“Strategic enactment: strategy making practices for complex terrains”

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Strategic enactment: strategy making practices for complex terrains

Abstract

The field of strategic management has been dominated primarily by rational and analytical approaches. Although there has been some shift to incorporate perspectives and ideas about emergent strategy, these draw primarily from theory related to organizational learning. This paper presents a critique of conventional approaches to strategic management by taking an inter-disciplinary perspective of strategy drawing on organizational learning, system dynamics, complexity theory, futures thinking, creativity and decision-making. It argues instead for a shift of perspective to that of *strategy making*, by way of a strategic enactment process that embraces a more organic, dynamic, emergent nature of strategy. A set of practices is proposed that may facilitate strategic conversation in such a strategic enactment process. This is a systemic set of practices to facilitate effective strategy and in traversing complexity and turbulence. It overcomes the formulation and implementation dichotomy by taking a holistic perspective and integrating them into a single gestalt of thinking-action, applicable in a wide variety of organizations and contexts.

Keywords: strategy, strategic enactment, complexity, emergence, foresight.
JEL Classification: M10.

Introduction

The field of strategy is multi-layered, diverse and fragmented, yet the strategic choice perspectives still dominate. An alternate conception of strategy based on a social constructionist ontology has been offered recently (Bodhanya, 2014). In this paper, I work within the strategic enactment frame but the focus is on strategic practices that are consistent with an interpretive approach. The first section outlines how I draw from both the literature as well as my own practitioner experience in constructing the arguments presented in this paper. This is followed firstly, by philosophical considerations and secondly, a theoretical perspective of why there needs to be a shift from strategic management to what may be termed strategic enactment. I draw on this theoretical perspective and practical experience to propose a set of practices that may be applied directly by practitioners in traversing complexity. The latter takes up much of the focus of this paper, and follows directly from the theoretical perspectives. I hope to show that although the proposed system is practice focussed, it does not merely consist of methods or techniques that are devoid of ontological and epistemological considerations rather it is drawn directly from them. I argue that the strategy field needs to become more inter-disciplinary. I attempt such an approach, where I utilize ideas and concepts from systems thinking, complexity theory, organizational learning, futures thinking, creativity and sociological network theory, in proposing the set of practices.

1. Case studies

The shortcomings of the strategic choice approaches are drawn from my own frustrations as a practitioner especially in strategic planning. I have since found that these shortcomings have been confirmed by the strategy and organization literature. I propose a tentative set of practices drawn from a theoretical perspective coupled with practice in the form of case studies in which I have been involved and through engagement in the teaching process.

The case studies were not conducted formally as research, but were either practitioner based or consulting type interventions in a few organizations. These case studies include a regional division of a large utility company in South Africa, the South African operations of a German-owned business in the automotive industry, a large multinational in the mining industry, a Section-21 not-for-profit organization specializing in environmental management and a parastatal initiative in rural development in South Africa. In addition, I draw on experience in facilitating small and large group workshops for youth and community organizations, as well as from teaching practice especially that based on experiential learning at the Leadership Centre in South Africa.

2. Philosophical considerations

I wish to set out the ontological and epistemological considerations that underpin the work. As ontology my premise is that organizational reality is not an objective, pre-given reality but rather one that is socially constructed. As a result any form of strategy-making and organizational intervention must acknowledge the plurality of perspectives and multiple realities as perceived by different actors. My epistemological stance here is that all organizational actors have, construct and do contribute to knowing and understanding. I contend that strategy-making

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needs to be embedded in practice, that tacit knowledge is deeper and richer, and that knowledge of practitioners are therefore valuable (Whittington, 2004; Whittington and Melin, 2003). Hence there is a need to de-emphasize expert knowledge, and for a privileging of "ordinary" knowledge. This will require a more pluralistic, egalitarian and democratic nature of organizational interactions, and is reflected in the practices that I propose.

2. Strategic enactment

Despite various classifications of strategy, the field has been dominated by strategic choice based on strongly rational and analytical approaches. Strategic choice is based on the premise that there is an objective pre-given reality that can be understood by a few rational actors who have the ability to choose an appropriate strategic position, and design or formulate the strategy which is then implemented. This is based on technical rationality with the ability to predict, forecast and optimize. Although this overly rational approach, especially in the guise of strategic planning has been subject to significant critique it continues to dominate. (Mintzberg, 1990; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Stacey, 1995; Stacey, 2003).

Strategic choice (Chaffee, 1985; Swenk, 1989) assumes that thinking and action may be separated, translated into strategy formulation and implementation. The key strategic actors are usually the executive team who are responsible for formulation. Other organizational actors at lower levels of the organization are the implementers. There is a distinct separation between thinkers and doers (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Human beings have bounded rationality (Sterman, 2000; Porac and Thomas, 2002) and adopt satisficing behavior (Sterman, 2000). This seriously questions the fundamental assumptions of strategic choice. Complexity theorists have argued that the world and the environment is too complex, fast changing, subject to non-linear relationships, and mutual causation (Anderson, 1999; Stacey, 2003). As a result cause and effect relationships may be distant in time and space rendering forecasting and optimization difficult. Complex systems produce emergent outcomes not within the control of any single actor or group of actors.

Although there has been this shift away from analytical approaches towards ideas based on learning (Rajagopalan and Spreitzer, 1996) and around emergent strategy (Quinn, 1978; Stacey, 1995; Stacey, 2003; Mintzberg et al., 1998), there are further opportunities for exploration that may enrich the field (Burgelman, 1988; Eisenhardt & Sull, 2001; Eisenhardt & Martin, 2000; Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2002; Whittington and Pettigrew, 2003; Smircich and Stubbart, 1985). A more holistic approach referred to as "strategizing and organizing" which argue for strategy to take a more processual view and also to become a more pluralistic discipline (Whittington et al., 2002) has begun to emerge. This is a marked shift from strategic choice or even population ecology (Tushman and Rosenkopf, 1992; Hannan and Freeman, 1997) writings on strategy.

Strategy embraces concepts such as purpose, planning, intent, vision, ploy, positioning, posture, and structure (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Scholars vary in their emphasis of what the essence of strategy is. However, as noted by Tsoukas and Knudsen (2002), Mintzberg (2003) there is near unanimity that it is about *consistent action over time*.

There should be a move away from the idea of strategic management towards one of strategic enactment (Smircich and Stubbart, 1985; Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2002; Porac and Thomas, 2002). The term strategic enactment implies that 1) strategy is enacted through organizational interactions rather than designed, 2) strategy formation and implementation are integrated as a single gestalt rather than the dichotomy as presented in the strategic choice literature (Mintzberg et al., 1998), 3) strategy is as a result of emergent processes (Porac and Thomas, 2002) at all organizational levels and hence challenges the hierarchical notion of policy, strategic, tactical and operational levels, 4) organizational reality is enacted and hence not objective and pre-given, 5) strategy is as a result of co-creation with the environment, thereby blurring the distinction between the organization and environment (Kauffman, 1995), 6) strategy being an emergent phenomenon of organizational interactions has to be inclusive, pluralistic (Handy, 1992; Whittington et al., 2002), tolerant of diversity and participatory in nature, 7) strategy is embedded in practice (Whittington, 2004; McKiernan and Carter, 2004; Whittington and Melin, 2003), and 8) a polyphonic organization capable of drawing in "voices of the margins".

The following represents a conceptual framework of such a strategic enactment process. In the next section I propose a set of practices to be embedded in organizational contexts that may facilitate such a strategic enactment process.

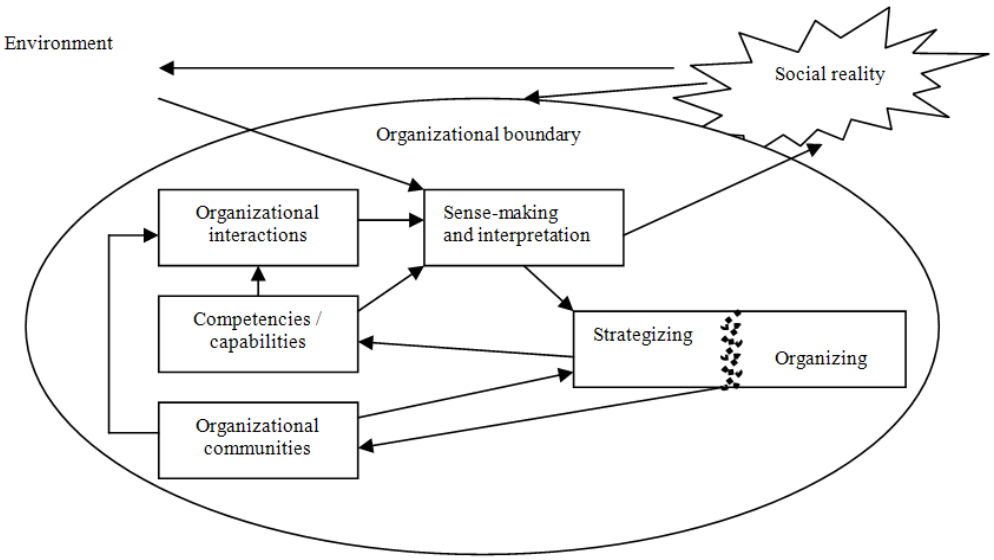

Fig. 1. Strategic enactment process

3. Set of practices

There are many ways in which such a strategic enactment process may be articulated, and each one of these will require a set of appropriate practices that may be embedded in the organization. In this section, I present a set of practices that represent one articulation of the process. They are designed to be systemic in the sense that they are inter-related and when used together will constitute what may be termed strategic conversation. By this I mean that the practices become embedded as organizational processes and part of everyday actions of the organizational discourse and doing. For the purposes of exposition, I have given each practice a label or name that is italicised, and try to give a sense of what each one is by presenting a set of methods, techniques or tools that form part of that practice. The practices are *Perceive*, *Discover*, *Imagine*, *Learn*, *Construct*, *Rationalize* and *Catalyze*. These labels are meant to reflect the verb form, as opposed to the noun form. This is consistent with the notion of strategizing and organizing as argued by (Whittington and Melin, 2003). The following table provides an indication of the features related to each of the practices.

Table 1. Strategic practices

Practices that contribute to strategic conversation in a strategic enactment process			
Perceive	Situation awareness Sense-making Plurality of viewpoints Understanding constraints Understanding conflicts	Imagine	Envisioning of plausible futures Foresight Rapid scenario building Intuition
Discover	Creativity Consideration of alternatives Novelty Non-linear approaches Suspension of judgement Discontinuities	Construct	Organizational self Organizational identity Business idea Boundary considerations Mutually reinforcing feedbacks
Rationalize	Analytical techniques Conventional strategy models and techniques Individual and collective volition Action planning Judgement	Learn	Mental models Double loop learning Surfacing and challenging assumptions Adaptive behaviour Conceptual models Systems models
Catalyze			
Integrating across practices Catalyze emergence Strategy as consistent patterns of action Small and large group interactions Comprehensive foresight interventions Search conferences Polyphony and multiple voices			

It is of necessity that I have to present each one separately as a distinct practice. In reality the entire set of practices needs to be interpreted and applied systemically such that together they contribute to

emergence of strategic conversation and thinking-action. These in turn lead to consistent patterns of action that become strategy. The systemic nature of the practices is underlined by *Catalyze*, which draws directly on all the other practises. To further convey the systemecity, I use a metaphor to describe the set of practices. Suppose that you are a tourist visiting a new city. You have a map where you can see the different landmarks, as shown in the diagram below.

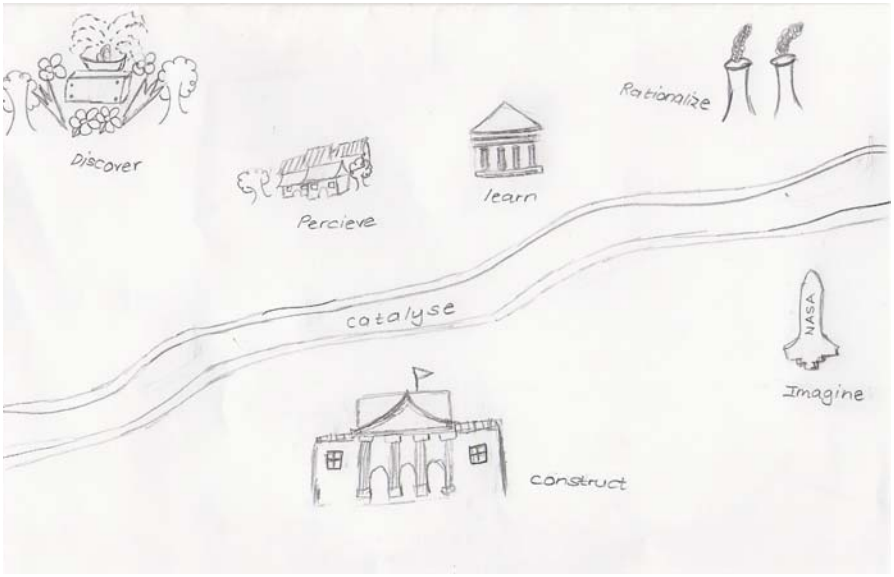

Fig. 2. Strategic practice route map

Each of the practices represents an important landmark in the city. As a tourist there is no fixed sequence of visiting the landmarks rather you do this by way of discovery and emergence. You may decide to spend an hour at a particular landmark or alternatively you may decide to spend an entire day there. You may choose to revisit one landmark before moving on to a new one. Different tourists (representing different organizations) will choose different landmarks and a different sequence in which to visit the landmarks.

As these are all important landmarks, most tourists will choose to visit each one at least once. Some will extend their stay and visit more frequently, during the day and again on another evening for example. In certain circumstances, some tourists may miss a landmark because of their travelling and monetary constraints but the ideal is to visit them all. They also recognize that these landmarks together make up the heart of city. Without one of the landmarks, something is taken away from the full experience of that city. There is also a historical relationship between the different landmarks which represent the town's evolution and growth. This attempts to underscore the systemic relationships between the landmarks.

Each of the practices that are described serves as the guidebook description for one of the landmarks. The description is just that. In order to fully appreciate what the guidebook says one has to experience the landmark itself. To fully appreciate what the practices mean they have to be applied in practice in the spirit of discovery and action, and not merely considered at an intellectual level. *Catalyze* may be thought of as a canal routing that runs through the entire town, which flows by every other landmark. A visitor to the town cannot be said to have experienced the town if s/he has not laid eyes on *Catalyze*.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully articulate each of the practices and their uses. However a high level description of what they comprise will be presented below.

3.1. Perceive. *Perceive*, as the name implies, is about how one perceives the situation that one is faced with. It is utilized such that we are able to achieve a full awareness of the situation. The goal is to capture all the essential information. We also want to gain an understanding of the constraints and the conflicts in the system or situation. In order to do this we use all the sensory information at our disposal.

3.1.1. Rich picture and rich narrative. Although *Perceive* draws on systems thinking methods, the primary one is the Rich Picture (Checkland and Scholes, 1999), which is used as a sense-making device. It is a visual summary of the situation that is being faced. We use icons, key words, symbols, speech bubbles and other graphic elements that help us characterize our situation. It contains the static elements and entities as well as transitory relationships. The Rich Picture is a powerful device to compress and represent complex information including relationships. It is used to sharpen our perception

of what is happening in our situation, and hence is central to *Perceive*.

Now that we have constructed our Rich Picture, taking into consideration all of the issues covered above, we translate our Rich Picture into what I term a Rich Narrative. The Rich Narrative provides a number of benefits. It forces us to be rigorous in articulating our understanding of the situation. It contributes to encouraging robust thinking. It encourages non-linear thinking, and helps us overcome satisficing (March, 1981; Sterman, 2000). Satisficing is when we stop our thinking and acting as soon as we arrive at a solution that is satisfactory. It is a kind of mental laziness that prevents us from achieving better outcomes. The Rich Picture and Rich Narrative work together as hand and glove. As we articulate the Rich Narrative we notice gaps in the Rich Picture. We therefore change the Rich Picture to address those gaps, and thereafter go back to the Rich Narrative. So we shall be iterating between the Rich Picture and the Rich Narrative, thereby improving both. This is what is meant by non-linear thinking – it is the iterative, recursive, back and forth movement between both. The one influences the other, which in turn mutually influences the first.

The Rich Picture and the Rich Narrative encourages us to use the full repertoire of cognitive skills. The Rich Picture being pictorial and making liberal use of color encourages right brain thinking, while the Rich Narrative exploits left brain thinking approaches reliant on verbal logic.

3.1.2. Understand the conflicts in the situation. We need to be able to sharpen our perception such that we become aware of the conflicts that are known, but more importantly those that are barely discernable. The conflicts that are bubbling under the surface have the potential to create difficult problems once they become manifest.

In summary, *Perceive* is about developing widespread organizational capability in situation awareness, and individual and collective sense-making. Although there are numerous methods and techniques to facilitate this, we have merely considered a few examples.

3.2. Imagine. *Imagine* is a stripped down version of constructing plausible scenarios of how the future might evolve by drawing on the essential elements of foresight. This may be considered as "fast" scenario building. For the purpose of this paper I offer a set of steps in a somewhat linear fashion, although in reality the actual articulation of *Imagine* is a much more organic, non-linear, dynamic and emergent process.

We begin by identifying the driving forces in the contextual environment, mindful of the key issue or decision under consideration. This may be facilitated by the conventional PESTEL analysis. In a group session it is fairly easy to generate a number of statements on Post-It notes, related to each of the PESTEL dimensions. Thereafter through a facilitated process, the group may engage in an intuitive clustering of data. It is recommended that the group consciously steers clear of clustering based on the PESTEL dimensions themselves.

In order to introduce some non-linearity in the process, I encourage participants to cluster the data as individuals without any discussion. After several minutes a distinct set of clusters begin to emerge. A second level of non-linearity is introduced by injecting a discontinuity in the process, by getting the participants to feel free to move a data statement from one location to any other location. This usually causes some consternation on the part of participants but they soon ease out of the discomfort. After the data clusters have settled, participants are asked to locate the driving force, in the sense of it having high explanatory power of the data in the cluster. The maxim is "let the data speak to you." It is recommended that the driving forces are conceptualized as variables with polar values such as High/Low; Cohesive/Fragmented; Effective/Ineffective and so forth. This facilitates the construction of the scenarios matrix as we proceed. Once we have the driving forces, we apply the predictability/impact matrix and select the two driving forces with the highest uncertainty and highest impact in relation to the focus question. This easily translates into four quadrants, which represent four different scenarios.

The larger group is then divided into groups who begin constructing the alternative futures. The critical aspects of futures construction are that each of the futures must be equally plausible and internally consistent. In order to ensure this, we apply the systems thinking technique of causal loop diagrams. These diagrams enable the groups to understand the structure of the system that drives each of the futures. Once the causal diagrams are constructed, they are "read" in the sequence of a given future. This reading represents the plot for that future. The skeletal plot is then fleshed out into narratives that show how the future has evolved from now to the horizon year. The description given here is a simple one, and it is noted that much more sophisticated forms of scenario generation may be applied.

3.3. Discover. *Discover* is ultimately about venturing out into the unknown, charting new territory, that is, it is about creativity. As noted by de Bono (1969), de

Bono (1990), the human brain is a pattern matching mechanism. It is quite obvious that this pattern matching ability is very useful, and of course very efficient, but it has a number of shortcomings as well. The pattern matching is not foolproof, as it produces the closest match. This is extremely helpful when faced with exactly the same situation as experienced before, but less so when faced with new situations, as the pattern recalled may not be the most appropriate.

The process underlying most techniques for unleashing creativity is to bypass or short-circuit the pattern matching mechanism. This does not mean that we want to eradicate this completely, but that we want to develop the skill to consciously bypass it when we want to be creative. This may be regarded as the first level of creative ability. Later, we may develop a second level of creative ability. This is when we have the ability to seamlessly and unconsciously switch between pattern matching, and suspending the pattern matching. Another way to look at creativity is that instead of pattern matching we attempt to break established patterns, that is, overcoming pattern entrainment (Kurtz and Snowden, 2003), so that new patterns may form, thereby leading to creative outcomes. It should be clear that the tool *Discover* might therefore draw on a myriad of techniques to stimulate pattern breaking. We may be able to discern or construct new patterns that lead to creative outcomes. In this section, I merely provide a few sample techniques to illustrate how *Discover* may be applied.

3.3.1. Random stimulation. Suppose that we have an opportunity area or problem situation that needs to be addressed. In applying the random stimulation technique we need to bring in a stimulus that is unrelated to our problem situation or opportunity area. One way of doing this is to select a random word unrelated to the problem or opportunity area. The word together with its meaning conjures up a whole set of ideas, images and associations in your mind. Based on any of these we proceed with "meandering" through these ideas and images and associations that will take us on to new associations and ideas. We proceed along the various webs of associations in an unstructured or loose fashion and see where it takes us. Consider the metaphor of wandering through a field or meadow of many varieties of flowers. You proceed from one set of flowers to another according to your whim or fancy at that moment in time. You are enjoying the sunshine, have all the time at your disposal, proceeding in a relaxed and leisurely fashion. You are feeling relaxed and light. This is what happens as you move across the network of ideas and associations from one set to another. At some point, rather non-deliberately and unconsciously you will make contact with your opportunity area or problem situation. At this point you will have one or more "raw" ideas that if developed will help to address your problem. This is a divergent phase of thinking, and hence you should not expect that you would have a fully-fledged solution to your problem. Rather you will have a number of ideas that with further development will result in workable solutions. When you are in the creative phase of thinking you are suspending judgment. Later you will apply judgments by way of constraints and your value systems. At this stage all ideas are acceptable, no matter how absurd, or whether they do not pass your value filters. The movement from the random word successively in a variety of directions until almost by chance you make contact with your solution may be described as a dance, but an un-choreographed dance. You dance and go with the music not knowing where you will end up.

3.3.2. Incubation. The technique of incubation relies on subconscious processes for generating creativity. You may have found yourself in a situation where you have been grappling with a problem for long periods without making too much progress. Then you decide on your own or based on a suggestion from someone else to "sleep on it." After some elapsed time, maybe the next day or a few days later you find a way forward on your problem situation. Incubation is what lies at the heart of "sleep on it." When we decide to use Incubation, we take a conscious and deliberate decision to leave the problem alone, and to signal to the unconscious mind to work on the problem. We do not know precisely how such unconscious processes work, but we do know that they may provide effective results. We may speculate that the sub-conscious mind is working with our tacit knowledge and compressed experience.

3.3.3. "If we had unlimited resources then…". It is often the case that our thinking is bounded and limited by the constraints that we currently face – as a result our creativity is stifled. This technique frees up our thinking by setting up a context where such constraints are removed temporarily. To apply this technique all we do is consider what the impact will be "if we had unlimited resources."

3.3.4. Controvary. The *Controvary* technique takes its insight from a concept used in the field of effective negotiations, where we attempt to turn constants into variables. In the context of negotiations between two parties, they often find themselves at a stalemate. One of the ways of coming out of deadlock is to re-look at the situation, and identify those things that are treated as constant or unchangeable. If one or both parties can find constants that may be turned into variables then it opens up the space for making progress in the

deliberations. We may apply exactly the same principle in terms of our problem situation when we face stagnation or "deadlock". Can we identify one or more things that we have treated as constant or unchangeable, that if we look at differently may be turned into variables?

3.4. Learn. *Learn* is devised to accelerate group learning by drawing on the learning cycle. It is an attempt to stimulate double-loop learning, by enabling participants to surface and challenge their assumptions, with the objective of changing their mental models (Senge et al., 1994). The following techniques are encapsulated in *Learn*.

3.4.1. Modelling. One of the ways to accelerate both individual and group learning is to explicate mental models. A key feature behind *Learn* is the ability to model an aspect of reality. In *Learn* we rely on modelling to help with understanding some organizational phenomena that may be of interest to us. The use of systems thinking modelling techniques is helpful. For example, one could try and understand key organizational patterns by drawing on systems thinking archetypes, or systems dynamics generic infrastructures. It is likely that we may also be able to develop one or more conceptual models that have relevance to our organisational setting. This could be in the form of typologies, annotated timelines, flow-charts, state-event diagrams, 2x2 matrices, behavior over time, cognitive mapping, metaphors or analogies. The point is that too many strategy processes rely on *single* models, frameworks or recipes. It is important rather to create a recipe "on the fly" to deal with complex and turbulent environments.

3.4.2. Surfacing assumptions. Participants begin by surfacing what is taken for granted and the basic assumptions about the situation or system under study. These are generated in an organic fashion, and once a large enough set of assumptions have been generated, we consider the validity of the assumptions, under what circumstances do they hold, when do they break down, whether there is consensus on the assumptions and so forth. We may also consider what happens if we reverse the assumption and what impact that will have on how we understand some phenomena. Alternatively we look at modifying some feature of the assumption to see what effect that might have. After a thorough consideration of the assumptions we shall have a more robust set that contributes to changing our mental models.

3.4.3. Intellectual reconnaissance. We may be able to continuously draw new insights by actively looking for new trends, social and political behavior through mechanisms for intellectual reconnaissance. We seek out disconfirming evidence of our pet ideas and theories to make them more robust. Intellectual reconnaissance encourages us to look in unlikely places for new information and insights.

3.5. Rationalize. *Rationalize* is an application of analytical techniques which may be considered to be beneficial. As such we are open to any method or technique, many of them drawn from strategic choice perspectives. The difference is that we do not apply them uncritically or in a mechanistic fashion. Instead they are merely one set of approaches in our multifaceted approach to strategy making. *Rationalize*, in itself, is multi-faceted. We apply it for sense-making as well as planning purposes. Some of the techniques that may be applied include the 5 forces, value-chain, portfolio maps, power relationships matrices and stakeholder analyses. As these aspects are well known and applied frequently in conventional approaches to strategy, I shall not consider them further here.

3.5.1. Narrative script for action planning. Individuals or small groups engage in writing short fragments of projects in the form of narratives. They do this from the vantage point of the not too distant future say a timeframe of about three times that of anticipated project completion. The narrative will include a description of the key actors, other stakeholders that were affected, the actions that they had conducted, the resources that they used, and the outcomes of the project. In doing this they will be applying mental simulation (Klein, 1999) projecting out into the future. They will also consider the key decision points, and watershed moments as the project proceeded through its trajectory. They could write more than one script that identifies successful and failed outcomes.

The importance of a systemic set of practices is crucial especially in utilizing *Rationalize*. Although the individual may use *Rationalize* in isolation, it is ultimately by applying it in a collective fashion in conjunction with other practices, especially that of *Catalyze*, that is likely to contribute to a consistent pattern of actions that constitute strategy.

3.6. Construct. *Construct* is about the construction of the organisational identity. We may argue that strategy is indeed about how the organizational identity evolves over time (Stacey, 2003). It becomes imperative that there are practices that consciously and deliberately contribute to identity formation and evolution.

Following on the premise of a socially constructed reality, we highlight that identity formation and development relies on multiple realities, based on history, values, socialization, discourses, practices and perceptions of the human agents in a social system.

Construct encourages surfacing and explicating of the diverse realities of organizational participants. One may notice that some of the other practices, for example, *Imagine* and *Catalyze*, automatically do this.

Here we build on that in another way, by considering the organization's primary identity in relation to the environment. The "organization" and the "environment" are not objective realities but are selected or constructed by the organizational participants themselves. *Construct* therefore contributes to strategic conversation by stimulating discourse on organizational identity. This is also a form of bounding the patterns of actions that may emerge.

3.6.1. Boundary definition. We may use systems thinking in terms of defining the organizational and environmental boundary (Ulrich, 1996). In this context we need to consider what we include and what we exclude as part of the organization. The goal is to consciously incorporate boundary considerations and judgements about what exactly constitutes the organization. Where does the organization end and where does the environment begin? This is not a trivial question, as it refers to a dynamic, moving boundary.

It is also important to distinguish between different kinds of boundaries, say for example between institutional, financial and knowledge boundaries. Depending on where we collectively assign a boundary impacts significantly on many organizational processes.

3.6.2. Business idea. Van der Heijden (1998) offers a succinct analytical device referred to as the "Business Idea". He describes it as the organizational self, which may be considered to be the current success engine of the organization. If the Business Idea is the organizational self, then it is intimately related to the organizational identity. We may study the Business Idea in detail to identify the mutually reinforcing loops at a micro-level and developing ways to strengthen those loops, through the action planning in *Rationalize*.

From the point of view of *Construct*, we may consider the Business Idea as representing the organizational identity, together with organizational boundary judgements. This may result in the construction of entirely new feedback loops, that contribute to the emergence of new patterns of behavior, and hence a change in the organizational identity.

3.7. Catalyze. The purpose behind *Catalyze* is to ensure that the strategy-making process ultimately leads to action. It is about utilizing the sense-making, creativity, foresight, rationalization and analytical components such that they become synergetic towards stimulating the emergence of consistent patterns of action which represents strategy. *Catalyze* ensures that this becomes an organic and dynamic process where thinking and acting become an intertwined process across a broad spectrum of organizational and other participants, such that there is a shift from strategy to strategiz*ing* and from organisation to organiz*ing*, and even further where the distinction between strategizing and organizing becomes blurred (Whittington and Melin, 2003).

Catalyze draws primarily on both large group and small group workshops or dialogue sessions that engage with the key issues facing the organization. In addition *Catalyze* attempts to utilize everyday organizational conversation as a mechanism for stimulating the change in organizational identity thereby changing patterns of action and hence changing strategy in an on-going way. In this sense, strategy is not episodic, but strategizing is what an organization does all the time.

The following are some of the techniques or interventions used by *Catalyze*.

3.7.1. Small group sessions. Each of these sessions is used to apply one or more of the practices that have been presented. For example, the creativity generation practice of *Discover* may be used as a basis for small-group interventions. The outcomes of these are internalized by the participants, and become part of the everyday language when they engage with other organizational participants.

3.7.2. Knowledge café. The Knowledge café sessions are simple, but stimulating environments to create and share knowledge (Brown & Isaacs, 2005). The format of a Knowledge café is fairly simple, but is open to all kinds of imaginative uses, and hence may be varied for specific organizational purposes. There is no formal debriefing. This is part of the *catalyz*ing process to encourage self-organizing patterns and emergence.

3.7.3. Large group sessions. These sessions are designed to facilitate the idea of the polyphonic organization. This is to *attenuate* but not to close off the hitherto privileged voices in the organization and to amplify the voices of the margins. In this way the artificial distinction between thinkers and doers are minimized. In addition, it enables dissenting voices to be heard, and brings in those that have been marginalized. It also removes the artificial boundaries between hierarchical levels of policy, strategy, tactical and operational. By way of drawing in multiple voices these distinctions become blurred. It places a heavy burden on all participants, as the power differentials between them need to be downplayed, and to encourage a deep level of

dialogue. The sessions are meant to be egalitarian, which may be stressful for both senior level managers as well as other organizational participants. There are a variety of ways of running such large group sessions. It could be used to apply one of the other practices in a collective fashion or it could be used for more specific organizational interventions, for example, sharing ideas on new product development.

3.7.4. Search conferences. A large group intervention may also be run as what is known as a "future search" or "search conference", drawing from the work of Emery and Trist at the Tavistock Institute (Weisbord, 1992).

3.7.5. Foresight exercise. The practice *Imagine* is a stripped-down version of a foresight exercise. The large group sessions may be exploited to apply a more comprehensive scenario planning, foresight or futures thinking intervention (Weinstein, 2003; Van der Heijden et al., 2002; Van der Heijden, 1998; Schwartz, 1998; Ringland, 2002). Such an intervention may be run over several days and then interspersed by work and action over a few weeks, returning to a large group workshop.

3.7.6. Social network stimulation. An important component of *Catalyze* is to stimulate the formation of new organizational groupings, as well as the diffusion of ideas and knowledge through an organization on a large scale. The process of social network stimulation may achieve this. It draws on the insight of the "small world" phenomenon (Buchanan, 2003; Watts, 2003) and the underlying architecture of this phenomenon, namely that of small world networks (Strogatz, 2003; Buchanan, 2003; Watts, 2003; Strogatz, 2001; Watts and Strogatz, 1998). The assumption is that social networks are small worlds that are characterized by short distance between participants, and cliquishness. There are a number of ways of activating social network stimulation. This may be done in the way that both the small group and large group sessions are constituted, that is, by way of the selection of participants who come from different social networks, informal groups and social islands within the organization. Secondly, new links are created during the sessions themselves. A third mechanism is to deliberately rewire the network relationships in order to benefit from the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Finally it is to encourage the emergence of new communities of practice.

Conclusions

The field of strategic management has been dominated by rational and analytical approaches especially that of strategic choice. I have argued for a shift of perspective to that of *strategy-making*, through a strategic enactment process that embraces a more organic, dynamic, emergent nature of strategy. Organizational reality is not an objective, pre-given reality, but is socially constructed, and as a result any form of strategizing and organizing must acknowledge the plurality of perspectives and multiple realities as perceived by different actors.

I have drawn on the literature as well as my own practitioner experience in proposing a set of practices that may facilitate strategic conversation in a strategic enactment process. This is a systemic set of practices to facilitate effective strategizing by taking a holistic perspective and integrating them into single gestalt of thinking-action. A tourist metaphor has been used to illustrate the application of the set of practices. There is no fixed sequence in the application of the practices and underlying techniques. The strategist may mix and match them in an improvisational manner specific to the given strategic context.

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