

# “Out-of-the-box? The state of the academic discussions about strategies and strategy work”

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## Out-of-the-box? The state of the academic discussions about strategies and strategy work

### Abstract

Strategies are popular instrument to organize business. However, general definition for strategy is still missing. This is an accepted state of affairs. However, there is a need to study further subjects of strategy and strategizing. This study focuses on this field using strategic journals and especially articles of “strategy work” as a source. The aim is to find combining and differentiating contents, discourses and meanings about strategy, and strategy work. Analysis reveals that the use of “strategy work” is mainly associated with the practices of strategy or strategy-as-practice and secondary the mainstream “traditional” perspectives. For example, in strategy education there is a need for new ways of thinking, “out-of-the-box”, outside the traditional perspectives. Despite the critique mounted against the traditional strategy perspective, there are efforts to construct combining strategy perspectives between practices (strategy itself) and traditional (managing strategy) perspective. The study suggests achieving added value via coexistence of two strategy discussions.

**Keywords:** practice-based studies, strategy, organizational learning, management development.

**JEL Classification:** D23, M10, Z10.

### Introduction

Business strategies receive an overflowing interest not only in the management literature but also among practicing executives. “Strategies” and “strategy making” are popular ways to organize business and public sector activities (e.g., Ackermann & Eden, 2011; Elbanna, Child & Dayanet, 2012). The study here focuses on strategies and strategy work and their meanings and definitions in management literature and especially in empirical articles. The study reviews several alternative strategy perspectives. For example, in one seminal book of strategies “Strategy safari”, provided by Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (1998), introduces even 10 different strategy schools. Despite this, several studies have introduced many new viewpoints for strategies after the publication of “strategy safari” (Baraldi, Brennan, Harrison, Tunisini & Zolkiewski, 2007; Haefliger, Monteiro Foray & von Krogh, 2011; Harrington & Ottenbacher, 2011), the study here concentrates only some main perspectives of the contemporary strategy discussions, and especially in strategy work, and provides new combining perspectives for them.

One of the main features in strategic thinking and discussions about strategy is the lack of generally accepted definitions for strategy (see, e.g. Feuer & Chaharbaghi, 1995; French, 2009; Nag, Hambrick & Chen, 2007). It might be even impossible to define strategy in a way, which satisfies the emphasis of different strategic schools and discussions. At its best, the definitions for strategy are suitable within a certain strategy discussion or school, not the same definition for the needs of wide range of schools of strategy.

Whether there is a need at all for the unified definitions of strategy or strategy work? (cf. Ansoff,

1965; Håkansson & Snehota, 1989). However, the updating gradually the contemporary meaning of strategy is necessary, because strategic management itself is a very successful and important branch in research and in business. The aim of this study is just to update the meanings of strategy and strategy work corresponding to their contemporary use.

However, there are several attempts to generally define the concept of strategy. The origin for term “strategy” comes from military use and dates back even fourth century B.C. in Sun Tsu (Mintzberg et al., 1998, p. 18). This study focuses, however, on the use of strategy in the context of business. Business research defines strategy, for example, as follows:

- ◆ Strategy has two main elements: *strategy itself*, that is (pattern of) activities, and *management of strategy* (attempts to affect the course of these activities). According to Baraldi et al. (2007, p. 881), this dichotomy is an underlying feature in Mintzberg’s (1987) 5 Ps model and in the perspectives of Snehota (1990, 164) about the strategy.
- ◆ Several studies notice the affinity of following concepts to strategy: strategic thinking, strategic planning and strategic management (Bonn, 2001; Casey and Goldman, 2010, p. 168; Liedtka, 1998).
- ◆ In addition, according to some definitions, strategic management deals with (a) the major intended and emergent initiatives; (b) taken by general managers on behalf of owners; (c) involving the utilization of resources; (d) to enhance the performance; (e) of firms; (f) in their external environment (see, e.g. Harrington and Otterbacher, 2011, p. 441; Nag et al., 2007, p. 942).

This definition is emphasizing the role of general managers in strategy work and, therefore, reflecting traditional (mainstream) perspectives for strategy

work, that is to say “management of strategy”. The other participants, excluding owners, of the firm are not mentioned. However, the workers, mid-managers and specialists might be possible to include “resources” in point (c).

Feurer and Chaharbaghi (1995, p. 12) find following features for strategies:

1. Content (diversification, consolidation, growth).
2. Implementation (acquisition, internal development).
3. Scope (activities, resources, technologies, market selection).
4. Process (central/decentral, structured/chaos, step-by-step/dynamic).
5. Method (analytic, inductive/deductive, entrepreneurial, system thinking).
6. Ownership (specialists, top management, all employees).
7. Time-frame (100 years, three years, continuous)
8. Philosophy (report/plan, mental model, general direction).

Already these examples prove the early findings of Steiner, Miner and Gray (1982, p. 14) about serious semantic problems with strategy and strategic thinking, which Casey and Goldman (2010, p. 168) have also noticed. The lack of unanimity for the definitions of strategy concepts provides possibility for several opposite schools and discussions about strategy. However, as already mentioned, either this study will not provide one unified definition for strategy or strategy work.

The study here also emphasizes the dichotomy between *strategy itself* and *management of strategy* and the classification of strategic perspectives is based on this starting point. Section 1 consists of the literature review for strategy discussions. Section 2 introduces the research design of this study and contains the empirical analysis of the chosen 10 articles about strategy work. After that, there is a discussion part of the study and finally concluding remarks.

## 1. Literature review

Strategic literature contains several attempts to define strategy and categorize strategic discussions and perspectives (see, Nag et al., 2007). For example, Mintzberg and his colleagues introduce several different categories. One typology is based on the so-called five Ps for strategy: plan, pattern, position, perspective and ploy (Mintzberg, 1987). *Plan* emphasizes that there is some direction for the strategy, *pattern* that there is consistency in behavior over time, *position* focuses on location of particular products in particular markets, *perspective* is emphasizing organization’s fundamental way of doing things and finally, strategy is also a *ploy* or

maneuver intended to outwit an opponent or competitor (Mintzberg et al., 1998, pp. 9-14). Especially interesting are the viewpoints introduced in the context of *pattern*: intended strategy, unrealized strategy, deliberative strategy, realized strategy and emergent strategy, which is based on learning of organization.

Another typology is based on ten strategic schools: *design school*, *planning school*, *positioning school*, *entrepreneurial school*, *cognitive school*, *learning school* (e.g. emergent strategy), *power school*, *cultural school*, *environmental school* and these all connective *configuration school*. Mintzberg and his colleagues divide these schools several ways, for example, whether they are prescriptive (normative) or descriptive. According to them, design, planning and positioning schools are prescriptive (aiming directly financial (optimal) outcomes) and other schools are mainly descriptive, that is describing different ways what kinds of elements strategy and strategy processes might contain (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

Actually, these prescriptive “schools” of strategy are emphasizing some kinds of managerialism. Other schools are more diversified with different approaches for strategy. This dichotomy resembles the introduced two perspectives of management by Tienari and Meriläinen (2009): constructivist-critical (relationship-based) management and positivistic-managerialistic (individual) ideology for management. This relationship-based management stresses the socially constructed practices of organization and exploits mainly qualitative research methods and the latter one mainly quantitative (positivist) research methods. (Tienari & Meriläinen, 2009).

**1.1. Perspectives for literature review.** Mintzberg et al. (1998) introduce ten strategic schools. Among them is design school, which is based on SWOT-analysis, one of the most popular tools in strategic management (Chermack & Kasshanna, 2007, p. 385). Succeeding school is “planning school” which has adopted several elements from design school. Furthermore, positioning school, in which the role of Michael Porter, among others, is essential, has similar prescriptive elements with planning school and design school (Mintzberg, 1998, p. 5). All other seven schools of strategy, introduced by Mintzberg and his colleagues (1998) are descriptive ones. Therefore, the combining of these three “schools” into one perspective is justified, and this perspective is in this paper called “*traditional strategic perspective*” or “*traditional perspective of strategy*”. The traditional perspective provides services to the top management of the organization: tools for planning large-scale moves while positioning the different business units or products of the company. Thus, this perspective combines planning and positioning in a way in which also such tools as

SWOT analysis, BCG matrix and several frameworks introduced by Michael Porter (Five forces, Diamond model) are essential parts of wholeness in the management of strategies. Because of strategic planning and top-down emphasis, this traditional perspective stresses the *management of strategy* instead of strategy (activities) itself. Furthermore, this sub-section introduced five other relevant perspectives for strategy work and research.

One important discussion in the field of management focuses on the dimension between competition and cooperation. Both competition discussions and cooperation discussions are possible to interpret as paradigms (see, e.g., Padula & Dagnino, 2007). Actually, traditional perspective, for example, positioning school, is based on the competition point of view. However, cooperation dimension deviates from these traditional perspectives of strategy. One important branch of management is industrial network theory (the associated discussions are known also as “IMP group”), which emphasizes processes behind interaction between organizations in networks (Baraldi et al., 2007). In addition to industrial network theory, the cooperation paradigm contains, for example, strategic alliances, inter-firm supply chain management (e.g. in project organizations), mergers, coalitions, consortiums and joint ventures (see, e.g., Rusko, 2008). Furthermore, coopetition – simultaneous competition and cooperation between organizations – might be part of cooperation paradigm as well as open innovation strategy (Mention, 2011). Mintzberg et al. (1998, p. 255) have a strategy school named as a “power school”, which consists of networks, collective strategy, joint ventures, strategic alliances and strategic sourcing, that is the most of the manifestations of cooperation discussions. Collaboration typically contains intentions, plans and contracts, and in this sense belongs to the category of *management of strategy*. However, sometimes collaboration – in the same ways as competition – might be unintentional or emergent strategy (see, e.g., Kylänen & Rusko, 2011; Mariani, 2007) following instead of “management of strategy” the *strategy itself*, that is the activities emphasizing the collaborative tendency in business strategies. This collaborative perspective has some similar features with traditional strategy perspective, because of the fact that both of them are focusing on rather macro-activities than micro-activities. However, this will not mean that collaborative perspective is generally following the guidelines of traditional perspective. For example, Ellson (2013) and Kobernyuk, Stiles and Ellson (2013) consider business cooperation in the context of strategy as practice perspective.

Actually, the contemporary strategic management discussions have noticed the importance of practices,

and this branch of research is sometimes called strategy as practice – approach (SAP) (Kobernyuk et al., 2013; Laine, 2010; Rasche & Chia, 2009). This viewpoint underlies micro-activities of strategic work (Mantere, 2008). In other words, SAP focuses on the interplay of practical activities in human beliefs, interpersonal relations, personal predicaments, organizational norms, power relationships, and conflicts of interests in strategy-making (Makkonen, Olkkonen & Halinen, 2012, p. 773). Thus strategy consists of *strategy itself* and activities associated with the strategy. Practically SAP resembles emergent strategy, which is a part of the “learning school” defined by Mintzberg et al. (1998) (see, also Rusko, 2012). In addition to that, SAP emphasizes current and past strategic activities having connections also with the cultural school of Mintzberg et al. (1998). Typically, intentional strategy differs from the actual realized strategy. The individual actions and practices generate the (unintentional) strategy. The study here recalls these joint perspectives of SAP, emergent (learning) strategy and cultural school as “*practical strategy*” stressing the fact that perspective resembles SAP and consists also of, for example, emergent strategy (cf. Rusko, 2012).

The fourth perspective dates back to knowledge management and core competence discussions. Furthermore, resources and resource based view (RBV) are also associated with this perspective. The study here calls the perspective which is combining knowledge management, core competence and RBV as a “*competence-based strategy*” following the idea of Tikkanen and Halinen (2003) in their conference papers, also e.g., Heene & Sanchez, 1997). This competence-based strategy has joint characteristics also with learning school (e.g. emergent strategy and explicit – tacit knowledge viewpoints) and cognitive school (e.g. psychological frame). Competence-based strategy has linkage with “doing” strategy and underlying activities of competence. Also, the strategy literature notices the connections of competence with practice-based approach (see, e.g., Ripamonti & Scaratti, 2012). Therefore, competence-based strategy follows rather the idea of *strategy itself* than management of strategy.

The fifth strategic emphasis on the management discussions is based on perspectives of global, scenario and environment (Elkington & Trisoglio, 1996). For example, traditional perspective, including planning, design and positioning of strategy, contains partly the same features. This fifth strategic perspective is called in this paper as *environment strategy* stressing the fact that now the direction is outwards from the organization: what will happen in the future in the business environment? (see, e.g. Tidd, 2001). Partly SWOT analysis considers the same matters such as the threats and opportunities of

organization. However, traditional SWOT analysis contains interior issues of organization (strengths and weaknesses). The study here understands environment strategy similar to “environment school” (Mintzberg et al., 1998, p. 288): organization will not change the environment but it must respond to the forces of environment in order to survive. Scenario methods are improving the agility of organization to react the changes of the environment (see, e.g., Drew, 2006). The perspective of environment strategy emphasizes more the strategy itself: the agility of organization depends mainly on the strategy activities and partly the management of strategies involving scenario work and its implications to practical strategy work in different levels of organization.

For example, Mintzberg et al. (1998) and Harrington and Otterbacher (2011, p. 447) take into the account entrepreneurship in the context of strategies. The entrepreneurial school emphasizes the importance of (one) individual for the whole organization. This individual (entrepreneur) has mainly successful intuition to manage the organization with his/her visionary views. Contrary to these viewpoints, Harrington and Otterbacher (2011) consider small business, intrapreneurs, entrepreneurial start-ups and corporate entrepreneurship in the context of strategy and entrepreneurship. In addition, this paper adds embeddedness to this context because of its focus on intentional individual activities – similar to entrepreneurial school and perspective introduced by Harrington and Otterbacher (2011). This above constructed entirety is called as perspective of *entrepreneurial strategy* consisting of individual entrepreneurial intentions (see, also Ireland et al., 2009). Entrepreneurial perspective emphasizes *strategy itself*: it assumes self-piloting management of strategies where individuals at different levels of organization are essential part of strategy. Compared with perspective of “practical strategy”, entrepreneurial strategy has more like prescriptive than descriptive characteristics.

**1.2. Literature review: the sample of ten articles for strategy work.** This section introduced, by exploiting qualitative textual analysis, the definitions and meanings of *strategy* basing in 10 articles focused on “strategy work”. Table 1 introduces generally these studied articles. The criteria for choosing these articles were the following:

1. Article is available in the most typical librarian data bases.
2. Article considers strategy and there must be at least once used term “strategy work” in this article (without the underlying meaning of “to make strategy work”).
3. Article has citations in other scientific articles or books.

4. Each article has different authors, that is to say, none of these articles has the same authors.
5. Article has been published year 2000 or later.

Actually, it was rather difficult to find articles considering “strategy work” without meaning “to make strategy work”. Most of the hits in strategy articles associated with the latter case. In order to avoid biased “distribution”, the aim was that there are not the same authors in different analyzed articles. Because of these difficulties of finding articles fulfilling these criteria, there was one exception in the case of Whittington, his papers participate in this sample with two joint articles (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Whittington, Molloy, Mayer & Smith, 2006). This might be accepted because Whittington is perhaps the best known representative of strategy-as-practice perspective. (see, e.g., Corradi, Gherardi & Verzelloni, 2010, p. 272). Surprisingly, following these criteria, the population of articles became relatively old: on average, articles are published in 2005-2006. The criteria direct towards this outcome: older articles are citing more than newer ones and the many of the latest articles are not available at once in typical librarian databases. At Table 1 is a summary of these articles. In this randomly chosen population some modified strategy perspectives have more hits than the others. Four articles of ten focused on traditional perspectives of strategy (Articles 2, 4, 5 and 7) and seven articles consider practical perspectives of strategy (Articles 1, 2, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10). Thus, articles 2 and 7 are emphasizing simultaneously the traditional and the practical perspectives of strategy.

Especially practical perspective of strategy gets several hits. This seems to be the general tendency: most of the popular articles of strategy work are emphasizing the social processes of strategy and/or strategy as practice discussions. Perhaps this is based on a term “work” after word “strategy”. Strategy, combined with term work, directs easily discussions towards practices. Because of this distribution, most of the articles are stressing rather “strategy itself” (5) than “managing strategy” (3). Two of them are somewhere between these two dimensions. Because of this, also most of the articles (6 of 10) have descriptive perspective, and the others are prescriptive or normative ones. Nearly the same distribution is in the case of managerialism and relationship-based distinction. The most important strategy schools in this population are learning school (or emergent strategy), design school with planning school and entrepreneurial school (Table 1).

Table 1. The features of the articles

Articles (in random order)	Emphasizing strategy itself or management of strategy?	Prescriptive or descriptive strategy?	The most important underlying strategy schools or viewpoints	The relationships with managerialism versus relationship- based management	Perspective of strategy
1. Whittington et al. (2006). Practices of Strategising/Organising: Broadening Strategy Work and Skills	Strategy itself, doing among the change	Descriptive strategy with the intention to linkage strategizing and organizing (also prescriptive)	(Organizational) design school, practices, entrepreneurship (managers shaping... their intuitive fashion)	Accepts both mainstream managerialism and practices	II. Collaboration perspective III. Practical perspective of strategy (especially) IV. Competence-based strategy
2. Vänttinen and Pyhältö (2009). Strategy process as an innovative learning environment	Partly strategy itself, partly management of strategy	Prescriptive (successful strategy process and implementation) and descriptive strategy	Learning school (learning individual and organization)	Both managerialism and relationship-based management	I. Traditional perspective of strategy II. Collaboration perspective III. Practical perspective of strategy (especially)
3. Bryson et al. (2007). Putting the Resource-Based View of Strategy and Distinctive Competencies to Work in Public Organizations	Mainly management of strategy (and competences)	Prescriptive strategy (added value for public organization)	Design school and planning school	Mainly managerialism with livelihood concept for public organizations	IV. Competence-based strategy (e.g. RBV)
4. Lundin (2012). Muddling through and TV enterprising in Sweden	Management of strategy	Prescriptive strategy (quantitative model)	Learning school and planning school	Managerialism (model for managers)	I. Traditional perspective of strategy
5. Dyson (2000). Strategy, Performance and Operational Research	Management of strategy	Prescriptive strategy	Design school and planning school	Managerialism	I. Traditional perspective of strategy
6. Mantere and Vaara (2008). On the Problem of Participation in Strategy: A Critical Discursive Perspective	Strategy itself	Descriptive strategy	Learning school (emergent strategy), cultural school	Relation-based management (practices)	III. Practical perspective of strategy
7. Watson (2003). Strategists and Strategy-making: Strategic Exchange and the Shaping of Individual Lives and Organizational Futures	Strategy itself and management of strategy	Descriptive strategy (about micro-processes of strategist)	Entrepreneurial, learning (emergent strategy) and cultural school	Managerialism, (relations between strategist's personal life and strategy)	III. Practical I. Traditional VI. Entrepreneurial V. Environment perspective of strategy
8. Ezzamel and Willmott (2008). Strategy as Discourse in a Global Retailer: A Supplement to Rationalist and Interpretive Accounts	Strategy itself	Descriptive strategy	Learning school, practices, Foucauldian analysis	Relation-based management (practices)	III. Practical perspective of strategy
9. Jarzabkowski & Whittington (2008). A Strategy-as-Practice Approach to Strategy Research and Education	Strategy itself	Descriptive strategy	Learning school	Relation-based management (practices)	III. Practical perspective of strategy
10. Nordqvist & Melin (2010). The promise of the strategy as practice perspective for family business strategy research	Strategy itself	Descriptive strategy (planning practices): strategy work is organization-specific	Learning school (emergent strategy), partly entrepreneurial strategy	Relationship-based management (practices)	III. Practical perspective of strategy

## 2. Textual analysis for strategy work among strategy articles

This section is based on the qualitative textual analysis or content analysis of texts associated with strategic work among the chosen population of ten strategy articles. Textual and, for example, discourse analysis are typical methods in the field of strategy research (see, e.g., O'Rourke, 2009; Short & Palmer, 2008).

Analysis considers the expressions, which are associated with strategy work directly or indirectly. Emphasis is especially on the points of "strategy work" or "strategic (work)". Furthermore, the interest is also in the sentences and meanings which consider strategy work without using these terms exactly. The process of analysis generally shows that discussions about strategy work or strategic (work) are more popular among the "new" branches of strategic research, such as strategy as practice. The "mainstream" strategic discussions mainly avoid these impressions. Discourse analysis reveals three discourses: the tools of strategy, juxtaposition of strategic perspectives between mainstream and new introduced perspectives, and competence associated with strategy.

**2.1. Tools of strategy.** These chosen articles introduce several ways and levels about the tools of strategy. The analysis interprets these appeared tools of strategy in three-ways: tools for doing strategy (work), tools for teaching strategy in business schools and universities, and tools for studying and discussing strategy in research. Partly these discussions are also overlapping and mixed.

**2.1.1. Tools for doing strategy work.** Several studied articles mention the typical tools of strategy work. Some of them are clearly technical/material tools:

- ◆ ... *Strategy practices are the social, symbolic, and material tools through which strategy work is done. ... tools that have become part of the everyday lexicon and activity of strategy, such as Porter's five forces, decision modeling and budget systems, and material artifacts and technologies, such as PowerPoint, flipcharts, and spreadsheets...* (Article 9, p. 282).
- ◆ ... *The balanced scorecard is consistent with our strategic development model...* (Article 5, p. 8).
- ◆ ... *Strategy workshops, strategy projects and strategy artefacts...* (Article 1, p. 615).

Technical tools are possible to include in the category "strategy itself" because they are depicting or associated with the doing itself. These tools actually have mainly prescriptive standing-point, because they are exploited in order to achieve some defined targets of the organization, typically high

profits and turnover. In this sense, strategy itself – perspective has connections with the prescriptive points of view.

Furthermore, articles consider somehow larger strategic perspectives and viewpoints associated with strategy tools:

- ◆ ... *"Visions," "missions," and specific "top-down" or "bottom-up" approaches are not only concepts but also have become naturalized parts of organizational life in contemporary organizations... (Article 6, p. 343); (see, also Article 5, p. 9).*
- ◆ *Active learning, to create competitive advantages or innovations (Article 2, p. 781).*
- ◆ *Communication, coordination and control (Article 1, p. 616).*
- ◆ *A multi-dimensional process view of effectiveness in strategic planning (Article 5, p. 6).*
- ◆ *the simple control system is essentially a reactive system... (Article 5, p. 7).*
- ◆ ... *Mystification, disciplining, and technologization are the very means through which hegemony is established and legitimized in strategy work... top managers tend to promote traditional top-down driven approaches in strategizing (Article 6, p. 353).*

These strategic tools are associated with attempts to affect the course of these activities, that is, they are following the perspective of "management of strategy". They often legitimate the authorities of strategic management. These tools are both descriptive and prescriptive. For example, traditional concepts, such as mission or vision have some general prescriptive aims, but also they – and their underlying processes and discourses (that is to say their strategy work) – might be ambiguous and therefore tools for legitimizing the power of top management.

In addition, some articles emphasize the personal characters and backgrounds of the strategists:

- ◆ *In particular, the identified types of modes, motives and arenas allow theorists and practitioners to better understand how strategic planning is closely linked both to the local and family-related rules of the game of strategy work in each family business embedded in the norms and values of the owner – family... (Article 10, p. 25)*
- ◆ ... *Justice to the complexities of human identity creation and sensemaking work and give full recognition to the subtleties of the organizational and strategy-making processes with which these are inevitably connected. Organizational strategists inevitably bring their own personal*

*orientations, identity projects and life priorities into their strategy-making work and these both influence and are influenced by the strategy-making in which they engage (Article 7, p. 1321).*

The citations above are possible to place as a part strategy as practice and “strategy itself”-discussions. Generally, the contents of chosen strategy articles exploit even the overflowing amount of word “practice”. This fact shows in an indisputable way the contextual association between terms “practice” and “strategy work” in the contemporary strategy discussions. The hits for word “practice” or “practices” are following for each article (Table 2).

Table 2. The hits for the words “practice” or “practices”

Article	Total amount of “practice” and “practices”	Outside the original text (e.g. in references and footnotes...)	In original text
Article 1	86	18	68
Article 2	12	1	11
Article 3	11	4	7
Article 4	2	1	1
Article 5	4	2	2
Article 6	60	15	45
Article 7	12	5	7
Article 8	57	11	46
Article 9	113	15	98
Article 10	138	12	126
Total	495	84	411
Mean	49,50	8,40	41,10
St. dev.	46,89	6,17	41,92

Among articles, there are remarkable differences in the exploitation of “practice”, as the values of the standard deviation show. Of course, the largest occurrences are in the strategy as practice papers. On average, there are 49,5 hits of “practice” or “practices” per an article, 41,10 of which are in the original text and rest of them are in references or for example in footnotes.

*2.1.2. Tools for teaching strategy in business schools and universities.* The articles, associated with strategy work, provide direct advice for strategy education. According to this advice, especially new perspectives for strategy are advisable. Most of the sample articles claim that the cases for education might also be based on directly to strategy work instead of focusing on the cases in mainstream (top-down) managerialism.

◆ *The richer ethnographic cases... can be especially helpful in the learning and teaching aspect of academic strategy work. Again, more issues can be covered than is possible with a single or conventional case. Also, the case can be*

*made more appealing if the writer uses the full range of fiction writing skills... than might be achieved with the ‘dry’ presentation that is typical of conventional cases (Article 7, p. 1309).*

- ◆ *With its respect for the unexciting effort and art of people’s labor, the practice perspective also promises the possibility of more practical tools and training than offered by traditional business school approaches founded on economic analysis. Formal strategy work is changing, and strategy research and teaching in business schools needs to support this change by changing too (Article 1, p. 618).*
- ◆ *The authors suggest that practice-based research can also inform strategy teaching by providing students with rich case studies of strategy work as actually practiced, analyzed through such sociological lenses as ethnomethodology, dramaturgy, and institutional theory (Article 9, p. 282).*
- ◆ *Strategy teaching needs to bring the practicalities of strategising/organising work directly into the mainstream strategy curriculum, instead of marginalizing them into adjacent sub-disciplines such as consulting skills (Article 1, p. 615).*

Ethnography is associated often strategy as practice – perspective (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Also, the cases for learning might be reflecting ethnographical and/or practice-based perspectives according to these citations of the practical perspective above. Therefore, also all these examples show the linkages between strategy work – expression and strategy as practice – perspective stressing doing strategy and “strategy itself” the points of view. Furthermore, these citations suggest more like descriptive than prescriptive perspectives and case examples for strategy education following the general critique against contemporary management and MBA education (see. e.g., Mintzberg, 2004).

*2.1.3. Tools for studying and discussing strategy in research.* Generally, although the overflowing use of “practice” expression, the messages and introduced strategy tools in the chosen articles are also – and perhaps mainly – directed to other scholars of strategy research. Typically, these articles often compare their perspectives with alternative (mainstream) perspectives. However, partly these articles use practitioners (i.e. strategists) in the position of audience simultaneously with scholars. Although the style of writing reflects the assumption about that the scholars should be the messengers for practitioners (actors) of the introduced new perspectives for strategy. Below are some examples:

- ◆ ... *It is necessary to refine and develop this approach if we are to recognize the full significance of the role of strategists' personal life strategies in processes of organizational strategy-making (Article 7, p. 1306).*
- ◆ ... *Processual analyses of strategy have tended to concentrate on the 'organizational level' and have not dwelt on 'the political rationalities of individual players in the strategy game'. A stronger 'practice' emphasis is necessary with closer attention being paid to how 'practitioners act' (Whittington, 1996) (Article 7, p. 1306).*
- ◆ *Strategy-as-practice research may, therefore, be influential in enabling practitioners to better understand their own actions, to reflect on its strategic implications, and to potentially reconstruct activity in light of these reflections (Article 9, p. 283).*
- ◆ *Thus, strategy-as-practice scholars emphasize... the actual doing of strategy: the material artifacts to hand, the language that is used, the physical positioning in strategy episodes, the laughter, frustration, anger, excitement, anticipation, boredom, repetition, and political maneuvering that are brought together in strategy work. Such deep studies will illuminate what is involved in being a competent strategist and how some practitioners are more influential than others (Article 9, p. 283).*
- ◆ *Discourses also construct specific subject positions for social actors. These positions define the structure of rights for the actors involved – what they are expected, can, or can not do... These positions are essential to understanding the agency and identity of specific organizational actors in strategy processes. These subject positions are thus crucial for comprehending how specific actors are supposed to or can participate in strategy work (Article 6, p. 343).*
- ◆ *The strategy as practice perspective directs attention to the actors involved in ongoing strategic activities, who they are and how, when, and where they are engaged in these activities as well as how they perform the strategic work, both in interaction with others and in relation to the specific practices and activities in different contexts ... Investigating strategic practices, scholars can reveal important links between micro and macro level aspects of strategy work... Seeing their active and dynamic nature, practices are means of doing strategy in which the actual strategizing is constituted, rather than static concepts or tools to be employed...In this view, strategic planning is not seen as something a firm has, but something a firm, or more correctly its actors do...(Article 10, p. 16).*

These new alternative strategy perspectives are mainly based on different discourses of “doing strategy” which reflect the practical activities of strategy. However, the needed change in strategy work is in the responsibility of scholars instead of practicing executives and of strategists. These articles do not provide clear instructions for strategists to change the direction of strategy work. However, they emphasize the need to change and complete the contemporary strategy work with the help of provided new strategy perspectives. This need for change is argued in the next sub-section.

**2.2 The need for the change?** Whether there is actually a need for change in strategy work, according to the discussions in the strategic management literature? Mainstream strategy literature is traditionally based on profit maximization assumption with competitive advantage, careful planning systems and strategic positioning by using tools such as BCG matrix, SWOT analysis and other tools typical for traditional perspective, that is to say for planning school, design school and positioning school in the typologies of Mintzberg et al. (1998). These perspectives are emphasizing macro-activities of strategy work where the control and management of strategy is mainly following the top-down direction. The new perspectives, such as practical perspective, are stressing also bottom-up and horizontal directions, that is micro-activities and their importance in strategy work. Because the actual strategy is – at least according to practical perspective – not only based on the will of top-management but also other actors of organization, the strategy appears to be “emergent”.

Among the chosen strategy work literature, there are dozens of citations, which consider these themes:

- ◆ *That is, the cynical managers or organizational members easily become sidelined in strategy work and reproduce such exclusion by their own resistance. Their cynical attitudes may also have broader implications in undermining the legitimacy of any strategy process or approach to strategy (Article 6, p. 355).*
- ◆ *Mainstream analyses of strategy and strategic management are dominated by a commitment to empirical realism where 'environments', for example, are viewed as 'independent, external and tangible entities' ... Its objects of investigation such as 'competitive advantage' are assumed to 'reside somewhere in time and space, findable in the same way that we find a misplaced fountain pen' ... – regardless of whether 'competitive advantage' is associated with the effective control of some key variable(s)*

or with the views or meanings attributed to entrepreneurs and/or executives.

- ◆ In practice managers should carefully consider not only the content and aims of the strategy but also the way in which the strategy is constructed and implemented. In addition, it is important to be aware of and to process one's (mis)conceptions about strategy, learning and management that form the basis of strategic management. Otherwise there is a danger that outdated and ineffective laymen's theories of strategic management will still dominate the strategy work (Article 2, p. 789).
- ◆ With its respect for the unexciting effort and art of people's labour, the practice perspective also promises the possibility of more practical tools and training than offered by traditional business school approaches founded on economic analysis. Formal strategy work is changing, and strategy research and teaching in business schools needs to support this change by changing too (Article 1, p. 618).
- ◆ The ways in which organizational strategists shape their own lives and identities and the ways in which they contribute to the strategic shaping of the organizations in which they work are more closely related to each other than the academic literature has tended to recognize....To examine how this dimension of the 'micro' processes of strategy-making relate to the more 'macro' processes of organizational performance, two closely interrelated innovative moves are made (Article 7, p. 1305).

Many articles of the sample emphasize the need for participation among the several levels of organization:

- ◆ We still know little of why strategy processes often involve participation problems... we argue that this crucial issue is linked to fundamental assumptions about the nature of strategy work. Hence, we need to examine how strategy processes are typically made sense of and what roles are assigned to specific organizational members (Article 6, p. 341).
- ◆ ... Employees should be taken as active partners in the strategy work from the very beginning of the process and room must be provided for the creation of a meaningful and shared understanding about the strategy and one's own role in it (Article 2, p. 789).
- ◆ Strategy-as-practice research may, therefore, be influential in enabling practitioners to better understand their own actions, to reflect on its strategic implications, and to potentially reconstruct activity in light of these reflections (Article 9, p. 283).
- ◆ While strategy studies have often touched upon participation..., we still know little about the reasons behind a lack of participation in strategy work... we argue that this crucial issue is linked to fundamental assumptions about the nature of strategy work (Article 6, p. 341).
- ◆ ... We extend this research by a systematic analysis of how discourses may impede or promote participation in strategy work. It is important to examine both aspects to fully understand the various ways in which participatory or nonparticipatory approaches are discursively constructed (Article 6, p. 341).

Thus, the initiatives above are emphasizing in strategy work the importance of bottom-up and horizontal linkages in addition to the top-down direction.

Although the "new" perspectives dominate the sample of discussions, in one of the cases the strategic planning attitude gets recommendations. However, among these articles are some development proposals for (traditional) strategic planning:

- ◆ By definition, trial and error is not an option for a strategic initiative as such events are not repeated. Hunch and hope is an option, and hunches may well turn out to be valuable developments but often they turn out to be hopeless (Article 5, p. 7).
- ◆ Without a mission and objectives an organisation will have no direction or purpose. Without the generation of new strategic initiatives the organisation will slowly decay. Without a performance measurement and feedback system it will be unknown how the organisation is performing or where it is heading. Without an assessment of uncertainty and an evaluation process the future performance of any strategic initiative will be left to happenstance... This is not to argue that any untested strategy will necessarily fail, or that fully tested robust strategies will necessarily succeed. The argument is that an effective strategic development process will be more consistent in securing a string of successful new strategic initiatives (Article 5, p. 9).
- ◆ ... One reason strategic planning is often less successful than it might be otherwise is that strategic planning exercises typically do not take distinctive competencies and their links to aspirations into account. In other words, many strategic planning efforts miss a key component of effective strategizing and performance measurement and management (Article 3, p. 713).

- ◆ *In this view, strategic planning is not seen as something a firm has, but something a firm, or more correctly its actors do ... From the perspective of doing strategic planning, there has not been much research conducted on “how such practices comprise resources or their implications for the way that strategists act within their worlds” (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009, p. 83) (Article 10, p. 16).*
- ◆ *In particular, the identified types of modes, motives and arenas allow theorists and practitioners to better understand how strategic planning is closely linked both to the local and family-related rules of the game of strategy work in each family business embedded in the norms and values of the owner-family, and to the more global institutionalized norms and expectations that guides planning as a common strategic practice (Article 10, p. 25).*

In spite of the strong criticisms against to mainstream strategy perspectives, many citations among the sample of articles show that the most ideal situation, in the case of strategy work might be the coexistence of these two perspectives: traditional (mainstream) perspective for strategy and “new” mainly practical perspective for strategy.

- ◆ *For practitioners, there is no need to reject formal strategy making, as some critics have proposed. Rather, practitioners can renew formal strategy by injecting craft directly into the process (Article 1, p. 615).*
- ◆ *...A discourse-attentive alternative is to study ‘competitive advantage’ as part of an evolving ‘language game through which strategy researchers and managers presently solve their problems’ ... or, to take a Foucauldian step, as a game in which such ‘problems’ are constituted as ‘problems’ through the discursive practices of strategizing ... (Article 8, p. 193).*
- ◆ *Our argument is not that increased dynamism makes formal strategy work irrelevant, but that continued relevance can be found for this formal work by re-conceiving its nature. Formal strategy can be renewed by a greater appreciation of the everyday practical, non-analytical skills required to carry it out... In a sense, we apply Mintzberg’s work (Article 1, p. 616).*

### 3. Discussion

**3.1. Completions and comments about discourse analysis.** The textual analysis above did not concentrate in collaboration or competence. However, this will not mean that their importance in contemporary discussions about strategy work is marginal. On the contrary, collaboration and competence or skills are directly or indirectly

present everywhere in the texts of sample articles. For example, practice (and relationship-based) perspective for strategy work bases on collaboration among all actors of organization whom are doing the strategy, that is to say, in addition to top management, strategy work is based on the skills of the workers, mid-managers, specialists and planners of organization. Strategy (as practice) perspective emphasizes for example social constructions, which framework is based on common (collaborative) attitudes.

Similarly, analysis in section 2 does not emphasize entrepreneurship or environment perspectives for strategy. In spite of that, both of these perspectives are present in these articles. Entrepreneurial perspective, which stresses the relevance and visions of the individuals, is especially important in articles 7 and 10. Environment and its changes is the underlying feature of strategy work practically in all of these sample articles. Organizations are established because of the needs of stakeholders and strategy work is based on fulfilling and satisfying the requirements of these stakeholders. For example, globalization is piercing phenomena in all strategic activities of the organization.

**3.2. Dichotomy between strategic perspectives among the cases.** The case sample of strategy work articles mainly concentrates on two categories: traditional mainstream perspective and practical perspective. Most of the articles are easy to place in Table 3. Only articles 2 and 7 are difficult to place in this map of strategy perspectives. The problem in the cases of articles 2 and 7 is that they contain suitable elements both for “strategy itself” and for “management of strategy” perspectives. Furthermore, article 2 emphasizes both on managerialism and relationship-based management, but also learning individual and organization are important features. Therefore, article 2 is more on the right-hand side of Table 3. Article 7 is placed on the left-hand side of Table 3 because the emphasis is on the managers/owners and their personal life.

Table 3. The positions of strategic perspectives

Element of strategy	The direction of management and interaction		
	Top-down	Top-down (and bottom up)	Top-down, bottom-up and horizontal interaction
Management of strategy (attempts to affect the course of these activities)	<b>Articles 3,4 and 5</b>		
Both strategy itself and management of strategy	<b>Article 7?</b>	<b>Article 2</b>	<b>Article 2</b>
Strategy itself (pattern of activities)			<b>Articles 1, 9, 6, 8, 10</b>

Although some dissolutions, most of the articles, associated with strategy work, are possible to place in the category of practical perspective or traditional perspective of strategy. Articles of practical strategy stress top-down, bottom-up and horizontal linkages in the organization and “strategy itself” perspective, that is to say the patterns of activities, and articles of traditional strategy perspective are emphasizing top-down perspective and “management of strategy” viewpoint. Therefore, Table 3 is possible to simplify into the form of Table 4, where there is a four-fold table about strategy perspectives.

Table 4. Dichotomy of strategy perspectives.

	Top-down	Top-down, bottom-up and horizontal interaction
Management of strategy (attempts to affect the course of these activities)	<b>Traditional perspective</b> – prescriptive perspective for strategy work	
Strategy itself (pattern of activities)		<b>Practical perspective</b> – descriptive perspective for strategy work

Of course, Table 4 is simplifying the strategy perspectives in the field of the strategy research. This is, however, a result of the “emergent” analysis of this study. The articles of the case sample are emphasizing this dichotomy. In addition, the

scholars are regarding this dichotomy in a constructive way: especially the articles of practical perspective are suggesting the co-existence of these two perspectives. Perhaps the right solution is to find out the best practices of these two perspectives and combine them in order to develop strategy work in the contemporary business.

**Conclusion**

**Main contribution of this study.** From the perspective of strategy work, the strategic discussions are strongly diversified. However, the core content of these discussions proved to be duplex. Basing in the literature review and content analysis, which focuses on a chosen sample for empirical articles of strategy work, the analysis shows the dichotomy between two categories: most of the sample articles are placed in the category of strategy as practice or “practical strategy” and remaining articles mainly into the category of traditional perspective for strategy.

As Figure 1 shows, traditional perspective for strategy work covers only part of the features, which are typical of contemporary strategy work. The discussions and features “out-of-the-box” contains elements which are also necessary to accept and study in the context of strategy work. Furthermore, traditional strategy work “in the box” provides several tools and perspectives which are vital for contemporary strategy work and research.

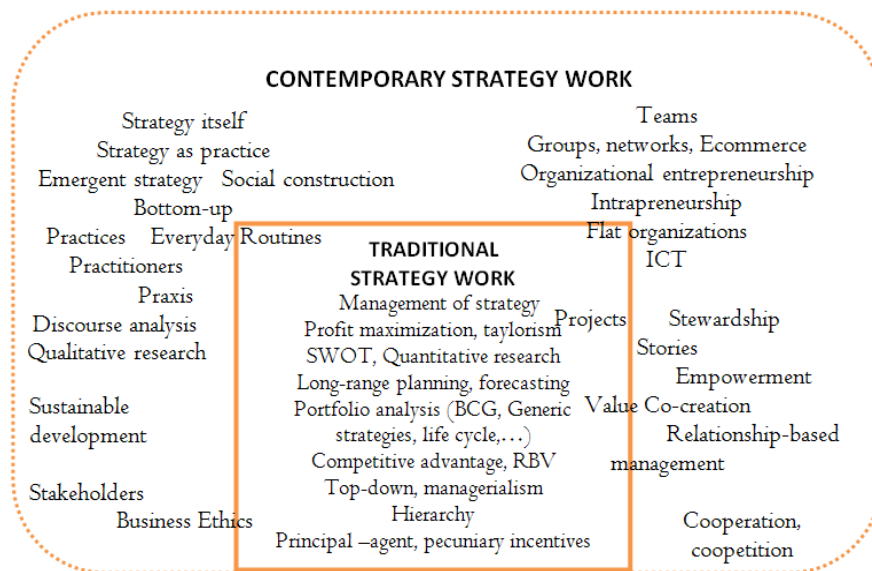


Fig. 1. Out-of-the-box and traditional perspectives for strategy work

During this research process, the relevant number of strategy work perspectives reduced to two alternatives: traditional and practical perspectives. Traditional perspective is emphasizing top-down linkages, “management of strategy” and quantitative methods. Practical perspective is stressing, in addition to top-down linkages, also bottom-up and horizontal direction in the strategy process, “strategy itself” and

qualitative methods. In this sense, this dichotomy resembles the dichotomy of management introduced by Tienari and Meriläinen (2009): constructivist-critical (relationship-based) management and positivist-managerialist (individual) ideology for management. This relationship-based management stresses the socially constructed practices of organization and exploits mainly qualitative research methods and the

positivist-managerialist (individual) ideology mainly quantitative (positivist) research methods.

At third, we found that several studies have noticed the importance of different, also practice-based, cases for strategy education. They make strategy education more versatile and provide better understanding for students about strategy work. Generally, the claims to exploit “new”, mainly practice-based perspectives in research and education are usual among the sample of strategy literature.

Finally, the dichotomy between the practices and traditional perspectives of strategy work does not mean, however, that different nuances and perspectives of strategy research are useless. On the contrary, they are completing the wholeness of strategy research. Even the dichotomy is not necessarily constant situation in strategy research: several scholars are suggesting the co-existence of these two perspectives: traditional and “new” (mainly practical) perspective. Perhaps the right solution is to find out the best practices of these two perspectives and combine them in order to develop strategy work for the needs of the contemporary business.

**Managerial implications.** This study provides practicing executives wide perspective for strategy work and strategy making. In addition to the typical tools of strategy, such as portfolio analysis, generic strategies and life cycle models there is also practical perspective for strategy making. This perspective takes into the account the interplay between individual actors, socially constructed reality of organizations and their importance and meanings in strategy work.

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Traditional strategy tools are also important part of strategic management, but the changing context is necessary to realize in strategy work: in addition to top-down management there are also bottom-up and horizontal management, which have great relevance in the strategy process. Pecuniary incentives, which are following the ideas of principal-agent structure, are important, but also perspectives, such as empowerment, intrapreneurship and value co-creation are significant in the contemporary business. Especially strategy as practice and relationship-based management consider these issues.

## Limitations and implications for further research.

Although new perspectives, such as SAP and relationship-based management are part of the everyday business, they have practical and partly theoretical limitations. Especially the lack of simple robust strategic tools is one important problem. However, these perspectives also exploit the traditional tools of strategy-making. New perspectives, such as stories and other qualitative research methods, need a lot of familiarity.

This study considers especially strategy *work*, which fact might have effects on the results of the analysis. There is lack of scientific articles focused on strategy work (without the meaning “to make strategy work”). Thus, the relatively small population of analyzed articles might have biased interpretations as a result. However, this exiguity provides possibilities for further research: strategy work is essential part of management among the practitioners. In this sense, there seems to be some kind of gap between *doing* strategy and *studying* strategy.

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