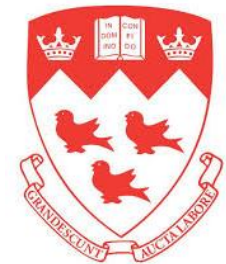


*How to lead strategy shoppers?
Constructive and destructive aspects
of strategy consumption*

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Introduction: Open Strategy and Strategy Consumption

- Strategies take shape dialogically, in processes of interaction between plans and emergent opportunities (Mintzberg 1978; Mintzberg & Waters 1985). Organizations learn as they operate, renewing their strategies in action (Mintzberg, 1990; Crossan & Berdrow, 2000)
- However, strategy textbooks still uphold the formulation-implementation distinction and portray top managers as strategists who shape their organizations to follow their plans and intentions obediently
- Growing interest in open strategy (Whittington, Cailluet & Yakis-Douglas, 2011) can be read as a sign of a shift in managerial and scholarly conceptions of strategy to take emergent strategy and related social aspects of strategy seriously
- We draw on the concept of “consumption” (Michel de Certeau, 1988; explored in management context by De La Ville & Mounoud, 2003; and Suominen & Mantere, 2010) to elaborate what happens to intended strategies when they enter the organization
- We seek to contribute to the internal perspective on inclusion, a key dimension of open strategy (Whittington et al., 2011)

Empirical context & Methodology

- Fieldwork conducted in three organizations (an industrial company, a polytechnic, and an insurance company, see Suominen & Mantere 2010).
- Dataset consists of in-depth interviews, observations, and strategy documents
- We adopted the theoretical lens of consumption (Michel de Certeau, 1988), to gain insights on how executives and middle managers consume strategy
- We also employed discourse analytic methods (Barry & Elmes 1997; Fairclough 1992; Alvesson & Kärreman 2000; Phillips & Hardy 2002) to identify and analyze three strategy consumption tactics; Instrumental, Playful, Intimate
- After identifying consumption tactics, we explored the constructive and destructive aspects that the different consumption tactics may foster

Three strategy consumption tactics

- Strategy as Instrument
 - Managers use strategy as a tool or device in their work to accomplish something useful or meaningful from their point of view
 - Examples: making sense of the business environment, coping with competition, prioritizing and setting goals, legitimizing one's own actions and decisions, solving everyday problems, motivating people
- Strategy as Plaything
 - Managers use strategy with irony and humor as a way to entertain themselves or to cope with it – and in some cases to express their cynicism and resistance towards it
 - Examples: joking and ridiculing top management's ideas and capabilities, parodying official strategy messages and symbols, questioning the nature of the strategy, emphasizing strategy implementation problems ironically
- Strategy as Intimate matter
 - Managers use strategy as building block or reference point when constructing their own identity and subjectivity as managers – either for or against it
 - Examples: glorifying oneself as a strategic leader, devoting or dis-identifying oneself from a company strategy, confessing helplessness and frustration with strategy, complaining about being sidelined or intimidated in the strategy process

Constructive and destructive strategy consumption (1/3)

	Constructive aspects	Destructive aspects
Instrumental strategy consumption	<p>Strategy provides answers to sensible and pressing questions faced at the shop floor level. Individuals with different interests can regard themselves as valuable contributors</p> <p>Corporate level strategic targets can be explicated in operational terms in different contexts</p>	<p>Strategy is used to drive personal agendas in a way that conflicts with the wellbeing of the organization. Only personally favorable parts of the strategy are “shopped”, other parts are subtly by-passed</p> <p>Strategy becomes “check-the-box” or “filling the forms” exercise, ritualistic performance that is done mostly to advance political goals</p>

Constructive and destructive strategy consumption (2/3)

	Constructive aspects	Destructive aspects
Playful strategy consumption	<p>Strategy fuels out-of-the-box thinking and invites novel solutions and ideas to strategy process</p> <p>Strategy-making turns out as a pleasant and experimental exercise that generates mutual understanding</p>	<p>Strategy is used with an ironic and sarcastic way to ridicule executives and strategists, leading to cynicism towards the organization</p> <p>Strategy turns into a joke</p>

Constructive and destructive strategy consumption (3/3)

	Constructive aspects	Destructive aspects
Intimate strategy consumption	Strategy makes individuals' work meaningful and gives them a sense of purpose as members of the organization	Executives and strategists build their identity too closely on a certain strategy, which stifles innovation and makes strategic change difficult Strategy can be threatening to people if they see themselves as "non essential"

Conclusions: How to lead strategy shoppers?

Instrumental	Playful	Intimate
<p>Make sure that strategy is instrumental for the people in your organization, i.e. it should help and ease their everyday work, not just yours</p> <p>Communicate strategy with an explicit and tangible manner that leaves less room for maneuvering and unwanted strategy shopping</p> <p>The only way to achieve this is through extensive dialogue with various stakeholders across the organization, because this is the only way to understand their perspective on which questions strategy needs to answer</p>	<p>Invite a diverse audience to strategy discussions. Accept that strategy can be thought and understood very differently in different parts of the organization</p> <p>Encourage and cherish thinking that challenges the dominant strategy doctrine, because it can bring novel ideas and insight to strategy processes</p> <p>Do not take critique personally</p>	<p>Make your strategy product, i.e. strategy presentations or descriptions appealing and interesting from the individual viewpoint, for instance by highlighting the uniqueness of the organization and the resources embedded in its rich history</p> <p>Let people discuss its meaning, and if possible let them participate in crafting it. Strategies should be explicated in such a way that people can see how it relates to their work in a personal manner</p> <p>Don't underestimate the past when communicating and introducing new strategies that require changes in people's behavior</p>

Contributions

- Contribution 1: Key dimension of “inclusion” in open strategy appears straightforward, but can be multifaceted and problematic. We shed light on, and problematize this dimension. In particular, we recognize individuals as active strategy consumers rather than as passive followers, or indifferent by-standers. “Inclusion” occurs in different ways, whether or not it is planned
- Contribution 2: We highlight social and organizational aspects of open strategy and enrich our understanding of open strategy in practice. We identify both constructive and destructive aspects of “inclusion”, in particular the effects associated with each of the three strategy consumption tactics
- Contribution 3: Implications for practice. Strategists can be conscious of how individuals engage with intended strategies, and can perhaps anticipate and respond more productively to different consumption tactics

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