


## THE ROLE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN SETTING STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Sema YİĞİT<sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

*Although strategic management is the job of top management, the participation of all employees in the process will affect its functioning and effectiveness. As elements of directional strategies, mission, vision, goals, organizational values, and strategies provide to all members of the organization a framework for involving strategic management process. In the study, the role of internal communication is considered as a bottleneck in strategic direction, and it is aimed to determine the bottleneck's effect. According to this aim, data were obtained via survey method from 15 managers and 182 employees of a textile company in Istanbul. Results showed that the most important tools for providing strategic direction are meetings, intranet, business journals, and bulletin boards.*

**Keywords:** Strategic Management, Setting Strategic Direction, Internal Communication

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## STRATEJİK YÖNLENDİRMEDE İÇ İLETİŞİMİN ROLÜ

Sema YİĞİT<sup>1</sup>

ÖZ

*Stratejik yönetim her ne kadar üst yönetimin işi ise de tüm çalışanların katılımı sürecin işleyişini ve etkinliğini etkileyecektir. Stratejik yönlendirme sağlayan unsurlar olarak organizasyonun misyonu, vizyonu, örgütsel değerleri, stratejik amaçları ve geliştirdiği stratejiler örgütün tüm üyelerinin stratejik yönetim sürecine dâhil olmalarını sağlar. Bu çalışmada iç iletişimin stratejik yönelimdeki rolü bir darboğaz olarak ele alınmış ve bu darboğazın etkisinin belirlenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Bu amaç doğrultusunda İstanbul'da faaliyet gösteren bir tekstil işletmesinde yapılan çalışmada veriler anket yöntemi ile 15 yöneticiden ve 182 çalışandan elde edilmiştir. Sonuçlar stratejik yönelimde en fazla önemi olan araçların toplantılar, intranet, işletme dergisi ve panolar olduğunu göstermiştir.*

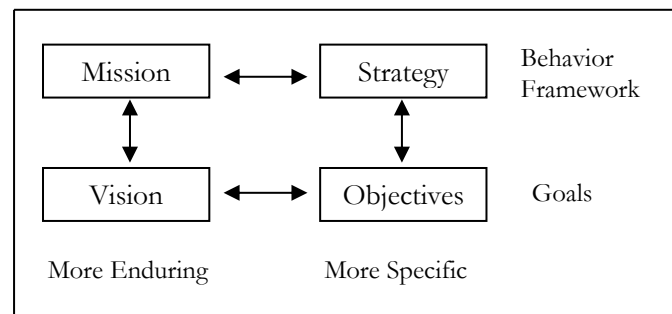
**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Stratejik Yönetim, Stratejik Yönlendirme, İç İletişim

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Mission, vision, values, and strategic goals are usually called directional strategies because they guide strategists to make significant decisions (Ginter et al., 2013). Usually, it is recommended that defining the directional strategies should be done after analyzing the external environment and internal organization (Harrison & John, 2007; Hitt et al., 2010; Rainey, 2010; Ülgen & Mirze, 2010) but sometimes defining them is considered as the first step of the strategic management process (Schermerhorn, 2010; Hill & Jones, 2011, 2012).

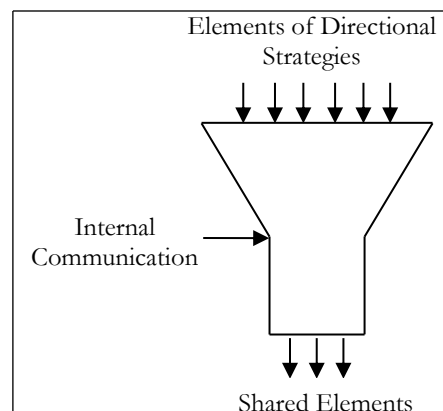
According to Ginter et al. (2013) there is rarely a clear distinction among the concepts and terms used in these statements, especially mission, vision, and value statements. Mission, vision, strategies, and objectives can be differentiated and fused to reinforce one another, in the manner described in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1:** Mission, Vision, Strategy, and Objectives  
(Source: Cummings&Davies, 1994, p. 149)

According to Drucker (2008), every enterprise requires a commitment to common goals and shared values. Without such commitment, there is only a mob rather than an enterprise. Because of this, every business should identify its mission, vision, values, goals, and strategies to gain a competitive advantage. When the employees of a business share common goals, they tend to be more motivated and more satisfied in their careers.

Knowing something is the first step to ensuring adopting and sharing it. Here, internal communication has a critical role in organizations. All employees can be aware of elements of directional strategies only through internal communication. Thus, internal communication plays a role as a bottleneck.



**Figure 2:** Internal Communication as a Bottleneck for Strategic Direction

In a broad description, internal communication is communication within an organization. It is used for accomplishing many goals like providing people with the information they need to do their jobs effectively. From a strategic management perspective, one of the important reasons for using it is to communicate elements of directional strategies clearly to all employees.

When determining the elements, it is needed to pay attention to a few points for communicating them easily. Businesses should have simple, clear, and unifying objectives. The mission of the organization must be clear enough and big enough to provide a common vision. The goals that embody it must be clear, common, and constantly reconsidered (Drucker, 2008).

## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

### **2.1. Organization's Mission**

Some organizations take the view that mission is primarily a strategic tool, an intellectual discipline that defines their reason for existence and target market. In this context, it is perceived as the first step in strategic management. Other organizations see mission as the cultural glue which consists of strong norms and values. According to this view, mission enables them to function as a collective unity (Campbell & Yeung, 1991). Although a mission can be used as cultural glue, it should be defined initially. It wouldn't be reasonable to wait until it appears over time along with norms and values. Because the organization's mission provides the framework or context within which strategies are formulated (Hill & Jones, 2011).

The mission describes what it is that the company does (Hill & Jones, 2011), what the organization's values, aspirations, and reason for being are (Daft, 2008), and what its character and identity are (Campbell & Yeung, 1991).

The mission statement includes both organization's business definition (manufactured goods and offered services, production operations, explanations about markets) and distinct (business *philosophy, values, business approaches*) properties (Ulgen & Mirze, 2010).

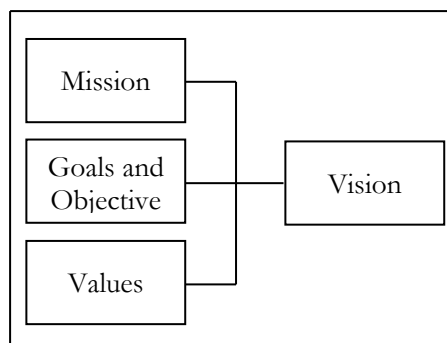
Definition of the organization's business stresses the need for a customer-oriented rather than a product-oriented business definition (Hill & Jones, 2011). Customer-oriented business definitions contain answers to questions like "Who is the customer?" "Where is the customer?" "What does the customer buy?" "And what is valuable to the customer?" (Drucker, 1986).

A well-defined mission is a basis for the development of all subsequent goals and plans. Without a clear mission, goals and plans may be developed cursory and not take the organization in the direction it needs to go (Daft, 2008). Also, without understanding the mission, the objectives, and the strategy of the enterprise, managers cannot be managed, organizations cannot be designed, and managerial jobs cannot be made effective (Drucker, 1986).

### **2.2. Organization's Vision**

Vision is a term that began to become popular in the late 1970s and was well-established by the mid-1980s (Hussey, 1998). It is often associated with the founder of the organization and represents the desired state that the organization aspires to achieve in the future. Vision statements reflect a firm's values and aspirations and are intended to capture the heart and mind of each employee and, many of its other stakeholders (Hitt et al, 2010). In contrast with goals and objectives, a vision does not change over time it tends to be enduring (Henry, 2008; Hitt et al, 2010).

Vision statements should include organizational values, the organization's mission, and objectives, in the manner described in Figure 3 below.



**Figure 3: Elements of Vision**  
(Source: Ülgen & Mirze, 2010, p. 182)

A clear and shared vision and top management commitment are essential (Coulson-Thomas, 1992) and organizations should translate the vision from words to pictures with a vivid description of what it will be like to achieve its goal (Collins and Porras, 1996). Some of the benefits of managing an organization with a vision are described by Lipton (1996). A vision enhances a wide range of performance measures, promotes change, provides the basis for a strategic plan, motivates individuals, facilitates recruitment of talent, and helps keep decision-making in context (Lipton, 1996).

### 2.3. Organizational Values

Organizational values as the beliefs shared by organizational members (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996) and state how managers and employees should conduct themselves, how they should do business, and how they should help a company to achieve its mission (Hill & Jones, 2011).

Within organizations, values convey information about expectations, organizational culture, norms, and other formal and informal rules, which connect employees to the broader organizational context (Johnson&Jackson,2009). Just as personal values define what individuals consider to be essentially desirable and guide their actions and judgments to these ends, organizational values play an important guiding and directing role in the functioning of the organization (Dobni et al, 2000).

Organizational values need not be shared throughout an organization for effective strategy formulation. If employees and managers share a strong commitment to positive organizational values, it may serve to get a competitive advantage and may be a key factor in successful implementation efforts (Badovick & Beatty, 1987).

### 2.4. Strategic Goals

Broad statements describing where the organization wants to be in the future are called strategic goals. They pertain to the organization as a whole rather than to specific divisions or departments. They are the stated intentions of what the organization wants to achieve (Daft, 2008). In this sense, goals can be described as a precise and measurable side of visions in a specific period of time (Ülgen & Mirze, 2010). The purpose of goals is to specify with precision what must be done if the company is to attain its mission or vision (Hill and Jones, 2011). Goals must have some criteria to help improve achievement (Daft, 2008). These are:

- Specific and measurable
- Cover key result areas
- Challenging but realistic
- Defined time period
- Linked to rewards

Usually business has a wide variety of goals. Goals are classified as formal and informal, strategic and functional, economic and non-economic (Ülgen & Mirze, 2010), short-term and long-term (Eren, 2013), strategic, tactical, and operational (Daft, 2008) based on different contexts.

## 2.5. Strategies

A strategy of a corporation is a comprehensive plan stating how the corporation will achieve its mission and objectives (Hunger & Wheelen, 2010) also strategy is an integrated and coordinated set of commitments and actions designed to exploit core competencies and gain a competitive advantage. The chosen strategy indicates what the firm will do as well as what the firm will not do. A firm's strategy also demonstrates how it differs from its competitors (Hitt et al, 2010) and strategy involves creating fit among a company's activities (Porter, 1996). Mintzberg and Waters (1985) compare intended strategies with realized strategies. Intended strategies are planned strategies and they are the result of a deliberate strategy process. Realized strategies are what the organization actually did. These are the results of an emergent strategy process (Mintzberg, 2007). The typical business firm usually considers three types of (corporate, business, and functional) strategy (Hunger and Wheelen, 2010).

According to Gandellini et al (2012) among the various definitions found in the literature the following combination of concepts best conveys the nature and purpose of strategy:

- Set of decisions,
- Related to the allocation of resources,
- Over the medium-long term,
- To one or more product/market combinations,
- In view of specific objectives,
- Considering external opportunities and threats,
- Internal capabilities and constraints,
- Definition of the related action plans.

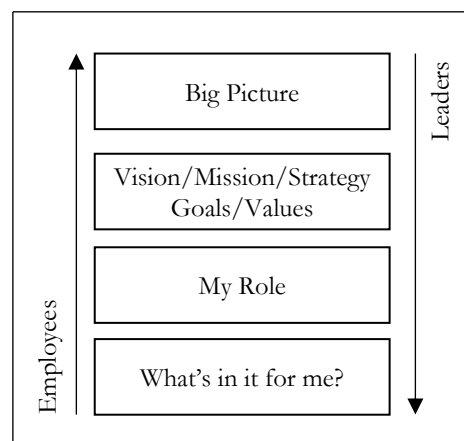
## 2.6. Internal Communication

Internal communication is seen as a vital instrument to business success and when done well can provide strategic advantage through aligning employee efforts, sharing knowledge, and engaging their passion (Quirke, 2008).

According to Van Riel (2007), communication activities are typically classified as management communications, marketing communications, and organizational communications within organizations. Internal communication is positioned within organizational communications like public relations, public affairs, environmental, investor relations, labor market, and corporate advertising.

Internal communication can be defined as an organization's managed communication system where employees are regarded as public or stakeholder groups (Yeomans, 2009). It consists of all methods (internal newsletter, intranet) used by a firm to communicate with its employees (Cornelissen, 2004).

Communication ensures the effective functioning of management activities as a message exchange process in organizations. Designing the management and organizational form in a way that allows open communication and encouraging employees to establish effective open communication play a very important role in the success of the communication process. One of the essential roles of internal communication is to provide better alignment between employees' communication and management, in the manner described in Figure 4.



**Figure 4:** Internal Communication from The Perspective of Leaders and Employees  
(Source: Adapted from Baron, 2006, p. 94)

Other important roles of internal communication are:

- Supporting major change programs,
- Communicating messages from top management,
- Communicating the business mission/vision/values,
- Raising awareness of business issues and priorities,
- Raising/maintaining the internal credibility of the top team,
- Employee motivation,
- Employee engagement,
- Facilitating feedback and
- Enhancing managers' communication skills (Yeomans,2009).

Several tools can be used in internal communication in business. Especially along with the improvements in technology the variety is further increased. Internal communication tools are classified in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Internal Communication Tools

<b>Face-to-Face Communication</b>	<b>Events</b>
Formal meetings	Conferences
One-to-one meetings	Presentations and speeches
Team briefings	Roadshows themed events, and business simulations
Mentoring, shadowing, secondment and visits	Workshops and seminars
Walking the talk	<b>Computer Based Communication</b>
Managed meals	Letters and memos
<b>Electronic Communication</b>	E-mail, bulletin boards, and online conferences
Telephone and voice mail	Multimedia
Fax	Documents on disk or via modem/network
Audiotape	Intranet
Audioconferencing	Twitter, website, blogs, social networks
Moving light screens	Video-sharing platforms
Video	<b>Printed Communication</b>
Videoconferencing	Magazines and newspapers
Videotext	Newsletters
Internal television systems	Manuals, guides and handbooks
Time-shift broadcast	Brochures and reports
	Briefing packs
	Notice boards

(Source: Adapted from Newbold & Scholes 1997, pp. 98-99)

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### 3.1. Methodology

A business where is used a wider range of internal communication tools was selected to conduct a study on behalf of getting more accurate outcomes. In this way, it was aimed to involve as many as possible communication tools for evaluation. Data was obtained from managers via a face-to-face survey method. But it couldn't be possible to conduct a survey face-to-face for employees because of the quantity. While all managers were included in the study, 182 of the 261 employees could be included.

The study consisted of two steps. The first step was interviewing with top management to determine whether the company's mission, vision, organizational values, strategic goals, and strategies were stated or not. Additionally, internal communication tools were identified and used in the business with the help of interviews. According to the outcomes which had been obtained by the first step, it tried to get data from other managers and employees.

### 3.2. Findings

It is observed that all elements of directional strategies are written and a significant part of them are developed by managers. Many types of internal communication tools are used in the business as seen in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Internal Communication Tools Used in the Business

Printed bulletin	Handbooks	Seminar
Meetings	Events	Reports/Feedbacks
Electronic bulletin	Training/Orientation	Poster
Intranet	Slogans	Website
Blog, Twitter	Bulletin boards	Coffee table conversation
Video	E-mail	Tele/video conference

There are 4 female and 11 male managers whose ages range from 27 to 57. Seven managers of them have high school degrees, rest of them have bachelor's degrees.

**Table 3:** Degree of Managers' Awareness of Elements of Directional Strategies

	Completely	Partially	None
<b>Vision</b>	14	1	0
<b>Mission</b>	14	1	0
<b>Organizational values</b>	15	0	0
<b>Strategic goals</b>	15	0	0
<b>Strategies</b>	11	4	0

According to Table 3, vision and mission are known completely by 14 managers, organizational values and goals are known completely by all participants and business strategies are known completely by 11 managers.

**Table 4:** Internal Communication Tools Seen as Information Resources for Strategic Direction by Managers

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Meeting</b>	14	93,33
<b>Intranet</b>	12	80,00
<b>Bulletin boards</b>	6	40,00
<b>Training/Orientation</b>	5	33,33
<b>Business journal</b>	3	20,00
<b>Handbooks</b>	2	13,33
<b>Mail</b>	1	6,67

There are 79 female and 103 male managers whose ages range from 18 to 54. Their experience duration in the business is range from 1 to 14 years. Also, it is determined that 101 employees' education level is primary, 54 employees' education level is high school, and the rest of all has received a college education.

**Table 5:** Degree of Employees' Awareness of Elements of Directional Strategies

	Completely	Partially	None
<b>Vision</b>	177	4	1
<b>Mission</b>	177	4	1
<b>Organizational values</b>	175	7	0
<b>Strategic goals</b>	177	5	0
<b>Strategies</b>	175	7	0

As seen in Table 5 all elements of directional strategies are known entirely by an important part of employees.



**Table 6:** Internal Communication Tools Seen as Information Resources for Strategic Direction by Employees

	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Meeting</b>	159	87,36
<b>Business Journal</b>	131	71,98
<b>Bulletin board</b>	123	67,58
<b>Intranet</b>	53	29,12
<b>Training/Orientation</b>	41	22,53
<b>Website</b>	40	21,98
<b>Events</b>	19	10,44
<b>Reports</b>	13	7,14
<b>Handbooks</b>	8	4,40

#### 4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

*Top management is responsible* for the *strategic* decisions that affect the organization as a whole. However, it is impossible to be managed all the strategic management processes by only top managers. Participation of all managers at any level and other employees in the process is essential. The strategic direction stage of the strategic management process ensures that participation is effective. *Strategic* direction (mission, vision, goals, organizational values, strategic goals, and strategies) provides all members of the organization a framework for involving strategic management process. Communicating the elements is at least as important as defining them. Here internal communication is a vital component. The strategic value of internal communication is the result of the efficient and effective functioning of a set of communicative structures that can spread values and messages within the organization (Meirinhos, Cardoso, Silva, Rêgo, & Oliveira, 2022, p. 2).

In this context, it is aimed to determine the role of internal communication in strategic direction. It was identified that all the elements of directional strategies were developed by the managers in the business. This has a positive effect on knowing and sharing the elements. The business uses many types of traditional and modern communication tools effectively. However, not all of these are used for strategic direction. While some of these are used for increasing organizational commitment and motivation, some of these are used for performing other business functions. However, although all internal communication tools have different effects, they all contribute to the strategic direction. It was revealed that meeting is the most important tool for strategic direction for both managers and other employees. Intranet and bulletin boards are also important tools for managers. According to other employees, business journals and bulletin boards are effective tools. Consequently, it can be stated that the most important tools for providing strategic direction are meetings, intranet, business journals, and bulletin boards. The results may be very useful for other businesses to choose internal communication tools in the strategic orientation phase. Attempting to make a study like this in the future, is important for the generalizability of the results.

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### **ETHICAL CONSIDERATION**

In this study, all the rules specified to be followed within the scope of "Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive" were complied with. None of the actions specified under the title of "Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics", which is the second part of the directive, were not carried out.

### **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Misyon, vizyon, değerler ve stratejik hedefler, stratejistlere önemli kararlar almaları için rehberlik ettikleri için genellikle yönlendirme stratejileri olarak adlandırılır (Ginter ve diğerleri, 2013). Genellikle yönlendirme stratejilerinin tanımlanmasının dış çevre ve iç organizasyon analiz edildikten sonra yapılması önerilir (Harrison ve John 2007; Hitt vd., 2010; Rainey, 2010; Ülgen ve Mirze, 2010) ancak bazen bunları tanımlamak, stratejik yönetim sürecinin ilk adımı olarak kabul edilir (Schermerhorn, 2010; Hill & Jones, 2011, 2012). Bir şeyi bilmek, onu benimsemeyi ve paylaşmayı sağlamanın ilk adımıdır. Bu noktada örgütlerde iç iletişim kritik bir role sahiptir. Tüm çalışanlar, yönlendirme stratejilerinin unsurlarından ancak iç iletişim yoluyla haberdar olabilir. Böylece, iç iletişim bir darboğaz rolü oynar. Geniş bir tanımla, iç iletişim bir kuruluş içindeki iletişimdir. İnsanlara işlerini etkili bir şekilde yapmaları için ihtiyaç duydukları bilgileri sağlamak gibi birçok hedefi gerçekleştirmek için kullanılır.

İç iletişimin stratejik yönlendirmedeki bu kritik etkisini test etmeyi amaçlayan bu çalışmada daha doğru sonuçlara ulaşmak adına geniş bir iç iletişim araçları yelpazesinin kullanıldığı bir işletme seçilmiştir. Bu şekilde değerlendirme için mümkün olduğunca çok sayıda iletişim aracının dahil edilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Veriler, yöneticilerden yüz yüze anket yöntemiyle elde edilmiştir. Ancak sayı nedeniyle çalışanlara yüz yüze anket yapmak mümkün olmamıştır. Araştırmaya tüm yöneticiler dahil edilirken 261 çalışandan 182'si dahil edilebilmiştir.

Çalışma iki adımdan oluşmaktadır. İlk adım, şirketin misyon, vizyon, kurumsal değerleri, stratejik hedefleri ve stratejilerinin ifade edilip edilmediğini belirlemek için üst yönetim ile görüşmelerdir. Ayrıca yapılan görüşmelerle kurum içi iletişim araçları belirlenmiştir. İlk adımda elde edilen sonuçlara göre diğer yönetici ve çalışanlardan veri alınmaya çalışılmıştır.

Yönlendirme stratejilerinin tüm unsurlarının yazılı olduğu ve önemli bir kısmının yöneticiler tarafından geliştirildiği görülmektedir.

**Tablo 1.**

*İşletmede Kullanılan İç İletişim Araçları*

Basılı bülten	El kitapları	Seminer
Toplantılar	Olaylar	Raporlar/Geri Bildirimler
Elektronik bülten	Eğitim/Oryantasyon	Afiş
Intranet	Sloganlar	İnternet sitesi
Blog, Twitter	Bülten panoları	Sehpa sohbeti
Video	E-posta	Tele/video konferans

**Tablo 2.**

*Yönlendirme Stratejilerinin Unsurları Konusunda Yöneticilerin Farkındalık Derecesi*

	Tamamen	Kısmen	Hiç
<b>Vizyon</b>	14	1	0
<b>Misyon</b>	14	1	0
<b>Kurumsal değerler</b>	15	0	0
<b>Stratejik amaçlar</b>	15	0	0
<b>Stratejiler</b>	11	4	0

**Tablo 3.***Çalışanlar Tarafından Stratejik Yönlendirme İçin Bilgi Kaynağı Olarak Görülen İç İletişim Araçları*

	<b>Frekans</b>	<b>Yüzde (%)</b>
<b>Toplantı</b>	159	87,36
<b>İş Dergisi</b>	131	71,98
<b>Bülten Panosu</b>	123	67,58
<b>Intranet</b>	53	29,12
<b>Eğitim/Oryantasyon</b>	41	22,53
<b>İnternet sitesi</b>	40	21,98
<b>Olaylar</b>	19	10,44
<b>Raporlar</b>	13	7,14
<b>El kitapları</b>	8	4,40

Yönlendirme stratejilerinin tüm unsurlarının işletmedeki yöneticiler tarafından geliştirildiği tespit edilmiştir. Bu da unsurları bilme ve paylaşma konusunda olumlu bir etkiye sahiptir. İşletme, geleneksel ve modern birçok iletişim aracını etkin bir şekilde kullanmaktadır. Ancak, bunların hepsi stratejik yönlendirme için kullanılmamaktadır. Bunların bir kısmı örgütsel bağlılığı ve motivasyonu artırmak için kullanılırken bir kısmı da diğer iş fonksiyonlarını yerine getirmek için kullanılmaktadır. Ancak tüm iç iletişim araçlarının farklı etkileri olsa da hepsi stratejik yönlendirmeye katkı sağlamaktadır.

Araştırma sonuçlarına göre toplantıların hem yöneticiler hem de diğer çalışanlar için stratejik yönlendirme için en önemli araç olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Intranet ve bülten panoları da yöneticiler için önemli araçlardır. Diğer çalışanlara göre, iş dergileri ve ilan panoları etkili araçlardır. Sonuç olarak, stratejik yönlendirme sağlamada en önemli araçların toplantılar, intranet, iş dergileri ve ilan tahtaları olduğu söylenebilmektedir.