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Strategic Decision-Making and Communication Technologies: An Institutional Theory Perspective on Yemeni Nongovernmental Organizations

Hanan Yahya Al-Shadadi
Clemson University

STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING AND COMMUNICATION
TECHNOLOGIES: AN INSTITUTIONAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE
ON YEMENI NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Hanan Yahya Al-Shadadi
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Dr. Brenden E. Kendall
Dr. Joseph Mazer
Dr. Chenjerai Kumanyika

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines how executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making through a lens of institutional theory as set forth by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). Specifically, this study addresses how communication technologies are used for strategic decision-making purposes and for making sense of the work of other organizations within the same institutional field – women's rights. Seven interviews with executives of NGOs and non-profit organizations were conducted and data were analyzed qualitatively. Through this analysis, this study answered two research questions: How do executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the roles/uses of communication technologies in strategic decision-making? And How do executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses of communication technologies for surveying the work of other organizations for strategic decision-making purposes?

This qualitative study yielded seven themes. These themes of fall into two main broad categories: (1) challenges and (2) environmental scanning. The category of challenges elucidated factors that affect the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and it included the minimal use of communication technologies and Internet and electricity as luxury. The category of environmental scanning addressed issues related to surveying the work of other organizations for strategic decision-making purposes, and it included lack of transparency and culture of sharing between organizations, limited benefit of surveying local NGOs, idolizing INGOs

and foreign NGOs, and local NGOs as role models based on survival, funding, and technology.

Findings of this study show, first, that the interviewees consider the minimal use of communication technologies and availability of Internet and electricity as factors that impede the effective use of communication technologies in their strategic decision-making process. Second, many interviewees question the benefit of surveying local NGOs due to the lack of a culture of sharing and transparency between organizations, and due to obvious admiration for INGOs and foreign NGOs. Third, most of the interviewees resisted the idea of mimicking other organizations and their practices.

DEDICATION

First, I thank Allah, the Almighty, for the many blessings he has given me and the abilities he has granted me. I thank him for answering my prayers and for giving me the opportunity to take this educational journey. I also thank him for giving me the patience and strength needed to complete my Master's degree and to write this thesis. I dedicate this work to my beloved country, Yemen and to everyone who is trying to make it a better place. I also dedicate it to all the people who have believed in me and supported me in many different ways. Lastly, I dedicate this work to all those who read it and use its knowledge.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The rapid spread of communication technologies has caused major shifts in the way organizations interact, present themselves to other organizations, and direct their efforts towards society. Organizations have become more virtually connected through the use of communication technologies, allowing them greater exposure to other organizations working in the same field. Due to this exposure, organizations may create similar versions, and perhaps even view others as role models, copying their practices and models.

The phenomenon of organizations resembling one another and developing cross-organizational norms and standards is the focus of institutional research in organizational communication. Scholars have noted that organizations with similar activities and circumstances may come to resemble one another in their practices and structures as a result of pressures that collectively act on them (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995; Scott & Christensen, 1995; Scott & Meyer, 1994). In this project, I explore what roles, if any, communication technologies play in this process of organizational imitation in strategic decision-making. More specifically, this study's primary goal is to investigate how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and for making sense of the work of other organizations in the same institutional field (women's rights).

Interpretation, meaning-making, and information are important factors in strategic

decision-making that can be advanced through the use of communication technologies. In fact, the role of communication technologies in facilitating both searching for and obtaining information in organizational settings has been well documented, with information processing often linked to significant research on organizational decision-making. For example, Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh (2010) argue that in order for a decision to be rational, it should work in harmony with existing decisions around it and such rational decisions usually depending on information. Since it is very difficult for an organization to make rational decisions in complete isolation from its surroundings, it can be inferred that communication technologies not only bridge the gap between organizations both in time and geographical distance but also play major roles in organizational decision-making. Therefore, scholars should review the role of communication technologies in multiple organizational phenomena, one being strategic decision-making.

In addition, it is important to direct research attention towards investigating NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen for several reasons. First, research on the Yemeni organizational context has been very limited. Second, investigating organizations in the social context of such a developing country will allow for a deeper understanding of the challenges that might face executives when using communication technologies in their strategic decision-making process. To clarify, it has been well documented that executives' success in decision-making depends on how they manage the challenges and opportunities originating from the changing environment in which they operate (Haag, Cummings, & Phillips, 2007; Laudon & Laudon, 2006; Lee, Chu, & Tseng, 2009). Being

a developing country which is facing a major crisis and going through a lot of rapid changes due to the ongoing war and political and economic instability, research on the Yemeni organizational context might allow for richer insight about the challenges and opportunities than applying the same or similar research to a more stable and developed social and organizational context. Finally, since a lot of the organizations in Yemen depend on foreign funds for survival, this research might be useful for donors because it might provide them with a better understanding of the Yemeni organizational context.

The Situation in Yemen

Long ago, Yemen was called Arabia Felix—Happy Arabia. After going through various kinds of struggles and conflicts, Yemen is now known as as the poorest country in the Middle East and its happiness is replaced with great sorrow. For the last many years, Yemen has suffered political unrest and economic instability. The Yemeni scenario is comprised of many struggles, including high levels of unemployment, food insecurity, inflation, dwindling reserves of oil and water, and conflicts both political and sometimes violent. These conflicts include the continuous power struggle between tribes and the military groups, the conflict between the Houthis and the state (leading to six short wars in the North), separatist unrest in the south, and the presence of Al-Qaeda and its attacks. All of these conflicts were hindrances to the country's development and resulted in poor economy, which had always worsened due to high levels of corruption.

In addition, in 2011, as part of the Arab Spring movement in the Middle East, Yemen went through a revolution that led to the removal of the former president of Yemen, Ali Abdullah Saleh, from power. Although the change of presidents was

achieved and was followed by the National Dialogue Conference led by President Hadi, it added to the complexity of the political situation. Various groups strove for power in the aftermath and Al-Qaeda became increasingly active, dragging the country into a major chaos.

For many years, NGOs have played an important role in the socio-economic development of the country and have facilitated the interaction between the government activities and civil society entities. The situation in Yemen and its historical context, however, have constantly affected organizations and their members, creating obstacles for them in achieving their goals, conducting their activities, and in operating daily. Having worked for NGOs and INGOs in Yemen, I came to observe some of the challenges that might face members of NGOs and non-profits in the dynamics of their everyday work, which are very different from those of other organizations in more developed parts of the world. For instance, organizations might need to shut down or ask their members to work from home due to security risks. In addition, there is lack of resources such as electricity and Internet for some organizations, particularly small ones or those operating in rural areas—effects include, for instance, delay in executing annual plans and aborted programs. Another challenge is lack of familiarity with using computerized technologies. For example, it is not very surprising to find that some organization members do not know how to send an email and still heavily rely on very basic means of communication such as fax for correspondence, or they might submit handwritten reports instead of typed ones. Another important challenge is the competitive donor-driven environment, which might affect the way NGOs and non-profit

organizations share information with each other and formulate their strategies. In my experience, these factors lead to repetition and duplication in many projects and activities conducted by Yemen-based NGOs and might affect the dissemination of information between these organizations.

On March 26th, 2015—during the course of this study—the biggest humanitarian crisis in the history of Yemen began. Airstrikes led by a coalition of forces from Saudi Arabia and 10 other countries against certain groups vying for power in Yemen marked the start of the current conflict. Discussing the various reasons for this current war against Yemen is beyond the realm of this thesis, but it is important to note that it added considerably to the difficulties faced by Yemeni organizations. Again, it is important to note that this war started during the time of conducting this study. The situation in Yemen preceding and during this war has been very critical for organizations and for Yemenis alike. Certainly, this difficult situation might have influenced the participants' responses emphasizing the challenges and the difficulties they were facing during and before the time of the interviews.

Rationale and Purpose of Study

Scholars should explore the use of communication technologies in relation to strategic decision-making to gain useful insights about how decisions are made and the forces affecting them. In particular, this study explores how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations reference the work of *other* organizations for strategic decision-making—again, focusing on the use of communication technologies in this process.

This study exploring the role of communication technologies in strategic decision-making with the inclusion of an institutional perspective may provide researchers with an important analysis of strategic decision-making since this subject of inquiry has received limited research attention. Multiple scholars have asserted that analyzing institutional character may contribute to the growing body of organizational communication research focused on institutional forces (Euske & Roberts, 1987; Kuhn, 2005; Lammers, 2003; Lammers, Barbour, & Duggan, 2003; Liu & Buzzanell, 2004; McPhee & Zaug, 2000).

Substantial research on organizational decision-making has emphasized the organizational choice to adopt communication technologies (Zorn, Flanagin, & Shoham, 2009) and the "information processing" view of decision-making processes (Hodgkinson & Starbuck, 2008). These researchers continue to assert that "conventional analyses of decision-making are not only more static, they lose the significance of time and context that are crucial to sense made and lack the colorful characters, who breathe life into the process of deciding" (Hodgkinson et al. 2008, p. 244). Furthermore, Hodgkinson et al. point out that the "information processor" view of decision-making does not include the social context in which decision-making occurs. Therefore, understanding the decision-making process cannot be isolated from factors that might have an impact on the process such as who is deciding, what technologies are used in the process, organization's surroundings, and its social context. Investigating decision-making from these different perspectives, as proposed by this study will lead to a better understanding of the strategic decision-making process.

Finally, the qualitative and interpretive nature of this study will allow for rich data

and new insight to be generated about the role of communication technologies in strategic

decision-making because it investigates NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen.

Even though these organizations might share similar interests and might be working on

similar issues, for the purpose of this thesis – addressing women's rights, they vary in

demographics, social context, the kind of communication technologies used, and

consistency in using such technologies. Therefore, each one of these organizations

presents a fertile area of research and will allow for useful data to be generated.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws upon research in (1) strategic organizational decision-making

and (2) institutional organizational theory. First, strategic decisions are known to be more

important than other organizational decisions because they are directed towards issues

crucial for the organization's survival (Mintzberg et al., 1976; Stahl & Grigsby, 1992).

Moreover, research on strategic decision-making draws attention to processes associated

with making strategic-decisions, some of which involve the interaction and management

of the relationship between the organization and its external environment (Ginsberg,

1988). Therefore, this study contributes to such research by providing qualitative research

into the beliefs, understandings, and uses of communication technology by decision-

makers.

Second, this study places strategic decision-making within the framework of

institutional theory. This theory suggests that organizations necessarily reference and

imitate one another in their practices and structures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott,

1995; Scott & Christensen, 1995; Scott & Meyer, 1994). For this study, I explore what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) call "mimetic pressure," a label for an organization's imitation of other successful organizations as a response to uncertainty. Applying institutional theory to this research, the primary focus will be on how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and for surveying the work of other organizations. Specifically this study examines whether decision-makers deal with uncertainty by following the practices of other organizations, particularly those they view as successful. Decision-making and the use of communication technologies do not take place in a vacuum. As such, this study further explores how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the use of communication technologies for surveying the work of other organizations and their strategic decision-making processes.

Research Questions

This study proposes the following questions:

RQ1: How do executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making?

RQ2: How do executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies for surveying the work of other organizations for strategic decision-making purposes?

Answering these questions will provide useful insights about the role of communication technologies in the strategic decision-making process and in surveying the work of other organizations for strategic decision-making purposes. Such findings will ultimately enhance our understanding of strategic decision-making processes.

Overview

As a qualitative study, the purpose of the current project is to generate insights about how the consistent use of communication technologies both to scan and gather accessible online information about the work and practices of other organizations might have an impact on strategic organizational decision-making. More specifically, it focuses on how executives utilize communication technologies in their organizations and what roles, if any, such technologies play in surveying other organizations' practices. Chapter Two of this thesis will address contexts of decision-making, strategic decision-making, and communication technologies. In addition, it will discuss research on institutional theory, explaining why imitation of other organizations might occur when making strategic decisions. Chapter Three will present the methodology and data collection processes. Chapter Four will address the results of this study. Chapter Five will discuss the findings and limitations of this study. Finally, Chapter Six will present the conclusion for this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature is divided into three main areas of scholarship. The first

part discusses the nature of decision-making and the importance of communication

technologies in the decision-making process. The second addresses the context of

strategic decision-making and the importance of understanding the decision-making

processes of other organizations. Finally, this chapter concludes with a review of the

research on institutional theory to gain an understanding of how decision-makers might

reference the work of *other* organizations for strategic decision-making purposes,

focusing on the use of communication technologies in this process.

Organizational Decision-Making

For the purpose of this study, it is important to address the nature of decisions and

decision-making processes. A multifaceted subject, decision-making has various

definitions. The process of making a decision is not a simple one. According to Simon

(1977), "each phase in making a particular decision is itself a complex decision-making

process" (p. 43). Clarifying the concept of phases, Simon, Hogarth, Piott, et al. (1986)

suggest that the process of decision-making is divided into phases, referred to as

"problem solving" and "decision-making." The "problem solving" phase includes

selecting matters that need attention, setting goals, and arriving at and designing suitable

action, while the "decision-making" phase entails evaluating and choosing from

alternative actions (Simon, Hogarth, Piott, et al., 1986). Providing a slightly different

language, Robbins (1990) suggests that decision-making is "the making of choices" (p.

108), again one that includes many steps. As March (1994) suggested these steps involve four basic inquiries: alternatives, expectations, preferences, and decision rules. More recently, Hodgkinson et al. (2008) sum up the concept of decision-making by defining it as "a matter of choosing from among a set of alternatives" (p. 457).

The problem solving activities related to decision-making differ according to both the sources and types of information (Dror, 1983; Bystrom, 2002). According to Simon (1965), "problem solving proceeds by erecting goals, detecting differences between present situation and goal, finding in memory or by search tools processes that are relevant to reducing differences of these particular kinds, and applying these tools or processes" (p. 83). In this sense, it is important to expand the notion of tools or processes used in the problem solving phase to include the integral role of communication technologies in the decision-making process and to consider these not only as sources of information but also as tools to identify and solve a problem.

Bots and Lootsma (2000) state, "identifying a problem is an essential step to solve it" (p. 2). As Simon (1997) suggests what must come first when solving a problem is analyzing decision-making data requirements and systems. Although his argument referred to IT systems and how they might serve as a suitable tool for reducing the differences between goals and organizational situations, his argument can be relevant when investigating the role of communication technologies in the decision-making process. According to Huber (1990), using computer-mediated communication and decision support technologies can be useful because they have the potential to provide accurate information, speed up the decision-making process, and reduce management

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levels in organizations. The result can be higher quality decisions.

The decision-making phase, according to most scholars, involves rational, political, and routine approaches (Mintzberg et al., 1976; March, 1997). In terms of rationality paradigm, Simon (1957) identifies a decision as a goal oriented activity that entails choosing from alternatives tied to cognitive limitations. The political approach characterizes decision-making as the result of interactions between people of power (Allison, 1971). The routine approach, as described by March and Olsen (1989), is a set of actions that arise from customarily appropriate behaviors. These three approaches as suggested by Allison (1971) are important to explain and predict strategic decision-making which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Terminology: Communication Technologies

Before introducing the literature on decision-making and communication technologies, it is important to discuss the term "communication technology." First, communication technologies fall into the broader category of information technology (Mustard, 2000). According Zmud's (1990) definition, information technology is "the application of computer and communications technologies in the acquisition, storage, analysis, distribution, and presentation of information" (p. 95). In addition, Reddy (1990) suggests that some examples of the technology include computers, including hardware and software; telecommunication, including fiber optics and satellites; videoconferencing; Internet; email, and artificial intelligence (p. 235). Mustard (2000) points out, "the advantages of digital technology include enhanced collection, storage, analysis, transmission, and encryption of information" (p. 38). Furthermore, new tools

and advances in technology have contributed to the introduction of new knowledge and methodology (Goodman & Sproull, 1990; Reddy, 1990; Weick, 1990). In addition, despite the development of technology, traditional tools such as telephone and written correspondence have not been replaced which means that new technologies are added to the existing mix (Mustard, 2000). According to Mustard (2000), new technology has dramatically resulted in shifting organizational communication patterns and one result of these shifting patterns is a change in the organizational decision making process.

Decision-Making and Communication Technologies

It is rare to find an organization today that does not use any kind of communication technologies even in the poorest countries in the world. Communication technologies are a necessity in today's organizations because they facilitate work and help them handle fast paced work environments that require multi-tasking and high performance. According to Cheney et al. (2010), communication technologies have been found to play major roles in facilitating instant access to information, allowing complex exchanges of information across distant geographical locations, thus saving time. Scott (1992) points out that "organizations whose internal features best match the demands of their environments will achieve the best adaptation" (p. 89). Therefore, it is essential to look at what roles, if any, the use of communication technologies plays in organizational decision-making processes.

Several scholars have highlighted the role of communication technologies in the decision-making process in relation to making an organization aware of its surroundings. For instance, Cyr, Gehling, and Gibson (1997) assert that the importance of

environmental scanning is becoming more evident because organizations which fail to identify environmental information will lose their competitive advantage. In addition, organizations are required to do more active environmental scanning when making a decision, and environmental scanning conducted and reinforced through computer systems has proven to facilitate decision-making process in the private sector (Maier, Rainer, & Snyder, 1997). More recent research suggests that information communication technologies enable "diffusion of organizational and market data that can be crucial input for effective decision-making and control at all levels" (Spanos et al., 2002, p. 3).

Research on technology and decision-making began in the mid-1970s and was directed towards the use of computers to support decision-making (Keen & Scott Morton, 1978). Additional research in this area formalized the concept of Decision Support Systems (DSS) by Gorry and Scott Morton (1971). More recent research by Shim et al. (2002) identified four technological advancements which influence decision support: data warehousing, on-line analytical processing, data mining, and the World Wide Web. Even more recently, according to Hodgkinson et al. (2008), "today the use of the term technology in the decision-making realm almost always refers to computerized information technology, specifically, the use of computers as a tool for assisting decision-making by managing information" (p. 98).

Several studies have investigated the organizational decision-making approach of adopting information communication technologies to produce objective benefits such as offering better services for customers, reducing potential costs, and improving operational proficiency (Zorn et al., 2009). Other research addresses the organizational

decisions to adopt communication technologies due to social and political forces such as competition between organizations within the same institutional fields (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Scott, 1991) and competition between individuals to enhance their career positions (Peled, 2001; Tantoush & Clegg, 2001).

As stated above, much previous scholarship on decision-making and communication technologies has examined the influence of technological advancements and their influence on decision support, decision-making in adopting communication technologies, and managing information to facilitate the decision-making process. Unlike past research, this proposed study does not discuss the decision-making of adopting technologies, but it addresses communication technologies as tools already adopted and daily used by organizations to investigate the impact of using such technologies on the decision-making process. Furthermore, the inclusion of an institutional perspective in the exploration of this phenomenon will provide a better understanding of how executives use communication technologies to survey, make sense, and obtain information about the work of similar organizations and how such use of technologies affect the decision-making process. Lastly, it is important to understand that this research is applied to the organizational context of Yemen. As such, some NGOs and non-profit organizations, particularly small ones or those in rural areas might not have the basic technological means available which, in turn, might lead to interrupting their use of communication technologies in the decision-making process and their awareness of their surroundings. Therefore, this research might allow for a better understanding of some of the existing gaps and challenges in the Yemeni organizational context.

Decision-Making and Information Processing

Information processing is a prevalent theme in the literature of decision-making because of its importance in decision-making processes. Since the purpose of this proposed research is to better understand the role of communication technologies in obtaining information about the work of other organizations, information processing will be discussed thoroughly in this section.

In this section, I address both information processing in relation to both individual and organizational decision-making for two reasons. First, it will facilitate gaining insights about how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations whose work will be discussed later in this project deal with the information available to them about the work and practices of other organizations revealed through communication technologies. Second, it will help determine whether such information impacts the decision-making process.

Previous research has explored decision-making from the perspective of "information processing" (Hodgkinson et al., 2008, p. 234). Much of this research has focused on the role of an individual's first judgment and preference in the decision-making process and how managers handle the complexity of available information (Hodgkinson et al., 2008). In addition, many scholars seem to agree that individual decision-making involves three phases: finding and clarifying a potential decision, developing a set of alternatives to choose from, and analyzing and selecting among these alternatives (e.g., Simon, 1957; Mintzberg et al., 1976). Such classification of individual decision-making underscores two activities in which a decision maker is required to take

part and these activities involve the gathering and use of information (Hodgkinson et al., 2008). Therefore, it is important to address how executives use communication technologies to gather information about the work of other organizations and how this information impacts the decision-making process.

In terms of organizational decision-making, organizations can be viewed as "information processing entities" (Cheney et al., 2010, p. 54). Cheney et al. state "organizations can be broken down into little bits of information – while simultaneously viewing the organization as a set of decisions" (p. 54). March (1997) has investigated organizational decision-making in various situations where information is the basis for making a decision. He also argues that this can be achieved by determining what is considered to be information and how such information is used and analyzed to inform a certain decision. Feldman and March (1981) offer examples of various organizations that collect piles of information they do not use in order to look as rational and modern as other more successful organizations.

Although Horowitz (1999) highlights technology's role in facilitating the search for information, he identifies some of its complications by stating, "Thanks to technology, our ability to collect data far exceeds our ability to make sense of it" (p. 55). We certainly understand that information is important in forming a decision. However, the challenge lies in processing and utilizing information to fit the decision at hand. That is why terms such as "information overload, information under load, and information quality" are often used by researchers in regard to individual and groups decision-making environments within an organization (Cheney et al., 2010, p. 57).

Cheney et al. (2010) acknowledge that information is essential for making a decision, but insist research shows too much information can be an obstacle for individuals or group decision-making. According to Lawrence et al. (2004), the challenge lies in determining the right amount and the most suitable information, especially for virtual organizations and geographically distant organizations. However, organizations may strongly believe they need to have all data available (Cheney et al., 2010). This means that searching for and displaying information is partially related to an organization's image. Clarifying this point, Lars et al. (2008) suggest that information is important for the organization itself and for other organizations, competitors, and consumers that might be observing.

Since communication technologies are used as sources of information and they affect the way organizations represent themselves to other organizations, it can be assumed that communication technologies also play a role in increasing the chances of obtaining information about the work of other organizations. From this standpoint, this research aims at exploring the roles of communication technologies in increasing imitation of other successful organizations in terms of strategic organizational decision-making processes and whether this notion of imitation set forth by institutional theorists (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) takes place in the organizational context of Yemen.

Strategic Decision-Making & Strategic Decision-Making Processes

Strategic decisions are complex, ill-structured, and non-routine (Schwenk, 1988). In addition, "a strategic decision is one, which is important, in terms of the actions taken, the resources committed, or the precedents set" (Mintzberg et al., 1976, p. 246). These

decisions, which are more vital than other decisions, have the following characteristics. First, strategic decisions reflect the interaction between the organization and its environment, indicating how an organization manages such interactions and relationships. Second, strategic decisions are the responsibility of top management (Ginsberg, 1988). Third, as Stahl and Grigsby (1992) pointed out strategic decisions are concerned with issues crucial to the organization's livelihood and survival. Fourth, although these decisions are interconnected with other decisions in the organization (Wilson, 2003), they are different from routine decisions because they typically address unusual issues for the organization (Stahl & Grigsby, 1992). Fifth, strategic decisions are political, seldom have one best solution, involve high levels of uncertainty, and are difficult to reverse once they are made (Wilson, 2003).

Prior research in strategic decision-making is typically divided into categories: content and process research (Elbaba, 2006. p. 2). Content research usually deals with strategy content issues such as portfolio management, diversification, mergers, and alignment of the firm's strategies with environmental characteristics (Elbanna 2006; Elbanna & Child, 2007; Rajagopalan et al., 1993). Unlike content research, process research "deals with the process through which a strategic decision is made and implemented, and the factors which affect that process" (Elbanna & Child, 2007, p. 561). For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on the process approach to understand how a strategic decision is made rather than how it is implemented.

Many researchers have been interested in investigating the role of human factors in strategic choice, organizational design, and performance (Finkelstein & Hambrick,

1996). In this research, I intend to examine how executives view the role and impact of communication technologies in the way they make strategic decisions. A review of strategic decision-making literature provides some insights about the nature of what executives do (Kotter, 1982; Mintzberg, 1973). However, insights about executives' experiences using communication technologies and the role of such technologies in making strategic decisions are limited, particularly in non-Western organizational contexts. Gaining understanding on this issue is of great importance because it has been documented that organizational outcomes can be affected by both the personalities and experiences of executives (Bantel & Jackson, 1989; Miller & Droge, 1986).

Researchers vary in their explanations of strategic behaviors. For example, some researchers assume executives are largely capable of comprehending strategic situations and are able to take logical actions in context to situations they face. However, other researchers adhere to bounded rationality assumptions. It is important for the purpose of this research to shed light on rationality in decision-making. Therefore, the next section will be an overview of rationality and bounded rationality.

Rationality & Strategic Decision-Making

Papadakis and Barwise (1997) pointed out the dominant place that the rationality of decision-making processes has occupied in both strategic decision-making theory and practice. Rationality is referred to as a way of describing logical behavior used in pursing goals (Dean & Sharfman, 1993). Based on March's (1994) definition, rationality is "a particular and very familiar class of procedures for making choices" (p. 2). According to a more recent definition, "rationality is the reason for doing something and to judge a

behavior as reasonable is to be able to say that the behavior is understandable within a given frame of reference" (Butler, 2002, p. 226).

Not all decisions are completely or entirely rational. This according to March (1994), is referred to as bounded rationality. To clarify, Snyman and Drew (2003) suggest that decision makers' capabilities are limited and that makes their rationality bounded. Hence, the decision-making process is bounded to cognitive and political realities (Snyman and Drew, 2003). Because of bounded rationality, decision-makers' goals become achieving "good enough rather than the best" (Eisenhardt, 1997, p. 1) objectives.

March (1994) was one of the first researchers to put forth various reasons for bounded rationality including: alternatives, information, and preference. First, decision makers do not consider all the consequences of alternatives and in most cases some alternatives are given more focus than others. Second, decision makers do not always seek relevant information or make use of information that is available. Third, in terms of preferences, decision makers do not seem to possess complete or consistent goals and those goals are not considered at the same time. In short, according to Simon (1995), an entirely rational decision process is rare because cognitive capabilities are limited, information is usually not complete, and different decision criteria are used.

Regarding the notion of rationality, some researchers assert that the debate whether decision makers are rational or boundedly rational is no longer controversial (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992). However, several researchers have been able to identify and highlight some obstacles to adopting rational decision processes (e.g. March, 1994; Jones et al., 1992). Jones et al. explained that lack of resources needed for analyzing and

searching out relevant information can be the reason for bounded rationality. This means that rationality is bounded most of the time. On the other hand, when discussing the rational model, researchers often assume needed information will be available although the cost of providing such information is ignored (Braybrooke & Lindblom, 1970). Paying attention to different aspects that lead to or hinder rationality is crucial. This is because, according to Rodrigues and Hickson (1995), availability of resources such as money, materials, technology, and accurate information during the decision-making process is likely to lead to decision success. In addition, it has been suggested that information technology "affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the organization primarily by reducing the effects of bounded rationality of individual and group decision making" (Bakos & Treacy, 1986, p. 110).

Bounded rationality scholars suggest various explanations for the ways executives deal with overwhelming situations. Some researchers claim such situations are dealt with through reliance on personal experiences and repertoires (e.g., Hambrick & Mason, 1984). Other researchers explain that executives deal with such pressures by copying the actions of others (Dimaggio & Powell, 1983). Bounded rationality is therefore crucial to this research because bounded rationality executives are more likely to copy the behavior and steps of other organizations. Paying attention to this phenomenon with specific focus on decision-making processes and communication technologies may open up new research avenues for those interested in strategic decision-making process and for those interested in the role of communication technologies in this process. In other words, this research may provide new insights for explaining strategic

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decision-making. In addition, with its focus on NGOs and non-profit organizations in the unique non-Western organizational context of Yemen, this investigation may or may not conform the assumption of mimetic isomorphism, particularly in case of uncertainty. Therefore, it will allow for useful and new insight on how the dynamics of working in a highly competitive donor-driven organizational environment might influence the way executives formulate their strategies and deal with uncertainty.

Strategic Decision-Making & Strategic Planning

This section of the literature review addresses the meaning of strategy, and strategic planning. Decisions are made in organizations on daily basis and at various levels. Certain decisions are more crucial than others because they carry within them more significant consequences. For instance, decisions about an organization's goals and missions are of critical importance because they identify what the organization is about and what its scope of work is. In addition, Bryson (2004) suggested that clear organizational missions and goals show the direction to which an agency is headed.

Most of the decisions an organization makes should be in some way linked to its goals and missions. According to Robbins's (1990) definition, an organization is "a consciously coordinated social entity, with a relatively identifiable boundary, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals" (p. 4). This means that organizations should think strategically to make their plans and identify their goals and missions accordingly.

Strategic planning. Mintzberg et al. (1976) and Fredrickson and Mitchell (1984) point out that strategy is decision-based because it is formed by a series of decisions.

Therefore, understanding how to plan for a strategy is very important. For instance, according to James Bryson (2004), the goal of strategic planning is to incorporate practices that "develop a continuing commitment to the mission and vision of the organization" (p. 31). In other words, the result of the practical process of strategic planning is to support strategic thinking with a clear focus of moving an organization towards achieving its desired vision. In addition, Bryson (2004) suggests that strategic planning is a process oriented approach which assists organizations to become effective strategists capable of fulfilling missions, meeting mandates, anticipating future challenges, as well as adapting to ever-changing service demands. The true significance of strategic planning for organizations is not merely to develop strategic plans, but to "create prepared minds' within their management teams" (Kaplan & Beinhocker, 2003, p. 71).

Organizational leaders, heads of organizations, and members of organizations are all motivated to achieve certain goals. Cialdini and Trost (1998) pointed out: "as humans, we are motivated to act in ways that are effective in achieving our goals: We want to make accurate decisions" (p. 155). From this perspective, it is logical to assume that members of an organization at various levels strive to achieve certain goals and to make the right decisions at all times. Bengfort (2000) defined strategic planning as "a formalized subprocess of strategic management that follows a prescribed set of procedures with a given time period for researching and identifying alternatives for strategic choice" (p. 31).

NGOs and Non-Profit Organizations

Various terms are used to refer to NGOs: voluntary, non-for-profit, citizen organizations, as well as "third sector" with the state representing the first sector and business the second (Salamon, 1993). As suggested by the World Bank (2001), NGOs are private organizations which pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services and undertake community development. According to de Souza (2007), it can be concluded that the main role of NGOs is to promote and protect the interests of the disenfranchised groups. This study focuses on NGOs addressing women's rights in Yemen. Although these organizations work on numerous issues and pursue various activities in their pursuit of protecting and promoting the rights of women, they might need to work closely together and they are likely to be exposed to the work of one another when making decisions, particularly strategic ones. In addition, some of these organizations work on advocacy and public policy and this means they interact with multiple organizations in their surroundings. Therefore, organizations as such will provide a rich context in which to examine and analyze the relationships between communication technologies and strategic decision-making through the lens institutional theory.

Strategic Decision-Making & External Environment. Making an accurate decision is not an easy task, particularly if there is complete isolation from the work of others. According to Grunig (1992), it is important for organizational leaders to be knowledgeable about the decision-making processes of other organizations that affect them. Gaining greater understanding of the work of others will enable an organization to

cope with its environment. Coping with the environment especially an environment that is becoming more and more global is a necessity and may lead to forming better decisions in general and strategic decisions in particular.

According to Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) "organizations are inescapably bound up with the conditions of their environment. In fact, it has been proposed that all organizations engage in activities which have as their logical conclusion adjustment to the environment" (p. 1) and "no organization is self-contained" (p. 2). Nutt (2001) argued that there are ways a manager could make better decisions, including searching for understanding, identifying a direction in line with an objective, as well as managing social and political forces that can present challenges.

Nowadays, one of the easiest and fastest ways to get information about other organizations is by searching the environment with communication technologies. Therefore, a question that is worth asking is whether or not this exposure to the work of other organizations through the use of communication technologies will affect the strategic decision-making processes and the way executives make strategic decisions. In order to provide answers to this question, addressing institutional theory is essential. Therefore, the next section will discuss research on institutional theory.

Institutional Theory

This research aims at examining the strategic organizational decision-making process through the lens of institutional theory. Borrowing from this theory is useful not only in investigating the role of communication technologies in this process but also in addressing the potential for communication technologies to increase the imitation of the

practices of other organizations when making strategic decisions. In addition, adding an institutional view to this research will allow for a more detailed investigation of the roles of communication technologies in the strategic decision-making process within the proposed NGOs and non-profit organizations in relation to their larger institutional context.

Institutional theory offers a fruitful context through which an organizational communication phenomenon can be understood. In fact, some scholars argue that institutional theory at its core is a theory of communication (Suddaby, 2011; Lammers & Barbour, 2006; Lammers, 2011). Institutional theory suggests that organizations will eventually come to resemble one another in their practices and structures when facing certain circumstances and as a result of multiple pressures collectively acting on them (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995; Scott & Christensen, 1995; Scott & Meyer, 1994). This theory also suggests that organizations have great influence on one another and they model the actions and behaviors of other organizations in their field and in response to their larger social context which is also called the institutional environment. Thus, pressures from the institutional environment result in increasing similar practices across institutions and organizations as they try to become legitimate members of a certain organizational field (Scott & Meyer, 1991; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983).

The concept of similarity/homogeneity is referred to by institutional theorists as "isomorphism" and is classified into two categories: competitive and institutional. It occurs to fulfill an organization's need to obtain political and social power in order to maintain social and institutional legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983).

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Again, institutional pressures that escalate the homogeneity of organizational forms may appear as: coercive, normative, or mimetic pressures (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Scott, 1995). According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), coercive isomorphism evolves out of political influence and search for legitimacy, and refers to pressure from entities that own resources an organization depends on. Normative isomorphism is linked to professionalization and it means following professional practices and standards. Mimetic isomorphism refers to the imitation of successful organizations and it is considered a response to uncertainty. For the purpose of this study, I focus primarily on what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe as "mimetic pressure," which refers to an organization's imitation of other successful organizations as a response to uncertainty. This research is an attempt to explore whether or not executives strategically seek mimetic isomorphism in conditions of uncertainty in the Yemeni organizational context, which is highly competitive and donor-driven in nature.

More recent research on institutional theory, as suggested by Oliver (1997), shows the influences that cause institutionalized activities to take place are of three levels: individual, organizational, and interorganizational. Berger and Luckmann (1967) describe influences on the individual level by explaining how managers both consciously and unconsciously follow certain norms, customs, traditions, or habits. Influences on the organizational level refer to common cultural, social and political systems that underpin following institutionalized activities. On the interorganizational level, such influences refer to the pressures that lead organizations to imitate or mirror one another. These pressures come from government, other organizations as well as from the society which

has certain ideas about acceptable and expected organizational behavior (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)

Even more recently, McPhee and Zaug (2000) suggest that members of an organization institutionally position themselves in relation to their organizations' external environments. Institutional positioning, in their view, is a type of communication flow that links an organization to its external environment. In this sense, borrowing from this theory will allow for generating insights about how members of an organization institutionally position themselves in the decision-making process and what roles do communication technologies play in this process.

Summary

This review of literature addresses three main areas of scholarship. The first section discusses organizational decision-making, presents various definitions of organizational decision-making, and notes the importance of both information processing and communication technologies in the decision-making processes. Presenting the nature of decision-making and the importance of information processing allows for a better understanding of the importance of communication technologies in decision-making. The second part addresses strategic decision-making and strategic planning. This part shows how strategic decisions and planning both require paying close attention to the external organizational environment and the work of other organizations and is an attempt to set the landscape for introducing the next section about institutional theory research. Finally, this chapter concludes with research on institutional theory in order to gain understanding

about why and how surveying the work of other organizations through the use of communication technologies might impact the strategic decision-making processes.

Research Questions

As stated in the review of literature, research on decision-making suggests that information can be the basis of making a decision (March, 1997) and technology plays an important role in facilitating the search for information (Horowitz, 1999). In addition, research on strategic decision-making shows that it is important for leaders of organizations to become knowledgeable of the decision-making processes of other organizations that affect them (Grunig, 1992) and "all organizations engage in activities which have as their logical conclusion adjustment to the environment" (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978, p. 1). Therefore, this study poses the following research questions:

> **RQ1:** How do executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making?
>
> **RQ2:** How do executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies for surveying the work of other organizations for strategic decision-making purposes?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This chapter describes the process I followed in order to investigate the proposed phenomenon and it is comprised of three sections. The first section is the analytic framework of this study. In this section, I describe the nature of NGOs and non-profit organizations that this study will focus on. Then, I clarify why employing an interpretive approach and a thematic analysis best fit the nature of this study. The second section presents data gathering techniques through which I present my agenda for conducting interviews. The third section presents data analysis and coding. In this chapter, I intend to show how this study will be methodologically based and how the data will be collected and analyzed in a systematic manner.

Analytic Framework

NGOs and Non-Profit Organizations

In order to explore the phenomenon at hand, this study focused on NGOs and non-profit organizations addressing women's rights and gender-based violence. Organizations as such provided a rich context in which to examine and analyze the relationships between communication technologies and strategic decision-making through the lens institutional theory. These organizations often need to work closely together and they are more likely to be exposed to the work of one another when making decisions, particularly strategic ones. These organizations were selected for the purpose of this study for several reasons. First, they work for similar causes and their objectives and goals are similar to those of other existing organizations within the same field–

institutional field. Second, some of these organizations work on advocacy and public policy and this means they interact with multiple organizations in their surroundings.

Data was gathered through interviews conducted with seven executives at those organizations not because they are the only ones who make strategic decisions but because they are the most involved in and familiar with the process. Lindlof & Taylor (2011) suggest that informants who are familiar with their surroundings and scenes have the ability to generate an understanding for their audience. Informants as such enjoy this ability because they have "inhabited many different roles and can speak knowledgeably about the social parts of the scene and how they work together" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011, p. 117).

Interpretive Paradigm

For the purpose of this project, I employed an interpretive approach to investigate the roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making with the inclusion of an institutional theory perspective. To clarify, my goal was to interpretively gain an understanding of how executives interpret and understand the role of communication technologies in the strategic decision-making process and how, if at all, such technologies are used in surveying the work of other organizations and how such use might impact the strategic decision-making process.

According to Miller (1997), interpretive researchers view themselves to as capable of demonstrating their participants' voices and experiences while searching to understand their realities. Therefore, I intended to dig into the realities of NGOs and non-profit organizations addressing women's rights and gender-based violence in Yemen and

to use them as illustrative examples for the purpose of this study. Employing an interpretive paradigm was ideal to allow for a focused investigation of the proposed phenomenon and for arriving at detailed findings.

Data derived using an interpretive approach is essential for organizations to understand a particular existing phenomenon. According to Cheney (2000), through interpretive paradigm, organizations can be considered as being shaped by social interaction and shared meaning. As an interpretive researcher, my aim was to uncover some of the existing concepts in those particular organizational settings to allow for the elicited data to be presented and manifested in a particular way. Therefore, this study was predominantly interpretive in nature. According to Kreps (1983), an interpretive perspective can be useful in directing the "development of a formal communicative mechanism to provide new organizational members with information about the organization and its folklore" (p. 246).

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was the framework employed in this study. This form of qualitative analysis is used for searching for themes and patterns within a data set and its flexibility and freedom from the strictures of applying any specific theory allows for providing rich and detailed, yet complex account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using thematic analysis was appropriate for this study because it allowed for open and direct analysis of the data and for making sense of and creating linkages between the concepts that were collected from individuals who play major roles in the process of strategic decision-making. In addition, because the uses/roles of communication technologies in

decision-making is a complex process that involves many aspects, this form of analysis was particularly beneficial for this study. According Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis allows for interpreting various aspects of the research topic. Furthermore, this form of qualitative analysis is beneficial for analyzing data about people's understandings of particular phenomena in particular contexts (Clarke & Braun, 2013) which makes it suitable for this investigation for eliciting detailed answers for the proposed research questions.

As the data started to emerge coding was possible. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest three types of coding: open, axial, and selective. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that coding represents the operations, by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways. In the data analysis section these types of coding will be described in more detail to demonstrate how the data was analyzed.

Data Gathering

Data for this study was gathered through conducting interviews. Therefore, in this section I present the significance of interviews. Then, I discuss procedures and recruitment design for these interviews.

Interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) suggest that interviews assist interpretive researchers when analyzing commonly accepted acts of discourse that form organizations. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), "conversation is the basic mode of communication" (p. 5). For the purpose of this study, interviews allowed for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and gave participants in the study the chance to

share their experiences with using communication technologies and strategic decision-making freely. Through interviews more data about the topic were elicited. Lindlof and Taylor (2011) point out that interviews are used to "verify, validate, or comment on information obtained from other sources" (p. 175). Therefore, interviews were the best way to collect data for this study.

In depth interviews were conducted with seven executives in seven different NGOs to yield interpretations for the proposed research questions. Confining the study participants to executives is ideal because they are familiar with their organization and its surroundings and they are key players in the process of making strategic decisions.

Interview Population and Sampling

The sample of this study consisted of seven executives, six of which worked for NGOs addressing women's rights at the time of the interview. The seventh participant, however, worked for a ministry but had previously worked for a women's rights NGO. The interviewees were all Yemenis who spoke English as a second language. Although some of the interviewees were not very fluent in English and had some difficulties in understanding certain terms in the interview questions, the interviews were still conducted in English to ensure the feasibility of the study. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) point out that a researcher must determine the feasibility of the study "against his own resources of time, mobility, skills and whatever else it takes to do the job" (p. 19).

According to Keyton (2006), qualitative researchers must be creative in finding ways to identify their sample and they may be able to use both snowball and network sampling techniques to reach and interview certain types of individuals. For the purpose

of this study both sampling techniques were utilized to recruit the study participants.

Snowball Sampling was used to find more participants. This particular type of sampling is used when participants from a specific population are hard to find. Utilizing this technique, research participants help the researcher by identifying other participants with similar characteristics (Keyton, 2006). This methodology was very helpful in increasing the number of participants in this study and a list of additional executives was compiled from referrals provided by the interviewees themselves. This methodology was very helpful in finding research participants in Yemen because the researcher was currently residing in the U.S. at the time of the interviews and it was harder for the researcher to find participants who were willing to be interviewed in English.

Network Sampling. The second technique that was used to recruit participants for this study is network sampling. According to Keyton (2006), in this type of sampling the researcher does not rely on research participants but rather gets help from individuals who fit a specific profile and ask them to participate in the study. For the purpose of the individuals who had pervious experience working for NGOs addressing women's rights helped the researcher find executives to participate in the study.

To make sure that the interview protocol and the coding procedures are appropriate, this study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This process was crucial to confirm the integrity of the project and the protection of the rights of the study participants. After compiling a list of potential participants through snowball and network sampling techniques, Facebook and Whatsapp messages as well as emails were sent to potential participants to invite them to participate in the interviews and this

was the main method for recruitment. The remaining potential participants, who were hard to reach through the above stated means of communication, were contacted directly through phone calls. Before conducting each interview, follow up e-mails including an informed consent were sent to every potential participant who had shown his or her interest in participating in the study to inform them of the parameters of the study and of their confidentiality and the nature of their participation.

Recruitment Issues. There were many challenges during the recruitment process and at the time of conducting this study. In this section, I shed light on the main challenges. First, it is important to understand that, in Yemen, organizations addressing women's rights often face more challenges and threats than organizations working in other fields such as those of development or education. To clarify, addressing issues such as women's empowerment, reproductive health, equality, and girls' education is considered very risky in the Yemeni context. This is because these issues might be considered contradictory to certain traditions that are the production of the patriarchal nature of the Yemeni society or to the beliefs of certain conservative religious groups. The level of threat to these organizations increases due to the political unrest in the country. During the recruitment process, Yemen was going through a critical time due to the conflict between the Houthis and the government led by President Hadi.

An example: before the war started and due to the political unrest in the country, one of the potential participants decided to withdraw from taking part in the study. He explained that it was risky enough for him to be working in an organization that promotes women's rights during that critical time. He also explained that he was

grateful that his organization was still surviving despite the difficult situation of the country. During my chat with this participant, he implied that being interviewed by a researcher, particularly one who is residing in the U.S., would jeopardize the confidentiality of the work of his organization and would cost him his job.

Another major challenge was the beginning and escalation of the war in Yemen, which made it extremely hard to conduct the last interview and to follow up with the study participants. Although by the time the war started most of the interviews had already been conducted, one interview was scheduled for the day before the war started. However, the participant asked to reschedule for the next day, which was the day when the airstrikes against Yemen began. This participant had gone through very tough circumstances. She travelled to attend a workshop outside of Yemen before the war took place. The participant was in great fear for the life of her kids whom she had left in Yemen with her husband and her grief was greater because she was not able to go home for her kids. First, this participant said that was unable to be interviewed but after approximately a week she agreed to be interviewed but only for a short time. Eventually, this participant and her children were reunited.

Following up with the study participants was extremely difficult. First, the participants lives were and are still in danger. For instance, in an attempt to follow-up with one of the participants, I came to know that he was very close to death due to a huge attack in Attan area in Sana'a and very close to his workplace. Second, the rest of the participants stopped answering phone calls or replying to messages and emails. This

could be explained by the horror they were experiencing and/or the continuous electrical blackouts in Yemen, which last for very long hours and even for days.

Interview Procedures

Upon receiving the interviewees' consent, interviews were scheduled in accordance with the participants' schedules and working hours. Interviews were conducted via phone calls and Skype calls depending on the participants' preference. In total, seven executives participated in this study.

Each interview lasted for about 20 to 45 minutes. At the beginning of each interview, participants were informed of the voluntary nature of their participation and were assured that their responses will be confidential. In order to get the participants' approval for recording the information, each participant was informed at the very beginning of the interview that interviews would be audio recorded. The interview questions (see Appendix A) were comprised of semi-structured and open-ended questions to allow further probing (Campbell & Russo, 2003; Knorr Cetina, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher followed a previously compiled interview protocol. The interview questions ranged from asking interviewees basic questions such as their names and positions in the organization to more specific questions about the use of communication technologies in their organizations' strategic decision-making processes and surveying the work of other organizations within the same institutional field.

An interview guide that the researcher had compiled prior to the interviews was followed. The interview protocol was followed without making any changes and the

questions were asked in a fixed order. However, the researcher provided some explanations when needed and some of the questions were paraphrased when the participants faced difficulty in understanding the questions.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data gathered from the interviews, thematic analysis, or the inductive identification of data set, was used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Three levels of qualitative coding were used to analyze the data: open, axial, and selective. Coding is the procedure that explains "operations by which data are broken down, conceptualized, and put back together in new ways" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 57).

Open Coding. Also called initial coding is a process used to break data down into "discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 102). The purpose of open coding is "to remain open to all possible theoretical directions indicated by the reading of the data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 46). According to Saldaña (2012), open coding gives the researcher the opportunity to deeply reflect on the data and it is the first step for a researcher to gain ownership of the data. The researcher began analyzing the data by employing the open coding process and that was the first step in the data analysis. Through using the open-coding process, initial categories were developed from the interview transcripts. These evolving categories were labeled and were assigned codes and this allowed for making comparisons between categories and subcategories that emerged from the data.

Axial Coding. This process followed open coding. Through axial coding, the researcher's goal was to find relationships between open codes in order to develop core

categories from these codes. Saldaña (2012) suggests that axial coding allows for reducing the number of initial codes and enables the researcher to generate conceptual categories from these codes. Thus, at the axial coding stage, codes were compared to determine their relation with one another. For this study, in order to further refine the initial categories, axial coding took place through analyzing each line of the data, conducting several reviews, and reassembling of the data in different ways.

Selective Coding. The last stage in the coding process involved selective coding. The axial coding process allowed for identifying more core categories and made a more focused analysis possible. At this stage, interview transcripts were further coded through selecting the most relevant data to reflect on the phenomenon being studied.

Analytic Memos. Self-directed notes on the research being undertaken were written throughout the entire coding process. According to Clarke (2005), "Memos are sites of conversation with ourselves about our data" (p. 202). In addition, memo writing facilitates both documenting and reflecting on the coding processes and choices (Saldaña, 2012). Therefore, the researcher wrote analytic memos throughout the process of coding to be able to more fully describe the emerging codes and their relationship with one another. In addition, analytic memos allowed for further clarification and explanation when doing the write up.

Summary

This chapter demonstrated the researcher's agenda for conducting this qualitative study. An interpretive paradigm was used to allow for eliciting data from the participants' own experience and such data were then used to drive my research. The data collection

came from semi-structured and open-ended interviews. To analyze the data, I utilized

thematic analysis through three levels of qualitative coding: open, axial, and selective.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to explore how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen understand and talk about the use/roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making through a lens of institutional theory as set forth by DiMaggio and Powell (1983). For this study, seven interviews were conducted with executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations addressing women's rights to answer the proposed research questions. This chapter briefly reports the main themes that emerged from the interview transcripts through presenting exemplar quotes. These themes will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The interviews were designed to elicit information about how executives understand and talk about the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and for surveying and the work of other organizations within the same institutional field. The illustrative descriptions provided by the study participants helped the researcher paint a picture of the nature of the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes in their organizations and were the basis for identifying the most prominent themes and patterns. The analysis of the interview transcripts yielded seven main themes. These themes fall into two main broad categories: (1) challenges and (2) environmental scanning. The category of challenges elucidates factors that impact the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes. The environmental scanning category is related to surveying the work of other organizations when making strategic decisions. See Table 1, below, for the seven main

themes derived from the interviews.

Table 1

Interview Analysis Themes

Themes	
Communication Technologies (Challenges)	Environmental Scanning
Minimal use of communication technology	Culture of sharing and lack of transparency
Internet and electricity as a luxury	Benefits of surveying other NGOs
	Idolizing INGOs and foreign NGOs
	Role Model Local NGOs
	Mimicking other organizations

Challenges

RQ1 was: How do executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making? Under the category of challenges two sub-themes emerged from the data analysis to answer this question. Each sub-theme is related to factors that affect the use of communication technologies when making strategic decisions. These sub-themes include minimal use of communication technologies and Internet and electricity as luxury. Table 2, below, provides quotations that exemplify each of the sub-themes of challenges discussed by the participants.

Table 2

Themes Relating to Challenges Affecting Communication Technologies Use

Challenges	Exemplar Quotes
Minimal Use of Communication Technologies	"Most of the time we don't use it [communication technologies]" "There is no effective communication technology in my culture."
	"The use of technology actually is very limited in Yemen."
	"In Yemen, here, the communication technology is not wide spread in many organizations."
Availability of Internet and Electricity	"The electricity in our county is not that good so it could affect us to use technology in a good way."
	"We have the issue of electricity blackouts in Yemen… if we just overcome this electricity and internet issue, I think technology will be used greatly."
	"Emailing might take a whole day. Just to send one email." "The decisions can be actually influenced by who has access to internet there in Yemen … Internet is not gonna be the way that [is] gonna reach everybody in Yemen. It is gonna just reach those who have internet, who have access which is the elite – who have money, who have internet, who have electricity."

Minimal Use of Communication Technologies

Limited use of communication technologies was a prominent sub-theme relating

to the challenges that affect the effective use of communication technologies for strategic

decision-making purposes. Most participants explained that the use of communication

technologies in their organizations, other organizations, and even in the whole country is

limited. Describing the use of communication technologies in his organization, one

executive stated, "We don't use technology in everything. We use technology little [little

technology]." The same respondent also believed that this issue not only limits the

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effective use of communication technologies when making strategic decisions, but also hinders the development of the organization as a whole. He said, "We are late because we don't use communication technologies in our process." It is also important to note that other interviewees viewed the limited use of communication technologies as a common problem across similar organizations. One deputy director stated, "Communication technology is not wide spread in many organizations." In addition, one interviewee talked generally about the limited use of technology in Yemen. He emphasized, "The use of technology actually is very limited in Yemen." It can be inferred that many participants view the limited use of communication technologies as one of the main factors that impede the effective use of communication technologies in their strategic decision-making process. In order for NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen to improve the quality of their decisions, more attention should be directed towards adopting communication technologies and familiarizing the organization members with the already existing ones.

Internet and Electricity as Luxury

Another sub-theme related to the challenges that affect the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes brings up the issue of Internet accessibility and the electricity blackouts in Yemen. Many interviewees pointed out that these two issues hinder the effective use of communication technologies. One respondent remarked, "If we just overcome this electricity and Internet issue, I think technology will be used greatly." It is also important to note that some executives who might be able to and are willing to use communication technologies in their strategic decision-making

process encounter frustration due to these two major obstacles. One respondent highlighted the difficulty she faces by stating, "There is no electricity. There is no Internet… I mean emailing might take a whole day. Just to send one email." In addition, one director pointed out that the issue of electricity blackouts affects the use of technology in Yemen by saying, "The electricity in our county is not that good, so it could affect us to use technology in a good way." Finally, when asked about his experience with using communication technologies when making strategic decisions, one respondent stated, "For sure [it] will depend on the availability of the network [internet] itself." Several participants stressed that the limited availability of Internet and electricity affect the use of communication technologies during their strategic decision-making process. They also felt that if electricity and Internet were adequately available, communication technologies will be used more effectively when making strategic decisions. Research shows that availability of resources such as money, materials, and technology during the decision-making process leads to decision success (Rodrigues & Hickson, 1995). Therefore, in order for NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen to improve the quality of their decisions, more attention should be directed towards ensuring the availability of needed resources.

Environmental Scanning

RQ2 was: How do executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies for surveying the work of other organizations for strategic decision-making purposes? The analysis of the interview

transcript yielded five sub-themes related to environmental scanning. These sub-themes include lack of a culture of sharing between organizations, limited benefit of surveying and getting information about other local NGOs, idolizing INGOs and/or foreign NGOs, role model local NGOs, and mimicking other organizations. Table 3, below, illustrates these five themes through exemplar respondent statements.

Table 3

Themes Relating to Environmental Scanning & Surveying Other Organizations

Environmental Scanning	Exemplar Quotes
Culture of Sharing	"In Yemen, there is no culture of sharing lessons learned or sharing experiences. There is no intention to do so, and where there is, there are usually no effective channels."
	"We cannot get the real information from theses organizations… You know, it is kind of anti-trust [trust for sharing information] between local organizations. Sometimes it gets like that."
	"We are not sharing…Like I said before, our culture don't [doesn't] care about the work of others. They work by themselves. They work alone, they don't care."
Limited Benefit of Surveying local NGOs	"What's the benefit? There [in other local NGOs] everything is traditional, the procedure, the transaction is traditional."
	"The information that we get from these local NGOs or other stakeholder will not.. they are not that useful for us in our organization."
	"These organizations do not have strategic plans and decision making is ad-hoc…Only few organizations develop timely strategies."
Idolizing INGOs or Foreign	"Some organizations, yeah, especially the international ones… to learn from their experience, from the technology they are using."

NGOs	"The foreign organizations in Yemen…. I hear they use technology in their decisions."
	"We'll check the websites of international organizations or national organizations of other countries."
Role Model Local NGOs Survival Fund, Technology	"They [organization X] will function no matter what. I mean even if, for example, there is no leadership for sometime, they will still function."
	"I think they are the model because of the limit of fund, limit of financial capacity but they are surviving."
	"X is the only organization that implements projects with millions of Euros."
	"They have a lot of donors. They are working with many different donors local or international donors."
	"I think they can be a model using emails websites, financial systems and even having the Facebook pages and using Whatsapp as well."
	"I hear that they use technology in their decision and it is very important…We are late because we don't use communication technologies in our process."
Mimicking Other Organizations	"I don't think I will try to copy a specific organization. No, I will never do that."
	"We are not copying them one hundred percent. We can take from them the useful things we can apply them in our communities."
	"We can't follow their work. We can't. I think we should not, actually."

Culture of Sharing and Lack of Transparency

Interviewees repeatedly noted that there is no culture of sharing between

organizations and there is an obvious lack of transparency, which often was viewed as

one of the factors that shape the dynamics of surveying the work of other organizations

and the information gathering process needed for making decisions. In using the word culture, the participants were trying to reference the organizational behavior in their context and how they look forward to more developed organizational patterns that promote transparency in sharing information, experiences, and lessons learned. Therefore, it is important to note that the use of the word culture in this context does not describe or refer to qualities, characteristics, beliefs, or behaviors that are inherent to the Yemeni people or society. One board member disclosed, "In Yemen there is no culture of sharing lessons learned or sharing experiences. There is no intention to do so, and where there is, there are usually no effective channels." Another respondent shared this point of view, saying, "The information that we get is not the whole information. They [other organizations] give us a brief [idea] about their works or what they are doing but they are not talking to us about their secrets or their confidentials." Another participants commented, "They work by themselves. They work alone, they don't care" and "we are not sharing. Our situation is poor in communication." It may be beneficial for NGOs and non-profit organizations within the same field to begin promoting transparency and a more open information sharing culture.

Limited Benefit of Surveying Local NGOs

Another sub-theme of environmental scanning was related to benefits of surveying the work of other local NGOs. This theme focuses on how executives referred to the significance and benefits of surveying the work of other organizations within the same field. When asked whether or not he surveys the work of others, one member of the board of directors stated, "These organization do not have strategic plans and decision

making is ad-hoc. ……only few organizations develop timely strategies." When the same respondent was asked whether she has ever surveyed the work of other organizations before making a strategic decision she simply answered, "No." Furthermore, referring to the importance of looking at the work of other local NGOs, one respondent disclosed, "What's the benefit there? Everything is traditional, the procedure, the transaction is traditional." In addition, one director commented "until now we didn't face any decision that we have to collect information about others [local NGOs], that never happened until now." She also stated, "others come to us to learn and to know the know how of [XXXX-her organization]." Finally, one deputy director remarked "the information that we get from these local NGOs or other stakeholders will not… they are not that useful for us in our organization." In order for organizations to improve the quality of their decisions, they should not ignore the importance of being knowledgeable about the decision-making processes of other organizations that affect them.

Idolizing INGOs and Foreign NGOs

Another theme of environmental scanning is related to idolizing international organizations or NGOs outside of Yemen. Many participants expressed their admiration for these organizations and enthusiastically indicated that these are the organizations that they are most likely to survey or even follow when making strategic decisions. When asked whether he surveys the work of other organizations when making strategic decisions, a deputy director revealed, "Some organizations, yeah, especially the international ones.. to learn from their experience, from the technology they are using. But for.. some local NGOs, comparing to our local NGO …we consider ourselves as a

role model for some of them." Another interviewee stated, "The foreign organizations in Yemen….I hear they use technology in their decisions …...there is innovation in their process. In their system [there is] always something new." In addition, another executive gave a comprehensive answer that touched the concept of looking up to foreign organizations. He noted, "We actually go online and search for other experiences – successful experiences in other countries." The same participant further explained, "It will be international or similar organizations in other countries to see what other organizations is [are] working on in other countries…we'll check the websites of international organizations or national organizations of other countries." It was observed during the interviews that most participants look up to successful NGOs and non-profit organizations. According to Powell (1983), organizations are likely to mimic other successful organizations.

Role Model Local Organizations: Survival – Funding – Technology

A sub-theme of environmental scanning which emerged for the data analysis is related to how local NGOs can be viewed as role model organizations. Although the majority of participants showed admiration for INGOs and foreign NGOs and their successful practices, many participants stressed that some local NGOs in Yemen could be and should be the role model. The interviewees put forth different explanations for why they consider certain local NGOs to be role models. Most of these explanations were related to these organizations' survival, funding, and use of technology.

Survival. Showing admiration for another local NGO, one respondent reported, "They will function no matter what. I mean.. even if, for example, there is no leadership

for sometime, they will still function." Another interviewee stated, "I can tell you some of the national organizations, some of the NGOs who [which] have their own systems and which is, I think, THEY ARE THE MODEL because [despite] of the limit of fund, limit of financial capacity but they are surviving."

Funding. Many of the study participants referred to availability of funds as one of the reasons for looking up to certain local NGOs. One executive stated, "Part of their [organization X] success was because there is a lot of funding or a lot of focus on them." Referring to funding as the main reason for admiring a certain organization, one manager emphasized, "[XXXX] is the only organization that implements projects with millions of Euros." In addition, one deputy director stated, "They have a lot of donors. They are working with many different donors local or international donors."

Technology. Few respondents referred to technology and its use as one of the reasons for considering certain NGOs as role models. However, the ones who conveyed this idea, did so in an emotional way. For instance, one executive stated, "they [organization X] have an impressive management system and it is all based on technology." The same executive also explained, "they [organization X] have their own Facebook pages and websites and they are even using Whatsapp… I think they can be a model using emails, websites, financial systems, and even having the Facebook pages and using Whatsapp."

Mimicking Other Organizations

Another sub-theme of environmental scanning is related to mimicking/copying or following other organizations' practices. Although the majority of participants suggested

that surveying the work of other organizations is important for strategic decision-making

purposes, most of them resisted the idea of mimicking/copying or following the steps of

other organizations. One executive explained, "I don't think I will try to copy a specific

organization. No, I will never do that." Another respondent said, "We are not copying

them one hundred percent. We can take from them the useful things we can apply them in

our communities." Another respondent also showed resistance to copying the practices of

other organizations. He emphasized, "We can't follow their work. We can't." The same

participant further explained, "I think we should not actually. I think we should see what

the gaps are and maybe work... each one works on their mandate issues." Finally another

respondent stated, "it is not copying, it is adopting." Such resistance to mimicking the

practices other organizations contradicts with the concept of isomorphism set forth by

DiMaggio and Powell (1983). NGOs and non-profit organizations would be remiss to

ignore the importance of learning from and mimicking other organizations and their

successful practices.

Summary

This chapter addressed the results and findings from the data collected in the

interviews. The analysis of interview transcripts yielded two main themes. These themes

fall into two main broad categories: (1) challenges and (2) environmental scanning. The

category of challenges elucidates factors that impact the use of communication

technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and consists of two sub-themes.

These sub-themes include minimal use of communication technologies and Internet and

electricity as luxury. The second category of environmental scanning is related to surveying the work of other organizations when making strategic decisions and consists of five sub-themes. These sub-themes include lack of a culture of sharing between organizations, limited benefit of surveying and getting information about other local NGOs, idolizing INGOs and/or foreign NGOs, role model local NGOs, and mimicking other organizations.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Communication technologies have become a significant part of today's organizations. The use of communication technologies results in major shifts in ways organizations interact with one another and allows for greater exposure to the work of other organizations. In addition, communication technologies facilitate the process of data gathering and obtaining accessible online information.

The purpose of this thesis was to explore how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen understand and talk about the roles/uses of communication technologies in their strategic decision-making process. Specifically, this thesis aimed at exploring how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and for making sense of the work of similar organizations within the same field. In order to investigate this line of research, this study employed thematic analysis. Seven executives from seven different NGOs and non-profit organizations were interviewed.

The interviews yielded interesting results that shed light on how executives understand and talk about the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and surveying the work of other organizations. Seven sub-themes were generated from the analysis of the interview transcripts. These themes related to two main broad categories of challenges and environmental scanning. The category of challenges related to factors that limit the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and it consisted of two sub-themes: minimal use of communication

technologies and Internet and electricity as luxury. The category of environmental

scanning related heavily to surveying and making sense of the work of other

organizations and it included five sub-themes: lack of a culture of sharing and

transparency between organizations, limited benefit of surveying and getting information

about other local NGOs, idolizing INGOs and/or foreign NGOs, role model local NGOs,

and mimicking other organizations.

This chapter represents a detailed description of the major themes that emerged

from the data analysis. First, it addresses each sub-theme of challenges that influence the

effective use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and

provides some insight about how organizations might overcome such challenges. Second,

this chapter addresses the sub-themes of environmental scanning and provides

suggestions about how organizations might benefit from surveying the work of others

when making strategic decisions. Finally, this chapter addresses how findings of this

research correspond and/or contradict with past research.

Review and Discussion of Findings

Minimal Use of Communication Technologies

The first sub-theme of challenges related to the minimal use of communication

technologies. Most participants acknowledged the significance of using communication

technologies in their strategic decision-making process. For instance, many participants

explained that certain communication technologies as well as information management

systems have helped in facilitating the decision-making process in their organizations,

contributed to making informed decisions based on evidence and real data from the field, and assisted executives with making decisions. However, most respondents repeatedly raised the issue of the limited use of communication technologies in their organizations as well as in others and viewed it as one of the factors that impede the effective use of communication technologies in their strategic decision-making process.

Although the use of communication technologies in organizational contexts is well documented, there are factors that influence its effective use. For instance, research shows that the decision of which communication technologies to choose and how to use them can be influenced by factors such as the availability of technology and the familiarity with the technology (Kahai & Cooper, 2003). Being a developing country, Yemen is still struggling with adopting and keeping pace with technological advancements and technological change. NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen, particularly the small ones and/or those in rural areas have very limited familiarity with technology. Therefore, in the Yemeni organizational context, the fact that some organization members might lack the basic skills of using a computer or the knowledge of how to send an email is not at all surprising. This limited use and familiarity with technologies can be a hindrance to the development of these organizations and can negatively affect the quality of the decisions made. One of the participants revealed, "we are late [behind] because we don't use communication technologies in our process." It has been suggested that lack of funds for staffing and development in non-profit organizations might be one of the reasons for not adopting other communication technologies (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Therefore, in case of unavailability of funding

allocated for adopting new communication technologies, NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen should work on increasing its members' familiarity with the already existing communication technologies through training and capacity building. This will be useful for organizations and will result in higher quality decisions. According to Huber (1990), using computer-mediated communication and decision support technologies can be useful because such technologies have the potential to provide accurate information and speed up the decision-making process.

Internet and Electricity as Luxury

Another sub-theme of challenges that affect the use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes brings up the issues of electricity blackouts and Internet availability. Electricity blackouts are a major problem in Yemen. These blackouts occur very frequently, sometimes on daily basis, and vary in their intensity. Some of these blackouts might last for several hours or even for several days and the electricity problem might worsen due to many factors, including political instability and poor economy. It has been suggested that blackouts bring economic and social losses to businesses and society (Yu, 2009). In Yemen, many NGOs and non-profit organizations are affected greatly by electricity blackouts. The impact of this problem is even more evident in smaller NGOs and non-profit organization that cannot afford generators due to limited financial resources. What makes the situation even worse for some of these organizations is the vast increase in fuel prices. This means that organizations, which already have generators, might not be able to afford the fuel to run them. Many of the study participants considered the problem of blackouts as one of the

major obstacles to the effective use of communication technologies in their organizations mainly because it results in limiting Internet accessibility.

Internet accessibility is another issue that was addressed by some of the study participants. Research shows that Internet connections in many parts of the developing world can be slow and patchy (Nourbakhsh et al., 2006). One of the respondents clearly explained this issue by saying "There is no electricity. There is no Internet… I mean emailing might take a whole day. Just to send one email." Therefore, providing NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen, particularly those with limited resources, with the resources needed for collecting and analyzing the information needed for decision-making will contribute to improving the quality of their decisions. It has been speculated that lack of resources needed for analyzing and searching out relevant information can be one of the reasons for bounded rationality (Jones et al., 1992). Furthermore, according to Rodrigues and Hickson (1995), availability of resources such as money, materials, technology, and accurate information during the decision-making process is likely to lead to decision success.

Culture of Sharing and Lack of Transparency

The five sub-themes related to environmental scanning also yielded significant insights about surveying and making sense of the work of other organizations when making strategic decisions. One prominent sub-theme that was discovered highlighted the issue of the lack of transparency and a culture of sharing information among similar organizations. The word culture in this context was used by participant to reference the organizational behavior in their context and to express their desire to have organizational

patterns that promote for transparency in sharing information, experiences, and lessons learned. Therefore, it is important to note that the use of the word culture in this context does not describe or refer to qualities, characteristics, beliefs, or behaviors that are inherent to the Yemeni people or society.

According to Grunig (1992), it is important for organizational leaders to be knowledgeable about the decision-making processes of other organizations that affect them. Although the majority of the study participants acknowledged the significance of learning about and obtaining information about the work of others, they considered the lack of transparency between organizations to be an obstacle. The participants also clarified that sharing information and lessons learned is not part of the culture of organizations in the country. This means that organizations are often unwilling to share information about their work or to learn from the experiences of others. Therefore, promoting a better culture of sharing among NGOs and non-profit organizations will help them work more efficiently and will result in higher quality decisions. It is important to clarify here that one of the most significant reasons for that the unwillingness to share information and for the lack of transparency between Yemeni organizations can be the high competition between local organizations and their dependence on foreign funds for survival.

Limited Benefit of Surveying Local NGOs

The second sub-theme of environmental scanning was related to the benefits of surveying the work of similar local NGOs for strategic decision-making purposes. Specifically, this theme yielded insights about how executives talk about the benefits of

looking at the work of other local NGOs before making strategic decisions. Few executives considered surveying the work of similar local NGOs to be important and to have an impact on their decision-making process. However, the majority of participants noted the limited benefit of surveying the work of other organizations and some of them even explained that they never surveyed or felt the need to survey the work of other organizations before making strategic decisions. Respondents offered various explanations to justify their claim. For instance, two respondents considered their own organizations to superior to others in the field and criticized the practices of other organizations. Other participants, however, simply explained that looking at the work of others is not necessary and they doubted the usefulness of the information they get about the work of others. This finding shows that there is some kind of isolation from the work of others and it supports an argument that an entirely rational decision is rare because information is usually not complete (Simon, 1995). It can also be inferred that this isolation might be the result of the obvious admiration for the more developed Western organizational models, particularly because a lot of NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen depend on foreign funds for survival.

According to Grunig (1992), it is important for organizational leaders to be knowledgeable about the decision-making processes of other organization that affect them. Therefore, in order to make more rational decisions, it is important to get more information about the work of other organizations. The tendency for organizations to look similar is referred to as isomorphism and results from pressures related to laws, funding, professional associations, and other agencies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983)

Idolizing INGOs and Foreign NGOs

The third sub-theme of environmental scanning is related to idolizing international organizations or NGOs outside of Yemen. Almost all of the study participants showed admiration for the work and practices of INGOs or NGOs outside of Yemen. This sub-theme can be further explained through institutional theory research as well as strategic decision-making research. The study participants explained that they are likely to survey and mimic the practices of INGOs or NGOs in other countries because they consider them to be successful. This concept of imitating and following the practices of other successful organizations is set forth by institutional theory research. According to DiMaggio and Powell (1983), organizations are likely to mimic other successful organizations particularly as a response to uncertainty. In addition, Grunig (1992) suggests that it is important for organizational leaders to be knowledgeable of the work of other organizations that affect them. Furthermore, organizations rely on their environment for legitimacy which, in turn, ensures a consistent flow of resources and organizational survival (Maguire & Uchida, 2000; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Oliver, 1991; Peyrot, 1991; Rowan, 1981; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). In Yemen, a lot of NGOs receive funds from INGOs and most of the time their survival depends on these funds. Therefore, obtaining information about these organizations is very important and might affect the strategic decision-making process in some local NGOs. In addition, as a developing country and as one of the poorest in the Middle East, Yemen is still behind in many aspects and it is not surprising that members of organizations will admire the work and

the practices of other organizations out of the country, which they consider to be more, developed.

Role Model Local Organizations: Survival – Funding – Technology

The fourth sub-theme of environmental scanning was related to admiring the work of some local NGOs. Although the majority of participants viewed INGOs and foreign NGOs as successful and some of them even referred to them as their role models, few participants viewed similar local NGOs to be their role model. One of the most important reasons that the respondents provided for admiring the work of other local NGOs was survival. Due to the political instability, poor economy, and lack of resources, a lot of organizations in Yemen struggle to survive. The survival of these organizations shows that they have good interactions with their environment and they are alert with the existing changes. Indeed, such organizations should be admired. In addition, respondents referred to adopting technology and using technology actively as another reason for admiring local NGOs. As addressed earlier, the use of communication technology is not very wide spread in Yemen. Therefore it is not surprising to discover that certain organizations are admired for their active use of technology and social media. In fact, it has been suggested that lack of funds for staffing and development in non-profit organizations might be one of the reasons for not adopting other communication technologies (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012). Therefore, due to limited resources NGOs should be encouraged to use social media and free Internet platforms. Finally, the survival of a lot of NGOs in Yemen depends on receiving funds from donors. Therefore, organizations that receive funding are viewed as successful and legitimate. This is

because these organizations have the resources needed to implement big projects, this, in turn, reflect that they have a good reputation and they have the donors' trust.

Mimicking Other Organizations

The last sub-theme of environmental scanning is related to mimicking/copying or following other organizations' practices. The majority of the study participants resisted the idea of mimicking other organizations within the same field. During the interviews, a lot of participants resisted the idea of mimicking other organizations including the ones they considered to be successful. Therefore, during the interviews the researcher replaced the word mimic with copy and/or follow to elicit more detailed answers from the study participants. However, the participants still rejected the concept of mimicking other organizations' and their successful practices. According to Wilson (2003), one of the characteristics of strategic decisions is that they involve high levels of uncertainty. In addition, bounded rationality research shows that one of the ways executives deal with overwhelming situations is by copying the actions of others (DiMaggio and Powell). Put differently, organizations are likely to mimic other successful organizations particularly as a response to uncertainty and this tendency for organizations to look similar is referred to as isomorphism and results from pressures related to laws, funding, professional associations, and other agencies (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Therefore, this finding contradicts with the concept of isomorphism and mimetic pressure. NGOs and non-profit organizations would be remiss to ignore the importance of learning from and mimicking other organizations and their successful practices.

Limitations

Although the results of this study yielded beneficial insights for the field strategic decision-making and communication technologies, there are limitations to its utility and application. The most prominent limitation was the sample size. Although the data for this study was gathered through conducting seven interviews with seven executives from different NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen, the generalizability of the results should be further explored.

Another limitation of this study was the language barrier. All the study participants spoke English as a second language, which at times made it difficult for the respondents to understand some of the interview questions and to provide detailed answers. To help elicit detailed answers, the researcher translated the questions into Arabic whenever needed or requested by the respondents. In addition, the participants were informed before the interviews that they may ask for any clarifications and may switch to Arabic whenever needed.

In addition to limited sample size and the language barrier, a third limitation was that most of the interviews were conducted through phone calls and Skype calls with no video due electricity blackouts and weak Internet connection in Yemen. This means that body language and other nonverbal cues that could have been beneficial for the discussion were not observed and the responses were analyzed based on verbal responses alone.

A large limitation of this study is that it was hard for the researcher to follow up with most of the study participants after the interviews were conducted due to the

beginning of airstrikes in Yemen by a Saudi-led coalition of 10 Arab countries on March 26th, 2015. Most of the participants had no Internet connection or electricity due to the war. In addition, most of the participants stopped replying to the researcher's emails, phone calls, and messages due to the crisis in the country and the tremendous fear that they were going through.

In order for this study to elicit detailed information on how executives understand and talk about the roles/uses of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and for surveying the work of other organizations in the decision-making process, certain types of communication technologies were not identified in the interview questions. This has made it difficult for few of the study participants to understand the questions about communication technologies and a few of them stated that the term "communication technologies" was too broad. Therefore, future researchers may consider narrowing their focus and specifying certain types of communication technologies when conducting a similar study.

Future Research

In order to overcome the limitations of this current study, future researchers should consider expanding the sample size to include a larger population. This will be beneficial because it will allow for the generalizability of the findings and for greater insight. A larger sample could be gained by increasing the number of the study participants to include more participants from different organizations and from various management levels. In addition, future researchers should consider conducting a similar

study in the participants' native language. Conducing the interviews in Arabic will allow for eliciting more detailed analysis and will also make it easier for researchers to find more participants. Another area of future research could be a comparative study on how communication technologies are used for strategic decision-making purposes and for surveying the work of other organizations in different developing countries.

Future researchers could narrow their focus to investigate how executives understand and talk about certain types of communication technologies such as e-mail and artificial intelligence. Furthermore, it might be useful to explore how the use of social media as well as interactive platforms affects the strategic decision-making process. Therefore, it would be beneficial to conduct a mixed method research including surveys and interviews. Surveys could be used to specify the types of communication technologies that are being used the most and then qualitative interviews to obtain a more detailed description of how such communication technologies are used and might impact the strategic decision-making process. Many participants in this study suggested that communication technologies play an important role in the strategic decision-making process. Thus, future researchers should focus on which communication technologies might be the most effective and suitable in the Yemeni organizational context.

Finally, one of the unexpected results of this study was the obvious resistance expressed by the participants in regards to imitating and following the practices of other organizations. Therefore, it would be beneficial to direct more research attention towards investigating this phenomenon during the organizational decision-making process.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to examine how executives at NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies in their strategic decision-making process through a lens of institutional theory. Specifically, this study examined how executives talk about the roles/uses of communication technologies for strategic decision-making and for making sense of the work of other organizations.

Interpretation, meaning-making, and information are important factors in the strategic decision-making process that can be advanced by communication technologies. It has been implicitly assumed that information technology has the potential to enhance decision-making (Dutton & Kraemer, 1978). In addition, it has been found that new technology has noticeably resulted in a shift in the organizational communication patterns and one of the results of these shifting patterns is a change in the organizational decision-making process (Mustard, 2000). Furthermore, substantial research on decision-making has emphasized the organizational choice to adopt communication technologies (Zorn et al., 2009) and the "information processing" view of decision-making processes (Hodgkinson & Starbuck, 2008). However, research on how executives understand and talk about the roles/uses of communication technologies in the strategic decision-making process has been very limited.

Therefore, the objective of this study was to provide a detailed description of how executives understand and talk about the roles/uses of communication technologies for

strategic decision-making purposes and for surveying the work of other organizations in the same field. This thesis was an attempt to move from the conventional decision-making research which does not include the social context in which decision-making occurs and factors that might have an impact on the process. Therefore, analyzing how executives understand and talk about the role of communication technologies in the decision-making process from an institutional theory perspective yielded great insight.

This investigation and the analysis of the interview transcripts yielded many results. Seven sub-themes were generated and they related to two main categories of challenges and environmental scanning. Two sub-themes of challenges helped to build a deeper understanding of the factors that impede the effective use of communication technologies for strategic decision-making purposes and reasons why communication technologies may not be used to its full potential in Yemeni organizations.

Five sub-themes of environmental scanning were generated and they related heavily to surveying the work of other organizations for strategic decision-making purposes with a focus on the organizational context of Yemen. These interpretations helped in expanding the understanding of institutional theory and particularly of "mimetic pressure," a label for an organization's imitation of other successful organizations as set forth by Dimaggio and Powell (1983). The participants in this study recognized the importance of learning from the experiences of other organizations within the same field; however, the results indicate that there is a clear resistance to imitating other organizations even the ones that are considered to be successful. It could be concluded that the increased competition between organizations as well as the lack of

transparency and effective sharing of experiences and lessons learned cause NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen to lose interest in surveying the work of other organizations and to resist following their successful practices during their strategic decision-making process. Therefore, NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen may benefit from promoting a more open and transparent culture of information sharing. In addition, although the majority of this study participants showed admiration for the work of INGOs and foreign organizations, it would be useful for NGOs and non-profit organizations in Yemen to closely observe the work of other local NGOs and to learn from their successful practices during the strategic decision-making process.

Although broad generalizations cannot be made from the results of this study, this thesis opens up new avenues for research that will advance knowledge in the fields of strategic decision-making, communication technologies, and institutional theory. More research is needed on the role of communication technologies in the strategic decision-making process and why communication technologies may not be used to its full potential in this process.

In addition, future researchers should consider investigating factors that might lead to increasing the imitation of other organizations within the same field, particularly in the context of NGOs and non-profit organizations in developing countries like Yemen. Finally, future research should address the potential of communication technologies in increasing the imitation of other organizations within the same field, particularly in case of uncertainty during the decision-making process.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Part 1: *The first few questions I want to ask you are about strategic decision-making in your organization and the use of technology…*

Q1: Tell me about your experience with making strategic decisions in your organization? When you think about your organizations' strategic decision-making process, what do you focus on?

Q2: Do you use any kind of communication technologies when making strategic decisions? What kind of communication technologies do you use? Follow-up/explanation: These may be technologies you use "within" your organization

Q3: Explain the role of communication technologies in your organization's decision-making process. Tell me about your experience with using communication technologies when making strategic decisions?

Part 2: *Now I want to change directions a little bit; I'm interested in talking with you about*

Q4: Do you look at the work of other organizations in the same field (Women's rights)? Do you do that much? Why?

Q5: Have you ever surveyed the work of other organizations using communication technologies before making a strategic decision? Tell me a story when something like that happened? What did you learn? What was the outcome?

Q5b: Do you have an organization that you consider to be a role model? What makes an organization as such your role model? How do you get your information about such organization? (Optional follow-up)

Q6: When is it *most* important – if important at all – to look at the work of other organizations and their strategic decision-making processes?

Part 3: *We're through most of my questions. The last few questions ask you to take a broad perspective…*

Q7: Does the information you get about the work of other organizations have an impact on your organization's strategic decision-making process? What is the effect of the information you get about the work of other organizations on the strategic decision-making process?

Q8: When you are uncertain about a specific strategic decision to be made by your organization, what do you do? Do you do some search about other organizations' practices? If yes, how do you do your search? Do you find that following the steps of other organizations to be a solution? If yes, which organizations are you likely to mimic and why?

Q9: What have I forgotten to ask you, but should have asked you? Is there anything we haven't talked about that you think is important to share?

Information Concerning Participation in a Research Study

Strategic Decision-Making and Communication Technologies:
An Institutional Theory Perspective

Description of the Research and Your Participation

You are one of a few executives invited to participate in a research study conducted by Hanan Al-Shadadi and Dr. Brenden E. Kendall of Clemson University's Department of Communication Studies. The purpose of this study is to understand how executives in NGOs and non-profit organizations understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making.

Your participation involves being interviewed by researcher. The entire process should take between 20– 45 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no known risks associated with this research. Possible discomforts include having interview audio recorded. Participants may continue the interview without the recording if they become uncomfortable.

Potential Benefits

The results of this research will provide organizations with useful insights about strategic decision-making processes. In particular this study will focus on the decision-making process and whether the increased exposure to the work of other organizations in the same field through the use of communication technologies might impact this process.

Protection of Confidentiality

Your identity will not be revealed in any publication that might result from this study. No personally identifying information or information directly identifying your organization will be published in this study. Pseudonyms will be used and only the research team will have access to recordings of the interview that contain identifying information. Recordings will be destroyed as the interviews are transcribed by the researcher.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You will not be penalized in any way should you decide not to participate or withdraw from this study.
Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Dr. Brenden E. Kendall of Clemson University at brendek@clemson.edu. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.

Appendix C

Template Recruitment Statement

Dear member of organization:

You are one of a few executives invited to participate in a research study conducted by Hanan Al-Shadadi and Dr. Brenden E. Kendall of Clemson University's Department of Communication Studies. Your participation involves being interviewed by researcher, possibly over the phone or internet video conference. The entire process should take between 30– 45 minutes.

The purpose of this study is to understand how executives in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and non-profit organizations (NPOs) understand and talk about the uses/roles of communication technologies in strategic decision-making. Personal information will not be published with this interview in any way; we will take measures to protect your identity and that of your organization.

Your participation in this study is very important to help advance understanding of strategic decision-making processes, especially for international NGOs and NPOs. Your interview will be scheduled at a time and through a method convenient to you. We thank you in advance for considering participation.

Attached to this message is a consent form, which explains your rights as a research participant. Please read it carefully and ask any questions you may have.

Thank you for your time and interest in this research. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me at halshad@clemson.edu. You may also reach out to the faculty supervisor for this project, Dr. Kendall, at brendek@clemson.edu.

Sincerely,

Hanan Al-Shadadi
MACTS Student
Clemson University
Department of Communication Studies
417 Daniel Hall
halshad@g.clemson.edu
+ [*personal phone number omitted*] (cell)