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Placing Strategy Discourse in Context: Sociomateriality, Sensemaking and Power[1]

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Abstract

There has been increasing interest in the discursive aspects of strategy over the last two decades. In this editorial we review the existing literature, focusing on six major bodies of discursive scholarship: post-structural, critical discourse analysis, narrative, rhetoric, conversation analysis and metaphor. Our review reveals the significant contributions of research on strategy and discourse, but also the potential to advance research in this area by bringing together research on discursive practices and research on other practices we know to be important in strategy work. We explore the potential of discursive scholarship in integrating between significant theoretical domains (sensemaking, power and sociomateriality), and realms of analysis (institutional, organizational and the episodic), relevant to strategy scholarship. This allows us to place the papers published in the special issue *Strategy* as *Discourse*: *Its Significance, Challenges and Future Directions* among the body of knowledge accumulated thus far, and to suggest a way forward for future scholarship.

Introduction

"Strategy is up there. Right up there. At the top. And, above all, the language that it mobilizes,

and is mobilized by it, is what puts it there." (Lilley, 2001)

Strategy work involves talk in all its forms – conversations at the water cooler, rumours and gossip about competitors, formal strategy meetings, mission and vision statements, corporate accounts, and carefully crafted press releases. Such talk is consequential for constructing, making sense of and communicating strategy. Words, in both their spoken and their materialised forms in text, are some of the most powerful resources for making and signifying an organization's strategy. Furthermore, strategy talk is connected to and positioned within a particular body of concepts. It is impossible to pick up a newspaper without reading about strategy since it forms the widely accepted language for talking about business, firms, markets and industries; their rivalry, competition, alliances, bubbles, growth and decline. In this talk about strategy, managers are also constructing themselves as strategists. Strategy is thus a discourse, widely adopted and accepted, with far-reaching effects beyond the firm and its actors.

Hence, increasing interest has emerged in the discursive aspects of strategy. Scholars have drawn on a variety of discursive approaches to study strategy in context. For example, they have adopted post-structuralist approaches (Knights & Morgan 1991; Ezzamel & Willmott 2008), critical discourse analysis (Balogun, Jarzabkowski & Vaara, 2011; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristo, 2004), narrative perspectives (Barry & Elmes 1997a; Fenton & Langley, 2011), rhetoric (Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007), ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (Samra-Fredericks 2005; Whittle, Housely, Gilchrist & Lenney, forthcoming) as well as metaphors and analogical reasoning (Cornelissen, Holt and Zundel, 2011; Heracleous and Jacobs 2008; 2011) to better understand the linguistic aspects of strategic phenomena. These different approaches provide a valuable

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set of theoretical and methodological resources that are adding significantly to our understanding of how language use shapes the work of strategy.

This proliferation of research has helped us to better understand important aspects of strategy discourse, its multiple manifestations, and ways in which they can be theorized and empirically examined. However, while strategy work involves talk in all its form, it is not *just* talk. Yet the focus in studies of discourse and strategy to date has mostly been on the language of strategy and its communication per se. To move forward it is important to place strategy discourse in context and acknowledge the social practices of strategizing in which such language is embedded. Recognising the variety inherent in different approaches to discourse and language based studies more generally, and the multiple discourses on "Discourse", we refer to Fairclough's (2003: 17) notion of discourse studies as those with a language-based approach to "representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world – there are alternative and often competing discourses, associated with different groups of people in different social positions". The reference to the "physical, social and psychological" highlights the potential of discourse to bring together other aspects of strategy practice that we know to be significant, but which so far have largely been studied independently.

The growing body of work on strategy as practice, which explores strategy as a situated socially accomplished activity, and something people in organizations do rather than something organizations have (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003; Jarzabkowski Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006), has started to highlight these linkages between discourse and social practice in strategizing. Strategizing comprises those "actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity" (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007: 8). Thus, with reference to Fairclough (2003), strategy discourse needs to be connected to the physical; those socio-

material practices involved in strategy work, such as whiteboards, flipcharts, post-it notes, agendas, and indeed the spatial and material arrangements of the rooms and places in which strategy meetings and strategizing occur (Whittington 2006; Kaplan 2011; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Rouleau, 2005). Discourse must also be linked with the psychological; those cognitive aspects of strategic sensemaking in which the performative power of discourse is a central thesis (Balogun et al, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011). Further, discourse is social; having power and influence effects that define the subjectivity and power relations between actors engaged in strategizing (Mantere & Vaara 2008).

This special issue editorial therefore aims to provide a framework that places strategy discourse in context. We draw on Fairclough's (2003) definition of discourse and the potential highlighted by research in the strategy-as-practice field to bring together discursive and strategy practices to argue that to further our understanding of strategy discourse, research needs to integrate exploration of the specific textual and contextual (physical, social, psychological) resources employed in the production and consumption of strategy. By so doing, we attempt to provide a comprehensive view of the achievements of research on strategy discourse but to also highlight the enormous outstanding potential for further research.

We first review six broad discourse perspectives that have been used to explore strategy and discourse. This review reveals the extent to which research has focused largely on language and communication at the expense of the physical, social and psychological in practices important in strategy work, despite the potential to marry research on strategizing with discourse perspectives in order to extend our theoretical and methodological resources. We then develop a framework that draws together research on discourse and strategy with research on strategy-as-practice to situate strategy discourse within its multiple levels of context, and integrate it with research on sociomateriality, sensemaking and power. We use

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this framework to locate the contributions to this special issue as well as develop a research agenda for advancing research on strategy and discourse.

Perspectives on Strategy Discourse

Discursive studies of strategy include a variety of theoretical and methodological perspectives. Our review of this body of work suggests that most research on discourse and strategy falls within one of six perspectives[2]: poststructuralist discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis (CDA), narrative, rhetoric, conversation analysis and metaphor analysis. We review these six perspectives below. Table 1 provides a corresponding synopsis including exemplary contributions.

Insert Table 1 about here

Poststructuralist Analysis

Poststructuralist approaches, such as Foucauldian discourse analysis, emphasize the central role of discourse as a basis of knowledge and power (Foucault 1973, 1980). From this perspective, strategy can be understood as a body of knowledge (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Ezzamel and Willmott, 2008); an institutionalized field of practice. Apart from its actual practice in organizations, strategic management is a discipline with a particular history. This discipline has developed its own social codes and knowledge that revolve around specific concepts, theories and models. These are discursive constructions that both enable and constrain organizational strategizing and other action. The knowledge of these concepts has also become a symbol of professionalization and competence in organizations, with important implications for subjectivity and organizational power relations. In their seminal paper, drawing on the work of Foucault, Knights and Morgan (1991) took a genealogical perspective to strategy discourse to show how it developed as a body of knowledge. Consistent with the

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[2] . In pulling this review together, we recognize that there are other related approaches that have also been used to examine strategic phenomena, including, for example, communicative construction of organizations (Robichaud et al., 2004) and vocabularies of organizing (Nigam & Ocasio, 2010). However, we focus our review on those perspectives most commonly used to date.

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emphasis on discourse as a basis for knowledge and power, they focused on subjectivity to reveal the largely overlooked inter-relationships between strategy discourse and the agency and identity of actors that might be considered "strategists".

Scholars have also focused on the overwhelming power of discourses by drawing on other poststructuralist perspectives. For example, drawing on Deleuze, Lilley (2001) focused on how strategy discourse influences our way of looking at organizations. Levy, Alvesson and Willmott (2003) proposed a Gramsci-inspired critical theory perspective to further the exploration and analysis of the hegemonic nature of strategy discourse and the associated practices. Grandy and Mills (2004) drew on Baudrillard's ideas about simulation and simulacra to analyse the naturalization of strategy discourse and its effects on practice.

While post-structuralist analyses usually focus on the power of discourses, recent studies have also thrown light on how specific discourses may be used to promote or resist change within organizations (see, for example, Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008). In his analysis of a building society, McCabe (2010) showed how strategy discourses were mobilized in ambiguous ways both to promote and support management's initiatives.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) has its roots in applied linguistics, but has developed into an inter-disciplinary methodology that can be used to explore the linguistic underpinnings of social phenomena and their power implications (Fairclough, 1989, 2003; Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Apart from its critical stance, CDA is characterized by its focus on the linguistic details of texts. It is this feature that distinguishes CDA from Foucauldian and most other poststructuralist approaches to discourse. It has been applied to several topics and in a variety of ways in strategic management (Balogun et al., 2011; Phillips, Sewell and Jaynes, 2008; Vaara et al, 2004; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Vaara & Monin, 2010), to examine how discourses are mobilized as strategic resources within organizational processes of

strategy development and change, but also to explore how some discourses may be mobilised to promote change and how other alternative discourses may be mobilised to resist and negotiate change.

In general, CDA is consistent with interpretive perspectives which seek to understand how organizational phenomena are socially constructed, but it aims to link these constructions to organizational or broader social power relationships and structures of domination through exploring the ways in which local discourses link with those that exist at broader organizational and societal levels (Fairclough & Thomas, 2004). This may be done through analysis of strategy texts (see Hodge & Coronado, 2006; Vaara, Sorsa & Pälli, 2010), but often also involves a focus on discursive statements and practices more generally (Balogun et al, 2011; Hardy et al, 2000; Vaara et al, 2004; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Vaara & Monin, 2010). Vaara et al. (2010) focused on official strategy texts to identify five central discursive features of strategic plans as a distinctive genre contributing to their authority: self-authorization, special terminology, discursive innovation, forced consensus and deonticity. Laine and Vaara (2007) by comparison focussed on subjectivity and organizational change to show how top managers launched a new strategy discourse to exercise control, while others mobilized alternative discourses to resist and still others distanced themselves from such discourses to protect their autonomy. Balogun et al. (2011) in turn demonstrated how change in an MNC may involve discourses of selling, resistance and reconciliation discourses that have implications for the subjectivity of managers. Specifically, these discourses about subsidiary roles in the organization were intrinsically linked with the legitimation of, or resistance to, broader discourses about globalization and localization.

Narrative Analysis

The narratological perspective encourages a focus on narrative and storytelling in organizations (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1998; Gabriel, 2000). It moves attention away from

the notion of discourse as a body of text common in more Foucauldian perspectives, to an exploration of the use of narrative in organizational processes of strategy development and change but also to strategy as a form of narrative about the future of an organization. Barry and Elmes' (1997a) analysis provided a landmark contribution, pointing to the potential for linkages between the narrative perspective and strategy. Since then, the potential of narrative perspectives has been recognized in the growing body of literature on narrative, strategy, and strategic change (Brown & Thompson, 2013; Fenton & Langley, 2011; Sonenshein, 2010; Vaara and Tienari, 2011).

Narrative perspectives can "make the political economies of strategy more visible", (Barry & Elmes, 1997a: 430) highlighting the role of strategy "readers" as well as strategy "writers" and alerting us to heterogeneity of narrative interpretations. From a narrative perspective, strategy and change are multi-authored processes in which there are struggles over alternative meanings as actors compete to dominate the future direction of an organization (Buchanan & Dawson 2007; Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Thomas et al., 2011). Different readers with different worldviews appropriate different versions of the strategy story, discounting other interpretations and defending their own by drawing on different discursive resources available to them. Hierarchical status may bring certain advantages, such as control over formal communication channels (Boje, 1995; Brown & Humphreys, 2006). Yet control to redirect understandings and change outcomes is never absolute due to other actors' ability to author their own version of reality through alternative narratives. Fenton and Langley (2011: 1189) also point to the potential of narrative to unpack the socially constructed nature of concepts such as strategy, strategists and strategizing recognizing that "narrative elements contribute to defining the nature of the activities in which people are engaged as 'strategic'" and "the way in which the identities of 'strategy practitioners' are

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subjectively constructed". However, empirical work in the area of narrative, strategy and strategic change remains limited.

Rhetoric Analysis

Rhetoric analysis "is specifically concerned with argumentation, justification and persuasion (Aristotle, 1984) and is particularly well suited to the examination of strategic action because it is a strategic form of speech act, in which actors use speech to have effects upon an actual or implied audience (Heracleous, 2006)" (Sillince, Jarzabkowski & Shaw, 2012: 632-633). Rhetoric is distinguished from other forms of discourse analysis *"by its situational focus on persuasive texts … (and by) assumptions of a direct and dynamic relationship between rhetorical structures of speech or argument and the cognition and action of actors"* (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005: 40). It tends to focus on rhetorical devices, such as forms of argumentation used to achieve particular ends (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004), and discursive practices of persuasion, in contrast to more overt forms of force or coercion (Cheney, Christensen, Conrad, & Lair, 2004). Since strategizing involves multiple, competing meanings about the firm and its purpose (Floyd & Lane, 2000), often in plurivocal contexts where multiple goals and interests abound (Barry & Elmes, 1997a), rhetorical analysis is of interest because rhetorical devices can be used to construct goal congruence between diverse organizational practices; for example in the communication of corporate strategies, or in organizational bargaining and processes of decision-making (Sillince, 2005).

The purpose of rhetorical analysis is not to evaluate the truth claims of particular arguments, but to examine the ways in which particular rhetorical devices are employed to bring about change or to justify particular decisions. Strategy studies have often drawn on so-called "new rhetoric" theory (Burke, 1989; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) which establishes '*a sense of communion centred around particular values*' (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 50-1). It breaks away from the focus on clarity in targeting messages

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at specific audiences, typical in more classical rhetorical traditions (Aristotle, 1984), to advocate messages for a universal or less specific audience, and in so doing draws attention to the ambiguous nature of contemporary organizations and organizational goals. For example, Sillince & Mueller (2007) show how top managers' rhetoric of empowerment persuaded middle managers to expand their remit and responsibility for a strategic change project, while Jarzabkowski & Sillince (2007) demonstrated how top managers' rhetoric generated commitment to multiple contradictory and contested strategic goals. Studies focus on the strategic and political role that rhetoric plays in meaning making; for example in the dynamics of legitimation (Erkama & Vaara, 2010) and persuasion through which actors are persuaded to enrol in strategic action (Sillince & Brown, 2009). Such audiences are not only external, as new rhetoric also explains how speakers construct themselves, rhetorically, as strategists (Sillince et al., 2012).

Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis

At a more episodic level, strategy is encountered in social interactions involving spoken acts or "talk". Such interactions are the focus of conversation analysis (CA) (Sacks, 1992; Psathas, 1995), an approach inspired by ethnomethodology (Samra-Fredericks, 2005; Whittle et al, 2013). Ethnomethodology explores the work that is done to maintain the taken-for-granted order of society (Goffman, 1961, Garfinkel, 1967). Both Ethnomethodology and CA are, therefore, concerned with understanding the everyday interactions through which people make sense of their world and uphold social order. CA specifically applies the principles of Ethnomethodology to the context of analysing conversations (Sacks, 1992).

Samra-Fredericks (2003, 2004 & 2005) and Whittle et al (forthcoming) highlight the potential of CA to explore order as "*accomplished* 'in and through details of on-going, irremediably *situated production* of order in particular settings'" (Samra-Fredericks, 2005 drawing on Jayyusi, 1991: 235, italics added). In other words, social order is an effortful

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performance involving the use of situationally specific knowledge. Consequently, CA can be used to analyse episodes of strategy work to explore how various kinds of often ambiguous and even contradictory meanings are created in specific discursive acts as they occur in the moment-by-moment interactions between actors. It can be used to explore the "talk" of strategists and to explicate the skills that lie behind their "crafting" of strategy (Balogun et al, 2007). Focus is placed on extracting and analysing particular contextually situated pieces of strategists' talk to understand how influence is constructed through what speakers highlight and what they hide, and also to understand their back stage crafting of talk, in order to facilitate front stage performances, and the use of talk-in-interaction ploys such as humour and play (Samra-Fredericks 2004, 2005). CA reveals how particular ideas are promoted and others downplayed, and specific voices heard or marginalized through the micro-level practices of mundane speech acts (Samra-Fredericks 2005; Thomas et al., 2011).

In one of the few studies to adopt CA to explore the work of strategists, Samra-Fredericks (2003) analyses pieces of strategy talk from episodes of strategizing by focusing on specific linguistic skills that strategists use to persuade and convince others, and to construct subjectivity as strategists. These include the ability to speak forms of knowledge, mitigate and observe the protocols of human interaction, question and query, display appropriate emotion, deploy metaphors, and put history to 'work.' More recently, Whittle et al (2013) analyse an extract of talk-in-interaction in a strategy meeting to show how members used power and politics to make sense of the internal organizational and external environments in which they worked. They showed the talk to be not "just talk" but to be *practical* and *consequential.* Through these conversations key decisions were made, which affected who was involved, what resources were used and how strategy was implemented.

Analogy and Metaphor Analysis

Strategy work involves inductive forms of reasoning such as the use of analogies and metaphors (Hill & Levenhagen, 1995; Hunt & Menon, 1995; Gioia 1986). Metaphors and analogies as archetypes of tropes in general, in common with the broader discourses they constitute, are recognized as constructive of social and organizational reality (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Conceptual similarities between the source and target domains involve both ontological and epistemic correspondences (Lakoff, 1993) whose blending can give rise to novel insights (Morgan, 1980; 1983; Cornelissen, 2005). Due to their potential in helping actors overcome cognitive unfamiliarity and novelty, metaphors and analogies are crucial drivers of sensemaking, framing and legitimation processes (Cornelissen & Clark, 2010; Cornelissen, 2012; Douglas, 1986; Hirsch, 1986; Leblebici, Salancik, Copay, & King, 1991; Sillince & Barker, 2012; Tourish & Hargie, 2012) and thus of interest to those studying strategy work that occurs within strategizing episodes such as workshops and meetings.

Analogies allow strategic actors to transfer insights and experiences from familiar to unfamiliar settings when evaluating and assessing novel strategic configurations (Gavetti, Levinthal & Rivkin, 2005; Gavetti & Rivkin, 2005). Indeed, Cornelissen, Holt and Zundel (2011) suggest that analogical or metaphorical framing of strategic change generates links in reasoning that enables the terms, conditions and uses of particular concepts to effect strategic change. Focusing on the example of strategy creation in strategy retreats, Jacobs and colleagues (Buergi, Jacobs & Roos, 2005; Heracleous & Jacobs 2008; 2011) also highlight how locally induced, multi-modal metaphors reveal cognitive, *emotional* and political aspects of strategizing that often remain neglected in more traditional approaches.

Placing Strategy Discourse in Context

This brief review reveals that we know a great deal about strategy and discourse, but also that significant potential exists to further our understanding given the largely exclusive focus studies have placed on the language of strategy and its communication. Thus, it is time

to place strategy discourse in context and focus attention on how it links with other literatures concerned with strategy practice: sociomateriality, sensemaking and power.

While it would be misguided to suggest that the discourse literature does not incorporate these perspectives to varying degrees, or that studies of these other domains do not account for the role of language at all, there are significant differences in focus between the literatures. Research on sociomateriality allows a stronger elaboration of how discursive practices are linked with other socio-material practices and objects. The sensemaking literature allows us to understand linkages between the linguistic and cognitive, the language and the mind, from a process perspective. Analyses of power in turn highlight the various political and power implications of strategy discourse, including the agency of social actors.

The discursive literature on strategy also has a close connection with the literature on strategy-as-practice (Mantere, forthcoming). Since this perspective seeks to (re-)introduce human activity into strategy research (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007), it focuses on not just the *work* of strategy, but also its institutional and organizational contexts. Mapping the research domain for strategy-as-practice research, Johnson, Langley, Melin & Whittington (2007) distinguish between three realms of practice; an episodic realm of analysis that focuses on actual activities (or praxis) of organizational actors (e.g. strategy workshops); an organizational realm of analysis that adheres to organizational actions (e.g. strategic change); and an institutional realm of analysis that is concerned with the institutionalized field practices or routines of strategizing (e.g. strategic planning, SWOT). This perspective therefore emphasizes the embedded nature of strategy practices, not just in specific organizational contexts, but also recognizing the institutionalized practices that organizations and organizational (groups of) actors draw on (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Molloy & Whittington, 2005). Similarly, bringing together research on strategy and discourse, Vaara (2010) argues for three different levels: a metalevel that focuses on strategy as a body of knowledge, an

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organizational level which focuses on particular discourse formations such as strategy narratives, and a micro level which focuses on the everyday social interactions through which strategy is constructed. Like Johnson et al (2007) he points to the linkages between these realms. The metadiscourses that form the body of knowledge for strategy influence organizational strategy narratives, which in turn influence local discussions about strategy within an organization. At the same time, strategy conversations also "give life" to organizational narratives.

While the six discursive perspectives we review above do not all map precisely against these three realms, there are clear links. Poststructuralist analyses with their focus on strategy as a body of knowledge offer potential within the institutional realm, although studies also reveal their potential for exploring organizational strategizing processes. CDA is concerned largely with analysing discourse and organizational processes of strategy development and change, yet also on appreciating how the local discourses mobilised to promote and resist change link with those that exist at broader organizational and institutional levels. Narrative analyses focus very much on organizational processes, particularly the consumption of strategic change narratives vertically and horizontally within organizations and their associated outcomes. Rhetorical analyses has a largely similar organizational focus, but also, because it explores rhetorical devices within speech acts and texts, can operate within the episodic realm, to reveal how these build legitimacy and goal congruence. It thus shares a concern with CDA for how speech and text link to broader discourses and meanings, which makes it a valid approach across realms. Finally, CA and metaphor analysis offer particular potential within the episodic realm, enabling a micro-analysis of the everyday social interactions through which strategy is created.

Yet within each realm we not only need to consider discursive practices but how they shape and are shaped by other important aspects of strategic practice identified above, namely

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sociomateriality, sensemaking and power. Thus, we need to bring together the interplay of discourse with sociomateriality, sensemaking and power within the institutional, organizational and episodic realms. Figure 1 provides a summary of our framework. We will next highlight its core elements and discuss the potential for future research to create better linkages both across realms and between elements of strategy work.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Socio-materiality, Discourse and Strategy Work

In line with the broader practice turn (Leonardi & Barley, 2011; Schatzki, 2001; Orlikowski & Scott, 2008), the practice of strategy is concerned with the way that socio-material aspects such as tools, locations and spatial arrangements configure strategic interactions between bodies and things (Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets, 2013; Buergi et al., 2005). For example, strategy workshops are often carried out in remote locations, separated from 'the coalface', and characterized by different manner of dress and spatial arrangements, such as round tables, U-shaped set ups, and strategy games, that shape the interactions that take place in such contexts (Johnson, Prashantham, Floyd & Bourque, 2010; MacIntosh, MacLean & Seidl, 2010; Heracleous and Jacobs, 2011). More generally, strategy is conducted with artifacts of various kinds, from flip-charts, 'post-it' notes, PowerPoint and other visual aids (Kaplan 2011; Molloy & Whittington, 2005), to analytic tools and statistical software (Faure & Rouleau, 2011), used for analysing and making predictions about the business environment. Indeed, a variety of material artifacts from simple visual aids through to advanced statistical tools may be entangled in the strategy work (Jarzabkowski, Spee & Smets, 2013) to the extent that it is difficult to separate the strategist from the material arrangements within which strategy work is performed (Callon & Law, 1997). For example, Callon & Law (1997) show that 'Stephen' may be discursively constituted as a 'strategist' through his embodied interaction with a range of material artifacts, including his telephone,

that make such an identification possible. That is, our normative understandings of who is a strategist and what is strategy work are conditioned by these widespread and taken-for-granted discursive and material practices.

Hence, a stream of research has begun to focus on the institutionalized ways in which strategies are formed and implemented in the normalized sociomaterial practices of strategy-making, including not only meetings and workshops (Buergi et al, 2005; Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008), but the tools, frameworks (Jarzabkowski, Giulietti, Oliveira & Amoo, 2013; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009; Wright, Paroutis & Blettner, 2013), plans (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011) and budgets (Denis et al, 2006) that accompany them. Importantly for our purposes, these analyses have pointed to the role of language and communication in the materializing of such strategy work (Faure & Rouleau, 2011; Fenton & Langley, 2011; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). Discursive practices are inherently bound up with the material practices through which actors interact (Leonardi & Barley, 2011); for example, discursive artifacts, such as PowerPoint slides and planning documents shape both who participates and what is the focus of the talk (Kaplan, 2011; Samra-Fredericks, 2010; Thomas et al, 2011; Vaara, Sorsa & Pälli, 2010). Furthermore, available discourses and conventional ways of acting greatly influence what can be said or done in strategic planning meetings (Fenton & Langley, 2011; Pälli et al, 2009). Strategy work is embedded in institutionalized conventions or genres, such as strategic planning, strategy workshops, strategy meetings, and their associated tools and artifacts, which provide specific sociomaterial and hence, innately discursive, resources that shape and are shaped by the strategy work being performed. That is, such strategy making episodes are characterized by particular forms of language (the language of competition), particular types of spatial arrangements (tables and boardrooms), particular participants (executives, often male, with particular roles and skills sets) and particular material aids (flipcharts, PowerPoint, spread sheets). Such sociomaterial arrangements are not neutral but rather constitute

affordances for who may participate in strategy and in what ways. Sociomaterial arrangements thus constitute particular power relations; those who are not competent in using strategy tools and frameworks do not have access to strategy-making spaces and social contexts (Jarrett & Stiles, 2010; Sturdy et al, 2006), or lack authority to author strategy texts and are constrained from participating in strategy (Mantere, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008).

These many tools, frameworks and normalized ways of performing strategy work provide a widespread language (Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Barry & Elmes, 1997a; Knights & Morgan, 1991) of competition, planning and rivalry that is embedded in the way we conceptualize strategy. Drawing on Baudrillard's perspective, Grandy & Mills (2004) argue for 'organization' and 'corporation' as 'first-order simulacra', that is, they are specific – and as such narrow – ways of representing the natural world. Strategy as a discipline is then full of frameworks that work as 'second-order simulacra'; that is, they are simplifying representations of particular organizations or corporations. This is the case, for example, with SWOT analysis or Porter's models (Worren et al, 2000). However, Grandy and Mills also contend that we have reached a stage of third order simulacra; that is, our strategy discourse has attained a level of presentation that is hyperreal. In a sense, the strategy discipline and its various models and practices have started to live a life of their own, which is disconnected from (other) reality (see also Knights & Morgan, 1991). That is, the discursive practices employed in strategy tools are both particular to their episodic contexts of use, as well as performing widespread general understandings about strategy work that are beyond any particular context (Whittington, 2006). Strategy materials thus become part of a strategy discourse that has power and influence beyond the particularity of their situation. Discursive practices provide us with the opportunity to further explore such links with material practices of strategizing.

To exemplify the role of materiality and discourse in general in strategy work, and that of the body in particular, we have included Liu and Maitlis' (2013) paper on "Emotional dynamics and strategizing processes: A study of strategic conversation in top team meetings" in this special issue. This study links discourse and materiality within the episodic realm. Liu and Maitlis draw on a micro-ethnographic video analysis of seven top management team meetings in a computer game firm to explore how emotion affects the discursive processes through which strategy is constructed. The study investigates displayed emotions in strategic conversations, explores how the emotional dynamics generated through these displays shape a top management team's strategizing and identifies five different kinds of emotional dynamics, each associated with a different type of strategizing process. While the emotional dynamics vary in the type, sequencing and overall form of the emotions displayed, the strategizing processes vary in how issues are proposed, discussed, and evaluated, and whether decisions are taken or postponed. Furthermore, the study demonstrates the relevance of emotions for the process and outcome of strategic sensemaking.

Sensemaking, Discourse and Strategy Work

In studies of strategy and change, sensemaking is generally conceptualized as a social process of meaning construction and reconstruction through which managers create sense for themselves and others about their changing organisational context and surroundings (see, for example, Balogun & Johnson 2004; Corley & Gioia 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Weick, 1995). It is a cyclical, on-going process of interpretation and action in which "organization members interpret their environment in and through interactions with others, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively" (Maitlis 2005: 21). Sensemaking is central to processes of strategic change in organizations since such change requires a "cognitive reorientation"; a shift in the shared interpretive schemes that govern the way the members of an organization conceive of their organization

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and their environment (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Bartunek, 1984; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, Mantere et al,. 200x; Sonenshein, 2010). This assumption has led to a particular focus in studies of strategic sensemaking on senior manager "sensegiving" (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007); the conversational and narrative processes through which senior managers seek to influence the sensemaking of others in the organization to redirect their understanding at times of change. The research on strategic sensemaking therefore focuses on social processes of interaction to understand not just the prospective sensemaking processes through which strategists arrive at their conclusions (see e.g. Gioia & Thomas, 1996), but also, and in fact more commonly, to explore how managers then influence the meanings, interpretations and understandings of others through their processes of sensemaking and sensegiving. Some studies also focus on the sensemaking of recipients and how middle managers develop meanings about change that is initiated by their seniors (see Balogun & Johnson, 2004; 2005; Sonenshein, 2010).

Importantly, sensemaking studies of strategy development and change have emphasized the role of 'talk' in the social interactions accompanying strategizing. Research on how middle managers influence senior managers through their strategic conversations, for example, reveals the nature of the conversational mechanisms by which middle managers generate a shared understanding of a change or sell an issue to top managers (Dutton & Ashford 1993; Dutton et al. 2001; Hoon 2007; Westley 1990). Rouleau (2005), by comparison explores the conversational mechanisms through which middle managers translate strategy for and discipline customers to accept change. Balogun and Johnson (2004 & 2005) highlight the role of 'talk' for middle managers in not just vertical interactions with seniors through team briefs, seminars and other documentation, but also lateral interactions between themselves including shared stories and rumours, in generating interpretations of what they are required to differently because of the change.

In addition, it is increasingly recognized that discourse is critical to the accomplishment of influencing through sensegiving. Maitlis (2005) and Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) showed sensegiving to be a fundamental situated leadership activity, based on a discursive ability to tell a story in the right way at the right time and in the right place, although they did not empirically investigate this discursive ability. Sonenshein (2006) demonstrated how managers use specific language to influence others in issue selling. Rouleau and Balogun (2011) in turn show discursive competence, the ability to knowledgeably craft and share a message that is meaningful, engaging and compelling within a manager's context of operation, and to lie in two interlinked discursive activities, 'performing the conversation' and 'setting the scene', which are underpinned by knowledge of contextually relevant verbal, symbolic and socio-cultural systems. Kaplan (2008) reveals the role of framing practices in building legitimacy for particular points of view among diverse stakeholders and therefore in building consensus for strategic decisions.

At the same time, the role of discourse in sensemaking has largely remained underexplored, despite the its acknowledged performative power. This performative power of discourse is a central thesis in speech act theory (Austin 1962) as well as sensemaking research (Weick 2005), "When we say that meanings materialize, we mean that sensemaking is, importantly, an issue of language, talk and communication. Situations, organizations and environments are talked into existence." (Weick et al., 2005: 409). Furthermore, such situations are constituted by their material properties, which provide scripted sequences of action (Akirch & Latour, 1992) that shape the way we make sense of things. For example, the spatial arrangement of most boardrooms scripts the forms of strategy interaction that take place, particularly when accompanied by plans, PowerPoint, flipcharts and screens, and hence shapes the sensemaking occurring within such settings. In other words, not only does discourse reflect cognitions, but that discourse is produced within material contexts, in which

cognition is shared and shaped (Paroutis & Heracleous, 2013). It crystallizes specific ideas and acts as a resource in strategic sensemaking.

Strategizing often involves competing ideas and expressions. One explanation for why some ideas rather than others become crystallized and institutionalized is that they are argued in a persuasive and convincing way. Another is that they 'resonate' with broader discourses that are seen as appealing, appropriate or fashionable, contributing to the narrative credibility of strategies (Barry & Elmes, 1997a). In brief, this means that successful strategy statements often condense meaning in a particularly effective way. Their specific texts and discourses may also include a significant degree of ambiguity that enables them to 'take off' in pluralistic organizational contexts, as ambiguous statements can resonate in different ways for different individuals and groups (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Gioia & Thomas, 1996).

No discourse or strategy statement emerges out of nothing, since all new framings or discursive innovations are linked with existing discursive and narrative structures. "Discourse provides labels, typifications, or frames through which we understand and interpret the world around us (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), at the same time drawing on and shaping our mental representations of the world" (Paroutis & Hercleous, 2013: 4). Such discursive structures are not only enabling but also constraining elements when it comes to strategic sensemaking. Simply, any organization or person within the organization is to some extent influenced by fashionable and widespread discourses concerning organizations and management (at the institutional level). For example, when interpreting the significance of a new market opportunity, most organizations and their members would probably use the words (and thereby ideas) that are usually employed in such settings without a further reflection of the underlying assumptions. Similarly, it is hard to imagine sensemaking about strategic planning that would not somehow connect with the established languages and doctrines of strategic management, even if the specific meanings are changed. For example, widespread discourses,

such as total quality, can acquire different meanings in different organizations (Zbaracki, 1998). In discursive terminology, the process can be called recontextualization (Fairclough 2003; Thomas 2003); discourses are used in novel ways in new contexts in a way that easily passed unnoticed. Studies of such widespread strategy discourses in context, and the way they are recontextualized have the potential to advance a more critical understanding of strategic sensemaking and its implications.

We have included two papers in this special issue with highlight the potential of specifically linking sensemaking and discourse. Abdallah and Langley's (2013) paper, "The double edge of ambiguity in strategy planning" draws on an interpretive discourse analysis of a case study of strategic planning in a cultural organization. Abdallah and Langley (2013) explore how strategically ambiguous texts, such as strategic plans, are consumed by different groups in an organization and how such strategic ambiguity impacts on collective strategic action. As such, it operates within the organizational realm. The study identifies different forms of ambiguity, namely structural duality and content expansiveness as well as four modes of consumption of strategic planning texts, namely an interpretive, instrumental, value-based and detached mode. While ambiguity initially enables participants to enact their respective interpretation of strategy, strategic ambiguity consumption over time induces internal contradiction and overextension. The study reveals how strategic ambiguity embodied in strategic planning texts shapes different and over time paradoxical consequences of strategy consumption in terms of organizational members' making sense of strategy texts. The study conceptualizes strategic ambiguity as a mixed blessing and in so doing demonstrates how ambiguous strategy discourse not only enables strategic change but simultaneously contains the seeds of its own dissolution.

Kwon, Clarke and Wodak's (2013) paper, "Micro-level discursive strategies for constructing a shared view around strategic issues in team meetings," operates more within

the episodic realm. It draws on a discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis of two management team episodes in a broader case study of an aerospace firm. Kwon et al (2013) explore the interactions between management team members as well as the specific repertoire of discursive strategies employed in creating shared views around strategic issues. Their study identifies five discursive strategies, namely re/defining, simplifying, legitimating, equalizing and reconciling which are employed in team interactions to facilitate formation of a shared view around a strategic issue. However, this paper also demonstrates the interrelationships between processes of discursive sensemaking on the one hand and issues of power on the other; namely how intentional use of discursive practices reinforced hegemonic positions in strategic conversations.

Power and Subjectivity, Discourse and Strategy Work

There is a significant amount of work on power and politics in strategy literature. On the one hand, key contributions to the process school have highlighted how power and influence are exercised (Bower 1970; Burgelman 1983; Pettigrew 1973). On the other, as reviewed above, critical analysis of strategy has focused on how strategy discourse reproduces ideologies and thereby power relations and structures of domination – thus focusing on the problematic features and constraining effects of strategy discourse (Knights and Morgan 1991; Levy et al 2003). Nevertheless, relatively few studies have explored the role of discourse in the construction of agency in strategy (see, however, Ezzamel & Wilmott 2008; McCabe, 2010; Oakes et al 1998).

A fundamental issue in such analysis is how discursive practices and resources enable or constrain the power and agency of organizational actors. The Bourdieusian analysis by Oakes et al (1998) is illuminative because it shows how moving from a system of 'cultural production' to business planning (strategy) fundamentally changed a museum organization and its decision-making practices. While the old practices had empowered professionals with

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cultural capital, the new practices favoured business and managerial thinking and action. In particular, the old skills and capital became less important while new abilities and capital related to business planning became crucial. Mantere and Vaara (2008) in turn demonstrated how widespread discourses may impede or promote participation of different managerial levels within strategy work. Their analysis showed how a seemingly innocent strategy metaphor such as 'vision' may in specific contexts contribute to a mystification of strategy where leaders are given a privileged role as 'prophets' and others constructed as mere followers whose primary responsibility is to 'implement' the strategies. However, they also demonstrated how in other circumstances the same metaphor may promote self-actualization and widespread participation.

While strategy discourse mobilizes organizational members in many ways, discourse is also mobilized *by* organizational members. Some work has already examined the episode-level processes involved to better understand how exactly organizational members use discursive resources to their benefit. Hardy et al (2000) illustrated how the successful mobilization of discursive resources involves circuits of activity, performativity and connectivity. First, in circuits of activity specific discursive statements are introduced to evoke particular meanings. Second, such discursive actions must intersect with circuits of performativity. This happens when the discourses make sense to other actors. Third, when these two circuits intersect, connectivity occurs. This means that specific 'discursive statements' 'take.' They illustrated this process in a study of a Palestinian NGO organization where a specific discourse finally 'took' and legitimated particular organizational changes.

While much strategy process literature has focused on the power of top managers, seeing lower level managers primarily in terms of resistance or indirect influence (Bower 1970; Burgelman 1983; Pettigrew 1973), discursive practices broaden the focus to examine how strategy discourse is mobilized at multiple levels. Laine and Vaara (2007) analysed how

organizational actors may mobilize and appropriate a specific kind of strategy discourse to attempt to gain control of the organization, and how others may in turn resist such discourse by means of distancing to protect their own degrees of freedom and identity. The Foucault-inspired study by Ezzamel and Willmott (2008) in turn elucidates how both top managers and organizational members use strategy discourses to resist the change imposed upon them. McCabe's (2010) analysis provides analogous findings in terms of the use of strategy discourse to both promote and resist change. By drawing on Actor Network Theory, Whittle and Mueller (2010) in turn illustrated how a management accounting system acted as obligatory points of passage in the construction of organizational strategy, especially in defining the 'added value' of ideas. However, they also showed how the same system and discursive practices provided spaces for resistance and deviance. Suominen and Mantere (2010) drew on the theorizing of De Certeau to show that middle managers consume strategy discourse through instrumental, playful and intimate tactics. That is, middle managers use strategy discourse to advance their political interests, enjoy themselves and build their identities.

It thus appears useful to go further in the episode-level analysis of processes where on the one hand discourses enable and constrain organizational actors, and on the other actors mobilize discourses and use various rhetorical and discursive tactics to promote particular conceptions of their organization's strategy, advance their own interests and/or construct themselves as strategists.

The special issue has two papers which bring together considerations of power and strategy and discourse. Dameron and Torset's (2013) paper, "The discursive construction of strategists' subjectivities: towards a paradox lens on strategy", draws on an interpretive analysis of 64 managers to explore how the subjectivity of strategists is constructed. Their cross-organizational study suggests that in their identity-formation, strategists face

fundamental tensions, resulting from the competing transcendent and immanent conceptions of strategizing activity. Strategists face conflicting demands to be cerebral and hands on (thinking vs. acting), self-sustained and social (solitude vs. sharing), and driven by an environmental focus as well as an organizational one (endogenous vs. exogenous). Furthermore, Dameron and Torset identify three strategist subjectivities that arise as responses to these tensions. Technical subjectivity favours the transcendent view (thinking, solitude and exogenous) over the immanent one (acting, sharing and endogenous). Mystified subjectivity seeks resolution by favouring the immanent view while social subjectivity seeks a balance between the two views.

Hardy and Thomas' (2013) paper "Strategy, discourse and practice: The intensification of power", draws on Foucauldian discourse analysis in a case study of strategic change in a global telecommunications company. The authors explore how the power effects of strategy discourses are intensified through particular discursive and material practices, which in turn leads to the production of different strategic objects and subjects. Their study identifies two distinct discourses that employ specific socio-material and discursive intensification practices (such as tailoring, packaging, scheduling, bulking up, holding to account or associating). Operating in the organizational realm, the study conceptualizes how the intensification of power effects of a specific strategy discourse (or lack thereof) bears down on strategy; how different forms of resistance are induced, and which strategy objects and subjects are reproduced by, and reproducing of, strategy discourse. Thus, their study interrelates issues of subjectification (and hence power) with discursive and material practices that intensify such power in strategy.

Exploring Interrelationships between Sociomateriality, Sensemaking and Power

While all the articles in this special issue are concerned with discourse, they focus on it through one of the three domains of strategizing. Furthermore, they then connect to at least

one of the other domains. Liu and Maitlis have a core focus on the sociomaterial nature of displayed emotions, but also demonstrate the role of emotion in strategic sensemaking. Abdallah and Langley and Kwon et al. focus primarily on sensemaking but in doing so link to issues of power and subjectivity. Dameron and Torset do the opposite, focusing on subjectivity but with sensitivity to the managers' active role in influencing their subject positions through the active management of paradoxical tensions. Hardy and Thomas also focus on power in a way that interrelates subjectivity and material practices.

This supports our contention that future discourse studies have the potential to integrate understanding of strategizing across these theoretical domains. Importantly, future studies can explore linkages between sensemaking and power, a connection which Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) identify as both important and unexplored. They (Weick et al., 2005: 418) call for sensemaking research, "enhanced" with a sensitivity to power, which would explore issues such as "control over cues, who talks to whom, proffered identities, criteria for plausible stories, actions permitted and disallowed, and histories and retrospect that are singled out." An increasing number of studies are starting to take these connections between discourse and sensemaking seriously through a focus on the role of narratives and framing and the potential this offers for connecting sensemaking to issues of power in processes of strategy development and change (see, for example, Balogun, Gleadle, Hope Hailey & Willmott, 2005; Kaplan, 2008; Sonenshein, 2010; Maitlis & Sonenshein 2010). It is generally agreed that "*A focus on stories and storytelling as strategic practices encourages attention to be paid to which narratives are marginalized and which rendered dominant, and the role of narrators, settings, political tactics and performance in determining whose voices are heard*" (Brown & Thompson, 2013). The narrative focus on organizations as discursive spaces (Hardy & Maguire, 2010) in which different interest groups, each of whom has the ability, to some extent, to narrate their own future, compete over the meanings of change and

possible organizational futures, raises the intriguing question of how one narrative comes to drive the future direction of polyphonic organizations. Narrative dominance is argued to be a product of credibility, both of narrative and narrator (Barry & Elmes, 1997a). Framing perspectives by comparison (Kaplan 2008) highlight the role of political action in how one stakeholder group builds resonance for their cognitive frames over those of others, mobilizing action in their preferred direction.

Narrative and narrator credibility links to issues of subjectivity, since we need to be concerned with not just how a narrative is made credible for strategy readers through the societal and organizational discourses it draws on, but also the identity work involved in the narrative as strategy writers enhance their own legitimacy and credibility (Fenton & Langley, 2011; Johnson, Balogun & Beech, 2010). We need to understand how strategists shape strategizing activity through *who they are*, but also how they are enabled and constrained by how others see them as, for example, heroes or villains. At the same time, we need to know how nominally less powerful actors build credibility to counter the authorial strategies of managers, maybe leading to the creation of a more shared and negotiated narrative of the future (see, for example, Balogun et al, 2011). Yet few studies examine how any of this occurs. There is, therefore, a significant research agenda in this area that can draw on not just narrative perspectives, but also CDA, rhetoric or metaphor to understand discursive ploys in the crafting of legitimacy.

Research on change and sensemaking also reveals the significance of material items and practices. Rouleau's (2005) middle managers were working with clothes from a fashion range when seeking to engage and discipline their customers. Rouleau and Balogun (2011) revealed the role of, for example, room arrangements and gestures in middle manager discursive competence. Kaplan's (2011) managers were enabled and constrained in their sensemaking by PowerPoint. Others have more specifically explored links between

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sensemaking and materiality in teams. Stigliana and Ravasi (2012) show interactions between conversational and material practices to support the transition from individual to group sensemaking.

Yet these studies do not typically bracket sensemaking and sociomaterial aspects of strategy work together with strategy discourses. Nor do they typically focus on the interaction of bodily practices, such as gestures and emotions, and sensemaking as the Liu and Maitlis paper suggests is possible. Indeed, largely they are not even specifically bracketing the material and the cognitive. The relevance of materiality is revealed but in the background rather than as a focus of the study. Thus a significant agenda remains to understand how cognitions develop discursively in connection with sociomateriality. Workplace studies (Sacks, 1992), which build on the principles of ethnomethodology and conversation analysis to bring together these factors, often through video based studies of workplace practice, offer opportunities to capture how sensemaking is entwined with the materiality of everyday strategy work.

Connecting across the Institutional, the Organizational and the Episodic

Analysis of strategy discourse can also elucidate connections across the institutional, the organizational and the episodic realms of analysis. This involves questions such as how do institutional norms constrain and enable strategy work in organizations and in particular strategy episodes, as well as how processes of strategy development and change in organizations can lead to shifts in institutional norms of strategic practice.

Thus, it is important to study how institutional language is projected onto local, episodic contexts. Seidl (2007) suggested that the link may not be as obvious as it first seems. Meanings created in a local context can be radically different from the initial ideas of an institutionalized discourse. He proposes that rather than being "diffused" to local contexts, institutionalized labels, such as total quality, create disturbances within organizations, which

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get affected in various ways. Such processes can be further studied empirically through a focus on translation or recontextualization (Fairclough, 2003; Thomas, 2003); a type of analysis that draws from CDA to examine how terms with more general and widespread meanings, or fashionable discourses from the institutional realm, are drawn on and used to influence meanings and interpretations within strategizing processes and strategizing episodes. Narrative analysis also provides means to explore how more general narrative types (Barry & Elmes, 1997a) may be used to create organization- or situation-specific stories. Ethnomethodology has in turn the capacity to illuminate the specificities of local interpretations and meaning constructions (Samra-Fredericks, 2010). A closer analysis of these processes can inform us about how institutionalized discourses become crystallized in organizations or how ideological assumptions are reproduced or transformed in local contexts.

To better understand how institutionalized discourses link with power and subjectivity in strategy work, it is useful to analyse the processes whereby discourses enable and constrain people, but also how strategists can mobilize and make use of global and organizational discourses to further their ideas, interests, or power position (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008). In one of the few studies to examine this, Paroutis and Heracleous (2013) show how strategy directors put in place to establish a strategy function within large firms, adopt the institution of strategy through drawing on associated discursive resources and in so doing, legitimize their own actions and identities as strategists. Beyond the contribution of Dameron and Torset (2013) in this special issue, we have limited understanding of how individuals become strategists, or even how some individuals in organizations come to be perceived as "strategic" whereas others come to be routinely classified as non-strategic and excluded from studies of strategizing. Thus we have much to learn from paying closer attention to strategy discourse and subjectivity.

Moreover, little is still known about how about how the genre of strategy work; in particular, how institutionalized conventions such as strategic planning, strategy workshops, strategy meetings, and their associated tools and artifacts, provide resources that shape and are shaped by the strategy work being performed. It would be useful to focus attention on how genres impede or promote inclusion or exclusion (who is present), how the physical arrangements influence turn-taking in strategy discussions, and how contextual factors such as time, space and place affect the nature and outcome of conversations. Furthermore, we need to study the recursive links between strategy tools as artifacts for doing strategy work in particular situations and the way that they are then perpetuated within strategy language that extends well beyond the situations within which they were initially deployed (Seidl, 2007; Zbaracki, 1998).

In addition to the obvious artifacts of strategy work, such as tools, frameworks and number-crunching systems, there is an evident need to go further in identifying other discursive and material elements and their underlying assumptions that are reproduced in strategizing. For example, we have largely ignored spatial arrangements of strategic interactions, even though analyses of spatial arrangements in other contexts, such as the arrangement of arbitrage desks on Wall St trading floors, have been shown to have a critical influence on the way that traders interact and the profitability of trades (Beunza & Stark, 2004). We need to explore what constitutes these materials in strategizing and how they shape and are shaped by more general social conventions attached to, for example, meetings and workshops. Future analysis should ideally be multi-level covering specific rhetorical tactics and conversational modes, narrative structures and broader discursive conventions. In particular, an analysis of socio-material entanglement in strategy discourse may give us a more clear sense of place and space, with which to extend our understanding of various communication genres involved in strategizing.

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Finally, it is also worthwhile to examine how the episodic level reflects at the institutional level. Here, research could explore how new ideas flow from the episodic and organizational to the institutional realm. There is a need to appreciate how shifts over time in widespread meanings attached to generic strategy language, terminology and practices are influenced through work within organizations. For example, the notion of ante-narrative (Boje, 2008) may be useful in analysing how new understandings of strategy may develop in organizations and how such strategic ante-narratives may compete for attention and legitimacy. Similarly, closer analysis of metaphors can inform us about the ways in which new strategic ideas and practices emerge, gain ground and sometimes become widely spread ways of making sense of strategic issues.

Conclusion

Discursive perspectives on strategy were initially seen as a threat and a challenge to the special status that strategists and strategy had acquired in organizations and, therefore, to strategy scholars and their original goal of understanding organizational decisions essential to a firm's long term survival and success. Scholars and managers alike turn to strategy in a search for crucial organizational outcomes: radical change, competitive advantage or establishing and achieving collective goals. If strategy is "just" a way of speaking, then surely many of the exciting questions explored by those studying and doing strategy are trivialized? These concerns are evident in, for instance, the debate that ensued after the publication of Barry and Elmes's (1997a), which argues for strategy as a form of fiction. Narratives are all fine and well, the critics allowed, as long as we accept that they are relevant to "implementation", not the thing itself that is strategy "formulation" (see Barry & Elmes, 1997b; Ireland & Hitt, 1997).

These concerns have proved unfounded. Yet for discourse scholarship on strategy to realize its full potential and address core questions pertaining to strategy research across

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theoretical boundaries, it needs to connect to phenomena beyond language. We hope that the ambitious contributions in this special issue, as well as our review of strategy discourse literature, have demonstrated that the specific appeal of the discursive view lies *exactly* in its ability to transcend boundaries, both between theoretical domains – such as sociomateriality, sensemaking and power – and across realms of analysis – such as the institutional, organizational and episodic. Discursive studies have the potential to be frontrunners in understanding how these complex social processes generate crucial organizational outcomes.

Such a research agenda also extends possibilities for contributions to the practice and understanding of strategy and strategy work by practitioners. The strategy-as-practice field, with its focus on strategy as work that individuals do, has an explicit interest in using research to inform strategy practitioners and their strategy work. Some studies cited above (e.g. Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Samra-Fredericks, 2003 & 2005) have very explicitly sought to recognize the skill and craft involved in strategizing, and to explicate some of this skill. If we develop the potential of strategy discourse studies to connect discursive practices to other strategizing practices, we will be able to advance simultaneously the understanding of both strategy scholars and practitioners.

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Table 1: Perspectives on Strategy as Discourse

Perspective	Focal interest	Main themes	Exemplars
Poststructuralist discourse analysis	Reconstructing strategy as body of knowledge	Power/knowledge; institutionalization; hegemony; subjectivity; identity	Knights and Morgan, 1991; Ezzamel, & Willmott 2008
Critical discourse analysis	Revealing the role of strategy in power relations	Power; subjectivity; legitimacy; identity; resistance; participation	Hardy, Palmer and Phillips, 2000; Mantere & Vaara 2008
Narrative analysis	Unfolding of strategy as story	Legitimacy; polyphony; 'authorship' and authority; organizational past, present and future	Barry and Elmes, 1997a; Brown & Thompson, 2013
Rhetoric analysis	Using strategy as managerial sensegiving device	Argumentation; sensegiving; legitimation; strategic communication; audience; identification;	Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993; Sillince, Jarzabkowski, and Shaw 2012
Conversation analysis	Exploring strategy as conversational accomplishment	Talk; language in use; linguistic skill; situated production of meaning and relevance;	Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Whittle, Housely, Gilchrist & Lenney, 2013
Analogy and metaphor analysis	Conceiving of strategy as a form of inductive reasoning	Source and target domain; novelty and unfamiliarity; sensemaking; framing	Palmer and Dunford, 1996; Heracleous and Jacobs, 2008

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Figure 1: Strategy Discourse, Sociomateriality, Sensemaking & power