Strategy Consumption at Operative Managers

A Case Study of an Industrial Company

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Abstract:

This empirical study is carried out to understand how strategy is practiced by operative managers. Particularly, I adopt the strategy-as-practice perspective and the ‘linguistic turn’ approach to study how operative managers consume strategy in their talk.

By drawing on the work of Michel de Certeau and Kimmo Suominen, I use strategy consumption framework as a theoretical lens to illustrate operative manager strategy’s usage. My research data was collected in a case organization located in Finland. I conducted semi-structure interviews with operative managers who have been working for more than 10 years and participating in current strategic initiatives at the case organization. The research was carried out with qualitative and deductive approach. Moreover, I also draw on critical discourse analysis as the data analysis method.

My key argument is that strategy consumption at operative managers in overall is similar to that at top management level in Suominen (2009). However, at the usage tactics level, operative managers use strategy in two competing ways namely, adopting managerial hegemony and resisting managerial hegemony which capture the struggling relationship between operative managers and strategy imposed on them.

The results contribute to a growing interest in understanding how non-senior managers actually practice strategy. In term of practical contributions, the insights of this study might be useful for top managers to reconsider their management in strategy work.
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Strategy plays an integral role in organizations ranging from private to public sector. In the world of business, companies, for a long time, have employed strategy as a tool for achieving future growth and sustainable success; otherwise they are regarded as being unable to cope with increasingly turbulent economic, and politically charged, environment (Carter et al 2008, Knights and Morgan 1991). In fact, according to Hardy et al (2000: 4), strategy has penetrated almost every organization and being perceived as “a determinant of success or failure: whether by having a good strategy, a bad strategy or no strategy”. Strategy has therefore received multiple attentions not only from practitioners but also from academia, and become a significant research domain.

Adopting the linguistic turns, researchers have discovered that discursive aspect of strategy is a fruitful area for strategy research since it can generate new knowledge which tradition research stream cannot (Vaara 2010). Particularly, strategy discursive practices have been discovered to have “constructive” or “performatory” effects which can impose power over strategy agents (see Knight & Morgan 1991, Shrivastava 1986, Kornberger & Clegg 2011, Mantere & Vaara 2008). Indeed, discourse in general and strategy discourse in particular constructs and reproduces concepts, objects, subject position and political relationship through which people make sense of the world (Fairclough 2003, Hardy et al 2000). Therefore, it dictates the activities of agents who live in it (Knight & Morgan 1991). For example, in the study of Mantere & Vaara (2008) and Kornberger & Clegg (2011), strategy discourse was discovered to be able to reproduce specific conceptions of strategy work and legitimize the practices of strategy participations in organizations. In practice, managers just take many aspects of strategy for granted and naturally embed themselves in the principle strategic management (Knight & Morgan ibid).

However, although strategy discourse dominates strategy agents’ work, strategy practitioners at the same time are also able to mobilize strategy discourse to pursue their own purposes (see Suominen 2009, Hardy et al 2000, Vaara et al 2004, Maitlis & Lawrence 2003). Hardy et al (2000) shows that strategy users, under specific conditions,
engage in discursive activities intentionally and use discourse as strategic resources to secure some outcomes whereas mitigate others. From the research of Knight & Morgan (1991) about power effects of strategy discourse over its subjects, actors, who have successfully secured a central role in strategy discourse, can also take advantage of the discursive power effect to “control” others.

As I mention above, discourse on the one hand imposes its power effect over strategy practitioners. However, on the other hand, strategy discourses can also be used and capitalized by managers as managerial equipment. Thus, strategy researchers argue that discourse possesses is dualistic or multifaceted characters. In fact, as Vaara et al (2004) argues, strategy discourse impose its power effects over strategy agencies, but it at the same time is (re)created, used, manipulated by various actors through active sensemaking processes. It is the later facet of discourse that is central in my thesis as my research aim is to investigate how strategy practitioners use strategy discourse or strategy.

1.2. Strategy consumption

Among the literature researching the dynamic interaction between practitioners and strategy discourses, I came across Suominen (2009) which illustrates the everyday practices of organizational actors in relation to strategy by drawing on Michel De Certeua’s idea of “consumption” (1988). The term strategy consumption in Suominen (2009) was developed to capture how organizational actors use strategy in their daily work. Eventually, it was discovered that managers use strategy or strategy discourse not only in original ways but also in creative ways for their own purposes which might not comply with the original purposes of strategy. In strategy consumption framework, the author also successfully examines the interconnection between macro and micro level discourses used by managers. (ibid)

In Suominen (2009), the focus was on the top and middle manager which is completely reasonable and valuable since those actors are widely perceived as the key strategic users. However, I personally ponder in which way operative managers consume strategy. Since operative managers are also perceived as subjects living in the strategy discourse with their own identity, they might be able to use strategy discourse for their
own purposes as well. In fact, Laine & Vaara (2007) through an empirical study reports that non-senior managers mobilize strategy discourse to seek for more autonomy in strategy work or simply ignore strategic issues imposed on them.

According to Hardy et al (2000), actors must hold specific subject positions with sufficient voice so as to enact discursive practice. This argument is echoed by Phillips et al (2008: 773) which says that “certain subject positions afford actors a degree of agency in producing texts that may subsequently affect discourse”. Therefore, given the differences in subject positions between operative managers and top and middle manager, the strategy consumption practice of those two groups can’t be similar. Particularly, from the traditional strategy research stream, managers have been widely portrayed as loud-voice actors, having the grand control over the strategy process, whereas operative managers’ role is marginalized. For that reason, in my research, being inspired by the framework of strategy consumption in Suominen(2009), I would like to examine strategy consumption practices with the focus at operative personnel level.

### 1.3. Research contribution and research gap

According to Vaara (2010), despite the proliferating of researches studying discursive aspect of strategy, the knowledge derived from this domain is still limited and the full potential of linguistic turn has not yet been realize. This thesis work is expected to contribute into the rise of such linguistic turn. Particularly, my research provides operative managers a chance to reflect on their own strategy consuming practice which in turn potentially gives them some more ideas on how to use strategy in their talk more effectively. For top and middle managers, this work provides them insights on strategy usage of their subordinates. This knowledge might be useful for further leadership skills improvement, especially in strategy process.

Among studies examining discursive aspect of strategy as well as the traditional strategy researches, researchers tend to focus more on the managers’ activities and interrelation between managerial level and strategy discourse, rather than operational level. As Shrivastava (1986) criticizes, traditional approach to strategy research implicit favours the normative idealization of sectional goals (i.e. the interest of dominant organizational
roles: top management, middle management, major shareholders). For that reason, there is relative handful of empirical research actually conducted on operative employee role in term of coverage of strategy research in general (for some example, see Mantere (2003), Mantere & Vaara (2008), Laine & Vaara (2007)). Moreover, in strategy process, operative managers are also a part in strategy communication, collaboration, participation which is crucial for the success of strategy. For such reasons, I think it is worth understanding the manners that operative managers relate strategy to their daily work.

1.4. Research Aim

As mentioned above, my thesis aims to comprehend the ways in which employees make use of strategy in their everyday work. Such research could broaden the scope of strategy consumption and add on strategy discourse knowledge. It is important to bear in mind that by comprehending strategy consumption practice of operative managers, my purpose is not to build a new framework, but rather to examine Suominen (2009)’s framework at operative managers level which was not the focus in Suominen (2009). More detail about research methodology and research setting will be addressed at greater length later in this thesis.

Adopting the linguistic turn in strategy research and the findings in Suominen (2009), I formulate the central research question as follows:

*How do operative managers consume strategy in their talk?*

It is important to clarify that my research process is substantially influenced by Suominen (2009). During the beginning of writing process, I even consulted Mr Kimmo Suominen about the overall research aim, research setting and some possible challenges for such research. During the writing process, I have continually attempted to digest his work, including Suominen (2009) and Suominen & Mantere (2010) which has provided valuable guidance for my thesis work in term of research setting, research methodology and reasoning for data analysis. By drawing on strategy consumption framework of Suominen (2009), I assume that when operative managers consume strategy, they also use macro-discourses of strategy as resources in (re)production and usage stage.
Therefore, the two other secondary research questions which need to be addressed to answer the main research question above are as follows:

**What kinds of discursive resources do operative managers use in strategy consumption?**

**What kinds of discursive practices do operative managers use in strategy consumption?**

### 1.5. Delimitation

Strategy is a sophisticated phenomenon that can be examined by different perspectives. My thesis adopts the “linguistic turn” in strategy studies, viewing strategy as something constructed discursively and thus focuses on the discourse of strategy. Although other perspectives about strategy, namely: rational approach and processual approach are taken into account in my thesis, the discursive aspect of strategy is set as a boundary for my study. The clarification of such focus is critical since it explains how I structure my research questions and choose analysis method. In particular, I am interested in studying how operative managers consume strategy *in their talk*, rather than in other venues, such as written document. Moreover, since the focus is on discursive aspect, I draw on critical discourse analysis as a method to make sense of collected data.

Another scope of my study lies in the sources of my data. In this study, I collect data from only one Finnish organization. This will inhibit the generalizability character of the findings. Likewise, the transferability of the results might be hampered due to the issue of culture.

### 1.6. Core concepts

*Strategy consumption:* This idea was developed by Suominen(2009) in his doctoral dissertation named “Consuming Strategy-The Art and Practice of Managers’ Everyday Strategy Usage” to illustrate how managers perceive and practice strategy in their day to day activities. Generally, according to the author, strategy consuming is the way that strategy consumers use and apply strategy not only in original ways but also in creative ways for their own purposes and ends. The consuming process consists of three
components, namely macro discourses, (re)production stage and usage stage. The features of this model, as well as the findings of this dissertation will be examined with more detail in literature review section.

**Discursive practices:** ways of activating and utilizing specific discursive resources in particular contexts (Vaara et al 2004:5)

**Operative manager:** According to the classification of Floyd & Lane (2000:159), the operative manager occupies the lowest rank preceded by top and middle managers in multi layers of management of organizational hierarchy. In terms of the roles in strategy work, operative managers’ responsibilities are associated with strategy experimenting, adjusting and conforming performance (ibid). This means that operative managers take responsibilities for implementing strategy conforming to orders of top and middle managers and executing other operational tasks; rather than formulating and controlling the strategy process. In the context of my case organization (See section 3.2.) the operative manager is responsible for major business issues, such as: technology development or product management at a global scale which differentiates them with other blue collar workers and normal employees such as sales officers or accountant.

### 1.7. Structure of Research

This thesis is divided into 5 main sections.

**Section 1 (Introduction):** The introduction section provides the background information, overview from relevant researches, the research gap, motivation for thesis and the expected contribution of my thesis.

**Section 2 (Literature Review):** In the second section, I discuss literatures that are relevant to my study. The literature review will be structured in a way that it helps comprehend the components of research questions. Firstly, I review traditional research streams on strategy to comprehend how strategy concepts and strategizing are constructed in such traditional researches. Such work also helps me to gain historical underpinning (extra-organizational discourses or macro discourse) in the development of strategy practices. Secondly, strategy-as-practice research is reviewed because my interest is the actual activities and practices of strategy practitioner. Thirdly, since my
study adopts the discursive perspective of strategy, the concept of discourse and how strategy is a discursive phenomenon is discussed. Then the concept of strategy consumption and findings from Suominen (2009) is discussed to elucidate the strategy consumption framework on which my thesis is based.

Section 3 (Research Methodology): After the literature review, research methodology is presented, clarifying the research process of this study, including: research approach, research design, introduction context of case organizations, data collection method, data analysis method.

Section 4 (Empirical Findings): the result of data collection and data analysis is presented in this section. The analysis is conducted in deductive manner.

Section 5 (Discussion and Conclusion): this section discusses the results and contributions this study brings into theoretical understanding regarding strategy consumption at operative management level. Based on the empirical findings, practical implications are addressed. In addition, limitations and directions for future researches are also mentioned in this final section.
2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Strategy

2.1.1. Rational approach

The development of this research body has started since the middle of 20\textsuperscript{th} century, with the work of the best well-known exponents in this area, i.e. Ansoff (1965), Hofer and Schendel (1978), or Andrews (1971). For example, Hofer and Schendel (1978: 2-3) argues that considering the degree of organizations’ adaptation to the changes of their respective environment (effectiveness) and internal structure and operating activities (efficiency) was the key for the survival and success of business. For such reason, strategy was defined as

“The fundamental pattern of present and planned resource deployments and environmental interactions that indicates how the organization will achieve its objectives” (Hofer and Schendel 1978: 25)

In the similar spirit, Ansoff (1965: 205) viewed strategy as

“An “operator” which is designed to transform the firm from the present position to the position described by the objectives, subject to the constraints of the capabilities and the potential”

Likewise, Andrew (1971) viewed corporate strategy as

“A pattern of major objectives, purposes, or goals and essential policies and plans for achieving those goals, stated in such a way as to define what business the company is in or is to be in and the kind of company it is or is to be”

From the above examples of strategy’s definition, it is obvious that according to rational approach, strategy has been conceived as a set of consistent objectives or goals, leading the firms from their present position to desired future position. And organizations can reach their “objectives” or “purposes” or “goals”, or survive and success by matching organizational competencies with opportunities derived from environment.
In the attempt to make the concept of strategy more explicit, researchers moved further to identify components of any organization’s strategy. For example, Ansoff (1965, 104-112) identified four components that a strategy must possess, namely

- A product/market scope: the product/market that the firm was operating in
- A growth vector: the direction which the firm was moving toward with respect to its current product/market scope
- Competitive advantage: particular properties of individual product/markets that gave the firm a strong competitive position
- Synergy: a measure of the firm’s ability to make good on a new product-market entry

According to Mintzberg et al (2009:5), rational research stream can be divided into three schools of thought, namely: design, planning and positioning which are prescriptive in nature. This means that the rational approach to strategy focuses on how strategy should be formulated. The design school views strategy formulation as a simple design to achieve the fit between external threats and opportunities and internal distinctive competency (Mintzberg 1990a: 172-175). The planning school views strategy formulation as a more formal and articulated planning process (Mintzberg 1994). The positioning school is similar to design and planning school in term of underlying premises, contributing into rational research stream by emphasizing narrowly on the content of strategy (the best fitting generic strategic position), not just the strategy-making process (Mintzberg et al 2009).

**Strategy formulation**

In rational approach of strategy, researchers strongly emphasize the importance of having formalized, analytical and rational processes for formulating explicit strategies. They believe that such rational procedure yields superior organizational performance (Hofer and Schendel 1978, 5-7). Thereafter, a large body of strategy researches have focused on formalizing the process of strategy formulation.
In general, the processes of strategy formulation presented by those researchers consist of four sub-activities, namely: the examination of the environment for opportunity and risk, the systematic assessment of corporate strengths and weaknesses, the identification and weighting of personal values and the clarification of public responsibilities (Andrew 1971, 179). According to Mintzberg (1994b, 35), since 1962, literally hundreds of these models have been produced, differing from each other in term of level of detail, rather than fundamentals. Some models are simple while others are very elaborate, using different kinds of checklists, tables, diagrams, and techniques (ibid). Hofer and Schendel (1978, 49) indicate that these models are also various depending on the type of analysis or organizational circumstances.

Basic premise
Rational strategy thinking perceives strategy as the end product of comprehensive, rational, analytical, linear and conscious planning process (Ansoff 1965, Andrews 1971, Hofer and Schendel 1978, Hart 1992). Indeed, Chaffee (1985: 89) argues that despite not being made explicit, planning and forecasting are always emphasized in rational model of strategy. Moreover, in rational model, organizations are also viewed as tightly couple entities so that the outcomes of planning process created by top managers would be adopted by subordinates without any distortion (ibid).

Mintzberg (1990:171) argues that the design school of thought “underlies almost all prescription in the field” which means that probing into the basic premise of this school (table 1) could afford understanding on the basic premise of the rational approach to strategy. According to Mintzberg(1990), in the design school, condition of stability and predictability is implicitly taken for granted so that data can be gathered sufficiently for the purpose of strategy determination. This assumption is also one of the basic premises of the planning school in which the organizational environment is supposed to remain static while strategists develop their strategic plans (Mintzberg 1994a: 227). Moreover, environmental changes, if any, are thoroughly projected and considered in planning process, thus plans are supposed to be implemented deliberately in predetermined manner without any distortion (ibid).

This idea about predictability is also confirmed by arguments of Smircich and Stubbart (1985: 725). The authors indicate that “nearly all strategic management research and writing incorporates the assumption that “organization” and “environment” are real, material and separate....environmental analysis thus entails discovery, or finding things that are already somewhere waiting to be found”. Virtually, since environment contains elements which are static and already somewhere, the external appraisal seems to be unproblematic. It is just the matter of finding out.

**Table 1: Basic premises of the design school of thought**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise 1</th>
<th>Strategy formation should be a controlled, conscious process of thought</th>
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<tr>
<td>Premise 2</td>
<td>Responsibility for that control and consciousness must rest with chief executive officer: that person is the strategist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Premise 3 | The model of strategy formation must be kept simple and informal
---|---
Premise 4 | Strategies must be unique: the best ones result from a process of creative design
Premise 5 | Strategies emerge from this design process fully formulated
Premise 6 | These strategies should be explicit and, if possible, articulated, which also favours their being kept simple
Premise 7 | Finally, only after these unique, full-blown, explicit, and simple strategies are fully formulated can be then implemented

Source: Mintzberg et al 2009:30-33

In addition, the separation of strategy formulation and implementation is central in the design school (Mintzberg 1990). This premise actually derives from a western rationality that thinking precedes and is detached from acting (ibid: 184). Therefore, it even can be argued that since strategies are produced from a rational, analytical, linear, conscious process of thought, implementation stage is assumed as an unproblematic task (Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984: 244). In order for formulation can be separated from implementation, the flow of information is crucial. Indeed, according to Mintzberg(1990, 185) the fundamental assumption is “data can be aggregated and transmitted up the hierarchy without significant loss or distortion”. Organizations with such operating mechanism are called “machine bureaucracy” (Mintzberg 1978). This type of organization emphasizes the importance of command, control and a clear distinction in responsibilities between thinker and actor, which was adopted from traditional military organizations and very popular in mass production field (Mintzberg 1990, 185; Hart 1992).

**Role of operative managers**

Classical strategy research or rational view on strategy is managerialistic by nature (Mantere and Vaara 2008). Given the emphasis on strategy formulation of rational approach(Hofer and Schendel 1978, Ansoff 1965, Andrew 1971 ), top managers and their roles naturally become dominant topics in strategic management researches while
the role of operative managers and other organizational members was diminished (Hart 1992, Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984). It is important to bear in mind that, rational approach does not make distinction between operative managers and other organizational members, i.e. middle managers. They are all called “implementers”, or “subordinates” in common (Hart 1992, Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984).

According to rational approach, top managers are chief strategists who design the strategy and even possess the grand control over the implementation process (Mintzberg et al 2009, Hart 1992, Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984). Other organizational members are relegated to just subordinate roles, involving in implementation process only (ibid). In other words, it is argued that organizational members in general and operative managers in particular execute strategy implementation task under top managers’ monitoring and controls which is passive and insignificant in nature. Indeed, organizational members, including operative managers, are portrayed as “soldiers” who obey exactly orders and execute strategies articulated by “commanders”-top managers (Hart 1992: 336, Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984). In addition, “doers” are induced to maintain desired behaviours which have to comply with the general/top managers' interests so that effective implementation of strategy is guaranteed (ibid). Virtually, it can be concluded that even though organizational members are said to be responsible for implementing strategy, they do not possess a full degree of autonomy in their job or any possibility for improvisation and creativity.

**Contributions and critiques**

Rational approach to strategic management makes significant contributions to top manager community. Indeed, the growth of rational approach assists managers in formulating and implementing strategy by affording comprehensive models to reduce complexity related to strategic management (Suominen 2009), i.e. decision flow in product-market strategy formulation (Ansoff 1965: 202), or Porter’s model of competitive analysis (Porter 1979). In addition, this stream of research has also developed and provided important vocabulary as well as powerful sets of concepts which are valuable for practice, further researching and business teaching (Mintzberg et al 2009: 47). Furthermore, Mintzberg (1990: 191) indicates that the design school of
thought can be best applied when organizations are undergoing a period of reconception or initial conception of strategy.

However, the rational approach to strategy has also been challenged and criticized in several aspects. Mintzberg (1990, 1994a) criticizes the basic premises of design and planning school of thought. The basic idea of rational approach that strategy is produced by evaluating organizational competence and environmental factors is not perfectly applicable in practice (ibid). Indeed, Mintzberg (1990: 182-183) argues that since strategic changes usually involve some kinds of risk and uncertainties, one specific capability cannot be judged as weakness or strength in advance until it is tested in appropriate context. In addition, whereas weaknesses or strengths are supposed to be thoroughly identified through analysis or conscious thought, Howard Stevenson (1976, cited by Mintzberg (1990: 182)) indicates that assessment of internal capabilities may be unreliable and privileged by personal biases, aspiration and hopes.

The fundamental assumption in planning process that external environment maintains static, perfectly predictable or at least under full control of organizations is criticized as well. In fact, the external environment keeps evolving all the time, including changes in discontinuous fashion, i.e. technological innovations or price increases that no model can completely capture (Mintzberg 1994a: 110). Thus, external appraisal isn’t as simple as finding something already exists somewhere. Such deficiency in internal appraisal and external appraisal is one of the most fundamental weaknesses of basic design school model and rational approach to strategic management in general.

As discussing above, rational view of strategy requires a significant level of articulation for strategy, making it explicit for the purpose of management. However, such articulation at some extent makes strategy inflexible, even being harmful for organizations (Mintzberg 1990: 183). Particularly, articulated strategies impede managers to promote necessary strategic modifications when facing with changing environment (ibid) and create resistance to later changes in long term (Kiesler, 1971 cited in Mintzberg 1990: 184). Moreover, although articulating strategy is important and necessary at some points of time for the purpose of investigation, support and coordination, it doesn’t mean that “strategies have to appear fully developed all of a sudden”(Mintzberg 1990: 184).
The rational approach has also been criticized for maintaining false dichotomies of strategy, i.e. formulation and implementation or thinking and acting. According to Mintzberg (1990, 1994a), formulation and implementation simply cannot be separated. In order for strategists or planners can focus on formulating strategy and control the implementation process without deeply involving in, it is falsely assumed that data are aggregated and transmitted up the hierarchy without significant loss or distortion (Mintzberg 1990: 185). As in the case of planning school, top managers are assisted by a group of strategic planners whose responsibility is to produce “hard data” consisting detailed “facts” about organization and its context (Mintzberg 1994a: 110). However, such kind of data is normally distorted due to lacking richness, excluding qualitative or missing important nuances (ibid). Consequently, formulators are never as well informed as implementer. In addition, studies have pointed out that in some cases, it is the individuals at frontline taking initiative in identifying and championing opportunities and initiating strategic changes, not the ones at top management position (Burgelman 1983, Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984). So, it is seen clearly that detachment formulation from implementation is impossible; thinking and acting should be interactive with each other.

Rational approach is also criticized for ignoring potential problems in implementation process, particularly the resistance from implementers regarding the intended strategy (Mintzberg 1990). Implementers can resist strategy due to lack of willingness, understanding, cooperation or motivation (ibid). In fact, implementers have their own values and perspectives; thus imposing strategy in top-down fashion makes them become unmotivated and un-innovative (Mintzberg 1990, 1994; Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984).

Overall, the rational approach to strategy has receives both appraisals and significant critique resulting from portraying strategy as a rigid state (Mintzberg 1990). Therefore, a more adaptive and flexible approach to strategy is needed (Mintzberg & Waters 1985).

### 2.1.2. Processual approach

A body of researcher community criticizes and challenges the rational approach to strategy, and promote a more attention to the social process wherein strategy actually
gets realized (Mintzberg & Waters 1985, Chakravarthy and Doz 1992). Indeed, as being discussed in 2.1.1, rational strategy research describes what strategy should be, rather than what strategy actually is.

Mintzber & Waters (1985) argues that strategy is actually a course of actions and decisions which emerges over time through organizational members’ learnings and actions purely deliberate, rather than an intended plan. In other words, strategy should be understood as “a pattern in a stream of decision”, rather than the outcome of rational and deliberate planning activities (Mintzberg 1978). By focusing more on how strategies emerge and are realized in organization, the processual approach to strategy is thus more descriptive in nature, compared to rational approach which is more normative (Suominen 2009:19).

**Basic premises**

One of the typical perspectives about strategy in processual view is that strategies are the outcome of learning and adaptation, the process of detection and correction of errors (Argyris 1989, cited by Suominen 2009:20). Such process is called adaptation or adaptive mode (Chaffee 1985:92, Mintzberg 1973:46-47). According to Mintzberg (1973:46-47), within the adaptive strategy mode, strategy-maker makes organizational changes in incremental and small steps and never moves too far from the given status quo. In order to cope with the conflicting pressures and maintain the coalition of disparate interests in business firms, strategy-maker carries out strategic changes in small steps, first doing one and then the other (ibid). “Taken together over time, these small changes often produced major shifts in direction” (Mintzberg et al 2009:188).

In processual perspective, the actual strategies emerge as the results of convergence on patterns or consistency of behaviour (Mintzberg & Waters 1985: 269-272, Mintzberg et al 2009: 12-13) while the rational approach argues that it is the outcome of intentional analysing, planning and decision-making process (see figure 1). Indeed, Mintzberg et al (2009: 199-200) presents the idea called “strategy as emergent” in which unintentional actions are taken one by one and people give their feedback then the process continue until the organization’s operations converge on patterns or realized strategy (more in learning school, power school, cultural school and environmental school in Mintzberg et
al 2009). In this sense, the concept of emergent strategy acknowledges the organization’s experimenting capacity, thus introduces strategic learning to strategy forming process. In strategic learning, the realized strategy can be traced to small actions executed by either leaders or even executive team when those organizational actors interact, conflict, mutually adjust, identify and remedy errors and learn from experiences. This means that any organization actor could be strategist while in rational approach only top executive is considered as the chief strategist. There are two characteristic of such learning process that one should bear in mind (ibid 200). Firstly, emergent strategy can be initiated by individual or collective’s effort. Secondly, the process of emergence can be quite simple or more complex (ibid). The table below summarize the underlying premise of learning school (ibid: 217).

Table 2: Basic premise of learning school of thought

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Premise 1</th>
<th>Strategy making must above all take the form of a process of learning over time in which, at the limit, formulation and implementation become indistinguishable.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Premise 2</td>
<td>There are many potential strategists in most organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premise 3</td>
<td>The learning proceeds in emergent fashion, through behaviour that stimulates thinking retrospectively so that sense can be made of action. Strategies can arise in all kinds of strange places and usual ways. The successful strategic initiatives create streams of experiences that can converge into patterns that become emergent strategies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premise 4</td>
<td>The role of leadership thus becomes not to preconceive deliberate strategies, but to manage the process of strategic learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Premise 5</td>
<td>Strategies appear first as patterns out of the past, only later, perhaps, as plans for the future</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mintzberg et al 2009: 217
It is also said that adaptive strategy model relies heavily on an evolutionary biological model of organizations (Chaffee 1985:92). A basic assumption in such adaptive model lies in its perspective about organization and environment. Particularly, in processual approach, environment is perceived as “a complex organizational life support system”, or dynamic and unpredictable object; thus organization must change with the environment for survival, rather than deal with it. For this reason, strategic management derived from processual approach is more flexible, responsive and open; in contrast to the rigidness of strategy in rational approach. (ibid)

In comparison to rational approach, the processual approach has different and even contrasting features. While strategy in rational approach is guided by the future, in processual approach it is the present. Indeed, in adaptive strategy making mode, the focus is on solving existing problems (the present), rather than seeking new opportunities (the future) (Mintzberg 1973:46-47). Furthermore, the adaptive strategy strives for achieving the condition of certainty wherever possible, rather than relying too much on the uncertain future (ibid).

Roles of operative managers

In processual approach, it is impossible for anyone to possess central power source since there is a complex web of political forces trying to influence decisions (Mintzberg 1973:46). Therefore, organizational members who are not in senior management position have a louder voice in strategy work in processual approach, compared to that in rational approach. Indeed, as mentioned above, in the adaptive strategy mode anyone even operative managers could probably be strategists who initiate strategic changes (Mintzberg et al 2009: 200, Burgelman 1983, Bourgeois & Brodwin 1984, Floyd & Lane 2000). It is said that non-senior managers and even external actors play the key roles in organizational learning and knowledge creation process (Hart 1992: 337-339). In particular, the lower-level managers usually have a firm connection with market and possess specific knowledge which helps adapt organization to the changing environment or diverse market demand (Burgelman 1983, Noda & Bower 1996: 160)

Hart (1992) mentions transactive and generative frameworks for strategy-making processes which reflect the essence of processual approach. In those two frameworks,
organizational members are portrayed as active ones who are responsible for the learning, improving, experimenting and taking risk. In general, organizational members in processual approach are said to deliver more contributions, play a more significant role in strategy work and organization’s performance, compared to those in in rational approach. (Ibid)

Balogun (2003) argues that middle managers cannot be simply described as change implementer since what they do in strategy work is more complex than that. In particular, middle manager actively influence the decision making process with their own experiences, undertake personal changes, help other through changes, keep the business running and implement changes needed. (ibid).

Contributions and critique

The major contribution of processual approach lies in its new, valuable perspective on strategy and strategy work. By introducing the idea of emerging strategy and strategic learning, processual approach provide insights into how strategy is actually realized. The idea of strategic learning also provides practical implications in terms of increasing organizational performance (Chakravarthy and Doz 1992: 8).

However, processual approach is criticized for being descriptive in nature, In particular, despite revealing the actual strategy formation, processual approach does not provide concrete advice in step-by-step form on how to execute strategy as rational approach does. Moreover, processual approach still examines strategy and strategy work at a macro level. Therefore, another group of researchers urges to study strategy in more micro level, “in close proximity the everyday reality of managers, such as: meetings, presentation and communications” (Mintzberg et al 2009: 289). Those researchers called their effort “strategy-as-practice” (ibid).

2.1.3. Strategy-as-practice approach

By definition strategy-as-practice is a research perspective, within the strategic management domain, considering strategy as something that people do, rather than as something that a firm has (Whittington 2002, Johnson et al, 2003, Johnson et al 2007). Particularly, researchers taking this specific perspective have studied concrete activities
carried out by strategy practitioners in organization in relation to strategy in order to “understand human agency in the construction and enactment of strategy” (Johnson et al 2007, Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl 2007). In other words, strategy as practice concerns with “what people do in relation to strategy and how it is influenced by and influences their organizational and intuitional context” (Johnson et al 2007: 7).

According to Vaara & Whittington (2012), strategy-as-practice research provides a distinctive contribution to strategic management research since it focuses on practitioners’ decisions and actions within the web of organizational and wider social practices which is neglected by other traditional research streams.

**Basic premise**

Whittington (2006) views strategy as a social practice, as what people do. According to (Jarzabkowski et al 2007, 7–8), strategy is defined “as a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity”. However, this definition is too broad to distinguish between strategic and non-strategic activities. Hence, Jarzabkowski et al (2007: 8) supplement the definition by adding the idea that activities are consider strategic if they are consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage of the firm. Putting together, I understand that from practice oriented perspective strategy is any human’s activities, regardless of the formal or informal form, which impose profound influences on organizations.

Whittington (2007: 1582) argues that researching strategy demands sociological lens. Adopting such sociological lens, he proposes guidelines for strategy-as-practice researches. Firstly, he urges for a more dynamic view on human’s activities, emphasizing the “structural connection” and “relationship”. Since such relationship and connection play a role in shaping expectation, behaviours and outcomes, they are worth studying. Secondly, he encourages practice oriented researchers to take a broader view on the context of activities, to focus not only on organizational context but also on wider societal level (societal embeddedness). Thirdly, practice oriented researchers should transform strategy into social practice, using sociological eyes to look for the irony, the neglected and the taken for granted aspect of strategy which potentially
deliver significant insights. Fourthly, Whittington suggests the problematization of “performance” in strategic aspect. Finally, researchers adopting comprehensive sociological lens should respect the continuities and accept that some strategic practices are repeated as routine for the organization. (ibid)

According to Jarzabkowski (2004) and Whittington (2006), one of the major objectives of practice oriented strategy research is to study the linkage between the micro and macro level of strategy, or the contextualization of micro actions in other words. Particularly, Jarzabkowski et al (2007) argues that “micro-phenomena need to be understood in their wider social context” because such micro actions are not isolated, but draw on socially defined and institutionalized modes of acting.

Practice theory is the theoretical roots of strategy as practice research (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Reviewing the practice theory, Whittington (2006) highlights three concepts that are critical in integration of the micro-phenomena (intra-organizational activity) and wider social context (extra-organizational aggregation). Firstly, he presents the concept of “society” which refers to the shared understanding, cultural rules, languages and procedures that guide human action. Secondly, there is the concept of “individuality” which refers to people’s actual activity. And thirdly, “actor” is portrayed as dynamic human who interpret practices artfully and creatively. The practice theory does not view those three concepts as separate, but rather as interrelated parts of a whole. Indeed, actors’ activities always are embedded in the web of social practices, draw on the rules and resources from society while society, in turn, is produced by these actions. Likewise, the strategy-as-practice research, adopting the practice theory, also underscores the interrelationship between organizational and social practices; praxis (actual strategic activities) and strategy’s practitioners. “Strategy practitioners” are those who perform strategy works, including not only senior executives, strategy planners or middle manager but also outside strategy actors, such as consultants, bankers and business school professors. “Praxis” is all of the informal and formal intra-organizational work in relation to strategy. This kind of work diffuses in character, taking place in sequences of episodes, such as: boarding meeting, presentations, projects and simple talks. “Strategy’s practices” are multi-level. At societal level, they are the norms, procedures and other shared understanding about strategy work that diffuse across nations and the worlds. Practices can also exist at
extra-organizational level in which strategy practices are shared between organization in the same industries or sectors. And at the lowest level, strategy practices refer to tools and techniques of strategy that is peculiar to specific organizations. Whittington urges researchers to study the interrelationships between these three concepts, namely practitioners, praxis and strategy practices in an integrative framework as below. (ibid)

**Figure 2: Integrating Praxis, Practices and Practitioners**

Source: Whittington 2006: 621

As Whittington illustrated, strategy practitioners (A, B, C) engage in strategy work, for example: strategy workshop, project, etc (praxis i-v) by drawing on the set of strategy practices available either from their organizational or extra-organizational contexts (strategy practices 1-4). Those strategy practices, according to Whittington, can be both *locally generated routines* and *internalized practices*. In the framework, extra-organizational practices can be introduced into specific organizational context by either internal strategy practitioners (A, B, C) or external practitioners (D), for example: consultants, bankers, or academics. Whittington emphasizes the argument that *praxis is an artful and improvisatory performance and practitioners*. Practitioners are not simply passive as they can both adapt existing practices and synthesize new ones. (ibid)
Among the researches about the interrelationships between intra-organizational-praxis and extra-organizational practices, Jarzabkowski (2004) provides significant insights. This research, in my opinion, complements our understanding about the artful and improvisatory praxis, as well as creative practitioners discussed by Whittington (2006). Jarzabkowski developed the concepts of “management practice-in-use” which, he argued, “conceptualize better how management practices are used and adapted in the construction of strategy”. Particularly Jarzabkowski (2004:544-547) argues that the management practices that practitioners use are already established in social structure, in macro institutional and competitive contexts with particular purposes or intents. They arise from co-production within industry, academia, consultancy and the press communities, and are diffused by business schools and consultancy. When practitioners execute those practices, their intent may or may not comply with the intent implied in such practices. In the event that practitioners employ the management practice for their own purposes, producing unanticipated outcome, practices are used in an adaptive way. When the practitioners’ actual intent complies with the original intent of practices, then practices are used with recursive manner. Jarzabkowski labels adaptive management practices as ‘artisan-like inventiveness’ in which socially legitimized practices are drawn upon and altered to generate new modes of acting with the retained traces of the past to serve particular purposes. Indeed, he argued that practices-in-use are social, interpretive and subjective (ibid). I will explain the transmission management practices from macro to micro context in the section of discursive aspect of strategy.

Within the interrelationship between the three concepts, namely practices, praxis and strategy’s practitioners, practices functions as enabling as well as constraining factors in praxis, not only imposing rigid constraints, but also enabling adaptation (Vaara & Whittington 2012). The interdependence of practices and praxis presents in a way that the outcome of small instances of praxis can result in something significant, such as the legitimation or de-legitimation of particular actors, choices, or even practices. The authors also reveal that practices and practitioners’ position are linked since discursive practices in particular play a role in constructing identities and roles of practitioners (ibid).

Role of practitioners
The practice approach takes the strategy practitioners seriously. By practitioners, the approach refers to a wide range of actors including middle managers, consultants and academia, rather than just senior managers for whom strategy present the key them in their daily work (Whittington 2006). According to Vaara and Whittington (2012) practitioners are never simple, but rather diverse in terms of socio-political and rhetorical skills, national culture and gender. In practice approach, regarding the strategy specialist the focus has extended into two directions, namely strategic planners and middle managers (ibid).

Nordqvist & Melin (2008) introduced the concept of strategic planning champion, describing how strategic practitioners introduce, promote and guide strategic planning process in organization. Their job is manifested through three roles. “The social crafts-person” role requires strategy practitioners to have good social and tacit social skills and sensitivity in order to skilfully balance different expectation and perspectives and set up consensus around strategic planning. “The artful interpreter” brings general legitimized strategy planning practices into play in the organizational context, harmonizing such practices with local norms, value and routines. “The know strangers” achieves the balance between distance and closeness in interaction with other actors by travelling between the various formal and informal arenas of strategy work. (ibid).

Angwin et al (2009) also reveal that strategy planners (or Senior Strategy Directors as in the case) work as structural ties, binding networks in a dynamic ways, coping with differences in languages, mental models across organization and managing multiple political and social tension through interpersonal skills. Candidates for this demanding job need to possess paradoxical qualities: analytical and creative, engaged and distant, a leader and a servant while the key quality is the ability to gain coherent and consensus toward strategic issues in the middle of tension. (ibid). Basing on those studies, it is obvious that strategy planners are believed to possess the mix of political, negotiating, interpersonal skills rather than just simple skills to execute the task of top-down formulators and controllers of strategy (Vaara & Whittington 2012).

Practices oriented approach also studies the role of middle managers in strategy work. Viewing the middle manager’s role as interpreter and seller of strategic, Rouleau (2005) identifies four micro practices of middle manager in strategy sense making and sense giving when they interact with company’s clients. The middle manager translates the
new orientation; in other word conveys the strategy message in a form of storytelling, using material and discursive symbols familiar for listeners. Over-coding the strategy is the micro practice in which middle manager takes advantage of interlocutor’s professional and socio-cultural code in reproducing conversation’s context. Middle manager, through conversation, creates subjective and emotional effects to insidiously ‘sell’ or convey the strategy message to clients in order to convince them to support the strategy message. Such micro practice is called disciplining the client. And finally, justifying the changes is to provide ‘good’ reasons for the outside actors so that they can adopt the strategy message and then middle managers can gain trust from those outside actors. (ibid)

Within practice oriented research stream, there are researchers being more interested in the role of language in strategizing (i.e. Mantere & Vaara, 2008, Vaara et al 2004, Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003; etc). According to Maitlis & Lawrence (2003: 112), language and language use are fundamental in strategizing since the process of strategizing in practice involves talks and texts, such as: meeting, informal conversations, jokes, stories, etc. Moreover, the outcomes of strategizing are presented in discursive form, such as: strategy plans, speeches, PowerPoint slides (ibid). Hence, in the next section, I discuss the discursive perspective on strategy to make sense of the concept of discourse and its role in strategizing. Such understanding about the discursive nature of strategy is valuable in order to answer my research question – “How operative managers consumer strategy in their talk”

2.1.4. Discursive perspective on strategy

Within practice approach, there is a research stream which argues that strategy is linguistically constructed and “reproduced by a variety of texts and practices that serve to make sense of the world” (Hardy et al 2000: 3). In fact, it is argued that since the process and outcomes of strategizing is discursive in nature, involving texts, talks, conversations, stories, etc ( Maitlis & Lawrence ,2003; Barry & Elmes 1997; Vaara 2010), examining the discursive elements and discursive practices in strategy talks enhances our understanding about the dynamics of strategizing process (Vaara et al 2004:2).
The discursive oriented researches aim to understand the micro-level activities and practices in strategizing process, with the concentration on central role of linguistic practices particularly (Vaara 2010). This approach focuses on ‘the process in and through which organizational and managerial phenomenal (strategy) are (re)produced and transformed, how specific organizations and management practices are discursively constructed, and how micro-level linguistic processes such as conversations or rhetoric are the core of organizational and managerial activity’ (ibid:5). It can be seen that in this research stream, text and linguistic practices, in other words discourse, play a crucial role. Rouleau (2005) emphasizes the significance of language and language use when middle managers (re)produce (or interpret) and ‘sell’ strategic change in their daily activities. Balogun & Johnson (2004)’s studying middle manager’s sensemaking activities during organizational structuring and Jarzabkowski & Seidl (2008)’s studying strategic planning meeting both highlight the important role of language in strategy researches.

Discourse by definition is “a set of ideas and practices which condition our ways of relating to, and acting upon, particular phenomenon” (Knight & Morgan 1991: 253). Fairclough (1992: 63) defines discourse as a mode of actions in which “people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation”. In a similar spirit, Vaara et al (2004: 4) views discourse as specific ways of speaking and constructing social reality. It can be seen that there are many varieties of approaches to define “discourses”. In the following, I review a certain nature of discourse which is relevant to the topic of strategy consumption.

**Dualistic nature of discourse**

According to Vaara et al (2004), discourse, which is related to social contexts and social practices, is a specific ways of speaking and constructing social reality. And it is important to know that discourse is socially conditioned and socially constitutive. On the one hand, discourses are socially conditioned since particular social actors in specific context (re)produce discourses. On the other hand, discourses also (re)construct concepts, object and subject and identities by/with which specific social actors have to live. Such ‘dual’ nature of discourses has important implication to comprehend the role of discourses in strategizing. (ibid: 3-5).
In other words, on the one hand, discourses have specific power over social actors, dictating them in particular context. On the other hand, top managers, consultants or journalists who are perceived as social actors can make use of specific discourses as resources for their own purposes, particularly for resisting, protecting or enhancing their social agency (Suominen 2009: 34, Laine & Vaara 2007: 53). Indeed, Reed (2000) urges for a more ‘critical realist’ approach in which social actors (e.g. managers) are able to ‘play with discourse’ and ‘practices them in context of power relations’. Suominen & Mantere (2010) also share the same idea, arguing that managers are able to use the institutionalized discourses of strategic management in creative ways for their own purposes, rather than completely subordinate to them. Laine & Vaara (2007:53) presents three typical ways that organizational actors use to mobilize discourses in subjectivities struggles. This means that actors are able to switch from one discourse to another and manoeuvre them to justify and legitimate specific actions or decisions (Vaara et al 2004). This perspective that social actors are able to make use of discourse as resources is meaningful to my study when examining what operative managers do with strategy discourse.

**Discourse and subject positions**

It is said that discourses create social reality by constructing concepts, objects and subject positions (Oswick et al 2000; Hardy et al 2000). Subject positions define ‘structure of right’ because different discourses require subjects to have different rights to speak (Mantere & Vaara 2008; Laine & Vaara 2007). Some subjects may have more right while others may have less due to the differences in their positions within discourses (ibid). For example, strategic discourses derived from rational strategy research stream grant top managers the ultimate rights or voices in formulating and controlling strategy process while at the same time silence others organizational actors, preventing them from participating in strategy process (Mantere & Vaara 2008). This is what Laine & Vaara (2007: 35) calls the ontological power of organizational discourse. The same argument can be found in Hardy et al (2000: 1236). In particular, the authors concluded that discourses become strategic resources only when being “appropriately grounded in the prevailing discursive context”. In other words, subject position of the enunciator must warrant enunciator’s voice so that their activities can have political
effect, rather than being ignored by other individual (ibid). Likewise, Knights and Morgan (1991: 262) argues that discourses with its power effect can “constitute the subjectivity of organizational members as particular categories of persons who secure their sense of reality through engaging in this discourse and practice”. In other words, persons by engaging in discourses will take up specific subject positions which are constituted by the discourse per se.

In this sense, discourses produce subject positions, defining what a social actor is allowed or restricted to do in specific discursive situations. Such knowledge about the nature of subject positions constructed by strategy discourses facilitates the understanding about how and what organizational members (such as: operative managers) could do with strategy in their daily activities.

**Discourse as a strategic resource**

Hardy et al (2000) contributes a very comprehensive model in which discourses are mobilized as strategic resources by strategy practitioners to promote strategic changes. In particularly, in order to successfully mobilize discourse as strategic resources, strategy practitioners need to carry out a range of steps that consists of three circuits, namely circuits of activity, circuits of performativity and circuits of connectivity. In the **circuits of activity**, the practitioner needs to introduce new discursive statement by using relevant rhetoric material, such as symbols, narratives, metaphors etc. Then he must engage other actors by connecting the relevant concepts or the discursive statement to individuals in meaningful way and leveraging subject position of practitioner (the enunciator). This step is called the **circuits of performativity**. And finally, the **circuits of connectivity** finalize the whole process by allowing new concepts, objects and subject positions to emerge in accordance with the discursive statement initiated prior in the circuits of activity. In other words, the new discursive statement is completely legitimized at this stage, being embedded in the discursive situation. Moreover discourses, according to this research, can be mobilized not only for legitimizing discursive statement, but also for delegitimizing. Again, the authors concluded that subject position, in other words the rights-to-speak of enunciator must, warrant the sufficient voice. Moreover, the rhetoric tools used must be familiar and meaningful to
relevant actors; and possess dislodging characters in case that discourses are mobilized for delegitimizing purposes. (ibid)

In fact the discourse, the subjectivity and the use of discourse are interrelating issues. In Laine & Vaara (2009) we can see how those three issues are intertwined. The corporate management draws on conventional strategy discourses (see section 2.1.1, Knight & Morgan 1991) for the purposes of gaining control and managerial hegemony. Moreover, corporate management at the same time by engaging in such conventional discourses also promotes its subject position as the strategist while diminishes subjectivity of other organizational actors. Middle managers and project engineer however initiate alternative discourses with dislodging characters to create room for manoeuvre and resist the imposed discourses. In particular, middle managers employ entrepreneurial discourse as a mean to contradict and criticize corporate management strategy discourse. Such entrepreneurial discourse emphasizes the bottom up approach to strategy and also values the subject position of middle managers as progressive strategic entrepreneurs whose actions should be given priority. Likewise, project engineers distance themselves from corporate management strategy by bringing up the concepts of “expertise”, “close customer relationship” and prioritizing the concrete business operation over abstract strategy rhetoric imposed by top management. The authors call this situation the discursive struggles on subjectivity, happening when actors promote competing discourses with inherently different view on strategizing. (ibid). In my opinion, this research successfully reveals how organization actors at the one hand are constrained by discourses, and on the other hand are able to mobilize discourses as discursive resources; then use them to legitimate and protect their subjectivity and to delegitimize other discourses. In the language of strategy consumption, findings from Laine & Vaara (2009) exemplifies how middle managers and project engineers used strategy discourse in creative way for their own purposes.

Multifaceted nature of strategy discourses
Figure 3: Strategy as multifaceted discourse

Macro-level:
Strategy as body of knowledge: Historically constituted discursive elements

Meso-level:
Strategy as narrative: Narrative constructions of specific organizations

Micro-level:
Strategy as conversation: Rhetorical speech acts

Sources: Vaara 2010: 7

Vaara (2010) proposes a multifaceted view on strategy discourse to deepen our understanding about strategy. Particularly, strategy discourse at meta-level can be seen as a body of knowledge, providing key ideas; widely accepted concepts, practices and method which are the basis for any discussion around strategy. At meso- or organizational level there are particular discourse formations which depend on social, cultural and organizational context such as strategy narratives. At micro level, strategy discourses are presented under the form of conversation, discussion or any social interaction in both formal and informal settings. Vaara emphasizes that the three facets are inter-linked together. Indeed, from a top-down perspective organizational discourses about strategy are formulated based on general accepted ideas and ideological assumptions (see Knight & Morgan 1991). Then, organizational discourses in turn dictate discussions or conversations about strategy in particular organizational context (see Mantere and Vaara 2008 for example). From a bottom up perspective, micro level social interaction (meeting, discussion, strategy workshop, strategy presentation, chat, etc) bring organizational discourses and meta-discourses into being, making them manifested in organizational context. (ibid). The value of this multifaceted nature of
strategy discourses lies in its ability to increase our understanding about the dynamics between macro and micro discourses of strategy and the process wherein specific discourses are mobilized between different levels. This also complements Jarzabkowski’s idea of adaptive management practice-in-use (2004).

2.2. Framework of strategy consumption

As I mentioned in the introduction of this study, my inspiration for this topic comes from the doctoral dissertation – Consuming Strategy: The art and practice of managers’ everyday strategy usage (Suominen 2009), written by Kimmo Suominen. In his work, Suominen developed a framework of strategy consumption which demonstrated different tactics that managers employ to consume strategy in their everyday practices. The focus of Suominen’s work is practices of top and middle managers who are considered as central strategy practitioners (Suominen & Mantere, 2010: 211).

In my study, I adopt the findings of Suominen’s study to examine the consuming practices of operative managers who have different subjectivity in strategy discourse. In particular, I use Suominen’s framework as a theoretical lens to examine how operative managers consume strategy (2009). Therefore, in the following sections I review two literatures, namely Suominen (2009) and Suominen & Mantere (2010) and the book “The Practice of Everyday Life” (de Certeau 1988) to get better insights on the framework.

2.2.1. The idea and theoretical lens of study

According to Suominen & Mantere (2010: 211), managerial profession is subjugated by the discipline of strategic managements and managers are dictated by strategy discourses as they are repetitively participating in and performing strategy practices. Indeed, one can argue that managers have autonomy in choosing which strategy they want to use; however they have very little choice about whether to use strategy or not; or to accept strategic management or not. Having strategy and incorporating strategic management is almost a MUST for the organization’s success. (Ibid: 212). Therefore, Suominen (2009:46) argues that “an individual manager is incapable to change or escaping the sanction, strategy discourse, imposed on him/her”.

However, managers are not prisoner of strategy discourses as Suominen & Mantere (2010: 212-213) argues. In particular, even though managers are not able to escape the strategy discourses, they gain a certain degree of freedom by using strategy discourses for their own purposes in creative and novel ways which have not been mentioned yet in orthodoxy of strategic management disciplines (ibid). With such notion, Suominen (2009: 40-43) found that the idea of “consumption” developed by Michel de Certeau (1988) was an appropriate theoretical lens for his research intention.

De Certeau (1988:31) defines the “consumption” as follow

“Consumption” is characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation (the result of circumstances), its poaching, its clandestine nature, its tireless but quiet activity, in short by its quasi-invisibility, since it shows itself not in its own products but in an art of using those imposed on it

De Certeau (ibid) provides a very sophisticated example of what he called “consumption”

“Thus the spectacular victory of Spanish colonization over the indigenous Indian cultures was diverted from its intended aims by the use made of it: even when they were subjected, indeed even when they accepted their subjection, the Indians often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within- not by rejecting them or by transforming them, but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs or convictions foreign to the colonization which they could not accept. They metaphorized the dominant order: they made it function in another register. They remained other within the system which they assimilated and which assimilated them externally. They diverted it without leaving it. Procedures of consumption maintained their difference in the very space that the occupier was organizing”

According to de Certeau (1988: xiii), consumption is another kind of production, or reproduction to be more accurate, which is devious, silent and invisible. As being
mentioned in the example above, the Indians took up what were imposed on them, such as the laws, representation, then re-created it a new use which is different to or might be diverted from the original one. In other words, they made them “function in another register”. In this sense, de Certeau brings up the gap between what people is supposed to do and what they actually do. (ibid)

**Strategies and tactics**

The key argument behind De Certeau (1988)’s idea of “consumption” is his distinction between “strategy” and “tactics”. Strategy refers to the actions when the subject with its own will and power (for example: a business, an army, a city) assumes a place of its own power and will, from an “environment”. Such place allows the subject to manage all of the relations between it and the exteriority. (ibid). According to Suominen (2009:43), strategies are relative stable and enduring and manifest themselves through physical artefact or/and discourses. In summary, strategies associate with the postulate of power.

On the contrary, a tactic is determined with the absence of power, an art of the weak (de Certeau 1998:37). Particularly, de Certeau described tactic with a more opportunistic characteristic. Since tactic does not have a place, it “insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance”. (ibid). A tactic refers to the use of products imposed by the dominant economic system in order to adapt them to users’ own interests and rules. (ibid: xiv). Thus, the author argues that many everyday practices, such as: talking, reading, moving, shopping, cooking, etc are tactical in charter. (ibid: xix). In other words, he argues that the everyday consumption practices are tactics in nature, for example: “renters make comparable changes in apartment with their acts and memories; as do pedestrians, in the streets they fill with the forest of their desires and goals” (ibid: xxi). In my opinion, those people as pure receivers practice consumption by making something else out of the things or doing improvisation actions with the things that are not their belongings. To my understanding, it is important to bear in mind that the outcome of consumption can be either physical-related, such as a new apartment with new decoration or mental-related, such as desires and goals. In summary, it is very important to bear in mind that consumption is a kind of subtle (re)production, and tactic in nature.
2.2.2. Construction of strategy consumption framework

According to Suominen (2009:3-4), although individuals (or consumers) cannot escape the management discipline imposed on them, they are not just passive human beings, but are active users, being able to consume strategy in their talk for their own purposes and means. This argument resembles the way de Certeau (1988) portray his “consumers”. Applying the idea of consumption, Suominen examined how managers use strategy discourses (or system) that are imposed on them (ibid). As we see in Suominen (2009)’s consumption framework, the author presented what managers make out of strategy and strategic management; and illustrated the process in which they made it.

Using de Certeau’s thinking as a theoretical lens and perceiving strategy as discursive practices, the authors also employed discourse analytic methods as theoretical framework in data analysis (Suominen 2009: 50-58). The data set was produced in three case organizations, consisting of interviews, written documents, Web pages, observations and media coverage (ibid). As the result of analysing process, Suominen identified two categories of talks, namely reproduction and usage tactics that construct the practice of strategy consumption (ibid: 74-80). Particularly, the framework of strategy consumption was constructed with three main components, namely macro-discourses, (re)production and usage.

Macro-discourses of strategy derived from social context depict strategy as a universal phenomenon, not being constricted to any local context (Suominen & Mantere 2010: 220). And managers use these macro-discourses as discursive resources (see 2.1.4 for more about discourse as strategic resource) when consuming strategy. Mapping with de Certeau’s thinking, such macro-discourses exists in wider societal context, then being imported into particular organization’s context. Likewise, managers live and work within such macro-discourses, however use them for their own purposes, poaching them without escaping from them. (ibid 221). Suominen (2009: 91) categorized five micro-discourses existing in his data set, namely militarism, mechanism, humanism, pragmatism and spiritualism. And each of them has its own ways to describe the nature, condition and actors of strategy (Suominen 2009: 81).
### Table 3: Summary of macro discourse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro-discourses</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Militarism (Mil)</strong></td>
<td>Strategy is a war plan or projection that guides the actions of organizational members. Strategy aims at winning battles or killing enemies on the battlefield. The organization is in a constant battle against its environment and competitors. Managers are commanders of their troops, and strategy is executed through their commands and orders. The employees, considered as troops, are responsible for executing these orders obediently.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Mechanism (Mec)</strong></td>
<td>The organization is a machine that executes strategy through mechanisms and processes. Strategy is a plan that is manifested through targets and objectives that are measured and reviewed with different technologies and practices. Managers design and set strategy procedures. Through these mechanisms, strategy cascades throughout the organization leaving little room for improvisation or application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Humanism (Hum)</strong></td>
<td>Strategies are shared contracts in organizations. Organizations consist of people who are competent actors at every level of the organization. Participation and dialogue are central requirements of strategy, and the whole personnel should be able to participate in strategy work. Strategy should belong to everyone in the organization and make their work meaningful and motivating for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pragmatism (Prag)</strong></td>
<td>Strategy is an everyday matter in organizations. It should be considered when making decisions at every level of organization. Strategies should be made concrete and practical by managers. They need to be taken to the grassroots consistently, so that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
practicality | people would understand their meaning for everyday work.
---|---
Spiritualism (Spir) | Strategy is a mission and vision driven intent that requires faith in it. It connects people to a higher level of purposes in an organization and gives them a sense of belonging.
Discourse of faith and believing | Managers are messianic leaders, who provide direction for their subordinates. However, they have to believe in strategy themselves; otherwise they cannot communicate it in a credible way.

*Source: Suominen 2009: 91*

*(Re)production* refers to a discursive practice in which managers with the help of macro-discourse of strategy bring strategy into being by defining it as management discipline located in the case organization (Suominen, 2009: 91-92). Particularly, in the (re)production phase strategy and strategy work are constructed not only as something “peculiar to each case organization, but also the ideas that are present in the wider strategy discourse”. Therefore, it is said that macro-discourses of strategy are brought from wider social level to the local level of organization by strategy users in this (re)production phase. (Ibid).

These following quotes are example of (re)production practice from Suominen (2009:75).

“*It [strategy] is such a big collective desired state and outlook, collective outlook of how the company can succeed.*”

“I actually read the strategy as a sort of shared contract here within the polytechnic.”

“That it [strategy] would be taken to as concrete level as possible, so that the individual seller understands what this means ‘in my life’. [...] This is everyone’s thing.”
In these quotes, when managers (re)produce strategy as management discipline, the macro-discourses are presented quite clear, for example: *a sort of shared contract* (Hum), *be taken to as concrete level as possible* (Prag).

“*Usage tactics are discursive practices that describe how the managers use and poach the strategy, (re)produced preciously, in creative ways*” (Suominen & Mantere 2010:230). However in contrary to (re)production practice which is easily recognizable in managers’ talk, usage tactics are clandestine and tacit in nature since it is “*scattered over the (re)production of strategy*” (ibid). There are three rhetorical tactics of usage, namely instrumental tactics, playful tactics and intimate tactics.

**Table 4: Summary of usage tactics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Usage Tactics</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Instrumental  | Managers use strategy as a tool in managerial work for:  
(1) Managers’ personal goals and purpose such as building legitimacy for their work and solving practical problem,  
(2) Collective purposes, for the benefits of manager’s unit, for the sake of the whole company  
To some extent, instrumental strategy use bends the rules of strategy by revising and applying them to drive one’s own agenda. |
| Playful       | Playful tactic embodies a critique and resistance towards strategy in opportunistic, subtle and quite ways.  
Ironical and cynical humour being used to subvert and resist the imposed strategy discourse is the feature of playful strategy consumption.  
Playful tactic is also used for the purpose of amusing and dis-identify managers from hegemony of strategic management |
| Intimate      | Managers use intimate tactic to construct their existence, subjectivity and identity in terms of strategy work. Moreover, managers also use |
intimate rhetoric to describe their own personal, sensitive, private feeling related to strategy

Source: Suominen 2009: 93-96

In order to clarify and demonstrate what these tactics are, I again present some quotes from Suominen & Mantere (2010) and Suominen (2009) as examples of how manager use macro-discourse of strategy in creative ways for their own purposes.

Example of instrumental tactic: “[company] strategy limits the scope of the business units, but as such, a business unit can create its own strategy rather freely under those boundaries.”—said by a business unit manager (Suominen & Mantere 2010: 233)

Example of playful tactic: “When the new employees arrive and when the new strategy period begins, a sort of strategy booklet is delivered to every employee [of Insurance]. It was like Mao’s Red Book”—said by a manager when he/she describes the company effort to communicate strategy (ibid: 234). In this quote, it can be seen that the sense of humour is central and strategy communication is taken playfully rather than seriously.

Example of intimate tactic: “Of course I know it [Polytechnic’s strategy] quite well, because I have had to swallow it. […] But it has been shoved down your throat, given to you ready-made. You have learned here over the years that [strategies] are not worth questioning. If you do, your faculty will face revenge by the top management.”—said by a manager. In this quote, it can be seen clearly that this manager dis-identify him/herself from strategy. Moreover, from this quote we can also recognize the significant emotion of fear and insecurity (ibid: 235)

**Dynamic of framework**

According to Suominen (2009:79) strategy consumption happens between structure and subjects, between dominant strategy discourses and the way manager use them. Firstly managers use macro-discourses of strategy to (re)produce strategy, portraying it as management discipline peculiar to the managers’ organization. The purpose of this discursive practice, according to the author, is to bring strategy into beings. Secondly after (re)producing strategy, managers use or poach tactically for their own purposes.
According to the author, it is important to bear in mind that to comprehend strategy consumption both primary local context (the case organization) and wider societal context that hosts macro-discourses of strategy need to be taken into account. (Ibid)

**Figure 4: Strategy consumption process**

Source: Suominen 2009: 79

I have discussed the framework of strategy consumption developed in Suominen (2009). Comprehending components of framework, theory and premise behind the framework is critical for executing my study. In the next section, I present the research methodology and research setting followed by data analysis and discussion.
3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Qualitative research principle

According to Patton (2002: 12), there is no concrete recipe or formula in making methods decision; and the choices of research method are dependent on purpose of study. Considering the purpose of my study and the relative strengths of qualitative methods, I employ qualitative research methods to answer my research questions. In the following paragraphs, firstly I re-state the purpose of my study and then present the strength of qualitative method to justify my method choice.

Suominen (2009) built up a framework in which he adopted the term ‘consumption’ to explain and display the ways that top and middle managers use strategy discourse in their daily work. He called such usage ‘strategy consumption’. As a result, he found that strategy or strategy discourse in particular was consumed in more creative and improvisatory ways than what traditional strategy research has shown (ibid). In this study, being inspired by Suominen (2009)’s findings I employ the strategy consumption framework to explain the way that operative managers consume strategy in their talk. In particular, the aim is to explore what kinds of discursive resources and discursive practices that the operative managers use when they consume strategy. However, my purpose is not to build a new model of strategy consumption, but rather to examine Suominen (2009)’s framework at operative manager level. In this sense, my study is carried out in a deductive logic.

With this study, I hope to contribute to practice oriented and discursive perspectives research a deep understanding to knowledge about strategy practices, performed by operative managers in. For this reason, qualitative approach is appropriate since qualitative research is used (1) to address “how” question, (2) to comprehend the world from the perspective of those studied and (3) to examine and articulate processes (Pratt, 2009). Such functions and benefits of qualitative approach are in line with the purpose of my study. Moreover, qualitative approach also provides rich and deep data from the subject’s perspectives, facilitating the study of issues in depth and detail (Patton 2002: 14).
3.2. Data collection

In this section, I present the unit of analysis, the choice of sampling and the process of collecting data. Such choices and processes are derived from the qualitative approach. I decided to collect data from a particular case company which provide an appropriate strategy context for my study. In fact, when I approached the case company and conducted data collection, it was undergoing many discussions across the organization regarding strategy including strategy reviewing, formulation and implementation. Discussion and activities relating to strategy formulation and implementation presented as a key theme in top, middle and operative mangers’ activities. Therefore, given the purpose of my study which is to examine the strategy consumption at operative managers, such context is potential in providing me rich data to answer the research questions.

The case company

The case company (henceforth Industrial) has a base in Finland, but operates in many parts of the world. It is important to bear in mind that the Industrial in my study doesn’t have any relation to Industrial mentioned in Suominen (2009). I name my case organization Industrial mainly to refer to the field that it currently has operations in. Operating in B2B setting, Industrial manufactures industrial products and delivers services for several customer segments, and has maintained a strong position not only in Finnish market but also in global market for a long time. In term of strategy, Industrial clearly defines its vision; then formulates the grand strategy (strategy at corporate level) which, according to internal strategy material, helps Industrial to get its vision. Moreover, in line with the grand strategy, Industrial also creates specific strategic initiatives (henceforth Alpha initiatives). Such Alpha initiatives which define the focus areas and relating strategic objectives are supposed to facilitate the strategy implementation at Industrial.

The Alpha initiatives have been spread across the Industrial as an attempt of top executives in driving the whole company to reach the desire targets. It is emphasized that everyone in Industrial needs to implement Alpha initiatives which in turn will result in reaching the strategic goals and company’s vision. Moreover, each business line in
Industrial has its own Alpha initiatives which are derived from the Alpha initiative at corporate level. In practice, Alpha initiatives for business units are formulated by referencing to Alpha initiatives at a higher level, and aggregating inputs or ideas of operative managers. Hence, it can be said that in Industrial operative managers influence the Alpha initiatives formulation at some extend, but the final, official initiatives is the decisions of top and middle managers. By focusing on operative managers, I would like to examine how they consume the Alpha initiatives which are truly imposed on them.

In 2013, due to the extremely challenging market environment, not only Industrial but also its competitor suffered from significant decline in profitability. To tackle the challenge, Industrial implemented certain strategic changes to get recovery, including changing organizational structure and modifying Alpha initiatives and relevant strategic targets. Since the beginning of 2014, it has been written clearly in the strategy material of Industrial that the most important target and the key Alpha objectives are to achieve profitability improvement. The Alpha initiatives even clearly define the key actions which Industrial’s personnel need to take to achieve the profitability improvement target. Since 2014, top executives at corporate levels, as well as senior managers at business unit level have been spending profound efforts to communicate the strategic change through team meetings and strategy workshops. At some business units, lower level managers, such as operative managers are involved in strategy planning sessions which allows senior managers collects their feedback and opinions regarding strategic targets and initiatives. In summary, all of efforts that top executives at Industrial have put in promoting Alpha initiatives can be seen as an attempt to achieve managerial hegemony and consistency which is believed as critical factor to guarantee a successful strategy implementation.

**Unit of analysis**

According to Patton (2002: 229), a good starting point for selecting and deciding unit of analysis is to think about: what we want to be able to say about at the end of the study. At the end of my study, I would like to comprehend and display the way operative managers practice strategy discourses in their daily work and demonstrate such findings in a framework. Therefore, I take individual operative managers in Industrial as units of
analysis in my study. In other words, I treat each interview as a separate unit of analysis, trying to make sense of the story that emerges from each interview. The next section presents my sampling choice and the rationale behind that.

**Sampling**

I use a technique known as intensity sampling (Patton 2002: 234) to seek out interviews. According to Patton, this technique, derived from purposeful sampling approach, consists of selecting a relatively small number of “information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely”. Such information-rich cases provide more insights and in-depth understanding (Patton ibid) which facilitate the purpose of qualitative inquiry. Particularly, in the context of my case company, operative managers whose work is closely related to company’s strategy are the information rich cases. Data collected from those operative managers manifest the strategy consumption (the phenomenon) intensively. However, the challenge I encountered is how to select “information-rich” operative managers. In other words, I needed to figure out the way to identify and contact the “right” operative managers in Industrial.

At the beginning, when approaching Industrial, I was connected with Industrial’s strategy manager. After understanding the purpose of my study and my data collection plan, the strategy manager connected me with business development manager who then introduced me to two heads of business units at Industrial. I interviewed the heads of business units and asked for further possible contacts of middle managers. After interviewing the middle managers, I again asked for possible contacts of operative managers. These interviews also help me to understand the context and the strategy process of their business units which in turn provides me ideas to modify the interview guide. When asking for the recommendation of further contacts of operative manager, I clearly emphasized the idea that I wanted to interview operative managers whose work were closely related to current strategy plan and Alpha initiatives. The support of top and middle managers at Industrial helps me to guarantee the high level of rich information in my sampling because they know which operative managers are suitable with my study. Finally, my sampling comprises of 8 operative managers whose responsibilities are mainly about business development, technical manager, production managers. Moreover, the scope of work of those operative manage is global.
Table 5: Summary of interviewee profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Years of working in Industrial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department director</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production technology manager</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement Manager</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department general manager</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology manager</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product sales manager</td>
<td>27 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology manager</td>
<td>20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of service production in Asian Pacific</td>
<td>More than 10 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: interviews at Industrial

Conducting interview

The research question is “How do operative managers consume strategy *in their talks*”; hence the data in my study are mostly linguistic and qualitative. In particular, the semi-structured interviews are employed as the major means of collecting such linguistic data because it is possible to ask for elaboration if some points are unclear or need more investigation. The interview is also appropriate due to the exploratory nature of my study as I clarified in the justification of qualitative research method use.

The interviews were conducted with the support of digital telecommunication system of Industrial because all of operative managers participating in my interviews were not located in Helsinki. However, such setting did not cause any major problem for data reliability. Each semi-interview took 1-1.5 hour and was recorded upon the interviewees’ approval. Moreover, prior each interview a short email was sent to informants, briefly introducing myself and clearly stating that my purpose. The interviewing language is English which is considered as the official working language at
Industrial. In the interview situation, the interviewees were encouraged to share their thoughts, experiences freely since their identity was kept confidential.

Basing on the study of Suominen (2009) I created my interview guide and added some modifications so that it was appropriate to operative managers and to the case organization’s context. As mentioned in the sampling technique section, prior to the interview with operative managers, I had opportunities to get familiar with the context and background information at Industrial by interview top and middle managers. Basing on such insights, my interview guide focuses on Alpha initiatives which operative managers work closely with. The official interview guide was divided into two parts. The first one consists of generic questions to discover interviewee’s perception and understanding about strategy concept and strategy process at Industrial. The second one focuses on the relation between interviewee’s daily works and Alpha initiatives.

3.3. Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Discourse analysis has been long perceived as a methodology to investigate the process whereby realities such as societies, organization, strategy etc are constructed and maintained through discourse (Phillips et al, 2008:770; Hardy et al 2000). My research draws on critical discourse analysis—a form of discourse analysis developed by Norman Fairclough (Fairclough 1992) which is considered as holistic approach to produce comprehensive insights into discourse research (Suominen 2009:56-58). Particularly, Fairclough’s methodology links the micro scale of everyday language use and macro scale of social structure while traditional analytical approaches tend to examine discourse’s aspects either too narrowly or too broadly (Phillips et al 2008). In fact, some traditional approaches are very helpful to analyse the micro process of communicative interaction (micro-linguistic aspects of discourse), they however “are much less useful in explaining how the social world is produced through acts of intersubjective meaning making” (macro social aspects). In contrast, some authors focus much more on the relationship between discourse and social systems rather than the everyday process of language use and sense making. (ibid)

The main reason for choosing such critical discourse analysis lies in its applicability to strategy consumption framework. Indeed Suominen & Mantere (2010:224) said that the
dynamics of strategy consumption framework also fit Fairclough’s (1992:73) three dimensional concept of discourse as it bridges the micro and macro level of discourses. Particularly, the macro-discourses represent the social practice while (re)production and usage are discursive practices (Suomine & Mantere ibid). Moreover, Suominen (2009) itself significantly adopts discourse analysis in general and Fairclough’s (1992) critical discourse analysis in particular for building the strategy consumption framework.

In my study, I apply Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis as a methodological framework, guiding my analysis process. In other words, I use Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis mainly as a guideline, adopting its spirit for the purpose of making sense of my data and construct analysis approach which is similar to what Suominen did in his research (2009). In the following, I present the key underlying arguments and elements in the framework critical discourse analysis which are relevant and valuable for my study.

3.3.1. **“Discourse” concept from Fairclough (1992)**

There are many views regarding the concept of discourse. According to Fairclough (1992: 63), discourse should be understood “as a form of social practice, rather than a purely individual activity or a reflex of situational variables”. There are two important implications derived from such definition. Firstly, due to this definition, discourse is a mode of action, a form in which people may act upon the world and especially upon each other, as well as a mode of representation. In my opinion, this sentiment implies that people in relation to discourse have an active role, being able to employ or use discourses for their own purposes. Secondly, discourse is both socially constrained and socially constitutive. (Ibid).

Fairclough (1992:64) also identify three types of constructive effect of discourse. Firstly, discourse constructs “social identity” and “subject positions”. Secondly, it helps construct social relationship between people. And finally, it contributes to the construction of system of knowledge and belief. (Ibid). These constructive effects are the foundation which Suominen (2009:72) relied on to identify and categorize the macro-discourses presented in his data.
Concept of discourse according to Fairclough (1992: 3-4) has, at least, three dimensions. First, discourse can be considered as text, a product of text production process, such as articles, books, piece of song, a speech, etc. Second, the concept of discourse emphasize the processes of producing, interpreting and disturbing in which there exists dynamic interaction between producer, such as: speaker and writer and receivers, such as: addressee and reader. And final, the notion of discourse is also associated with particularly way of structuring areas of knowledge and social practices. This dimension has a root in social theory. Fairclough emphasizes that those three dimensions exist simultaneously and intertwine in any discursive event (ibid).

Recognizing the importance of language analysis in studying social change, Fairclough (1992) establish the critical analysis framework, incorporating these two analyses together to provide a practically usable method for studying social change through language use since these two topics are linked together (1992: 1). As we will see, the framework consists of three levels of analysis which are consistent with three dimensions of discourse.

3.3.2. Critical discourse analysis framework

Figure 5: Three dimensional conception of discourse

Source: Fairclough (1992:63-73)
This CDA framework is Fairclough’s attempt to bring together three analytical traditions (1992:63-73). While textual analysis level, in the centre of the model, focuses on micro text/language use, social practice analysis examines discourse at the level of social structure and macro-sociology in which the discourse is embedded (ibid). Between these two levels, there is discursive practice analysis level paying attention to intermediating practices whereby discourse at macro-sociology or social practice is actively (re)produced, distributed and consumed (Fairclough 1992:78). Suominen (2009), Phillip et al (2008) and Vaara (2010) are some typical researches that apply Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis framework to examine the text production, distribution and consumption. According to Suominen (2009: 58), “consumption practice” in his framework is “a discursive practice mediates between the text, the discursive activities of managers, and the social practice of strategy”. In fact, three elements above, namely text, discursive practice and social practices are the reflection of the concept of discourse above.

To my understanding, Fairclough urges researchers to analyse discourses at three levels, namely, text, discursive practice and social practice simultaneously (1992: 63-100). In other words, analysing one dimension, for example: discursive practice, should be put in the relation with the others, for example: social practices and text. Fairclough (ibid) also suggests a more detailed guideline to apply his framework in practice. Particularly analysing text should take into account four features of text, namely vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure. Likewise, analysing the discursive practices should involve the force of utterances, coherence and intertextuality of text. In term of social practice dimension of discourse, we should pay attention to ideology and power. The below table is analysis checklist extracted from Fairclough (1992:63-100, 231-238) which I will apply in my data analysis section.

Table 6: Critical discourse analysis checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The focus for analysis</th>
<th>Example of guiding questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Text analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>- The alternative wordings and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Does the text contain new</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their political and ideological significance.

- How the meanings of words come into contention within wider struggles.

- Metaphors, ideological and political import of particular metaphors and conflict between alternative metaphors.

**Grammar**

- Assess three functions of language, namely transitivity, theme and modality; and dimensions of meaning.

- Transitivity: to check whether particular process types (relational process or action process) and participants are favoured in the text, what choices are made in voice, how significant is the normalization of the processes. What are cultural, ideological, political and theoretical factors underlying such choices?

- Theme: to see if there is a discernible pattern in the text’s thematic structure.

- Modality: assess the relative

lexical items and if so what theoretical, cultural or ideological significance do they have?

Does the text contain evidence of over-wording or rewording?

Are passive clauses frequent, and if so what functions do they appear to serve?

What is the thematic structure of the text and what assumptions underlie it?

Are modalities predominantly subjective or objective?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Import of modality features for social relations in the discourse and controlling representations of reality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohesion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text structure</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Discursive practice analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Inter-discursivity</strong></th>
<th>Focus on text production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Specify what discourse types are drawn upon in the discourse sample under analysis and how</td>
<td>Does the sample draw upon more than one genre?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What activity type(s), style(s), discourse(s) are drawn upon?</td>
<td>What sorts of transformation does this type of discourse sample undergo?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Intertextual chains</strong></th>
<th>Focus on text distribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Specify the distribution of a discourse sample by describing the intertextual chains it enters into</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coherence
- Focus on text consumption
  - Investigate how text are interpreted and coherent link between sentences

How ambivalent is the text for particular interpreters?

**Social practice:** according to Fairclough (1992:237-238), the analysis of social practice is too complex to be reduced into checklist. One should analyse social practice with the focus on nature of social practice of which the discourse practice is a part.

Source: Fairclough (1992:63-100, 231-238)

This CDA is appropriate for the scope of and the idea of my thesis. The emphasis of interplay between macro and micro discourse in CDA are useful to comprehend and establish the (re)production stage wherein organizational actors bring strategy into being at both societal and organizational level. According to Luke (2002: 100, cited in Vaara et al 2010), CDA is described as “shunting back and forth between microanalysis of texts, using varied tools of linguistic, semiotic and literary analysis and the macro analysis of social formations, institutions and power relations that these texts index and construct”. Thus, employing the CDA would help to discover the social, societal, political and economic assumption (macro discourses) in discourse and text which are (re)produces by actors.

### 3.3.3. Intertextuality

Intertextuality is one of the central themes underlying behind CDA framework (Fairclough 1992:84-102). Intertextuality refers to “the productivity of texts, to how text can transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions (genres, discourses) to generate new ones”. In other words, it is the fact that “specific other texts are overtly drawn upon within a text”. In intertextuality perception, texts transform the past into the present in conventional or creative ways (ibid). According to Hardy et al (2000:1245), during the process of mobilizing discourses as strategic resources, strategy practitioners
take advantage of the intertextuality of discourse, *borrowing* the concepts from elsewhere to initiate new ones.

Metadiscourse is a peculiar form of manifest intertextuality. Metadiscourse implies that the person is situated above or outsider her own discourse, and is in a position to control and manipulate it. Moreover, in metadiscourse Fairclough also portrays text producer as having ability to distances herself from some level of the text, treating the distanced level as if it were another, external, text. (ibid:122)

Again the notion about intertextuality in general and metadiscourse in particular complement the strategy consumption framework. The intertextuality elaborates the transformation of discourses from wider social context into local context of the case organization while the metadiscourse presents another perspective about relationship between discourse and subjectivity.

### 3.4. Data analysis process

According to Patton (2002:434), purpose guides analysis. In other words, decision on data analysis approach and method should take the purpose of study into account. As mentioned in the “Research Aim” section and the reasoning for the choice of qualitative research principle, the purpose of my study is to examine Suominen (2009)’s framework of strategy consumption at operative manager level. Generally speaking, my analysis is structured according to the basis of prior research in order to test a previous framework (it is the framework of strategy consumption in my study) in a different situation. For such reason, data analysis process of this study is carried out with deductive content analysis approach (see Elo et al 2008 and Mayring 2000).

According to Elo et al (2008:107), deductive analysis process consists of three main phases, namely preparation, organization and reporting. The table below summarize the main goal and the necessary steps in preparation and organization phase (ibid:109-112).
Table 7: Steps in deductive analysis process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phases</th>
<th>Main Goal</th>
<th>Steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>To become immersed in the data</td>
<td>- Decide unit of analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Become completely familiar with data as a whole by reading all data materials thoroughly and in several times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>To make sense of the data, to learn “what is going on” and to obtain a sense of whole</td>
<td>- Develop a categorization matrix. The matrix consists of definitions of main and sub categories, coding rules and examples. Such definitions and rules are derived from the theory that the study bases on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Code data by using the guidance in the categorization matrix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting</td>
<td>To report the analysing process and the results</td>
<td>Present models, conceptual system, conceptual map or categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Elo et al 2008:109-112

Mayring (2000) presents the steps model within qualitative content analysis, emphasizing the precision and transparency of categorization matrix.
However, due to the differences between operative managers and top managers in term of subject positions in strategy discourses as being discussed in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, strategy consumption practices at those two groups are unlikely to be completely similar. Therefore, I, while analysing data in deductive fashion, also try to examine data “afresh for undiscovered patterns and emergent understanding” (Patton 2002:454). This means that within the analysis process, I still keep my mind open, looking for new patterns emerging from my data.

In this section, I have presented the reasoning behind my choice of deductive analysis process. I also review the deductive analysis procedure developed by other scholars as a guideline for my analysis. In the “Data Analysis” section below, I apply such procedure to my actual analysis process.
4 DATA ANALYSIS

I analyse my data by using the framework of strategy consumption (Suominen 2009) as theoretical lens for categorizing and coding data. Particularly, the first stage is to identify the macro-discourses that are used by operative managers; then to put them into categories. At this stage, in order to identify the macro-discourses, I follow the same process that Suominen did that is by asking a) how the talk constructs the systems of knowledge and beliefs in the case of strategy, i.e. what strategy is according to it, and b) how it is practiced, c) how talk constructs social identities and subject positions, and d) how it produces social relationships between people (Suominen 2009:72). Then, the next stage is to read the whole data set again in order to see how strategy is (re)produced and used by operative managers with macro-discourse materials.

In my case, I use section 2.2 in which I review and summarize strategy consumption framework as the preference when analysis data. Establishing the categorization matrix as suggested by Elo et al 2008 and Mayring 2000 would be duplicated work.

4.1. Macro-discourses of strategy

In my case organization, I can only identify the presence of mechanism, pragmatism and humanism macro discourse. However, it is interesting to see that the operative manager revealed another aspect of mechanism macro discourse.

As Suominen (2009:83-84) described, mechanism macro discourse construct strategy work as a top-down procedure in which strategy message cascades downward throughout organizational layers. The position of top managers is still critical for strategy work since people on the top of management make strategy and then cascade down for implementation. In my data, I realize that operative managers also construct strategy work as a process or a working machine but with a bottom up fashion. In their opinion, they travel here and there, talk with different kinds of employee and understand “daily operation” which “managers are not seeing that much”.

“You cannot just say: it is the strategy and for you. It means that it is the same for all. I mean you have to see in which business environment you are working
in and then the culture. And that is what we have done at <department> at least.”

“I was going between our locations and I am talking with the blue collar, the white collar and management there so I have quite a quite nice big picture how to realize this. So I guess that could be something I could bring more to this kind of planning because like often these guys who are making this strategy and plan they are not seeing that much things of daily operation in the broad level.”

Moreover, operative managers emphasize that strategy should be adapted to specific market. In order words, making strategy should take the market situation into consideration

“We see very different customer behaviour in different market areas, like North America, South America, Europe, China. It is a completely different needs and behaviour so, of course we need and we have strategy how to approach different market area. That is of course a must. Strategy is like a way to approach different market.”

All of the above arguments imply that the starting point for strategy making is the local market situation and the personnel who understand the market and daily operations. It demonstrates how strategy work should operate in a bottom up fashion. For that reason, I argue that the mechanism macro discourse can also be used to represent the bottom up working procedure as well. More quotes and arguments supporting this argument can be found in section 4.2.5 and 4.2.6.

4.2. Strategy (re)production

In this section, I will show how strategy is (re)produced by operative managers on Industrial. During this analysis phase, I focus on two issues

- How do operative managers reproduce nature of strategy? (i.e. what is strategy?)
- How do operative managers reproduce different subject positions in strategy and the relation between those positions? (i.e top managers and operative managers)

This strategy reproduction, according to the figure 4, is a component in strategy consumption framework. According to Suominen (2009:75), managers at first use macro-discourse as discursive resources to “define strategy at societal level, adapting it to their organization here and there”. The purpose of such discursive practice is to generate a foundation for further usage tactics (ibid).

4.2.1. A plan for organization, to gain profitability increase or to prevent profitability decrease

“More likely I would like to see there are kinds of plan because that should be the plan, plan to go forward. That is strategy.”

“How the [Alpha initiatives] are formulated in such a way that if we try to reach them, we really improve. We will never meet all the targets of course but we take that in the right direction.”

“It [strategy] is good way to communicate to people where the management of the company goes and what is the target for the future”

“The strategy always means to go somewhere. The meaning of strategy is that we have a plan to go somewhere, better business or better operation or something better.”

These quotes above depict strategy as “the plan” for the interviewees’ organization. In particular, “the plan” per se consists of targets that if people “try to reach them”, they go forward “in the right direction”. In particular, as we can see, in all of the quotes above except for the third one, there exists a consistent formula to define strategy:

Strategy = noun + to infinitive + object/adverb

For example: a plan to go somewhere, way to communicate to people, plan to go forward. Obviously, such structure signifies the purpose of having strategy which is to go forwards or go to better places.
This kind of reproduction resembles the way that rational strategy research conceptualizes “strategy” discussed in section 2.1.1. The elements of “right direction”, “targets” and “plan to go forwards” in the above quotes remind us about the conventional idea about strategy which is “to transform the firm from the present position to the position described by the objectives” (Ansoff 1965: 205).

We can notice that in the second and the third quote, ‘targets’ are incorporated in the definition, being considered as integral parts residing in strategy. In term of strategy targets and strategy execution, in the second quote, one operative manager also recognizes the character of imperfection when he said that “we will never meet all the targets”. However, what is interesting here is the normalization of such imperfection by adding the adverb - “of course” at the end of the clause, as if such imperfection was obvious, not surprising and accepted. Thus it can be said that in his perspective strategy or strategy execution in particular, is problematic inherently. Nevertheless, such imperfection does not necessarily result in failure because the operative manager still see himself going in the right direction without meeting all the targets. This clearly means that even though targets are the integral part of strategy, the work he takes to reach those targets are more important, not the targets per se. Therefore, strategy-as-action is underscored rather than strategy-as-nouns.

When I took a further step to identify “the right direction” which was mentioned, operative managers associated it with the profitability.

“I would say there is huge potential. And it is just how we are following the strategy and then reach the target for growth [growth in profitability]”

“The [Alpha initiative] is important because, behind those, it is result coming. If we are not doing these actions, then the figure in the last line is red. If we are doing well then there is black number. Of course, it is very important to take these actions and to get profitability out.

“If we don’t have a good strategy, we cannot just be people standing all over the world, just to show up there without the good strategy because then the expected profit will be gone for many years”
“I think that in the company overall strategy that [a particular business line] must grow because this business is shrinking, so we need concentrate more and make more service products and that kind of products we can sell. And business of [a particular business line] must grow. I think that is the clear strategy for the company.”

The first two quotes give us the impression that strategy is reproduced as the profit-making tool. This type of reproduction has a root in rational strategy approach in which strategy is considered as the source of corporate’s profitability; and the success of strategy is evaluated in terms of profits. (Whittington 2001). Indeed, the structure: (if) clause A, then clause B, is used in the first two quotes to express the cause and effect. In such structure, clause A causes or results in clause B. As we can see, according to the operative managers “following the strategy” or “doing these actions” will result in profitability growth. In this sense, profitability growth is the better places mentioned above.

It is interesting to see that in the second quote, the operative manager uses the metaphors to associate strategy with profitability. Particularly, the “red numbers” and “black numbers” are borrowed from financial accounting rhetoric. According to Fairclough (1992:194) metaphor reveals the text producers’ belief and system of knowledge through the way they construct their reality. In this case, we can see a very close connection between strategy and financial aspect of organization in this interviewee’s perspective.

The third quote starts with a negative sentence. The combination of negative sentence and cause-and-effect structure signifies the importance role of strategy in organization’s profitability. By saying that “without the good strategy, the expected profit will be gone”, operative manager seems to reproduce strategy not only as a profit-making tool but also a defensive tool, preventing profitability from decreasing. In either ways, profitability is still the central theme.
4.2.2. **Strategy formulating is top management’s responsibility**

This type of reproduction discusses strategy work with the focus on top management’s responsibility. Operative managers described strategy work as the job of top managers and strategy was portrayed as if it had been given from the high level.

“I don’t know the process well in our company, how they define, I don’t know the practical. It came from Head Quarter”

“Especially, strategy itself is more top management issues to control how company continues forward”

“The normal employees don’t involve in the formulation of the strategy. It comes from the top”

“Anyhow, if we going back to the making process of [Alpha initiative], of course, there are something that has been given even for [the business unit] already before the [Alpha initiative] process, so there are something being given from above the business. These are strategy guidelines and these should be included somehow in the [Alpha initiative]”

“There are decision maker on the management and they [strategic targets] are driven down, through organization [...]. So they are both, some of those are motivated by money and some of those are just given and maybe you are not using those too much time to think whether they motivate you. It is the task given for you and you just perform that.”

The impression of top-down approach in Industrial’s strategy making process can be clearly taken out from these quotes. In particular, the first two quotes associate strategy with the “top managers’ issue”. The personal pronouns “I” and “normal employees” versus “they” and “decision makers” also manifest the distance between two groups of subjects. Then the last two quotes elaborate further the top-down approach in Industrial.

Especially, the last two quotes are full of agentless passive voice. If we take into account the fact that strategy is more top management issues as mentioned above, then we know that agent is omitted in this case because it is already known. In other words,
the ideology that top management’s *cascading* strategy is normalized in this organization. This type of reproduction seems to depict a picture of hierarchical organizational structure which signifies a distance between top managers and the rest organizational member. Again, this type of reproduction derived from the conventional strategy approach which portrays the top managers as chief strategists.

“My participation is mainly listening and sometimes answers in kinds of employee interview but not very active participation. But of course, management level will also do that, I am not working in that management level so... I am okay with this situation at this moment”

**Question:** How do you see the role of giving and receiving feedback? **Answer:**

“I am not sure that it has a very big effect. I a little bit doubt that if we give the feedback, does is actually go to the people who actually make the strategy, do they ever hear about this feedback. The feedback does not have significant effect.”

“This is like a ready-made target. Management who established the [Alpha initiatives], I think our voice is not in that discussion. Perhaps it is possible that our previous comment has taken notices before this draft being made. But officially no”

“I think that when there is establishing process going on, employee can’t say comment but afterward when strategy has established, then of course everybody has to hear and participate to establish, to take their work”

The previous quotes contain the discourses impeding participation that Mantere & Vaara (2008) has discovered. In particular, Mantere & Vaara (2008: 341) argues that the main reason for non-participatory issue lies in the fundamental assumptions about the nature of strategy work. And there are three central discourses, namely “mystification”, “disciplining” and “technologization” that associate with non-participatory approach to strategy work. The shared characteristic in term of subject positions in those discourses is the portraying top managers as central, key strategists while organizational members as followers. (ibid: 354). Obviously, the operative managers in Industrial reproduced
their subject position strictly as a follower in strategy work by being satisfied with the not-very-active participation and agreeing with the state of no voice in the discussion. Moreover, the wide use of modality, such as: “I am not sure”, “I think”, “I am a little bit doubt that”, “Perhaps it is possible that” is a manifestation of operative managers’ weak power in relation to strategy work. By constructing strategy as something-being-given and including participation-impeding discourses such as “no voice in the discussion”, “ready-made targets”, etc in reproduction phase, operative managers reveal their perception of the one-way, top down strategy communication. But it is important to notice that operative manager accept the situation, “living with what they have and do the best” as one operative manager said.

And the idea that operative manager use to justify this type of reproduction is:

“So I believe that top management who are working with official strategy. They know what are happening on the fields and the factory, so that they can take actions into strategy”

“We can make decision easier in that process where not many people involved. I know the persons behind. They know the business and market situation very well. So the [Alpha initiative] are well selected”

“The company is not the democracy. It is something that is owned by a group of people and they are the ones that make decision and point out where to go. The others are employees.”

In those quotes, operative managers legitimize top managers’ power in strategy process by provoking their belief in top managers’ knowledge. Indeed, “they” representing for top management is the theme of the above quote i.e “they know what is happening on the field and the factory”, “they know the business and market situation very well”, “they take actions” and “they make decisions”. According to Fairclough (1992:183), theme can give insights into common sense assumptions about social order and rhetorical strategies. In this case, the theme reveals operative managers’ common sense assumption about top management’s knowledge and abilities.
Furthermore it can be seen that in operative managers’ perspective, being aware of “the business”, “the market” and frontline issues such as “happenings on the field” is the key for a person to participate in strategy work. And since operative managers attach the ability to have such critical information with top managers, they appreciate the top managers’ critical role in formulating strategy.

Interestingly, the last quote legitimizes top managers’ authority by using analogy. There are obvious comparisons: “organization” versus ”democracy” and “group of owners” versus “employees”. Owner in Industrial context refers to the major shareholders. Such comparisons are likewise employed for the purpose of highlighting the authority of top managers.

And in terms of macro-discourses, in this type of reproduction, the mechanism macro-discourse plays a crucial role. In particular, the way operative managers portray strategy as something being given from above and the involvement of strategic target are the clear influence by mechanism rhetoric. Furthermore, the presence of mechanism macro-discourse can also be identified by the fact that top manager is perceived as central, key strategist who cascade strategy throughout the organization.

4.2.3. **Effective strategy work requires a high level of concretization**

At some point, operative managers underscore the idea that strategy has to be “clear”, “simple”, “concrete” and “detailed”.

“I would like to see the more simplicity of strategy, whatever we are presenting. So that even in the third page, one can see clearly what does it mean or what is the target”

“It [the Alpha initiative] should have some clearly defined and measurable number somehow. Then it come very clear targets because everything is counted on in our organization by numbers more or less.”

“Strategy is more concrete than mission or vision.”
“Strategy should be clear and simple. And it is easy to understand. I think that is important. It should not be too long, not too many pages, but still very easy to read and understand.”

“Strategy implementation is mainly about how management communicates and explains that strategy to us in a lower level. Get us to understand what the strategy is and where it takes. It is more like communication. It is important in a sense that the decisions top management makes are explained to the all of us who are working in organization. So we get a better understanding of why company going this or that direction”

In operative managers’ perspective, strategy has to be clear and simple which means that it must contain “the target” and “measurable number”. Further, the justification for decisions behind strategy according to operative managers needs to be clear as well. This demand for concretization and articulation is another evidence of the dominance of rational strategy ethos. As it can be seen in the table 1, one of the basic premises of rational strategy approach is that “these strategies should be explicit and, if possible, articulated, which also favours their being kept simple”. In other words, operative managers in this case take the simple, detail and concrete character of strategy for granted.

Although it is clear that operative managers require strategy to be articulated, the personnel who are responsible for such task are unmentioned in the quotes. The passive voice is used to emphasize the course of action that makes strategy explicit, simple and clear. However, the agent is again omitted. As the operative managers consider strategy as top management’s issue as mentioned above, I think we can logically assume that in the operative managers’ opinion, top management is responsible for such articulating task. And the following quotes justify such demand for articulation.

“The more concrete they are, the better they are getting ready, meaning that they are good KPI to follow than those when they are not clear.”

“It should be explained to people, how in their daily work, they can implement those and work toward the target. So nowadays, lots of us are a little bit unsure
what they should change in their daily work so they could go toward this [Alpha initiative] targets”

In operative managers’ opinion, a clear strategy results in the “good KPI” which is considered as a guideline, steering employees’ daily activities. As these quotes explain, if strategy is clear and explained to people, they can “work toward the target” and know “how to change in their daily work”. In this sense, it is the targets in strategy that helps operative managers bring it to their daily work and modify their daily work easier.

It is easy to identify the pragmatism rhetoric in those quotes. This type of reproduction requires strategy to be “simple”, “clear” and “detailed” so that operative managers can modify their daily work accordingly. The demand for simplicity and articulation demonstrate that operative managers want to know what strategy means in practices and in his daily work. In this sense, they bring strategy from “a plan”, “top managers’ issues” to practical issue such as “targets” and “KPI”. In term of subject position, by showing the demand to have the KPI to follow and the targets to work toward, operative managers seems to construct their position as the doer in implementation phase. It seems that operative managers follow the given strategy by focusing on the target and KPI derived from such strategy.

4.2.4. Strategy work is about follow-up

When being asked about the most important thing that needs to be done to implement strategy successfully, operative managers responded as bellows

“Follow-up is the most important, making sure that this [Alpha initiative] are getting through and really done... I personally feel that without follow up, nothing happens”

“Of course the most important thing is to communicate the [Alpha initiative], discuss them and then to come back to it during the year and see what has been done”

“When you discuss it [The Alpha initiative] one time, it does not mean that they are inside of the brain forever so we should keep refreshing.”
“I think the key is communication and follow up and we set frequent follow up, depending things are going in right directions. If not then the corrective actions should be done”

Follow-up in those quotes is discussed as an integral job in strategy implementation. We can see that “communication” and “follow up” are the central theme in this type of reproduction. The meaning of these two is overlapped at some extent, but both of them share the same idea about controlling in implementation. The operative managers when they reproduce the strategy work emphasize the importance of checking “what has been done” relating to strategy. Furthermore, such follow up should be carried out in a “frequent” basis, “during the year” which indicates the continuous process. The purpose of such “communication” and “follow up” is to see whether organization is “going in the right directions” so that corrective action could be done promptly. It means that in the perspective of operative manager implementation phase isn’t unproblematic, but rather contain inherent problems. Another purpose is to keep the strategic message refreshing inside the brain. Again mechanism rhetoric is employed in this type of reproduction. Organization is portrayed as a working machine that needs regular check-up to ensure that nothing goes wrong.

In summary the first four types of strategy reproduction obviously contain significant elements of rational strategy approach. Particularly, strategy is reproduced as a plan transforming the organization into the desired state/form in the future. Operative managers advocate the idea that strategy is a means for making profit or preventing profitability from decreasing. Moreover, control, “follow up” and articulation are identified as critical issues which guarantee a successful strategy work. The subject position of top managers is reproduced with the important role in strategy making process, while operative managers are just the passive follower and do not have responsibility in making strategy. In such reproduction, operative managers mainly use mechanism and pragmatism macro-discourses. They reproduce how strategy is cascaded throughout the organization in a top-down approach with mechanistic rhetoric. Operative managers also use pragmatism rhetoric to emphasize their idea that strategy needs to be simple, clear, detailed so that they can bring it to their daily work and modify their daily work accordingly.
However, it is interesting to see that operative managers reproduce strategy by using elements not only in rational strategy approach but also in processual approach. In the following reproductions, operative managers presented the different, but not contrasting perspective about the nature of strategy. They reproduced strategizing not as the job of top management but as collective issue; and strategy is the reflection of environment.

**4.2.5. *Strategy has to be adapted for specific market***

This type of reproduction reflects quite well the central idea in processual approach in which organizational changes follow environmental changes, not another way around (see in section 2.1.2). As we can see, the notion of “adapted strategy” has been emphasized in this strategy reproduction.

“You cannot just say: it is the strategy for you…. I mean you have to see in which business environment you are working in and then the culture. And that is what we have done at [operative managers’ department] at least”

“What I mean is that at this time we focus maybe too much on having big workshops in some areas. Instead, doing opposite, looking first at customers, business potential focus on the sale activities, provide the right technology, and then we should have the local needed workshops to provide that to the customers. So we go from the customers to the operation not from the operation to the customers.”

“I don’t really notice how the strategy is done but I believe it is quite much following the global market situation and then of course the area market situation. Somewhere better strategy is implemented according to how the world is going around.”

“We see very different customer behaviour in different market areas, like North America, South America, Europe and China. It is a completely different needs and behaviour so, of course we need and we have strategy how to approach different market area. That is of course a must. Strategy is like a way to approach different market”
Strategy work is reproduced as a reflection of “how the world is going around” including “global market situation” and “area market situation”. In day-to-day practice, deciding strategic issues should be carried out by “going from the customers to the operation not from the operation to the customers”. These quotes reflect the idea that strategy should not be an intended plan, but rather be emerging from strategic things. This is in line with the ideas about strategy process in processual approach. Moreover, from these quotes, it is clear that the criteria to choose or evaluate strategy, according to these operative managers, lie in the applicability of strategy in specific “business environment”, “the culture”, “customer behaviour” and “customer needs”, rather than the ability to generate profitability as mentioned in section 4.1.1. Although it is not obvious, we still can feel the presence of mechanism macro discourses from the above quotes through mechanistic rhetoric, such as: “implement”, “go from…to, not from…to”, etc.

Reproducing strategy as a reflection of environmental differences also implies a different strategy making manner which will be illustrated in the next section.

4.2.6. Strategy work is collective project in nature

Combining the mechanism macro-discourse and humanistic macro-discourse, operative manager reproduced strategy as a collective work and underscored the importance of participation. In term of contribution, operative managers reproduced their subject position as “progressive strategic entrepreneur whose views and actions should be given priorities” (see Laine & Vaara 2007:45). The following quotes exemplify the collective characters in strategy work that is expressed by the operative managers.

“There must be commitment in lower level of organization. They are responsible to execute the strategy but it really involves for all the levels in organization.”

“As I see and how it should go in [Industrial] is that implementation starts from top management, from the CEO, it goes through the organization, all the level in the same line. In [Industrial] it is not only the top management, but also the middle management and below. Make sure that the message gets through and it turns to actions.”
“One of the important steps in the implementation we have to emphasize is that all of the concerned persons, sales persons, our all groups of persons understand the same thing…. The core idea is everyone understands and moves in the same way to bring the synergy and to bring the result”

“It is most important that you understand where you are in the strategic plan even though your name is not mentioned or organization is not mentioned but somehow you should find out yourself on the plan. I think that is important.”

Participation is the central theme. Notion such as “all the levels in organization” and “all of the concerned persons, sales persons, and our all groups of persons” build up the image of collective strategizing. Although distancing personal pronouns such as “I” versus “they” are still used, mediating and collective subjects such as “all the levels”, “everyone”, “all of the concerned persons” are also drawn on to signify the participation in strategy work.

Particularly, the use of concessive words-“even though” and “but” in the last quote somehow underscore the activeness character in participation. It means that organizational members should actively find their positions in the strategy rather than are driven into participation by command (see Eriksson & Lehtimäki 2001 for ‘participation by command’). Operative managers also emphasize the collective character in strategy work by criticizing the non-collaborating problem. For example, “sometimes it is a little bit frustrating to see some people who are refusing any changes in improvement or something in some locations or some developed organizations”.

In this type of reproduction, strategy work as a whole is not only top managers’ issue any more, but the all of the concerned persons’ issue. The purpose of such involvement is to make sure that strategy turns to actions, bring the synergy and bring the result.

So far, I have presented how operative managers reproduce strategy, strategy work and relevant participants. Such reproduction phase as I mentioned above is a part of strategy consumption framework since it is later drawn on as a foundation for usage tactics. Thus, in the next sections, I present the usage tactic of operative manager. In particular, I analyse what operative manager make something out of strategy and how they do that.
4.3. **Strategy usage**

After identifying the way that operative managers reproduce strategy, I read my data again to figure out what kinds of usage tactics that they use for consumption. This usage phase is also a component of strategy consumption. In other words, I tried to identify the outcome of the process in which operative managers *made of* the Industrial’s strategic change in their talk. However, this analysis phase is somewhat more challenging in comparison to analysing the reproduction phase since this usage stage, the core element of strategy consumption framework, is clandestine and tacit (Suominen 2009:76). According to de Certeau (1984:31), it is even less visible, blending with their surroundings.

4.3.1. **Instrumental usage**

In this type of usage, operative managers in most of the cases used strategy as a guiding tool in their daily activities. At the organizational level, strategy is reproduced as a plan directing organization forward to a better place (see 4.2.1) while at individual level it is also used as a guiding tool for personal or department’s purpose. Unfortunately, I could not find any other purposes in this instrumental usage tactic. The reason for such issue will be presented later in the discussion section.

“In implementation, we have workshop that each team has certain strategy section. Team leaders inform us the latest strategy decision. There are basic information and we have small exercise how to implement that and of course during that section we did not finalize everything but it was a start and after the section everybody finds it easy to think about that in their daily work, and find their own targets in [Alpha initiatives] to make more precise plan for themselves.”

“The [Alpha initiatives] and the actions related to the [Alpha initiative] are not so detailed to tell you exactly what you should do, but it gives you directions and it is up to you to figure out how to really do it”

“My actions are kind of based on these things on the strategy and this [Alpha initiative]”
As the previous quotes explain, strategy is used by operative managers as “a start” to think, to “find their own targets”, ”to make more precise plan for themselves” and “to figure out how to really do it”. In this sense, it seems that operative managers use strategy as a base for their daily activities. One operative manager sees that strategy still provides a certain degree of freedom for their own actions because it is up to them to “figure out how to really do it”. This implies a possibility for operative manager to manoeuvre and manipulate the given strategy. Then, the interviewees continued to illustrate in more detail how they used strategy as a guideline.

“It [strategy] comes first from the top management, then it goes down to the next level which is the [Business Unit’s name] and he [The head of business unit] makes strategy bases on that. And I break it down to fit into [department’s name]

“That are goals or targets set by management, somehow we try to reach those target and that kind of guiding us to the right direction”

“We have some general [Alpha initiative], then we have to make some slight adjustment to [Alpha initiative] so it really fits to the individual business”

“…There are a certain items that we should focus that would be the guideline for us to move forward. For example we have some products that we should focus on, when it comes to daily life, and then we talk about this product with sales representatives, with customers and so on”

Particularly, after strategy is cascaded from the top management, operative managers “make some slight adjustment”, “break it down to fit into” their department. This action can be understood as operative managers’ attempt to make sense of the given strategy and make it habitable for their own department. Then, they also spread the strategic message to “sales representatives” and even to “customers” who are external stakeholders. We can see a good flow of strategic message which give use the impression that operative manager strive to maintain the managerial hegemony that is introduced by top management.
All of the quotes above share a similar structure. They always start with items attached to top management, such as “goals or targets set by top management”, “it comes first from the top management” or “some general [Alpha initiative]”. Then the operative managers extend the first clause by elaborating their further actions relating to those top management’s items. Such structure gives us a clear impression about the transition of strategic message.

As we can see in previous quotes, operative managers employ mechanism macro-discourse to illustrate how they use strategy as an instrument for the purpose of guiding and steering their daily activities. “Objectives”, “goals”, “targets” and the practice of talking strategic message to other internal and external persons are very typical elements of mechanism macro-discourse. Moreover, the picture of strategy message flowing from top management to operative management depicted in the above quotes is also a clear indication of mechanism macro-discourses. The emphasis on connecting the strategy with the operative managers’ daily work, making it habitable in daily work is the evidence for the presence of pragmatism macro-discourses.

4.3.2. Intimate tactics

The intimate tactic at Industrial is used for three purposes. Firstly operative managers use it to demonstrate the detachment between them and organizational strategy. In fact, in Industrial operative managers revealed that there exists a weak link between organizational strategy and their daily job. Secondly, operative managers use the intimate tactic to construct or protect their subjectivity in strategy work. And finally, some operative managers reveal their inspiration or motivating feeling when engaging into strategy work. In my opinion, in intimate tactics usage, the end product of the interaction between operative managers and strategy, in other words the outcome of strategy consumption, is their sentiment of detachment, the self-awareness about their strategic agency and the feeling of motivation. Unlike the instrumental usage tactic which manifests the appreciation of operative managers toward managerial hegemony, the intimate tactic in Industrial reveals operative managers’ resistance toward strategy imposed on them.

Detachment with organizational strategy
“So I think [Alpha initiative] has, to a certain degree, influenced a little bit what you do, but it is not everything because you are not only do things that.....there are many other things that you must be responsible too because otherwise thing does not work”

“For me that is not so important. Of course I have personal target that I try to fulfil when I can. But of course I have also some other duties and task that I need to do so I am not always and only focus on [Alpha initiative] or my personal target. If there are some more important things then I will do those ones.”

The above quotes show that operative managers consider strategy not as the most important issue since there are even "some more important things”. In other words, operative managers interpreted strategy as something “not so important” and at some points ignore it even though they appreciate the connection between strategy and their daily work through personal targets. The above responses give us the feeling that operative manager undermine the importance of strategy in their daily work.

In operative managers’ perspective, the given strategy is somewhat “general” and more about “big picture” while their daily work is “more of small things”. As we will see the in following quotes, pragmatic macro-discourse is used to signify the incompatibility between strategy and daily work.

“As I said that the strategy is like big picture, and we are working, our daily work is more of small things. So it just doesn’t necessarily affect so much our everyday life.”

“Of course the issue is that company has the strategy, and then we do our daily work. Then next year company change strategy. It actually does not have big affect for our daily work. I believe that”

“They give us some targets and guideline, but still of course, sometimes it is a little bit too general. So it is difficult for people to understand how they, in their daily work, reach the targets and work toward that targets.”
“Strategic messages are very difficult to understand and the crazy stuff is used, they do not mean anything. May be because they are not explained simple enough what does it mean and how, what would be done to fulfil those targets and so on.”

The above quotes show that operative managers create a certain gap between strategy as a “big picture” and their daily work as “small things”. The contrasting rhetoric, such as: “big things” versus “small things”, “too general” versus “targets and guideline”, “crazy” versus “simple” and the conjunction word “but” are used to signify the contrast and a certain degree of incompatibility between operative managers’ work and corporate strategy. In this sense, it can be interpreted that the operative managers dis-identified their work from Industrial’s strategy as it is not their concern. The metaphor “crazy stuff” can be understood as a critique that deepens the detachment between strategy and operative managers’ work and the emphasis on the negative feeling of operative managers’ toward strategy. In the entire above quote, operative managers voice their critique about the inapplicability or incompatibility characters of strategy in a direct and rationale manner. This can be interpreted that they have been spending much time thinking about such contrast.

Using strategy discourses to underscore the detachment their work and organizational strategy, those operative mangers remind me about the project engineers in Laine & Vaara (2007:47-50) who distance themselves from the top managers’ attempt to promote managerial hegemony. Indeed, in Industrial, using intimate tactic to underscore the detachment could be considered as the resistance toward managerial hegemony as well. By not fully incorporating strategy into their daily work, operative managers seem to limit the ability of top management to control their work. In the next section, I present another purpose of using intimate tactic that again illustrates the operative managers’ resistance toward managerial hegemony.

Construct and demand for strategic subjectivity

“Especially, if we look at [Industrial] level, either high level, with the [Alpha initiative] number one for [Industrial] as I know is service. The shareholders of [Industrial], one very important thing for the value of the share is how big
portion of the business comes from services. So, if you are working at the service, then you are always doing things that relates to the number one [Alpha initiative] of the whole company not only in service but on [Industrial]’s highest level.”

Question: Do you believe you have sufficient skills and knowledge to take more responsibility in strategy process. Answer: “...yes because I see lots of these things in practice. I was going between our locations and I am talking with the blue collar, the white collar and management there so I have quite a quite nice big picture how to realize this [strategy]. So I guess that could be something I could bring more to this kind of planning because like often these guys who are making this strategy and plan they are not seeing that much things of daily operation in the broad level.

“I make every month a global monthly report that we are collecting all the report to the system in one report which easily to follow. And that is an extremely important input to the strategy, seeing we are going in the right direction, or if we have to change the strategy in some areas”

“The main strategy right now is to develop the area and we are more sales sufficient.... So, to develop the sales, we think that we need to add specialist to the areas...We also think that one way to help areas to develop the sales is that we, from the technology centre, travel more with them because you learn very much when you are out with specialist”

Here, we can see that operative managers legitimize their important role in strategy work by using three tactics. First, they connect their work with the interest of shareholders who are considered as the salient stakeholder of the corporate. Second, they appreciate their knowledge about both big picture and “daily operation” which they gained by “talking with the blue collar, the white collar and management there [in the local areas]”. Furthermore, according to operative managers, top management doesn’t have that broad knowledge. This is completely contrasting to what was presented in ‘section 4.2.2’ in which operative managers undermine their own knowledge, but give positive appraisal top management’s knowledge and ability. And final, they emphasize their important role in aggregating “extremely important” reports
to the head quarter system, or travelling as a “specialist” to assist local area. This gives us the impression that operative managers construct their position as a critical bridge between head quarter and local market. These legitimizing tactics are completed by the help of mechanism macro-discourses.

It is obvious from the above quotes that operative managers glorify their subject position as strategic agency. By ‘strategic agency’, I adopt the idea from Mantere (2008) to refer to “an individual’s capacity to have a perceived effect upon the individual’s own work on an issue the individual regards as beneficial to the interests of his or her organization”. In particular, when giving justification for the importance of their role, operative managers underscore the value of their contribution for organization’s strategy work. Indeed, the ways operative managers legitimize their important role in strategy work above give me the impression of pioneering, progressive managers who are working hard in daily but crucial operations. Therefore, I argue that operative managers in my case draw on entrepreneur ethos and heroism characters which are similar to the findings of Laine & Vaara (2007). Due to their self-awareness about the strategic agency, those operative managers believe in their ability and demand more opportunities to take more responsibility in strategy work.

By reproducing strategy work as bottom up process and strategy as collective work, then consistently using discourse to construct their strategic agency, operative managers strengthen their subjectivity and agency over top management. One operative manager even values his subject position by connecting his contribution with the quality of good manager.

“Of course, it is always the manager who is responsible for setting the targets, but I think a good manager would listen to the employees and discuss, because it can be things that the managers don’t see or understand by himself”

Alongside with constructing or glorifying their strategic agency, operative managers also make comparison and marginalize the subject position of top management “who are making this strategy”, criticizing the top management’s lack of situation awareness. Operative managers draw on denial or diminish rhetoric to undermine the authority position of top management, questioning their agency in strategy work. For example one operative manager once said that “like often these guys who are making this
strategy and plan they are not seeing that much things of daily operation in the broad level.”

In summary, this type of reproduction promotes competing discourses and different views on organizational strategizing. I argue that this could be seen as the operative managers’ resistance over the managerial hegemony. Laine and Vaara (2007) calls this situation the struggles over subjectivity which is very typical in contemporary organization. According to Laine and Vaara (2007: 51), the cause of such discursive struggles lies in the attempt of top management in promoting managerial hegemony. Such attempt would “trigger the act of resistance of various kinds”. This discursive struggle is one of the products that operative managers at Industrial make out of strategy. In my opinion, this struggle and the feeling of distancing mentioned previous is a strong demonstration for how operative managers avoid becoming the prisoner of strategy discourses. Indeed, the way they distance themselves from the strategy, then construct and demand for strategic agency represent a creative strategy usage which doesn’t comply with the conventional strategy ethos mentioned in section 2.1.1 and section 2.1.2.

Motivation feeling

It is interesting to see that some operative managers also consider strategy as a source of motivation in their work. In particular, when operative managers perceived strategy as something playing a significant role in their job, they get motivation out of strategy.

“The [Alpha initiative] gives you extra motivation to do certain things, for example, developing new products. In one [Alpha initiative] you need to focus more on developing new products. And maybe I spend more time on that than what I should do if it is not the [Alpha initiative]”

“My motivation is that I will participate in that work would mean that I will have opportunity to improve the situation where we are at the moment.... So somehow, go forward where we are to improve our operation whatever it means.”
“That exactly what has been motivating me to make sure that despite any organization model, I anyhow try to convince the area, the operation, the sale to go after the [department] business, to continue to grow”

“Even at the moment there are a lot of cloud and raining but I can see the sun.”

According to the above quotes, what operative managers make out of when they engage into strategy work is the feeling of motivation. In particular, the motivation of operative manager comes from the fact that their jobs become much more meaningful and clearer. For example, they can see the meaning of their job when developing new products; or providing “opportunity to improve the situation” such as: “improve the operation” or “continue to grow”
5 DISCUSSION

In my study, I focused on two inter-related questions: What kinds of discursive resources do operative managers use in strategy consumption? and What kinds of discursive practices do operative managers use in strategy consumption? It is important to emphasize that my study only provides glimpses of strategy consumptions at operative management level since this is a single case-specific study.

In the following sections, I will demonstrate how my analysis answers the research question. Furthermore, I revisit the literature that was already discussed in the literature review.

5.1. Macro discourse-discursive resources

Suominen (2009:81) argues that macro discourses are discursive resources in the strategy consumption framework. Such macro discourses are imported from societal level or extra-organizational level (See figure 2 and figure 3), then being used by managers in reproduction and usage phase of strategy consumption. Suominen identified five different macro discourses that top and middle managers employed; and each of those macro discourses discusses different ideal aspects of strategy (see table 3) (ibid: 81-91). In my case, operative managers employed only three macro-discourses, namely mechanism, pragmatism and humanism discourse when they consumed strategy. They didn’t use any or used very little militaristic and spiritualistic rhetoric to portray the ideal state of strategy.

As we can see in the analysis, mechanism and pragmatism macro-discourse are very dominant in the reproduction phase and usage tactics. However, it is interesting to recognize that operative managers draw on mechanism macro-discourse to emphasize the bottom up approach in strategy while in Suominen (2009:83-85) top and middle managers use it to emphasize the top down strategy process. Therefore, at this point I argue that the same macro discourse can be used to reproduce competing perspective about strategy.
The pragmatism macro-discourses are used to signify operative managers’ perspective about strategy in the relation to their daily works. In particular, it is used widely when operative managers elaborate how they appreciate the important role of strategy in their work, using it a guiding tool for their daily activity. It is also drawn upon when operative managers criticize the detachment between strategy and their daily work. Again, we can see that the same macro-discourse is used for competing purposes. In other words, it can be said that organizational actors use macro discourse in creative ways, depending on their situational needs.

5.2. Discursive practices

5.2.1. Reproduction

Overall, operative managers in my case also consume strategy in two phases. They first of all draw on macro discourse to bring strategy from societal level to Industrial context, discussing the ideal state of strategy and strategizing. Then they use the reproduced strategy for their own purposes and ends. In my data, there exists two competing ways of reproducing strategy work.

Strategy is reproduced with the help of conventional strategy ethos which reveal operative managers’ appreciation toward managerial hegemony. In this case, operative managers reproduced various aspects of strategy which in some cases resembles how top and middle managers in Suominen (2009) did. In particular, a majority of operative managers, in the context of Industrial, established nature of strategy as a plan for driving organization forward and achieving profitability targets. Moreover, strategy must be clear, simple and easy to understand and containing measurable targets so that it can be used as a guideline and translated into “KPI” in daily work. The strategy process was described as top-down approach with emphasis on the high level of concretization and follow-up during the process. Particularly, operative managers constructed top management in authority position. In their opinion, strategy work is top management’s responsibility. Moreover, operative managers legitimize and emphasize the top management’s authority by using contrasting rhetoric to distinguish organizational context with democracy; owners with employees for the purpose of emphasizing the
crucial role of top management. They also value top management’s knowledge about business and market position which is perceived as crucial to create qualified strategy. Obviously, in the perspective of this group, strategy work is characterized as top down process and it is the top management’s responsibility.

On the other hand, there is another group of operative managers in a cautious manner reproducing strategy and strategy works in a competing way, compared to the above reproduction. This kind of reproduction turns the strategy upside down and underscores the collective nature of strategy work. In particular, these operative managers firstly reproduced nature of strategy as the reflection of the environment. Strategy in their perspective is “implemented according to how the world is going around”. In term of strategy work, they believe that strategy should “go from the customers to the operation not from the operation to the customers”. It means that these operative managers place a profound emphasis on the local strategy work and frontline activities. In other words, they implicitly argue that strategy should arise from the market and the customer rather than from higher level’s intention. This idea is contrast with the top down approach reproduced above. Moreover, they also think that strategy work should be collective in nature. It means that strategy work is not only the top management’s responsibility but also everyone’s concerns. For example, one operative manager emphasized that “everyone understands and moves in the same way to bring the synergy and to bring the result”.

Above, I have highlighted the two competing ways of reproducing strategy that exist in my data. In the next section, I will discuss in more detail different kinds of usage tactics that operative managers draw on.

5.2.2. Usage tactics

First of all, it is important to state that there exists no playful tactics in my case. The reason might lie in the context of my case organization. The usage tactics are similar to the reproduction in a way that there exist two competing ways of using strategy. On the one hand, operative managers draw on instrumental tactic to use strategy as a guiding tool. They bring strategy to grass root level and incorporate it to their daily activities by working toward strategic objectives and targets derived from strategy. This usage tactic
reflects the operative managers’ appreciation toward managerial hegemony. On the other hand, operative managers refer to strategy as a way to distance or detach themselves from the strategy. In this case, operative managers also draw on relevant strategy discourse to construct their subjectivity as strategic agency opposing to the managerial hegemony.

**Instrumental tactics**

In the instrumental usage tactic, operative managers mainly use strategy as a guiding tool. They bring the strategy to the grass roots level, drawing on it as a framework to direct their daily activities. By being a framework, it means that operative managers still find room for manoeuvre. In particular, they are able to make strategy habitable for themselves and for their own business unit. In my opinion, what operative managers actually make out of strategy in this case is the content of strategy, or the meaning of strategy. As we can see in section 4.3.1, operative managers pay profound attention to “objectives” and “strategic targets” which are derived from the strategy message so that they can guide their action closer to the organization’s strategy. This kind of instrumental usage tactic is quite common as we also can see the similar findings in Suominen (2009:107). However, in comparison to top and middle managers’ instrumental usage tactics, operative managers seemed to use strategy in a less creative and improvisatory way. In fact, Suominen (2009:165) reveals that top and middle managers not only use strategy according to conventional strategy ethos such as: analysing market and setting targets but also for other creative purposes, such as: legitimizing and justifying their positions, motivating other subordinate, etc. It means that top and middle managers in Suominen (2009) consume strategy as instrument more strategically while operative managers in my case mainly consume less strategically. They mainly focus on the content of strategy, taking out the meaning of strategy and then adopting it to their daily work. However, operative managers using strategy as instrument in a less creative way doesn’t necessarily mean something bad or good here. I just simply compare the instrumental usage tactics between operative manager in my cases and top managers in Suominen (2009).

**Intimate tactics**
I see the similarity between intimate tactics usage of operative managers and that of top and middle managers in Suominen (2009). Besides revealing personal feeling and intimate details toward strategy, managers in Suominen (2009:166) glorify themselves in strategy work as well as dis-identify from strategy that does not concern them. In fact the similar intimate tactic can be found among the operative managers in Industrial. In particular, operative managers in my case show their detachment to strategy as they draw on distancing, contrasting and comparing rhetoric to emphasize the gap. Furthermore, they underscore their strategic agency as opposed to top management’s subject position as a way to protect their own identity in strategy work. This can be seen as the most significant theme in intimate usage tactic of operative managers. This kind of discursive struggle over subjectivity, according to Laine & Vaara (2007), is quite typical in contemporary organization whenever top management strives for promoting managerial hegemony.

Suominen & Mantere (2010:239) argues that the resistance or critique toward strategy is mostly found to be indirect, hidden or implicit. However, it is not the case in my study. As we can see in the intimate tactic, operative managers might present the resistance toward managerial hegemony and struggles over subjectivity with cautiousness. However they criticize the inapplicability and incompatibility between strategy and their daily work in very direct and rational manners.

In summary, strategy consumption at operative managers at the overall level is similar to that at top and middle managers. In particular, operative managers also with the help of macro discourses undergo the reproduction phase, then the usage tactics. However, if we took a closer look in to the framework, we can see that operative managers consume strategy mainly in the ways which are competing to each other. In particular, by drawing on different macro discourses or the same macro-discourses with competing purposes, a group of operative managers consume strategy in accordance with top management’s expectation while the other group consume strategy mainly for the purpose of resisting the managerial hegemony. I summarize my findings in the figure 7 below. I want to highlight that in my opinion the operative managers’ resistance toward managerial hegemony demonstrates how they avoid becoming the prisoner of strategy discourse. In other words, criticizing strategy, distancing strategy with their daily work
and constructing strategic agency are operative managers’ behaviours that are beyond the spirit of conventional strategy discourses and the expectation of top management (the conventional strategy discourses is mentioned in section 2.1.1 and 2.1.2).

Figure 7: Strategy consumption framework of operative managers

![Strategy Consumption Framework](image)

Sources: Self develop with reference to framework in Suominen (2009:79)

5.3. Strategy as practice

Jarzabkowski (2004) introduces the concept named ‘management practices-in-use’ to demonstrate how organizational actors can use management practice with their own intent that may not comply to the original purpose of that practice. Indeed, actors draw on existing practices which have already established their technical and cultural legitimacy, but then use them in new modes or improvisation ways to serve particular sets of ends (ibid:545). The results from my study elaborate the management practice-in-use with the focus on operative management level. In other words, my study illustrates how operative managers practice strategy and what they make out of strategy
which is imposed on them by higher management level. In the case of Industrial, while 
the ordinary purpose of the strategy and Alpha initiative is to drive the whole 
organization toward the target of increasing profitability, a body of operative manager 
community perceives and adapts strategy for a different set of end, such as: for 
underscoring the gap between strategy and their daily work, or for constructing their 
strategic agency in the intimate usage tactic. Such ends are, I believe, beyond the 
original expectation of Industrial’s top management.

Moreover, regarding the model of integrating praxis, practices and practitioners from 
Whittington (2006), my study elaborates how operative managers integrate practices 
from societal level to the praxis. In particularly, the integration process includes 
*reproduction phase* in which practices at societal level are drawn on to make the 
concepts function in particular organizational context; and the *usage phase* in which 
practitioner actually adapt practices that are reproduced earlier to particular sets of ends. 
Therefore, I would like to argue that the overall strategy consumption framework 
developed by Suominen (2009) can also be applied at operative management level. In 
other words the way that operative managers integrate practice with praxis, connecting 
macro level with micro level strategy discourses is similar to what top and middle 
managers do. However there might be some differences when it comes to praxis or 
usage tactics. For example, as I emphasize in the discussion section, while top and 
middle managers use instrumental tactic *strategically*, for a wide range purposes, 
operative managers mainly use strategy as a guiding tool, consuming just the content of 
strategy.

5.4. **Strategy as discourse**

In term of strategy discourse, my study reveals that mechanism, humanism and 
pragmatism macro discourses are used not only by top and middle managers in 
Suominen (2009) but also by operative manager in Industrial. As a consequent, 
reproduction and usage tactic of operative managers and top and middle managers are 
similar at some extend. This fact confirms the domination of discourse over individuals 
when they describe strategy or make sense of concepts relevant to strategy (see Knight 
However, although there exists the domination of discourse over individuals, strategy practitioners in general and operative manager in particular are still able to poach the discourse and make "it function in another register" (de Certeau 1988:31). In other word, the findings from my study indicate that although operative managers don’t have choice whether to engage the macro discourses, they do have choice over which discourses they would incorporate, basing on their own need and situation. As it can be seen in my analysis, operative managers draw on heroism rhetoric and entrepreneurial ethos to portray their strategic agency. The purpose of such subjectivity construction is to diminish top management’s subject position, at the same time strengthen operative managers’ strategic agency which obviously serve the individuals’ need.

My empirical research also argues for the dynamic relationship between subjectivity, reproduction, transformation and using strategy discourses. The findings of my study can be considered as another illustration for the struggle over subjectivity that is mentioned in Laine & Vaara 2007. Particular, operative managers as opposing to the strategy imposed on them draw on relevant discourse to (1) resist and criticize the strategy and (2) portray their strategic agency while diminish top management’s position in strategy work.
6 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Reading Suominen (2009) has given me the inspiration to work on the topic of strategy consumption. Following the future research suggestion in Suominen (2009:182), I aim to examine and illustrate the strategy consumption at operative management level. The primary research question is as follow:

**How do operative managers consume strategy in their talk?**

Then, adopting the strategy consumption, I structured the secondary questions as follow to answer the primary question comprehensively:

**What kinds of discursive resources do operative managers use in strategy consumption?**

**What kinds of discursive practices do operative managers use in strategy consumption?**

I started the work by reviewing different theoretical approaches to strategy, namely: rational, processual and practice. The purpose is to understand how strategy and strategy work are perceived in different theoretical lens and the underpinning assumptions in each approach. I pay significant attention to the practice approach in general and discursive perspective on strategy in particular because I want to understand how operative managers consume strategy in their talk. In fact, my study adopts a large amount of findings in the practice approach as well as the discursive perspective on strategy, especially the researches on discourse. I also digest the de Certeau (1988) and the review the framework of strategy consumption developed in Suominen (2009) with the purpose of getting better understanding about the theoretical foundations, the construction and main components of the framework.

During the analysis process, I used the framework of strategy consumption as a theoretical lens to make sense of and categorize data sets. I found that operative managers consume strategy in a similar manner that top and middle managers in Suominen (2009) did. In particular, at the general level operative managers also undergo two phases, namely reproduction and usage tactic with the help of macro-discourses.
However, some differences are also signified. I could not find the existence of militarism macro-discourse. Likewise, in term of usage tactic, operative managers in my case do not consume strategy playfully, nor present any ironical and cynical humour. In instrumental tactics, they seem to consume strategy less creatively compared to top and middle managers do in Suominen (2009). In fact, operative managers use strategy instrumentally only as a guiding tool for their daily activities, consuming mainly the strategic message or the strategy content in other words. I am not judging such differences since according to Suominen & Mantere (2010:236) and Jarzabkowski (2004) strategy practitioners use strategy adaptively for their contextual and situational needs. In the case of Industrial, operative managers consume strategy in two competing ways resulted from the recent changes in organizational structure as well as strategy direction. While Suominen & Mantere (2010:236) portray strategy consumption of top and middle managers with creative and improvisatory characters, I argue that strategy consumption at operative management level can be characterized with two competing characters, namely adopting-managerial-hegemony and resisting-managerial-hegemony. Especially, operative managers resist managerial hegemony by criticizing strategy and constructing their strategic agency as opposing to top managers’ subject position. Such usage shows how operative managers avoid becoming the prisoner of strategy discourse or the strategy imposed on them. According to Laine & Vaara (2007:52) such characters “mirror the age-old tension between top driven control on the one hand and the right of self-determination and self-realization on the other” which exists in other contemporary organizations as well.

Managerial contribution

The result of my study is useful for top management since it provides insights into how top management’s subordinate think (reproduce) and talk (use) about strategy. According to the results, strategy consumption at operative manager can be classified into two competing categories, namely coping with and resisting managerial hegemony which provides a clear implication to top management skills.

First of all, it is necessary for top managers to understand that when they promote the managerial hegemony, especially strategic change initiatives, it is likely to trigger acts of resistance of various kind (see Laine & Vaara 2007:51). In my study, such resistance
is manifested by operative managers’ criticizing strategy and constructing their strategic agency as opposed to top management’s subject position. Such issue doesn’t only exist in specific case, but rather likely happens in other contemporary organization as well. The result of my study is in line with such argument. Indeed, the outcome of the operative managers’ consuming process as I have shown in the intimate usage tactic is their resistance toward strategy imposed on them. Therefore, I think that paying attention to such issue should be the starting point for top managers to implement any strategic change initiatives. Moreover, according to Laine & Vaara (2007), such resistance or struggles over subjectivities is the main reason for why strategic messages or strategic change initiatives are rarely implemented as being expected. In fact top management often underestimates the problematic effect of particular strategy discourse (ibid: 52). I think top management can overcome this challenge by considering two suggestions bellow.

Second, the result of my study illustrates how operative managers, when consuming strategy, present their resistances. In particular, when resisting the managerial hegemony, operative managers tend to distance themselves from the strategy and strategic target, criticizing its inapplicability and incompatibility. Moreover, they also take advantage of heroism rhetoric to structure and value their strategic agency, demanding for more recognition of their contribution and opportunities to take up further participations; while undermine the subject position of top management at the same time. Therefore, to marginalize the problem of resistance, top management might want to reconsider and redesign the organizing of strategy work to increase the degree of operative managers’ involvement. Particularly, top management can consult the notion of strategic learning (see 2.1.2 Processual approach) to design a more appropriate strategy process which allows non-senior managers to play a more critical role.

Third, the main reason for operative managers’ resisting problem or struggle over subjectivity, according to Laine & Vaara (2007:50), lie in the disempowering effects of discourse that top management uses to promote managerial hegemony. In particular, the disempowering effect of discourse can threaten the subjectivity of non-senior managers which in turn results in their evocation of competing discourse (ibid: 51). Obviously, the operative managers in the case of Industrial draw on relevant discourse to construct
their strategic agency as opposed to the top management’s position. Therefore, top management, when communicate the strategic message or present strategic change initiatives, might want to pay more attentions to the rhetoric aspects of strategy document and communication so that non-senior managers don’t feel the threatening to their subjectivity. As we can see in the analysis, operative managers also tend to reproduce strategy work as top management’s issue, resulting in their in-active participation in strategy and relevant resistance which are not unpopular in other organizations. According to Mantere & Vaara (2008:356), top management could rectify such non-participatory issue by provoking self-actualization, dialogization and concretization discourse. In other words, top management through communication session or strategy workshop might want to portray and promote a different picture about strategy and strategy process. That is the picture of strategy in which various organizational actors have more opportunities to participate in constructive dialogues, to outline and define objective for themselves and to proactively perceive their roles and responsibility in strategy work. (ibid)

From the perspective of operative managers, the results of my study also provide certain insights that they can apply into their daily work. First and foremost, operative managers should understand that they are absolutely not the prisoners of strategy discourse. Indeed, as my study reveals, even though operative managers can just receive the strategic cascaded from the top management, they can use strategy in creative ways, such as drawing on appropriate discourses when engaging in strategy to construct their strategy agency or resist the strategy discursively. And second, operative managers should appreciate their opportunities to engage in the daily operations and travel to different local market. The knowledge gained from those opportunities is critical for operative managers enhance their strategy even.

Limitation:

The most obvious limitation in my study is my interviewing skill. According to Patton (2002: 341), “the quality of the information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer”. As a self-evaluation, I think my interviewing skill still needs further improvements. Second, my research is restricted in term of data collection. In other words, my studied data was collected from only one case
organization which inhibits the generalizability of the findings. Third, the conclusion in my study is based on the analysis of data collected through two main channels, namely interviewing and internal documents. It would have been possible to collect more meaningful data if I had had opportunities to do observations, to see how operative managers consume strategy when they participate in real discursive events such as team meetings or strategy workshops. Forth, at some points in my study, I make comparison about strategy consumption between operative managers in my case and top and middle manager in Suominen (2009). Such comparison is at some extend inappropriate since the context and the case organizations of two study is different. Lastly, from the perspective of constructivism, the data, analysis and conclusion in this study are subjective, being influence by my own interpretation, values and norm. Therefore, even though I aim to objectivity, the conclusion is not the comprehensive interpretation.
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APPENDICE

Appendix 1: Interview outline of Industrial Strategy Process

1. How do you understand by the term 'strategy', 'strategy planning', 'strategy implementation'?
2. In your opinion what are the role/responsibilities of non-senior managers in the strategy process?
3. How well do you know your business unit’s strategy process? Could you explain briefly how the strategy process operates?
   3.1. Who created the strategy?
   3.2. How was strategy created in your unit?
   3.3. How was strategy implemented in unit?
4. In your opinion, what are the strengths and weaknesses of strategy process? How did you communicate those points with your colleague or your managers?
5. How do you see the importance of non-senior managers’ participation in strategy process? Is there any problem with strategy participation in your business unit at the moment?
6. How do you participate in your business unit’s strategy process? Personally, what motivated you to participate in the strategy process?
7. Do you feel you have the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in the strategy process? (Why/Why not)
8. How much do you satisfy with your participation in strategy process at your business unit?
9. In general how do you see the importance of strategy communication in strategy process? How are strategies communicated in your business unit?
10. How do you see the importance of giving and receiving feedbacks in strategy process? How and what kind of feedback do you give to your supervisors related to strategy? (Tell a concrete example)

The strategic theme
11. What are the main strategic targets that your business unit focuses to achieve now?
12. In your view why is the Alpha Initiative important for your business unit?
13. How much do you agree with the Alpha initiatives at your business unit?
14. Would you really want to focus on some other issues? What are they?
15. What is the initiative that is most difficult for you to apply to your work?
16. How do you see the influence of Alpha initiatives in your daily work?
17. From your point of view, how do you see the growth opportunities for your business unit? And what are relevant challenges?
18. In your opinion, what actions need to take to achieve the growth target?
19. How have you become aware of the Alpha Initiatives? What is the best methods for you to become aware of the Alpha Initiatives
20. In what other situations and with whom have you discussed the Alpha Initiatives?
21. What has according to your perception been done to implement the Alpha Initiatives in your organization?
22. Among the Alpha Initiatives, which key object/plan is most related to your work and how do you deal with them in your daily work?
23. In what way is the Alpha Initiatives presented in your team’s work practice right now? Is there any part that you would like to modify so that the Alpha Initiatives could present in the team’s work practice in a more effective way?
24. How are Alpha Initiatives’ targets set for your work?
25. What is your motivation for promoting the Alpha Initiatives in your work?
26. How do you relate the personal Alpha Initiatives target to your daily work?
27. What are the challenges in doing that? And what did you do to overcome those challenges?
28. How do you see the connection between your work and your company’s long term objectives?
29. Do you feel that you have been given a sufficient opportunity to influence objectives associated with the Alpha Initiatives? (If not: how would you have wanted to influence them?)
30. How do you evaluate your contribution in your business unit’s operation? In your opinion, are your contributions valued appropriately?

31. In your opinion, in term of management practice what is the single most important thing that should be done to implement the Alpha Initiatives in your organization?

32. Do you believe that the Alpha Initiatives will be realized?

33. How do you see the future of your organization?

Questions? Comments? Thank you!