Bartolomeo Rafael Bialas
Adam Figiel

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BRAND ORIENTATION

How to manage wisely, drive profitability, and improve revenue growth

A must-read for forward-thinking leaders, this book shows how a brand-oriented management philosophy can help you manage more wisely, strengthen your competitive edge, and unlock sustained profitability and revenue growth.

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Introduction

What an organization focuses its attention on – and therefore commits its valuable resources and assets to and directs activities towards – is reflected by its dominant management philosophy (de la Cruz Jara, et al., 2025). Management philosophy – also known as strategic orientation – is a nebulous business concept that essentially refers to an organization's overarching approach and mindset towards managing style and selecting and achieving its objectives. It's a set of guiding principles that dictate how an organization operates, allocates assets and resources, makes decisions, and responds to its environment. Management philosophy also reflects the organization's mission, vision, values, purpose, and long-term strategic direction. It is the business mindset that guides and informs an organization's actions, processes, activities, and decisions. Management philosophy can be conceptualized as the metaphorical "north star that keeps an organization moving in the right direction, even when the terrain gets rough or the path is unclear" (Consultancy-me.com, 2023). Management philosophy allows an organization to navigate towards its long-term strategic objectives, helping it make optimally informed decisions, adapt to constantly changing environment, and – ultimately – achieve long-term success (Consultancy-me.com, 2023). Strategic orientation – say Marcelo F. de la Cruz Jara, Jelena Spanjol, and Theresa Doppstadt – "represents a firm's strategic focus determining managerial resource allocation and influences how the firm creates value for customers and shareholders, for example by investing in the development of novel products" (de la Cruz Jara et al., 2025).

Even though the concept of strategic orientation of organizations has recently attracted widespread attention from management scholars, there is no universally accepted definition of the strategic orientation of an organization. According to Henri Hakala, "The very nature of an orientation is a matter of debate, and different streams of literature have developed diverse concepts. A dictionary definition of the word *orientation* refers to *general or lasting direction of thought, inclination or interest.* Academic literature has defined the orientation of the business in various ways. [I adopt a view], in which strategic orientations are viewed as principles that direct and influence the activities of a firm and generate the behaviors intended to ensure the viability and performance of the firm. These principles can also be actively *used* to steer the activities of the organization. Some researchers see orientation as a representation of an organization's adaptive culture which steers its interaction with its environment. [I see] orientations as adaptive mechanisms, not as culture, but acknowledge that company culture may be manifested through its orientation" (Hakala, 2011).

The impact of management philosophy on corporate performance has been widely recognized within the academic milieu, but the proverbial nuts and bolts of management philosophy remain elusive. Numerous scholars maintain that strategic orientation has a profound impact on corporate performance. The importance of management philosophy in business is predicated on the strategic alignment theory which "assumes the importance of fit among a firm's strategic parameters and contextual factors on firm performance. Alignment refers to the firm's internal and external environmental factors. It covers different outcome variables, such as financial performance, productivity, and customer benefits" (He at al., 2024). Strategic alignment revolves around the practice of integrating an organization's goals and strategic objectives into its overarching business strategy, work processes, and individual roles. The major objective of strategic alignment is to get every member of the organization – from top-level management to frontline employees – to work seamlessly towards a shared vision while embracing the organization's purpose and values. "When done effectively, strategic alignment results in greater coordination, stronger collaboration, and optimal use of resources to achieve organizational goals. It prevents fragmented efforts across departments and helps improve performance. The actions of each strategic business unit, team and individual directly contribute to and drive the organization's overall success. While having a clearly defined business strategy is important, it is of little use if the organization is not aligned around it. Strategic alignment is crucial because it ensures the day-to-day work and the efforts of all employees are systematically contributing towards the long-term objectives. Some key benefits of strategic alignment include:

- Heightened focus on priorities: resources and efforts get consolidated around initiatives that create maximum value. Low-priority or non-strategic work gets eliminated.
- Improved coordination and collaboration:functional silos are broken as everyone sees themselves as working for the organization rather than just their department or team.
- Reduced inefficiencies and duplication: processes, systems and structures are designed to optimize cross-functional cooperation rather than operate independently.
- Better decision-making: executives and managers can make informed choices regarding investments, opportunities and challenges as they have visibility into their impact on strategic objectives.
- Stronger organizational performance: synergies are created when diverse skills and perspectives across levels work as one united force towards common goals.

- Sustained competitive advantage: continuous innovation and improvements help the organization stay agile and resilient through changes in the business environment.

So, in essence, strategic alignment acts like a strategic GPS – it orients the entire organization in the right strategic direction to achieve its vision" (The Strategy Institute, 2024).

Aside from the strategic alignment theory, management philosophy has its roots in the strategic choice theory. According to Brian Harney, "strategic choice refers to the process whereby power holders within organizations decide upon courses of strategic action" (Harney, 2023). In other words, strategic choice theory describes the role that managers or leading groups play in influencing an organization through making choices in a dynamic political process. "Previous to this theory, a common view was that organizations were thought to be designed along operational requirements based on the external environment. Strategic choice theory provided an alternative that emphasized the agency of individuals and groups within organizations to make choices, sometimes serving their own ends that dynamically influenced the development of those organizations. These strategic choices formed part of an organizational learning process that adapted to the external environment as well as the internal political situation. […] Strategic choice theory starts with consideration of relevant forces in the external environment that affects employment relationship. Changing the external environment induces employers to make adjustment in their competitive business strategies. In making these adjustments, the range of options considered are filtered and constrained so as to be consistent with the values, beliefs, and philosophies engrained in the minds of key decision-makers. As choices are also embedded in particular historical and institutional structures, the range of feasible options available at any given time is partially constrained by the outcomes of previous organizational decisions and the current distribution of power within the firm and between it and any unions, government agencies, or other external organizations it deals with" (V Skills Certified, n.d.). According to Wucheng Han, Yang Zhou, and Ruoyu Lu, "Decision makers' perceptions of the environment are shaped by their prior ideologies, and strategic actions are determined by actors' and organizations' prior cognitive frameworks which exist in the form of embedded mindsets and cultures. The strategic choice theory argues that the forces and variables of the external environment are dynamic, and their interaction often influences business strategies, the effectiveness of organizational adaptation depends on organizational decision-making teams' perceptions of environmental conditions and their decisions about how the organization should respond to those conditions" (Han, et al., 2022).

Looking from the perspective of the strategic alignment and the strategic choice theories, management philosophy can be described as the strategic direction an organization deliberately adopts to foster behaviors conducive to sustained superior performance (He at al., 2024). There are several commonly cited strategic orientations in management literature: market orientation, technology orientation, entrepreneurial orientation, learning orientation, cost orientation, innovation orientation, product orientation, and brand orientation. Some scholars introduced strategic orientations based on concepts such as *professionalize, collaborate, compete*, and *influence* (Wageningen University & Research, 2024). For example, market orientation is frequently examined and almost universally recognized as one of the major contributors to the success and financial performance of an organization. Other management philosophies, such as entrepreneurial, learning, and technology have also been recognized as influential and consequential. The utilization and development of assets and resources by businesses aim to enhance competitive advantage, improve innovation, and achieve desired business objectives. It must be mentioned, of course, that strategic orientation has varying degrees of impact and influence depending on the industry, cultural context, and the degree of economic development (Nguyen et al., 2025). Numerous studies clearly show that a positive correlation exists between strategic orientation and financial performance. Organizations with a well-defined and effectively implemented management philosophy tend to perform better than organizations without well-articulated and/or poorly implemented management philosophy (Harney, 2023). Management philosophy, understood here as an organization's overarching approach to markets and competition, influences its ability to identify opportunities, adapt to changing environment, introduce new innovations, attract consumers, and – ultimately – impacts its profitability, revenue growth, and market share. In summary, management philosophy plays a critical role in driving financial performance by shaping an organization's competitive advantage, innovation capabilities, and adaptability. By embracing – and effectively implementing – a well-articulated management philosophy, organizations can enhance their ability to achieve their financial objectives and create long-term value.

One of the management philosophies often considered under-researched and under-emphasized is brand orientation. The term brand orientation was coined in the 1990s by Frans Melin and Mats Urde. "The main reasons for introducing this concept were, first, to create a better understanding of how brands are a strategic resource at a time when many still considered them an *add-on* to a product, and, second, to spread knowledge about how to successfully manage a brand at a time when brands were primarily handled by marketing departments. The emergence of the theory behind brand orientation should therefore be seen in the perspective of the role which brands were given and how they were perceived in the existing paradigm of market orientation. The initial critique against the traditional way of managing brands voiced by Urde and Melin was that a brand needs to be given *integrity*, not only in relation to customers' needs and wants and actions by the competition, but also in relation to internal strategic processes. Instead of a tactical marketing tool, brands should be an expression of an organization's *strategic intent*. Reducing brands to an unconditional response to customers' desires or actions by the competition narrows the prospect of building long-term, consistent and valuable brands. Inspired by the resource-based view, Urde states that a different approach to brands than that in market orientation is required – one that has consequences for how an organization perceives, prioritizes, organizes, develops and protects its resource base. Urde places great importance on a brand's symbolic meaning, not only for customers but internally as well. In a brand-oriented organization, brand identity takes precedence over customers' needs and actions by the competition, whereas in a market-oriented organization these are focal points. Instead, satisfying customers' needs and wants takes place within the framework of the brand. A brand-oriented approach entails a passion for brands and becomes a way of expressing a conscious desire to create and communicate an identity. In this way, a brand takes precedence over the product, and emotional values and symbolic meaning becomes central to management in an organization" (Gromark and Melin, 2013). Brand orientation offers numerous benefits, including increased brand recognition, improved customer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and strengthened advertising effectiveness. Brand orientation also leads to lower price sensitivity, positive perceptions of the brand among potential job candidates, and motivated and emotionally engaged employees. Ultimately, brand orientation helps build a strong, recognizable, and trusted brand, which can significantly drive business success. As a guiding principle that shapes an organization's strategic direction, processes, activities, and decisions, brand orientation "provides a platform to lend significance over and above the importance of satisfying customer needs and wants to improve firm performance" (Boso et al., 2016).

This book is designed to help executives, entrepreneurs, strategists, management consultants, leaders, and business students learn to confidently structure, organize, and evaluate strategic efforts and objectives. Chapter 1 defines and introduces readers to the strategic value of brand orientation as an effective and farsighted management philosophy and describes why it should be implemented as a dominant strategic orientation within an organization. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the links between consumer behavior and organization's brand orientation. This chapter explains why neuroscience became relevant for brand strategists and how it can improve brand orientation. In this chapter we dive into the maze-like symphony of neural connections, explaining the brain's role in how individuals perceive, react to, and remember brands. This chapter also presents a thorough analysis of the socio-psycho-cultural underpinnings of brand orientation. As consumers, people make decisions that align with their personal tastes, preferences, values, beliefs, convictions, aspirations, and ambitions. People build relationships with brands that reflect their values, cultural norms, dreams, and desires. So, it's essential that business leaders understand their target audience and align with their customers' values, focusing on the value they will add to their customers' lives. Chater 3 covers the concepts of employer branding and internal branding so that business leaders can understand the impact of brand orientation on talent attraction, employee retention, engagement, and overall productivity. This chapter argues that brand orientation acts as a guide for both the employer and internal branding processes resulting in improved organizational performance and a strengthened corporate reputation. In chapter 4, discussion of the dynamic relationship between brand orientation and financial performance of an organization provides business leaders with the knowledge they need to successfully implement brand orientation and anticipate the benefits of this management philosophy in the most challenging periods in business's history.

BRAND ORIENTATION reveals why management philosophy matters more than ever and positions brand orientation as one of the most powerful and underleveraged drivers of sustained success.

Drawing on cutting-edge academic research, interdisciplinary insights, and the lived experiences of high-performing companies, this book demonstrates how brand orientation transforms the way organizations think, act, and compete. It reframes brand management from a marketing activity into a strategic business mindset — one that aligns internal culture, operational choices, customer experiences, and corporate governance around a unified, value-driven identity.

Readers will explore how brand orientation shapes organizational resilience, innovation capacity, and long-term financial outcomes. From unpacking the neuroscience behind consumer trust and loyalty, to understanding how brand-driven leadership strengthens employer branding and reduces operational inconsistency, the book offers a comprehensive roadmap for leaders seeking clarity in complexity.

Whether you are a CEO striving to sharpen your organization's competitive edge, a marketer aiming to elevate your brand's role within the executive agenda, or a student preparing to shape the future of business, this book equips you with the mindset and mechanisms needed to design an organization that stands out, stays aligned, and thrives — even in the most turbulent environments.

BRAND ORIENTATION is essential reading for anyone committed to building meaningful brands, strengthening organizational performance, and unlocking the full strategic potential of brand-driven management.

Dr. Bartolomeo Rafael Bialas (Las Vegas, USA) is an international expert in brand strategy, consumer psychology, and strategic thinking. He has worked with many business and government organizations, including MGM Grand, Wynn, The Rivers Casino, White Square Gallery, ING Group, Nevada Governor's Office Of Economic Development/International Trade And Diplomatic Protocol, AMCHAM, AGEXPORT, ¡Yaestá!, Grupo PDC. He has been a visiting professor at various universities around the world, including USA, Belize, Guatemala, Aruba, El Salvador, Argentina, Poland, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Croatia, Hungary, Portugal.

Professor Adam Figiel's (Krakow University of Economics) scientific interests span consumer behaviour, brand management, marketing and business strategy, strategic management, and supply chain management. He has authored and co-authored numerous publications in these domains and is recognized for his contributions with multiple university, ministerial, and state awards.

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