurement can produce recurring activity without evidence of progress. Measurement without feedback and learning can generate information without adjustment.

The framework therefore proposes that sustained organizational action depends on the reinforcing relationship among these mechanisms. Weakness in one mechanism can reduce the effectiveness of the others. This explains why isolated implementation interventions may produce limited results. Improving communication alone may not resolve unclear decision rights. Introducing performance measures may not improve execution if strategic behaviors remain undefined. Increasing meeting frequency may also fail if meetings do not support accountability, learning, or decision-making.

This interconnected perspective responds to concerns about fragmentation in strategy implementation research. Tawse and Tabesh (2021) observed that the literature contains numerous recommendations and theoretical perspectives that are not always integrated. Friesl et al. (2021) similarly identified multiple implementation practices across a dispersed body of research. Holm et al. (2026) advanced the field by integrating managerial and organizational levers. The Strategy-to-Action Framework builds on this foundation by organizing selected mechanisms according to their role in moving strategic intent toward sustained organizational action.

6.7. Distinguishing Organizational Activity from Strategic Action

Another important implication concerns the distinction between activity and strategically aligned action. Organizations can generate considerable activity during

implementation without producing equivalent strategic progress. Meetings can occur. They can produce reports. Projects can remain active. Employees can also complete assigned tasks. None of these activities automatically demonstrates that strategic intent is advancing.

The Strategy-to-Action Framework provides a basis for making this distinction. Organizational activity becomes strategically meaningful when it connects to behavioral expectations, aligned systems, clear ownership, repeatable execution processes, and relevant performance information. Strategic action is therefore not defined by the volume of work performed. The relationship between organizational behavior and strategic intent defines it.

This distinction has both conceptual and practical significance. Conceptually, it shifts attention from implementation activity to implementation alignment. Practically, it encourages leaders to examine whether visible work is contributing to intended outcomes.

Areguamen (2026) similarly distinguishes movement from activity in his discussion of execution. The current study extends that perspective by situating it within the broader strategy implementation literature. The resulting framework provides a conceptual explanation for why organizations can remain operationally busy while experiencing weak strategic execution.

6.8. Contribution to Strategy Implementation Scholarship

The study contributes to strategy implementation scholarship in several related ways. First, it provides a process-oriented account of how strategic intent can become sustained organizational action. Rather than presenting another inventory of implementation factors, the framework organizes selected mechanisms according to their functional role in execution.

Second, the framework gives behavioral translation a distinct position within the implementation process. Existing research demonstrates the importance of managerial interpretation, sensemaking, competencies, and implementation activities (Christie & Tippmann, 2024; Nguyen Thi et al., 2025; Schuler et al., 2023; Wowerath, 2026). The framework brings these insights together by emphasizing the conversion of strategic intent into observable expectations.

Third, the framework explicitly incorporates temporality through execution cadence. Strategy implementation unfolds over time. Recurring organizational practices therefore matter to the continuity of execution (Friesl et al., 2021; Hodgson, 2023; Merkus et al., 2019). Execution cadence captures this recurring dimension within the broader implementation process.

Fourth, the framework treats feedback and measurement as adaptive rather than terminal mechanisms. Performance information is not positioned merely as a means of control. It becomes an input into organizational learning and recalibration (Holm et al., 2026; Ssekiziyivu et al., 2026).

Finally, the framework connects managerial and organizational dimensions of implementation. Behavioral interpretation and ownership reflect managerial ac-

tion. Systems, routines, decision structures, and measurement mechanisms reflect organizational conditions. Sustained execution requires both. This integration is consistent with recent calls for a more holistic understanding of strategy implementation (Holm et al., 2026).

Overall, the discussion supports the central proposition of this conceptual study. Strategic intent becomes sustained organizational action when organizations translate priorities into behavior and reinforce those behaviors through aligned systems, clear ownership, recurring execution rhythms, and adaptive feedback. The five mechanisms are analytically distinct, but their value lies in how they work together. This interdependence provides the theoretical foundation for the managerial implications that follow.

7. Managerial Implications

The Strategy-to-Action Framework has direct implications for managers responsible for moving strategic priorities from planning to execution. The framework suggests that implementation problems should not be diagnosed only as leadership or communication failures. Managers should examine whether strategic intent has been translated into behavior, supported by organizational systems, assigned to clear owners, reinforced through recurring routines, and evaluated through feedback and measurement. This diagnostic approach is consistent with research that identifies both managerial and organizational levers as important to effective implementation (Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

7.1. Translate Strategic Priorities into Observable Behaviors

Managers should begin by converting broad strategic priorities into specific behavioral expectations. Strategic statements often describe desired outcomes at a high level, but employees may still be unsure what they should do differently. Research on middle managers shows that interpretation shapes implementation behavior and can influence whether intended or unintended strategic outcomes emerge (Christie & Tippmann, 2024; Schuler et al., 2023).

Managers should therefore define the behaviors, decisions, and actions that support each strategic priority. For example, a strategy centered on customer responsiveness should clarify the daily behaviors that demonstrate responsiveness, such as faster escalation, shorter decision cycles, or more frequent reviews of customer feedback. Wowerath (2026) found that goal orientation, reflection, communication, and feedback can help translate strategic objectives into actionable steps. Managers should therefore verify whether organizational actors can explain the actions the strategy requires, rather than assuming that communication alone creates execution clarity.

7.2. Align Organizational Systems with Strategic Priorities

Managers should examine whether organizational systems support the behaviors the strategy requires. Employees may understand what they should do and still

encounter structures, policies, controls, or processes that discourage the desired behavior. Holm et al. (2026) identified structures, internal processes, resources, communication, and performance systems as important organizational levers in strategy implementation.

System alignment requires managers to compare strategic priorities with the conditions surrounding execution. Reporting structures should support timely decisions. Resource allocation should reflect current strategic priorities. Performance measures should reinforce desired outcomes. Communication systems should make relevant information available to those who need it. Managers should also identify contradictions between stated priorities and incentives. A strategy may encourage collaboration while performance systems reward isolated departmental results. Such contradictions can weaken implementation even when employees support the strategy. Managers should therefore treat system alignment as part of execution rather than as a separate administrative concern (Iskandar & Ardianto, 2024).

7.3. Establish Clear Accountability and Ownership

Clear accountability is another important managerial requirement. Strategic priorities can lose momentum when responsibility remains broadly shared or poorly defined. Managers should clarify who owns each strategic outcome, who performs the required actions, and who has authority to make related decisions. Holm et al. (2026) emphasized assigning responsibilities and clarifying implementation activities.

Ownership should extend beyond task completion. Managers should distinguish between being assigned an activity and being accountable for an outcome. Organizations should also align decision rights with accountability. Responsibility without authority can delay action, while authority without accountability can produce inconsistent execution. Managers should therefore ask three questions for each strategic priority: Who owns the outcome? Who performs the required actions? Who has authority to make the necessary decisions? These questions can reveal gaps hidden in broad implementation plans. Because implementation also requires coordination, managers should ensure organizational actors understand how their responsibilities connect with others (Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

7.4. Build an Execution Cadence

Managers should create recurring rhythms that keep strategic priorities visible over time. Strategy implementation rarely sustains itself through a single launch meeting or annual review. Competing operational demands can gradually reduce attention to strategic priorities. Friesl et al. (2021) emphasized the temporal dimension of implementation, while Merkus et al. (2019) highlighted the importance of routinization.

An execution cadence can include progress reviews, milestone checks, implementation meetings, decision forums, and feedback sessions. The purpose is not to increase meetings but to create structured opportunities to reconnect strategic

intent with current action. Review routines should focus on movement, barriers, required decisions, and necessary adjustments. Cadence should also support adaptability. Hodgson (2023) explained that organizational routines can support varied and adaptive action. Managers should therefore maintain a review rhythm while allowing decisions to respond to changing conditions.

7.5. Use Measurement to Support Action

Managers should select measures that show whether strategic action is producing meaningful progress. Measurement systems support execution when they connect strategic objectives with operational performance (Micheli & Mura, 2017). However, too many or poorly chosen measures can obscure progress rather than clarify it.

Useful measures should be relevant, visible, timely, and actionable. They should help managers determine whether implementation is moving in the intended direction and what requires adjustment. Measures should also distinguish activity from progress. Meetings held, reports produced, or tasks completed may provide operational information, but they do not necessarily show movement toward strategic outcomes. Holm et al. (2026) identified performance measurement and management as important implementation mechanisms. Managers should therefore use measurement to maintain alignment and accountability, not simply to document results.

7.6. Convert Feedback into Organizational Learning

Managers should treat feedback as an input to learning and adjustment. Performance information has limited value if it does not influence subsequent action. Ssekiziyivu et al. (2026) found that organizational learning contributes to strategy execution through knowledge acquisition, distribution, interpretation, and organizational memory.

Managers should create opportunities to discuss what implementation results mean. When progress is slower than expected, the first response should not be increased pressure. Managers should determine whether the problem lies in unclear behavior, system misalignment, weak ownership, ineffective routines, or inaccurate assumptions. Feedback should support recalibration rather than blame. This does not eliminate accountability. It helps employees identify implementation problems early. Wowerath (2026) identified reflection and feedback as mechanisms that strengthen strategy implementation. Managers should therefore use review routines to capture lessons, identify obstacles, and adjust implementation approaches.

7.7. Diagnose Execution Problems by Mechanism

The Strategy-to-Action Framework gives managers a practical diagnostic structure. Instead of asking broadly why execution is failing, managers can examine each mechanism separately. A strategy may fail because employees do not understand

the required behavior. In other cases, the behavior may be clear, but organizational systems may create barriers. Responsibility may be unclear. Review routines may be inconsistent. Performance information may be unavailable or unused.

These differences matter because each problem requires a different managerial response. Additional communication will not resolve weak decision rights. New performance measures will not correct unclear ownership. More meetings will not improve execution if strategic behaviors remain undefined. Managers should therefore diagnose the execution problem before taking corrective action.

7.8. Avoid Confusing Activity with Strategic Progress

Managers should distinguish organizational busyness from strategic progress. High levels of activity can create the appearance of implementation even when strategic outcomes remain unchanged. Areguamen (2026) emphasized this distinction in *The Execution Blueprint: Turning Strategy into Daily Motion* by arguing that execution requires visible movement toward intended outcomes.

The Strategy-to-Action Framework helps managers make this distinction. They can assess whether current activities connect to strategic behaviors, receive support from aligned systems, belong to accountable owners, operate within execution rhythms, and receive evaluation through meaningful measures. If an activity cannot connect to these elements, managers should question its strategic value. The key managerial question should shift from “What are we doing?” to “What strategic result is this activity advancing?”

7.9. Strengthen the Role of Middle Managers

Middle managers deserve particular attention because they operate between strategic direction and operational execution. They interpret senior-level priorities, coordinate teams, allocate attention, and resolve implementation problems. Recent research confirms their importance to effective strategy implementation (Christie & Tippmann, 2024; Nguyen Thi et al., 2025; Tawse et al., 2024).

Senior leaders should avoid treating middle managers as passive transmitters of strategic decisions. They should involve them in translating priorities, identifying implementation barriers, clarifying responsibilities, and designing execution routines. Middle managers also require appropriate competencies. Nguyen Thi et al. (2025) found that behavioral and strategic competencies influence implementation across organizational levels. Organizations should therefore develop managerial capability in communication, coordination, decision-making, strategic interpretation, and problem-solving. Supporting middle managers can also improve upward feedback because they often encounter execution problems before senior leaders notice them.

7.10. Treat Execution as an Ongoing Management System

The broader managerial implication is that strategy execution should be treated as an ongoing management system rather than as a temporary implementation

campaign. The literature consistently indicates that implementation depends on interconnected managerial and organizational mechanisms (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

Managers should integrate execution into normal organizational operations. Strategic priorities should influence decisions, resource allocation, routines, performance discussions, and learning processes. The objective is to reduce the separation between strategy work and daily work. The Strategy-to-Action Framework supports this integration. Behavioral translation clarifies what must change. System alignment supports the required behavior. Accountability establishes ownership. Execution cadence sustains attention. Feedback and measurement support learning and adjustment. Together, these mechanisms give managers a practical structure for connecting strategic intent with repeatable action.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This conceptual study has several limitations. First, the Strategy-to-Action Framework was developed by conceptually integrating existing strategy implementation literature rather than through primary empirical data. As a result, the relationships among behavioral translation, system alignment, accountability and ownership, execution cadence, and feedback and measurement remain theoretically derived. Their strength, sequence, and interaction require empirical testing.

Second, the study focused on literature most directly related to the framework's mechanisms. Strategy implementation draws from strategic management, organizational behavior, leadership, performance management, organizational learning, and routine theory. Other perspectives, such as change management, dynamic capabilities, organizational design, and institutional theory, may provide additional explanatory value.

Third, the framework's operation is bounded by context. Under high environmental uncertainty, shorter execution cycles and more frequent feedback may be necessary, and second-order feedback may revise strategic intent more often. In decentralized organizations, local behavioral translation and decision rights may improve responsiveness, but cross-unit alignment becomes more demanding. Under severe resource constraints, organizations may need to sequence or selectively activate the mechanisms rather than align all systems at once. In regulated settings, formal controls and approval requirements may strengthen accountability while limiting local discretion and slowing adaptation. These conditions do not negate the framework; they alter the configuration, timing, and relative influence of its mechanisms. Future studies should test these contingencies across industries, organizational sizes, ownership structures, and national settings.

The framework also assumes that the five mechanisms can be analytically distinguished, although they may overlap in practice. Accountability may be embedded in performance systems. Execution cadence may influence feedback quality. Behavioral translation may depend on routines and managerial communication. Future studies should examine these interaction effects and determine whether

some mechanisms have stronger influence than others.

Causality also requires further investigation. The framework proposes that the five mechanisms contribute to sustained organizational action, but the direction of influence may also be reciprocal. Strong execution outcomes may reinforce accountability, routines, and confidence in performance systems. Repeated organizational action may also reshape strategic intent over time. Longitudinal studies would be useful for examining these reciprocal relationships.

Future research should also examine the framework's sequencing. Some organizations may need system redesign before they can clarify behavioral expectations. Others may begin with ownership, cadence, or measurement reforms. Comparative studies could determine whether different sequences produce different implementation outcomes.

Each mechanism also offers opportunities for empirical testing. Researchers could examine whether behavioral translation predicts implementation consistency; whether alignment among structures, incentives, resources, and decision processes improves execution; whether clearer decision rights strengthen accountability; and whether execution cadence improves continuity without creating administrative burden. Future studies could also distinguish measurement systems that merely report outcomes from those that actively support learning and adjustment.

The distinction between organizational activity and strategically aligned action also warrants empirical testing. Researchers could develop measures that differentiate activity volume from strategic progress and examine whether activity bias contributes to weak execution. The role of middle managers should remain central to this agenda because they shape interpretation, coordination, accountability, cadence, and upward feedback (Christie & Tippmann, 2024; Nguyen Thi et al., 2025; Tawse et al., 2024).

Methodologically, future research could use quantitative, qualitative, longitudinal, and mixed-method designs. Surveys could test relationships among the mechanisms, while case studies and interviews could explain how the mechanisms operate in practice. Cross-country studies could also examine whether managerial authority, accountability expectations, communication patterns, and decision rights shape the framework differently across institutional environments.

Overall, the study's limitations identify a clear empirical research agenda. The Strategy-to-Action Framework provides a structured foundation for examining how strategic intent becomes sustained organizational action. Future research can strengthen that foundation by testing its mechanisms, interactions, contextual conditions, and outcomes.

9. Conclusion

This conceptual study aimed to explain how organizations can translate strategic intent into sustained organizational action. The study addressed a persistent challenge in strategy implementation: organizations may formulate clear strategies yet

struggle to embed those strategies in daily behavior, systems, responsibilities, routines, and performance processes. Recent scholarship confirms that implementation depends on the interaction of managerial and organizational mechanisms, not on strategy formulation alone (Friesl et al., 2021; Holm et al., 2026; Tawse & Tabesh, 2021).

The study identified the strategy-action gap as the distance between declared strategic intent and the actions repeatedly performed to advance that intent. This distinction matters because organizational activity does not automatically translate into strategic progress. Meetings, reports, projects, and completed tasks may demonstrate effort. However, they contribute to execution only when they remain connected to intended strategic outcomes.

To address this gap, the study developed the Strategy-to-Action Framework. The framework assigns differentiated but mutually recursive roles to five mechanisms: behavioral translation mediates movement from intent to action; system alignment, accountability, and ownership enable that conversion; execution cadence reinforces continuity; and feedback and measurement adapt the mechanisms and, when warranted, strategic intent. Sustained organizational action is the proximal outcome, with strategic progress and organizational performance positioned downstream.

Behavioral translation provides the first connection between strategy and execution. Organizations must convert strategic priorities into observable behaviors, decisions, and expectations. Research on middle managers and implementation activities demonstrates that interpretation influences how strategy is enacted in practice (Christie & Tippmann, 2024; Schuler et al., 2023; Wowerath, 2026). Strategic awareness alone is therefore insufficient. Organizational actors must also understand what the strategy requires them to do differently.

System alignment provides the organizational conditions that support those behaviors. Structures, processes, resources, communication mechanisms, incentives, and performance systems can either facilitate or constrain implementation (Holm et al., 2026; Iskandar & Ardianto, 2024). The framework therefore emphasizes that execution cannot depend solely on individual commitment. Organizational systems must reinforce, not obstruct, strategic priorities.

Accountability and ownership strengthen execution by making responsibility visible. Strategic priorities require clearly assigned outcomes, responsibilities, and decision rights. Ambiguity weakens follow-through, while responsibility without authority can delay action. The study therefore links accountability with ownership and decision rights as complementary implementation mechanisms.

Execution cadence provides continuity. Strategy implementation unfolds over time and competes with routine operational demands. Recurring reviews, milestone checks, decision cycles, and feedback sessions help maintain strategic attention and reinforce follow-through. Cadence should remain purposeful and adaptive, not bureaucratic. Its value lies in sustaining attention to strategic priorities while allowing adjustment as conditions change (Friesl et al., 2021; Hodgson,

2023; Merkus et al., 2019).

Feedback and measurement complete the framework by reconnecting organizational action with strategic intent. Performance information makes progress and deviation visible. First-order feedback adjusts behavior, systems, ownership, or cadence; second-order feedback can revise strategic intent when evidence challenges underlying assumptions. Measurement therefore becomes strategically valuable when it informs learning and authorized adaptation rather than merely recording outcomes (Holm et al., 2026; Laamanen et al., 2025; Micheli & Mura, 2017; Ssekiziyivu et al., 2026).

The framework also emphasizes how these mechanisms depend on one another. Behavioral clarity without aligned systems may produce understanding without support. Aligned systems without ownership may provide resources without responsibility. Accountability without cadence may create expectations without sustained follow-through. Cadence without meaningful measurement may generate recurring activity without evidence of progress. Measurement without feedback and learning may produce information without adaptation.

This interdependence explains why isolated implementation interventions often produce limited results. Strategy execution is more likely to be sustained when the mechanisms operate as a connected system. The Strategy-to-Action Framework therefore shifts attention from individual implementation factors toward the process through which those factors reinforce one another.

The study also contributes to the distinction between organizational activity and strategically aligned action. High levels of activity can create an appearance of execution. Yet activity becomes strategically meaningful only when it advances intended outcomes. This distinction is consistent with Areguamen's (2026) argument in *The Execution Blueprint: Turning Strategy into Daily Motion*. Areguamen emphasizes that execution requires systems, accountability, rhythm, feedback, discipline, and visible progress rather than activity alone.

From a managerial perspective, the framework provides a practical diagnostic structure. Leaders can assess whether strategic priorities have been translated into behavior, supported by systems, assigned to clear owners, sustained through recurring routines, and evaluated through meaningful feedback. This approach helps identify where execution is weakening before managers introduce corrective action.

The study is conceptual and therefore requires empirical validation. Future research should test the five mechanisms across industries, organizational sizes, national contexts, and levels of environmental uncertainty. Researchers should also examine the sequencing, interaction effects, and boundary conditions associated with the framework. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies may be especially useful for examining how the mechanisms evolve.

The central conclusion of this study is that sustained organizational action emerges as recurring, strategically aligned decisions and behaviors that persist across execution cycles and adapt through feedback. Planning alone does not pro-

duce this proximal outcome, nor does implementation consistency alone demonstrate strategic progress or organizational performance. Sustained action becomes more likely when organizations translate strategic priorities into role-specific behavior, support that behavior with aligned systems, connect accountability with decision rights, reinforce action through execution cadence, and use feedback to adjust execution or revise strategic intent when evidence warrants. The Strategy-to-Action Framework provides a conceptual foundation for examining that differentiated and recursive process.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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