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CONSUMING STRATEGY: THE ART AND PRACTICE OF MANAGERS'
EVERYDAY STRATEGY USAGE

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ABSTRACT

Although the managerial profession is subjugated by the discipline of strategic management, managers are not completely subordinate to it. Instead, they are able to use the institutionalized discourse of strategic management, which is not their own product, in novel and creative ways. In this paper, we focus on the tactics that managers, as central strategy practitioners, use to *consume strategy*. Drawing on the work of the late Michel de Certeau as a theoretical lens, we conduct an empirical analysis of discourse, produced by 36 managers operating in three case organizations. This analysis allows us to elaborate on three different tactics of strategy consumption: instrumental, playful and intimate. The results capture the reciprocal dynamics between the micro and macro-levels of strategy discourse, that is, between strategic management as an institutional body of knowledge and the discursive practice of individual managers.

INTRODUCTION

It is exceptional to come across an organization that does not have any plans or objectives labeled as *strategic*, whether it is operating in the private, public or third sector. Indeed, strategy seems to have penetrated almost every organization, obligating managers to follow suit and submit themselves to the principles of strategic management, a discourse (Knights & Morgan, 1991) which has almost become an industry, and whose members construct and produce strategies and strategic practices that are further applied in different organizational settings (Whittington, 2006).

Critical management scholars have started to recognize that strategic management is not a value-neutral body of knowledge of factors influencing organizational performance or competitive advantage. Strategic management is also an ideology (Shrivastava, 1986). It subjugates us as we are repetitively participating and performing its ceremonies and practices (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). It dominates the way we manage others and are managed ourselves; not only for operative and middle managers (Mantere, 2008), but also managers at the very top of the organization (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Lilley, 2001).

The notion of managers being subjugated by strategy discourse might sound surprising. Indeed, many managers actively try to learn strategy and one can expect almost all managers to express positive sentiment about strategy. This is however, not the issue. The issue is that while managers may often have a choice about which strategy they choose, they seldom have a choice about whether to incorporate a strategy or not (Shrivastava, 1986; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Inkpen & Choudhury, 1995). Consider a middle manager confronting a CEO, or a CEO confronting the shareholders, arguing that the firm

should *not* be managed strategically, but according to management discipline X. The fact that we may actually have difficulties thinking of a word to replace X, shows how effective strategy is at silencing alternative conceptions of management. Rather, other disciplines show an allegiance to strategy, evident in the use of the term ‘strategic’ in association with other management disciplines: strategic human resource management, or strategic communications, to name just two.

Yet, while strategy is something that contemporary managers have little choice about, managers are not completely subordinate to it. Instead, in this paper, we illustrate ways in which they use this strategy discourse in their life situations. Managers invent novel and creative ways of consuming strategy in their everyday practice. This radically alters our view of the relationship between strategy and organization. Managers, as central practitioners of strategy, are regarded as users of strategy, consuming it creatively for their own purposes through their discursive practices, i.e. their ways of talking. This is to say that while managers – or other organizational members for that matter – have little choice over accepting strategic management as the dominant management discourse, they exert agency over what to make of this discourse in their practice. This view can be contrasted with the Foucauldian notion of displacing the subject; subjects have little choice over the production of discourses but are masters of consumption.

We apply the late French theorist Michel de Certeau’s (1988) idea of “*consumption*” as a theoretical lens in this work to explain and understand how managers practice strategy. De Certeau conceived social practice as being constituted in relationships between producers, who create dominant institutions, and consumers, who find ways in which to dwell within the institutional landscapes produced by those in power. Consumption, as de

Certeau calls it, is a collective activity that makes “*transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to its own interest and rules*” (ibid., xiv).

He defines the nature of consumption as the following:

“‘consumption’ [...] characterized by its ruses, its fragmentation (the results of the 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 1988, 31)

The everyday practices of managers, like tactics and ways of talking, show how they are creatively using, resisting, and appropriating the strategy discourse imposed on them by the orthodox of strategic management. This strategy consumption represents the art and practice of everyday strategy usage. Through our discourse analysis of the talk of managers in three case organizations, we can offer a novel view into strategy as social practice practiced within organizations. It will also allow us to elucidate a new form of agency that managers practice within the bounds of strategy discourse.

Our interest is not limited to top managers, those who are traditionally conceived as ‘strategists’ in the organization (Chandler, 1962; Andrews, 1971; Porter, 1997). Instead, our data set contains middle managers as well. For our purposes, middle and top managers are not categorically different. Middle managers play diverse roles in the strategy process to the point of driving strategic renewal (Burgelman, 1983; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Wooldridge, Schmid & Floyd, 2008); top managers are subjugated by strategy discourse as well as others in the organization (Knights & Morgan, 1991). This means that the focus on consumption has implications for our conception of *strategic organization*.

The classical ‘design’ view on strategic management (cf. Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 1999) suggests that strategic management uses the organization to achieve its aims. The critical, in particular the Foucauldian view (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008) suggests a more fundamental usage; that the discipline of strategic management re-enacts itself by building managers into its image. De Certeau’s work on consumption denies either effect but suggests that usage is bidirectional: in their consumption activity, managers also use strategy for their purposes. This suggests that the strategic organization is not a mere tool for strategy implementation but has ‘a life of its own.’ Our empirical analysis below suggests something of what this life entails.

STRATEGY AS DISCURSIVE PRACTICE

In this work, our strategy conception stems from the practice (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Whittington, 2006) and discursive (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristö, 2004; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere & Vaara, 2008, Vaara in this volume) perspectives of strategy. The practice approach to strategy could be seen as “*a part of a broader concern to humanize organizational and management research,*” since it attempts to “*understand human agency in the construction and enactment of strategy*” by focusing on the actions and activities of a strategy practitioner in it (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007, 6). Rather than treating strategy as a naturally-occurring phenomenon, characteristic of well performing organizations, the practice view utilizes “*the sociological eye*” and treats strategy like any other institutionalized activity in our lives (Whittington, 2007).

One of the key objectives of strategy-as-practice research has been to understand the linkages between strategy as a micro-level activity within organizations, as an organiza-

tion-level practice, and as an extra-organizational industry in its own right (cf. Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Langley, Melin & Whittington, 2008; Vaara in this volume). Whittington (2006, 614-615) highlights three concepts that should be taken into account when studying the relationship between the structure and individual. First, there is the concept of “*society*,” a field or system, such as shared understanding, cultural rule, language, or procedure, which is guiding, setting the scene, and enabling human activity. Second, there is the concept of “*individuality*” that refers to people’s creative and partly unexpected activity in practice. The third concept is the “*actor*,” which means strategy practitioners, individuals performing and using strategy. The practice theory views these themes as interrelated parts of the whole. The actions of individuals cannot be separated from society, but society itself is, on the other hand, produced by these actions. (Ibid.)

Another stream of strategy research, relevant to the present study is the work of scholars who focus on strategy as a linguistic phenomenon. According to these authors, strategy is a discursive construction produced in talk (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hardy, Palmer & Phillips, 2000; Vaara, Kleymann & Seristö, 2005; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Phillips et al., 2008; Vaara in this volume). The authors strongly resonate with Knights and Morgan (1991), who define strategy as:

“set of discourses and practices which transform managers and employees alike into subjects who secure their sense of purpose and reality by formulating, evaluating, and conducting strategy” (Knights & Morgan, 1991, 252)

However, we also acknowledge that discourses, such as strategy, are not only totalities (cf. Foucault 1972, 55) that dominate individuals, but that discourses can also be used and applied as resources (Hardy et al., 2000) by individuals. That is, also strategy discourse can be consumed by managers in different ways for their own benefit, and it is these discursive consumption tactics that this paper studies.

There are clear continuities between the practice and discursive literatures. Much of strategy as a social practice is discursive in nature (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). The process of strategizing usually involves lots of talk and text, such as memos, meetings, presentations, storytelling, and conversations, among others. Also the outcomes of strategizing are discursive, like strategy plans, vision statements, speeches and Power Point slides, just to mention a few. (Maitilis & Lawrence, 2003, 112.) Managers also spend a lot of time communicating and promoting strategy, trying to “sell” it to their different stakeholders with means that are fundamentally discursive and rhetorical by nature. Discourse is their resource by which strategy is constructed, maintained and sustained. (Johnson et al., 2008, 42.) Strategy discourse acts as a resource for legitimating particular organizational realities as salient against competing ones (Nielsen & Rao, 1987; Vaara & Monin, 2010). Strategy discourse does not simply mirror reality, it creates it. Strategy does not just react to problems existing in organizational environment; but also constitutes and defines those problems by appearing as a natural and unquestioned way to solve them (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Grandy & Mills, 2004).

Strategy discourse is not a unanimous enterprise but a polyphonic project that receives different kinds of emphasis in different contexts (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Seidl, 2008; Mantere, 2010). Competing macro-level strategy discourses can be located in wider soci-

etal contexts, but these same discourses can (and most likely will) be utilized and consumed in different ways at the micro-level (Seid, 2008). Again, we can make a distinction between societal-level strategy discourses that embody general elements of strategic management, and organizational-level strategy discourses that include contextual and content-specific strategies of organizations. That is, while the former discuss strategic management at a general level, the latter has organizational-strategy formulators planning and discussing what the organization should do in certain situations. The notion of production adopted here encompasses both the organization-level, as well as field-level forms of production.

TACTICS OF STRATEGY CONSUMPTION

A focus on strategy consumption thus allows for the linking of strategy practice at various levels of analysis, identified as crucial for the project of understanding strategy as a social practice (Whittington, 2006; Johnson, Langley, Melin & Whittington, 2008). What is consumption? In his sociology of practice, de Certeau used the term to describe how different cultural and societal mass-products are used by ordinary people in their everyday life. For De Certeau, the term ‘consumption’ holds a positive connotation since it has a sort of redemptive effect and meaning in our lives (De Certeau, 1988; cf. Mitchell, 2007). De Certeau investigated the ways in which users operate, not just as passive and obedient beings who are guided by the established rules, but as improvisatory users who are creatively using and transmuting the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and rules. He raised the consumers, the “*unrecognized producers, po-*

ets of their own acts, silent discoverers of their own paths in the jungle of functionalist rationality,” as the central actors of everyday life (de Certeau, *idib.*, xviii).

To de Certeau, consumption is an activity that uses institutionalized, mass-produced, and imposed goods and products for one’s own purposes. The consumer cannot “own” the product or structure he/she is consuming; neither can he/she escape it in many cases. This leaves him/her in the situation of making something out of the system or product that is imposed on him/her, adopting and using it intentionally. Consumption like this is characterized by its ruses and fragmentation. It poaches and shows itself not in its own products, but in an art of using those that are imposed on it, making it clandestine, invisible, tacit and tireless by nature. (De Certeau, *ibid.*, 31.)

Although de Certeau raises the everyday practices of *individuals* to the podium, he does not, however, want to return to individuality. Moreover, de Certeau views subjects as mere vehicles or authors of consumption. His investigation is concentrated on “*modes of operation*” or “*schemata of action*” rather than “*the subjects who are their authors or vehicles*” (De Certeau, *ibid.*, xi). His interest is not in the individual subjects *per se*, but more likely in the modes or logics of operations, or the consumption *tactics* that the consumers use, which he considers to be socially shared by nature (for alternative solutions to the structure/agency dilemma, see the Ortmann & Seidl paper in this volume).

In this paper, we shall employ de Certeau’s theoretical concepts to look at ways in which managers at various level of the organization consume strategy. As de Certeau (*ibid.*, 37) points out, consumption is “*an art of weak*,” which means that consumers do not have the power to change the discourse, but rather to subvert and modify it. Although managers often have little choice over whether to treat strategy as relevant or not, we shall illus-

trate, however, the tactics they employ to actualize themselves as “*poets of their own acts*” (ibid. xviii). As was the case with De Certeau, it is the tactics that hold our interest, not the subjects themselves.

THREE CASE ORGANIZATIONS

As the topic area is largely unexplored, a qualitative, theory-building approach was considered appropriate (Lee, Mitchell & Sablynski, 1999). We chose a multiple case setting, based on interviews, as we wanted to move beyond contextual depth to a wider level of generality about the condition of the strategist (Langley, 1999). The research data were produced in three very different case organizations.

When the research data were produced at *Industrial* (name changed), our first case organization, it had just finished describing its strategy process. Industrial is a global manufacturing company, operating in chemicals. The strategy process chart they had just produced was the main artifact for strategizing at Industrial. The chart consists of two circles, the first representing strategy creation and the second strategy implementation. Traditionally, Industrial had had robust methods when it came to strategic planning, and now, due to the new strategy process diagram, strategy implementation received more interest and resources. Many members of Industrial’s top management, including the senior vice president of strategic planning, who was responsible for the strategy process, seemed to have rather high expectations for the strategy process.

The second case organization, *Polytechnic* (name changed), is a Finnish multi-sector polytechnic. Polytechnic provides education to thousands of students in three faculties that

are further divided into a dozen degree programs. Although Polytechnic operates under a City Council and the Ministry of Education, it has autonomy in its internal affairs and it is managed by a board and a rector. At the time the data were produced at Polytechnic, the organization was implementing its strategy. A special effort was put on a strategic theme called “*R&D operations*,” which aimed to increase the amount of Polytechnic’s research and development conducted in cooperation with its external stakeholders. The motivation for promoting the R&D at Polytechnic was both internal and external. Due to previous changes in the Finnish legislation, the polytechnics were obligated to engage in R&D. However, Polytechnic also considered that successful R&D would legitimize its activities and improve its brand. This attempt to pursue R&D represented a big change at Polytechnic, especially for those who were supposed to engage in R&D in addition to their teaching duties.

The third company, *Insurance* (name changed), is an insurance company that provides insurance services to its customers in different customer segments. These services are produced at the headquarters of Insurance by the business units, and market operations like marketing, selling and customer service are performed by the customer service organization spread across the business area. Insurance has a long history in the business and its current organizational form is actually the result of many mergers and acquisitions over the years. It has a strong strategic intent to be a customer-driven company. It also has a developed strategy process which governs and guides the strategy work done in the company. Although Insurance is known in the industry for its rather conservative growth strategy, recent years have seen great financial success and during the last 18 years, the company has improved its profit record annually. Thus, some are afraid that this unparal-

leed success might have made people feel too “*comfortable*,” which may prevent further changing and development. Thus, recently Insurance has pursued extensive strategy communication, emphasizing that every employee should understand and adopt its strategic intent and develop his/her everyday work to coincide with the strategy.

METHODOLOGY

The data set of this study was produced during 2003-2008 in three case organizations (see Table 1). At Industrial, the data were produced over a two-year period from 2003-2005; at Polytechnic, the data was produced from May to August 2004; and at Insurance, the production of data lasted from 2007 to 2008. The data consist of interviews, written documents, web pages, observations and media coverage. The entire interview data produced from all three case organizations consists of 33 individual and group interviews (consisting of 36 interviewees).

--- Insert Table 1 around here ---

For the purposes of this paper we focus on these interviews. Each semi-structured interview took 1-2 hours and was recorded with the approval of the interviewee and transcribed verbatim. Case-specific interview outlines were formulated for each organization to ensure that the interviewees within every case organization were asked the same questions, with some modification to facilitate local vocabulary. In the interview situations, the interviewees were encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences about the issues and themes that they considered meaningful and important, whether they were included in the interview outline or not. Also, the interviewees were asked to justify and describe

their ideas and views through stories and examples in order to enhance the data with narrative. All in all, an effort was made to make the interviews an interventive and confrontative arena by discussing certain issues more than once during the interviews and by encouraging the interviewees to share different and even contradictory ideas and opinions instead of emphasizing consistency (Potter & Wetherell 1984, 164-165).

In order to increase the validity of the study, other data sources and methods were also used to create triangulation (Silverman, 2006, 291-292). *Observations* were a major data source, mainly used as background information when constructing case descriptions and analyzing the interview data. Because of the differences in the case organizations' data production processes, there is more observation data available from Industrial and Insurance than Polytechnic. Observation data helped us to put the interviews into perspective and locate them contextually. In addition, different organizational documents, the web sites of the case organizations, and media coverage were used as background information when constructing case descriptions and analyzing the data.

The data were analyzed using discourse analytic methods. Discourse analysis is neither a clear-cut research method as such, nor a unified enterprise, but more like a theoretical framework that includes and allows different kinds of applications and focus areas (Cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 6-8). Discourse analysis has been influenced and informed by a variety of studies, from sociology, anthropology, and linguistics, and as Grant et al. (2004) put it, it is a "*plurivocal project*." The common ground for all these approaches is a constructivist view, which regards reality as socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), and discourse analysis aims to uncover and study these construction processes by providing us with an understanding of the construction, maintenance, and change of so-

cial reality (Hardy, 2001). As Phillips and Hardy (2002, 2) put it, this is valuable because *“without discourse, there is no social reality, and without understanding discourse, we cannot understand our reality, our experiences, ourselves.”*

Identifying macro discourses

To understand the dynamics of strategy discourse in the construction of organizational reality, we first focused on identifying competing macro-discourses of strategy that describe the desired and/or ideal state of strategy both in the case organizations and in general. In the data, managers seemed to draw upon these discourses when discussing how they would like to act in strategy work and what strategy should be in an ideal world according to them. We coded the data and categorized this kind of talk in terms of the differences, similarities and patterns that could be found in it (Potter & Wetherell, 1984, 168). By drawing on Fairclough's (1992, 64) three different aspects of the constructive effects of discourse, we constructed categories 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 the talk, and b) how it is practiced. We were also interested in finding out c) how talk constructs social identities and subject positions, and d) how it produces social relationships between people. We soon noticed that different categories of talk contained features of “isms” like humanism and rationalism, and even religion, and they were used both as means and causes when the managers tried to build their point of view. They appeared to be resources whose nature made them easy to draw upon (ibid., 85-86).

Coding allowed us to come up with different categories of talk that seemed to have their own special characteristics. We decided to call these categories of talk macro-discourses

of strategy, since they clearly construct strategy as a universal phenomenon by drawing on broad societal discourses and isms (cf. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000). There appeared to be five such macro-discourses: Militaristic, Mechanistic, Humanistic, Pragmatic, and Spiritual macro-discourses. As macro-level discourses they are not only present in the case organizations, but also exist in the sphere of culture of a larger management and strategy discourse. They are derived from the social context of strategy (Fairclough, 1992, 73) and used and maintained by different strategy practitioners of the strategy community. In this respect, they are “*imported*” to the case organizations from the outside (Phillips et al., 2008, 782).

Identifying tactics of consumption: (Re)production and usage

After discovering De Certeau’s work, we began to recognize the role of macro-discourses as products of consumption more clearly, i.e. managers seemed to consume and use them for their own purposes and ends creatively. This urged us to analyze how these macro-discourses were consumed by individuals. As a result, we identified two discursive practices of strategy consumption, (re)production and usage. These two discursive practices indicate that strategy consumption is something that includes both the production and use of strategy (cf. De La Ville and Mounoud, 2003, 108). The first discursive practice, (re)production, recognizes and discusses strategy and strategy-work ideals peculiar to the case organization, aided by macro-discourses of the strategy. Similarly, it generates and grounds strategy as a management discipline by bringing strategy into being and giving it meaning for further usage (Fiske, 1989, 35). In most cases, (re)production originated as a result to a question like “*How do you see strategy?*” in the interviews, but it was also a

topic that the interviewees returned to at different phases of the interview situations.

(Re)production is characterized by normative and idealistic talk. It often consumes strategy as something that it should be, rather than something it actually is at the moment.

Usage is more clandestine (de Certeau, 1988, 31) and tacit in comparison to (re)production. It is characteristically hidden within the “official” strategy discourse. It literally uses and applies the macro-discourses (re)produced earlier for one’s own purposes and ends. While analyzing the data, we noticed that there seemed to be three kinds of rhetorical usage tactics, each seeming to fulfill its own function and purpose (cf. Potter & Wetherell, 1984, 168). First, there was talk that constructs strategy as a device, something that is used as a tool or method in strategy work to gain something. This talk was manifested in the expressions that describe strategy as a “way” or “means” to do something, or managers describing how “*strategy means*” this and that for them. We decided to call this usage tactic *instrumental*. The instrumental tactic uses strategy as a device, an instrument (cf. Hendry 2000), which is used as a means in managerial work. The tactic aims at making strategy habitable by adapting and poaching it for managers’ purposes of some kind. The instrumental strategy usage, at first glance, appeared to be a literal adoption of strategy discourse, but once we took a closer look, we noticed that it is often the letter of strategy that is adapted, not the spirit. To some extent, instrumental strategy “bends the rules” of strategy by revising and applying them to drive one’s own agenda.

Second was talk that takes a rather ironical and critical stance against strategy and sort of plays with it. We decided to call this usage tactic *playful* (cf. De la Ville and Mounoud, 2003, 105). While analyzing the data, we soon noticed that when strategy is used playfully, most use it for their own pleasure. Indeed, we found Fikes’s (1989, 47) idea very fit-

ting for our purposes, when he concludes that the pleasure provides “*one’s own meanings of social experience*” and avoids “*the social discipline of the power-bloc.*” Again, in de Certeau’s terms (1988, 31-32), the playfulness transfers strategy “*into to another register.*” However, the accounts of playful strategy usage did not seem to produce any material outcomes for the managers, neither were they able to cite what they gained by adopting this attitude, but what they did keep was their status and subjectivity (Fiske, 1989, 36). In the playful accounts, managers may also dis-indentify themselves from strategy, criticize it, and amuse themselves with the ridiculous aspects of it, but still perform it in their work. By doing this, they both dis-identify and (re)produce strategy at the same time (Fleming & Spicer, 2003). So, a playful tactic like this is used to maneuver and create space within the hegemony of strategic management. The playful tactic is also a comedic strategy narrative that constructs strategy as a carnival and allows managers to amuse and entertain themselves with it.

Thirdly, there was talk that constructed strategy as a personal experience and/or issue for the managers. This kind of intimacy means the managers’ personal relationship and attachment to strategy. Here, strategy appeared neither as an instrument for doing something, nor something to play or amuse oneself with, but an arena that provides managers a way and means to construct their existence, subjectivity, and identity in relation to it (see Sillince and Simpson in this volume for linkages between strategy work and identity work in organizations). Where as in the playful tactic, the managers resisted strategy’s colonization of their subjectivity playfully, here they instead seemed to use it to construct and shape their subjectivity and identity as managers. They use strategy “*narcissistically pleasing oneself, instead of others*” to summon up their emotional desires and pleasures

(Featherstone, 2007, 27). This is why we decided to name the third strategy usage tactic *intimate*.

Dynamics of (re)production and usage

Strategy consumption is something that happens in between the dominant strategy discourse and managers' own use of it. Consumption is a mediating factor between structure and subject. The strategy consumption process, or the trajectory, as de Certeau would call it, includes two sides. Firstly, managers consume strategy by *(re)producing* it with the help of the macro-discourses of strategy. The (re)production of strategy brings strategy into being by constructing it as management discipline. Secondly, the managers *use* strategy tactically for their own purposes through three different tactics (instrumental, playful, intimate). The consumer performing this process is an individual manager located in a particular local discursive context. In order to understand strategy consumption, this context has to be taken into account, since talk does not exist in a vacuum. The primary local context of consumption wherein the manager operates is his/her own organization, which is taken under consideration in this work. However, it has to be noted that the manager also operates in a wider social context that extends beyond the limits of a particular organization. This is the context that hosts the macro-discourses of strategy that are imported into the case organizations for strategy consumption.

The framework also fits Fairclough's (1992, 73) three dimensional conception of discourse nicely. The macro-discourses represent the social practice of strategy while the (re)production and usage are discursive practices. Here text is considered as the discursive

sive activity of the managers (Fairclough, 2005) that are poets of their actions, in the midst of the strategy discourse.

MACRO-DISCOURSES OF STRATEGY

The macro-discourses of strategy are discursive structures that the managers use as resources when consuming strategy. To some extent, they could be characterized as cultural “commodities,” manifestations of the body of strategic management that the managers are unable to escape, but can use and apply in an individual and contextual manner. The first discourse, militaristic (Mil) macro-discourse, brings strategy back to its roots (Bracker, 1980; Knights & Morgan, 1995; Grandy & Mills, 2004) by seasoning it with war rhetoric. The militaristic macro-discourse paints a violent and war-like picture of strategy. The discourse portrays strategy as a “*battle plan*” or projection that guides the actions of organizational members. Strategy aims at winning battles or killing enemies, while a business environment is viewed as the “*battlefield*,” and managers as the ones capable of seeing the whole battlefield. The organization is conceived to be in a constant battle against its environment and competitors, who are referred to as “*enemies*.” The militaristic discourse also glorifies managers, stressing their role as commanders of their troops. It clearly positions them as the officers, who are not just highly capable but also legitimized to give orders to people executing the strategy orders. Strategy is executed through the commands and orders given by these “*generals*” or “*commanders*.” The employees, considered as “*troops*” or “*soldiers*,” are responsible for executing these orders obediently, while fighting on the “*front line*.” Besides that, the militaristic discourse is also very masculine by nature. Soldiers are considered “*boys*” and the generals and

commanders are most likely understood as men. This kind of a “*disciplining discourse*” reproduces and maintains certain organizational hierarchies and command structures in strategy process and organizational decision-making (Mantere & Vaara, 2008).

Like the militaristic discourse, the mechanistic (Mec) macro-discourse constructs strategy as a posture: a “*position*,” “*set of targets*,” or “*plan*” that is designed or planned by the top managers of the organization (cf. Ansoff 1984). However, the mechanistic discourse draws on technological rhetoric, conceptualizing the organization as a machine that executes strategy accurately. The mechanistic macro-discourse explains little of the content of strategy, but discusses the processes and mechanisms through which strategy is (or should be) accomplished in the organization. According to the mechanistic discourse, the strategy process is a one-way; mainly top-down process, where strategy “*cascades*” down through different organizational levels and layers. The discourse includes many discursive practices that highlight this vertical dimension and nature of strategy. Strategies are made at the “*top*” of the organization, and “*implemented*” to “*practical people*” at the lower levels of the organization. After the strategic objectives are set, they “*cascade*” downwards in the organization. In the mechanistic discourse such strategy implementation is described with metaphors like “*rolling out*” and “*cascading*.” These expressions show how strategy implementation is regarded as a goal-setting process wherein a grand strategy is divided into sub-goals and targets. These procedures and mechanisms are designed and set by top management.

While the militaristic macro-discourse positions managers as central players in the strategy, the mechanistic macro-discourse outlines the role of technologies (Mantere & Vaara; 2008) and mechanisms in strategy. The discourse views implementers of strategy as parts

of the machine, passive recipients of strategy, who are capable, motivated and willing to implement strategy when provided with sufficient objectives and targets through the mechanisms. They are given “*inputs*,” and certain “*outputs*” are expected and measured with the use of “*meters*” and “*metrics*.” Like the militaristic discourse, the mechanistic discourse leaves little, if any, room for improvisation or application. It assumes that strategy should be implemented as such, and behavior and organizational structures should be changed according to it (cf. Chandler, 1962). In some cases the mechanistic discourse even says that people should be “*forced*” to implement strategy.

The humanistic (Hum) macro-discourse is in many ways different from the militaristic and mechanistic macro-discourses discussed above. The humanistic discourse stresses the importance of participation and dialogue (Mantere & Vaara, 2008) and the significance of the entire personnel in strategy work. It places humans, as willing and thoughtful actors, at the center of strategy work at every level of the organization. The humanistic discourse stresses the voluntaristic nature of humankind. It claims that people cannot be forced to follow strategy of any kind without their consent. The discourse emphasizes the role of “*participation*” as a precondition for a successful strategy process. It assumes that when people at different levels of the organization are allowed to “*participate*” in strategic planning, they will also “*commit*” themselves to strategy implementation. This also holds true for the opposite scenario: if people are excluded from the strategy creation process, they are unlikely to feel “*ownership*” for the strategy, therefore distancing them from it. The discourse of humanism also brings up “*meaningfulness*” as a condition of successful strategy implementation. The more meaningful people find strategy, the more willing they are to act according to it. It says that strategy is a common issue for the

members of an organization. Strategies are not commands given by top management, but are instead agreed and “*shared contracts*” that guide the coherent and consistent action of the organizational members. This kind of discourse has also received more attention among popular strategy writers (cf. Kim & Mauborgne, 2005, 171-184), which may explain why managers find it particularly appealing.

As the humanistic macro-discourse enhanced willingness and meaningfulness in strategy work, the pragmatic (Prag) macro-discourse highlights the significance of tangibility and practicality as a means of understanding and adopting strategy. The pragmatic discourse considers strategy a part of the everyday activities of the organization; in some cases it even says that strategy is action *per se* (cf. Mintzberg & Waters 1985). It also stresses the importance of translating strategies into grass root action by making them practical, understandable and concrete (Mantere & Vaara 2008). The pragmatic macro-discourse views strategy as a sort of “*guidance*” steering the everyday actions of the organization. It says that this guidance should be considered and reflected when making decisions at every level of the organization, all the time. While the macro-humanistic discourse emphasized the meaningfulness of the strategy for the individual, the pragmatic macro-discourse highlights its tangibility and practical value in terms of applicability. The pragmatic discourse also outlines the language of strategy. It says that strategies should be made “*clear*” so that their meaning for practice is understood. The discourse is against the abstract strategy language, using metaphors such as “*hieroglyphs*” to characterize undesired expression. When strategies are concrete and clear, they are understood and adopted, it concludes.

The spiritual (Spir) macro-discourse does not discuss religion or religious issues as such, but tends to draw on the spiritual and mystical (Mantere & Vaara 2008) rhetoric by comparing strategy to a spiritual experience and practice. The spiritual discourse brings up faith and the experiences with faith as preconditions and antecedents of strategy. It regards strategy as something that is almost beyond the material world, connecting it to a metaphysical reality greater than oneself. Strategy is thus a practice that connects oneself with the higher-level purposes of an organization and gives people a sense of belonging (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003, 93-94). The spiritual macro-discourse constructs strategy as a matter of “*faith*.” Faith in strategy enables people to serve something purposeful and greater than their personal aspirations (Pfeffer 2003). Strategy is manifested through “*vision*” and “*mission*” statements, both concepts adopted originally from spiritual vocabulary. Strategy is a practice that gives people mission and vision, a purpose and direction, and connects them with the higher-level purposes of the organization. Strategy is a “*journey*” into the vision for the people. The spiritual macro-discourse also brings up the sense of belonging. According to it, faith in strategy gets people to feel as if they belong to the organization and invest in realizing its purpose. While committed to the “*values*” of the organization, they feel a sense of purpose and significance. Hence, the spiritual discourse emphasizes the symbolic nature of strategy. Strategy is a sacred mission or vision that requires faith in order to live according to it. The spiritual discourse positions managers as “*messianic*” leaders, prophets or priests, who have the “*wisdom*” to lead their people to a better future, a prophetic promised land. The role of managers is to believe in strategy sincerely, in order to be able to make their own subordinates believers and disciples of the strategy too. Their obligation is to share and spread the gospel of

strategy further. Again, the employees are considered as “*followers*”, closely following the guidance of strategy. Organizational members favorably disposed towards strategy are called “*true believers of strategy.*” Having become believers of strategy, the subordinates become spokesmen for the strategy themselves.

(RE)PRODUCTION OF STRATEGY

Even as we found that macro-discourses impacted the lives of managers, we also found practices regarding how the macro-discourses were reproduced through managerial agency (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). (Re)production is a discursive practice that constructs and maintains strategy as a management discipline. It brings strategy into being by defining the discipline of strategy at the societal level and localizes it to the case organizations. We saw evidence of the reproduction of all of the five macro-discourses. As each of them constructs and holds its own views and ideas about strategy and strategy work, the managers may use them skillfully as resources when (re)enacting an organizational reality. These macro-discourses exist in a wider social context, which means that they are brought into the case organizations from the outside and are imported as discourses by nature. They can be recognized from the case organizations as well as from the wider strategy and management discourse (Table 2).

--- Insert Table 2 around here ---

The (re)production of strategy is a very dominant, obvious and visible part of strategy consumption in the data. (Re)production constructs an epic narrative of strategy, outlining and discussing not only strategy and strategy work peculiar to each case organization,

but also the ideals that are present in the wider strategy discourse. Managers seem to (re)produce strategy in similar ways in different case organizations (Table 2), which recalls the ideas of the rational strategy approach. The following quotes from the managers of case organizations illustrate how they (re)produce strategy:

“It [strategy] is the way we reach our vision [...] it’s our lifeline, or an operating manual for success.” (Industrial)

“You must have the most inspiring vision. [...] And in order to realize the vision, actions are derived from it, strategic ladders that are climbed up to reach the vision.” (Polytechnic)

“Strategy consists of the choices that we do, [it states] where are we headed, and how do we will get there.” (Insurance)

Here, strategy appears to managers mostly as a way or journey into the defined vision of the organization, which can be interpreted as a reference to the spiritual macro-discourse. Strategy is portrayed as the “way,” “plan” or “choices” on how to reach the “vision” - a journey into salvation for the strategy believers. This kind of journey metaphor was commonly used in every case organization to illustrate the nature of strategy. It is interesting how the terms “vision” and “mission,” both of which derive from spiritual rhetoric, are (re)produced by the managers so frequently and consistently. This may indicate that these expressions are not only deeply rooted at the case organizations but also at strategy discourse, although the consumers, here managers, might not recognize or acknowledge the religious underpinnings.

Again, at every organization managers also outline how strategy should concern the whole personnel and how it should be realized in the everyday actions of the organization, which refer to the humanistic and pragmatic macro-discourses. The following comment from the manager of Insurance is an illustrative example of that:

“That [strategy] would be taken to the most concrete level possible, so that the individual seller understands what this means ‘in the context of my everyday life.’ [...] This thing belongs to everybody, and it brings benefits for the customers, and for us, as well as for the company.”

To some extent, the mechanistic macro-discourse is also present in every case organization, as the managers emphasize mechanisms and processes that relate to strategy. In the following, the manager from Industrial accounts for the functioning of his/her company’s strategy process in a very mechanical manner:

“Well, to put it shortly, we have some intention of what we want to accomplish, a vision state, and then we have a predefined mode of operation, and then we have a disciplined practical implementation. The process is very logical, as it can be in an engineer-based firm. The strategy is formulated at the top management level of a firm and then it is cascaded through these different business plans into practical action.”

As can be seen, for most parts, the accounts of (re)production are faithful to the rational strategy approach (cf. Chandler, 1962; Ansoff, 1984). Top managers formulate visions and strategies that are further implemented in organization. This could be read as a sign of the dominance rational strategy discourse has over managers. This finding confirms the Foucauldian (1972, 55) idea that discourses, as manifestations of power structures,

dominate managers. In practice, many managers do not have a choice whether or not to apply strategic practices in their work. The similarity may also reveal that certain root metaphors, such as the metaphor of the journey (Inns, 1996), have been deeply embedded and institutionalized in the strategy discourse and became a socially-accepted way to describe strategy. The journey metaphor seems to provide us with a means to describe the progress, direction and purpose of an organization (and its strategy) in a manner that makes sense to us.

USAGE TACTICS: INSTRUMENTAL, PLAYFUL AND INTIMATE

Usage tactics are discursive practices that describe how the managers use and poach the strategy, (re)produced preciously, in creative ways (Table 3). This side of strategy consumption could be characterized as a “quiet” part of strategy consumption. The macro-discourses of strategy are also applied as resources in this discursive practice, but in a more clandestine and subtle manner. Their consumption is somewhat hidden by nature, since usage is scattered over the (re)production of strategy. It represents “*devious*” and “*dispersed*” talk that does not manifest itself through its own products, but more likely through “*ways of using*” strategy (De Certeau, 1988, xii-xiii).

Our discourse analysis revealed three tactics that were used across all three organizations, and across different managerial accounts. We shall call them the instrumental, playful and intimate tactics. We shall address each tactic in turn. Importantly, Table 3 illustrates how the macro-discourses are adapted to local use when managers pursue the various tactics in the case organizations.

--- Insert Table 3 around here ---

When using strategy instrumentally in the case organizations, the managers catch the rational ethos of strategy embodied in the accounts of strategy (re)production. For instance, at Industrial, managers analyze their business environment and set targets and objectives based on it; at Polytechnic, they try to position their organization into the market; and at Insurance, they use strategy as a direction for creating motivation and commitment among their subordinates. However, managers also use strategy for their own purposes and intentions instrumentally with methods that may break down with the (re)production of strategy. This is an example of “*bricolage*,” (“*an artisan-like inventiveness*,” cf. Jarzabkowski, 2004) an activity that combines and connects bits of strategy discourse to managers’ own repertoires. For instance, in some parts of the instrumental tactic, strategy is used for a manager’s personal goals and purposes, such as at Industrial, where the business unit managers treat strategy as a loose framework that allows them to maneuver (opportunistically) with their own unit-specific strategies (cf. Laine & Vaara 2007). The following quote shows this kind of usage in practice:

“They don’t pay an awful lot of attention to how you reach your profit margins. [...] Industrial’s strategy tells roughly the businesses we want to be in. [...] Industrial’s strategy limits the scope of the business units, but as such, a business unit can create its own strategy rather freely under those boundaries.”

Again strategy was used in case organizations to secure and legitimize managers’ work (Industrial) and to justify decisions and choices (Insurance). Here, the managers clearly apply strategy for their own purposes, for building legitimacy for their work (cf. Knight & Morgan, 1991) or solving practical problems by labeling them “strategic,” as is the

case at Insurance. However, in many cases strategy is also used for more collective purposes, mainly for the benefit of a manager's unit (Polytechnic & Insurance), in some cases even for the sake of the whole organization (Polytechnic). In many cases, instrumental strategy consumption like this aims at coping (Chia & Holt, 2006) with the strategy. It may not necessarily turn strategy into something totally different, since it does not have the power to do it, but more likely operates within it by plying it and trying to cope with it.

While the instrumental tactic adopts strategy and maintains its rational ethos by using it instrumentally, the playful tactic takes strategy more creatively and less seriously. It is also more critical towards strategy than the instrumental tactic, as can be seen in the cases of Industrial, Polytechnic, and Insurance. For most parts, the playful tactic embodies a critique and resistance towards strategy and its methods, which can be read as a sign of cynicism from the managers. However, playfulness is not purely an explicit resistance of strategy, but more likely an opportunistic, subtle and silent pragmatism, which resists and subverts strategy implicitly and quietly on its own terms (Fleming & Sewell, 2005). For instance, in every case organization strategy and strategy work is a source of amusement for the managers that allows them to joke and ridicule them. In the following, the manager of Insurance describes playfully his/her company's efforts to communicate strategy:

“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.”

Comparing strategy to Mao's book is a quite clever discursive move from the manager. In a way, Mao Zedong's *Little Red Book* was also a 'strategic' tool to change the Chinese

people and society just like Insurance's strategy is an attempt to change Insurance's people and working culture. By distributing "*the strategy booklet*" to every employee of Insurance and requiring people to read it, the management of Insurance engages in the same kind of a practice as the Chinese government to subjugate the employees. This example shows how humor is a central feature of the playful strategy consumption in case organizations. Ironic and cynical humor is used in a carnival-like manner, not only to subvert and resist but also to cope with the power of the strategy discourse imposed on the managers. Irony provides them with a way to criticize and challenge the sacred norms of the strategy in a way that might be considered illegitimate, if expressed in any other words (cf. Fleming & Sewell 2005). Irony also represents the rhetoric that holds managers apart from strategy and channels criticisms, disagreement, and/or frustration towards it, and it is dissembled in such a way that it is difficult to understand without knowing the context wherein it is used. Being cynical, it sees through the strategy and its practices, and considers them repressive by nature. The playful tactic also uses contradictions and comparisons as rhetoric resources when illustrating the absurdity of strategy in some cases.

In the case of intimate strategy usage, de Certeau's remarks about the "*clandestine*" nature of consumption are most obviously materialized. The intimate tactic shows how managers use strategy discourse creatively to construct their own subjectivity based on it and in relation to it. For instance, at Industrial, managers glorify themselves as "strategic leaders" with it; at Polytechnic, they construct themselves as fearless and brave agents who dare to take some risks in order to cope with strategy; and at Insurance, they show their subjection to it by devoting and submitting themselves voluntarily to the company's strategic intent. However, in every case, organization managers also feel themselves

somehow repressed by the strategy, either lacking support in strategy work (Industrial) or feeling themselves sidelined and intimidated (Polytechnic) or helpless and incapable when faced with strategy (Insurance). The following comment from the manager of Polytechnic shows how he/she has been forced to accept strategy:

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."

Again, in every case organization managers dis-identify themselves from strategy if they find it unsuitable for them for some reason. This kind of strategy usage may indicate that strategy does question and confront the managers' identity and may force them to dis-identify from it, maybe even sabotage the whole strategy (cf. Guth & MacMillan 1986). These findings show that strategy is not just an instrument or plaything for managers, but that it also evokes emotions, such as fears and insecurity, and reveals something private and literally intimate about their relation to strategy.

DISCUSSION

The practice approach has urged us to study the practice of strategy both at intra and extra-organizational levels (Whittington, 2006). In this work, we sought a way to bridge this gap by studying the use of strategy and by showing how strategy, as an institutionalized management discipline, is practiced, i.e. *consumed* by managers in three case organizations. As a result, we have shown how the two context-specific and embedded discursive

practices of strategy consumption, the (re)production and consumption, are closely connected to the macro-level strategy discourses present in the wider strategy and management literature. By showing this interconnection, we have demonstrated how managers, as strategy practitioners, consume and use different macro-discourses of strategy.

The results also show that strategy is consumed and used by managers in more creative and improvisatory ways than the previous, namely rational-oriented, strategy research has shown. Jarzabkowski (2004) introduced the concept of “*management practices-in-use*” to explain and describe how institutionalized practices, such as strategy, can be used in ways that may not comply with the original purpose of practice. The strategy usage illustrated in this work sheds light on the use of strategy practices by pointing out how strategy is practiced by managers with improvisatory and adaptive manners for their contextual and situational needs. For instance, when using strategy instrumentally, managers analyze their business environment, set targets and objectives (Industrial), and try to position their organization on the market (Polytechnic). Here their strategy usage is reminiscent of the rational strategy approach in various ways (cf. Chandler, 1962). However, in other areas, managers seem to use strategy instrumentally for totally different purposes than the rational ethos would suggest. For instance, the legitimization aspect (Neilsen & Rao, 1987; Vaara & Monin, 2010; also see the Suddaby, Foster & Trank paper in this volume) seems to be acute in every case organization, as strategy provides the managers with the means to watch their back and justify their positions. At Polytechnic and Insurance, managers apply strategy instrumentally to motivate their subordinates. Strategy seems to offer them a device that connects their work with that of their subordinates to the objectives and higher-level purposes of their organization.

Although strategy is almost unanimously acknowledged ((re)produced) as a management discipline in the different case organizations, the way it is used by the managers in their everyday life is very context-specific and largely based on their individual needs. This finding shows that strategy is an indefinite and versatile (and maybe even precarious) practice for managers (Whittington, 2003), and that they use and consume this practice in multiple ways and with multiple means that may even depart from the ideals that they themselves attach to it. Different kinds of ideals and models (macro-discourses) can be used creatively by managers, depending on their prevailing situation and needs. For instance, at Industrial, strategy is treated as a loose framework that allows managers to maneuver freely with their own sub-strategies (cf. Laine & Vaara, 2007). At Polytechnic, managers perform some prohibited actions and tricks in order to cope with strategy in their everyday work. They also use strategy to solve major problems in their units by labeling them as strategic. These findings show how the strategic actions of managers may not necessarily arise from the intended and intentional strategies, as purely rational thought would suggest, but rather they emerge from everyday “*practical coping*” and “*dwelling*” of managers when things are labeled and regarded as strategic (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009). This is also in line with the ideas of the processual strategy approach (cf. Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Previous work on strategy discourse has already shown that strategy is not a unanimous discourse, but more likely consists of different kinds of (even contradictory) ideas and types of discourse (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Phillips et al., 2008). The results of this work show how different macro-discourses of strategy can co-exist within the same organization and be used tactically for different purposes by its manag-

ers. For instance, the spiritual macro-discourse is used widely as a resource to (re)produce strategy as a sacred journey into the intended vision of the organization. The same macro-discourse is, however, also used as a means to ridicule and joke about the role of the top management in strategy work, as is the case at Industrial and Insurance. Alternatively, as Mantere & Vaara (2008) discovered, spiritual language can be used in an intimate way to address the realization the meaningfulness of a manager's work as a part of an organization. This example shows how strategy discourses can be polysemic resources, having a number of meanings and ways of using them (Hardy et al. 2000), and that strategy consumption is a discursive accomplishment that capitalizes and appropriates the discursive space between the discursive structures (macro-discourses of strategy) and the user (manager).

Our analysis demonstrates that managers (re)produce strategy in relatively similar ways in different case organizations, often in ways that mirror the ideas of the rational strategy approach. Here, strategy generally appears to managers as a way or journey into the defined vision of the organization, which can be interpreted as a strong reference to the spiritual macro-discourse. Again, at every organization, managers outline how strategy should concern the whole personnel and how it should be realized in the everyday actions of the organization, which refer to the humanistic and pragmatic macro-discourses. To some extent, the mechanistic macro-discourse is also present in every case organization, as managers emphasize mechanisms and processes that relate to strategy. This finding confirms the Foucauldian (1972, 55) idea that discourses, as manifestations of power structures, dominate individuals. In practice, many managers do not have a choice whether or not to apply strategic practices in their work. Strategy is imposed on them by the

Zeitgeist that treats strategy as a superior management discipline (cf. Knights & Morgan, 1991; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Ortmann & Seidl in this volume), and the similarity found in the accounts of the strategy (re)production seems to indicate this. It may also reveal that certain root metaphors, such as the metaphor of the journey (Inns, 1996; Mantere & Vaara, 2008), have been deeply embedded and institutionalized in the strategy discourse and became a socially-accepted way to describe strategy. The journey metaphor seems to provide us with a means to describe the progress, direction and purpose of an organization (and its strategy) in a manner that makes sense to us.

However, the (re)production of strategy is only the other side of the strategy consumption process, since managers are also able to use and subvert strategy in creative ways (Table 3). Strategy use is an area that has been somewhat neglected in previous research on strategy discourse. Through these accounts of strategy usage, we can not only learn *what* is being done with strategy, but also *how* strategy is consumed stylistically by managers (de Certeau, 1988). The accounts demonstrate how strategy is consumed in a more creative and intimate way than previous strategy research has shown.

Instrumental strategy usage stems largely from the contextual and situational needs of managers, departing from the rational ethos of strategy in some cases. Previous research on strategy discourse has identified several power effects of strategy (Knights & Morgan, 1991). The results of this work show how managers can subtly use and apply these power effects in practice. For instance, managers make strategies appear important and legitimate to others (Industrial & Polytechnic) and in this way use strategy to demonstrate their managerial rationality. They also legitimize their exercise of power to their subordinates by using strategy to justify the choices and decisions that have been made (Insurance).

These examples show how strategy discourse can be used to justify and legitimize many things in organizational life (cf. Vaara & Tienari, 2002; Vaara et al., 2004; Suddaby, Foster & Trank in this volume).

On the other hand, playful and intimate strategy usage tactics depart even more clearly from the ideas of the strategy (re)production. These strategy usage tactics show how managers shape and consume strategy and strategic issues actively and individually. For instance, the playful usage tactic seems to be highly critical towards top management in every case organization. At Polytechnic and Insurance, the content of the strategy and the methods and tools that are used in strategy work are harshly criticized. It is also interesting to note how dis-identification becomes a central feature of intimate strategy use in every organization, as managers seem to produce and construct their role as bystanders in strategy. Strategy usage like this does not produce any tangible or concrete results, and can thus often be regarded as unproductive. Nevertheless, as we have seen, they are anything but innocent or empty accounts, but colorful and interesting notions about the cynicism and humor related to the strategy work that may distance the practitioners from strategy or force them to dis-identify from it (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Mantere, 2003). They certainly influence the way that managers act and master strategy in their work. Accounts of playful and intimate strategy usage also represent very artful and skilful styles of using strategy discourses.

The critical views on strategic management (Shrivastava, 1986; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Ghoshal, 2004) can be criticized for being too deterministic in its relation to agency (Heraclous & Barrett, 2001; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). To some extent, it may be guilty of downplaying the role of agency in the construction, reproduction and transformation of

discourse, by ignoring the fact that individuals are not as passive and powerless as the Foucauldian tradition of the discourse analyses may suggest (Reed, 2000). This work outlines the agency of individual managers who use and appropriate strategy discourse in their everyday life actively and artfully. Although strategy discourse definitely “*transforms managers [...] into subjects*” and makes them follow its principles (Knights & Morgan, 1991, 252), managers are also able to transform and subvert the strategy discourse to fit their own preferences and desires. By showing this kind of strategy consumption, this work stresses the dynamic relationship between discourse and power (Hardy & Phillips, 2004), and the dynamics between agency and structure, by showing that although macro-discourses have power over us we can use and (re)produce them in novel ways. Intimate and playful strategy usage tactics tell us how the managers engage themselves in strategy personally, either struggling with its meaning vis-à-vis their subjectivity (Laine & Vaara, 2007) or using it to construct their identity (Sillince & Simpson in this volume). The struggles become most obvious in the case of playful and intimate strategy usage. Especially playful strategy usage is in most parts quite cynical and critical towards strategy and its manifestations. By showing detailed descriptions of this kind of strategy usage, this work shows how managers artfully resist strategy. They use and appropriate the strategy discourse skillfully for their own purposes to resist and alternate it, while at the same time articulate and talk in ways that do not directly confront the dominant discursive regime (Mumby, 2005). By doing this, they fix the meaning of the strategy discourse and consume it in their own terms. This finding shows that resistance towards strategy is seldom evident and direct, but more likely implicit, hidden and playful by nature.

Previous work on strategy discourse has showed how different strategy discourses can either promote or prevent participation and engagement in the strategy process (Mantere & Vaara, 2008). In the case of intimate strategy usage, this work shows how the lack of chances for participation, and poor applicability of the strategy can make managers dis-identify themselves from it. On the other hand, intimate strategy usage also shows how managers can engage themselves strongly in strategy with different discursive resources. For instance, the militaristic macro-discourse can be used to glorify managers as strategic leaders, and the combination of militaristic and spiritual macro-discourse can be used to construct managers as obedient and submissive foot soldiers or followers of strategy (cf. Knights & Morgan 1991). These results confirm the finding that strategy discourse does not only produce different subject positions for the individuals alone, but also that individuals can use strategy discourse to construct and realize their subjectivity (Laine & Vaara 2007).

CONCLUSION: USABILITY OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRATEGY

From its outset, the mainstream of strategy literature has regarded strategy and organization as separate issues; strategy formulation being followed by implementation, termed as the “allocation or reallocation of resources – funds, equipment, or personnel” (Chandler, 1962: 11) The accepted notion that strategic decisions are followed by implementation often leads to the idea that managers are able to realize strategies by “twisting organizational levers”, resulting in configurations that control cognition and behavior in ways that support strategy. While the strategy/implementation split has been challenged a number of times, both practitioners and academics are affected by the notion that strategic analy-

sis and organizational activities are fundamentally separate categories, where good performance is created by the second following the first.

Our approach to the topic has certainly been radical, if strategy is viewed from the “design lens” (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2008). Our results do, however, offer practical implications as well. Our illustration of the tactics of consumption underscores the importance of official strategy’s ability to address issues relevant to people’s work practice. While the implementation view would characterize the success of strategy realization in terms of the organizational members’ activities being redirected in a specific way, perhaps we should treat the *usefulness and usability of official strategy* as a success factor for strategy realization, to augment and challenge popular conceptions such as resistance to change (Hrebiniak, 2006), reward systems (Hrebiniak & Joyce, 1984; Kaplan & Norton, 1996), staff understanding and sub-unit goals (Kaplan & Norton, 1996) or control structures and practices (Simons, 1995). Does official strategy meet the needs, concerns and anxieties of managers at various levels? Is it capable of offering answers to pressing questions?

Our analysis also suggests a number of areas for further research. First, in this study, strategy consumption was studied at the level of top and middle managers. In order to broaden the scope, further research should concentrate on the employee level. It would be interesting to compare how different groups within an organization consume strategy and strategic issues. Indeed, few accounts of strategic management from the viewpoint of the operative personnel yet exist (but see Mantere, 2005). Second, it would be interesting to take a more ethnographical and longitudinal approach to strategy consumption, and to study how a group of managers (and employees) would consume strategy in their talk

during a longer period of time. This kind of approach would increase our understanding on how usage tactics evolve and change over time. Third, it would be also interesting to study how individuals use different kinds of consumption tactics in different forums and platforms when addressing strategy to different audiences. Fourth, it would be interesting to concentrate on a single strategy usage tactic presented in this work, for instance playful strategy use, and study how it is manifested in different organizations and contexts. Playful strategy usage embodies an interesting form of resistance towards strategy and thus it would be interesting to study what provokes and fuels this kind of consumption. Finally, one of the limitations of this work is the fact that strategy consumption has been studied at the level of strategic management practice. We still know relatively little about how certain individual strategic practices, such as the Balanced Score Card or Porter's Five Forces, are used in different contexts and situations. Further research should thus narrow the scope and focus on a single practice or practices and study how they are used as strategy practices.

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FIGURES AND TABLES

Table 1 Data Production at the case organizations

Data source	Industrial	Polytechnic	Insurance
Interviews	Ten interviews conducted in 2003. Interviewees were chosen from the top and middle managers of Industrial, from different parts of the company.	Six interviews (three individual and three pair interviews, a total of nine interviewees) were conducted in 2004. The interviewees were chosen from the top and middle managers of Polytechnic, from different parts of the organization.	18 interviews conducted in 2007. The interviewees were chosen from the top and middle managers of Insurance, in three different units.
Documents	Documents concerning strategy and other subjects as background information. The material was useful when describing the contextual factors of Industrial.	Documents and web pages of the organization were used as background information in constructing the case description and analyzing the data. Polytechnic's websites and old annual reports were used as a source of background information in constructing the case description.	Documents received from the company helped construct the case description of Insurance and contextualize the interviews.
Observations	The authors were present in various strategy workshops and seminars both as observers and facilitators. These sessions provided us with a chance to observe how strategy was communicated and consumed by the managers of Industrial.		The first author was present in various strategy workshops and seminars both as an observer and a facilitator. These observations provided us with a more thorough understanding of Insurance's organizational culture.

Table 2 Strategy (re)production at the case organizations

Discursive practice	Industrial	Polytechnic	Insurance
(Re)Production	<p>Strategy is a way or means to reach the vision or to win the war. (<i>Spir & Mil</i>)</p> <p>Strategy is created and executed through a systematic strategy process (<i>Mec</i>)</p> <p>Strategy concerns the entire personnel and everyone should be able to realize it in his/her everyday work. (<i>Hum & Prag</i>)</p>	<p>Strategy means realizing the inspired vision. Strategy is ladders or road signs that lead to the vision. (<i>Spir & Mec</i>)</p> <p>Strategy, as an agreed contract, requires the participation and involvement of the entire personnel. (<i>Hum</i>)</p> <p>Strategy is pragmatic and should be taken to the grass roots, where everyday decisions are being made. (<i>Prag</i>)</p>	<p>Strategy describes the vision or intent Insurance aims at. (<i>Spir</i>)</p> <p>Strategy sets conditions on how the company proceeds towards the vision. (<i>Mec & Spir</i>)</p> <p>Strategy should be a coherent part of everyday life at Insurance. (<i>Prag</i>)</p>

Table 3 Strategy usage tactics at the case organizations

Discursive practice	Industrial	Polytechnic	Insurance
Usage: Instrumental tactic	<p>Managers use strategy to analyze their business environment systematically and to create a shared understanding of it. (<i>Hum & Mec</i>)</p> <p>Managers use strategy to set targets and objectives. (<i>Mec</i>)</p> <p>Managers create sub-strategies to secure and ensure that their unit is in line with Industrial's strategy and appears legitimized. (<i>Hum & Mec</i>)</p> <p>Managers use Industrial's strategy as a loose framework or guideline, which leaves them room to maneuver with their own sub-strategies. (<i>Prag</i>)</p>	<p>Managers produce elegant strategy papers for the City Council to legitimize and report organizational activities as an administrative task. (<i>Mec, Spir & Prag</i>)</p> <p>Managers use strategy to differentiate Polytechnic from its competitors and improve its brand. (<i>Prag</i>)</p> <p>Managers use strategy to build commitment and involvement in their own units. (<i>Prag, Hum & Spir</i>)</p> <p>Managers use strategy to solve problems in their own units. (<i>Mec & Prag</i>)</p>	<p>Managers use Insurance's strategy as an intent that they make tangible and execute as a part of their job as managers. (<i>Prag & Mec</i>)</p> <p>Managers use Insurance's strategy as a tool to motivate and inspire their subordinates. (<i>Hum & Spir</i>)</p> <p>Managers use Insurance's strategy as a means to justify and legitimize choices and decisions. (<i>Prag</i>)</p>
Usage: Playful tactic	<p>Managers question and joke about the role of Industrial's headquarters and top management as central strategists. (<i>Mec & Spir</i>)</p> <p>Managers amuse themselves with the cultural differences between different parts of Industrial that prevent the company from operating coherently and realizing its strategy in a desired way. (<i>Prag</i>)</p>	<p>Managers joke with the poor quality of Polytechnic's strategy and ignore its guiding effect in their work. (<i>Spir</i>)</p> <p>Managers construct and portray administration-driven strategy work and its mechanisms as unsuitable and ridiculous for Polytechnic. (<i>Mec</i>)</p>	<p>Managers amuse themselves by joking about the abstract content of Insurance's strategy. (<i>Spir</i>)</p> <p>Managers ridicule the role of Insurance's top management and headquarters in strategy. (<i>Prag & Spir</i>)</p> <p>Managers parody the methods used as symbols and tools in Insurance's strategy communication. (<i>Spir</i>)</p>
Usage: Intimate tactic	<p>Managers use strategy to glorify themselves as strategic leaders. (<i>Mil</i>)</p> <p>Managers outline how they lack support in Industrial's strategy process. (<i>Hum & Prag</i>)</p> <p>Managers dis-identify themselves from parts of Industrial's strategy that do not concern them. (<i>Prag</i>)</p>	<p>Managers reveal how they take risks and use prohibited tricks in order to cope and maneuver with Polytechnic's strategy in their work. (<i>Prag & Mec</i>)</p> <p>Managers share how they feel themselves intimidated, sidelined and dominated by others when taking part in Polytechnic's strategy work. (<i>Hum</i>)</p> <p>Managers pass and ignore Polytechnic's strategy swiftly when they consider it unsuitable for themselves. (<i>Mec</i>)</p>	<p>Managers devote and submit themselves to Insurance's strategy. (<i>Spir & Mil</i>)</p> <p>Managers reveal how they feel themselves helpless and incapable in front of Insurance's vague strategy, although they are expected to know its practical meaning thoroughly. (<i>Prag</i>)</p> <p>Managers dis-identify themselves from Insurance's strategy by silencing it and ignoring some of its practices. (<i>Prag</i>)</p>