



Information as the link between purpose, processes, and people: a study of the portuguese institutions

A informação como elemento de integração entre propósito, processos e pessoas: um estudo em instituições portuguesas

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Abstract: For information management to effectively meet its goal, companies must clearly know the information concept they are pursuing, to whom it belongs, how it is stored, and who is responsible for managing, controlling, and using it. This research aims to evaluate the role of information as an integrating element of purpose, process, and people in Portuguese organizations that focus on collecting, processing, and disseminating information. It is an interdisciplinary study included in the context of Administration and Information Science in the aspect in which information and its flows connect with the various components of the strategic alignment of organizations. This exploratory study adopted a multi-case methodology. Three Portuguese organizations were studied. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with managers of the organizations under study. The cases were analyzed individually and subsequently subjected to comparative analysis. The findings suggest that, despite the centrality of information in their strategic purpose, the organizations surveyed do not use the information in its internal management and do not present the same effectiveness depicted in the provision of information services to external parties.

Keywords: Strategic alignment; Purpose; Process; People.

Resumo: Para que o gerenciamento da informação seja efetivo no cumprimento de seu objetivo deve-se saber com clareza o que é a informação para a empresa, quem a possui, como é conservada, quem é o responsável pelo seu gerenciamento, como controlar e utilizar a informação. Esta pesquisa tem por objetivo avaliar o papel da informação como elemento integrador do propósito, do processo e das pessoas em organizações de captação, processamento e disseminação de informação em organizações portuguesas. É uma pesquisa interdisciplinar e insere-se no contexto da Ciência da Administração e da Ciência da Informação no aspecto em que a informação e seus fluxos colaboram com os vários componentes do processo de alinhamento estratégico da organização. O estudo de natureza exploratória adotou uma metodologia multicaso. Foram estudados três casos de organizações portuguesas. Os dados foram recolhidos através de entrevistas semiestruturadas com profissionais da gestão das organizações pesquisadas. Os casos foram analisados individualmente e, posteriormente, procedeu-se à sua análise comparativa. Os resultados obtidos indicam que, apesar da centralidade da informação no seu propósito estratégico, as organizações pesquisadas não utilizam a informação em sua gestão interna e não revelam a mesma efetividade que possuem na prestação desses serviços informacionais.

Palavras-chave: Alinhamento estratégico; Propósito; Processo; Pessoas.

1 Introduction

Corporate organizations can be found everywhere. They differ with respect to size, to the way they act, to their products and services, resources and geographical and operational spread, and rely on a system of resources to achieve their goals through an information processing network.

Their search for competitive advantage increasingly depends on their ability to make decisions, devise strategies, and transform these into daily actions

to which their employees can contribute, thereby producing significant results. In this process, it all boils down to the critical role of information for this to materialize.

The aim of management is to improve organizational operation through a sharpened decision-making process. The collection, processing, storage, retrieval and distribution of information all combine to create knowledge within the organization and enable

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Received Sept. 9, 2015 - Accepted Jan. 20, 2016

Financial support: CAPES – Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (Processo BEX 6175/14-7).

management to that effect. Thus, in order to carry out, plan, manage and execute the tasks assigned to them, managers need to have appropriate, specific and relevant information.

A company's performance depends on how all its parts interact with one another, rather than on how they function on their own. It further depends on how information is processed and disseminated, and it is with this in mind that Management and Information Science converge to give their contribution to the organizations.

Information Science is concerned about the principles and practices of information production, organization and distribution, about the study of information from the time it is produced until it is used, and also about how it is transmitted in a myriad of forms and through a variety of channels. Information Science is the area of knowledge that looks into the properties and behavior of information, as well as the forces that determine its flows and how to process it in order to efficiently and effectively access, disseminate and use it.

Hence, the more sustained and developed the organizational system, the environment and its operational functional, the more relevant the information within organizations. This is a process by which the organization is able to collect meaningful insights about itself and its corporate environment, and to inform the environment thereof. Information is, therefore, a vital means of integration that needs to be assessed with respect to the impact on such an organizational integration process.

Thus, in order to carry out, plan, manage and execute the tasks assigned to them, managers need to have appropriate, specific and relevant information that should be treated as the managers' basic requirement for decision-making and for the effective improvement of organizational performance

Organizations increasingly need to align their strategies with internal business processes and with people as an ongoing process, so as to have a comprehensive insight of themselves, which can be achieved by replacing the traditional vertical short-sighted view with a broad horizontal view. According to Morrison et al. (2011), this ensures that actions are done in a concerted way and geared more to realizing the strategies of the organization.

This is the backdrop of our research, one in which we seek to describe the situation of information collection, processing and dissemination organizations, namely libraries, museums and archives.

While it is for libraries to preserve, update and disclose the collections in their custody, museums are responsible for studying, preserving and disseminating history and memory; archives, in turn, are entrusted with the management, collection, technical treatment and preservation of documents. Being institutions that handle information as their principal "product",

our research seeks to understand and describe how they operate internally, considering information as the element required for realizing the said strategic alignment, and to find the answer to the question – based on the popular proverb – "does the carpenter's house always need work? "

Our research falls within the field of strategic management from the viewpoint of Management, and of information management from the viewpoint of Information Science. Through case studies we have sought to take account of the interdisciplinarity of Management Science and Information Science in the study of strategic alignment, based on information about: the purpose, which can also be viewed as the mission or the *raison d'être* of the company; processes, which can be understood as the management model; and people, in organizations dedicated to the collection, processing and dissemination of information. We have looked at how the strategy is processed, how it is deployed, and, finally, how the feedback thereof is given to enable the follow-up and monitoring of actions and strategic intentions, aiming to appreciate the role of information in the information environment of the organizations studied.

This research aims to evaluate the role of information as an integrating element of the purpose, process and people in organizations dedicated to the collection, processing and dissemination of information through a multiple case study. It fits into the context of information management in that information and its flows contribute with the various parts of the organization's strategic alignment process.

Our research has found that the analyzed institutions do not base their strategic alignment of purpose, process and people on information. Although efforts are made to seek alignment towards achieving the strategy, it can be said that information is not the key component in organizational integration. Thus, we have concluded that the answer to our question is that the carpenter's house always needs work.

In addition to this introduction, this article is divided into four parts. The first part focuses on the basis of our research, addressing the main concepts related to the topic. The second section deals with the methodology approach, describing the basic components of the process underlying the research. The third section reports on the investigation results and, correlating them to the concepts presented in the first section, it discusses the main aspects and learnings from the investigation. The final comments provide an overview of the investigation, its results and lessons learned.

2 Literature review

The origins of the concept of alignment lie in the contingency approach studies (Venkatraman & Camillus, 1984), according to which there is no single

better way of management, and everything depends on the environment context that is important for the organization. In other words, it seeks the adequacy and necessary adjustments required of the organization to better use its capabilities and resources to respond to its environment.

An organization is aligned at internal level when its leaders and players act according to the company's strategy. Prieto & Carvalho (2004) argue that recent studies refer that a properly implemented strategy is a relevant practice to good organizational performance. Developing and implementing strategies adequately has been seen as an important means of achieving better organizational performance. According to Costa et al. (2009), the alignment of the company's day-to-day activities with the strategies can become a relevant distinguishing factor for organizations.

Over the years, many authors have addressed the issue of strategic alignment. Among these, we note Henderson & Venkatraman (1992), Beer & Eisenstat (2000), Prieto (2006), Kaplan & Norton (1997), Galbraith et al. (2002), and Morrison et al. (2011), all of whom point to the idea that for alignment to occur, resources and capabilities need to be integrated, although they do not agree on how it should be realized.

Strategic alignment is an important business management tool that aims to provide the company with the conditions to operate in its line of business, optimizing its resources towards its goals. This corresponds to the adequacy and functional integration between the external and internal environment with a view to developing competences and maximizing organizational performance (Prieto, 2006); Kaplan & Norton, 1997; Okumus, 2001; Hussey, 2007).

It should also be noted that in management-related disciplines, more specifically the management of organizations, the alignment topic can also be found in management by objectives (MBO) and in management by guidelines, which take their names from the *Hoshin kanri* plan (Prieto & Carvalho, 2004). Other relevant works introduced the resource-based organization perspective (RBV), such as the approaches of Galbraith (1977) and Waterman et al. (1980).

Other authors have also addressed the topic of strategic alignment and the specific issues of its development, for example, Sender (1997), who refers to the importance of human resources for organizational alignment. As for Gordo (2010), performance management is an important tool for organizations seeking strategic alignment, as it provides the information for decision making. Afonso (2014) states that performance assessment is key to achieving strategic alignment. This author sought to evaluate the use of the performance assessment tool and came to the conclusion that if performance assessment and its criteria are not fully integrated into the strategic alignment, this hampers its materialization.

The entire organization seen as a company is an open system that is part of a dynamic environment that contains other systems, and in which often enough it is difficult to clearly define its boundaries due to the multiple relations between environment and system. Information can be regarded as one of the most important assets of the organizations and that which will enable the interconnection between the external and internal environments of those organizations. It should be noted that, in spite of this, there is little focus on information in relation to strategic environment.

Information is the element that acts as the beacon for organizational integration and the promotion of organizational alignment. It is used in strategic alignment for integrating purpose, processes and people, and provides the conditions for promoting the balance between organizational environments and their information spaces, both within the company and in the transfer of information among companies, in a manner adapted to the specific needs and requirements of each environment. It is for the information spaces, through information flows, to meet the demands for information both inter and intra-organizational environments.

Strategic Management and Information Management ought to go hand in hand in order to achieve alignment. The former can be regarded as the creation, choice and formulation of the strategy, the translation into action by implementing the necessary changes and, finally, the monitoring and assessment of its effectiveness (McGee & Prusak, 1994; Ferlie & Ongaro, 2015).

Information Management, in turn, can be conceptualized as the process of applying the administrative processes of information acquisition, organization, monitoring, dissemination and use in the management of organizations. Its principal goal is to identify and optimize the information resources of an organization and its information capacity, allowing the organization to learn to adapt to business environment changes (Tarapanoff, 2001).

The concept of information management has its peculiarities, since how it sees Management is different from how Information Science sees it. Regarding Management, it covers the information collection, storage and dissemination throughout the organizational environment, without, nevertheless, taking Knowledge Management and Competitive Intelligence into consideration. Information Science addresses the management of information taking all aspects and applications of information into consideration, and considers that the information cycle encompasses all issues inherent to the use of information, Knowledge Management and Competitive Intelligence included (Oliveira et al., 2011).

McGee & Prusak (1994) take this combination of Strategic Management and Information Management to provide all the elements necessary to apply

information in strategy. This can be approached as a four-pronged exercise:

- [1] **Information and strategic definition**– the information on the competitive environment and the current organization, to help managers identify opportunities and threats to the business, and devise a plan to ensure a more effective response;
- [2] **Information and strategic execution** – the information both from the viewpoint of internal circulation and of its relation with the environment, to implement the strategic options adopted;
- [3] **Information and integration** – information that seeks consistency between plans, processes, actions and decisions in support of strategies, objectives and overall goals of the business, providing an effective alignment in which the understanding of strategies and goals and the use of indicators and additional information can enable planning, monitoring, analysis and improvement in the work sectors, in the main processes, and in the business as a whole;
- [4] **Information for strategic monitoring** – feedback on performance is essential to achieve a flexible business that implements its strategic goals and recognizes the need to change them when they become ineffective, demonstrated by the comprehensive performance indicators on financial and non-financial measures. This encompasses a clearly defined management process to allow the business to adapt the indicators, and the means to collect, filter and disseminate important indicators to the relevant persons in the organization.

In our research, we have considered **purpose** as the first component when determining whether or not there is strategic alignment. Efforts will be made to determine if the organization has a strategic formulation in place, as well as the mechanisms that will enable it to integrate it through strategic deployment. According to Heijden (2004), the ways in which managers think about achieving their goals and strategic actions are generally classified as rational, evolutionary and procedural.

The first one, the rational approach, deals with thought and action separately. It builds on the principle that there is a solution and it is up to the strategist to find it. The basic premise is that there is always a better solution and that the job of the strategist, who represents and thinks on behalf of the organization, is to find the solution that is closest to the ideal one,

making the best of the available resources. This approach compares the organization to a machine. It commonly emphasizes the use of mathematical and simulation models (Heijden, 2004).

Since the rational approach cannot cope with some issues in the organizations' strategy development, the evolutionary approach steps in to shift the emphasis to the complex nature of the behavior within organizations, advocating the need for random experimenting and for filtering what has gone wrong. According to this approach, there is not much sense in putting a lot of effort into trying to define a strategy, as the world is far too complex for anyone to try to control it, and that it is best to react as events happen and see which changes will be the most suitable. From this follows the possibility of devising a set of strategies to meet the psychological needs of managers, so that they can feel in control (Heijden, 2004).

Finally, the procedural approach sees the organization as a complex adaptable system, open to the environment, and reacts by adjusting to the circumstances. While the rationalists and evolutionists are not concerned with how the organizational process works, the proceduralists take the organization's internal processes into consideration during planning (Heijden, 2004).

We now turn to the second component used to determine whether or not there is strategic alignment – **process** – viewed as a way of implementing strategy within the organization and of monitoring its execution. There are two approaches to strategic implementation: process-oriented and function-oriented.

To face these challenges, Neubauer (2008) found the solution in Process Management, or as it was initially known, *Business Process Management* (BPM), which allows the organizations to quickly adapt.

The goal of process management is to deliver value to the client, so it is not merely about designing, developing and executing business processes, but also about taking the interaction between processes into consideration, controlling, analyzing and optimizing them (Kohlbacher, 2010).

In the organizational integration model enabled by strategic alignment, the process-oriented approach is one of the horizontal alignment aspects (Carvalho et al., 2012).

It is said that there is strategic alignment when purpose, processes and people are integrated. It relies on Process Management to be the link between the strategy of the business and its employees (Morrison et al., 2011). Our research, therefore, considers internal alignment without nevertheless disregarding the importance of external alignment.

Being transdisciplinary, the process represents the synchrony between inputs, activities, infrastructure and references necessary to add value to the human

being, and can be regarded as a number of actions arranged to provide a continuous flux of information, material and work (people and machines) that take up resources (time and money) to provide satisfaction to its recipient (client, space of interaction, and society) (Gonçalves, 2000; Harmon, 2007; Kohlbacher, 2010; Rosemann & Vom Brocke, 2015).

The functional approach model points to a more monologic set of actions, known as Fordism, with characteristics of the mechanistic approach of Taylor's school of business.

The third and final component used to define whether or not strategic alignment is in place is related to **people**. This is where we find the elements that will enable us to determine whether there is an appropriate capacity for building the alignment.

People play an important role in the alignment process, as it is for them to actually execute the strategy. In this regard, the development of skills and capacity building has gained force (Carvalho et al., 2012).

As stated by Zarafian (2001), competence is a practical intelligence of situations that is supported by acquired knowledge and that transforms it as the diversity of a situation increases.

From 1990 on, competence is understood as a combination of resources that the individual has, replacing, at the level of organizations, the concept of professional qualifications underpinned by workplaces (Fleury & Fleury, 1997).

Fleury & Fleury (1997) conceptualize competence as a responsible and recognized ability to act that involves the mobilization, integration, transfer of knowledge, resources, and skills that add economic value to the organization and social value to the individual.

Over time, the concept of competence has undergone changes due to productive restructuring, economic, organizational and market unpredictability, and to the changes in the labour market and its relations (Fleury & Fleury, 1997).

Thus, the concept of competence was regarded according to three dimensions: knowledge, skills and attitudes. This concept covers not only technical knowledge, but also cognition and work-related attitudes. Competence consists of knowledge, skills and attitudes (KSA) that enable an organization to achieve its goals. As denoted by the scheme itself, KSA work interdependently, that is, it is up to the individual to show a specific skill; and the individual is considered to have specific knowledge and attitudes (Durand, 2006).

In conclusion, knowledge is the set of information incorporated and structured by the individual, through which he or she processes reality, including the ability to receive information and integrate this information, and knows about the "what" and the

"why". Having the skills means having the ability to apply and use knowledge productively, including technique and expertise. Attitude, in turn, is related to the emotional and social characteristics of work, in other words, how the individual identifies with the organization's values, his or her commitment and motivation to achieve the expected results.

3 Research methodology

Information is the key element in the objectives of libraries, museums and archives, the latter ultimately being information processing organizations. Our investigation aims to understand and describe the internal operation of organizations having information as their underlying element toward strategic alignment, and to seek an answer to the question: "does the carpenter's house always need work?"

This being the central question of the investigation, we have set our goal to describe the role played by information as an integrating element of the purpose, processes and people towards the strategic alignment of organizations dedicated to the collection, processing and dissemination of information. As the basis for our study, we propose (1) to identify how the institutions establish their strategies; (2) to identify how strategy is deployed in the information-based management process, and (3) to describe the role of information in the strategic alignment of the institutions covered by our study.

We have adopted a multi-case methodology in a qualitative approach. The technical procedures involved descriptive studies, documentary research, and semi-structured interviews with managers of the organizations under study. The semi-structured interviews involved the management and managerial-level staff of each institution between March and April 2015. (Alves-Mazzot & Gewandsnajder, 2000; Yin, 2001; Cervo & Bervian, 2002; Gil, 2002).

Field research was based on the procedures proposed by Alberti (1990). The interview script was divided into three parts and addressed issues related to the purpose, processes and people in the institutions. The purpose-oriented questions – ten in total – pertain to strategic planning, interaction with clients/users, and innovation level; as for processes, fifteen questions explore process-related topics such as management model, use of information technologies, connectivity, information access and availability, and monitoring. Finally, ten people-related questions aiming to describe recruitment, selection, assessment and training of talent.

The institutions under study were the following: Soares dos Reis National Museum, under the Directorate General for Cultural Heritage of the Portuguese Government, the Porto Municipal Library, and the General Archive, linked to the Porto Municipal Council.

4 Results and discussion

We have already mentioned the three aspects taken into consideration when using information as the organizational integration element: purpose, processes and people.

4.1 Purpose

As mentioned earlier, the first component for determining whether or not strategic alignment exists is **purpose**. This purpose enables us to determine if the organization has a strategy in place, as well as the mechanisms that will enable the organization to integrate it through strategic deployment.

The ways in which managers think about achieving their goals and strategic actions are classified as rational, evolutionary and procedural.

The first one, the rational approach, deals with thought and action separately and is the most proximate to all the institutions under study: General Archive, Municipal Library, and Soares dos Reis National Museum.

Worthy of note is the strategic planning of the Municipal Council that has enabled its dependent institutions to organize their plans based on the Municipal Council's own organizational planning.

As a result of the Council's strategic planning, strategic objectives were submitted and a Balanced Scorecard (BSC) was created. However, the deployment of strategy into practice is done in a way similar to that proposed by the *Hoshin Kanri* model or Management by Guidelines. We note that methodologies merge depending on how the hierarchical structure of the Municipal Council's organizations is orchestrated.

The Soares dos Reis National Museum seeks to develop its alignment without a methodology based on the strategic planning of the Directorate General for Cultural Heritage. As regards strategy deployment, a recent study by Santos & Varejão (2015) shows that the museum is increasingly inflexible, and this is shown as the inability to define delegations of power and the failure in preparing and implementing strategic, quick and efficient answers to meet the increasing demands brought about by the transformations to which museums have been subjected.

At the General Archive and Municipal Library, holding meetings to assess strategy is not a systematized practice. There are, however, fairly frequent operational meetings to discuss issues related to the continuous improvement of quality. At the Soares dos Reis Museum, holding meetings is not common, so strategic assessment is not conducted regularly or in a participatory way.

Communication using Information Technologies is not fully used to align the three institutions; these tend to use it more for operational activities.

External information, especially that of clients, is not obtained in a proactive manner, nor is the retention of information received done systematically by the three institutions. Information is received via institutional channels, such as Talk to Us, e-mails and suggestion boxes. All three institutions know their clients well, yet they do not make the best use of this privilege to take in their information and contribute to strategic progress. We cannot overlook the fact, though, that even with the scarce means they have at their disposal, they still take most of the information received to improve the performance of their institutions.

Where the clients have their say in the matter, two aspects should be highlighted. The first one is that the General Archive and the Municipal Library conduct surveys every two years. The initiative is promoted by the Municipal Council, but is not specifically targeted to the performance of the institutions. In other words, there is no correlation with the service provided. So, being a general survey, it hardly brings any benefits to the General Archive and the Municipal Library, as they cannot use it to revise their strategies. The second aspect concerns the Soares dos Reis Museum, which does not systematically listen to its clients.

All institutions refer that they are innovative, but this is hardly so. Mention must be made of the Soares dos Reis Museum regarding its innovative approach to increasing its audience. Santos & Varejão (2015) argue that in view of the changes taking place in museums, this museum should make an added effort to find innovative management solutions.

As for monitoring at these institutions, it takes into consideration the established performance indicators so that they fulfill the information requirements in management reports, which are of little value to the strategic decisions.

The institutions have indicators, but they do not use them in their strategic decision making. The only institution that reported using these indicators to address strategic alignment-related issues was the General Archive, while indicators are rather used in continuous improvement processes.

Santos & Varejão (2015) explain that performance indicators in the Soares do Reis Museum are few, being limited to measuring the number of visitors, satisfaction, time, costs and productivity.

Finally, none of the institutions use internal information to redirect their strategies.

The second component used to determine whether or not there is strategic alignment – **process** – is viewed as

a way of implementing strategy within the organization and of monitoring its execution.

There are two approaches to strategic implementation: process-oriented and function-oriented.

All institutions have adopted the function-oriented approach. Their organizational structure is hierarchical and the decision making process is centralized, confirming the mechanistic management model. The Soares dos Reis Museum has interdisciplinary teams dedicated to project development (*ad hoc*). Santos & Varejão (2015) have referred the rigid procedures, lack of autonomy, and concentration and centralization in this museum. They add that “the organizational and management dimension is according to the concentrated and rigid hierarchical functional model”, which agrees with a hierarchical type of organization.

The Archive and the Library have adopted the Management OF Processes and not the Management BY Processes (BPM). Business Process Management is a cross-cutting concept, that is, end-to-end. In these two institutions, the link is made between the parts of the processes under their specific responsibility, in a verticalized manner. The management units are in charge of each part of the processes, and transfers take place across areas, and not as a continuous flow.

The value chain and documents of the Municipal Council are both process-oriented; however, what is noted is that practice fails to tie in with how these institutions under study act.

The aspects related to the strategic implementation processes are: the design of processes and definition of activities/tasks for achieving strategy, the use of Information Technologies in the organization and information flows. Other aspects to be considered pertain to the strategic follow-up and monitoring, and include: the existence of performance indicators and how they are formed and used, and ways of realizing the strategic follow-up and monitoring.

Once the strategy is formulated, both its implementation and monitoring need to be defined so that the organization can carry out all activities necessary to achieve its objectives and goals and, thus, adopt an integrated management model based on information.

The functional approach adopted provides for an information dynamic between the various organizational environments. The latter exist in the organization’s hierarchical levels, that is, at strategic, tactic and operational level. Nevertheless, the flow of information is low, being limited strictly to what is required by the activities of the business. This is reflected in the high flow concentration and low communication between the various areas.

In this model, information flows tend to drop down through the hierarchy, from the strategic level to the operational level, where the information should be propagated for the strategy to be implemented and for organizational integration to materialize. Moreover, information flows rise from the operational level to the strategic level for the monitoring and follow-up of operations and organizational projects.

The information dynamic corresponds to the described flows, where the information contained in the plans, programmes and projects are deployed down the hierarchical structure and the monitoring information flows upwards in the form of performance indicators.

Our research was not concerned with the comprehensiveness and depth of information in the deployed plans, nor with the indicators, *i.e.*, it was not our intention to assess contents, but rather the movement (process) of the strategic realization. In this sense, and in theory, the institutions under study fulfill the objective set for strategic implementation.

Finally, while the institutions do not rely on the information in their decision making processes, they nevertheless use it intuitively. Indicators are not analyzed systematically to generate information for strategic alignment. The information is extracted from the indicators should any irregularity or anomaly be found. In the case of the General Archive, this is done more intensely, and in the Municipal Library, in some cases, this is done to solve problems or for continuous improvement purposes.

As mentioned earlier, the third and final component used to define whether or not strategic alignment is in place relates to **people**. This is where we find the elements that will enable us to determine whether there is appropriate capacity for building the alignment.

The Human Resource area of the Municipal Council is replacing outsourcing works with internal training in order to respond to demands and not be limited due to the lack of resources for staff training. However, their involvement in capacity building with a view to strategic alignment is not quite clear. Another aspect to consider is that its staff has not been renewed for several years.

There is no systematic forming of work teams and adoption of collaborative practices in the day-to-day activities, except in the case of specific project-oriented activities, as in the case of the Soares dos Reis Museum, or for solving problems, in the other cases.

One specific aspect that may become more serious over time concerns knowledge and its preservation. Due to the low renewal of staff and reduced concern in maintaining the memory and knowledge of the organization, everything that has been done so far

may all go to waste as staff leaves the organization once their length of service has expired.

5 Final considerations

Our research has sought to assess the information applied to strategic alignment, focusing on the relation between purpose, processes and people in organizations dedicated to the collection, processing and dissemination of information. Three institutions were selected to be studied: Soares do Reis National Museum, Porto Municipal Library, and Porto General Archive, in Portugal. The Municipal Library and the Archive are both services of the Porto Municipal Council.

Throughout our work, we have sought to relate the dynamics of the institutions with the strategic alignment for organizational integration purposes, with a view to achieving their strategic objectives.

Particular note must be made of the Porto Municipal Council, and especially the General Archive, that stand out from among the other institutions as they have implemented a General Quality System with a view to strategic alignment.

All institutions are not quite in line with the environment; however, there is a greater dynamics between the Soares dos Reis Museums and its users.

All institutions have a rigid and invariable organizational structure. Although centralization is also one of their features, which is in line with the hierarchy and control-based authority model, the institutions are somewhat flexible in that respect.

Vertical communication is a reality in all three institutions, although in urgent situations the management does interact outside the hierarchy.

As they are controlled by and exposed to the monitoring of both governmental bodies and society, the institutions seek to abide by formal rules and regulations. Nevertheless, there are no handbooks with standards applicable to existing processes to establish the operational procedures for many situations. The Porto Municipal Council is an exception in this regard, for it issues documents and guidelines to its services, which the Library and the Archive are a part thereof.

Information Technology is not used to support strategic issues, but is rather used to solve operational problems in all institutions, both Brazilian and Portuguese.

The performance management of institutions is not developed and the performance indicators are used to comply with the requirements of higher authorities. Those that are developed are an advantage only at operational level, as in the case of the Porto General Archive.

It can be concluded that the Portuguese institutions under study do not use information toward strategic alignment and fail to use it to make their mark. It is also noted that there is no single way of achieving alignment, and that the Porto Municipal Council, in particular, and the other institutions under study have the means to achieve it, but are not using them to their advantage.

In general, the institutions under study are strongly influenced by a traditional management model because they are public bodies and are subject to the regulations applicable thereto. However, the interviews revealed that some institutional activities bring them closer to more modern management models. Even though the mechanistic model prevails in all institutions, there is also some evidence of Toyotism, in particular in the General Archive, which is stimulated by the Porto Municipal Council.

The study shows that it is important to recognise, first and foremost, that knowledge (seen in a global perspective), objectives, and strategies should guide the organizations, meaning that information is considered as a continuous process towards creation and decision making. Secondly, the fragmented perspective of tasks should be replaced with a management model that favors a greater integration and creates, or helps to create value for the organization and all those interested therein. In third place, information technology should be integrated in the services provided so that it is part of the process and of the organization, as an added resource, as a means rather than an end. Finally, these competences should be disseminated and internalized throughout the entire company.

Nonetheless, our research results are not limited to the understanding of organizations dedicated to the collection, processing and dissemination of information. They also contribute to the understanding of how the management model of these institutions work and how they articulate information for the purpose of strategic integration, and, in this regard, we can say that the results were positive.

Finally, the research has identified a new opportunity for deepening the study, by including the consumer/user of these institutions' services, through their participation, producing information that enables the improvement of the organizations.

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