The concept ‘strategy’ has become a ubiquitous part of the Western worldview; it has taken over spheres of life far from its original homes in war and business, and is used to manage a variety of collectives, including churches, the Red Cross, and the Boy Scouts. The rational and apparently simple language of strategic plans as a ‘common direction’ or a ‘shared understanding’ seeks to cut through the complexity of organizational life and the different, often competing perspectives people take as they go about their business. However, such sharedness remains elusive: many or most organizations operate in environments defined by multiple objectives and diffuse power, and the formulations of the management are reinterpreted, challenged and appropriated by a polyphony of other voices. Even in such environments where the maintenance of a shared understanding of goals and direction appears impossible, people find ways of acting as if they were in agreement; they manage to coordinate their actions and understanding of strategic priorities.

Building on a strategy-as-practice approach, this study investigates how people achieve such coordination despite unavoidable differences in views and ambiguity of meaning. I draw on a 19-year study of strategy work in a Finnish city organization to study how participants introduced broader institutional perspectives to the strategy work as related but different perspectives on the city and its future and used them as institutional voices in dialogue. This study focuses on the ways in which these institutional voices were used in tandem to craft a collective strategy and how this resultant strategy was interpreted and reinterpreted according to situational needs.

My findings describe how participants in the strategy work in Bay City related the pluralist institutions with each other and used them in context, and how participants used these institutions into partially shared, flexible practices and meanings, ultimately creating a strategy text which was used to coordinate organizational action in a variety of ways, without complete agreement of its meanings. I describe this meeting of perspectives as an ideational dialogue between locally relevant institutional voices, which enabled the creation of a collective strategy. This account makes three contributions to our understanding of the practice of strategy. First, it elucidates the institutional nature of strategy work by describing the role of local enactments of societal and field-level institutions in strategy work. Second, it introduces the notion of institutional dialogue and institutional voices to advance the conversation on institutional complexity, demonstrating the constructive aspects of institutional complexity for strategy work. Third, it provides a polyphonic account of how a collective strategy is formulated in an ongoing process balancing diverging interests.
Strategy Work as Dialogue
Reflections on Institutional Voices in a City Organization

Helsinki 2017
Strategy Work as Dialogue: Reflections on Institutional Voices in a City Organization

Key words: strategy as practice, collective strategy, dialogue, discourse analysis, institutional complexity

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PREFACE

This book has its beginning in my fascination with the apparently fundamental differences between people who live together – as friends, family, or colleagues. People who inhabit at first sight very similar life worlds, and who seem to have made very similar life choices, may and often do act according to completely different rationales. How does that happen? What do such people have to say to each other? As members of society, we are constantly exposed to such differences in our daily lives. They even go under our skins: I act according to a very different rationale in my business negotiations, when seeing a beggar on the street (it does happen in Helsinki), or when I am at home with my family. Others, I am told, have similar experiences. How do we deal with the knowledge of these differences? How do we reconcile these different roles?

These questions are surely too complex to be answered in full - certainly between the covers of a doctoral thesis. They point to themes that have become the focus of much theoretical activity in the field of organization studies, and continue to inspire my research. Despite its convenient place in an emerging theoretical stream, this book is built around a life-long curiosity about differences in the lifeworlds of people. This curiosity has developed into an academic interest, and shaped my path as a researcher. A part of it is captured on the pages of this work.

My self-appointed task is to describe the creation of a collective strategy in strategy discussions: the ways in which participants in strategy work craft bridges between their (seemingly conflicting) views, and coordinate their views on the goals of the organization as well as the actions taken to fulfil these goals. To achieve my goal, I concentrate on the different worlds that discussants in a Finnish city organization create and react to in their discussions of what the municipal organization – a very complex construct – is, and does, in its equally complex environment. This is a challenge in itself, and would be impossible without the help of simplifying tools; in this case a theory of institutional complexity, a conception of language as social practice, and a method of dialogical analysis. I am conscious of the existence of many alternative paths: many of these might have been much straighter and better paved, but probably not as scenic as the one I took.

As a student and scholar of dialogue, I see this book as the work of a community. Although my name is on its cover, many of the ideas presented in the book have only travelled through me. As with (almost) all scientific work, any novelty that this work has
lies more in the interpretation and combination of ideas than the creation of something completely new. If these ideas belong to anyone, they belong to those wise scholars who have travelled before me, to the gracious people of my case city who have trusted me with their words, and to the wonderful community of friends, colleagues and family who have shared this trip with me.

I am ever indebted to my supervisors, Saku Mantere, Eero Vaara, and Frank den Hond, for their encouragement and persistence in pushing my work forward. Creating an academic monograph out of the eclectic ingredients I chose would not have been possible without your patient guidance. Saku; thank you for introducing me to Mikhail Bakhtin’s world, helping me find my voice in it, and in raising difficult issues when it was needed. Eero; I could not have had a more supportive and encouraging supervisor than you. Thank you for all the doors you have opened, and for teaching me what generative dialogue can mean. Frank; thank you for walking beside me and helping me turn this book from a sprawling maze of ideas into an argument. I have thoroughly enjoyed our playful discussions, be it in marathon meetings, over coffee or in the sauna. I am also deeply grateful to Professors Linda Rouleau and Martin Kornberger for their incisive and encouraging comments as pre-examiners of this work, as well as to Professor Kornberger for flying to Helsinki to debate it as my formal opponent.

My work would not be the same if I had not received the help of a veritable army of commentators over the years. I am especially thankful for Nina Granqvist, Ruthanne Huising, Linda Putnam, Henri Schildt, and Janne Tienari for helpful guidance and inspiration over the years. I have over the years been supported through membership in a strong and constructive academic community, both in the vibrant Helsinki Organizational Studies community and abroad. The list of those I have taught, learned, laughed, cried, written and debated with is too long for detailed thanks – I hope to raise a glass to your health the next time we meet. Some central idols and partners must be named. I am especially grateful to Paul Buhanist, Jenny Helin, Tuukka Kostamo, Tuomas Kuronen, Frank Martela, Riku Ruotsalainen, Kathrin Sele, Chris Smissaert, Hanna Timonen, Maria Törnroos, Jouni Virtaharju and Carola Wolf. I am especially thankful to the Noux Raiders - Henrika Franck, Philip Gylfe, Virpi Sorsa, and Mikko Vesa – for the years of scholarly discussions over red wine; let the Plan B flow! I also owe much to Professor Paul Lillrank and my great colleagues at the HEMA institute for setting me on this path years ago. I have found my academic home in a broad community which spans the international Strategy as Practice community, the European Group of Organ-
ization Studies, and my former colleagues at the Copenhagen Business School. I can neither name you all nor express how important you have been.

Addressing the topic of dialogue in organizations would not have been possible, if the political and professional leadership of Bay City had not generously opened their world to our team of researchers, and invited us to participate in their seminars, listen in on meetings, and share stories over coffee or – sometimes – wine. Across the past eight years, I have been the student and you have been my teachers. Thank you for your trust.

The work of a budding scholar is precarious, and based on the trust and good will of funders who see not what the work is, but what it will be. I have been very fortunate to receive funding from the Doctoral Program of Industrial Engineering and Management, the Hanken School of Economics Funds, the Finnish Cultural Foundation, the Foundation for Economic Education, and the Foundation for Municipal Development (in chronological order). Thank you for freeing me from my worldly obligations, enabling me to concentrate on chasing an idea.

The most important – or broadly speaking the only – tool a social scientist has is their personality. In this study I apply what I have learned from the people around me; those who have made me into the person I am today. I have been fortunate enough to be surrounded by wonderful friends everywhere I have been. Tatu L, Lotta, Juha, Kirsti, Aapo, Reko, Tatu K, Diego, Hector, Krisu, Renne, Kipa, Miglu, Sane, Pietu, and many others – we have taught each other well, and managed to stay alive while doing it. Thank you for showing me a mirror.

And then there is my family. I am the first researcher in my family, on both sides and across generations, and in the first generation of my family members to earn a university degree. Despite this gulf in experience, my whole family – my parents, grandparents, and other relatives – have always instilled in me and my brother the value of curiosity, literature, and civilization, and persistently claimed that we can achieve any task we undertake. So far, this claim has held true, and I am deeply grateful for instilling me with your trust and love. In addition, I have grown with a strong trust in people and a persistence which has carried me through both stress and the physical and metaphorical blows that the world has thrown at me. I owe these to you.
Finally, Anna – my dear Dr. Broberg – and Taito; I cannot thank you enough. For walking this path with me, letting me chase clouds when it was needed, and pulling me back to the ground when I needed it. During my maturation as a researcher, our family has grown from two independent souls to three, soon four people. Anna; you have been my partner in science, as in so much else. Combining two dissertations and careers with family life has certainly given us enough to think about; it has also made us into the couple we are today. We have learned to dream even as we run to the kindergarten or cook, and to take care of ourselves and each other. Thank you for sharing the high points and the hardships with me; you have made them so much more precious. Taito; as I keep telling you, you are the loveliest little person I have met; I cherish each day when we can teach each other – hopefully building a constructive, mutual dialogue for a lifetime. And as for the little one who is yet to come, I cannot wait to meet you, too. I do this work for you two.

Kari Jalonen

Café Bon Temps, Helsinki

September 8th, 2017
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1 INTRODUCTION

Life in language is in fact dependent upon the preservation of a gap. Two speakers must not, and never do, completely understand each other; they must remain only partially satisfied with each other’s replies, because the continuation of dialogue is in large part dependent on neither party knowing exactly what the other means. (Caryl Emerson in the Editor’s Preface to Bakhtin, 1984, p.xxxii)

Strategy researchers often make the implicit assumption that organizational strategies strive for the ideal of a unitary understanding of the goals and direction of the organization, formed and shared by “the leadership” of this organization (Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992; see also e.g. March & Simon, 1958; Mintzberg, 1978; Pettigrew, 1992). However, what this talk of strategy as a ‘shared understanding’ or a ‘common direction’ means amidst the different perspectives taken by people amidst the complexity of organizational life remains unclear. Many or most organizations operate in pluralistic environments defined by “multiple objectives, diffuse power, and knowledge-based work processes” (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Denis, Langley, & Rouleau, 2007, p. 179; see also Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006), and the formulations of the management are reinterpreted, challenged and appropriated by a polyphony of other voices (Kornberger, Clegg, & Carter, 2006; Vaara, 2010). Even in such environments where the maintenance of a shared understanding of goals and direction appears impossible, people find ways of acting as if they were in agreement; they manage to coordinate their actions and understanding of strategic priorities (Kellermanns, Walter, Lechner, & Floyd, 2005; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990). This study seeks to find out how people achieve such coordination in pluralistic environments; more precisely, I concentrate on the creation of a collective organizational strategy — one which enables the construction of organizational goals and coordination of collective action (Mantere, 2013; Mintzberg, 1978) despite unavoidable differences in views and ambiguity of meaning (Denis et al., 2007).

My answer to this question builds on and contributes to the discussion on strategy as a social practice. Instead of the plans or competitive moves often called strategies, this literature concentrates on strategy work: the stream of recurring practices and their continuous adaptation through which participants1 on various levels of the organization

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1 In line with the strategy as practice approach (e.g. Whittington, 2006), I acknowledge the often central role of middle managers and employees in strategy work, in addition to the top management. I thus refer to organizational members participating in strategy work as either ‘participants’, emphasizing what they do in this work, or as ‘strategists’, emphasizing their organizational mandate as the influencers of the organizational goals. Since in my empirical case those participating in the formal meetings were present in their official roles, these two terms are used almost interchangeably in this work, emphasizing these two aspects of their roles.
construct the long-term goals of the organization, and coordinate the means by which these goals are pursued (Jarzabkowski, 2004). Strategy, then, emerges as a continuous social achievement – something that participants in this work ‘do’ together (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 2007). Previous literature has noted that strategy exists to a great extent in and through language use (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hardy, Palmer, & Phillips, 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) and that the shared nature of strategy is always an incomplete social accomplishment – it emerges in an ongoing social negotiation in a community, ever subject to change (Mantere, 2013; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). However, we know relatively little about how these partially shared strategies are formed, and what are the limits to shared understanding about strategy (Mantere, 2013; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017).

Recent studies in strategy as practice have argued that strategy work is embedded in broader societal and macro-institutional contexts (Smets, Greenwood, & Lounsbury, 2015; Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Adopting this view helps us understand how the societal and field-level institutions constitute central perspectives for making sense of strategy work, and guide the crafting of strategy (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Suddaby, Seidl, & Lê, 2013), and describe pluralism through the different institutions which the participants employ in strategy discussions. When seen from a practice perspective, societal institutions are not ready-made structures; instead, they enter the organization through the active work of actors (Jarzabkowski, Matthiesen, & Van De Ven, 2009; Jarzabkowski, Smets, Bednarek, Burke, & Spee, 2013). Following this approach, I describe pluralism as an enacted phenomenon, where broader societal institutions are made relevant in the organization and purposefully applied to fit the local context (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Smets, Jarzabkowski, Burke, & Spee, 2015; Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012). I build on the literature on institutional complexity (Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011; McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015) to discuss how the institutional prescriptions are experienced together, and how people develop responses to these complexities between institutions (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013).

I employ Bakhtin’s work on dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986c; Kornberger et al., 2006) to study how these enacted institutions are used as ideational voices in dialogue (Hazen, 1993; Kornberger et al., 2006; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008). This approach enables me to study the prospects of dialogue as an intermediate area between alternate paths –
the apparent dominance of a single perspective and the breaking down of dialogue into complete ambiguity where voices compete as incommensurate views instead of contributing to a shared discussion.

This study investigates interactions in a context where a collective strategy was achieved: strategy work in a Finnish city organization which I’ll call Bay City, spanning the years 1995-2013. Faced with a restructuring of the public sector and the effects of the global financial crisis, the political decision-makers and managers were able to maintain a dialogue between the different institutional perspectives. Through this dialogue, they created a polyphonic strategy and incorporated different views of the city while maintaining a sense of common direction. This dialogue took place in the interaction between a broad variety of participants representing political, professional and other interests, and the course of dialogue was rarely to the advantage of all participants. Despite occasional conflicts, the tentative and precarious dialogue strengthened over time and enabled participants in strategy work to develop the strategic direction of the city organization in a collective effort of participants who brought together varying perspectives and interests.

My analysis concentrates on the natural talk occurring in formal meetings, group sessions, and informal conversations between municipal actors, complemented by interviews and secondary documents. I follow the strategy work through the crafting of four consecutive strategic plans over a period of seven years, concentrating on the dialogical practices through which participants used central institutional voices to create a polyphonic strategy process (e.g. Hodge & Coronado, 2006; Vaara, 2010).

My findings describe how participants in the strategy work in Bay City related the pluralist institutions with each other and used them in context (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013), and how participants weaved these institutions into partially shared, flexible practices and meanings, ultimately creating a strategy text which was used to coordinate organizational action in a variety of ways, without complete agreement of its meanings. I describe this meeting of perspectives as an ideational dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984) between locally relevant institutional voices, which enabled the creation of a collective strategy.

This study contributes to the field of strategy as practice by describing the processes of negotiation by which strategy is created as a collective entity in pluralistic organizations (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Denis et al., 2007). I propose an integrative framework de-

2 The case organization and individual participants have been anonymised.
scribing the process of institutional dialogue to craft a collective strategy. My model describes the construction of a collective organizational strategy and adds the perspective of institutional dialogue to the recent discussion on the institutional embeddedness of strategy work (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Suddaby et al., 2013). This account makes three concrete contributions to the discussion. First, it elucidates the institutional nature of strategy work by describing the role of local enactments of societal and field-level institutions in strategy work. Second, it introduces the notion of institutional dialogue and institutional voices to advance the conversation on institutional complexity, demonstrating the constructive aspects of institutional complexity for strategy work. Third, it provides a polyphonic account of how a collective strategy is formulated in an ongoing process balancing diverging interests.

1.1 Theoretical grounding

My account of the creation of a collective strategy in interaction contributes to the discussion on Strategy as Practice by describing how participants in strategy work use different perspectives together to craft strategy as a collective entity, which enables collective action while allowing for sufficient plurality of meaning. The Strategy as Practice discussion concentrates on the social aspects of strategy work (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006); the activities, shared understanding and recurring practices that together form results such as the decisions, goals and market actions described in strategic management guidebooks. Strategy as Practice scholars study these activities as one of the central processes of organizing. I complement this literature with a discursive and constructionist perspective on the institutional setting of strategy work, and study the crafting of the complex institutional setting into a collective strategy by drawing on the literature on dialogue and polyphonic organization.

1.1.1 A practice view on collective strategy

The Strategy as Practice perspective sees strategy as something different than the formal documents and presentations crafted by the management: “organizational strategies take place in collective actions by organizational members. Strategies are achieved in work, conducted by organizational members, in coherence with each other, and over time” (Mantere, 2013, p. 1409). Strategy is here described as the continuous work undertaken by organizational members together for various ends such as understanding their environment, formulating suitable goals and guiding their action (Denis et al., 2007; Mantere, 2013; Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985). Building on the above account, I conceptualize strategy work as the stream of recurring practices and their continuous
adaptation (Jarzabkowski, 2004) through which people on various levels of the organization formulate the long-term goals of the organization and coordinate the means by which these goals are pursued. Strategy work draws on the ideas and practices of a broadly spread discourse (Knights & Morgan, 1991) with locally crafted meanings (Seidl, 2007). Similarly, I define an organizational strategy as a set of meanings which emerges from this continuous work, and which participants see as consequential to ‘strategic’ topics such as “the outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage” of the organization (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 8). It is inseparably linked with the social process of strategy work by which these meanings are worked out: the rules and theorizations are polyphonic and often appear conflicting, and applying them in discussion requires situational adaptation (Kornberger et al., 2006).

A strategy is often assumed to be ‘organizational’, or ‘shared’. Despite the social nature of strategy work, the assumption of the sharedness of the organizational strategy is problematic. It neither conforms to pluralist organisational realities, nor (were it to be realized) does it make possible the flexibility and distributed action necessary for operating in changing environments and the organizational development to answer evolving challenges. However, some kind of sharedness is necessary in order for the legal entity to show the characteristics of a social organization. This sharedness of strategy is a social accomplishment (Mantere, 2013; Mantere & Vaara, 2008) and can take many forms. By collective strategy I refer to a specific quality of strategies – their variable ability to evolve into a broadly shared constellation of meanings which enables construction of goals and coordination of collective action despite differences of opinion and interest (Mantere, 2013), and ambiguity of meaning (Jarzabkowski, Sillince, & Shaw, 2010). A strategy can be more or less collective: as noted, the conception of a perfectly shared strategy is an unattainable ideal, and the polar opposite - a strategy of which there is no agreement among the members of the organization - would not be a strategy at all in the sense described above. Different individuals have different views, priorities, and roles in organizations, and their interpretations and use of strategies will differ (Denis et al., 2007). However, their actions are partially coordinated by the strategy, and enact its different parts in various partial but recognizable ways (Steele & King, 2011). In this way, I see a collective strategy as one that is both clear enough to coordinate action and flexible enough to allow acceptance and adaptation to the needs of different interests and situations. Collective strategy is an ongoing and partial achievement, created (if at all) in the use of the strategy discourse and its relations with other discourses in the organizational context (Seidl, 2007).
1.1.2 **Strategy work in its institutional context**

I draw on the discursive and constructionist work on institutions (Greenwood et al., 2011; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004; Zilber, 2008) to construct a discursive account of strategy work as a meeting point for pluralistic pressures. The creation of a collective strategy is guided by partially shared meanings on the one hand and the pluralistic nature of organizational life on the other. Pluralistic organizations are characterized by “multiple objectives, diffuse power and knowledge-based work processes” (Denis et al., 2007, p. 179). This ambiguity of purpose affects all organizations; however, some organizational settings include it more than others (Denis et al., 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache & Santos, 2010). Pluralism dilutes the power of a management-controlled strategy to influence organizational action, and thus creates a challenge to rationalist views of strategy-making. However, pluralism is not only outside the control of organizational members. It may also be beneficial; the coexistence of alternate language games gives rise to flexibility and enables situational adaptations to complex and changing situations (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013).

In this way, pluralism alone is neither positive nor negative – it becomes beneficial or detrimental to the strategic actions of organizations through the ways in which the different views are managed in the organization (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). In a pluralistic organization, people must fit together alternate views that may be harmonious, conflicting, or incommensurate, depending on the situation. This is made (conceptually if not in practice) more difficult by the fact that these views are moving targets – they are born in the organization through continuous processes of social construction (Phillips et al., 2004).

I look at the pluralism of strategy work through an account of institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011). The pluralism that affects the strategy work of Bay City reflects the complex institutional environment surrounding city organizations and strategy work. Participants in strategy work assess suggested strategies by referring to institutionalized accounts of the municipal environment and judge the suggestions of others against their views of rational and effective action. In this way, they enact a variety of institutions as locally relevant. These local institutions are created and maintained discursively through the talk and texts created in the organization (Phillips et al., 2004). These local institutions overlap, influence each other and make up an interconnected and contextualized web of meanings that requires situational interpretation (Greenwood et al., 2011). Such institutional complexity is often persistent; it defies stable reso-
lutions and leaves participants with often significant freedom of choice in how they recreate and combine these local institutions and employ them in their decisions (Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015). My work analyses the enactment of this institutional complexity in the organizational setting, focusing on how participants construct this complexity as relevant to the strategy discussions and how they negotiate the complexity, maintaining both a sense of direction and sufficient ambiguity in the face of these pluralistic demands (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Denis et al., 2007).

1.1.3 Studying meaning-making in dialogue

This study takes dialogue as the basis for understanding the processes of meaning making by which collective strategy is created. Dialogue, with its focus on different views and positions as voices (Hazen, 1993), is a fitting approach for studying strategy work in pluralist settings where these voices and the gaps between them are central to organizing efforts (Kornberger et al., 2006). Both the forming and use of meanings takes place in dialogue – in “chronologically sequenced discursive acts” (Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004, p. 4; see also Ford & Ford, 1995) between discussants and the ideas they use (Bakhtin, 1984; Kornberger et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2011). These interactions put the different views in relation to each other, allowing discussants to use them together to understand the topic at hand and bridge gaps between alternative views (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). The meanings constructed in individual interactions become organizationally shared through being repeated, applied and commented on in later discussions (Bakhtin, 1986c; Boden, 1994; Samra-Fredericks, 2003). The processes of meaning-making are laden with the use of power; the negotiation of meaning is intrinsically intertwined with the negotiation of tensions between different views and perceived interests, and language use constructs specific worlds, imposing and normalizing certain power structures (Knights & Morgan, 1991). These interpretive and constitutive perspectives on language use are here studied together.

I draw specifically on Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981b, 1984, 1986c; Kornberger et al., 2006). Bakhtin posits that human interaction exists at the intersection of several views, unfinished and incompatible, and argues that these views exist as related and unavoidably different voices in dialogue (Vice, 1997). I study the negotiation of institutional views made relevant to strategy work as ideational voices in dialogue. To Bakhtin (1984), ideational voices are applications of ideological positions – conceptions of the society, interpretations of the topic at hand, or world views that speakers employ to contribute to discussions in a specific local context. These idea-
voices take the same place in discussions as the voices of the people who use them: the ideas are expressed in the words of people and form the words these people use (Bakhtin, 1984; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008).

Speakers enact societal institutions in this way, as institutionally founded ideational voices that introduce certain meanings, priorities and goals as rational, and formulate them in terms that are relevant to the context at hand and to the other institutional voices employed. These institutional voices become dialogical as they are put into relation with other ideas in interactions. These relations are made and remade in each utterance, as speakers relate their speech intent with previous utterances, the situation at hand, and the expected reactions to their words (Bakhtin, 1986c). In addition, later utterances employ the available institutional voices in a different way (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008), leading to a continuous negotiation of the relationships between them. The use of institutional voices enacts the surrounding field-level and societal institutions in the context of interactions and positions them in relation to each other and the context of strategy work.

I focus on three dimensions of dialogical practice: broadening and narrowing the dialogue, interpreting the voices through their relational use, and constructing the collective strategy through situational sounds of the voices. The first dimension brings forth the opposing pressures towards the useful openness of meanings on the one hand and their unanimity on the other (Bakhtin, 1984; Boje, 2008; Rhodes, 2000a) and enables me to study how strategists used the institutional voices to balance between these pressures. The second dimension focuses on the dialogical practices used to relate these voices to each other and the relations thus constructed between the different voices (Cooper, 2005) as either complementary, conflicting or incommensurate. The third dimension focuses on the differences in the enactments of the institutional voices as they were adapted to different discussions, describing how these situational sounds (Bakhtin, 1984; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008) were used together in later discussions to craft a collective strategy. Together, these dimensions span the path of strategy work from the individual meeting discussions to the acceptance of a strategy document and the subsequent reopening of its meanings in the following strategy round. These dialogical practices describe how relations between voices were constructed and how some of these relations were seen as desirable and laminated into broadly shared meanings which influenced the organizational strategy.
1.2 Methodology

My empirical analysis is based on a longitudinal single case study of the strategy process in Bay City – a Finnish middle-sized city. Since 2006, our research team has had comprehensive access to the strategy process and we have collected a systematic and rich corpus that includes observations of 142 strategy meetings, 97 interviews, informal conversations, and document data from 1995 to 2013. Our data capture most of the central discussion fora in which the city strategy was discussed by the managers (the city management team, the three divisional management teams), the politicians (the city council, the city board), and other actors. Each forum has its own role in the strategy process and a separate viewpoint in the strategy process.

My empirical analysis focused on three strategic themes which were central to the strategy discussions in Bay City. Specifically, I followed how the broad theme of sustainable development was related to strategy work, how the attractiveness of the city organization (its ability to attract taxpayers and employers to relocate to Bay City) became a central strategic goal, and how the strategists constructed their view of the ‘self-responsibility’ of inhabitants for their own wellbeing. These themes were chosen for their centrality to the strategic plans during the period of observation; all three emerged as central strategic goals, and their discussion included some of the most interesting attempts to understand and influence the future of the city organization.

My analysis followed how these themes were taken up in the case organization, related to previously used elements of the local institutional landscape, and used to formulate strategic goals for the case organization. Specifically, I followed these themes by analysing the use of specific phrases – ‘sustainable development’, ‘attractiveness’, and ‘self-responsibility’ – in the strategy discussions, interviews, and documents.

My analysis concentrated on the discussion of these strategic themes as a central site where the collective meanings of strategy – and thus the strategic direction of the organization – were crafted. I analyzed the discussion around each occurrence of these phrases, identifying the use of institutional voices in them. Further, I concentrated on the minute analysis of three vignettes to better understand the role of the three dimensions of dialogical practice in the creation of the collective strategy.

Focusing on these labels allowed me to identify and follow discussion of these themes during strategy discussions and to track the institutional arguments linked with these themes through time. My analysis concentrated on the use and development of these
themes in the formal strategic planning process and other arenas of strategy work. The analysis looked at both the connections that participants make in the use of the strategic themes in individual strategy meetings and the development of each theme across meetings.

1.3 Research questions

In order to fulfil the theoretical goals outlined above, this study is built around two research questions. My first research question focuses on the ways in which these institutional voices were used to craft a collective strategy and how this resultant strategy was interpreted and reinterpreted according to situational needs. As I described above, I conceptualize collective strategy as one that is both clear enough to coordinate action and flexible enough to allow acceptance and adaptation to the needs of different interests and situations. My first research question reads as follows:

**How do participants in strategy work achieve a collective organizational strategy despite the unavoidable pluralism of perspectives?**

My account of collective strategy builds on an institutional view of the beliefs and perspectives at the basis of negotiating the strategy. In answering this question, I have concentrated on studying the ways in which participants’ enactments of these institutional perspectives contributed to the ability of the city organization to craft the institutional demands that arose from the various accounts of the institutional environment into a collective strategy that was both clear and flexible. This focus on the institutional aspects of meaning construction gives rise to my second research question:

**How do participants in strategy discussions produce and reproduce the institutional environment as relevant to their strategy work?**

The second question concentrates on the purposive enactment of the complex institutional environment in the strategy discussions in ways which enable participants to use them in strategy work. I have answered this second question by following the ways in which strategists enacted the various institutional pressures in the treatment of the three chosen strategic themes in strategy meetings, interviews, and documents.

Drawing on the previous literature on Mikhail Bakhtin’s work on dialogue (1981b, 1984, 1986c; see also Hazen, 1993; Kornberger et al., 2006; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008), I
have conceptualized this account of the institutional pressures enacted in the strategy discussions as the use of institutional voices in dialogue. I found that participants enacted these pressures in the strategy discussions as contextualized and relational perspectives on the organization and its goals. These perspectives gave voice to societal institutions in a way that related them to both each other and the context of the strategy discussions.

My findings show how during the strategy process participants enacted institutional voices that were only partially compatible. They continuously reinterpreted these voices to fit the evolving content of the strategy discussions and to use them together to develop the strategy document in the situated discussions. They fit these voices together as situational settlements of institutional complexity; this enabled them to agree on the meaning of the strategy and make conclusions. These situational settlements helped the strategists to avoid clear contradictions between institutions and maintain sufficient flexibility of interpretation. Over time, these situational settlements formed into a strategy text compatible with the central strategic themes while ambiguous enough to be legitimate and useful in the varying situations faced by the organization (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010).

The remainder of this study comprises four parts. Next, I will present my theoretical background, beginning with an overview of the previous research on strategy as a collective activity (Chapter 2). Chapter 3 positions strategy work in the context of societal institutions as they influence action in the organizational context. Last, Chapter 4 describes the crafting of a collective strategy as a continuous dialogue between institutional voices and describes the three dimensions of institutional dialogue used to structure the findings. The third part of the study describes the methodology of the work; it is divided into a description of the research process (Chapter 5) and the analytical approach (Chapter 6). The fourth part presents the findings of the study. Chapter 7 describes the four central local institutions constructed in the data and their use as institutional voices in Bay City. Chapters 8-10 present the results of my analysis of the three dimensions of dialogue. These chapters link the uses of institutional voices in individual discussions with the long-term outcomes of these dialogues. Finally, the fifth part of the study comprises the discussion of these findings in relation to previous theory (Chapter 11) and my conclusions (Chapter 12).
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

My work draws on three theoretical literatures, which I will expound in the following three chapters. Chapter 2 describes the theme of collective strategy, linking it specifically to the strategy as practice discussion. Chapter 3 expands my theoretical background by positioning the challenge of collaborative strategy in the discussion of societal institutions, which are used in this study to account for the organization and coordinating of action. Last, Chapter 4 introduces Mikhail Bakhtin’s conception of dialogue to explicate the processes by which these perspectives are made use of in strategy work.

2 STRATEGY WORK AS A COLLECTIVE PROCESS

While strategies are written on pieces of paper and in PowerPoint files, organizational strategies are not pieces of paper. Organizational strategies take place in collective actions by organizational members. Strategies are achieved in work, conducted by organizational members, in coherence with each other, and over time. (Mantere, 2013, p. 1409)

The concept ‘strategy’ has become a ubiquitous part of the Western worldview and has been applied broadly enough to become greatly diluted; as Marjorie Lyles remarked, “‘strategic’ has become a buzz word for all disciplines trying to stress the importance of their work” (1990, p. 363). Indeed, the word and its surrounding discourse are used for a variety of ends. The diversity of these ends suggests that strategy is a problematic concept; the variance in its uses and meanings calls for its interpretation separately in each local context (Seidl, 2007). To craft this broad discourse into the coordinating tool usually sought by managers, organizational communities must make it their own – learn to use it together to solve their problems and adapt it to the issues at hand.

In line with the words of Mantere above, this chapter focuses on the role of strategy as a collective phenomenon – a social object continuously created through collective action, with partially shared and evolving meanings. I argue that we do not know enough about the process by which an organizational strategy is made collective under pluralist conditions. This work concentrates on the use of the strategy discourse, building on and contributing to the stream of research made under the strategy-as-practice flag. This emerging stream of research (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) studies strategy as a social activity – as an emerging social object created and recreated through the coordinated actions of a community (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006).
The creation of a collective strategy has proven to be a problematic issue for strategy research. Most (if not all) organizations exist in pluralist settings where several divergent value systems coexist, and power and influence are distributed among multiple stakeholders (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Denis et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006; Mintzberg & McHugh, 1985). Coordinating these divergent values, goals, and interests into a collective strategy calls for a strategy that is clear enough to coordinate organizational action (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Vaara, 2010) on the one hand, and ambiguous enough to invite commitment from proponents of various views (Denis, Langley, & Cazale, 1996), allow adaptability for different functional needs (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2001) and enable flexibility in changing situations (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) on the other. This study contributes to our understanding of collective strategy by describing the process by which participants in the strategy work of a pluralist organization enact pluralist goals and interests in strategy discussions, using them to achieve and maintain this balance and make up the strategy as a collective endeavour.

After briefly introducing the Strategy as Practice discussion, I will describe previous accounts of strategy as a collective phenomenon. I will next look more closely at two central themes in this discussion – the coordination of shared meanings through discursive practice and the impact of pluralism on strategy work – and introduce the creation of a collective strategy as balancing between these positions.

2.1 Conceptualizing Strategy as Practice

The field of strategy as practice concentrates on the social aspects of strategy work (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Whittington, 2006); the activities, shared understanding and recurring practices that together form results such as the decisions, goals and market actions described in strategic management guidebooks. SaP scholars study these activities – often jointly called ‘strategizing’ – as one of the central processes of organizing. This perspective studies strategy as something that people do – a social object created in a continuous stream of actions (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Johnson et al., 2003; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2007). Activity performed in the organization is considered strategic “to the extent that it is consequential for the strategic outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage of the firm” (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 8).

The strategy as practice field has grown into a broad umbrella for focusing “a more comprehensive, in-depth analysis of what actually takes place in strategy formulation, planning and implementation and other activities that deal with the thinking and doing
of strategy” (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2016, p. 1). Use of this term unites researchers taking a variety of perspectives on the activities which deal with strategies and strategy work, from the formal practices of strategy (Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, & Schwarz, 2006; Jarzabkowski, 2003; Kwon, Clarke, & Wodak, 2014; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011) to the identities of strategists (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Beech & Johnson, 2005; Dameron & Torset, 2014; Jarzabkowski et al., 2009), strategic sense-making (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Mueller, Whittle, Gilchrist, & Lenney, 2013; Rouleau, 2005; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011), the role of materiality (Heracleous & Jacobs, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009) and discourse (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Seidl, 2007; Vaara, 2010).

As part of the broader practice turn (Bourdieu, 1990; de Certeau, 1984; Foucault, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, & von Savigny, 2001), proponents of the strategy as practice stream study social life as “an ongoing production that emerges through people’s recurrent actions” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1240), seeing that “[i]t is through action and interaction within practices that mind, rationality and knowledge are constituted and social life is organized, reproduced and transformed” (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. i). Strategy as Practice scholars employ this broader discussion to study how strategy is performed through the micro-level activities and recurring practices of individuals acting together (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

This study focuses on practices as “arrays of embodied human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 11) – the repeated actions and interactions of people, located in their social contexts. Such arrays of activity together constitute the field of practice – the visible and communicative sphere of action, where individuals act, observe each other, and in so doing constitute the social world. These practices, then, are instantiated in various ways in the situated, everyday acts of individuals and groups – in praxis (Reckwitz, 2002; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). By taking a practice approach, I concentrate on collective action and adopt a social ontology of practice: “the social is a field of embodied, materially interwoven practices centrally organized around shared practical understandings” (Schatzki et al., 2001, p. 13). Social phenomena such as language are studied through practices or recurrent human activities.
Building on the above account, I conceptualize strategy work as the stream of recurring practices and their continuous adaptation (Jarzabkowski, 2004) through which people on various levels of the organization formulate the long-term goals of the organization and coordinate the means by which these goals are pursued (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003). Strategy work draws on the ideas and practices of a broadly spread discourse (Knights & Morgan, 1991) with locally crafted meanings (Seidl, 2007). Strategy work makes up a multi-voiced community where the construction of a social reality, coordination of action and political influence are intermingled (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010). Strategy work takes place to a great extent in and through language use, and the ideas and practices used in it gain their significance in particular social contexts (Hardy et al., 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Vaara, 2010). This strategy work often takes the form of conversations aimed at creating shared understanding and specific actions (Ford & Ford, 1995).

Consequently, I define an organizational strategy as a set of meanings which emerges from this continuous work (Mantere, 2013; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985), and which participants see as consequential to ‘strategic’ topics such as “the outcomes, directions, survival and competitive advantage” of the organization (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, p. 8). This social object is inseparably linked with the social process of strategy work by which these meanings are worked out (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2010); the meanings and theorizations are polyphonic and often appear conflicting, and applying them in discussion requires situational adaptation (Jarzabkowski, 2004; Kornberger et al., 2006). The organizational strategy emerges iteratively, through the use of a shared vocabulary, meanings, and practices of working out these meanings (Chia & MacKay, 2007; Mantere, 2013; Seidl, 2007).

In this view, the strategy document has a comparatively minor role. It is the outcome a (periodical or continuous) process of formal strategy formulation – the physical and virtual object accepted by the management and used as the material form of the strategy. While the strategy document may have important power effects on its subsequent use (Eriksson & Lehtimäki, 2001; Vaara, Sorsa, & Pälli, 2010), it forms a small part of the social object called strategy. The strategy document is an artefact which has power through its use in the daily work of the organization (Vaara et al., 2010).

Armed with these concepts, we are ready to define the central term for this study. By collective strategy I refer to a specific kind of strategy – one which forms a broadly shared constellation of meanings which constructs goals and coordinates collective ac-
tion despite differences of opinion and interest (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Mantere, 2013; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017). Such a strategy cannot be decomposed into the actions and intentions of individuals (Searle, 1990). Instead, this strategy exists in the organizational community; the members of the organization are aware of the existence of these meanings and recognize them as available to participants in strategy work even when they do not agree with these meanings (see also Cramton, 2001; Tomasello & Rakoczy, 2003). A strategy can be more or less collective: as noted, the conception of a perfectly shared strategy is an unattainable ideal, and the polar opposite – a strategy about which there is no agreement among the members of the organization – would not be a strategy at all in the sense described above. Different individuals have different views, priorities, and roles in organizations, and their interpretations and use of strategies will differ (Denis et al., 2007). The actions of participants in strategy work are partially coordinated by the strategy and enact its different parts in various partial but recognizable ways (see also Jarzabkowski, 2004; Steele & King, 2011).

In this way, I see a collective strategy as one that is both clear enough to coordinate action and flexible enough to allow acceptance and adaptation to the needs of different interests and situations\(^3\). Collective strategy is an ongoing and partial achievement, created (if at all) in the use of the strategy discourse and its relations with other discourses in the organizational context (Seidl, 2007).

A collective strategy can be seen as either a positive or a negative creation, depending on the perspective taken. Although a collective strategy is built on broadly shared meanings in the organization, these meanings may not be fully accepted by participants, or reflect the (perceived) interests of all parties. A collective strategy is a site of contestation or struggle between different discourses and interests seeking to influence the goals and action of the organization (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Vaara, 2010).

### 2.2 Strategy as a collective phenomenon

I will next collect together the central strands of previous research on collective strategy and position my research questions in relation to them. The discussion of strategy as a collective phenomenon has long roots which predate the strategy as practice stream by

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\(^3\) This definition is inspired by Mintzberg & McHugh’s (1985) problematization of intended strategies. “To assume that the intentions of the leadership are the intentions of the organization may not be justified, since others can act contrary to these intentions. Presumably, to be ‘organizational,’ intentions must be broadly shared – truly collective. And yet, stated intentions can belie the real ones – even the most detailed plans may be fantasies, or simply ploys to fool the competition.” (ibid., p. 162).
several decades. I will begin with a brief discussion of the classical foundations of the discussion in the planning school of strategy, moving through strategy process research and the culture school to ground my work. After this, I will describe the two contemporary accounts of collective strategy central to my theorizing: practice theoretical accounts of strategizing and the literature on strategy as discourse. This discussion of previous research leads me to conclude that while the current theoretical discussions together constitute collective strategy in the daily adaptation of an ambiguous strategy to situational constraints, they do not sufficiently elucidate the processes by which this is done.

2.2.1 Foundations of the discussion on collective strategy

The classics of the strategic planning school describe a clear, shared strategy as an ideal, and also account for how such strategies are formulated in organizations. This perspective emphasizes the perspective of the top management of the organization; the top management is seen to formulate the view of the organization about its environment and the ensuing strategy, and then communicates this strategy clearly to the organization (Andrews, 1987; Ansoff, 1965; Chandler, 1962). Central contributions of the strategic planning school have looked at the coordinative role of strategic plans (March & Simon, 1958; Porter, 1985) as a question of integrating the various lower-level goals and actions in a hierarchy under the corporate strategic plan formulated by the management (Mintzberg, 1994). A kind of imposed collective strategy emerges from this integration, which can be influenced through practices such as participative strategic planning, collective incentives, and goal communication (Ketokivi & Castañer, 2004).

In concentrating on the coordinative function of strategy, the strategic planning school describes strategy as an ideally shared phenomenon and sees this ideal as watered down by organizational realities. These accounts stress the desirability of clarity and the univocality of interpretations, and state that the true meaning of the strategy should be easily interpreted from the text. An ambiguous strategy would decrease the ability of the organization for coordinated action towards the goals voiced by the management (Eisenberg, 1984). The relation between this normative ideal and theories of strategy work is difficult; even as researchers assume that organizations strive for complete sharedness, they question the possibility of achieving it (Beer & Eisenstat, 2000; Cyert & March, 1963; March, 1991). For instance, Cyert and March (1963, p. 28) state that “the [classical] studies [of organizational objectives] suggest further that behind this agreement on rather vague objectives there is considerable disagreement and uncer-
tainty about subgoals, that organizations appear to be pursuing different goals at the same time.” The managerial planning literature treats this disparity of goals as an inevitable, problematic feature of organizational decisions, and concentrates on understanding and controlling its effects. This view of collective strategy as an unreachable ideal has had a strong influence on the scientific debate and practical applications of the tools of strategy (for a critical overview, see Mintzberg, 1994).

This normative ideal was challenged by strategy process scholars (Pettigrew, 1992), whose work went beyond formal strategy documents to examine the unfolding of strategy in organizational action, and extended the scope of strategists from the top management to include middle managers (Burgelman, 1983; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008), as well as other organizational members (Laine & Vaara, 2007, 2015; Mantere, 2005).

This account was complemented by the view of strategy as a form of culture, which takes the form of shared cognitive schemas (Hendry, 2000), or taken-for-granted ways of understanding strategic ends and means (Phillips, Sewell, & Jaynes, 2008), which are constituted in the practices of organizational communities (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002). Applications of the organizational culture literature on strategy have tended to focus on the perspective of the top management – a relatively uniform group – (e.g. Hendry, 2000; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2002), or treat the organization as a coherent entity with relatively shared views (e.g. Prahalad & Bettis, 1986). While these studies have helped us to understand the role of dominant beliefs for the sharedness of strategy, they have tended to emphasize the coherence of strategy, often glossing over the conflictual, political processes by which these meanings are debated.4

2.2.2 The formation of a collective strategy as practice

Contributions to the field of Strategy as Practice have problematized the assumption of coherence by locating strategy in the ongoing work of the organizational community, drawing on the broader practice turn. I will next describe how the Strategy as Practice discussion contributes to our understanding of collective strategy by applying theories of practice in accounts of practices and phenomena seen to contribute to the creation of this system of shared meaning. As outlined in the previous section, this field refers to the broad account of social realities as formed through the ongoing coordinated, re-

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4 As Joanne Martin (2002) notes, this is a feature shared by much of the broader culture literature.
peatable practices applied in various ways in the actions of individuals and collectives, and describes strategy as coordinated action that happens in the collective actions of an organizational community (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010). Collective strategies here emerge in the sense defined in the previous section — as a broadly shared constellation of meanings which constructs goals and coordinates collective action, constituted by the social practices related with the social object of 'strategy'.

This application of theories of practice forms the basis of the understanding of collective action in the Strategy as Practice field. These applications anchor the doing of the organizational strategy in the minutiae of "the intra-organizational work required for making strategy and getting it executed" (Whittington, 2006, p. 619), concentrating on the complex of actions around the objects and practices of strategy. This discussion sees individual acts as embedded within a web of social practices; these social practices, in turn, are repeatable patterns of action (a nexus of doings and sayings) embedded in a culture, and shared by its members (Reckwitz, 2002). These social practices coordinate the actions of individuals as they are applied in "practices-in-use" (Jarzabkowski, 2004) or praxis (Whittington, 2006) by knowledgeable members of the organizational community.

The discussion of pluralism in strategy work describes strategy as irreconcilably complex: the multiple objectives and diffuse power make it impossible to avoid contradictions and conflicts in strategy work (Denis et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). Identification with the formal strategy varies by social position of different participants and the practices of participation employed (Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009; Korsgaard, Schweiger, & Sapienza, 1995; Mantere & Vaara, 2008). The practices and extent by which groups with different interests develop shared understanding of the formal strategy are not clear (Jarzabkowski & Balogun, 2009). Different interests and perspectives are frequently present in the use of and meanings assigned to the strategy, despite managerial efforts to present the strategy as collective and harmonious (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). Indeed, pluralism of goals and interests seems to be the norm for many (if not most) organizations (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006), and requires continuous maintenance and the situational interpretation and adaptation of several perspectives on the organization to arrive at decisions which take into account the different interests and goals. The Strategy as Practice literature thus sees that shared, organizational social practices coordinate organizational action by crafting broadly shared, if
flexible, meanings. These are applied as ‘practices-in-use’, according to the preferences of knowledgeable individuals.

Carter and colleagues (2008b) criticized SaP literature for overemphasizing the managerial interest and the practices of management and for not using the concept of practice to its full extent, instead conflating different definitions and concepts into interchangeable simplifications. Despite the ensuing discussion (see e.g. Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008a; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008) and subsequent advances, this criticism remains a valuable reminder of the complexity of the concepts used in the strategy as practice discussion and the ease with which the resulting ambiguity glosses over important differences. The literature on collective strategy is by no means exempt from this criticism – indeed, attempts to describe the ‘sharedness’ of an organizational strategy often focus on the managerial account, and as will be discussed, contributions including this one build on a variety of different perspectives, which are often difficult to combine without clashes between them.

As a partial corrective to these problems, authors working within the Strategy as Practice field have drawn on the broader process philosophical literature to argue that the importance of formalized aspects of strategizing has been overemphasized (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009; Chia & Rasche, 2015). In what I will call a “strategy as becoming” perspective (Rantakari, 2016; see also Tsoukas & Chia, 2002), these writers have drawn on the broader process philosophical literature to describe strategy as an ever unfolding process. This literature emphasizes the ongoing features of the social action which constitutes strategy and examines this social action through concepts such as flux, creativity, disruption and indeterminism (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). The strategy as becoming view contributes to our understanding of collective strategy by expanding the focus of discussion to include situational and relational features of practice over the planned actions of individuals. This account invites us to “see the world as the movement of relationships between things rather than the things themselves as static or quasi-static structures” (Cooper, 2005, p. 1708).

Proponents of the strategy as becoming view have questioned the reducibility of practices to the intentional acts of individuals and complementing the view of individual action with a focus on an immanent, ‘trans-individual’ logic of practice (Bourdieu, 1990; Sandberg & Tsoukas, 2011) as a “logic of a situation [...] that provides an element of directionality and that moves things along in a more-or-less predictable manner” (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p. 226). Further, Chia and MacKay recognize that individual or
deliberate intentionality is not a prerequisite to strategy: "strategy may emerge as a consequence of the inherent predisposition of an actor to unselfconsciously respond to external circumstances in a manner that we may retrospectively recognize as being consistently strategic" (ibid., p. 228).

Instead of the visible doings of individual actors, these authors emphasize the role of practices as "historically and culturally shaped regularities" in patterns of activities (ibid., p. 227), dispersed spatially and between different actors with shared practical understandings (Schatzki, 2001). Such practices "imply trans-individuality; cultural transmission, socialization, institutionalized constraints, embodied mannerism, etc., play a crucial role in explaining human doings" (Chia & MacKay, 2007, p. 227). In this way, studies of strategy as becoming have broadened our understanding of practices from a focus on individual action into an “unowned approach to strategy” (see also MacKay & Chia, 2013; Rantakari & Vaara, 2016, p. 50; Rescher, 1996), placing the emergent strategy in the practices and understandings shared by a social collective. These trans-individual practices are collective in the sense of this work - shared but plural. The ‘dispositional tendencies’ can certainly take many forms, as they mix with individual identities, interpretations and interests, and are adapted to situations and the views of participants in discussion.

Seeing strategy as trans-individual and situational practical action recognizes strategy as immanent in what people do as they go about their lives (Chia & Rasche, 2015). It emphasizes the role of tacit daily action in two senses. First, people in a social context have a shared tendency to act in accordance with an individual and organizational identity, including the “deeply embedded internalized tendencies” shared and distributed in an organizational culture (ibid., p. 51). Second, this perspective reminds us that strategy often emerges in opportunistic interventions before the formal planning takes place or in the improvisational application of strategies in concrete situations. This account of strategy practice as purposive, unowned action aims to complement the focus on formal, intentional strategy work; acknowledging the existence of inherent predispositions also helps us explain the unfolding of decisions in formal decision-making. These two accounts are best seen as complementary perspectives instead of mutually exclusive alternatives (Chia & Rasche, 2015; Tsoukas, 2015).

This perspective thus offers several concepts useful for studying the relationship between the sharedness of organizational strategies and their multiplicity. Its proponents powerfully argue for the importance of contextual, detailed and rich studies of strategic
practice (Rasche & Chia, 2009). The focus on the inter-individual, relational existence of practices enables us to complement the focus of mainstream strategy as practice research on observable practices, often related to the formal strategy work of top and middle management.

2.2.3 A discursive perspective on collective strategy

A parallel literature has emphasized the role of discourse in the creation of collective strategy. Focusing on the use of language in strategy work takes distance from the rationalistic view of the planning school (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998) and brings into focus the socially constructed, contested nature of strategy work (Knights & Morgan, 1991). As strategy is talked and written into being, it creates a particular kind of world – a world that “embodies particular ways of seeing organizations, subjects, and societies”, and “has particular truth effects which are disciplinary on subjects and organizations” (ibid., p. 255). In other words, the strategy discourse makes certain things visible and others invisible to its participants, and constrains what is seen as possible or desirable in organizations. In this way, strategy becomes ‘a knowledge’ – a way of knowing the world (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Samra-Fredericks, 2005).

Discourse is thus both a structure that enables and constrains action and social activity which enacts this structure in recurrent interactions that both fit the strategy discourse with other relevant discourses and mould it to suit the ever-changing situations faced by individuals. The focus of this is on the latter aspect of language use – discursive practice. These include the writing and reading of strategy texts (Suominen & Mantere, 2010; Vaara et al., 2010), talk at strategy meetings and workshops (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Samra-Fredericks, 2003), and the use of analytical and communication tools (Kaplan, 2011; Langley, 1989). This stream of literature studies the practice of strategy as a field of recurrent linguistic activity (Whittington, 2006; Whittington et al., 2003), geared towards the coordination of action in and around the organization (Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

In his review of the literature examining the discursive aspects of strategy, Vaara (2010) describes strategy as a multifaceted interplay of discourses and discursive practice between the different levels of strategy, from the societal to the organisational and the interactional. These three levels together constitute the object of strategy; organisational and interactional discourse draws on its broader contexts, reproduces these contexts, and helps transform them. Additionally, Vaara sees strategy as an interdiscursive
phenomenon which is influenced by a variety of other discourses that bear down on the organization. The discursive literature on strategy practice describes collective strategy as emerging in an organizational nexus of these discourses, and emphasizes the study of discursive practice in understanding how this happens.

In a related view, the shared language of strategy has been discussed through a conceptualization of strategy as a collective language game (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011; Mantere, 2013, 2015; Seidl, 2007; Seidl & Whittington, 2014). Based on Wittgenstein’s (2009) practice view of language, this discussion describes the construction of an organizational strategy as a set of relatively stable, partially implicit rules, which guide action in organizational communities. This approach studies organizational strategy as a collective set of rules that governs the use of ‘strategy’ and other, associated labels (Mantere, 2013; Seidl, 2007), continuously negotiated by the members of a community and linked with other language games through their relevance to the same community or the same purpose (Mauws & Phillips, 1995). Positioning utterances as “moves [...] in the game of language”, meaningless without the surrounding system of meanings (Astley & Zammuto, 1992, p. 444), this perspective concentrates on the shared nature of the rules of the language game, and contributes to our understanding of the various uses of the strategy discourse to varying organizational needs. While the conception of language games elucidates the rule-like status of meanings negotiated in interaction (see e.g. the example of tensions in the use of strategy labels in Mantere, 2013), it has offered few methods to describing the constitution of these rules or the management of tensions between them in the flow of interaction.

The broad discussion of discourse and politics in strategy work has thus emphasized the fundamental role of language in strategy work (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere, & Vaara, 2014; Barry & Elmes, 1997; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2010; Hardy et al., 2000; Knights & Morgan, 1991) and enriched the understanding that strategy scholars employ of power and politics as constitutive, generative forces in collective processes of negotiating meaning (Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Hodge & Coronado, 2006; Mueller et al., 2013; Samra-Fredericks, 2003). The implications of this literature on collective strategy are detailed and applied to the context of this study in sections 2.3 and 2.4 below.

2.2.4 Positioning this study with the previous discussion

The managerial ideal of a shared, clear and univocally interpreted strategy, presented by the planning school of strategy, is complemented and contested by the inclusion of
the middle management and other organizational members as strategists, and the descriptions of collective action in the organizational communities. Pluralist and discursive views have added to this the conflictual, political processes by which these meanings are debated. A concentration on the practice of strategy, in turn, has provided us with important insight into the central role of practice in constituting the meanings of strategy and coordinating action in organizations. These practices are contextualized and crafted to a large extent through the use of language. Different views of the central aspects of organization abound, and constitute these practices in different ways (this argument will be taken up in the next chapter). Managing the differences between these views is a central part of strategy work, and requires a balancing act between tensions. We can thus conclude that some level of sharedness is necessary in order for the members of the organization to be able to act in concert. At the same time, organizational pluralism calls for the fluidity or openness of meanings, which enables the reconciliation of the different values, goals and stakeholder groups (Denis et al., 2007). Achieving a collective strategy is an ongoing social accomplishment (Mantere, 2013; Mantere & Vaara, 2008), which can be usefully seen as a balancing between the ideals of clarity and pluralism of meanings.

Despite this variety of views, our understanding of the process by which a collective strategy comes about remains incomplete. While these theoretical discussions together constitute collective strategy in the daily adaptation of an ambiguous strategy to situational constraints, they do not sufficiently elucidate the processes by which this is done. I conclude that the previous discussion in strategy has not yet sufficiently described how these views are fit together and the lasting tensions between them managed – what organizational members do in their daily praxis that enables the existence of a collective strategy.

This study makes a contribution to this discussion by describing how the polyphony of the strategy process is maintained – the processes by which participants flexibly maintain collective action without agreeing on the interpretation of this action and show this as a process of constituting a collective strategy over time. Arguing with Vaara (2010) that these processes are achieved to an important extent through discursive practice, I will next explore the role of discursive practice in crafting a collective strategy.
2.3 The strategy discourse and its use in organizations

This section describes the role of broad discourses in constituting strategic action and subjectivities in the organizational context, building on the discursive accounts of collective strategy introduced above. Specifically, this account discusses the macro-discourse of strategy and its uses to guide organizational action. Enriching Vaara’s (2010) account of strategy as multifaceted discourse, I will next describe the world constituted by the broad macro-discourse of strategy (Knights & Morgan, 1991) and then look at how participants employ this discourse in creative ways, adapted to their organizational contexts and the interests of those present (Suominen & Mantere, 2010), constituting collective meanings (Seidl, 2007).

To understand the discursive practice through which collective strategy emerges, we need to understand the setting in which it takes place and which it constructs – the broad discourse of strategy, set in its institutional and organizational contexts. To the individual speaker, the strategy discourse presents itself as a pre-existing structure of meanings that guides the interpretation of each utterance. The word ‘strategy’ has become the torchbearer of a pervasive and influential discourse that has come to influence our attitudes to fields from business to politics and personal life. The strategy discourse is a dominant way to conceptualize goals, causes and concerted actions and is “actively involved in the constitution, or re-definition, of problems in advance of offering itself as a solution to them” (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 270). Seen this way, strategy is not a neutral body of knowledge that organizational members can choose to apply or ignore as they wish. The strategy discourse is both a way of knowing the organization and a practice that proffers specific solutions to the problems it helps construct (Carter, 2013; Eriksson & Lehtimäki, 2001; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011).

This discourse creates its participants through subject positions that emphasize managerial authority, and constrain what the participants in this discourse take note of and see as legitimate, leaving ‘non-strategic’ views of the organization unuttered (Hardy et al., 2000; Kornberger, 2012). The use of these concepts, tools and practices of strategy in daily interaction enacts the world as controllable, measurable and rational (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Kornberger, 2012), enables the attribution of value and risk to prospective actions (Grandy & Mills, 2004) and divides past events into successes and failures (Vaara, 2002). In this way, the strategy discourse emerges as a way of knowing the world, embedded in social practices which reproduce the ‘truth’ of this way of knowing (Knights & Morgan, 1991). This knowing is done in practice, as these concepts, tools
and practices are mobilized by discussants in daily interactions. The rationality offered by the strategy discourse is positioned alongside other views of the organization (e.g. quality management, environmental issues, or employment relations), which portray organizations and their goals in a different light. A goal of strategy-as-discourse studies has been to denaturalize this discourse and show the consequences of its use (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 2000; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011).

Use of the strategy discourse has spread across a broad gamut of fields, from its traditional setting in corporations to settings such as health care (Denis, Dompierre, Langley, & Rouleau, 2011), development aid (Hardy et al., 2000) and national politics (Hodge & Coronado, 2006). In the municipal sector (the setting of my empirical study), strategic management has become a central way to conceptualize the municipal field, public services and their appropriate goals (Eriksson & Lehtimäki, 2001; Kornberger, 2012; Pälli, Vaara, & Sorsa, 2009; Vaara et al., 2010). Kornberger and his colleagues describe the municipal application of strategy as a powerful discourse that simplifies city organizations into a single mould, and has gained a strong, often dominant, authority (Kornberger, 2012; Kornberger & Carter, 2010; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). They view strategy as a muscular, efficient discourse that aims to render the municipal sphere countable and manageable — and thus definable using a single set of criteria. Strategy directs action and focuses attention; it “produces answers to political questions and legitimizes action while providing those in power with the freedom to conduct the business of framing the conversations backstage, unseen by, and unaccountable to, the public” (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011, p. 156). According to this account, the strategy discourse aims for, and often achieves, a muscular clarity which enables its use to legitimate ‘strategic’ alternatives over others in decision making and direct organizational action according to the interpretations of those in control of the strategy discourse.

Despite its pervasiveness and aims of dominance, the strategy discourse is far from a unified field. The strategy discourses recreated in different local contexts differ from each other, forming an ecosystem of strategy discourses (see also Mantere, 2013; Seidl, 2007). These local strategy discourses are “both autonomous and highly interdependent” (Seidl, 2007, p. 209); while they share a language made up of co-evolving labels, the meanings assigned to these labels are locally created in relation to “the existing discursive structures” (ibid., p.207). The strategy discourses recreated in each local context build their own meanings in ways that are locally relevant. They construct their own conditions of possibility; they are similar to each other, but embedded in and con-
structured through their local discursive contexts. These local strategy discourses do not systemically add up to a coherent macro-discourse of strategy; broadly shared debates such as those conducted in the mass media form their separate contexts, where the strategy discourse is created anew. On the other hand, the overlap of contexts – the presence of people in several contexts and their exposure to talk from these contexts – enables the communication of labels and (to some extent) meanings between these contexts. In other words, this perspective argues that the strategy discourse is constructed separately in different contexts in locally relevant ways and coexists with other discourses seen as relevant in situationally meaningful ways.

The research on the role of macro-level discourses and their interaction helps us to understand how broad discourses are used in the constitution of organizational worlds. While the strategy discourse constitutes a specific world, it does so in the broader context of other influential macro-discourses, adapted to the institutional, organizational and situational context. These discourses form a pluralist environment in which discussants are able to draw on a variety of discursive resources to make sense of their worlds and advance their interests. This study complements this discussion by describing the contextualized use of these discourses in relation to each other and the situation at hand. The use of these discourses takes place in the ongoing flow of discursive practice, which is the topic of the next section.

2.4 Pluralism and the discursive practices of strategy

As the strategy discourse is used in daily praxis, it is intermingled with other explanations of the organization, and competes with them for appeal. To appeal to organizational constituents, a strategy should construct a narrative that “stands out from other organizational stories, is persuasive, and invokes retelling.” (Barry & Elmes, 1997: 433). The strategy discourse is adapted to and applied in relation to the other discourses at work in the same social context, and it is adapted to perceived changes in the organizational environment. Local strategy discourses and the other discourses that complement and compete with them form a polyphonic discursive context (Vaara, 2010). This section focuses on the use of these societal discourses in the organizational and interactional context in which strategy work takes place.

This pluralism begins with the organizational enactments of the strategy discourse. Despite the shared nature of discourses in their social context, different versions of the strategy discourse often exist side to side (Vaara, 2010). These strategy discourses, con-
structured by participants to make sense of and influence the strategy, coexist with the management-sanctioned strategy discourse, at times complementing interpretations of the formal strategy and at other times competing with them (Hardy et al., 2000; Jarzabkowski et al., 2009). These organizational strategy discourses persist through their enactment in recurrent interactions that both fit them with other relevant discourses and mould them to suit the ever-changing situations faced by individuals. The meanings assigned to the strategy discourse are diverse and vary in often surprising ways. In studying strategy discourses, we are faced with a historically contingent mélange of different understandings that incorporates multiple (e.g. scientific, military, neoliberal and spiritual) views of the organization (Vaara, 2010). The ways in which these understandings are recreated in local strategy discourse have implications for what is seen as possible (Mantere & Vaara, 2008); for example, constructing strategy as a grand, management-led plan implies a very different role structure and opportunities for participation than a view of strategy as a collaborative process of meaning-making.

Discursive research on strategy work has argued that to constitute a collectively meaningful view of the context at hand, participants must bring together the various discourses relevant to strategy work: "strategic actors […] must locate their discursive activities within a meaningful context if they are to shape and construct action" (Hardy et al., 2000, p. 1228). However, the interactions of these discourses in the flow of daily work are complex and lead to a continuous need to reconcile them in some way. This lack of unity, which questions the very nature of strategy as a quest for a unified direction for the organization, is described as the challenge of pluralism (Denis, Lamothe, & Langley, 2001). Pluralistic organizational contexts are characterized by the existence of multiple legitimate goals and interests, which must be taken into account in strategy work and organizing efforts (Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). Such pluralism is a feature of all organizations to an extent; some organizational settings include it more than others (Denis et al., 2007; Greenwood et al., 2011; Pache & Santos, 2010). Pluralism leads to ambiguous goals, which “have multiple, indistinct, incoherent or fragmented meanings, in which no single meaning is the ‘best’ or most coherent interpretation” (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010, p. 220). Pluralism dilutes the power of strategy work to influence organizational action and weakens efforts to create a collective strategy.

Pluralism enters strategy work through the enactment of incommensurate pressures by participants (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Denis et al., 2007; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). These processes of enactment, and the views enacted in them, form an important part
of the construction of shared understanding. The settings in which these local strategy discourses emerge are rife with other central discourses that influence the ways in which the strategy discourse is understood and develops. Local strategy discourses are embedded in social practice; any power effects they have are produced through the skilled actions of individuals who could do otherwise (Giddens, 1984; Knights & Morgan, 1991). These individuals are not only subjected to the strategy discourse; they are embedded in and indoctrinated by the plurality of other discourses around them. Their use of the strategy discourse is influenced by these other discourses and also by their own interpretations of (and resistance to) these discourses.

The ambiguity inherent in pluralistic contexts may also be beneficial; the coexistence of alternate rationalities available increases flexibility in decision making, enabling situational adaptations to complex and changing situations (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013). Indeed, research on strategic ambiguity has found that ambiguity can have positive effects; it may promote diversity and facilitate organizational change (Eisenberg, 1984) and allow the organization to create shared meanings in a context characterized by multiple ideas (Sillince, Jarzabkowski, & Shaw, 2012). The ability of different groups to maintain their own readings of strategy texts facilitates (or even enables) their cooperation (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010).

This flexibility may, however, be a mixed blessing if it leads to power struggles or indecision. If such conflicting interpretations of the strategy prevail, strategic decisions may spin out of organizational control (Denis et al., 2011). Ambiguity may thus be a mixed blessing. Abdallah and Langley (2014) found that while initially enabling, strategic ambiguity may over time lead to problematic uses of strategy such as runaway interpretations, internal contradictions and disillusionment. Denis et al. (2011) describe a process where ambiguity led to a cycle of escalating indecision, where the organization remained unable to commit to a decision for a long time, remaining in a loop of discussing and deciding on the same subject.

In these accounts of strategic ambiguity, excessive ambiguity represents the opposite end of the spectrum from a clear and uniformly understood strategy: a situation where several interpretations reign, and prioritizations or compromise between them cannot be made. Excessive ambiguity thus becomes a position where several interpretations of the strategy exist in isolation from each other. Vaara (2010) illustrates the difference between useful and excessive ambiguity in concrete terms: “In the best cases, a multiplicity of narratives increases discussion about strategic choices and gives voice to peo-
ple that may easily be marginalized in organizational decision-making. In the worst cases, such polyphony adds to chaos, increases internal politics, augments conflicts, and leads to an inability to reach consensus on future direction” (p. 40).

Pluralism is inherently neither positive nor negative – it becomes beneficial or detrimental to the strategic actions of organizations through the ways in which the different views are managed in the organization. Be it positive or negative, the strategy-as-practice stream sees pluralism as a central feature of strategy work (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Denis et al., 2011, 2007). The strategy discourse is neither coherent in meaning nor independent of other perspectives on the organization; it exists in practical applications based in their social contexts, and necessarily adapted to the social reality prevalent in these contexts. As already noted, when studied more closely the macro-discourse of strategy breaks down into several coexisting discourses. As these discourses emphasize different things and partially contradict, they interact in the creation and interpretation of ‘the organizational strategy’. In addition, the strategy discourse exists in relation to a network of other discourses of organization, which impact how it is brought to life and develops in its social context.

Descriptions of discursive practice constituted by the strategy discourse and organizational pluralism present strategy work as the creation of organizationally relevant meanings to the themes discussed by the broad strategy discourse, as they are enacted together with other discourses seen as relevant to the strategy endeavour in the organizational context, continuously adapted in relation to each other. These adaptations evolve over time, and may at different times favour one or more of the discourses, leading to different outcomes. I argue that there is a paucity of knowledge on how these adaptations are continuously performed in strategy work. The research forms a picture of ambiguity as either positive or negative – constituting strategy work as a balancing act between too much clarity and too much ambiguity, where each solution is necessarily contextual and open to renegotiation. We do not know enough about how actors find these contextual solutions.

The previous research on pluralism and discursive practice forms an important perspective on collective strategy. Pluralist views of organizational discourse describe organizational settings as complex, describing situations where persistent ambiguity prevails over organizational goals and their interpretations. While the pluralism of interpretations complicates strategy work and weakens efforts to create a collective strategy, it may also enable situational adaptations and the creation of collective meanings with-
out binding participants to a fixed interpretation. Despite descriptions of both positive and negative effects of pluralism, there is a scarcity of accounts of the ways in which the ensuing complexity is managed in strategy work. The following chapter will address this issue by positioning strategy work in a complex institutional environment. Chapter 4 will then introduce Mikhail Bakhtin's view of dialogue as a way of understanding how the institutional views enacted as relevant are used to manage this complexity.
3 STRATEGY WORK IN ITS INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

It is not simply what people ‘do’ that matters, but how they do so ‘together’. (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006, p. 216)

The previous chapter described strategy work as discursive practice, set in organizational and situational contexts which influence the practices and meanings employed. This chapter enriches this account by positioning the daily strategy work as embedded in its institutional context. Despite the recurring descriptions of strategy as an institution in its own right (Carter, 2013; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006), the impact of other societal institutions on strategy work remain underutilized in strategy as practice (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Suddaby et al., 2013; Vaara & Durand, 2012). This study positions strategy work in its local institutional context by studying the ways in which broadly shared institutions are employed as discursive resources in constructing a collective strategy. To do this, I describe societal institutions as social constructions crafted through talk and text (Phillips et al., 2004), which are continuously enacted as meaningful to the organizational context and the situation at hand, as a part of a complex environment made up of several such local institutions. This local construction of the complex institutional environment is a central part of the balancing act of collective strategy; in constructing the institutional environment of strategy work, participants express their perspectives on the organization and adapt them into the views of others.

Institutional beliefs of the organization and its environment guide strategy work by supplying strategists with legitimate accounts of the environment and the organization, defining the suitable courses of action and the practices by which these are pursued (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Whittington, 2006). In addition, organizations may seek to manage the institutional environment through their own strategic actions (Lawrence, 1999). Despite recent contributions to the links between organizational strategy discourse and its macro-institutional context (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Smets et al., 2012; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2010), more work is needed to understand the institutional background of strategy work as its constraint and an enabler (Suddaby et al., 2013; Vaara & Whittington, 2012).

The institutional environment is a central guiding force of organizational action (Hendry, 2000; Zilber, 2008), including strategy work (Seidl & Whittington, 2014; Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). However, previous research on the role of institutions in strategy work has concentrated on the institu-
tionalized aspects of the strategy discourse (Balogun et al., 2014; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Vaara, 2010) or charting the overlap between the two fields (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Suddaby et al., 2013) while contributions situating the practices related to strategy and management in their surrounding institutional environment has been less frequent (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015). We know that the meanings assigned to the strategy discourse are contextual (Seidl, 2007), and that the practices and tools of strategy work are used in context-specific ways (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006). These contributions lift the societally shared strategy discourse to the fore, and focus on its effects on the organizational settings in which it is used. However, they do not directly discuss the role of the broader institutional context in the use of the strategy discourse, which is central to this study.

Researchers using a discursive approach have made broadly similar contributions. Centrally, a stream of research following Knights & Morgan (1991) has used a Foucauldian approach to describe the strategy discourse as the centrepiece of a discursive formation which performatively constitutes its social context as ‘strategic;’ the discourse thus creates specific conditions of possibility, which enable certain ways of acting as rational, while restricting other actions (see also Pälli et al., 2009). Paroutis & Heracleous (2013) described ways in which local meanings assigned by strategists to the strategy discourse contributed to the adoption of a new institution. These topics have, however, not been sufficiently studied from an institutional perspective; studying the enactment of the surrounding institutional environment into locally relevant enactments helps us to understand the negotiation of strategy and the construction of a collective strategy in pluralist organizations.

I look at institutions as social constructions crafted through talk and text, which guide action in their social settings (Phillips et al., 2004), and describe the ways in which they are crafted in pluralistic settings to guide the work of strategists (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). This argument builds on discussions on the social construction of institutions (Phillips et al., 2004; Phillips & Malhotra, 2008) and institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011). This account of institutions sets strategy work in the context of multiple, interrelated social institutions, helps us to understand the worldviews that are discursively negotiated in strategy work and begins to describe the processes of negotiation. My work aims for an account of strategy practice that is both ‘tall’ and ‘flat’ (Seidl & Whittington, 2014); I seek to study the role of broader institutional meanings
in the crafting of strategy, and set the negotiation of these meanings strongly in the local context constructed as relevant in the interactions.

I contend that institutions gain their meaning in interactions between actors (Bechky, 2011; Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Goodrick & Salancik, 1996; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006). I thus take a ‘bottom-up’ approach to institutions, concentrating on the ways in which institutional beliefs are creatively employed and adapted in interactions and on how they evolve (Holm, 1995; Lawrence & Phillips, 2004; Zilber, 2008). This account parts with the prominent top-down narrative that sees institutions as “broad, ‘supraorganizational’ logics or ‘symbolic systems’ that order reality” (Hallett & Ventresca, 2006, p. 214 citing Friedland & Alford 1991, p.243).

This chapter adds to the overall argument of the study in two ways. First, the institutional perspective stands to enrich our understanding of the macro-discourses that structure strategy work. It enables a more detailed account of the ways in which these discourses constitute the context of strategy work through locally meaningful institutions (McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) which are created and recreated discursively (Phillips et al., 2004; Phillips & Malhotra, 2008). Second, this chapter relates the pluralist account of strategy work to the discussion of institutional complexity – a central discussion on this topic outside the field of strategy as practice. Research on institutional complexity has described the ways in which conflicting institutional prescriptions are negotiated and fit together in the daily lives of organizational members (Smets et al. 2012) and how such negotiations form organizational practice. This stream of research stands to contribute to pluralistic accounts of strategy work.

3.1 Institutions

Institutional theory maintains that organisational life builds on the institutional beliefs held by participants, – taken-for-granted beliefs about organisations, their goals, and the accepted ways to pursue these goals – as well as the practices and social positions that these beliefs structure (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Scott, 2001). Such institutions are social constructions (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Zilber, 2008) created through discourse (Phillips, 2003; Phillips & Malhotra, 2008); institutions are “self-regulating, socially constructed mechanisms that enforce their application” (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 638). For them, institutions are “constituted by the structured collections of texts that exist in a particular field and that produce the social categories and norms that shape
the understandings and behaviours of actors” (Phillips et al., 2004, p. 638). The support, maintenance and destabilization of institutions happens through the production of texts which attempt to influence their supporting discourses (Phillips, 2003); actions produce texts, some of which ‘take on’ and are repeated or accepted as a part of a discourse which produces and reproduces institutions.

As social constructions created through talk and text, institutions are seen to reside in communities that construct, enact, and enforce them. At their broadest, institutions may be shared by all members of a society – such as the broad ideas of a state or the roles suitable for members of a family. More narrow beliefs will be shared by members of an organizational field – a group of actors who consider each other relevant to their pursuits – or the members of an organization (Scott, 1994). These shared beliefs are often expected to be made coherent by continuous interaction (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hinings, Greenwood, Reay, & Suddaby, 2004). However, the breadth of the communities which share institutions in sufficiently similar form tends to remain unclear. In addition, various institutions often overlap, reinforce, and contradict each other in social contexts (Heimer, 1999): individuals or organizations are usually not guided by a single dominant institution, and instead operate in pluralistic settings are subjected to several institutional orders, which impose overlapping prescriptions (Denis et al., 2007; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2009; Kraatz & Block, 2008). These different institutions are interdependent in local social contexts; they build on each other and employ many of the same elements (Greenwood et al., 2011). Such interdependence of institutions is a topic that has gained much attention in recent years under the rubric of institutional complexity.

The discussion of institutional complexity focuses on the interplay of institutions in organizational contexts and helps us to understand the ways in which the different institutions that emerge in organizational contexts are interrelated by being used together. The complexity view takes institutions as intertwined in a local context, and mutually interacting with each other (Goodrick & Reay, 2011; Greenwood et al., 2011). These institutions influence social action together, through their contextualization and application to specific issues (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Kwon et al., 2014; R. E. Meyer & Höllerer, 2010; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Smets et al., 2012). This conception of institutions broadens our understanding of the context of strategy work by describing the complex interactions and negotiations between the different conceptions of the environment.
According to the dominant macro-cultural account of institutions, societal institutions form broader institutional worldviews, or institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991). Friedland and Alford’s introduction of the concept defined an institutional logic as “a set of material practices and symbolic constructions” that creates “specific categories, beliefs and motives” (1991, pp. 248–252). The discussion of institutional logics is strongly grounded in the understanding of institutions as “master principles of society” (Thornton, 2004, p. 70) – overarching cultural constructs which are shared across organizations and organizational fields (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Thornton et al., 2012). Since this study focuses on the local adaptations of such broader institutions in organizational praxis, my use of the term institutional logic is limited to descriptions of such broad macro-cultural institutions in previous literature.

To distinguish between the macro-cultural institutions and the institutional prescriptions enacted in interaction and used to legitimize and guide action, I will refer to the latter as simply local institutions, and concentrate on describing how they are enacted during the strategy work in Bay City. Despite a difference in terminology, my focus on interaction builds on the research on the management of institutional complexity in daily practice, which has concentrated on “micro-level instantiations” (McPherson & Sauder, 2013, p. 167) of logics, or “the practices that enact and balance [institutional] logics” (Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015, p. 933). Together with the discursive perspective on institutions relevant to my study, this approach emphasizes the role of meanings. I will next describe the enactment of institutions in the flow of interaction as contextual, continuously evolving, and political constructions.

### 3.2 Constructing institutions through discourse

My interest in the institutional context of strategy work focuses attention on a specific aspect of institutions: the institutionalized meanings – such as taken-for-granted institutional beliefs, norms, and theorizations of causality – used to interpret the organization and guide action (DiMaggio, 1983; e.g. J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Zucker, 1977). This focus on meaning has been central to institutional theory from its outset; Berger & Luckmann (1966) divide institutions into their structural, practical and ideational aspects (where the ‘ideational’ dimension refers to the meanings related with these institutions). These aspects are different dimensions of the same phenomenon; institutionalized meanings are encoded in practices and structures, and these express and affect meanings (Zilber, 2008).
Although action is often used as a proxy for studying the meanings related with institutions (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; e.g. Westphal, Gulati, & Shortell, 1997), institutionalized practices are not equated with specific institutional meanings. Similar practices may be rooted in different meanings, and employed for different purposes (Westphal et al., 1997; Zilber, 2002). The relationship between institutional meanings and action is negotiated through talk and text (Green, Li, & Nohria, 2009; Phillips et al., 2004) and an understanding of both practices and the ways in which they are made meaningful is necessary for comprehending the institutional environment that permeates organizations (Phillips & Malhotra, 2008).

The meanings assigned to societal institutions are always temporary and challenged: they are adapted to local contexts and situations, and mobilized in different ways by actors holding different opinions and interests (Phillips et al., 2004; Rao, Morrill, & Zald, 2000; Zilber, 2006, 2008). Meanings may differ between actors working in the same social context, who share similar practices and social structures; these differences may lead to reactions and institutional effects that would not be explainable through the actions and institutional structures alone (Townley, 2002; Zilber, 2002). From this perspective, institutions emerge as contextualized, continuously evolving, and political processes of enactment (Zilber, 2008).

First, institutional practices, structures, and meanings vary between different contexts. As broader institutions are taken up in new contexts, they are adapted and made relevant in their new context (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008). Consequently, institutions are deeply embedded in their social context and understood in relation to this context – including any other institutions enacted in the same community. It is important to note that the local institutions employed by communities and organizations may combine institutional beliefs in ways that differ from accounts of surrounding macro-social institutions made in other similar settings. Thornton et al. (2012) state that even though abstract institutional orders are broadly shared by the members of societies, their component building blocks differ locally and are combined in different ways in their application to local contexts (see also Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005). In this way, the beliefs nested in field-level and societal institutions are combined opportunistically “as individuals and organizations [...] manipulate cultural symbols to obtain resources and to change practices” (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 124). From the perspective of interaction, institutions can be seen as resources that individuals and
groups use to express, contextualize and solve the individual and organizational problems they face in their everyday lives (McPherson & Sauder, 2013).

Organizations in pluralistic settings confront incompatible prescriptions based on multiple institutions (Kraatz & Block, 2008). The patterns that such complexity takes – as well as organizational responses – are not fixed: they evolve with time, and are shaped by organizational attributes, its relations with other organizations, as well as the broader environment (Greenwood et al., 2011). Organizations may respond in different ways to institutional prescriptions, ranging from habitual, unnoticed acquiescence to compromise or open defiance (Oliver, 1991). When incommensurate institutional prescriptions are brought together without a clear priority-setting procedure, organizational members must find ways to respond to them. In complex environments, these prescriptions influence each other in locally meaningful ways. This forces organizations to combine these prescriptions in some way, often compromising between them (Greenwood et al., 2011; Kodeih & Greenwood, 2013; Kraatz & Block, 2008).

Second, the meanings related to institutions are in continuous evolution; institutions are enacted, translated, interpreted and made meaningful through the day-to-day praxis of people in their social contexts (Powell & Colyvas, 2008), and these activities reproduce and change the institutions in their settings. Enactment refers to the combination of interpretation and action: people actively engage with their surroundings to learn about the environment and continuously make interpretations and try them out in action (Taylor & van Every, 2000; Weick, 1979). This view sees the relationship between the organization and its environment as reciprocal; people act according to their institutionalized understandings and these understandings shape both the responses they get and their interpretations (Weick, 2003). The barrage of new inputs into this interpretative process is continuous; the social and natural environment continually presents actors with new inputs, which are adapted into the previous institutional beliefs and practices. The institutions shared by actors therefore evolve continuously as they are maintained.

According to this view, organizing presents itself as a collective process of negotiation, where the various enactments are fit together in an attempt to reduce equivocality. These enactments are performed discursively – through talk and text (Taylor & van Every, 2000). This view of enactment is supported by institutional accounts of organizational action: “Institutional pressures exist only to the degree that internal and exter-
nal participants believe in them and engage in the institutional work necessary to permeate them” (Suddaby, Elsbach, Greenwood, Meyer, & Zilber, 2010, p. 1235).

Third, these interpretative processes intermingle with the political interests and positions of participants (e.g. Kaplan, 2008). Actors have a range of options in their enactments of institutional meanings. They make use of them based on their perspectives, interests and positions in webs of power (Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Munir & Phillips, 2005; Oakes, Townley, & Cooper, 1998; Oliver, 1991; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005). The role of language use is central in these processes (Zilber, 2008).

The ensuing account of institutional meanings as local, continuously evolving, and political constructions offers a contextualized way to look at the work of meanings; the ways in which actors make a difference through the continuous editing and recontextualization of meanings (Czarniawska & Sevón, 1996; Sahlin & Wedlin, 2008; Zilber, 2008). It describes the strategic and political, largely discursive dimension of the institutional reality. This view of institutions reminds us of the discussion of the strategy discourse in the previous section – a broad, plastic system of meanings which is enacted in different ways in different social settings.

The field of strategy serves as a good example on the mixing of societal institutional orders into a locally sensible mix: the strategy discourse builds on the institutions of market, corporation and elements of religion, but combines them into a specific constellation of beliefs that legitimizes certain kinds of action (Knights & Morgan, 1991). Such work of meanings is in line with the account of discourse made in the previous chapter; the meanings that make up institutions are negotiated through the continuous creation of texts and are thus contextual and transient. The institutions at play in organizational strategy work reflect the institutional environment of strategy work in its various local contexts; they are justified by reference to institutional prescriptions seen as relevant in the context and are expected to conform to the views of rational and effective action held by other strategists. As described in the previous chapter, the beliefs assigned to the strategy discourse are formed in organizational contexts by being enacted in contextually relevant ways (Seidl, 2007). Made in the flow of everyday action, these enactments build on institutions shared across social contexts and over time form them into local institutions in the ways described above.
3.3 Balancing complex institutions in organizational praxis

I have above described the previous research on the ways in which participants enact the institutional environment in strategy work to guide decision making and coordinate collective action. I will next explore the implications of previous research that describes how organizational members negotiate the prescriptions of a complex institutional environment into a ‘strategic’ interpretation, to enable the coordination and legitimation of action. This account paves the way for studying the ways in which strategists enact the institutional environment in interaction and craft the strategy as a dialogical, collective phenomenon, balancing between the clarity of a dominant perspective and the ambiguity of unresolved institutional complexity.

Interestingly, previous studies of institutional complexity (Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; e.g. Thornton et al., 2012) have used the field-level concepts of institutional logics and resolution of complexity to address the phenomenon of fitting together inconsistent institutional prescriptions in organizational practice. For clarity, I will repeat their terminology without changes, although its fit with my organization-level account of the enactment of institutions is not ideal. These previous studies have focused more on finding stable organizational resolutions for complexity, whereas my perspective on institutions as local, processual, and politically contested makes such stable resolutions seem both unlikely and unnecessary. This difference in language serves to illustrate differences in perspective.

The institutional complexity approach focuses attention on the interaction of institutions in the organizational setting, and the alternative responses to institutional pressures in the cross draft of these institutions. In order to go on with their work, actors find ways to overcome the differences and conflicts between institutional prescriptions (Giddens, 1984; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015). Actors enact institutions in situationally dependent ways, and these institutions may alternately strengthen or dampen each others’ effects, depending on the situation (Greenwood et al., 2011).

Smets, Jarzabkowski et al. (2015) described how actors may resolve institutional complexity by segregating the institutional logics they employ from the domains of interaction in which they find themselves. Actors in their study used organizational structures to balance different institutional logics by keeping them separate while bridging between their demands. At the office, their research subjects worked according to a collegial, community logic, while in customer interactions (on the trading floor) they em-
ployed a market logic focused on the profitability of transactions and share price. These logics were connected according to situational demands, but carefully segregated in order to both uphold a working professional community of trust and deliver value to the company.

In addition to such spatial segregation of institutional logics, previous studies show other ways in which actors created settlements between institutional logics acting on the same organization. For example, Reay and colleagues (Goodrick & Reay, 2010; Reay & Hinings, 2009) describe how professional and market logics were segregated by professional groups. Alternately, a recent stream of research on hybrid logics shows how actors resolve the differences between different logics by blending their central elements into a new, local combination (Currie & Spyridonidis, 2015; Lindberg, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013; Wry, Lounsbury, & Jennings, 2014). This creative use of institutional logics is usefully conceptualized as social negotiation, both of institutional interpretations and suitable solutions to individual and organizational problems (McPherson & Sauder, 2013).

It is notable that most of the settlements of institutional complexity described above maintain the conflicts between institutional logics in some way. This hints at the partiality of these resolutions, and the possibility that conflicts may re-emerge. Resolutions may range from the institutionalization of “hybrid arrangements” into uncontested settlements to “ongoing tension and contestation and continual reflexivity” (Greenwood et al., 2011, pp. 352–353). Importantly to the current study, Smets et al. (2015) find that institutional complexity in their case was not so much resolved as it was used to advance the twin organizational objectives of short-term economic gain and long-term community membership. Instead of lasting resolutions to complexity, their account introduces the notion of persistent institutional complexity as a feature of organizational life. The overlapping institutions which make up the complex institutional setting come together in contextually unique combinations and influence each other in ways that are very difficult to predict. These institutions impose demands on action, and their component beliefs and norms may strengthen each other in some cases, attenuate each other in others, or be incommensurate in some cases. Instead of generalized compatibility or conflict, the compatibility of logics may vary by issue at hand. This makes the resolution of institutional complexity an ongoing, uncertain affair which requires continuous maintenance.
This conception of persistent institutional complexity is a central issue in strategy work; strategists spend a lot of effort in defining the environment of the organization, recognizing alternatives for action and narrating past actions as successes or failures. Such negotiations are an ongoing feature of strategy discussions. It may even be, as Smets et al. (2015) hint, that the presence of persistent institutional complexity aids organizations to attain goals which are complex or difficult to reconcile; the relevance and usefulness of institutions may vary by situation or task, and recognized institutional complexity may—such as in Smets’ account of segregated logics—allow the organization to focus on those meanings and practices which are relevant to the task at hand.

The idea of organizational actors resolving institutional complexity may thus be an overly simple story; descriptions of the relationships of complex logics in organizations seem to require more nuanced vocabulary, including a richer account of the contextual, ongoing nature of such resolutions. Indeed, the account of persistent complexity calls attention to the issue-level and situational negotiation of complexity. This issue has, however, received limited attention in the discussions on strategy as practice as well as institutional complexity. The above account of institutional complexity thus enables us to look at strategy work as the creation of a collectively accepted account of the organization, its goals and the legitimate actions taken to reach these goals.

This chapter has enriched the earlier account of strategy work as contextualized discursive work by showing how it is embedded in a complex web of social institutions that are enacted in strategy work. I’ve concentrated on the enactment of institutionalized meanings as contextualized and continuous enactment, which often happens under conditions of persistent institutional complexity. Armed with this account, we can begin to study the creation of collective strategy by describing it as the negotiation of institutional complexity, which can be studied as the enactment of the institutional environment in interactions.

Enactments of the institutional environment are interesting to this study to the extent that they contribute to our understanding of strategy work. Central to this is to investigate what kinds of social institutions are enacted in strategy discussions, how they are related with each other, and how strategists react to tensions perceived between these institutions. However, due to the focus of the previous literature on resolution of complexity, the previous literature offers us little advice on studying these negotiations empirically. In the next chapter I will use Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1984) conception of ideational voices engaged in dialogue to construct my approach to these negotiations.
4 CRAFTING A COLLECTIVE STRATEGY THROUGH DIALOGUE

But I hear *voices* in everything, and the dialogic relationships between them.
(M.M. Bakhtin, cited in Shukman, 1983, p. 4)

The previous theory chapters have described organizational strategy work as a continuous process of interaction, where complex institutional pressures are continuously introduced and negotiated in order to direct organizational action. This chapter introduces Mikhail Bakhtin’s (1981b, 1984, 1986b) theory of dialogue as an account of the continuous work by which discussants apply and adapt the various institutional perspectives to craft a collective strategy that enables them to coordinate their actions. Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue offers us a useful language for discussing the constitution of organizational phenomena in interaction and the negotiation of the different views. This approach enables us to better understand the role of social institutions enacted in strategy discussions, the relations constructed between these enacted institutions and the implications of the processes of negotiation between them for the creation of a collective strategy. Specifically to the goals of this work, this chapter adds to the theoretical framework by formulating an analytical framework which can be used to investigate the practices by which the balance between the dominance of a single perspective and ambiguity between alternate interpretations is achieved and maintained.

Bakhtin describes the social world as a continuous dialogue made up of different voices, which comment on and influence each other without blending together. His conception of dialogue speaks of a relational social world, which individuals interpret together through a continuous weaving together of different perspectives. Bakhtin emphasizes the centrality of social action, and is suspicious of stable entities and shared meanings. I apply his conception of ‘ideational voices’ (Bakhtin, 1984) to offer a processual account of the construction of the institutional environment in strategy discussions and argue that this account of institutional dialogue increases our understanding of how strategists reconcile and live with persistent institutional complexity. The emerging dialogue is contextual and relational; the perspectives come together in ways which comment on the situation at hand and rely on the interpretations of participants based on the perspectives they bring to the dialogue. Any understanding of the dialogue requires an understanding of the situation in which the dialogue took place, and also an understanding of the perspectives of participants. Just as we cannot understand an utterance made in a discussion without knowledge of the previous utterances or the participants present, we cannot understand the strategy discussion without knowledge
of the challenges constructed as central in these discussions or the views of the strategists present.

The account of institutional dialogue explicated in this chapter emphasizes features of social practice similar to those of the strategy as becoming discussion described in Chapter 2. It sees dialogical practice as contextual and trans-individual – founded in a community engaged in continuous interaction, where participants craft their views together, in relation to the other emerging views and interpretations. Here, my study is indebted to similar accounts of a dialogue as an ongoing, ever emerging social practice made by many previous interpreters who have adapted Bakhtin's work on dialogue to organizational topics (see e.g. Kornberger et al., 2006; Shotter, 2008b; Cunliffe, Helin, & Luhman, 2014).

I first briefly introduce the previous literature on dialogue in organization studies, concentrating on Mikhail Bakhtin’s account of dialogue as constitutive of social reality. The following section concentrates on his discussion of ideational dialogue and combines it with the institutional account given in the previous chapter to coin the concept institutional voice. Then, I detail my use of this concept as an analytical tool in elucidating the dialogical process of constructing a collective strategy. Last, I introduce three central dimensions of dialogue which I employ in my analysis: managing the breadth of dialogue, relating the institutional voices to each other in their talk, and chaining the institutional dialogue in different meetings into a temporal chain of interactions.

4.1 Organization as dialogue between a plurality of voices

An extensive literature on dialogue has sprung up in organization studies, applying and adapting the philosophical and social theoretical work of Hegel, Bakhtin, Mead, Vygotsky, Wittgenstein, and Goffman, among others, to organisational concerns. Authors such as Hazen (1993, 1994), Carter et al. (2003), Kornberger and colleagues (Kornberger et al., 2006), Boje (1991; 1995; 2008), have described organizations as composed of the dialogue between multiple voices expressing different perspectives and interests. This approach has been applied to discussions in strategic management (Kornberger, 2012, 2013; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011), knowledge management (for a review, see Mengis & Eppler, 2008) and change management (D. L. Anderson, 2005; Kellett, 1999; Thomas et al., 2011). This literature also has strong links with organizational communication, where dialogue has been described as the organization of difference in public discourse (R. Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2004; Baxter & Montgomery,
Due to the breadth of the discussion of dialogue in organizations, a more precise theoretical positioning of this work is necessary. Deetz and Simpson (2004) divide the literature on dialogue into the liberal humanist, critical hermeneutic, and postmodern positions. The liberal humanist perspective (based broadly on the work of Maslow and Rogers) emphasizes the finding of common ground through understanding, empathy and active listening (Bohm, 1996; Senge, 1990). The critical hermeneutic orientation emphasizes the role of interaction (rather than individuals) in the production and negotiation of meaning, but still relies on the significant rational agency on the individuals participating in the interaction (Deetz & Simpson, 2004). The third, postmodernist perspective on dialogue emphasizes the indeterminacy and constructed nature of the positions in dialogue, and describes the role of dialogue in “reclaiming conflicts, resisting closure, and opening new opportunities for people to be mutually involved in shaping new understandings of the world in which they live and work” (Deetz & Simpson, 2004, p. 142). In building on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, my discussion of collective strategy as a dialogue is positioned between the critical hermeneutic and postmodern views of dialogue. These both include an account of dialogue as an inherent feature of social reality, presenting the world as a combination of different voices which together construct social realities.

Bakhtin and his proponents in organization theory (Boje, 2008; e.g. Hazen, 1993; Kornberger et al., 2006; Shotter, 2008a; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008) describe organizations as fundamentally polyphonic, or composed of several different voices. These voices represent distinct positions on the organization, based on different individual experiences, cultural meanings and political interests. Such voices come to life as they are used and used together (Bakhtin, 1984); each interpretation is made in a context and in relation to an audience – e.g. the expected readers of a text being written, people participating in a conversation or the bad conscience resulting from a regretted act. As this audience actively interprets the previous utterance, it brings new voices to the interaction, and sets the scene for continued interaction. Bakhtin’s dialogical conception of truth does not conflate the different voices present in social life into a systemic view of reality or hide the plurality of views from us (Morson & Emerson, 1990). His conception of dialogism as a general feature of language opens up a way of studying the textual...
negotiation of different positions as crafting a multi-voiced understanding of the ways in which ‘the truth’ of a contextualized issue can be understood.

It is central to note that the voices used in dialogue are not direct representations of individual speakers; people often compare several voices as they construct their contextualized views, and creatively include several voices in their utterances as they see fit (Erdinast-Vulcan, 2013). They are able to relate these voices with each other, employ them, and argue with the voices used by others. Such polyphony presents truth as dialogical – made up as a combination of several interpretations by different voices (Bakhtin, 1981b; Kornberger et al., 2006; Morson & Emerson, 1990). Participants in polyphonic dialogue do not have full control over the interaction; the voices they employ bring into their utterances the perspectives of other experts, previous discusants and their listeners – “someone else’s consciousness” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 239, emphasis in original) – allowing the speakers to see the world through new eyes.

Bakhtin’s use of the concept of voice focuses attention on contextuality and relationality as two central features of dialogue. First, Bakhtin sees meanings constructed in dialogue as contextual; the meanings of utterances are always meanings communicated with a specific audience, in a certain context (Bakhtin, 1984). In this way social reality is constructed as a continuous, situated dialogue between different voices, as they are perceived and used by people who actively interpret their surroundings. Second, the meanings constructed in dialogue are relational; they are interpreted from the relations constructed between the voices introduced to this context. These voices are unfinalizable; they can only be expressed in relation within an interactional context made up of several such voices, and only in part. Together they make up a contextual conception of reality that acknowledges and juxtaposes the various voices present. As these multiple voices enter in dialogues, they remain separate from each other (Morson & Emerson, 1990).

These ideas have been applied as a polyphonic view on organization, which takes the interplay of different voices as the foundation of organization. Mary Ann Hazen laid the cornerstone for this perspective in describing organizations as “socially constructed verbal systems” composed of individual subjects with their own unfinalized and contextual perspectives (1993, p. 15). These individuals bring a variety of voices to organizational contexts and the observation of even one voice that is different from one’s own implies that there might be other different ways of conceiving the organization, with different conceptions of its central ideas (Bakhtin, 1984; Clegg, Kornberger, Carter, &
Rhodes, 2006). Such different voices may or may not enter into dialogue with each other. However, polyphony exists even when observable dialogue is hindered by the dominance of a single voice or the exclusion of some voices from public arenas. Even a dominant view requires re-enactment (and thus interpretation and adaptation) to remain salient, and these re-enactments leave the door open for misunderstandings, critique and subversion (Kornberger et al., 2006; Rhodes, 2000a).

Members of an organization observe social reality from multiple positions and make sense of it using multiple languages based in different social worlds, cultures or discourses (Bakhtin, 1986c). People with different perspectives on the world, who use different voices to express their views, are prone to misunderstandings, breaks in communication and individualist advancement of perceived interests. This may lead to conflicts, the marginalization of some perspectives or the domination of a single perspective. In bringing together fundamentally different voices and relating them, dialogism balances the separation of these voices; as the voices meet in dialogue, the people using them juxtapose several voices and adapt them to each other’s perspectives. The different voices do not usually merge; if this happens, then dialogue between them turns into quiet agreement and ends.

4.2 Institutions as ideational voices

Next, I seek to show that seeing collective strategy as a dialogical construction helps us understand the negotiation of institutional meanings in strategy work. In so doing, I explore dialogue on an ideational level, concentrating on the institutionally based ideas expressed in strategy discussions and written texts. In pluralist organizations, different participants in the strategy work tend to draw on different institutions in constructing the strategic goals, issues, and priorities based on their perspectives. The strategy discussions where this happens thus bring these institutions together as ideational voices in dialogue.

In Bakhtin’s work, ideational voices are voices expressing conceptions of the world, positioned in the context of interaction. An idea is “a principle for visualizing and representing the world” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 82) or an ideological perspective that helps interpret the world. These ideas emerge as they are placed in relation to other voices – either directly in the interaction, or in the interpretations made of them by observers. I explore the perspective that under conditions of persistent institutional complexity, institutions enter discussions as such ideational voices which engage in dialogue, influ-
encing each other and leading to new combinations of beliefs. An institutional voice is thus a specific kind of ideational voice – one which expresses a specific institutional perspective, situating it in a specific organizational and interactional context, together with other voices.

An analysis of institutional complexity as a dialogue between ideational voices enables us to focus on the continuously evolving relations between different local institutions, avoiding the simplifications of the concentration on the resolution of complexity described in Chapter 3.3 (see also Greenwood et al., 2011; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013). This account of institutions as ideational voices refers to local understandings of institutions in a manner similar to that of the discussion of the ideational dimension of institutions outlined in Chapter 3.2; the institutions here emerge as abstract views of the world, made flesh in their enactment in interaction. The dialogical approach emphasizes a different aspect of these local views, discarding the systemic assumption so often made by institutional theorists, i.e. the view that meanings prescribed by institutions constitute shared and internally consistent “systems of meaning and normative understandings” (and Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Greenwood et al., 2011, p. 321; see also Zilber, 2008). Instead, this approach sees the meanings constituted by each institution as dialogically created and unfinalizable – each institution includes a rich potential for meaning, which is only made harmonious by the assumptions and active work of inhabitants in adapting them to each interaction.

In addition to these institutional idea-voices, this perspective of contextual use emphasizes the role of people acting together, engaged in dialogue. These institutional voices come to life through their use in interaction: through constructing locally relevant institutional voices, in text or speech. In this way, these idea-voices are a perspective on social construction through discourse (as discussed in chapter 2.3); they concentrate on the ways in which different broad, constitutive discourses are used together to construct the social world in the flow of interaction.

The dialogical understanding of social life described above also enriches our understanding of institutions as the setting for social life. It grounds institutions in day-to-day interaction, and includes them as voices which people employ in their talk and texts, applying and adapting broader institutions as organizationally and situationally relevant perspectives used to construct and resolve the issues discussed. Such views of institutions are brought up discursively, through interaction between individuals. Individuals include several institutional voices in their talk; they build on previous utter-
ances on the same topic and incorporate any cues on the audience’s reactions or anticipated criticism (Bakhtin, 1986c). In other words, the speech intent of speakers centres on the topic at hand (as the speakers interpret it), while they utilize several institutional voices to express this intent and vie for legitimacy from their audiences. This conception allows examination of the interaction of several institutions in context. Institutional voices here emerge as “third agencies” (Shotter, 2008b, p. 506); they are used by individual speakers to understand the world, yet remain partially outside their control. The use of these voices allows discussants to see the world through new eyes, and has potential for changing the discussants as they adapt their perspectives to new voices. In order to be useful, such institutional voices must be familiar enough to other participants in the same discussion and acceptable as legitimate views to the context. In this way, the institutional voices link back with the conceptions of other participants about the issue at hand.

As they are used in interaction, each institutional voice is woven together with other voices, and they together construct the institutional environment in relation with the topics at hand. The ways in which these institutional voices are interpreted locally depend on the institutional constellation enacted as relevant in the situational and organizational context of interpretation (Greenwood et al., 2011). In this way, the different parts of the institutional environment for strategy work are interwoven in discussions, as different interpretations are brought together, adapted and put to use. This brings up the value of the dialogical approach to studying institutional complexity that is played out in interactions: institutions are made relevant and their meanings are negotiated in several ways, in relation with the local context (Zilber, 2002, 2008). Local adaptations may also result in institutional change outside their original context (Smets et al., 2012). Institutional dialogism is a useful approach to studying what happens between institutional voices, as they are enacted in local contexts, and as they play out over time.

The dialogical description of institutions bears a family resemblance to previous accounts of institutional complexity. The ideational dimension of institutions – phrased in more concrete institutionalist terms as their “systems of meaning and normative understandings” (Greenwood et al., 2011, p. 321) – has been central to descriptions of institutional complexity; in their introduction of the concept, Greenwood et al. defined institutional complexity as the “incompatible prescriptions from multiple institutional logics” faced by organizations (2011, p. 318). As detailed in the previous chapter, institutional complexity is thus defined from the perspective of an organization in interac-
tion with an institutional environment composed of several overlapping institutions with unclear relations. Like Bakhtin’s conception of ideational voices, this account is contextualized, and is made up of the enactments of several ‘ideas’ or ways of interpreting the world as perceived by the participants in these enactments. Institutional complexity emerges when the prescriptions and proscriptions of different institutions are perceived to be incompatible – that is, when they are placed in relation to each other in the context of their application. In this combination, institutions emerge as the contextual, relational interpretations made by organizational members of the prescriptions of broader institutional logics to the organizational context. These institutional voices are applied to interaction together; they are enacted as situationally relevant, compared and fit together or judged as conflicting.

Bakhtin places great emphasis on this contextualized enactment of ideas in interaction; “the idea is inter-individual and intersubjective [...] a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or more consciousnesses” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 88, emphasis in original). These ideas gain new contextual meanings when they are brought into the context of interaction, and take on “a new and eventful life” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 91) in relation to the context and their later interpretations in it. As speakers together make an idea relevant and relate it to other ideas in the context, it gains a meaning in the interactional context. The idea comes to life in the interaction and dialogue with other voices “reveals its various facets, nuances, possibilities” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 89). This dialogue between ideas has the potential to transform the positions of speakers and the meanings of other ideas in the context (Ramsey, 2008). Analogously, institutional complexity may lead to hybridization, the incorporation of practices from several logics (Pache & Santos, 2013) or the blending of logics together more broadly (Glynn & Lounsbury, 2005; Murray, 2010).

This account of complex ideational perspectives of interpretation and their application as contextualized “live events” is reminiscent of Weick’s (1979) view of enactment. Unlike organizational views of enactment, ideational voices are not seen as separate from each other; ideational voices exist in and make up a discursive context made up through the awareness of participants of previous utterances and ideas, which are made relevant through interpretation.

The institutional environment of strategy discussions takes form through a series of situated enactments. The choice to discuss the goals and future of the organization through the strategy discourse creates a specific context for discussions, where the par-
Participants’ previous conceptions of strategy guide the discussions from their beginning. As described in Chapter 3, the strategy discourse constructs specific conditions of possibility, a specific language, and specific accounts for rational action that direct any dialogue (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). As a part of the context for strategy work, it is enacted into the dialogues through the interpretations and adaptations made by speakers, and combined with other enacted facets of the environment, such as the institutions of free market economy or democracy. These enactments are commented on, repeated and – sometimes – forgotten; they are used as voices among others in strategy dialogues.

At this point, some tensions between the institutional and dialogical perspectives on strategy as practice should be noted. As I argue in Chapter 3.1, most accounts of institutional theory are built on assumptions of the relative stability and sharedness of societal institutions. Tensions exists between these assumptions and Bakhtin’s view of the social world as fundamentally an emerging process, made up of the continuous dialogue between alternative perspectives, which creates social reality as an ever emerging process where all meanings are situational and unfinalizable.

To reconcile these tensions, this work draws on a specific subset of the institutional field. The perspective taken in this work of institutions as locally enacted voices in dialogue builds on a view of social reality which differs significantly from the more traditional view of institutional theory, which emphasizes the structural features of institutions. I have sought to combine the institutional and dialogical perspectives on strategy as practice by aligning this work with the traditions of discursive work on institutions (Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004), the ideational dimension of institutions (Zilber, 2008), and the view of institutions as locally enacted phenomena (Barley, 2008; Hallett & Ventresca, 2006; Lok & de Rond, 2012). This work thus builds on a specific view of institutions as complex and locally meaningful social constructions, which influence each other and are used to make sense of the context and guide collective action.

Admittedly, the dialogical perspective adopted in this work brings out these tensions quite clearly by emphasizing the local and strongly processual nature of institutions, and concentrating on the continuous creation and recreation of institutional meanings through communication. These assumptions position this study far from many mainstream accounts of institutional theory. However, these tensions are a recognized part of the broader discussion on institutional theory, instead of inherent to the theoretical or analytical perspective chosen in this work.
4.3 Crafting a collective strategy through institutional dialogue

This account of institutional dialogue enables us to return to the previously discussed approaches to the problem of collective strategy. In Chapter 2, I characterized two ideal accounts of the strategy discourse in coordinating collective action; the dominance of a clear, managerially controlled strategy constituted by a muscular strategy discourse (discussed in Chapter 2.3) and the strategic ambiguity ever prevalent in pluralistic contexts (see Chapter 2.4). Neither of these alternative accounts fits the description of a collective strategy; the dominant discourse account capitalizes on sharedness, risking pretension and confrontations between the dominant discourse and dissenters, while the ambiguity account may lead to conflict or confusion between proponents of different interpretations and impede commitment to a strategy.

This work places collective strategy – in its varying degrees of sharedness – in the middle ground between the clarity of a single dominant view and the ambiguous persistence of unrelated views. In the following, I describe the creation of a collective strategy as a balancing act between these two alternatives – as institutional dialogue. This account aims to complement the perspectives of pluralism and dominance of the strategy discourse and describe the daily practice by which participants in strategy work cope with the pluralism inherent in strategy work and with the struggles between the various perspectives.

As described above, I describe institutional dialogue as the contextual and relational use of several perspectives in a context of interaction, applying them as complementary perspectives to create something new; in what follows, these characteristics of institutional dialogue comprise important ways for understanding the construction of meanings in dialogue and identifying institutional dialogue. I will next argue that institutional dialogue, with its focus on different views and positions as voices (Hazen, 1993), is a fitting approach for studying the creation of collective strategy in pluralist settings where these voices and the gaps between them are central to organizing efforts (Kornberger et al., 2006). The use and negotiation of meanings takes place in dialogue – in “chronologically sequenced discursive acts” (see also Ford & Ford, 1995; Grant et al., 2004, p. 4) between discussants and the ideas they use (Bakhtin, 1984; Kornberger et al., 2006; Sullivan, 2011). These interactions place the different views in relation to each other, allowing discussants to use them together to understand the topic at hand and bridge the gaps between the alternative views (Bradbury & Lichtenstein, 2000). The meanings constructed in individual interactions become organizationally shared.
through being repeated, applied and commented on in later discussions (Bakhtin, 1986c; Boden, 1994; Samra-Fredericks, 2003). This dialogue takes place between the clarity of meaning supplied by a single dominant voice and the ambiguous, shifting relations between the different voices. Both clarity and ambiguity are necessary for strategic action; the coordination of action calls for clear, shared meanings, while ambiguity is both useful and inevitable in pluralist contexts. Striking a constructive balance between these two unattainable ideals calls for a process of continuous negotiation which sets the various positions in relation to each other as voices engaging in a dialogue.

While this study follows Bakhtin’s work in portraying dialogue as a fundamental, inevitable part of social life, it concedes that the ability of discussants in organizations to recognize and build on the various voices present is limited (Boje, 2008; Hazen, 1993; Kornberger et al., 2006; Shotter, 2008a). That is, although different participants bring to the organization their particular views – “their individual style, perspective and uniqueness” (Hazen, 1993, p. 21) – these views are not necessarily recognized as ‘having a voice’, and allowed to contribute to the production of new meanings together (Deetz & Simpson, 2004). On the contrary, organizational praxis can be – and often is – based on the dominance of some central voices and the silencing of others, and at other times these voices remain unintelligible to each other (see also Bakhtin, 1984; Carter et al., 2003). Hence construction of a collective strategy builds on the ability of an organizational community to give voice to these different views (such as the institutional voices described above) and maintain a dialogue between these views. This ability places its demands on the participating community, which must work to create and maintain its ability to engage in dialogue. I will next sound out some demands in Bakhtin’s work that resonate with the construction of a collective organizational strategy.

The ability to engage in dialogue requires its participants to **accept the existence of several valid perspectives**: to avoid being stuck in the monological unity of a single consciousness, reach out across different views and enable them to contribute to a single discussion by connecting them with each other. In the alternative to dialogue – the monological unity of a single, correct, worldview – each thought is right, wrong, or incomprehensible – it is “either affirmed or repudiated; otherwise it simply ceases to be a fully valid thought” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 80). For a monological unity, alternative perspectives do not exist: each thought can be related to the monological unity, and judged
as either right or wrong. Else, it is seen as incomprehensible; a thought that is unrelat-ed to the monological unity cannot be understood.

Dialogue requires people to **reach out and participate** – it is created jointly by speakers and listeners (or writers and readers) who turn to each other to communicate (Bakhtin, 1986c; Morson & Emerson, 1990). In creating dialogue, the participants en-dow each other’s utterances with a voice, or voices – they imagine the perspective from which they are spoken as a personified voice. The participants in dialogue create the dialogical meeting ground together; to do this, they need to be willing to listen to different perspectives - to accept that they may encounter perspectives which are both for-eign to them and valid as perspectives on the topic at hand. This acceptance amounts to an acknowledgement of the potential value of different views.

This participation means that people bring the voices together and **use them to create new meaning**. By bringing these perspectives together and applying them to their common concerns in dialogue, participants create dialogical relations between them. Dialogical relations arise in language use – in concrete utterances which create “the positions of various subjects expressed in discourse” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 184). As participants bring these perspectives together, they bridge the languages used to discuss them and create new connections between these perspectives. They use one perspective to look at another, and in so doing, they reveal new facets of these perspectives and open up opportunities for new understanding. In this way, dialogue enables participants to provoke and test their ideas and to generate new understanding together. Over time, participants accumulate a history of dialogical meetings between voices, which they may draw on in subsequent utterances. Such a history of dialogue enables participants to anticipate the reactions of others to their words, to see what may be acceptable or appealing to the community of participants. In this way, dialogue builds a history of local understandings between voices – a fragile understanding of difference, if not in-creased similarity. As they engage familiar voices in dialogue, participants strengthen their ability to use these perspectives together – at least until new voices join the dial-logue, disrupting the status quo. Dialogue between voices thus breeds the ability for further dialogue.

It is important to note that the existence of a dialogue does not necessitate agreement or a constructive tone between these voices. Such tensions are an integral part of dia-logue in organizational contexts which are always laden with power: “[w]hen we listen to polyphonic organization, we hear harmony, dissonance, clash, counterpoint, silence,
complex rhythms” (Hazen, 1993, p. 22). These tensions between voices contribute to the ability of organizational communities to resolve conflicts and solve problems; while they need not create a harmonious fusion of the various voices, they may together lead to an exchange of ideas, and an increasingly shared understanding. Discursive struggles over meanings form a part of this balancing act, as different groups argue for their views (Laine & Vaara, 2007). The frontlines in such struggles are often unclear; actors are conscious of the variety of discourses available and may apply them opportunistically, reinterpreting each others’ views past the point of distortion (Hodge & Coronado, 2006). We thus see that the ability for dialogue constructed by such practice is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the creation of a collective strategy or even an understanding of the views of others. Even when all expected demands and conditions are met, participants in interaction will frequently misinterpret each other and end up in interchanges which are far from the ideal of a dialogical encounter.

Consequently, the importance of shared meanings and the search for ‘common ground’ between participants is often overemphasized (Deetz & Simpson, 2004). This common ground is highlighted by humanist views of dialogue such as Senge (1990) or Bohm (1996), as well as the literature on coordination and knowledge sharing (e.g. Clark ’96; Cramton ’01; Bechky ’03). Such a common ground would bind the various perspectives into itself, and limit their expression into ‘constructive’ views, supporting the common ground. Dialogue built around common ground is thus only partially open and binds each participant to constructive agreement even when it may not be acceptable to anyone. In practice, however, such limitations may be a part of organizational life in many settings; the emerging dialogue is always imperfect and only partially attained in ongoing interactions.

The organizational ability for dialogue requires continuous maintenance and may degenerate into conflicts between different views in different ways. As participants acknowledge the existence of several valid perspectives on the organizational strategy, combine these perspectives to participate in strategy work, and use them together to create new meaning, they may come to craft an organizational strategy which provides participants with several, coordinated perspectives on the organization and use these to coordinate their work. This builds – ideally – on the views of all participants, using them together without conflating them into a fixed combination. This ideal construction has its limits; since dialogue builds on differences in perspective, misunderstandings and conflicts between participants are part and parcel of interaction and need to be
resolved to maintain the dialogue. Much depends on the abilities of participants to understand each other and create trust in the midst of differences in perspective. As conflicts draw out and remain unresolved, the dialogue will likely suffer (Barge & Andreas, 2013).

To summarize the argument thus far, dialogue can be understood as the continuous construction of a polyphonic understanding of an issue by the interaction of several ideological positions, separate but linked by their shared interactional context. Dialogical interactions join together the varied and incompatible elements without making them the same: because of this, they cannot be objectified according to any single position without losing a part of their relevant meaning (Bakhtin, 1984). The focus of the dialogical approach is on the relations between these complex voices and the unfinalizable, multiple perspectives on the world that they construct together. Strategy emerges in this account as an uneasy process of continuous compromise between the coordination of a shared direction on the one hand, and the need for locally relevant direction and fair treatment on the other. A better awareness of the voices used in strategy work and the dialogical practices between them holds promise for both the analytical understanding of strategy work and for the practical efforts of organizational members. Although previous research enables us to parse together a rich account of dialogue and its role in organizations, we do not so far know enough about the specific practices through which the dialogue is maintained (Cunliffe et al., 2014). This work may in an applied sense shed light on these practices in the context of strategy work.

To conclude this chapter, I will describe my approach to studying the ways in which collective strategy emerges in dialogue, through the ways in which these voices are constructed and placed in relation to each other.

4.4 Dimensions of institutional dialogue

Having established my view of institutional dialogue in strategy work, I will next make the case for concentrating my analysis of dialogical practice on three central and salient dimensions of institutional dialogue, which enable us to deepen our understanding of the use of the institutional voices in crafting a collective organizational strategy. These three dimensions are managing the breadth of dialogue, relating the institutional voices to each other in their talk, and chaining the institutional dialogue in different meetings together into a temporal chain of interactions. Although these dimensions do not exhaustively describe the role of dialogue in strategy work, they show the relevance
of this perspective to understanding the central features of institutional dialogue for the construction of a collective strategy and lay the theoretical background for my description of collective strategy as ongoing dialogue between institutional ideas, enacted in the flow of interaction.

### 4.4.1 Managing the breadth of institutional dialogue

The first dimension focuses on the changing breadth of the dialogue in strategy discussions: the variety of different interpretations of the strategy, from the plethora of situational voices used in successive meetings to the clarity and dominance of a new strategy document when it is first presented by a proud CEO. Building on Bakhtin’s conceptions of centrifugal and centripetal forces in dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Boje, 2008), this first dimension brings forth the opposing pressures towards the differences and openness of meanings on the one hand and their unanimity on the other. This dimension supplies us with the conceptual tools for studying how strategists use the institutional voices to balance between these pressures.

The organizational world emerges in these discussions as an uneasy balance between the increasing separation between the different voices, and their coming closer – the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies at play in them (Bakhtin, 1984). The centrifugal tendencies that broaden the dialogue by introducing new voices and separating them from each other partially stem from the social context; they are reactions to the situation at hand, based on the perspectives and interests of speakers. In addition, the perspectives and ideas that people express change from time to time; each discussion can only encompass a part of the person speaking and the utterances that speakers make may be in apparent conflict with previous and later utterances.

Alternately, as the speakers reach out to each other in their attempts to reach common ground, they give rise to the centripetal tendencies of dialogue; they narrow down the dialogue by abandoning or silencing some of the voices used in dialogue (Erdinast-Vulcan, 2013). This description also illustrates the difference between the institutional voices described in this study and the individual speakers who employ them in discussions; the Bakhtinian, dialogical account emphasizes that people are not limited to a

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5 Bakhtin describes these tendencies succinctly: “Human existence, created as it is in many languages, presents two opposing tendencies. There is a ‘centrifugal’ force dispersing us outward into an ever greater variety of ‘voices,’ outward into a seeming chaos that presumably only a God could encompass. And there are various ‘centripetal’ forces preserving us from overwhelming fluidity and variety. The drive to create art works that have some kind of coherence—that is, formal unity—is obviously a ‘centripetal’ force; it provides us with the best experience we have of what Coleridge called ‘multeity in unity,’ unity that does justice to variety.” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. xxi–xxii)
single, coherent voice. Instead, their subjectivities and actions are based on a polyphonic combination of several voices, representing different ideas, roles, values and interests (Bakhtin, 1981b, 1986c; Erdinast-Vulcan, 2013). Thus, the dialogue may be narrowed down without participants being silenced or explicitly changing their views; advocates of a criticized view may shift their views through small adjustments in their wording and emphasis, which only a close observer would note.

4.4.2 Relating the institutional voices to each other in interactions

The second dimension describes the dialogical practices used to relate institutional voices to each other and also the relations thus constructed between the different voices. This dimension focuses on the dialogical practices used to relate these voices with each other and the relations thus constructed between the different voices. In Chapter 3.3 above, I describe the institutional context of the strategy discussion as a series of situated enactments. A dialogical view sees these adaptations as relational; each use of the voices is adapted to its context; speakers enact those facets of the idea-voices they use, which they see as relevant to the topic of conversation, and appealing to the others present. In this way, the other voices used in the same context – or expected to be used later – influence what is said. Each use of the voices is related with others in a situationally meaningful way, and used to fulfil an intent in this interactional situation (Bakhtin, 1986c) – to solve a problem, promote a favoured interpretation, or establish a relation with other speakers or their words.

As noted above, these voices are constructed by such relational use and are thus unfinalizable; they cannot be detached from their contextuality nor described in their entirety (Bakhtin, 1981a, 1984; Morson & Emerson, 1990). The differences in situational enactment mean that institutional voices emerge as distinct situational ‘sounds’; these idea-voices “pass through” these discussions and “[sound] differently in each” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 278–279; see also Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008). In each discussion, they gain a specific emphasis and relations with other voices and emerge as new versions of themselves: identifiable, but different from their use in other discussions. Dialogue is thus an important part of generating meanings in a context; they arise out of the presence and interplay of different voices – be they those of individuals or less embodied ideas. The situational nature of each enactment affords them with the ability to connect the broad significance of the institutional idea with the situation at hand.
Institutional voices are composed of a series of such ‘live events’ – applications of ideas in interaction with their contexts (Bakhtin, 1984). The situational use of these voices links the ideas with other voices made present in the situation and emphasizes those aspects which speak to the current interactional context (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008). Institutional voices exist between speakers; they are commonly accepted, relational and contextualized perspectives which speakers continuously appropriate. They are thus continuously debated and reinterpreted as they move from mouth to mouth; this forces speakers to assess and potentially adapt their views to the uses to which others put these ideas. (The difference in the use of these voices may be radical, too - and at times is.)

From the perspective of institutional complexity, these enactments combine the institutional voices in different situational constellations and apply them to different topics in different ways. Although different people speak about institutions as if they agreed on their meanings, their particular views are different, as are their expressions of them. Although our views of the central societal institutions diverge significantly, they guide our actions in similar ways (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Phillips et al., 2004). In this way, the emerging institutional voices are made up of a series of situated views of a multifaceted, necessarily dialogical social object.

As I describe in Chapter 3.3, we do not know enough about how this situational enactment between institutional voices takes place. These idea-voices take form through being made relevant in the situation at hand; the ‘sound’ of an institutional voice in a situation is formed through constructing the relations between it and other voices made relevant in the interactional context. These voices and their relations make up the enacted social context in the situation. The combinations of voices and relations between them change over time – sometimes these ideas may be in conflict, sometimes in harmony. These changes in their relations during the discussions attest to the situational nature of the settlements of institutional complexity, and make this discussion a fitting context for studying the practices through which the institutional voices are negotiated in strategy discussions.

The combinations create settlements of institutional complexity: the discussants enacted the complex institutional voices in ways which resolved the complexity between them and enabled them to construct – to avoid conflicts between the institutional voices and “go on” with their decision making (Shotter, 2008a). This dimension serves to describe how the relations between voices were constructed and how those relations
which were seen as desirable were crafted into situational settlements on the suitable choices.

4.4.3 Chaining the situational enactments of institutional voices into an ongoing process

The third dimension focuses on the use of these situational enactments of the institutional voices as they were adapted to different discussions – the different sounds of institutional voices described above – and describes the use of these situational sounds together in later discussions to craft a collective strategy. It emerges from the above description of situational settlements in the form of a question: how do speakers relate these situated enactments together into a repeated institutional voice, relevant across interactional contexts and capable of being acknowledged in strategy discussions and texts? I base my answer to this question on Bakhtin’s account of chains of speech interaction (Bakhtin, 1986c), describing how the situational sounds are carried from one speaker and interactional context to another. Additionally, I draw on the ethnomethodological work of Boden (1994) and Samra-Fredericks (2003) to conceptualize the role of repetition in the negotiation of these sounds.

First, Bakhtin’s conception of how the meanings expressed by different participants fit together is based on the idea that all utterances are based on the previous words of others: “there can be neither a first nor a last meaning; [anything that can be understood] always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its totality is the only thing that can be real. [...E]ach individual link in it is renewed again and again, as though it were being reborn.” (Bakhtin, 1986a, p. 146) Organizational members – in this case, participants in strategy discussions – build their words on previous utterances from the past discussions and the immediate conversation. Additionally, their words anticipate the responses of those present in the immediate conversation (other strategists, citizens, and ultimately, all readers of the strategy) (cf. Baxter & Montgometry, 1996, pp. 27–29). I have come to call this positioning of utterances in the chain of interaction between past and future texts and speech temporal chaining. This term is meant to acknowledge the active nature of this work; temporal chaining is done by choosing one’s words and often by explicitly referring to past utterances and anticipating future interpretations.

Temporal chaining is possible when participants are aware of the contents of previous discussions and are able to anticipate the reactions of those strategists who are not pre-
sent in the current discussion. It thus calls for the existence of mutual knowledge between participants (Barr, 2004; Cramton, 2001) – knowledge that the participants share with each other and know that they share. Such mutual knowledge can be gained through personal familiarity with previous discussions (presence in them as well as familiarity with other participants) and also with written and spoken reports of these discussions. In this way, knowledge of previous interactions forms the basis by which participants adapt their words to the chain of interactions to influence the strategy work as efficiently as possible.

In this chain, participants repeatedly bring up similar accounts of the issue at hand, commenting on it from their own viewpoints and adapting it to their respective interactional contexts. These accounts laminate (Boden, 1994; Samra-Fredericks, 2003) into shared understandings of the context, which gain importance through both repetition and adaptation to fit a series of contexts. As these laminates become a part of the stock of mutual knowledge – knowledge that is shared and known to be shared – they take on an importance in their own right; they are adapted into strategic choices or criticized, used to craft links between perspectives and interests. Repetition of similar sounds in successive conversations thus increases their usefulness as discursive resources in later discussions and grants them the prominence to influence these discussions (Kwon et al., 2014). To repeat the words of Barry & Elmes (1997, p. 433), the stories of strategy emerge among the “many competing alternatives woven from a vast array of possible characterizations, plot lines, and themes”. However, there is less knowledge of how these stories of strategy emerge from the various stories which are told in organizations; this work hopes to shed more light on the role of dialogue in temporal chaining.

Together, these dimensions describe the crafting of strategy as a collective phenomenon – a tool for coordinating work without forcing a complete consensus among participants.
METHODOLOGY

This section is divided into two chapters. Chapter 5 describes the research process by introducing the research site, data, choice to concentrate on the discussion of three strategic themes in my analysis, and finally describes my approach to studying collective strategy as institutional dialogue. Chapter 6, in turn, details my analytical approach and process.

5 THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The peculiarity of real-life utterances is that they are intertwined by a thousand threads into the non-verbal real-life context, and when separated from it, almost entirely lose their meaning. Not to know their immediate real-life context means not to understand them. (Voloshinov, 1983, p. 12)

Bay City is an environmental city with high vitality, and offers an attractive living and cultural environment. (The vision statement, the Final Strategy Document, 2009)

My empirical analysis is based on a longitudinal single case study of the strategy process in a Finnish middle-sized city I have chosen to call Bay City (pseudonym). In this chapter, I will introduce the case context and my specific focus on three thematic discussions within the strategy process of Bay City.

5.1 The research site: strategy work in Bay City

City organizations are a good example of the complexity of organizational discussions. Like all municipal organizations, city organizations are local wielders of administrative power that represent the interests of the inhabitants and are responsible for the production of various services ranging from street lighting to specialist health care. In Western democracies, legislation imposes on city organizations a broad set of responsibilities and a double governance structure that subjects office-holders to the decisions of an elected city council. These organizations may be characterized as networks that are composed of specialized, loosely coupled actor groups and discussion fora. The framework of strategy has been eagerly taken up in city organizations (Kornberger, 2012) and has shaped the conceptions of local government in public discourse (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011).

The case organization – Bay City – is a fitting example of the introduction of the strategic management framework to the public sector. Bay City is a middle-sized city in the Finnish context – a local population centre with strong links to the capital area of Hel-
sinki. Bay City is an old industrial town, which has been struck hard by post-industrial structural changes; many industrial employers have downsized, moved out or gone bankrupt since the late 1980s, leaving the community to find new sources of employment.

The city first adopted the concept of strategy in 1995 as a new tool for long-term planning. The discussions on city strategy show a long history of developing the urban structure and public services in ways that respond to environmental pressures. During the years 2006-2009, decision makers and employees were schooled in the new discourse; the first strategies included long explanations of the various strategy tools employed and the functions of such central texts as the mission statement, strategic goals and measures. These texts shortened and were finally removed, as the language of strategy became a natural way to discuss the city. The primary data collection started in 2006, as these changes were taking place and city strategy was gaining prominence as a management tool in Bay City. As the strategy framework became an established approach to the City, the list of topics to which strategy tools were applied grew steadily longer.

The strategy discussions studied here were a central venue for making sense of the challenges seen to affect Bay City and responding to them. Financial problems were visible throughout our 20-year data collection period. Bay City was reminded of the importance of a sound resource base by three financial crises: the post-Cold War depression of the early nineties, the internet boom of the early 2000s and the financial crisis that started in 2008. These economic downturns and the related structural changes in the economy have shaped the relationship of the city organization with its environment and resources acquisition.

The economic downturn had an impact on the public services organized by the city. Finland has a public sector with a very broad selection of services, and municipalities have been responsible for organizing (financing and coordinating, although not necessarily producing) most of these services. This breadth is exemplified by a review by the Finnish Ministry of Finance (Hiironniemi, 2013), which found a minimum of 535 statutory tasks assigned to Finnish municipalities. These tasks spanned the spheres of authority of 10 national ministries, and services from the elementary education and health care services to the construction of snow fences. As the resource base of the municipal sector diminished, strategists in Bay City – like elsewhere – began to discuss the
alternatives for developing services to save resources while maintaining the quality and extent of services produced.

The long history of financial troubles caused by the structural changes and the resulting high unemployment led both politicians and managers to look for strategic changes and develop the work practices of the City organization. The improvement of the financial situation was a legitimate goal very broadly shared in the organization; it emerged in all the observed discussion forums during the entire span of strategy discussions in our data and in most of our interviews.

The goal to improve the finances of the City organization was a key motivator for the second central development which characterized the data collection period: the structural reform of the city organization. In order to improve cross-functional coordination and the efficiency of service production, the organization of Bay City underwent a radical restructuring effort in 2003-2004. The City organization, previously composed of a large number of relatively independent functional offices, was regrouped into three new service divisions. New directors were recruited as heads of these divisions and given a strong mandate to redesign the organization and its working models. The new managers drew on the societal discussions on public sector renewal. Their argument was that the municipal sector was in a process of profound and lasting change; the resource base was diminishing, the demand for public services increasing and the opportunities of municipalities to improve the lives of their citizens were seen as quite limited.

Development efforts after this reorganization were coordinated and unprejudiced. Bay City adopted new measures such as outsourcing, formal quality management tools, and process modelling, and was able to bridle the rising operational costs comparably well. These successful changes were seen to strengthen the role of strategy in the management of the city as well as the culture of cooperation and open discussion prevalent in local politics. This spirit of cooperation prevailed despite turnover in the individual participants; new city councils came to power in 2005, 2009 and 2013, and there were significant changes in the management of the city during the observation period.

To summarize, the collected data document a clear change in the role that Bay City took in relation to its inhabitants. The developments in the management model and service production charted the way from a traditional welfare state model to a city organization which aimed for the economical use of its resources to best fulfil its legislated goals. The data collection period witnessed a central part in a long societal discussion on the reas-
essment of public services; during these years, societal discussion on the diminishing resources turned from forecast to fact. In Bay City, these developments were made in relatively constructive discussion. Although differences in views persisted and issues were often strongly debated, the interaction between opposed groups remained open, and differences remained resolvable. This both enabled the fruitful and open research cooperation and raised the theme of dialogue to the fore. I quickly became interested in understanding how the dialogue between different views was made possible and how the constructive relations worked as a tool for reformulating local government.

5.2 The collected data

The current case study was created as a part of an on-going longitudinal research project on the strategy process of Bay City. Our research group consists of three researchers at the Hanken School of Economics interested in city strategy – Professor Eero Vaara, Assistant Professor Virpi Sorsa and myself. Since 2006, our group has had comprehensive access to the strategy process. Although the data I employ have been collected as a group effort, I performed the analyses described here independently for the purposes of this study.

We have collected a systematic and rich corpus that includes observations of 159 strategy meetings, 97 interviews, informal conversations and documentary data from 1995 to the present. The data are summarized in Table 1 below. Our data capture the central discussion fora in which the city strategy was discussed by the managers (the city management team, the three divisional management teams), the politicians (the city council, the city board), and other actors. Each forum has its own role in the strategy process and a separate viewpoint in the strategy process.

Table 1 Summary of data (items and number of pages)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Politicians</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Meetings</th>
<th>Politicians</th>
<th>Managers</th>
<th>Documents</th>
</tr>
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<td>19</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1184</td>
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<tr>
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<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>2010</td>
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<td>2011</td>
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<td>57</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>146</td>
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</table>
Our archive of strategy-related documents starts from the year 1995, when the term strategy was adopted in the case organization. The strategy framework came to supplement and over the years replace what had previously been called the long-term planning process. The strategy framework combined previous planning-related discussions (such as financial planning, resource allocation, and service development) and gave them a common vocabulary. Members of the organization adopted this vocabulary widely over the years, and by 2006 the strategy terminology had become normalized to an extent that it was seen as a natural description of the resources and planning of public services. The documentary data from this period comprise final strategy documents and their drafts, meeting minutes and Power Point slide sets from strategy-related meetings, plans for the strategy process, and related news articles from two local newspapers. These data were collected retrospectively.

Our primary data collection began in late 2006, when Virpi Sorsa started observing strategy-related meetings and seminars, and interviewing strategists. I was introduced to the case context in early 2009, and was responsible for all the data collected during that year. The data cover three full rounds of strategy formulation (performed in 2007, 2009 and 2013) resulting in the reassessment and writing of a new version of the strategy document and an extensive mid-term review conducted in 2011. These strategy discussions include the contributions of three different city councils: new councils took office in 2005, 2009, and 2013. The analyses performed for this study emphasize the primary data period, 2006-2013. The years 1995-2005 are used primarily for setting the context of the study and guiding the interpretations made in the following chapters.

My research has been informed and inspired by the tradition of organizational ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; van Maanen, 1988; Zilber, 2002). However, the position I and my colleagues assumed in the field differs from the ethnographer’s. Ethnographers are usually described as partial insiders in the community studied; they participate in the action under investigation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). As is often the case in organizational research, my role from the context of city strategy was more distant, that of a familiar visitor. I make my interpretations not as a local politician, employee or elector, but as an empathetic outsider – an avid spectator who has followed the path of the strategists but not participated in the action. My strict concentration on strategy work left most of the organizational and communal world around it in the shadows. Similarly, my data show a focus on language use. As an observer and a note taker, I did not primarily aim to describe the organizational or local culture as a
whole, and concentrated instead on those aspects that helped me to understand the language use and negotiation of meanings in strategy work. This choice was made consciously on the basis of my research interest and my mandate in the case organization, and distinguishes this project from most of the ethnographic tradition.

5.3 Strategic themes as mini-cases

My analyses focused on the use of three strategic themes which played a central role in strategy work in this organization: attractiveness, self-responsibility and sustainable development. I analyzed the discussion of these strategic themes as a central site where the collective meanings of strategy – and thus the strategic direction of the organization – were crafted. I studied the ways in which these three strategic themes were taken up in the case organization, related to previously used elements of the local institutional landscape, and used to formulate strategic goals for the case organization. They gained their local significance as responses to environmental challenges; as described below, sustainable development (the theme with the longest history in Bay City) emerged as a way to improve the state of the local natural environment after an environmental crisis; self-responsibility was introduced to strategy discussions as a solution to the expanding service demand; and increasing the attractiveness of Bay City (the latest entrant of the three) was depicted as a response to the diminishing employment base of the city.

These three strategic themes were central elements of the strategic plan of Bay City; during the entire period of observation, each was used to formulate a central strategic goal, and was considered a fundamental part of the future of the city organization by strategists. I chose strategic themes which participants referred to using specific labels – respectively, ‘attractiveness’, ‘self-responsibility’ and ‘sustainable development’, which I could draw on to identify these strategic themes in discussion. This analytical approach provided me with a way to follow the evolution of these themes during the period of observation; although the meanings assigned to these labels changed, they referred consistently to the same goals and bound different interpretations of the same topics together.

Concentration on these ‘mini-cases’ within my empirical material enabled me to follow the evolution of these central topics of conversation over the data collection period in depth; such an analysis (and also reporting its findings) would have been untenable over the span of the entire data set. I focused on the use of these labels in discussion by closely studying the discussion around each occurrence, following the development of
meaning during the span of each meeting and the connections that participants made between the themes in each discussion. Despite this focus on thematic ‘slices’ of conversation, I employed both all of the data and my experience as an observer in interpreting these discussions. I studied the ways in which these three strategic themes were adopted in the case organization, related to previously used elements of the local institutional landscape, and used to formulate strategic goals for Bay City. My analysis concentrated on their use and development in the formal strategic planning process and other arenas of strategy work. The analysis looked at both the development of each label across meetings and the connections that strategists make between the labels in each discussion.

Discussion on the chosen strategic themes was well positioned to answer my research questions; they structured the strategy discussion for organizational members and made up an important part of the strategy vocabulary around which further enactments were constructed. These discussions revolved around defining the organization and its strategy – they featured organizational working definitions of central strategic issues, application areas and priorities of the organization. I will next introduce these three strategic themes.

5.3.1 Securing a better future through increased ‘attractiveness’

Attractiveness was a key theme in the Bay City strategy process. It referred to the need to make the city attractive not only to its current inhabitants, but also to new inhabitants and businesses. The theme implied an emphasis on the necessity of securing the resources necessary for service production. This was an on-going discussion for the 20-year period of strategy work represented in our data. Due to industrial restructuring and globalization, strategists felt that the city needed to attract investments and new taxpayers.

The label ‘attractiveness’ was included in the strategy of 2005 as a strategic theme that described the future image of Bay City. The label was coined in the strategy discussions during difficult economic times; the City economy was failing, and there was a strong need to acquire resources and enhance the efficiency of public service production. The foundation for the discussion on attractiveness was in the shared understanding that the City faced a serious threat of economic disaster; signs of a shortfall in resources were seen by all strategists and there was considerable urgency in the call to improve the resource base. Attractiveness emerged as a strategic theme after a long discussion
on the financial resources of the city, and many of its central components, such as population growth, development of local economy and increasing economic activity, were a part of the strategy from 1995 – the beginning of the period covered by my data. I have included this incubationary phase in my analysis to facilitate the interpretation of this strategic theme.

Beginning in 2005, attractiveness became the central term for discussion of the need to make the city attractive not only to its current inhabitants, but especially to new inhabitants and businesses. The label implied an emphasis on the necessity of securing the resources necessary for service production; strategists felt that due to industrial restructuring and globalization, the city needed to attract investments and new taxpayers. The discussion on attractiveness concentrated on securing the resource base necessary for maintaining the organization. In grappling with the resource base, the discussion defined the relationship between the organization and its environment. Strategists in Bay City described its environment using economic terminology and defined how the environment could be developed in ways that maintained the sustainability of the resource base and even improved it. The discussion on attractiveness was closely linked with development projects that aimed at improving the resource base. This discussion sets the scene for understanding the use of the other two themes: the economic troubles so visible in the discussions of attractiveness are also central to discussions around ‘self-responsibility’ and ‘sustainable development’.

After the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, strategists in Bay City enlisted attractiveness as a tool in the national-level project for defeating the crisis by increasing the ‘economic vitality’ of the public sector. From 2009 on, attractiveness became a key means by which the city sought to increase its economic vitality, conceived as the acquisition of the economic activity and resources necessary for creating wellbeing for the local community. Vitality was used to discuss the actions of the City and the local community on economic terms, linking future well-being with the resources available in both the community and the City organization. As this new, partially overlapping label was introduced to strategy discussions, attractiveness was demoted from a visionary theme to a concrete tool for attaining another goal. Although in formal documents these labels had clear meanings which built on each other, their use in the flow of strategy discussion was often interchangeable, and they were defined in situationally suitable but varying ways. To reflect this overlap, I included the use of ‘vitality’ in my analysis in the same strategic theme.
5.3.2 Reorganizing public services through ‘self-responsibility’

The strategic theme of self-responsibility refers to the responsibility that inhabitants were to assume for maintaining and improving their own well-being and that of their family and friends. The theme is thematically close to attractiveness – both are used to discuss the resource base and service demand – and they were introduced to the strategy discussions around the same time. Like attractiveness, self-responsibility was central in discussion of the renewal of the public service offering; the entire observation period was marked by a lively discussion on slowing down the growth rate of public spending and improving the effectiveness of public services. While the theme of attractiveness concentrated on improving the resource base of the City, discussion of self-responsibility was its complement: slowing the rate of growth in public spending by developing the service offering and influencing demand for these services.

The strategists in Bay City introduced the label self-responsibility as part of a large-scale change process conducted in 2003-2004. In a fundamental reorganization, the city organization was divided into three new service divisions. New divisional directors were recruited and given a strong mandate to redesign the organizational structure and its working models. The new managers drew on the societal discussions of public sector renewal. Their argument was that the municipal sector was in a process of profound and lasting change; the resource base was diminishing, the demand for public services increasing, and the opportunities of municipalities to improve the lives of their citizens were seen as quite limited. The directors wanted to direct attention to the limits of public responsibility and the impact of citizens’ lifestyle choices on their own wellbeing. Self-responsibility became widely used in strategy discussions and acted as the central label for an emerging discourse that described the municipal organization and citizens through the language of investment (in wellbeing) and resource use.

Self-responsibility became a central theme in the strategy work of Bay City. It was used to justify the development of service production in various ways and to describe the active civic society that strategists saw as part of reality and as a goal. The discussion concentrated on topics such as the resources needed to organize public services in the future, plans for developing the public service offering, emancipation of citizens through increased choice, and visionary talk about the future division of responsibility between the city organization, other service providers and individual citizens. The relationships between these arguments remained unclear in the polyphonic conversations. Speakers rarely compared the different perspectives or used them to comment on pre-
vious arguments about self-responsibility. Each argument assigned distinct meanings to self-responsibility and evaluated the consequences of its inclusion in the strategy from its own perspective.

5.3.3 Finding a visionary future in ‘sustainable development’

Bay City has a long history in discussing sustainable development as a goal of the city organization. A history of severe water quality problems in local bodies of water has made the City work together with researchers in environmental ecology, and the long-term cooperation led to public attention as well as a fair amount of economical activity in the environmental sector. The label sustainable development was already present in the first strategic plan written in 1995 and remained salient in strategy discussions and documents throughout our observation period. Yet the way the label was used and thus the meanings it held varied in our data over time.

Sustainable development was often linked with broader societal discussions about the ecological and societal impact of urban structure, and in Bay City these discussions were influenced by influential international reports such as the Brundtland Report (WCED 1987) and the UN Agenda 21 (United Nations 1993). Especially the division made in the former report between ecological, social and economic sustainability was often used. A different key formulation of sustainable development derives from the Finnish Local Government Act, which states: “the municipality aims to promote the well-being of its citizens and sustainable development in its territory” (the Finnish Local Government Act, 1995). This made sustainable development a statutory requirement for municipal organizations, and thus a central strategic theme. However, not all meanings attached to this theme were prevalent in the state-level discourse.

Sustainable development was seen as a multidimensional topic that described different perspectives from which the results of decisions could be assessed. These perspectives were rarely applied as concrete strategic goals. The meanings assigned to this label in discussions varied broadly; it was originally defined through the statements and reports of influential societal actors such as the United Nations and the Finnish state. As the label became established in strategy discussions, the societally rooted meanings gave way to a strong link with the local ecological and social environment.

In 2009, the broad legitimacy of sustainable development was used to argue for its role in supporting economical progress; the use of the label came to signal the implicit legitimacy of promoting green business as a condition for or cause of attractiveness. Sus-
tainable development thus became used as a means of improving the resource base of the City in addition to being a goal in its own right.

5.4 Studying collective strategy through institutional dialogue

Although this study builds on Bakhtin’s work and later work on the polyphonic organization, it is not written as a polyphonic account of strategy work in Bay City. Writing a polyphonic account that gives space to several voices in a single text has often been portrayed as difficult, even nigh impossible (e.g. Bakhtin, 1984; Letiche, 2010; Rhodes, 2001). Perhaps luckily, the goal of this study is not to reproduce the polyphony observed in the strategy discussions studied, but to provide evidence of the existence of several institutional voices in the case material and show how these voices intertwine and come together to shape a polyphonic set of coexisting interpretations of reality. The difference here is significant; my work focuses on understanding the role of institutional dialogue in strategy work instead of giving space in the text to individual voices.

I build on Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky’s work to focus on the ideational voices used by the strategists of Bay City, teasing out the ways in which they employ these ideas and give them voice. This is different from the (more often employed - see e.g. Hazen, 2006; Rhodes, 2000b; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008) perspective of the voices of individual speakers, focusing on the speakers’ voices and portraying them as living people whose worlds are unfinalizable – far exceeding the accounts of the written text. An analysis of the dialogism between institutions concentrates on the complexity of these ideas instead of the speakers. It offers the promise of an enriched account, which balances the institutional perspectives enacted in the local context, allowing them to “meet as equals and engage in dialogue that is in principle unfinalizable” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, pp. 238–239).

In promising a clearer picture of the use of institutional ideas, the conception of institutions as ideational voices includes a very practical methodological problem. If we hear applications of broader institutional ideas – ‘sounds’ of idea-voices – in the talk and texts of strategists, how do the speakers themselves link these different interpretations together into this “very same” voice? Or in the words of Meyer and Höllerer, “with all the different labels used to denote an idea and the heterogeneous meanings attached to it, how do we as scholars recognize that we are analysing variations of the same theme? How long can we think of a concept as ‘transformed’ or ‘translated,’ and when is it to be regarded as ‘different’ altogether?” (2010, p. 1259)
The answer to this question hinges on the interpretation that we make of the context of the analyzed texts; we must draw on the same means as the intended audience of the text in situating the utterance in its context and interpreting its intended meanings. In doing this, we can either rely on our ability to take the position of the intended audience and choose a sufficiently good interpretation of the meanings and relations between the choices, or observe the interpretations expressed by the audience and analyse them. The centrality of the researcher’s interpretation cannot be overlooked; meaning does not exist outside its interpretation (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Bakhtin, 1986b; Shotter, 1993). Both these approaches position the interpreter inside the context; we must strive to understand the life worlds of the strategists and the interpretations they make from a position similar to theirs, reacting to their words as members – or empathetic visitors – in a shared context of interaction. I will discuss the concrete ways I have sought to do this in my description of the analysis below.
6 ANALYSIS

For us, as outsiders, this entire ‘conversation’ is utterly incomprehensible. Taken in isolation, the utterance 'Well!' is empty and unintelligible. Nevertheless, this peculiar colloquy of two persons, consisting of only one [...] word does make perfect sense, is fully meaningful and complete. (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 99)

This chapter describes my analysis, proceeding from the in-case analysis of the three strategic themes to the study of dialogical practice in the strategy work of Bay City, based on an analysis of the discussion of three strategic themes. The five phases of the analysis are summarized in Table 2 below.

6.1 Placing the research in context, choosing strategic themes

As is usual for qualitative research, the analysis of the data began during the data collection phase. During the time I spent observing strategy meetings, interviewing strategists in Bay City and in informal discussions with them, I became very familiar with the research context, and acquired practical insights into the ways in which strategists in Bay City saw the context of the strategy discussions and the central issues that emerged. This contextual knowledge made the current analyses possible.

Audio recordings of the observed strategy discussions and interviews were transcribed using the services of a professional transcriber and input into the qualitative analysis package Atlas.ti. I started the detailed analysis with a careful general reading of the transcripts to better understand the topics of conversation, their role in the strategy process, and the rich and varied opinions that central strategists expressed.

As I collected the data and began to read the transcripts and documents, I was struck by the effort which participants put into understanding a variety of views on the future of Bay City and engaging with views which seemed quite foreign to them. This insight gave rise to the theoretical and analytical effort which led me to engage with Mikhail Bakhtin’s work and focus a dialogical lens on the efforts of these strategists.
Table 2  The phases of the analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedure and aim</th>
<th>Data analysed</th>
<th>Inputs for next phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1: Choosing strategic themes** | • First contact with the research context, general reading of the discussions  
• Practical insights into the strategists' views of the context; identification of the central themes where a collective strategy was negotiated | All collected data (see Table 1 above). | • A rich understanding of the research context and the role of dialogue in strategy work  
• Identification of the three strategic themes and their focal labels for further analysis |
| **2: Longitudinal analysis** | • Deep understanding of the discussion of the studied strategic themes over time  
• Categorizing and interpretative coding of the focal labels of these themes | The meeting discussions of the three chosen strategic themes (see Table 3 below). Interviews and documents used to support interpretation and connect the meetings with each other. | • Narratives of the development of the three themes (Ch. 5.2)  
• Coded discussions of the studied themes.  
• A first coding of the institutional meanings |
| **3: Analysis of the institutional dialogue across themes** | • Identification of enacted institutions through an alternation between dimensions of institutions and institutional arguments  
• Identification of the role of these local institutions in strategy work as institutional voices | The discussions of the strategic themes coded in Phase 2 (three strategic themes, 2007-2013). | • An account of the four institutional voices central to the discussion of the strategic themes  
• An understanding of the role of dialogue in their use (Ch. 7) |
| **4: Choice of mini-cases** | • The identification of illustrative discussions for the detailed analysis of the three central dimensions of dialogical practice | The discussions of the strategic themes coded in Phase 2 (three strategic themes, 2007-2013). | • Mini-cases for detailed analysis of each of the three dimensions. |
| **5: Analysis of dialogical practices** | • A close reading of the discussion to identify the institutional voices and the practices by which they were used together | Dialogical practices were studied through three mini-cases constructed from the discussions identified in the previous phase (Chapters 8-10). | |

Similarly, the richness of data led me to conclude that I needed to limit my focus on the discussions in order to better understand the work of the strategists in fitting these views together. My emerging Bakhtinian approach led to curiosity about the collaborative development of ideas. Combining Bakhtin’s (1984) discussion of ideas with the heady concept of the situational sounds of these ideas (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008), I
recognized the importance of strategic labels as coordinates by which strategists in Bay City guided their own work. As I read through the material, I looked for labels which were used throughout the data, and over time found myself returning to three central labels which supplied me with sufficient amounts and richness of material to perform my analysis.

The entire analysis was performed in Finnish – the language in which the strategy discussions in Bay City took place – and the quotations presented on these pages were translated at the last possible stage to minimize the risk of misinterpretations and misunderstandings. During the translation of extracts from the empirical material, I have edited for clarity; while I have striven to preserve the richness of original meanings as well as possible, I have left out pauses and redundant words and converted utterances into complete sentences.

6.2 Longitudinal analysis of the three strategic themes

I began my analysis by charting the developing use of the strategic themes described in Chapter 5 over time, as they were discussed in successive meetings, written in strategic plans and applied to service production. I studied the three themes as case studies of the use of institutional arguments in strategy work. This longitudinal analysis led to the creation of summarizing narratives of the roles which these themes played in the negotiation of different local institutions and the crafting of the city strategy.

My analysis of these themes progressed from a classifying to an interpretive mode. First, I performed an automated text search for the central labels of the three strategic themes (‘self-responsibility’, ‘attractiveness’, and ‘sustainable development’) in the discussion transcripts using the search function available in Atlas.ti. I also extended my analysis to central documents (such as meeting minutes, PowerPoint presentations, and circulated drafts of the strategic plan) when these were available and coded the use of the studied labels in these documents. After this, I read through the discussions around all occurrences of the labels to acquire a general understanding of the role of these strategic themes in Bay City, and to identify the recurrent meanings assigned to these labels. This first round led to the systematic coding of all occurrences of each label; as I was reading the discussions, I coded around each occurrence to include the discussion on the topic during which the label was mentioned. These discussions ranged from short exchanges to multi-page discussions focusing on a strategic theme.
After reviewing the discussion of the chosen strategic themes in the available data, I decided to concentrate my analysis on their use in strategy meetings. The meeting discussions offered the richest perspective on the development and meanings of the strategic themes by bringing together the arguments of several discussants on the same topics, and showed them directly commenting on each others’ views. The interviews and documents significantly enriched my interpretation of the meeting discussions; I drew on the interviews and especially the documents used in these meetings to contextualize the meeting discussions, clarify unclear comments and track the frequent references which discussants made to strategy-related documents. Table 3 below illustrates the meeting discussions – the central data set analyzed – by showing the number of occurrences of the central labels of the studied strategic themes in the data by strategy round.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategic Theme</th>
<th>2007-2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010-2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-responsibility</td>
<td>295</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>553</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sustainable development</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>265</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>476</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After distinguishing the discussions of the chosen strategic themes into separate data sets, I focused on the use of these themes during the studied period and the ways in which the discussions of the different themes influenced each other. To do this, I performed a detailed analysis that charted the emergence of meanings during the study period and significant changes in their prevalence. I coded the meanings assigned to the strategic themes into broad categories. These categories were created to capture the diversity of meaning in which these themes were used. They contributed to development of these meanings and their definition through each other (what one might call their ‘triangulation’ in the discussion). As early as I could, I began to craft interpretive narratives of the roles which the themes played in the broader strategy process and also the meanings assigned to them. The development of such narratives led me to a prosessual account of the discursive meanings given to attractiveness, self-responsibility and sustainable development.

This analysis also studied the links of these meanings with the institutional environment. I tracked the meanings assigned to the themes in strategy discussions and the reasoning used to argue for these meanings. I looked at the ways in which strategists
employed institutional arguments in describing the strategic themes and how they related them to each other and to the other themes studied. This round of analysis charted the plural interpretations of the themes in the discussion and their applications in crafting the strategic plan and anticipating its effects on the subsequent action in the organization. By so doing, it formed the basis for studying the construction and enactment of local institutions in strategy discussions. This phase of the analysis led to three outcomes; a coding of the occurrences of the strategic themes in the data (based on the occurrences of the central labels), narratives of the developing roles of the three themes in the strategy discussions and a first coding of the institutional meanings.

Finally, I triangulated my tentative conclusions on the dynamics of the discussions of the three themes by performing two explorative longitudinal analyses. First, I compared the coding of the meanings with the speakers who used them in discussion to find out if speakers or groups privileged some meanings over others. This analysis failed to show any clear patterns in the themes across central speakers or groups; most strategists employed several very different meanings and used these meanings in different roles, combining their own (or ‘correct’) interpretations with speculation on the views of other stakeholders, and the criticism of less desirable alternatives. In addition, I analysed the development of the meaning use to see any patterns in the prevalence of meanings across time.

Quantification of talk-based text (especially researcher-created constructs such as these coded meanings) is problematic, because it reduces the discussion of themes into mere numbers, leaving aside the roles in which the themes were mobilized in the broader discussions. However, these analyses offered significant support to my interpretation that the different institutional meanings were employed dialogically in the strategy discussions – speakers acknowledged the relevance of several institutional perspectives and moved flexibly between them in their discussions. In addition, this triangulation effort allowed me to track the discussions by speakers and visually identify discussions where the mobilization of themes was especially active or less active than expected. Although they did not lead directly to the reported findings, these explorative analyses guided my analysis efforts and helped me identify discussions where the studied strategic themes were central to the institutional dialogues.
6.3 Combining the theme narratives into an account of institutional dialogue

Based on the analysis of the strategic themes, I set out to combine my first results and analyse the local institutions at play in the discussion of the three studied strategic themes. To do this, I revisited the discussions of themes and their institutional meanings coded during the previous phase with the goal of describing patterns of institutional meanings across the strategic themes and across groups of strategists. I sought to construct the central institutions used in the context of strategy discussions in Bay City through understanding how these institutions were used together over time.

As a basis for constructing these local institutions, my analysis built on the contributions of Thornton and colleagues (see also Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Thornton, 2004; Thornton et al., 2012) on the dimensions of institutions in use. While their work takes a different perspective on institutions in context, their approach is useful for constructing the local institutions enacted in Bay City. Thornton and colleagues describe institutions through nine “elemental categories or building blocks, which represent the cultural symbols and material practices particular to that order” (ibid. p. 54). These nine ‘elemental categories’ include the root metaphor of an institutional order, three sources of social position (legitimacy, authority and identity), four categories for the basis of action (norms, attention, strategy, and informal control mechanisms), and the nature of the economic system. This account underlines the partial locality of these logics; the categories allow an analyst to construct an account of the instantiations or “instance[s] of concrete evidence” (Thornton et al., 2012, p. 54) of institutions in their studied settings.

Although Thornton and colleagues adopt a realist language, treating these ‘elemental categories’ as reflections of institutions found in society, they are also useful in forming a comparative analytical framework to study the differences between interpretations of societal institutions as they are constructed in interaction. Their utility in the current study stems from this comparison; the elemental categories make up a framework for an observer of the organization to study how the actors in the organization enact the broader institutional frames as relevant to the local context and act on the perceived institutional pressures. These elemental categories act as comparative tools; they enable an analysis of the similarities and differences in interpretations of these societal logics across different, interrelated contexts.
My coding alternated between the nine dimensions of Thornton et al. (2012, see chapter 4) and the data in order to analyse the local institutions used in strategy discussions. To do this, I revisited the coded institutional meanings and recoded them with the goal of categorizing them by the central institutional orders employed by strategists in Bay City. I used the nine building blocks of institutions as a starting point and sought to elucidate the root metaphors, sources of social position, basis of action and the economic systems enacted by the strategists. I compared my initial coded institutions with the six macro-institutions listed by Thornton et al. (family, community, religion, state, market, profession and corporation) and developed my own coding scheme as I proceeded. My analysis alternated between this coding of dimensions and combining the most instructive quotations into a table which drew together the repeating patterns of the institutional orders emerging in the Bay City data.

My interpretations built on the richness of the communicative context through a close reading of the strategy discussions in their broader context (cf. Hellgren et al., 2002). I construed the use of these local institutions in individual utterances using the same means available to strategists: contextualized interpretation, made with my long experience of strategy discussions in Bay City and familiarity with the data, linked with the contextual knowledge of the societal and field-level discussions around the topic. When possible, I followed chains of consecutive utterances where the same speakers expanded on their ideas and the reactions of participants to the views of others. I constructed the local institutions by identifying repeating patterns of interpretation.6 I chose particular periods for my analysis, which included particularly rich and varied discussion of the strategic themes. My analysis included all three themes studied and data from all the strategy rounds included in my data. I continued my analysis until it no longer changed my understanding of the central local institutions; at this point I had coded over 40% of the occurrences of the studied strategic themes.

This analysis allowed me to chart the institutional views as they were used in discussions: as partial enactments of broader societal institutions, or applications of an institutional perspective on the city. These enactments varied from terse references (e.g. “you know we can’t do that”, said between people who know each other’s views) to long and carefully worded theorizations of the future. This iteration lead to the emergence of

6 The approach chosen by Michael Smets and colleagues (2015) was a central influence: “we used a method developed by Thornton and colleagues (2005; 2012) to probe our hunch that observed practices enacted community and market logics. To do so, we cross-coded the above-listed practices [gleaned from the open coding of “all the mundane micro-practices”, p. 939] against the aforementioned elemental building blocks of institutional logics.” (Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015, p. 940)
four local institutions, which were persistently used in discussing all three themes: the Welfare State, Communality, Economizing, and Market (these are described in detail in Chapter 5.3). These four local institutions combined elements of the societal and field-level institutions into constellations relevant to the strategy discussions in Bay City. The table I constructed evolved into Table 4, presented in Chapter 7.1. This table presents the local institutions through five of the dimensions suggested by Thornton et al. (2012): the root metaphor, sources of legitimacy, the basis of norms, the basis of strategy and the nature of the economic system. These five emerged as relevant in the data and best served to distinguish these local institutions from each other.

To summarize, I treat these local institutions as analytical tools. In this work, they should be seen as my summary enactments of a continuous and interrelated reality. Although fundamentally different interpretations of the institutional environment could be observed in the discussions, institutional arguments formed a continuum of interpretations which did not fall into clearly distinct categories. This made construction of local institutions from the analysis of expressed institutional arguments challenging.

This problem is unavoidable, given that the institutions identified in a context are necessarily the product of a researcher’s interpretation. The exact contents of these local institutions are, however, not the core of my argument. These local institutions were constructed to demonstrate the differences in institutional beliefs applied to the context at hand; they are best seen as collections of similar institutional beliefs which were often used together to enact coherent views of the institutional environment. I constructed these local institutions to emphasize the differences in their interpretations (Rhodes, 2001). I concentrated on the ways in which they were used: to complement and lend legitimacy to each other and strengthen both each other and the incomplete but evolving view of the future which they construct.

The conception of institutions as ideational voices may seem contradictory to their treatment as analytical tools; after all, does not the metaphor of ‘voices’ refer to something almost tangible – sounds which are universally observable, and exist without regard to the opinions of their observers? Here I return to Bakhtin’s view of voices as ever-changing streams of ideas that take various forms as they are used in different situations and are set in relation with other idea-voices. This, to me, means that the four institutional voices I have constructed might have been seen as three or seven different combinations of similar ideas.
My description of the findings of this analytical phase built on Bakhtin’s views of dialogue, describing how the local institutions were enacted as relational voices in dialogue. My analysis of the use of strategic themes supported this account; the same speakers built their use of the themes on several institutions (often in the same discussions) and linked the themes to each other and to the context of strategy discussions. The use of the local institutions could thus be studied usefully as contextualized, relational dialogue between ideational voices. This description of the role of the local institutions as institutional voices in dialogue constitutes Chapter 7 below.

6.4 Choosing mini-cases for studying dialogical practice

The fourth phase of my analysis prepared for the close analysis of dialogical practice in this excessively broad research material. This phase consisted of relating the use of institutional voices in the strategy discussions with the three dimensions of institutional dialogue and identifying illustrative mini-cases – discussions of specific strategic themes during specific rounds of the strategy process – in the strategy discussions to study dialogical practice.

The contextual and relational use of the local institutions identified in the previous phase presented a dilemma for my analysis. It meant that their interpretation depended strongly on the understanding of the organizational and situational context of discussion: the previous views of the participants, the topic of discussion, and the surrounding political discussions influenced how participants interpreted the utterances, and thus needed to be taken into account in my analysis as well. At the same time, coding the institutional voices across the three themes in a way which would be transparent to the reader was not feasible due to the breadth and richness of material available. I decided to concentrate on the in-depth analysis of specific developments in the use of the strategic themes, which show the central practices and outcomes of dialogue without tying my account down in endless empirical detail. Concentrating on such mini-cases allowed me to include the changing situation of the organization as the context for the strategy discussions and describe the evolution of local institutions in dialogue, as the institutional voices were brought together, changed each other and contributed to strategy work.

My search for the practices through which strategists used these institutional voices applied the conceptual framework of the discussion on dialogism to the results of my previous analysis. As described in Chapter 4, my reading brought into focus three cen-
tral dimensions of institutional dialogue which I chose as the theoretical foci of my analysis of dialogical practice: the broadening and narrowing of dialogue, the situation-al 'sounds' of the institutional voices and the complementary and conflicting relations between voices. Although these dimensions do not exhaustively describe the role of dialogue in the strategy discussions in Bay City, they show the relevance of this perspective and enable us to understand the central features of institutional dialogue for the construction of a collective strategy.

I sought to find illustrative discussions of the three strategic themes during each of the four strategy rounds (2007, 2009, 2011, and 2013) in order to find discussions of strategic themes during rounds of the strategy process which would enable me to analyse these three dimensions of dialogical practice in detail. I sought to find longer developments in the discussion of the themes that would enable me to follow both the recurring practices and the (short-term) outcomes of institutional dialogue. To be able to show the outcomes of the discussions in strategy work, I sought discussions which led to a change in the strategic direction of the organization.

I identified three discussions that showed rich examples of the three dimensions of dialogical practice described above. These were, respectively, the formulation of self-responsibility as a strategic theme during the strategy round of 2007, the situational interpretations of sustainable development and the use of attractiveness to describe and respond to resource scarcity during the 2009 strategy round. I constructed my mini-cases from these three discussions by identifying and coding the four institutional voices in these discussions, with a focus on identifying interactions which best elucidated the role of the three dimensions of institutional dialogue. My analysis iterated between the meeting discussions and the emerging descriptions of dialogical practices.

From the perspective of covering the entire data set, it would have been ideal to choose each vignette from a different round of strategic planning. However, our data set included significantly fewer strategy meetings from the years 2010-2013, and a close reading of them led me to conclude that the discussion of my chosen strategic themes was not rich enough to enable a detailed analysis of the institutional dialogue. For this reason, I decided to focus on strategy work performed in 2007 and 2009, leaving the rest of the material into the background. This should be seen as a limitation of my choice to focus on the discussion of specific strategic themes; the research material of 2010-2013 would certainly have enabled me to analyse institutional dialogue using a
broader perspective (which, as described above, would have caused other, more significant limitations).

6.5 Analysing the three mini-cases to elucidate the creation of collective strategy

The final phase of my analysis concentrated on the dialogical practices by which the strategists used the institutional voices. My goal was to bring to light the use of local institutions in strategy work, concentrating on the ways in which this contributed to the promotion of a collective strategy (outlined in my second research question). In addition, an analysis of the dialogical practices sought to expand on the above answer to my first research question.

During my analysis, I constructed descriptions of the institutional dialogue, which describe the dialogical practices related with the three dimensions, and illustrate them with vignettes drawn from meeting discussions. My analysis of the first mini-case, reported in Chapter 8, illustrates the alternating cycles between opening and closing the dialogue with the close analysis of a single interaction in a Management Team meeting. I concentrated on a single meeting in describing this first dimension to be able to illustrate the contextual nature of these cycles; the practices of opening and closing in the strategy discussions became visible in relation to the use of the institutional voices across the broader discussion and an illustration of the surrounding discussion was a central to the justification of my findings. My analyses of the following two dimensions chart the development of the treatment of strategic themes over a single round of strategic planning, concentrating on different dimensions of dialogical practice. My description of the second dimension (in Chapter 9) compares the relations constructed between institutional voices across different meetings, and the third (in Chapter 10) follows the chaining of these situational uses of the voices into a collective strategy. Together, my analyses of these mini-cases expand on the account of dialogism between the different institutional voices constructed in the previous phase and the ways they were used and fit together in strategy discussions.

In studying the dialogical development of shared meanings, I analysed chains of interaction (Bakhtin, 1986c) – either in the form of a set of consecutive utterances in a single meeting, or a series of utterances that develop a single theme, spanning several meetings during the strategy round. The utterances that made up these longer developments were united by their references to previous utterances, their shared vocabulary and –
centrally – their position in a round of the strategy process, aimed at commenting on previous strategies and affecting the interpretations of other strategists.

I grounded my analysis on Bakhtin’s and Voloshinov’s account of studying utterances in context. To analyse a communicative utterance we must analyse its context, the role of the other participants in the dialogue (including the analyst), and the relationships between the speakers. Any account of utterances must “reproduce this event of the mutual relationships between speakers, must, as it were, ‘re-enact’ it, with the person wishing to understand taking upon himself the role of listener. But in order to carry out that role, he must distinctly understand the position of the other as well.” (see also Holquist, 1990, p. 60; Voloshinov, 1973, p. 106).

I alternated between the theoretical concepts, the uses of institutional voices in the data and the outcomes of the dialogue over the course of time. My reading was guided by the question, “what does this discussion tell us about the dialogical use of institutional voices?” I focused on situations where several institutional voices were used together – either combined in the same utterance or to comment on previous or expected utterances.

To understand dialogical practice, I sought to go into the worlds of the strategists, interpreting their ways of carrying on the dialogue and overcome any differences between perspectives (Shotter, 1997). I sought an active “understanding in practice, one which will allow us to anticipate what appropriately should ‘flow’ from what, thus to ‘go on’ in an activity, or to ‘follow’ another’s actions, in a concerted manner” (ibid., 355). This interpretive approach emphasizes my aim to make these interpretations transparent and credible. Based on the dimension of dialogue under study in each vignette, I grouped the emerging practices in each vignette into second-order practices (Hardy & Thomas, 2014) which described the outcomes of the practices. These results are described in chapters 8 to 10 below.
FINDINGS

The third part of this book describes my empirical findings on the negotiation of a collective strategy through institutional dialogue. Chapter 7 describes how complex institutional pressures were enacted in the context of strategy and how they were used in strategy discussions: strategists constructed the institutional environment of the strategy discussions was constructed through the enactment of relevant institutional pressures, and used these local institutions as ideational voices that engaged in continuous dialogue. This account enables us to interpret the role of the broader societal institutions in the crafting of organizational strategy and illustrates the importance of negotiating the institutional environment for the crafting of a collective strategy.

Chapters 8 to 10 expand this account by describing three central dimensions of the dialogical practices used by strategists to reconcile the institutional complexity in strategy discussions, based on the analysis of three vignettes. Chapter 8 focuses on the cycles of broadening and narrowing dialogue in the formulation of self-responsibility as a strategic theme during the strategy round of 2007. Chapter 9 explains the exploitation of relational opportunities in the discussion of resource scarcity during the 2009 strategy round. Last, Chapter 10 explains the enactment of institutional voices as situational sounds in the discussion of sustainable development during the strategy round of 2009. Together, these three chapters explain how institutional dialogue emerged as a coordinating process that fit together the complex institutional requirements made on the organization, and coordinated decision making in Bay City. Although these dimensions do not completely describe the broad role of dialogue in the case organization, I argue that they enable us to understand the role of dialogue in the creation of a collective strategy.
FROM SOCIETAL INSTITUTIONS TO INSTITUTIONAL VOICES

We all know that if people eat, drink better or healthier and do more exercise, it has a tremendous impact on healthcare expenses and social expenses and so on. And there the individual must also have responsibility for himself. (City Board member, City Council meeting, 2009)

This chapter describes the four central local institutions I recognized in the case organization and their use as ideational, institutional voices engaging in dialogue. This account, explicated through the next four chapters, shows how strategists constructed the institutional environment of strategy work and how they enacted the broader institutions as relevant to the strategy discussions and negotiated them into a collective strategy. In this chapter, I will first describe the local institutions I recognized in the strategy discussions, and then proceed to describe their use as institutional voices in dialogue.

This description shows how the organizational environment was made visible in Bay City as voices in institutional dialogue. Strategists in Bay City employed the multi-voiced nature of the institutional environment to find combinations of institutional beliefs which fit situational needs and spent a significant amount of effort in discussing their views with an effort to adapt them into an account which would be relevant and acceptable to all. The interpretation and adaptation of these institutions was a continuous process, visible in formulating the strategic goals of the city, applying these to the crafting of detailed strategies and guiding the interpretation of these after approval. Strategy work in Bay City shows how enactment of the institutional environment in strategy meetings was a central way for strategists to bring together their views as the basis for negotiating a collective strategy.

7.1 Identifying institutions in talk and text

Strategists in Bay City coined several parallel meanings for the focal strategic themes during the observation period, and these different meanings coexisted with little recognized conflict both during single strategy meetings and over the entire round of strategy discussions. These meanings were situationally used to describe the strategic themes in ways that fit the context of the city strategy as constructed in each ongoing discussion and they were based on different understandings of the City organization, its environment and desirable goals. In discussing the studied themes, strategists introduced macro-social institutions to the strategy discussions; they employed institutional interpretations to make sense of the studied themes and link them with the context of city strat-
egy. In doing so, they constructed contextualized interpretations of the inter-institutional constellation around the City organization, as it was made relevant to the strategy process.

My analysis set out to chart the ways in which this developing inter-institutional constellation was enacted in strategy discussions. As described in chapter 6.3, I concentrated on five categories (or “elemental building blocks”) of institutions (Thornton et al., 2012) which could be discerned in my empirical data. Searching for instances of these building blocks led me to classify the use of institutional arguments through four local institutions repeatedly enacted in strategy discussions: Welfare State, Community, Economizing and the Market. These locally relevant institutions enacted and maintained different conceptions of the city organization, public services, citizens and operating environment. They were used in strategy discussions to make sense of the organization, relate the views presented to each other and legitimize and delegitimize competing suggestions for the strategy.

Although these local institutions were used together, the strategy discussions in Bay City did not over time converge on a single shared understanding of the themes, the city, or its strategy. These local institutions prevailed over the period of observation and were adapted to situations in ways that did not form an overarching organizational settlement of the four institutions. In other words, the continuous coexistence of these local institutions shows the persistent institutional complexity that characterized the strategy work in Bay City. As I will explain in detail in this chapter, the use of these institutions was strongly contextual and relational, leading me to describe these local institutions as institutional voices in continuous dialogue. These institutional voices are summarized in Table 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welfare State</th>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Economizing</th>
<th>Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The City as the steward of the society</td>
<td>The City as a community of citizens with shared norms and culture</td>
<td>Public service as investment</td>
<td>The City as organizer and regulator of market-based choices of citizen-consumers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic participation; Advancement of social equity and wellbeing</td>
<td>Shared responsibility, altruism; Unity of will</td>
<td>Relaxation of resource constraints</td>
<td>Opportunities for choice; existence of markets for the private production of central services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;The aim of the City is to uphold and develop a physical, functional and educational environment where people want to live and work, while advancing societal equity and the principle of sustainable development.&quot; (City strategy, 1995)</td>
<td>The question of communality - how can Bay City be a place where all inhabitants feel that it’s a good place to live - feel they belong there and can influence the City.&quot; (The Strategy Manager, City Council meeting, 2009)</td>
<td>I’ve seen in my [work] that the economic resources of municipalities are not enough for all that’s been promised to citizens. […] Also, we know based on international research that less than 10% of wellbeing comes about through social and health services.&quot; (Director, Interview, 2007)</td>
<td>&quot;In this case, the biggest challenge is that the City should be able to produce so much vitality, tax revenue, that they can produce at least reasonably good services for the middle class, so that it doesn’t move away.&quot; (The Strategy Manager, City Board meeting, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;But what about those inhabitants who are not ‘active?” (The Strategy Manager, Management Team meeting, 2009)</td>
<td>And well, we need everybody over 65, all retired people who are in good shape, to participate in supporting those over 65-year-olds whose health is not so good so they can live at home et cetera. Getting that communality back as it was in the 1950s is a terribly long process.&quot; (Director, interview, 2007)</td>
<td>&quot;There are aging people with a decent income. So […] we’ve got to find a way to tell them that it’s quite OK, and not unequal, if they want to use their money on a rehabilitation weekend at a spa, or whatever. And vice versa, the flip side is that these core tasks and primary health care are still guaranteed. […] And so on, that there’s the adequate level that we cover the lives of citizens and take care of them, but some things are not part of that equation.&quot; (Council member, City Council meeting, 2007)</td>
<td>&quot;Bay City has in many ways lost its competitive position against other cities. The attractiveness we need to get people [to move here], to guarantee they feel at home, and to guarantee the availability of employees for our companies and attract new business activity - this is an extremely important issue [for our strategy].&quot; (The Mayor, City Council seminar, 2012)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 4: Representative indicators of the local institutions (adapted from Thornton et al., 2012)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Welfare State</th>
<th>Communality</th>
<th>Economizing</th>
<th>Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basis of Strategy</td>
<td>Increase wellbeing and sustainable development</td>
<td>Nurture a network of active local communities to improve the wellbeing of citizens</td>
<td>Increase the efficacy of services, decrease resource use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You could say that the city creates the basis for wellbeing. As stated in the value statement, [the City] will focus on its core tasks, but advances equality, maintains social justice and takes care that no-one falls outside the safety net or has to carry more responsibility than they can. (the Strategy Manager, City Board meeting, 2009)</td>
<td>“The principle is that the city creates the conditions for the activities of all kinds of communities - cooperates with them. […] That means Bay City offers inhabitants opportunities to take part in the development of their own living environment and city services.” (the Strategy Manager, City Council meeting 2009)</td>
<td>M1: “Could we formulate the renewal of our service production as a goal? […] That’s what we’re looking for, isn’t it?” M2: “In a way, yes. To snip away a part of the selection we’ve got now, but also improve what’s left.” […] M1: “We’ll do things differently from before. But how will it affect our inhabitants? That’s the increase in self-responsibility.” (Management Team discussion, 2007)</td>
<td>Bay City is a growing, business-friendly city with high vitality - that’ll be in our goals. We need these companies as taxpayers and employers. […] The strategy draft is challenging enough, but we need to stand out more: it’s too much like what all the others have.” (City Board member, Council seminar, 2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic System</td>
<td>The Nordic Welfare State: tax-based funding of wellbeing services, broad public services aimed at the general public</td>
<td>Cooperative economy: Public services complemented by the support of the local community and family.</td>
<td>Economy of scarcity: Difficult economic times are ahead and resource efficiency holds the keys for resource creation (through improved investment potential).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Advancing the wellbeing of citizens calls for a new approach. Citizens of Bay City and their communities will in the future take a greater responsibility for their wellbeing. This is a change in both culture and attitudes, which aims to strengthen the willingness of citizens to support and help each other when needed.” (City Strategy, 2005)</td>
<td>“The City organization concentrates on its core tasks and the prioritization of its service production. Bay City will still produce services, which its citizens will complement with services they will acquire from other producers. […] Services will not be provided based on production capacity, but on genuine customer needs.” (City Strategy, 2005)</td>
<td>“Alternate service provision modes will be promoted so that citizens have the opportunity to choose their service provider and the price they pay for the service. The adoption of new service innovations will be explored without prejudice.” (City Strategy, 2005)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The **Welfare State voice** was an application of the Nordic Welfare State model to City strategy. More specifically, it drew on an ideal of universal public services (provided to the whole population), which was governed by a strong local government and mandated by broad public participation. This model was considered the cornerstone of Finnish municipalities and the legitimacy and meanings related to it were strong and widespread. Its use in discussions referred to widely shared and taken-for-granted beliefs on the relationship between the City organization and its inhabitants: the City was seen as the local arm of the strong Finnish welfare state, which collected a relatively high level of taxes and supplied its citizens with a high level of universal public services ranging from education to specialized health care.

The legitimacy of Bay City as the local representative of the welfare state was based on statutory responsibility for the wellbeing of all citizens and the advancement of social equity through the redistribution of wealth into public services. In this role, the city organization served the people by providing them with the public services listed in the legislation; these services were based on the principles of universal access and egalitarianism; According to these principles, the City organization sought to provide citizens with a broad set of statutory services seen to improve their wellbeing and especially to support underprivileged groups and individuals. Citizens had a central role as voters and beneficiaries of the actions; they were constituted primarily through their rights as citizens to receive services and much less as active participants in the society. The economic system described by the Welfare State local institution was based on the tenets of the Nordic Welfare State model; it promoted tax-based funding of wellbeing services and redistribution of wealth through broad public services and income transfers aimed at the general public.

Second, the **Communality voice** was based on an image of the City as a community of its inhabitants. It emphasized the benefits of a strong civil society composed of the activities of families, neighbours and civil associations. This communal lifestyle was seen as a necessary answer to the resource deficiency faced by the city organization, and would empower “active citizens” to improve the wellbeing of their “loved ones” (including the citizens, their families and the local community). The community described through this voice was thus a specific construct, formed in the strategy discussions, which formulated a view of the local community through the eyes of the participants in this process. The Communality voice described a society that was different from (and often compared with) the Welfare State voice: instead of the universal wellbeing ser-
ices produced by the state and the City, the wellbeing of citizens was nurtured directly by the citizens, their families and the local community. The strategists constructed communality as the positive side of the limited resources of the City; by caring for each other, citizens could improve each other’s quality of life in ways that the health and social services of the City could not employ: individual caring and adaptable collaboration with those in need. This account was also seen as a criticism of the Welfare State voice; by treating citizens as “passive” recipients of services, the Welfare State was inefficient in its efforts to create wellbeing. The Communality voice advocated a cooperative conception of the public economy; tax-funded public services would be complemented by the informal care and everyday support of families and local communities. This was seen to both create wellbeing outside the reach of the City organization and decrease the demand for public services.

Third, the Economizing voice grounded the strategy discussions in the services produced by the City organization. It took a technical and economic view of the City organization, describing public services as investments of scarce resources that produced returns including taxes, the improved wellbeing of citizens and the fulfilment of legal obligations. The Economizing voice linked strategy discussions with the present service structures and compared these service structures with the current and prospected future needs of citizens. The investment view of services legitimized the improvement of resource constraints and increasing the economic efficiency of service production. The Economizing voice was focused on the improvement of individual services and also improvement of the resource constraints of the City. These two goals were made similar through their shared focus on efficiency. The Economizing voice was based on an economy of scarcity; economically difficult times were foreseen and resource efficiency was seen as the key to the survival of the City organization. Efficiency would secure the services necessary for the short term as well as maintain the investment potential necessary for future growth.

Last, the Market voice related the City organization with private-sector conceptions of economic rationality. It constructed norms of efficiency, rationality and measurability for the City organization and emphasized the market mechanism and competition as the central ways of improving this mechanism. The Market voice constructed the City organization as the organizer and regulator of markets for service production; the City would ideally leave the day-to-day service provision to private contractors, concentrating on the management of the service portfolio as a whole (e.g. contracting, quality
management and service development). The existence of well-functioning markets for wellbeing services would also enable citizens to make informed customer choices between alternate service offerings, either using vouchers issued by the City or their own funds. The Market voice based its legitimacy on increasing the economic efficiency of service production and the opportunities for choice of citizen-consumers. In addition, the focus on markets and competition coincided with the strong argument for improving the conditions of business life, one of the central stakeholder groups of the City. This was seen to improve the resource base of the City organization through improved employment and a stronger tax base. Applications of the Market voice conceptualized the economy through competition on a free market; citizens were likened to consumers who could make informed choices according to their needs and service production was based on competition between comparable private providers on markets for well-defined services.

In summary, the Welfare State voice, the Communitarian voice, the Economizing voice, and the Market voice enacted different perspectives on the City organization and its desired future. This list of institutional voices made present in the strategy discussions is by necessity incomplete; these voices blended into each other in interactions and other institutional voices were at times mustered to interpret the discussions and support arguments in the strategy discussions. However, these four institutional voices encompass those clearly identifiable institutions which were repeatedly used across several rounds of strategy discussions and shared by several groups of strategists. They were central to the inter-institutional constellation employed by strategists in discussing the three studied strategic themes. The concurrent use of such voices shows how none of these perspectives was enough to exhaustively describe the emerging strategy of Bay City.

Since this reproduction of local institutions is based on my empirical analysis, the local institutions differ from accounts of the macro-social institutions found in institutional theory (e.g. Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Thornton et al., 2012). Despite building on similar institutional beliefs as those described by the macro-institutional literature, the strategists in Bay City constructed the institutional environment through their characteristic combinations of beliefs. As is described in detail below, the local institutions constructed through the use of these four voices were in effect permutations of macro-institutional orders; these converged on the case context in ways that differed from field-level and societal accounts, despite building on societal-
ly constructed meanings. This is aligned with previous institutional accounts, which see institutions and institutional logics as analytical constructions of related beliefs created by an observer (McPherson & Sauder, 2013; Thornton et al., 2012). Similarly, the local institutions presented above should be seen as analytical constructions of references to similar shared beliefs, which expressed similar worldviews and were often used together.

The dynamics of the institutional voices that were used in each meeting varied, as did their use over the years of strategy discussion. The use of the voices was not stratified by individual speakers or their position in the organization. Most speakers routinely used more than one voice, and their awareness of the different voices was witnessed by frequent speculations on alternate interpretations that could be made. Speakers often switched between voices in successive utterances, or even in the same utterance. Different strategists also gave slightly different interpretations of the voices in their enactments, making their interpretation a contextualized effort.

### 7.2 Local institutions as contextual and relational voices

In this section, I will show how a dialogical account of the four local institutions described above enables us to understand how the persistent institutional complexity between them was used to craft a collective strategy. This account sheds light on the ways in which strategists in Bay City constructed a seemingly harmonious strategy from a pluralistic, contradictory institutional environment. The description shows the potential of the dialogical approach to understanding the construction of the institutional environment in strategy work and begins to describe the crafting of a collective strategy that combined these local institutions.

Strategists frequently used the local institutions together, to comment on, criticize and support each other in situationally meaningful ways. These institutional voices carried over from discussion to discussion, as the views of strategists were repeated in other fora of interaction across the strategy process. This kind of contextual and relational use fits the Bakhtinian account of institutional dialogue described in Chapter 4; institutional voices were grounded in the context of interaction through locally relevant enactments and gained their meanings by being linked with other voices used in the context. This account of institutions as ideational voices is strongly processual, enabling us to see how institutional accounts came together and developed across time. The relationality of the institutional voices helps us to understand the flexibility of both the en-
acted institutional environment and the emerging organizational strategy. The institutional voices were made meaningful in relation to each other; strategists defined the voices through each other, compared them with each other and combined them with each other in situationally acceptable ways.

These institutional voices refracted the central challenges of the city from different perspectives, and were used to construct solutions for these challenges. As described in Chapter 5.1, Bay City struggled under mounting financial troubles, which led to a broadly accepted need to reconstruct the role of the city in a way which would respond to the needs of inhabitants with fewer resources and to increase the resource efficiency of the City organization. The three strategic themes which I analyzed – self-responsibility of citizens, sustainable development of the city and the attractiveness of Bay City for prospective inhabitants and employers – were constructed in the strategy discussions as elements of a positive future: partial solutions to the troubles constructed in the use of the four institutional voices.

The four institutional voices should thus not be seen as independent from the three strategic themes to which they were applied in the strategy discussions I analyzed. Both the institutional voices used in the discussions and the central themes of the strategy emerged in the same discussions, as participants discussed their views of the situation and future of the city organization; they were outcomes of this dialogue as much as they influenced its path. While my construction of these institutional voices was influenced by my concentration on the three strategic themes, I argue that these themes were the most prominent answers to the central strategic challenges perceived by the managers and politicians; they permeated the strategy discussions and emerged as the central components of the vision statement and the strategic goals of the city.

I will next describe the ways in which strategists in Bay City used the four institutional voices described above in the strategy discussions. The contextuality of the institutional voices complicates the use of three themes as examples: instead of describing the contexts of three discussions in parallel, I will in this sub-chapter draw my main examples from the discussion of self-responsibility.

7.2.1 The contextuality of local institutions

The persistent institutional complexity experienced in the strategy process was negotiated through contextualized accounts of the institutional voices. The four institutional voices described above were used to address the organizational and situational context
of strategy in Bay City. In the dialogues, views of the organizational context were constructed through the negotiation of a series of situational contexts. The situational contexts enabled discussants to position the voices within a concrete issue and use these voices to narrate a coherent inter-institutional constellation, in relation with the discussed issue, which enabled them to make sense of the current and future strategy of the city organization as it was refracted through this issue. The voices were expressed through specific, contextualized “sounds” – the contextualized applications of broader institutional perspectives to a strategic issue (Bakhtin, 1984; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008). Only a small part of the broad perspectives of the city and its action included in these institutional voices was used in each discussion; they were applied to the discussions in specific ways, and formulated specifically as perspectives on each topic of discussion. In each discussion, these sounds were set in relation to each other and used to connect the various perspectives on the topic at hand, enacted through the different institutional voices, into a solution which reconciled them in an acceptable way.

Central strategists constructed the need for self-responsibility through a new account of the operating environment of the City. The environment was often constructed through a pessimistic account of the future of the Finnish welfare state – a central strategic issue in the economically challenging times. The argument was that after several decades of continuous economic growth, the predicted period of economic stagnation forced the public sector to cut back its service offering, revitalizing the need for inhabitants to care for their own wellbeing. This account built on applications of the Welfare State and Economizing voices, which gained their meanings from the historical context. In the words of the director for social and health care:

Well I think that I've been pretty much to blame that this self-responsibility is there. And first of all, I've seen in my time at [the association of Finnish local authorities] that the economic resources of municipalities are not enough for everything that's been promised to citizens. And second, if you look just at wellbeing services as a broad category, then the demand for services is rising all the time. Whether it's a health thing or, how should I put it, a medical thing or similar, people want [the public system to] take care of every smallest deficiency in their wellbeing -- in quotation marks you could say so. (Interview, the Director of social and health care, 2007)

The director for social and health care referred here to self-care as the necessary outcome of the scarcity of resources that the city organization faces. He constructed the Economizing voice as a critique of the Welfare State voice, which was seen to direct the scarce resources wastefully; the desired, efficient future of Bay City was different than its unsustainable past, when “everything [was] promised to citizens”. His description
introduced the Economizing voice by emphasizing resource concerns and describing wellbeing as an outcome of monetary investments. Resource scarcity was almost an actor in this argument; the bleak financial situation of the City limited its opportunities for improving the wellbeing of its citizens and thus forced the citizens to assume more responsibility for their own wellbeing.

Similarly, calls for self-responsibility were often set in the context of the strength of the Welfare State voice. This voice emphasized the responsibilities of the state and the city for providing the citizens with services they could not fund alone. Speakers sought to balance this responsibility with the importance of the community (using the Community voice), and limits in the means of the city to impact the wellbeing of inhabitants (with the Economizing voice). These juxtapositions were described by the acting Mayor as below:

We can’t afford this development – we must raise the productivity of care work, and that calls for transferring this responsibility. It can’t be the society, or municipality, so that you live as you live, get yourself all possible lifestyle diseases and then require that you, or one of your loved ones is kept alive as long as possible. You must start from how everyone takes care of their own wellbeing first. We must go back to the time when family members took care of each other, and that included grandparents, grandchildren. That’s nothing dramatic, but we must return this thought to the discussion. (Interview, acting Mayor, 2007)

Here and elsewhere, managers argued that since resources were limited, the effectiveness of public services in achieving this goal should be evaluated. The results of this evaluation could be used to develop a new service system in which the City could work together with citizens to more effectively create wellbeing together. The details of this cooperation were to be worked out in political discussions. This issue brought in the Market voice: the City would encourage and support the emergence of private-sector service providers to complement the public service offering, and improve the efficiency of its own service production by outsourcing service production and adopting best practices from its private-sector partners.

The discussion of self-responsibility in the examples above positioned the discussion in a specific institutional context; self-responsibility was argued to be a vital strategic theme to Bay City at this specific time, due to its specific history of broad public services and traditional culture valuing a strong community. The context in which these interactions took place was created as part of these same interactions by relating them to shared conceptions of the environment, the City and its current challenges and pub-
lic services. Accounts of the context of strategy discussions were thus already imbued with the institutional voices employed in the discussions and legitimized certain strategic choices over others. This discursively created context was based on the use of several institutional voices, which were used complementarily to position previous discussion on attractiveness, self-responsibility and sustainable development in ways that legitimated and guided actions of the City organization. The institutional voices comprised four perspectives on these themes; each voice described different goals and causal outcomes for action, emphasized different actors relevant to the strategy process (assigning different subject positions to these actors) and assigned different opportunities for action to the City organization.

The discussions about self-responsibility recreated the context of strategy work through the scarcity of public resources. This account described how the survival of the City and the wellbeing of its citizens called for restrictions in the public services offered to citizens. These comments emphasized the Economizing voice in their account of self-responsibility; the dire financial situation was described as the strongest motivator for introducing self-responsibility in the City strategy and this necessity also enabled strategists to argue for service cuts without distancing themselves from the legitimacy of the Welfare State. Despite the centrality of the Economizing voice in this discussion, no stable inter-institutional constellation emerged between the local institutions. Their use and relationships varied significantly across different situations, depending on the views of the participants, the issues at hand and the broader discursive context of the strategy discussion.

7.2.2 The relationality of local institutions

In this discursively created context, the institutional voices became meaningful by being compared with each other, used to support or criticize each other or described as similar or different in some way. To use Bakhtin's term, the use of institutional voices was relational; they were interpreted in relation to each other and became understandable through the similarities and differences constructed between them (Bakhtin, 1984). The first formulation of self-responsibility in the 2005 strategy shows how the institutional voices gave meaning to each other:

The basic services of citizens will be taken care of. Service production is customer-oriented, and increasingly organized in cooperation with other actors. The service offering emphasizes diversity, opportunities for choice, and self-responsibility.
Advancing the wellbeing of citizens calls for a new approach. Citizens of Bay City and their communities will take a greater responsibility for their wellbeing. This is a change of both culture and attitudes, which aims to strengthen the willingness of citizens to support and help each other when needed.

The City organization concentrates on its core tasks and the prioritization of its service production. Bay City will still produce services, which its citizens will complement with services they will acquire from other producers. *(Strategic plan, 2005)*

This description of the service production built strongly on the Economizing voice: the City would produce the “basic services” required by legislation, concentrating on an ambivalent set of “core tasks”. The Community voice was used to soften the blow; in difficult times, citizens – families, friends, local communities – would step up to help those in need. The Economizing voice was here used in relation with the Welfare State voice; the cited strategy text contrasts the former world of universal services designed to answer the needs of citizens, with “a new approach” made up of “basic services” and self-financed services to “complement” the public offering. This relationship is not stated directly in the text, but it is made clear in repeated public discussions on the need for service reforms.

The quotation also strongly emphasized the Market voice; by describing citizens as customers and stating that cooperation with market actors (under the euphemism “other producers”) would be increased, the City legitimized a target to develop markets for complementary services and alternatives to publicly funded services. These market-based services would be produced through “alternate service production modes” (public-private partnerships, externalization of service producing units and outsourcing) that augmented the City organization’s own service production without putting a strain on the public budget.

The above strategy text thus tied the institutional voices together; it concentrated on the positive outcomes of the new self-responsibility strategy, showing that the Welfare State, Community and Economizing voices were in harmony. In the future, citizens would be able to access high-quality wellbeing services, organized efficiently, while also receiving the support of a stronger local community. In the example above, the voices were employed as consistent with each other, and the institutional pressures they constructed were not seen as conflicting. These relations varied across situations; institutional voices were seen as mutually supporting in some situations and as conflicting in others. Through such relational differences in their use, the same institutions could
‘sound’ quite different when placed in a new context. The discussion on self-responsibility raised critical interpretations based on the Welfare State voice:

> Well I’m a bit scared – this [formulation] has a bit of a neoliberal stamp on it. Especially this sentence here, that the self-responsibility of citizens means activating them to take care of the development of their own wellbeing, [taking] responsibility for their loved ones and living environment, and investing in the acquisition and funding of the services they use. In my head, this means that people pay for the services they get with money – and those who can’t afford to pay, get what’s left. (Council member; City Council seminar, 2007)

In a rare example of open contradiction, the above interpretation of self-responsibility included a description of the privatizations inherent in the self-responsibility formulation as detrimental to the Welfare State and made assertions of causality that differed significantly from the previous positive accounts.

When applied to the issue of developing public services, the same institutional voices were juxtaposed in a completely different manner. Use of the label self-responsibility was at times criticized strongly because it might later be used to legitimize termination of public wellbeing services:

> Yeah, I think it [wrangling between political parties] shows up here, too. Maybe not so that people would shun self-responsibility, probably not that way so much... But if you wanted to understand it in a terribly radical way, which is always possible, that if you cause your own illness then it isn't treated [in the public system], then I think maybe these discussions might have been had as well. But that in general people would be more responsible for themselves, that principle probably wasn't politicized, just the degree of responsibility. So this is how I interpreted the discussion afterwards. But then it was more important politically to talk about what this really, what this eventually makes possible, do we outsource, do we privatise everything - that was probably the most political discussion there. (Interview, member of the City Board, 2006.)

According to this interpretation, the label itself was acceptable; however, the dangers of misinterpretation it included were seen as problematic. While there was no history of such changes in Bay City, self-responsibility could have been used to legitimize a broad privatization of public services which could ultimately lead to erosion of the welfare state. The danger described here was considered serious; such possible misuse of self-responsibility would endanger the welfare state, which in the context was a strongly institutionalized ideal describing good public management. The use of voices here is interesting: while the reported interpretation does not dispute the current use of self-responsibility in strategy work, it describes the term as dangerous due to the risk that it
might be used to argue for “privatis[ing] everything” – a threat to the status quo and to the Welfare State voice.

This criticism brings up the same institutional pressures as above, but in a different constellation; politicians were worried that the application of self-responsibility to cut public services (Economizing) could change the City from a caring provider of universal services (Welfare State) to a privatized society (Market) where citizens would have to rely on their social networks (Communality). This criticism was directed at the privatizations and changes in the public service offering – not the theme of self-responsibility as a whole. Notably, instead of questioning the actions of current strategists, these critical interpretations concentrated on analysing the consequences of a possible self-responsibility strategy. Avoiding the polarization of the discussion allowed a constructive dialogue to go on.

7.3 Institutional voices in dialogue

This account of institutional complexity shows strategy work in Bay City as a plural field characterized by continuous negotiation among different local institutions to achieve relational and situationally meaningful combinations. Strategists worked with persistent institutional complexity by employing these voices together, often even in the same utterance. The studied strategy discussions demonstrated the ability for dialogue described in Chapter 4.3; participants acknowledged the legitimacy of the various institutional perspectives and used them together to solve the problems of strategy work. Their work employed and developed a shared social language and included situational differences in the uses of the various perspectives. This dialogical work of meanings forcefully guided strategy work, the ensuing strategic choices, and their interpretations in subsequent decision-making.

The Welfare State, Communality, Economizing, and Market voices contributed to each other in use, forming a web of arguments about the strategic significance and implications of attractiveness, self-responsibility, and sustainable development. These institutional voices came together in the continuous negotiation of situational narratives based on different interpretations and combinations of the local institutions. This plurality is exemplified in the coexistence of the different self-responsibilities in the definition given in the 2007 strategy document:
The self-responsibility of citizens is taken to mean the activation of citizens to take care of the maintenance and development of their own wellbeing, responsibility for their family, friends and the local community, and greater investment in the procurement and funding of the services they need and use. *(Strategy document, 2007)*

In this vignette, the four institutional voices formulated self-responsibility as a principle that guided the strategy discussions. The text gives a threefold definition of the label, describing it as the “activation” of citizens (supposedly by the City organization) to change their attitudes, an increased focus on the family and community, and increased use of the market mechanism (through the “procurement and funding” of services) to enhance the efficiency and quality of services offered to citizens. These three self-responsibilities build on all four institutional voices; the first definition describes a benevolent welfare state acting on behalf of inhabitants, the second definition emphasizes the role of the community and the third combines service development with the market perspective of the City.

The previous quotation illustrates the dialogical relations between the institutional voices. Discussants recognized the validity of several institutional voices as perspectives on the City, compared them and applied them to make sense of the situation at hand. Strategists used these voices to enact various demands made on the City organization, thus leading to the enactment of institutional complexity. The strategists were faced with the challenge of crafting a strategy which would satisfy the complex demands. This complexity was visible in strategy discussions, where self-responsibility was assigned very different meanings. The arguments repeated legitimate meanings and formed distinct ideational voices that expressed often-repeated positions, based on specific institutional perspectives. These voices engaged in dialogue; they were positioned with each other and used to balance and complement each other as valid perspectives on a complex topic.

The example given above is a fitting description of the persistent institutional complexity experienced in the strategy discussions in Bay City, and the use of dialogue to resolve it in the context of the individual strategy discussion. Several institutional voices were employed in the discussions. Their relations remained ambiguous in the resulting strategy text, calling for further interpretation and situational negotiation. The lack of generally applicable meanings for these labels did not reduce their usefulness in the eyes of strategists. On the contrary, the latitude for different interpretations provided by ambiguity was seen as an important part of implementation of the strategy in the
service units. The ambiguity helped the strategists find an acceptable interpretation and then use the label to discuss issues that were central to their agenda. At the same time, there were recurrent attempts to control and delimit the gamut of legitimate meanings for each label.

Institutional dialogue was enabled by the relative openness of dialogue; several institutional views on the strategy were present in the discussion, the decision making process was built on the need for consensus, and the strategy tools used in strategy work expressly embraced plural interpretations of the organization and its environment. Relating these perspectives to each other was left to the situational application of the strategy text. The voices enacted the complex relations of the institutions at play in the strategy discussions in Bay City; the accounts of the institutional demands that emphasized the creation of wellbeing, economic efficiency, community and market-based action were often in conflict and were fit together in their situational enactments. However, these situational uses of the voices did not lead to lasting hybrids; their enactment varied by situation and the differences between situational uses maintained the voices as distinct perspectives on the organization. To understand the ways in which participants enacted the institutional voices in situationally relevant ways, we must look more closely at the dialogical practice by which these voices were used. The following three chapters will concentrate on three central dimensions of dialogical practice to do just this.

A central question for this study is how this dialogue between institutional voices was maintained without collapsing into the dominance of a single interpretation or being decoupled into several unrelated positions. Speakers in Bay City positioned their arguments with previous ones, adapted them to their audiences and invested significant effort in predicting and countering possible future criticism. Such active interpretations of the utterances in their context meant that speakers often incorporated several institutional voices in their utterances, constructing relations between the voices. Strategists employed several institutional voices in often creative combinations in order to build legitimacy for their views. They contemplated several sides of the issue under scrutiny and looked for the path of least resistance – the wording that would supply the strategy with the most expressive power (or legitimacy) while causing as little critique as possible.

The combination of political influence and sensemaking is central to understanding these dialogues. Institutional dialogue can be interpreted both as the calculative advocating of specific interests and as non-political attempts to make sense of the organiza-
tion and its environmental demands. Use of institutional voices takes place in a power-laden context; strategists have different positions in relation to the institutions (the Market voice, for example, was linked with the political right by many speakers), and they routinely evaluated the acceptability of arguments to other strategists. On the other hand, the institutional dialogues also enabled speakers to try out interpretations based on different institutional voices, compare voices with each other and use them to complement each other. The legitimizing accounts, causal assertions and visions of the future constructed by the institutional voices differed significantly from each other and dialogue between them allowed strategists to fit the voices together in politically acceptable ways.

The four institutional voices constructed quite different views of the City organization, its environment and desirable goals. They were used to enact particular perspectives on the unavoidably complex legislative, political and societal context. The institutional pressures that were introduced to Bay City through legislation, political discussions and the media were incommensurate and often in conflict; enacting them into an actionable strategy required continuous adaptation. The use of these voices brought out the persistent institutional complexity inherent in this context and enabled the strategists to avoid conflicts between the alternate views.

In this way, the institutional voices were made understandable through their positions in a material and discursive context, composed of a multitude of different interpretations that were made understandable by their mutual relationships. The local institutions were used together, as institutional voices that complemented and criticized each other. These voices were formed relationally, through continuous contextualization of other institutional voices; they were described in the context created by enacting institutionally based beliefs (such as the active nature of citizens, the limits of public resources or the centrality of the City in improving wellbeing) and through comparison of the various interpretations with each other.

The institutional environments constructed in interaction thus reflect the organizational context, the context and topics of each discussion and also the institutional beliefs shared by the participants. Seminal contributions have described strategy discourse in a similar light, as e.g. “constructed in particular social contexts” (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 253) or “a multitude of autonomous [local] discourses” (Seidl, 2007, p. 197). Hence, the institutional voices can only be understood in their social context. The current study enriches this account by describing the richness and polyphony of this social
context. In Bay City, strategists enacted the context in very different ways depending on the situation and topic at hand; taken together, these various enactments evolved into the organizational strategy.

### 7.4 Three dimensions of institutional dialogue

In this chapter, I have described the central local institutions at play in strategy work and argued for the relevance of analysing their use as institutional voices, engaged in dialogue in their particular organizational and situational contexts. The following three chapters delve deeper into the use of these institutional voices in strategy discussions in order to shed light on three of the central dimensions of institutional dialogue which emerged in the case studied: broadening and narrowing the dialogue, relating the sounds to create new meanings and creating a collective strategy through temporal chaining.

As described in Chapter 6.3 above, these dimensions emerged in my analysis as pairs or triads of related second-order practices through which speakers enacted a contextually relevant institutional environment and actively managed the relationships between the four central institutions. I took these three dimensions of institutional dialogue as the focal points of my analysis of dialogical practices and focused my analysis on specific mini-cases which would illustrate their role in the discussion of the three strategic themes analysed. Together, these mini-cases aim to show how strategy was crafted as a collective phenomenon – as a tool for coordinating work without imposing complete consensus on the participants.

The three mini-cases describe the formulation of self-responsibility as a strategic theme during the strategy round of 2007, the situational interpretations of sustainable development in 2009 and the use of attractiveness to describe and respond to resource scarcity during the 2009 strategy round. Concentrating on shorter discussions allows for setting the institutional dialogue present in them in its context; the details of the topics at hand, the discussants, the position of the interaction in the broader strategy process and any previous discussions on which the discussions built. I have constructed these mini-cases to be able to describe the institutional dialogue in depth. Due to the contextuality of the institutional dialogue, describing it transparently through the entire material would have consumed too much space. However, the practices identified in these mini-cases were also identifiable in the broader material.
The dialogical practices described below are the collective efforts of several strategists. The practices comprise one or more comments made in their context – including their reception by the other speakers, visible in their later comments. That is, the use of institutional voices in discussions often becomes clear in the successive utterances of several speakers, as several speakers give their interpretations and criticize or support the suggestions of previous speakers. Thus examples of the practices rely greatly on the context of the discussion; utterances need to be interpreted in relation to the context of the surrounding discussion and to its nonverbal context as well. To facilitate this, I present fewer and longer quotations. Many of the examples below are longer interchanges of at least a few consecutive utterances and where it was not possible to include long passages, I have done my best to explain the surrounding discussion on which my analysis is based.
8 BROADENING AND NARROWING THE INSTITUTIONAL DIALOGUE

Maybe it's specifically a feature of self-responsibility that if we define it in more detail, we'll be in trouble. It comes up as a very different entity in different divisions and different functions... so we can't necessarily define it at the city level in much detail. (The Mayor, Management Team meeting, 2010)

This chapter expands on the broad analysis of institutional dialogue by concentrating on the first of the three dimensions of dialogical practice which emerged as central to understanding the creation of collective strategy: the practices of broadening and narrowing the institutional dialogue. My analysis of this dynamic elucidates the opposing pressures towards the useful openness of meanings on the one hand and their clarity on the other, and explains how strategists used the institutional voices to balance between these pressures. As strategists constructed the environmental demands on the City organization and fit them into the context of strategy discussions, they drew on several institutional voices. Speakers alternately broadened the dialogue by introducing to the discussion new institutional voices or new ways of using these voices or narrowed the breadth of voices used in the strategy discussion by fitting the different interpretations together or delegitimizing them. This chapter begins with a general description of this dynamic and then concentrates on the description of the practices of broadening and narrowing the institutional dialogue, based on a detailed analysis of a single mini-case: a pivotal discussion of self-responsibility in a Management Team meeting held in early 2007.

Strategists saw shared views as the basis of strategy work and sought to write a strategy which would be clear and monologic in meaning, while being inspiring and acceptable to all strategists. However, this combination of clarity and broad acceptability proved elusive; despite its importance as an ideal, the meanings and uses of the label self-responsibility were multiple and fluid. In adapting to new situations and attempting to influence the discussion, strategists continuously introduced new interpretations to the discussions and these in turn opened up the dialogue. In this crafting of definitions, speakers employed the institutional voices together in cycles of broadening discussion through adding new uses of institutional voices and fitting these voices together in ways that narrowed down the dialogue.

Such cycles of expanding and contracting dialogue emerged as a recurrent feature of strategy work in Bay City. Such cycles were often evident in individual meetings as discussants aimed to conclude individual topics (as well as meetings, in many cases) with
summaries or formal decisions. In addition, as the strategy development processes focused on crafting a coherent strategy document, they alternated between the introduction of new voices to the discussions and fitting them together to reach a semblance of agreement.

I explored this dimension of institutional dialogue through an analysis of the formulation of self-responsibility as a strategic goal during the strategic planning cycle of 2007, when strategists struggled to define self-responsibility in a way which would be acceptable to the different groups of strategists while being focused enough to guide development of public services. Crafting of shared definitions of this strategic theme was impeded by the coexistence of conflicting demands on the organization. The City simultaneously needed to “create wellbeing for its citizens”, strengthen the civic society, decrease the use of economic resources and support the private enterprise needed to maintain employment and a healthy tax base. These views built on the application of the four institutional voices (Welfare State, Community, Economizing and Market) to the topic of self-responsibility. Strategists integrated these views into the same strategy document through introduction of new interpretations and adaptation of the strategy text and its interpretations.

This mini-case was chosen to enable closer analysis of this important dimension of dialogical practices, including the context of the surrounding discussion; as noted in the methodology section, a contextualized, relational analysis across the entire data set would have been impossible due to the sheer amount of data. Specifically, I have concentrated on analysing the discussion on self-responsibility in a pivotal meeting of the Management Team of Bay City, held in the beginning of the strategic planning cycle of 2007. This meeting discussion collected together many of the central themes of this strategic planning cycle and the ideas mentioned for the first time here came to influence treatment of the strategic theme during this cycle.

I have concentrated my examples on a single extract from the meeting discussions (196 lines and 70 utterances) in order to clearly bring out the discursive context of the dialogue and to give sufficient room to the relationality of the practices through which the institutional voices are used. An understanding of the breadth of institutional arguments used calls for analysis of the flow of discussion in context; identifying the introduction of perspectives new to the discussion, following how discussants fit together or exclude previously used voices from the discussion. In addition, the length of this extract brings forth the alternation of centrifugal and centripetal practices in the discus-
sion, which alternates between broadening and narrowing the use of institutional voices without a clear conclusion. This description focuses on an excerpt of the discussion of self-responsibility in a management team meeting central to the strategy process of 2007. A transcript of this excerpt is available in Appendix 1.

In this excerpt, five management team members formulate a new draft for the strategic goal on self-responsibility between the different interpretations of the term. This excerpt shows these dialogical practices as they were applied to the crafting of the strategic position of the City from the various perspectives adopted by the managers and politicians, both those present in the discussion and absent. Alternating between institutional voices, the discussants presented the concept of self-responsibility as a pluralistic meeting ground for several interpretations, where any definition of a theme invited more definitions. In this discussion, the members of the management team unsuccessfully attempted to reconcile the various voices, alternating between suggesting solutions and bringing up new questions. This extract exemplifies the unfeasibility of achieving a lasting agreement on the meanings of self-responsibility; due to the pluralistic nature of the discussions, any definition of a theme invited competing interpretations based on other voices. The discussion continued to alternate between the narrowing of the meanings used and their renewed broadening. I will next use examples from the above excerpt to describe in detail the practices by which the institutional meanings were opened and closed during the discussions described.

8.1 Broadening the dialogue

My analysis of dialogical practices yielded three practices through which strategists broadened the institutional dialogue by introducing new institutional voices to the discussion or by using these institutional voices in a new way: supplementing, abstracting, and differentiating.

Supplementing refers to the introduction of a new sound of an institutional voice as a parallel perspective on the discussion – either through the addition of a new voice or the use of a previously used voice in a way that added a novel institutional interpretation to the discussion. Supplementing thus broadened the use of institutional voices in the strategy discussions by adding new alternative formulations or constraints to be

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7 These speakers are designated in the vignettes (and Appendix 1) with the following identifiers: M1 – Acting Mayor; M2 – Director of Educational Services; M3 – Director of Technical Services; M4 – Representative of the Central Administration; M5 – Representative of the Social and Health Services Division.
addressed in formulating the strategy text. The following example offers a salient ex-
example of this practice:

But don’t we have in the current strategy – which isn’t always very [...] con-
sistent – this prevention thing [the goal of decreasing future service needs
through preventive services]. Isn’t it pretty important in any case? So that we
don’t just do things and then need to put most of our resources into fixing the
ensuing problems, but from a citizen’s perspective agree to increase preven-
tive work in addition to increasing self-responsibility. *(M2, lines 27-31 in Ap-
pendix 1)*

Previous use of the Economizing voice in this discussion had discussed self-
responsibility as reducing the range of the service selection. For instance, the previous
speaker stated that Bay City would “in any case [...] narrow down our range of services”,
concentrating on improving specific core services. In this example, the Director of Edu-
cational Services introduced a new interpretation of the Economizing voice to the self-
responsibility discussion by citing the current strategy document; in order for the ac-
tions of the City to be economically efficient, public services would need to decrease the
future service needs of the inhabitants. The Director of Educational Services com-
plemented these views by stating that the City should “agree to increase preventive work in
addition to increasing self-responsibility” in order to save resources (avoid the need to
“put most of our resources into fixing the ensuing problems”). This enabled her to craft
an account which avoided conflict between the Welfare State and Economizing voices;
in addition to saving public resources, preventive work would decrease the need for
services such as health and social services by improving the wellbeing of citizens. By
introducing the Economizing voice, the speaker added a new perspective to the discus-
sion without disrupting the importance or priorities of the previously used perspec-
tives.

In another example of Supplementing, two speakers complement each other in intro-
ducing another sound of the Efficiency voice:

M3  ...Because [the border] often runs inside the services, that there are parts
of them we could give up but...
M2  Exactly.
M3  ...so that the basic service remains.
M2  Now that’s what we should be talking about. That every service can be
studied from the perspective of how we can bring about more efficiency,
and how.. *(Lines 37-40)*

* All line numbers in this chapter refer to the unabridged discussion extract available in Appendix 1.
In this vignette, the Director of Technical services (identified as M3 above) argues that the focus of the discussion should move away from categorizing individual services into “core” or “basic services” and others that the City would leave to the self-responsibility of citizens. His suggestion is taken up by the following speaker, the Director of Educational services (M2); the two speakers advocate a closer focus on the component “parts” of these services, limiting the scope of the public financing of each service. This new sound changes the implications of self-responsibility; instead of abandoning individual services, the City would “give up” specific components of these services in order to improve the efficiency of service production. By calling for a detailed study of each individual service in the implementation of self-responsibility, this addition also advocates leaving more responsibility for interpretation of the strategy to the service units, thus increasing its ambiguity. Such suggestions will be discussed next.

Abstracting introduced a new sound to the institutional voice that increased its ambiguity. It opened up the meanings of the voice used, arguing that the exact interpretation of the strategy was either impossible or outside the scope of the strategy discussion. In the following example, the Director of Technical Services introduced the Market voice to the meeting, using it to support the Economizing view of self-responsibility:

[...] in any case we’ll pare down our own service production, that is, narrow down our range of services, and then how this happens could be left to everyone’s own responsibility. That may have been a slightly dangerous formulation, but I hope you get it. That what remains is done well, and we’ll devote more to attractiveness, and put in more [resources] to services improving that [attractiveness] when we trim elsewhere. (M3, Line 25)

In suggesting that the detailed application of service cutbacks be left to “everyone’s own self-responsibility”, the director referred to the use of the Market voice in previous meetings; citizens and managers alike could be trusted to make rational choices based on the market alternatives available. However, the utterance stopped short of formulating this new voice clearly; in arguing for the relevance of the Market voice, the Director did not specify its implications for the strategy in detail. Later in the discussion, the Director of Technical Services returns to this topic, repeating a similar abstract use of the Economizing and Market voices:

I guess that we should here divide our service production, or our service repertoire – whatever the package turns out to be, into two categories and take care of one part as we do now, and take the other part to be the one where the self-responsibility of people in acquiring services is increased. How we describe the border between the categories, that’s what we’re discussing now. (M3, line 37)
Here, the director used another sound of the Market voice, calling for individual, economic self-responsibility; in order to secure the “basic security” of citizens, the City would increase the role of citizens in “acquiring” – paying for – the less central services they would need. This second sound of the Market voice divided the public services into a prioritized class of core services and less central services that could be left for marketized production. This suggestion remained on an abstract level – the discussants found themselves unable to divide public services into “core services” and others. This suggestion was discussed at length, with other participants expressing their frustration towards the City Council, which had earlier removed a similar formulation (see lines 47-51 in Appendix 1), and introducing the interpretations made by the politicians and managers to the discussion.

The suggested division leaves the definition of “core services” to a later discussion, and enables the speakers to define it as a complicated issue, better left outside the strategy discussions. The increasing ambiguity of the self-responsibility goal allowed the speakers to concentrate on the choice between the remaining core services and the use of resources to improve the attractiveness of the City. At the same time, it invited further discussion of the possible meanings of self-responsibility in different situations; this is discussed under Concretizing, below.

The practice of differentiating describes how speakers employed an institutional voice to introduce a new interpretation of the issue at hand as contradictory to previous voices, while treating these voices as equally legitimate ways of understanding the topic. By arguing that the strategy included several contradictory voices (either in their interpretations of the topic of discussion or their implications for the strategy), differentiating presented a new sound as a problem to be resolved in subsequent discussion:

> I understand very well that when we’ve, well, taken away some of our services and added to our attraction factors, there we may have taken away services from what it is that improves our attractiveness. So we’re decreasing our attractiveness by reducing quality – then that will not improve our attractiveness. (M5, Line 36)

In this vignette, the deputy to the Director of Health and Social Services portrayed the Economizing and Market voices as conflicting. His argument was that Bay City could not combine the service cuts advocated through the Economizing voice (“taking away some of our services”) with the increasing attractiveness seen as central to the Market voice. In concentrating the scarce public resources on improving “attraction factors”, the City might find that the services it had cut as nonessential would decrease its attrac-
tiveness for working inhabitants and employers, who would provide the City with tax income. The two institutional voices used here both emphasized the importance of maintaining public resources for the future of Bay City, and they were often used together to support self-responsibility. The above interpretation emphasized their difference by concentrating on their outcomes and depicted them as alternate choices for important service-level choices.

8.2 Narrowing the dialogue

The practices of broadening the dialogue alternated with centripetal practices that narrowed use of institutional voices in strategy discussions by either silencing voices or joining them together into a hybrid. The analysis yielded three first-level practices which narrowed down the breadth of institutional voices used in the strategy discussion: coordinating, concretizing, and hybridizing.

Coordinating institutional voices was a central practice that served to align the voices used in dialogue with each other. This practice refers to the ways in which strategists sought to establish the appropriateness of certain sounds of the institutional voices used in the self-responsibility discussion (and reject others) and fit certain wordings and labels to the strategic goal. In the following example, the speaker enacts the Communality voice as a norm for the strategists:

M3 The point here is that we need to find and use concepts which we understand in the same way.
M2 Mmh [approvingly]
M3 We need to spell it out. If we can’t get to that, we say that wellbeing, basic services or basic security and then leave it to everyone to think about it in their own, slightly different ways; then we won’t have a strategic direction.
M1 That’s right. So one sheet of strategy and a tome for explaining our terminology. That’s approximately how it would go. (Lines 21-23)

Here, the Director of Technical Services introduced the Communality voice to argue that the shared understanding of strategic goals should be a criterion for the strategic plan; for the strategy to be useful as a management tool, “we” – the managers and politicians participating in strategy work, and presumably also the voters evaluating the acceptability of the strategy and the citizens who make the ensuing decisions of service use – should understand it in the same way in order to be able to use the strategy in guiding their action. The speaker described the strategy as a set of meanings formulated by the managers, but necessarily shared and accepted by the local community (the
“we” to which he repeatedly referred). To fulfil this institutional requirement, the strategy needed to be “spell[ed] out” and understood “in the same way”. The speaker emphasized this sharedness as a value in itself, placing it alongside other institutional demands and restrictions on their use.

Coordinating worked to narrow the dialogue and ultimately helped strategists to anticipate later interpretations and avoid surprises. In addition to directly employing several institutional voices, Coordinating had a metadialogical function; it was used to underline the need for clarity and speculate on the expected results of other dialogical practices.

The practice of concretizing refers to applying the voices to the discussion in a situated example. In addition to providing a useful starting point for conversation, concretizing enabled strategists to refer the discussion to a concrete issue, which enabled them to apply the various institutional voices together and resolve their relationships more easily than would have been possible without a context known to the discussants and which could be discussed in detail. The following words by the Acting Mayor are a central example from this vignette:

But in this discussion it could be good for us to think it through this way, so... if the city concentrates on its core tasks, what does it then not do? Does it maintain skiing tracks? (M1, line 1)

Participants returned to the above questions several times during the vignette and used it to link specific decisions to the theme of self-responsibility. The Acting Mayor continues:

M1 In order to get our thoughts going – what are these core tasks? If they are maintenance of skiing tracks, and well. Pandering to people in their active age and everything else possible, then well somehow, somewhere we need to draw the line, say what we mean by it if we aim for concentration on core tasks. What’s our goal then?
M4 The well-being of people
M2 And an active life and...
M3 And then we should get a common denominator to [the services that] remain. (Lines 11-14)

Here, the examples given by the Acting Mayor clarify the earlier question and direct the discussion towards a clear formulation of the increasing self-responsibility and the remaining “core tasks” of the City. This was seen as a complicated task:

M3 So for instance this prevention, then... Weell damn it, of course exercise
In the above example, the two discussants discuss concrete examples drawn from the lives of citizens: the health benefits of cross-country skiing, the discussion in a local newspaper and the tragedies caused by slippery winter-time streets. These examples prioritize the Economizing voice by emphasizing the outcomes of service-related decisions on the wellbeing of citizens and the economic efficiency inherent in the production of this wellbeing.

Concretizing enabled participants to explore the possible use of the strategic plan in the expected future, negotiate the rules by which it could be acceptably interpreted and reformulate the text to change the expected interpretations. Concrete examples served to elucidate the implications of the suggested strategy text in a variety of situations and its usefulness for guiding later decision making. Uses of concretizing built on institutional voices to theorize these implications and bring together different views of the example.

The third practice, **hybridizing**, refers to the situational amalgamation of institutional voices, where the component voices are portrayed as mutually supporting or identical in relation to a discussion, creating a situational hybrid for the needs of the discussion at hand. Such hybrid sounds were often short-lived; they were questioned or simply bypassed by later discussants making their own interpretations. However, even short-lived hybridizing emphasized the possibilities for fitting the different institutional voices together and strengthened the belief that the strategy could reconcile all the demands at the same time.

I wrote down this formulation early last week, that the basic security of citizens is taken care of and self-responsibility in acquiring other services is increased. (*M3, Line 46*)

Here, the Director of Technical Services suggests a hybrid between the Welfare State voice ("the basic security of citizens is taken care of") and the Market voice ("self-responsibility in acquiring other services is increased"), based on a division between core services and other, nonessential services. This formulation balances between the
requirements of the two voices, arguing that increasing self-responsibility and the needs of inhabitants do not necessarily imply conflict; essentially, they are here seen as complementary perspectives on arranging public services with scarce resources. Similar ideas were central to the acceptability of self-responsibility and were often repeated in the discussion (e.g. in the same speaker’s words on line 25 that “what remains is done well”).

The discussions often resulted in formulations which combined the requirements of several voices. A fitting example of such hybrids emerges later in the discussion, when the Acting Mayor (M1) refers to the budget of Bay City:

M1 I need to check what we wrote about this earlier...
  <The discussants read through the City budget>
M1 Here it is: ‘Basic services for citizens are taken care of...
M3 [The concept used] there is ‘basic services’. That’s, like, a broader concept.
M1 [Reads out from the City budget:] ‘Services are organized in a customer-oriented way and increasingly in cooperation with other actors. Variety, opportunities of choice and self-responsibility are emphasized in the service offering.’ (Lines 54-57)

The Acting Mayor brings up the budget to assess the suitability of its formulation as the basis for the self-responsibility goal in the future strategic plan. This text spins together the Welfare State, Market, and Economizing voices to support the decision to narrow the selection of publicly produced services and increase the responsibility of citizens for financing some previously public services. These three voices are seen as essentially the same strategy; the City could simultaneously fulfil the legal and moral requirements posed by the Welfare State voice (“basic services for citizens are taken care of” and “services are organized in a customer-oriented way”), improve its efficiency as prescribed by the Economizing voice (by focusing on the “basic services” only and emphasizing “self-responsibility [...] in the service offering”) and move towards market-based services (by organizing service production “increasingly in cooperation with other actors”).

In referring to the budget, the Acting Mayor brings the three voices together to paint a positive picture of the outcomes of this change; the decrease in service levels is inevitable, but concentrating on the central services will allow the City to both improve its resource situation (thereby improving the public services) and still secure the high-quality wellbeing services where they are needed to guarantee the preconditions for the wellbeing of all citizens. Although this account builds on three institutional perspectives on the City, its use of these voices is very nearly monological, presenting them as indistinguishable parts of the same argument.
8.3 Summary: alternating between polyphony and monologization

This chapter has illustrated two central features of the institutional dialogue in Bay City: the alternation between broadening and narrowing dialogue during strategy discussions and the situational nature of the sounds of institutional voices used to craft suggestions for the organizational strategy. Broadening the use of institutional voices brought in new interpretations of the theme of self-responsibility, introduced new solutions and posed new challenges to previously suggested solutions. Conversely, the narrowing of the dialogue adapted the presented views together and enabled the discussants to create situational settlements between them.

Use of the above practices in strategy discussions formed cycles where the dialogue alternated between monologization, or narrowing down the views into a single-voiced document, and broadening the interpretations into polyphonic discussions. From this perspective, the discussion in the Management Team meeting described above can broadly be divided into three sections. In the first section, lines 1-20, the discussants opened the discussion by bringing out their views on the topic of self-responsibility and the ways in which central institutional voices are used to make sense of it. Alternating between the Welfare State and Economizing voices, the discussants charted the possibilities for formulating a commonly accepted definition of self-responsibility.

The second section (lines 21-46) began with the suggestion that the discussion concentrate on finding a common ground (L21: “we need to find and use concepts which we understand in the same way”). This led the discussants to concentrate on defining the ‘core tasks’ and identifying them in the public service offering. Broadening practices was emphasized, as the discussion moved to creating shared understandings of this issue. The discussants moved to evaluating the account of self-responsibility crafted in the first section and this change of perspective enabled the discussants to fit the different voices together in a way that narrowed the dialogue. The second section concluded with the suggestion by M3 about formulation of the strategy (line 46: “I wrote down this formulation early last week that the basic security of citizens is taken care of and self-responsibility in acquiring other services is increased”).

This compromise effort in the third section led (lines 47-70) to further broadening of the institutional dialogue. After the Director of Educational Services reintroduced conflicting meanings by observing that the political leadership of Bay City had already rejected a similar suggestion, the discussion returned to the definition of the central la-
bels and broadened it to discuss the interpretations of the service-related labels on which the self-responsibility discussion had been based. The extract ended in M5’s resigned comment that the definition of ‘basic security’ is both broader and more complex than had been hoped in the previous discussion.

After this extract, the discussion flowed smoothly into the next topic of conversation. Discussion of the topic ended with the conclusion that in its current form this Market view of self-responsibility was too controversial to gain acceptance in the City Council. Despite their concerted efforts to close the dialogue, the discussants failed to convert it into an acceptable suggestion for the strategic plan. As was typical to the observed meetings, the discussants did not conclude their discussion of self-responsibility with a clear outcome, instead leaving it to the secretary to formulate the written minutes to reflect the discussion.

The minutes of this meeting summarized this discussion, without suggesting changes to the formulation of the strategic goal of self-responsibility. Importantly, although the discussion did not finish with narrowing the discussion into a clear formulation which could be suggested to following meetings, the formulations discussed and the sounds of institutional voices used in the meeting were reported at subsequent meetings. The formulations crafted in it influenced the ensuing strategy process through the direct references made by the discussants and by the effect these had on the subsequent interpretations of self-responsibility. The situational settlements crafted in meetings were at times more polyphonic than a narrow reading of the developing strategy text would suggest.

The discussion outlined in this chapter shows the difficulty of finding commonly accepted views of the central labels at hand – or, more broadly, the difficulty of resolving institutional complexity perceived on the organizational level. Interpretations of self-responsibility vary significantly between the different groups of strategists whose views were discussed; even in the Management Team (a relatively homogenous group with similar interests), the institutional voices were used to construct very different views of this central label. This caused difficulties for the strategy process; in order to guide the actions of the City organization, the strategy should be relevant to its various units, and be interpreted in sufficiently similar ways across them. The strategists recognized this difficulty and did their best to work around it. The formulations of goals in strategy discussions struck a balance between creation of sufficient consistency to avoid conflicts and leaving enough room for situational interpretation to make the goals applica-
ble in the various situations faced by the service units. This ambiguity persisted over time, as attested by the next mayor three years later:

Maybe it’s specifically a feature of self-responsibility that if we define it in more detail, we’ll be in trouble. It comes up as a very different entity in different divisions and different functions... so we can’t necessarily define it at the city level in much detail. So it’s, we should just manage to write just so much about it that when it’s interpreted by the divisions we don’t end up with formally different interpretations – the interpretations go in the same direction. *(the Mayor, Management Team meeting, 2010)*

In the above vignette, this ambiguity was seen as an important part of implementation of the strategy in the service units; it allowed adaptation of city-level strategic goals to the situational challenges faced by the service units, which was seen as central to the relevance of the strategy. These situational adaptations aimed at settling the institutional complexity perceived in relation to individual issues in a way that did not conflict with the city-level strategy. These situational resolutions of institutional complexity can be thought of as settlements analogous to the field-level settlements described by Rao & Kenney (2008). The conception of situational settlement refers to the temporary and limited resolution of conflicts between several institutional logics applied to the same discussion. Such situational settlements were based on the contextual details of the issue at hand and built on these contextual details to decrease the ambiguity of this issue and fit the institutional voices together. The additional detail provided by the situational context enabled strategists to construct the issue more narrowly and the clarity of detail allowed the institutional voices to meet in ways which would not have been possible on an organizational level, allowing discussants to describe them in ways that resolved the conflict.

In the discussion analyzed in this chapter, these situational adaptations of institutional voices were best visible in the discussions of basic services. These discussions brought up requirements for producing broad services and alternatively for making the organization more efficient by restructuring and limiting these services. These requirements were taken to be incompatible. At the same time, neither of these conflicting requirements could be disregarded; needy citizens had a legal as well as a moral right to their services, while the survival of the City organization was seen to depend on its ability to streamline its resource use.

In this discussion, members of the Management Team enacted the four institutional voices in a way that sought to resolve this problem. While the prescriptions of these
institutional voices remained incompatible or ambiguous in the broader strategy discussions, the contextual detail allowed for dialogical interchange between the voices. The discussion settled on a local resolution of the institutional complexity; the two requirements were balanced by linking them through the positive view of self-responsibility. The more communal lifestyle that this view emphasized was seen to both make the City more attractive to newcomers and decrease the social need that necessitated interventions on its part. The account resolved the complexity experienced between the institutional demands imposed by the institutional voices on this issue and presented an appealing narrative of the City that could be built on in later interchanges.

These settlements neither blended the institutional voices together nor silenced less prominent voices under a dominant account. Instead, they maintained the dialogue between the various voices in ways that fit them together and fulfilled the requirements posed by these views of the organization. Such settlements formed the basis for further discussions by acting as a useful basis that could be developed, yet were not generally applicable as resolutions of institutional complexity due to being situated in a specific issue that did not address the needs of the organization in general. Strategy work in Bay City became a set of such settlements, using the same institutions in different issue-level settlements.

In addition to the practices of broadening and narrowing the institutional dialogue, this chapter has begun to illustrate the ways in which participants adapted the institutional voices to find points of agreement between participants and also the difficulty of concluding the discussion in agreement, even among like-minded participants. These features of institutional dialogue will be explored in more detail in the next chapter.
9 RELATING INSTITUTIONAL VOICES WITH EACH OTHER

Bay City is a green city with high vitality, and offers an attractive living and cultural environment. *(The vision statement of Bay City, strategic plan, 2009)*

As concluded in the previous chapter, the strategy discussions demonstrated continuous cycles between centrifugal and centripetal forces; several institutional voices remained in an uneasy balance, and were continuously compared and played out in relation to each other. This chapter describes the dialogical practices used to situationally enact these voices in relation to each other and the relations thus constructed between the voices. This dimension expands my account (in Chapter 7) of the relational use of institutional voices by concentrating on the practices of relational use. A closer analysis of these practices brings to light how institutional voices were enacted together to find points of agreement and conflict and craft situational ways of proceeding with strategy work.

These dialogical practices are studied through the analysis of a mini-case concentrating on the discussion of the strategic theme of attractiveness during the strategy round of 2009. During the four-month span of this strategy round, attractiveness gained a central role as a proposed solution to the problems created by the emerging financial crisis. The label attractiveness had developed into a central theme in strategy discussions during the previous strategy cycle. As I described in Chapter 5.3.1, the use of attractiveness became intertwined with the broader issue of addressing resource scarcity, which was discussed through the theme of economic vitality. Due to the overlap in the use of the two labels, I have included the discussion of economic vitality as a significant contributor to the discussion of the attractiveness theme.

Securing the resources necessary for the operation of the City organization was seen as important by both the service-focused defenders of the welfare state and those arguing for its reconfiguration or renewal. Attractiveness and vitality offered proponents of these perspectives an opportunity to bring up their interpretations, and inspired them to describe the future of Bay City based on the inferred resource constraints. The two concepts had significant overlap in the discussion, and (as will be demonstrated below) strategists often used them interchangeably or used both concepts together. In the final strategy created during the 2009 talks, vitality had a prominent role in the vision statement of Bay City and as a central strategic goal, while attractiveness was demoted to a subordinate role, used narrowly to refer to the development of an “attractive city centre”.

The concept of attractiveness was constructed as a necessary but problematic account of the changing priorities of the City organization, which employed the four institutional voices in changing combinations – sometimes in conflict, sometimes in harmony. These changes in their relations during the discussions attest to the situational nature of the settlements of institutional complexity (see Chapter 3.3), and make this discussion a fitting context for studying the practices through which the institutional voices are negotiated in strategy discussions. To capture these relations, this mini-case follows the discussion of attractiveness across different meetings held between February and May, 2009. This comparison of meetings enables the description of the situational use of attractiveness; discussion of the chaining of these discussions into a collective strategy is left to the next chapter.

In this discussion, the different institutional voices were used to construct a resource perspective of the City, assess the strategy alternatives related to this perspective and relate it to the other perspectives seen as relevant to the city strategy. The issue was seen as a central strategic choice; the resource situation of the city was deteriorating due to the financial crisis, causing increased pressure for changes in public services. Use of the four institutional voices presented different perspectives on the resource needs and public services, and the relations constructed between these voices (complementary, conflicting or incommensurate) varied situationally. As described in Chapter 7, the voices were used as distinct situational ‘sounds’, which influenced decision-making together.

My analysis identified three second-order practices of relating: complementing the voices with each other, contrasting them as conflicting and constructing them as incommensurate. These dialogical practices describe how relations between voices were constructed and how those relations which were seen as desirable were enacted as complementary, conflicting or incommensurate in discussing the role of securing resources through attractiveness. The practices thus enacted the complex institutional environment in a specific combination related with the discussion, creating situational settlements.

I will next go through the three clusters of dialogical practices which emerged from my analysis of this mini-case: the use of voices to alternatively complement or differentiate each other and practices constructing them as incommensurate. These practices were not confined to the discussion of attractiveness; similar dialogical practices were re-
peatedly used to bridge different views into dialogical accounts of the city. This chapter illustrates how these practices were used to relate different institutional arguments.

9.1 Complementing the institutional voices with each other

The institutional voices were often used in support of each other, as strategists sought to understand the institutional environment around Bay City and negotiate strategic choices. The different voices were used to explore alternate perspectives and to bridge differences and convince the advocates of other institutional voices. These explorations resulted in the use of several institutional voices as complementary; speakers enacted several voices as supportive of the same solution. In the discussion on attractiveness, the complementary use of institutional voices took the form of three related practices: mutual support, enabling and balancing.

The first practice, mutual support, refers to a pattern where the participants enacted two or more institutional voices as coinciding in support of the same interpretation of the strategy. Discussants thus harnessed the voices both to understand the situation at hand from alternate perspectives and to show institutional support for their preferred strategy formulation. The exact relationships and priorities between voices were often left unclear; the emphasis was on their support of the same interpretation.

A central example comes from the following description of the role of attractiveness in the future of Bay City. Here, the Strategy Manager, a recently hired civil servant responsible for coordinating the strategy process, combines a wealth of previously discussed strategic issues and describes them as parallel, complementary goals, combining the underlying institutional accounts into an inspiring vision of the future. His description invites the following discussants to comment on these elements and combine them:

It was seen that Bay City should be able to change its economic structure. High-skill jobs are needed, and you could say that Bay City won't thrive by leaning on traditional industries. The attractiveness of the city centre was seen as very central: Bay City must have a centre with high vitality, high attractiveness, so that when people come for a visit, they see that Bay City is a great place and want to stay here. This comes with the quality of the built environment, landscaping, parks and so on. The improvement of our image was seen as important: public transport, developing the research activity, taking advantage of the St. Petersburg market, tourism, security. These make up the vitality perspective. (The Strategy Manager, City Council seminar, 2009)
In the above quotation, the Strategy Manager collected previous enactments of institutional voices and combined them into “the vitality perspective”, which drew heavily on the Economizing voice. He argued for the importance of this perspective by describing Bay City as a community of inhabitants with a shared fate (“Bay City won’t thrive by...”, “Bay City must...”, “our image”, etc.); in order to survive, the City would need to act as one to improve its vitality. The account of the “city centre with high vitality” employed the Market voice; in order to effectively compete for inhabitants, Bay City must conform to their expectations of an attractive city. The Strategy Manager also employed the Welfare State voice by listing the high-quality public services (such as the public transport and public research activity mentioned here) commonly discussed as the cornerstone of the strong welfare state. He then redefined these services into “attraction factors” used to draw new inhabitants and businesses to the area.

In the above comment, the Strategy Manager listed a broad array of themes under the vitality perspective, bringing in all four institutional voices to argue for his view. In his enactment, the relationships of the voices were described in a positive light but left open to the extent that discussants could continue his argument in many directions. In this way, the Strategy Manager opened up the discussion for the group work to follow. This vignette is also a good example of the intertwined use of the labels of attractiveness and vitality and illustrates how strategists often repeated both concepts or used the two concepts interchangeably to denote the ability of the City to attract economic resources.

Additionally, the strategists often enacted an institutional voice as an enabler of another voice, which they saw as primary. Through this practice of enabling, the relationships between the two voices were constructed as hierarchical; a secondary voice was seen as instrumental to fulfilling the requirements posed by the primary voice.

The following vignette example of enabling is the way in which the mayor described the construction of a positive future for Bay City in the first strategy seminar of the new Council:
We need to think about these things here, too: how to strengthen our strengths and reduce our weaknesses. [...] I’d call for a focus on the long term, and emphasize the importance of getting a strategy which prioritizes things. A strategy to which everyone agrees easily and without discussion can be nice, but it won’t be useful. We’ll have to consider both over the long term and in relation with the economic situation how we can create the conditions where the Bay City region will get in on the national economic growth when it begins again faster than we did in the 1990s. That calls for competitiveness, education, attractiveness, [and] investments in the built environment. It also calls for the strengthening of the internal cohesion of our community and taking care of the weakest of our society, but we need a balance between these. We can’t take care of the responsibilities of the City over the long term unless we strengthen these requisites for growth and prosperity. *(The Mayor, City Council seminar, 2009)*

Here, the mayor stated that in order to fulfil the higher-order goal of taking care of the needy (portrayed as “taking care of the weakest”, using the Welfare State voice) Bay City needed to build the attractiveness necessary for improving its resource situation. His account of attractiveness depicted it as a way to first fulfill the requirements made by the Market voice (to “get in on the national economic growth” through “competitiveness, education, attractiveness […],”), which were necessary for the ultimate fulfillment of the moral requirements expressed by the Welfare State voice. Such ethical argumentation described the City as the active steward of its inhabitants and aimed at increasing their wellbeing – as well as the economic sustainability of the City. These ultimate goals were hallmarks of the Welfare State voice, which was often described as the primary goal of strategic action, legitimizing actions based on other voices.

These hierarchical relations could be constructed in various ways, according to the needs of the situation. The following vignette reverses the hierarchy of the previous example:

*The city should be able to produce so much vitality, tax revenue, that they [the city] can offer the middle class at least reasonably good public services, so that they don’t leave. *(Strategy Manager, City Board meeting, 2009)*

Here, the Strategy Manager describes the Welfare State voice (offering “at least reasonably good public services”, especially to middle-class citizens) as subordinate to the Market voice (the ability to compete for these citizens, and ultimately the tax revenue they create). There was no clear conflict between these two arguments; each presented an internally consistent argument which fit the interactional context well. Such differences effectively illustrate the complexity of the topics discussed.
The related, more open practice of balancing was also prevalent in the discussion during 2009. Here, strategists argued that several voices, as different but equally important perspectives on the issue at hand, were necessary for the construction of attractiveness. Balancing did not specify clear relationships between these perspectives; they were united by their centrality to the discussed issue.

A recurring topic for balancing in the current mini-case was the relationship between the maintenance of high-quality services and development of the attractiveness of Bay City. By constructing different institutional pressures, the institutional voices emphasized different constraints and opportunities for strategic action. These perspectives needed to be carefully balanced, as argued in the following vignette:

M1 We should somehow make it concrete and visible [to council members], because they keep repeating how we should care for our citizens. And we do, of course. But still it should be clear that we need to somehow balance these things; we need to have good quality in certain services – schools et cetera – but in addition we need attraction factors so that the city also renews itself. I don’t know if we need to make scenarios to see how we’ll end up if we don’t get an influx of more people here.

M2 Scenario work would have been nice, but there isn’t enough time for it. But looking at the consequences of the previous recession, it would be catastrophic if the new growth came as slowly after this one as it did in the early nineties.

M3 Yes, unemployment stayed high for a long time, or is still slightly more than it is elsewhere in the country.

M2 Bay City got in on the growth of the metropolitan area four or five years late. If that were to happen now, the recession would last here those two years, and then four or five more before growth got underway.

M1 We’d have to make that concrete by describing what it means to basic services if it happens. So how do we make this transparent so that even the strongest proponents of basic services will understand that we need to take action in order to secure these basic services for the future? That’s how I see it. It isn’t enough to just be content with taking care of basic services, especially now that the situation is difficult. (Strategy Team meeting discussion, 2009)

In this example, the Welfare State voice is enacted through the need to “care for our citizens” by providing them with central public services of “good quality”. This voice is positioned as the view of the City Council, and balanced with the Market voice, described as the need of the City to attract “an influx of more people” and economic growth, and by the Economizing voice visible in the emphasis on “securing basic services for the future”. The Welfare State voice emphasized the maintenance of high-quality services, while attractiveness was central to the Market and Economizing voices. Both were seen to require significant investments, and they could have been construct-
ed as conflicting. However, strongly emphasizing one of these goals over the other was seen to endanger the fulfilment of both; basic services were seen as a core part of attractiveness, while attractiveness was central to the maintenance of viable public services.

The complementary use of the voices worked effectively in legitimizing the presented interpretations of attractiveness, and helped to gather broader support for them. In their use, the voices were adapted to the other voices used in discussions; they were brought up as complementary views supporting the same strategic choices. The institutional pressures they constructed could be resolved through similar strategic choices. This positive, visionary use was contrasted by the next cluster of practices: dichotomizing the voices, or presenting them as conflicting views to public services and resources.

9.2 Contrasting the voices as conflicting

At other times the voices were used in ways which emphasized the differences between the institutional pressures they described as central. Maintaining the differences between the institutional voices was an important part of pluralistic dialogue between institutional voices; the recognition of several different voices enabled the discussants to transcend the idea of a single correct strategy, use the voices in turn and compare their implications for the City organization.

The construction of differences between the voices is visible in a single practice, which I will call conflict-building. Descriptions of contradictions between institutional voices emerged in the ways these voices described the City and the strategic goals they prescribed. The differences between institutional voices were most often not visible as direct conflicts between interpretations of the environment (or the strategists expressing them). Instead, they were demonstrated indirectly, as differences between the goals that these interpretations were seen to prescribe. Conflicts between institutional voices were seen as problems requiring a solution; such problems were often smoothed out through incremental “improvements” in strategy formulations, as in the following example:

We must balance between our legal obligations and attraction factors. We know that there are things which are very good in Bay City, which could improve our attractiveness. But we lack the funds to [capitalize on them]. And on the other hand, there are a lot of legal obligations imposed on us by the state. (City Council member, City Council seminar, 2009)
Commenting on the use of goals to coordinate decisions, the speaker – a City Board member – points out a discrepancy between two strategic goals based on different institutional voices. The first goal, fulfilling the legal obligations of the City, was seen as a reference to the traditionally dominant Welfare State voice (see e.g. the Local Government Law, 1995, §1: “Municipalities aim to advance the wellbeing of its citizens and the sustainable development”), while the goal of improving attractiveness emphasized the importance of attractiveness and the Market mechanism creating a positive future. The City Council member argues that this goal contradicts the overall goal of ‘balancing the economy’, and presents this disparity between the goals as an issue to be resolved in further discussion.

Conflicts such as the above were frequently seen as problems of formulation; the voices could be seen as harmonious if formulated well enough. This is exemplified by a comment from the Strategy Manager:

We also acknowledge that these values are followed under certain boundary conditions; we need to make choices. [...] They may be in conflict, and such conflicts need to be resolved in more detailed strategy work. (Strategy Manager, Management Team meeting, 2009)

This construction of conflicts as shared problems, to be resolved together, is a telling example of the openness of the institutional dialogue in Bay City; it is easy to imagine more conflictual alternatives in such situations, such as resolving conflicts between voices by choosing one voice and silencing others, but there were very few instances of clear conflicts between voices or strategists. The strategists avoided development of conflicts between voices into interpersonal conflicts (in ways demonstrated in the examples above) and spent significant effort in maintaining the relations between voices and their ability to contribute to discussion of the same issues.

Despite being a recurring practice used by strategists, conflict-building was not a prevalent way through which strategists discussed differences between institutional voices. The conflicts found in the discussions were mild, and less direct ways of building difference prevailed over them. These practices of constructing difference without direct conflicts between the voices will be discussed next.

9.3 Constructing the institutional voices as incommensurate

Participants also valued the use of several institutional voices as alternate perspectives on the strategic themes beyond the agreement or conflicts between them. It was often
seen as useful to study an issue from several perspectives, even when these were seen as incommensurate: simply different, each with a potentially valuable contribution to the discussion. Incommensurability between voices were constructed through two practices which avoided the comparison or reconciliation of voices, while relating them with each other in another way (e.g. through the topic of discussion, interpretations of the future or offered solutions). These practices – parallel use and emphasizing unclarity – had an important role in supporting institutional pluralism; they strengthened the dialogue between institutional voices through broadening the discussion, and emphasized the legitimacy of switching between perspectives.

First, speakers actively avoided comparisons through emphasizing unclarity. Strategists often admitted the difficulty of predicting the future of the city and emphasized the need for taking several perspectives into account. The speakers acknowledged that there was no single way to reconcile alternate theorizations of the future. This argument was most prominently used by managers who emphasized the need for strategic change. In order to thrive in the future, Bay City needed to work hard to renew itself. However, the path that would lead to the desired results was unclear:

There isn’t a single self-evident path to success – a strategy which we could choose based on our strengths and opportunities and trust that they’d come true. If we want to craft a growth strategy – or even a strategy to maintain our vitality – we must look holistically for a turning point in our path. Bay City must do something in a different way from before. It may need stronger priorities, seek to exploit the strengths and opportunities it has as well as possible, look at some weaknesses and seek to improve them. This calls for investments, it calls for hard work, and choosing something that others don’t choose. [...] A city can never completely make the jump into a blue ocean strategy, since so many of its tasks are legislated. But at least we can try to swim in pink waters, try not to compete for the exact same things in the same way like all other metropolitan municipalities or medium-sized Finnish cities. [...] We can choose a very safe strategy with small steps, but we won’t achieve a big jump into a new development. And in 10-15 years we might see that the cautious strategy is wrong. On the other hand, we may choose something that’s very different from what we do today, or what others do. But since it requires investments, there’s always a risk involved. (The Strategy Manager, City Council seminar, 2009)

Here, the Strategy Manager argued that due to the economic difficulties, Bay City would need to commit to a strategic choice without knowing its outcome. Although the speaker didn’t emphasize any of the institutional voices over the others, he juxtaposed the strong emphasis on the need for “doing things differently” than before (e.g. making “different choices” to “achieve a big jump into a new development”) with the alternative
of “very safe”, “cautious strategy”, which would not create the “new development” described as necessary. In Bay City, such cautious strategies were commonly linked with the prescriptions of the Welfare State voice: a broad variety of universal public services, a slow rate of change and steady economic growth to finance them. The Strategy Manager drew on the Market voice to say that these were no longer enough; Bay City needed to choose “something that others don’t choose”, in order to avoid the fiercest competition (“swim in pink waters”, in reference to Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). However, instead of arguing for a new prioritization of voices, the speaker accents the need for new perspectives based on the parallel use of different institutional voices and leaves the task of finding the right priorities and choices for the political decision-makers.

In another example, emphasizing the difference between institutional perspectives was seen as important to achieving the desired interpretation of the strategy:

P1 I think [the strategy should state] that the City should grow and develop the vitality of the entire region. We should mention [...] that this should happen in an economically sustainable way. But the ecological, social and cultural sustainability, we can mention them under the [separate goal of] sustainable development. And I wonder, should we mention economical sustainability under sustainable development, or here under service development?

SM I’d place it under sustainable development. Because there is, or can be, a significant conflict between ecological sustainability and the economy. If we put them under different headings, it gets lost that we’re looking for two [different] things. By putting them together we show that we know that we’ll need to balance between these two. (*Discussion in a City Board meeting, 2009*)

Here, a Board member asks a question about the relation between two concepts which are taken to represent different institutional voices in the strategy discussions; economically sustainable practice refers to the efficiency of the city organization (a central tenet of the Economizing voice), while the broad value of sustainable development was linked in this discussion with the Welfare State voice. The Strategy Manager responded to this question by emphasizing the differences between the two arguments under evaluation. If economical sustainability was separated from ecological and social sustainability, the differences between them would be lost; by keeping these concepts together in the strategy, the Strategy Manager hoped to emphasize their difference and complementary value.

**Parallel use** of several voices was the second central practice by which the institutional voices were used incommensurably. Strategists employed several institutional voices
in their utterances without discussing their compatibility or other relationships – as their own opinions, as alternate interpretations of an issue, or as the expected interpretations (legitimate or otherwise) of other participants. In so doing, they emphasized the shared awareness and importance of institutional complexity in relation to the issue at hand and encouraged others to take several perspectives into account. Such use of institutional voices described them as parallel, equally legitimate accounts of the city, with either shifting or unclear relationships.

For instance, the Strategy Manager often discussed several voices in sequence, without making conclusions between them. The following vignette is a rich example:

I’ve categorized these ideas into groups here, and four central themes emerge. The first is, you could call it creative willingness to change. Then there’s the self-responsibility question, or you might call it collective responsibility. Then there’s sustainable development, the lived environment and ecological values. And fourth, the community, an active civil society, participatory decision-making, and customer-centred action. And [fifth], wellbeing and citizen, or customer satisfaction. These are the five themes which emerge very clearly. They are not necessarily in conflict, and they are things we can develop. [...] What surprised me in this summary was that the issue of attractiveness, of the economy, got such small emphasis. This may be due to the assumption that it will be included in the discussion regardless. (Strategy Manager, City Council seminar, 2009)

In this extract from a strategy seminar for the City Council, the speaker is discussing the results of previous group discussions which aimed to find the central strategic choices of the city. The alternatives he lists emerge almost as a list of the central institutional voices. After the broad goal of “willingness to change”, the “self-responsibility question” of the second theme had a strong emphasis on the Economizing voice, while “sustainable development, the lived environment and ecological values” had repeatedly been described as ‘attraction factors,’ in reference to a Market voice. The emphasis on the local community and democracy evident in the fourth theme brought up the Communality voice and the final theme of “wellbeing and citizen satisfaction” brought up the high-quality services central to the Welfare State voice. Such descriptions were often ambiguous, weaving positive and negative interpretations together, and combining issues with each other. In this case, the Strategy Manager used this ambiguity to underline his neutral position and signal that he was leaving responsibility for prioritizing these issues to the political decision-makers. He repeatedly emphasized that his role was to prepare and coordinate strategy work, not to make decisions.
The parallel use of several institutional voices was useful due to both the need for choices between the alternate paths their differences involved and the uncertainty in-built in their accounts of the future. This openness and uncertainty of interpretations made institutional dialogue a central tool in Bay City. At the same time, these examples illustrate how differences between the institutional voices were used as a constructive tool in strategy discussions. Distinguishing the voices in discussion enabled their use as distinct perspectives on the future and strategic goals of the city. The distinction of the institutional voices constructed as complementary was central to strategists who wished to legitimate their views: several different voices presented a stronger argument together than any of them would separately. Complementary use thus built on difference, and did not lead to the integration of the complementary voices into a single voice. The complementary voices were used as separate but sufficiently similar perspectives to address the same issue and promote similar conclusions.

9.4 Summary: Relational balancing between institutional pressures

The discussions show how the strategy work in Bay City was based on a complex constellation of local logics and how these logics were continuously adapted to each other. The voices were used in relation to each other in constructing the institutional environment in the discussions and responding to the perceived institutional demands. Strategy work emerges in this vignette as a relational search for sufficiently good solutions to the complex institutional demands posed by the local logics enacted in dialogue; the participants sought to balance the demands of the different voices together.

First, this vignette allows us to delve into the complex relations of the institutional voices by showing how they relied on each other for meaning. Enactments of institutional voices in the discussion of attractiveness consistently brought up other voices to support, juxtapose or complement the argument. As the quotations shown above demonstrate, the voices were intertwined from the outset; speakers often employed several voices in the discussions and anticipated comments based on different voices. The voices were used together to assess each other and the desirability of alternate strategic choices for Bay City. In this account, speakers used these institutional voices creatively as discursive tools to solve practical problems and further their interests. Through the dialogical comparison of institutional voices, several institutions came together to ‘speak through’ individual utterances; they reinforced, contested and reinterpreted each other in ways that were both situationally meaningful and politically suitable. The prescriptions of institutional voices were enacted in relation to each other.
and the voices were fit together as they were interpreted. The situated relatedness of these institutions with each other made them useful; as solutions based on an institutional voice were applied, they were placed in the context of other institutional demands, which led to useful compromises and more broadly applicable solutions.

Second, the vignette illustrates how discussants balanced the institutional pressures they enacted by seeking ‘good-enough’ resolutions for the institutional demands constructed by the alternate institutional voices. The institutional pressures enacted in the context of a strategic issue stemmed from several institutional logics and the speakers had to continuously weigh their interpretations of attractiveness and suggested prescriptions against the demands of the different institutional voices. The discussants sought to take into account the demands made through several institutional voices; instead of complete solutions, they settled for ones which satisfied all of them sufficiently well. Choices between alternatives were based on avoidance of clear conflicts and compromise among legitimate demands more than emphasis on any single institutional demand.

Finally, this mini-case is a good example of how strategists avoided contradictions between institutional voices when they first emerged before they evolved into broader conflicts in strategy work. It is notable that my analysis of the strategy discussions emphasized the importance of complementing and constructing the voices as incommensurate. Conflicts between the institutional voices were brief and – as will be discussed in the next chapter – rarely carried over from one meeting to the next. The use of practices of contrasting – when it happened – led speakers to switch topics and the themes constructed as conflicting rarely re-emerged in later meetings.

Institutional dialogism directs our attention to the relational development of institutions in the situated dialogue between institutions as they are applied to the local interactional context. In these interactions, some situated improvisation led to locally useful results, which were picked up and re-enacted in later interactions. This account broadens the model of Smets et al. (2012) by accounting for the situational enactment of a complex institutional environment across societal and field level logics.
10 CREATING A COLLECTIVE STRATEGY THROUGH TEMPORAL CHAINING

We concluded that sustainable development is so inbuilt into us, like equality which we also left out, that we don’t need to include them explicitly [in the strategic plan]. [...] We didn’t discuss this any further, although we know it may be one of the most important issues in the world at the moment. (Council member; City Council seminar, 2009)

While the previous chapters have concentrated on the enactment of institutional voices in individual strategic meetings, the last vignette describes how successive meetings built on each other to form a chain of discussions that led to collective formulation of a central strategic goal. This chapter focuses on temporal chaining: the practices through which strategists developed an emerging strategic theme into accepted text in the strategic plan through successive re-enactments and adaptations of different situated uses of the four institutional voices.

This chapter follows the development of sustainable development into a central strategic theme during formulation of the strategic plan in 2009. I analyse the ways in which strategists built on previous enactments of institutional voices from previous meetings and anticipated possible future enactments of these voices, thus fitting the individual uses of the voices into a collectively understood formulation of the strategic theme which gained broad enough support to be written into the final strategic plan. I describe how the voices commented on each other and moulded how other voices were used in each discussion. Following successive discussions on the same theme allows me to compare differences between the discussions and see how speakers managed differences between the situational sounds of each voice in successive discussions.

This dimension of institutional dialogue is related with both of the previous dimensions; chaining describes the conclusions which strategists drew from the relations negotiated between institutional voices in meetings and how they re-enacted these sounds in later meetings, adapting them to fit new situations. Similarly, this account enriches the previous description of the broadening and narrowing of institutional dialogue by describing the longer cycles of broadening and narrowing of dialogue across meetings as these sounds of voices were discussed in successive meetings and adapted into a final formulation that was written in the strategic plan.

This description resembles Boden’s (1994; see also Samra-Fredericks, 2003) description of forming collective meaning by the lamination of successive interactions, which
repeated similar meanings. Following the chain of successive re-enactments of similar sounds of institutional voices shows how strategists negotiated the acceptability of their suggestions as strategy formulations and took turns at adapting these suggestions in order to make them more broadly acceptable and supposedly more attractive as themes in the strategic plan of Bay City. Over time, this chain led to formulation of a central element in the 2009 strategic plan: the description of sustainable development as a fundamental part of the future of Bay City.

Understanding the situational adaptation of the institutional voices helps us to understand the management of ambiguity in strategy discussions by charting the uncontested settlements or ongoing tension and continual reflexivity between the interpretations.

10.1 Re-enacting the past

This section describes the central practices used by strategists to re-enact previous sounds of institutional voices in the strategy discussions, to formulate and comment on suggestions for goals, descriptions of the environment and other elements to be included in the strategic plan. As strategists discussed suggested formulations of the strategic plans, they built on previous institutional sounds, linking them with each other and adapting them into new combinations. Through such chaining, suggestions were combined with each other and adapted into formulations which were seen positively by a broad enough group of strategists to be written into a draft of the strategic plan and ultimately worked into the final document.

These re-enactments built on previous sounds from the ongoing meeting, as well as previous meetings held in the context of strategy work in Bay City, and relevant formulations outside this context (e.g. by local actors, other city organizations seen as relevant competitors, or by state actors relevant to the theme of sustainable development). My analysis outlines four practices by which strategists re-enacted past sounds of institutional voices to formulate the strategic theme of sustainable development: linking, challenging, appropriating and silencing.

Speakers chained situations and sounds of institutional voices by linking them to previous sounds of institutional voices. These (often positive) repetitions played an important part in the adoption of new strategy formulations as into the text of the strategic plan. In these re-enactments, previous candidate formulations were reformulated, praised, criticized, linked with new topics, or had their consequences evaluated. Such re-enactments transferred formulations to new discussion forums, recontextualized
them and linked them with new strategic themes. In this way, they acted as means for assessing the proposed formulation in relation with the strategy and the descriptions of the organisational environment linked with strategy discussions. These re-enactments ranged from brief references to detailed descriptions of suggested strategy formulations. The following assessment of sustainable development is a typical example:

SM  Do you see that these four or five suggestions could be values which the City can realize in its actions?
M1  Commenting on sustainable development, I think that the Technical Services Division have launched it, and written it into practices or goals [...] so that it [has been made into] a value that all divisions could easily adopt as their own.
M2  It just comes from the work we’ve done on the Aalborg Commitments [for sustainable development], which includes the promotion of sustainable development in all divisions. We could apply it to topics like population growth – that we’re not looking for a tremendous growth, but for some kind of sustainable growth...
SM  But there’s the problem with [the situation of] Bay City that if it’s this kind of sustainable growth, it will not sustain our economy. (Strategy Team meeting, 2009)

In this discussion from the first recorded meeting of the 2009 round of strategy discussions, two middle managers assess the relevance of sustainable development as a value for Bay City. After M1 commented on the formulations of the Technical Services division, the third speaker linked these with the process by which Bay City had aligned to the Aalborg Commitments – a European urban environment sustainability initiative which Bay City has signed. This process applied the use of sustainable development in the previous strategy, which combined ecological and social sustainability with a conception of ‘sustainable growth’. This is visible in the third comment, where the representative of the Technical Services division suggested that this formulation of sustainable development implied harmonious growth that would not tax the ecological or social environments of the city. The Strategy Manager (SM) responded by referring to the use of the Market voice in the previous strategy; Bay City would urgently need to attract economical growth to attain the economical resources necessary for its survival. These references to previous discussions together linked the discussion with the broader strategy process and enabled the discussants to efficiently fit together and reformulate central themes of the strategy into a new combination that was relevant to the topic at hand – crafting a suggestion for the value statement of the city.

Linking often took the form of combining several previously mentioned formulations, and crafting from them a broader formulation of a strategic goal:
I'm not very excited about the concept 'sustainable development', but it's the only term we have which balances ecological concerns with economic growth, cultural sustainability, and social sustainability. Sustainable development means that Bay City is a place for people of different ages and different kinds – their communities, so to say. That Bay City feels like home to its citizens – a nice place to visit and stay in. But it easily turns into a useless concept if it doesn't have a small edge to it. That’s why the last paragraph has been included, to emphasize the environmental perspective that’s original to sustainable development. The city organization improves the energy and material efficiency of its own actions, and guides inhabitants and others to act in environmentally friendly ways. Even though this strategy primarily guides the City Council and the City organization, it can also be used to discuss actions which also guide inhabitants. Sustainable development will not become reality unless also our inhabitants act according to its prescriptions. (Strategy Manager, City Council seminar, 2009)

The example above illustrates how comments linking previously used sounds of institutional voices to the suggested formulations could clarify the possible meanings of the formulation. Above, the Strategy Manager offered sustainable development as a way to balance different, positive ‘concerns’. These concerns referenced different institutional voices. The “ecological concerns”, “social […] and cultural sustainability” refer to previous use of the Welfare State voice by emphasizing these concerns as uncompromised value, and it is complemented by the homeliness of Bay City for the communities of “people of different ages and kinds,” the Market voice (“economic growth”, “a nice place to visit and stay in”), and economic efficiency (“improv[ing] energy and material efficiency”). After defining his use of sustainable development, the Strategy Manager described his suggestion for complementing this visionary guidance with concrete “prescriptions” on environmental goals, which aimed at guiding the decisions of the City organization, its inhabitants and any other relevant actors in Bay City. This “balance”, however, was left ambiguous in this view of the strategy, as neither this comment nor later exchanges clarified how this goal in the strategy document would guide action related to these concerns. The appealing description of the different concerns balanced by sustainable development did not include a similarly appealing account of the possible relations between these concerns or discuss the solution of the conflicts foreseen between them. The treatment of such conflicts was left to later discussions.

Second, speakers challenged previous sounds of institutional voices by juxtaposing two sounds of (either the same or different) institutional voices in order to criticize one of them, or point at a problem with its inclusion in the strategic plan. In addition to describing two views as conflicting, this use aimed at influencing the formation of the strategy by changing the suggested formulation. The challenging did not necessarily
include direct arguments for abandoning the discussed formulation. In addition, speakers often described inconsistencies and other smaller challenges for including formulations in the strategic plans, inviting suggestions for responding to these challenges (or even making such suggestions directly). This is exemplified in the following politician’s comment on a draft of the strategy:

Thinking of these goals 15 years on, I don't think I would want to live in a model city of ecologically sustainable development, or the leading centre of green technology. I wouldn’t move to a place like that – from my own perspective, I think that would be a really boring place. (City Board member, City Council seminar, 2009)

Here, the speaker commented on the current draft of the strategy document by contrasting two central strategic goals: the suggested formulation of Bay City as a “centre of green technology” with the higher goal of attracting new inhabitants and improving the tax income. His statement questioned the viability of the goal for achieving the desired results, claiming that a narrow focus on technology would conflict with the higher goal of attractiveness and economic vitality. He used the Market voice to oppose the prominent use of this same voice – competition for businesses in the field for green technology – by giving this voice a new sound. Referencing the Market-based account (described in the previous chapter) by which cities competed for new citizens with their attractive lived environments, he set these two views against each other.

These challenges were often directed at improving the formulations more than questioning their inclusion in the strategic plan. The successful resolution of such challenges in subsequent discussion could strengthen the formulation significantly by adapting it to respond better to the perceived requirements of the institutional environment, such as in the following vignette:

M1 I feel that sustainable development is... in a way, suffering inflation [in our discussions...] It is a difficult [label]. Can anyone here think of something new that would bring some new insight to it?
SM That’s why I further defined it [in the following sentence]. Sustainable development tends to be linked with the environment pretty often these days [laughs]. [...] I originally wrote here that ‘the city decreases its environmental emissions and improves its energy efficiency. But this turned out to be difficult, because it may prevent our growth. (Strategy Team meeting, 2009)

Referring to previous comments, the first speaker challenged the usefulness of sustainable development for the strategy because of its ambiguity. The speaker asked participants to clarify the meaning of sustainable development in the strategy discussions.
The Strategy Manager responds by acknowledging this concern, and opening a discussion on the need to specify the use of sustainable development and its implications for the strategy. The ensuing discussion was both constructive and useful for later meetings, leading the discussants to focus their use of sustainable development, which made the theme more useful for later meetings.

Indeed, at times challenging resembled a calculated way of strengthening a suggested formulation; by posing a challenge which could be resolved without confrontations, speakers could direct the attention of the participants (as well as the time available for discussing the topic) to a presumably easy challenge and move the discussion away from potentially more serious challenges. In Bay City, such easily resolvable challenges led to the introduction of new institutional sounds which supported the discussed formulation and allowed the discussant making the challenge to appear neutral or critical of the suggestion. Such challenging frequently served to maintain the institutional dialogue; it built on assessing the suggested formulations openly and constructively, using alternate perspectives and without participants taking personal positions in the debate.

Third, strategists appropriated strategic themes for their own purposes by attempting to redefine the theme in ways which broke from their previous use in the strategy discussion. In Appropriation, speakers redefined an already legitimate strategic theme or label in a way which aimed to change its effect on the organizational action. This was done either by combining it with another, previously used theme (see the next example below) or by introducing a new meaning to the targeted label (see the example on public transportation on the following page). The established labels helped link new initiatives and interests to established positive meanings. When successful, such efforts moved strategy discussions to a new direction; by shaping the meanings of strategic themes already used in the strategy discussions, actors could have a major influence on the organization’s strategy with relatively small changes in the formulation of the strategic plan.

It should be noted that most attempted appropriations were unsuccessful; they were not repeated in later utterances, and did not affect the wording of the strategy. For a clear example of an unsuccessful attempt at appropriation, the following quotation from a city council meeting shows a novel use of ecological sustainability to argue for favouring private car traffic in the city centre:
With regard to sustainable development, is this the right starting point? Public transport and cycling lanes are a part of it, but if we think about how small a percentage of people agrees to use them, and about the size of the city. [...] I think this paragraph should highlight that the structure of the community, infrastructure, is built [...] so that there’s as little congestion as possible. So that those who use their own cars can move as flexibly as possible, since they can’t get from A to B by public transport. So as a criterion then, the flow of traffic; measures of congestion, the emissions created in congestion, then that’s an even more important part of sustainable development than public traffic. 

(Council member, City Council meeting, May 2009)

Here, the speaker did not question the applicability of the sustainable development in the question of improving the local transportation system: instead, she drew on the positive goal of ecological sustainability to prioritize the improvement of private car traffic through the city centre (that being the natural and popular mode of transport, regardless of the actions of the city). The speaker’s argument seems to support a specific sound of the Market voice; she described the will of the citizens as the stable, undisputable choice of (consumer-) citizens, and argued that the task of the City was to respond to this demand by removing obstacles to the free flow of traffic, thus decreasing the resulting emissions. Similarly, she argued that few people would “agree to use” public transportation, obliging the City to follow the invisible hand of the market.

The speaker attempted to change the interpretation of the strategic theme of sustainability from the improvement of public transportation (seen by previous speakers as a part of creating an image of Bay City as a ‘green city’) to facilitating the flow of private cars through the city centre. However, this appropriation of the strategic theme failed to gain traction with the other participants; it was not commented on at the time, was not referred to in later discussions, and did not form a part of the strategic plan.

To give an example of a successful appropriation during the strategy round of 2009, the Strategy Manager was able to successfully link sustainable development with attractiveness, appropriating the widespread support and legitimacy of sustainable development to cover concerns of securing resources (linked through economic sustainability) as a strategic priority. The appropriation effort culminated in rewriting the strategic plan so that sustainable development was seen as a source of competitive advantage that enabled the City to attract companies and ‘green business professionals’. This new meaning for sustainable development existed alongside the previous meanings. The Strategy Manager harnessed the theme of sustainable development as a way to improve the attractiveness and economical vitality of the city in the following way:
The positive connotations of ‘sustainability’ were here taken up in a new setting, and linked with the goal of maintaining the resource base of the city organization. The Strategy Manager formulated sustainable development as first and foremost a way to improve the competitiveness of Bay City by enabling it to attract new businesses and inhabitants. The previously dominant formulations of “ecologically sustainable development” and “good standards of living and housing” were harnessed as “strengths” to “complement” the competitive strategy of the city – not as ends in themselves, as before.

Appropriating the theme of sustainable development into the introduction of these strategic decisions was useful since ‘sustainable development’ was a broadly supported and highly legitimate element of the strategy. At the same time, the previously central voices of social and ecological sustainability were temporarily demoted to a secondary role, as they fit the new appropriation only as justifications to support entrepreneurs in the environmental sector. This appropriation caught on in the strategy discussions and was supported and linked with a broad spectrum of voices during the strategic planning cycle. It was written into a central strategic goal in the resulting strategic plan:

Bay City is a growing city with high vitality [...] To reach this goal Bay City profiles itself as a leading green city that combines the sustainable development of the whole city with strong environmental expertise and a position as a centre of environmental business. (Final strategy document, 2009)

The new strategy described sustainable development as a method for achieving the higher goal of economic vitality, in line with the first suggestion described above. This attempt to appropriate themes thus ‘stuck’ in the strategy discussions; it successfully introduced new meanings, redirected the conversation agenda and provided legitimacy to new initiatives.

Last, use by strategists of the proposed strategic choices often attempted to silence alternative choices. A central example of silencing is the transition in the meanings of sustainable development visible in the examples above. As the discussions progressed,
the traditionally prominent use of sustainable development as a virtue in itself gave way to its use as a competitive tool in the markets for businesses and well-educated taxpayers – and ultimately economic growth. For example, let us return to the results of the successful appropriation of sustainable development in the strategic plan, quoted above. This formulation stands in sharp contrast to the previous strategic plans, which described a different understanding of sustainable development:

Bay City is a centre of growth. This means an increase in the population, as well as the amounts of jobs and companies. The growth leads to improvements in the employment rate and the economy of the city. This makes possible the prerequisites of the well-being of inhabitants and sustainable development.

(Final strategy document, 2006)

Both quotations, taken from final strategy documents three years apart, build on the theme of sustainable development. However, the priorities given to the theme are different enough to be almost opposite. In the strategic plan of 2006, sustainable development is described as a fundamental goal of the city, whereas the 2009 strategic plan positioned sustainable development as an instrument for economic ends. While the Welfare State voice (e.g. in “sustainable development of the whole city”, “the prerequisites of the well-being of inhabitants and sustainable development”, respectively) and Market voice (e.g. “high vitality”, “centre of growth”) are present in both, the use of institutional voices in these formulations is fundamentally different. The 2006 goal very clearly harnesses growth as a way of attaining the higher goals (or “prerequisites”) of improved well-being and sustainable development of the region. In a repetition of the discussion in the above example on appropriation, the 2009 formulation downplayed the previously central use of sustainable development, especially its ecological dimension, as a value with an intrinsic ethical and societal significance.

The practices of re-enacting the past described above blurred the authorship of the suggested formulations. In the course of several consecutive re-enactments, the source of the formulation was often left unmentioned. Additionally, repetition and adaptation were required for an interpretation to be written into the strategic plan. Before a formulation was written into the draft of the strategic plan, it was discussed at several successive meetings of different groups, adapted and agreed upon. The adaptations of suggested formulations often changed them in ways that made them more broadly applicable to the strategy and these discussions were seen as fundamental to gaining the acceptance of the community of strategists.
10.2 Anticipating the future

In addition to building on previous uses of the institutional voices, the temporal chaining of utterances anticipated the future interpretations of participants on the candidate strategies, either during each ongoing meeting, in future meetings during the strategic planning process or later, as the resulting strategy would be used in Bay City and beyond. I will describe this anticipation through a single practice: anticipating interpretations.

First, in anticipating interpretations strategists adapted the suggested formulation based on a discussion of the possible ways in which this formulation might be interpreted by eventual readers, either during the strategic planning cycle or later, should the formulation become accepted as a part of the plan.

This anticipation of interpretations was prominent in the discussions between managers assessing the views of the political decision-makers, as in the following comment made by the Strategy Manager in the first observed meeting of the 2009 round of strategy discussions:

I’d be happy to hear comments on this, if this kind of suggestion was to end up there [in the City Council] at some point. Could Bay City choose as the basis of its strategy work a set of values that states that the City is innovative and embraces change? There’s wellbeing, citizen satisfaction, communality and participation. [...] How do you think the Council would comment on this? You know the Council members and the atmosphere much better than I do. Or on the other hand, what will people in our divisions say if we choose these formulations? *(Strategy Manager, Strategy Team Meeting, 2009)*

The Strategy Manager asked other discussants for comments on a preliminary draft of the organisational value statement. The statement lists values which in Bay City were linked with various institutional voices, drawn together in a specific constellation. The list begins with innovativeness and change, which were linked with the dire economic situation constructed through the Economizing voice. It balances this with values of wellbeing and citizen satisfaction, which introduce the Welfare State voice and the Communality voice ("communality and participation"). The Strategy Manager offered these values as a basis for the strategic choices that were to be discussed during the round of strategy work and asked the managers present in this meeting to reflect on how politicians might react to these values. The playful and speculative tone of this remark illustrates how strategists actively used voices which did not describe their personal opinions in the strategy discussions.
The interpretations others would make of suggested formulations to strategy work often played a central role in the strategy discussions. The following vignette illustrates the detailed level of the anticipation of these interpretations:

M  With regard to sustainable development, we need to discuss how green a goal we want to make it. The starting point was global environmental sustainability, and I think that's where the contents come from.
D1  We'll make it blue-green.
SM  That makes it a Coalition Party-Greens alliance.
D1  Oh – so that would be the interpretation?
SM  Yes, people would interpret it politically. That's why green is a difficult term to use, since people will identify it with a single party [the Greens of Finland].
M  And some do the same with blue [blue is the signature colour of the National Coalition Party]. *(Management Team seminar, 2009)*

Here, the Mayor’s (M) original question on the role of ecological sustainability in the formulation of a strategic goal turns into a discussion of colours; after the Director of Education makes a light-hearted suggestion to combine the suggested ‘green’ of the ecological dimension with another colour, the Strategy Manager turns the discussion towards the possible interpretations on the political ownership of the goal. He argues that the formulation should avoid any clear hints of alignment with a single political group’s agenda to remain broadly acceptable to decision makers. Although the tone of the discussion is light and humorous, the vignette ends with an agreement that the formulations of the goals should be well thought out in order to appeal broadly to the decision-makers – up to the choice of colour in which these goals were presented.

The anticipation of future interpretations often concentrated on pre-empting later criticism during the strategic planning cycle. This practice was notable both for its prominence and its weight in affecting the formulations; due to the consensual nature of decision-making on strategy in Bay City, strategists assigned special importance to the prospective criticism that central stakeholders could make of the suggested formulations. Since conflicts were uncommon, a single conflict could become a significant obstacle to the acceptance of the formulation. The following example illustrates the centrality of pre-empting criticism:

The ‘model city of sustainable development’ [formulation] is extremely difficult. It includes weaknesses [of Bay City], and advancing this goal calls for a great amount of political work. At the latest when new urban plans go forward, people [citizens and decision makers] will start to get nervous and ask if choosing such big goals is feasible for us. I think they are, but it’s not evident that others will agree [laughs]. *(Strategy Manager, Strategy Team meeting, 2009)*
The speaker here argues that the ability of strategists to convince others of the feasibility of the strategy would have a strong impact on the ability of the City organization to advance the chosen goals. This was especially prominent in the sustainable development discussion; the choice to become a ‘green city’, as formulated in the final strategic plan, was ambitious and was seen to involve a need for broad and consistent actions across the board – actions which might not be appealing to all the politicians and managers who would need to act on the strategy or the citizens whose support would be necessary to mandate the action.

The following example, from another meeting of the strategy team, illustrates how the broad acceptance of strategic goals was seen as central not only to the formulation of the strategy, but also to the ability of Bay City to fulfil these goals:

> I see that Bay City has an enormous opportunity with sustainable development, environmental friendliness [...]. But it is a decision of such magnitude that, like [a previous speaker] said, you can doubt that the Council and others can commit to acting in accordance to it in all sectors and walks of life. *(Senior manager, Strategy Team meeting, 2009)*

To craft a strategy which would reflect the political will of the citizens and decision-makers and thus achieve this commitment, the strategists spent a significant amount of time on discussing the views and possible interpretations of these decision-makers. Anticipation of interpretations was thus an important tool by which strategists assessed the feasibility of strategic choices.

The anticipation of future interpretations is an illustrative example of the addressivity of the discussions (Bakhtin, 1986c); the talk and texts produced in strategy discussions were specifically aimed towards the other participants in each meeting and to the broader community of strategists (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996). In speaking, strategists sought to elicit responses from other participants (both those present and those strategists participating in later meetings), and to direct these responses towards their suggested interpretations.

Additionally, the above examples show a new facet of institutional dialogue; the institutional voices were often applied speculatively and playfully, without strong commitment to a position. In this way, strategists could try out new interpretations and adapt the voices to each other and the situation without exposing themselves to personal criticism. Hence, the political nature of the organization and the linguistic division of labour between experts of different fields strengthened the dialogical nature of discus-
sions; even uncomfortable voices were not bypassed. Instead, acknowledging critical voices and integrating them in promoted arguments was seen to improve the likelihood that the argument favoured would be accepted as part of the strategy.

**10.3 Summary**

This mini-case has described the crafting of an organizational strategy as a series of meetings, connected into a continuous process of interpretation and negotiation, where the broad group of strategists collectively wrote and edited the strategy text and its meanings. This process took place through the practices of collective chaining; the continuous re-enactment of specific sounds of institutional voices in different discussions, which allowed for the adaptation and debate between different situational sounds and anticipated future interpretations of the strategic plan in order to guide organizational action. The chaining of suggested formulations allowed strategists to adapt them to the uses of institutional voices in different discussions. These situational sounds were used together in later discussions to craft a collective strategy — these voices were “passed through” these discussions, “sounding differently in each” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 278–279; see also Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008). For example, the Welfare State voice took on a different sound when it was used to describe sustainable development as the guardianship of the natural environment than in the same discussion to legitimize the harnessing of sustainable development as a way to improve the attractiveness of the City. Both were applications of the same voice, but to very different ends. In this way, chaining was used to create agreement, craft compromises and allow for useful ambiguity between different sounds of the institutional voices.

The temporal chains created through re-enacting previous sounds and anticipating future interpretations connected the treatment of suggested themes in polyphonic strategy meetings, and the formulations of these themes into documents such as drafts of the strategic plan, meeting minutes and Power Point presentations. Over time, the repetition and adaptation of similar sounds in the alternation of relatively monological written documents and polyphonic discussions led to the development of the final strategic plan; discussants assessed the previous monologization in strategy meetings and recombined its key ingredients polyphonically, negotiating successive drafts of the strategic plan.

In order to be included in the strategic plan, a formulation had to pass muster in several different strategy meetings and be linked with rest of the strategic plan and the other
formulations being made in the discussions. These re-enactments often significantly changed the initial formulation, linking it and adapting it to new situations and themes, voicing it through new sounds of institutional voices and pre-empting later criticism.

As my vignettes illustrate, some ideas and topics were privileged over others in these temporal chains. The discussion of sustainable development focused attention on particular issues that consequently gained a dominant position in the strategy discussions and the official strategic plans. Their frequent use also reproduced specific subject positions and power relations within the organization; in practice, managers who could use this strategy jargon and show their expertise became key strategists while other actors often struggled to make their voices heard. This account highlights the discursive skills required of actors who wished to participate and contribute to the strategy process. For example, the Strategy Manager was particularly well equipped to craft and sell strategic analyses and corresponding initiatives to both civil servants and the politicians in part because of his competent use of the strategy discourse and to link the strategic themes with this basis for legitimacy. Additionally, he made use of his position as the coordinator of the strategy project: his role included spanning the boundaries of the different discussion forums, summarizing their discussions in later meetings. As can be seen in the examples above, this enabled him to comment on, reinterpret, and prioritize previous views as he reported them forward.

These observations lead to an exploration of whose ideas and topics formed the process of chaining by which the strategic plan was formulated. Although my research did not explicitly focus on the power implications of processes of institutional dialogue, my analysis charts a clear change which the discussion of the themes of self-responsibility, attractiveness, and sustainable development had on the strategy work of Bay City. During negotiation of sustainable development as a strategic issue in 2009, sustainable development was redefined from being an intrinsic value of the City organization to being primarily an instrument for improving the attractiveness of the City; it was used as a legitimizing tool for attracting environmental technology companies to Bay City and as a coordinating theme for organizing the actions of the city in a way which supported the attractiveness of these businesses, and would make Bay City into a “leading green city”. This account is reminiscent of Oakes et al. (1998), who described the rise of business planning in a cultural organization as a conceptual redefinition of the organization, affecting the actions of participants and also the ways in which they conceived the organization and its tasks. Similarly, the use of the four institutional voices to bring
together the various themes of strategy emphasized the neoliberal, economical conceptions of the city organizations, and guided the strategists to increasingly use the competitive and economy-based interpretations of the City instead of others (cf. also the implications of strategy discourse in Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). This analysis suggests that negotiation of meanings in dialogue also guided the views of central decision-makers in addition to staff and employees, describing how these meanings unfolded in small incremental steps over time without an express decision to mould the meanings assigned to central labels such as sustainable development.
DISCUSSION

The last part draws together the findings presented above into a theoretical model and discusses the contributions of the study in relation to previous research on strategy as practice. I have set two goals for this study. My first goal was to describe how participants continuously craft the different voices present in strategy work into a collective strategy – a partially shared understanding (Mantere, 2013) that balances useful ambiguity with the sharedness of meaning needed for coordinating action. Second, I have aimed to complement our understanding of the role of the broader societal and macro-institutional contexts for strategy work (Balogun et al., 2014; Seidl, 2007; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2013) by describing how the complex relations between different institutions are dialogically managed and fit together in strategy discussions.

This approach has enabled me to describe the work of meanings at the heart of strategy work. Specifically, I have looked at the negotiation of a complex institutional environment into a collective strategy by studying the enactment of pluralistic social institutions in strategy work. I have analysed strategy work as embedded in broader societal and macro-institutional contexts and described how various institutional pressures are managed dialogically and fit together in strategy discussions. A central part of strategy work is its use to understand the environment and coordinate action; hence strategy work relates the organization to a broader context that enables concerted, strategic action (Knights & Morgan, 1991).

I have argued that we do not know enough about how this institutional environment is reflected on strategy work. Understanding this better will enable us to understand how strategists construct a collective strategy. On the basis of Bakhtin’s (1984, 1986b) work on dialogue, I have looked at the institutional environment as a continuous negotiation of different institutional voices, set in complex relations. I see this negotiation of the perceived institutional environment as central to both the coordination of action and the creation of shared understanding in strategy work.

To fulfil these goals, I’ve described the ways in which strategists in Bay City employed the strategic themes of ‘attractiveness’, ‘self-responsibility’ and ‘sustainable development’ in crafting successive strategy documents through the period 1995-2013. In this part, I will move from these empirical results to discuss their theoretical contributions, limitations and avenues for further research.
11 CRAFTING A COLLECTIVE STRATEGY THROUGH INSTITUTIONAL DIALOGUE

Understanding a sentence in language is much more akin to understanding a theme in music than one may think. (Wittgenstein, 2009, § 527)

This chapter collects the empirical elements described above into a model of the creation of a collective strategy under institutional complexity. I have defined a collective strategy as a broadly shared set of meanings which constructs goals and coordinates for collective action despite differences of opinion and interest (Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Mantere, 2013). Hence, collective strategy refers to the problem, described in Chapter 2.2, of forming a broadly shared system of meanings which constructs goals and coordinates collective action despite differences of opinion and interest. A collective strategy brings different perspectives together into a strategy that is both clear enough to coordinate action and flexible enough to allow acceptance and adaptation to the needs of different interests and situations.

I have studied this balancing through the continuous enactment of locally relevant institutions in the construction of a collective strategy, describing this process as a continuous dialogue between institutional voices. My analysis has concentrated on the use of the locally enacted institutional environment in constructing a collective strategy. In constructing successive strategic plans for Bay City, strategists negotiated different views of their own organization and also of the competitors, citizens, environmental challenges and opportunities they considered relevant. Taking an institutional view of these negotiations enabled me to study the ways in which strategists enacted the broadly shared norms and beliefs in the context of strategy discussions and negotiated the complex views they applied into collective, partially shared accounts.

In this chapter, I will construct these findings into a theoretical model, showing the process by which the institutional dialogue described in the previous chapters gave rise to a collective strategy in Bay City. I will next describe the three central features of the collective strategy in Bay City illustrated by my findings. Firstly, the collective strategy emerged in the contextualized dialogue between participants who voiced different views of the City and its future. Secondly, the meetings in which this dialogue took place were connected by the written strategic plans produced by them and by the spoken strategy which shaped their meanings in the organizational community. Thirdly, the collective strategy came to life as these live events were brought together in chains of dialogue, connecting the institutional ideas produced and continuously developing
them further. After describing these three central features, I will draw them together into an account of the process of institutional dialogue through which this collective strategy emerged.

11.1 Collective strategy in strategy meetings

My analysis of strategy work as a dialogue illustrates the creation of collective strategy in interactions – in the strategy meetings where the politicians and managers came together to discuss and decide on the strategic direction of Bay City. In these interactions, they created the strategy as an ongoing dialogue between related voices, negotiated to fit together but ever apart. The participants in these interactions crafted the beginnings of a collective strategy by bringing together the various perspectives on the organization, relating them to each other and crafting situational combinations of these voices as the basis for later strategy work. Figure 1 below summarizes the role of the interactions in crafting the collective strategy.

**Figure 1 The basis of collective strategy in strategy meetings**

The strategy discussions brought the participants together to discuss issues that had proved relevant to the strategic planning process in previous meetings. As the participants discussed the central issues structured by the strategy work, they applied a variety of institutionally founded perspectives on the organization, its environment, and actions in polyphonic and often seemingly contradictory ways. These perspectives emerged in my analysis as four *institutional voices* - ideological perspectives which
were made up of shared, institutional beliefs which were repeated and made relevant to the strategy discussions. These institutional voices (the Welfare State, Community, Economizing, and Market voices) were used to make the broader institutional environment of strategy work relevant to the strategy work in Bay City and to each issue under discussion (see chapter 7). These voices were used contextually; they were adapted to the context of strategy work in Bay City. At the same time, continued use of these voices enacted and re-enacted this environment in the strategy discussions; thus these local institutions constructed the basis for action, while the action reconstructed the institutions to make them relevant to the context of strategy work (see also Barley & Tolbert, 1997).

The use of these institutional voices in strategy meetings built on the history of previous strategy discussions in Bay City, constructed through 1) references to previous documents and suggestions for strategy formulations made during the strategy work, 2) the meanings negotiated through the previous sounds of the institutional voices and 3) the other features of the material context and strategy practices considered relevant to the issue at hand. These three bases of strategy discussions are shown in the incoming arrows on the left-hand side of Figure 1. I will next summarize the ways in which these were used to construct collective strategy in strategy meetings.

First, the strategy discussions drew on previous strategic plans and other documents such as meeting minutes, PowerPoint summaries, and suggestions for strategy formulations crafted during the strategy work. As noted in Chapter 8, cycles of broadening and narrowing dialogue were apparent in the strategy meetings. The discussion was opened up for debate in each meeting and summarized into a written document at the end of the meeting. Subsequent meetings built on these summaries; a new meeting often started with a report on the results of previous meetings based on the summary (in the form of a draft of the strategy document, Power Point slides, or meeting minutes), and formulated the task or problem to be solved in the next discussion. These summaries – enacted in either the formal presentations of secretaries of previous meetings or the utterances of other witnesses – brought elements from the previous discussions to each meeting, interpreting the views expressed in the previous meeting and translating them for the participants in the current discussion.

Strategists referred to the work performed in previous meetings through the suggested formulations for the strategic plan and documents crafted in these previous meetings – they were treated as the tangible results of previous strategy meetings. In this way, the-
se documents and suggested formulations for the strategic plan carried forward the situational applications to the interactional contexts in each meeting discussion and to each strategic issue discussed in these meetings. Together with the (unwritten) sounds of institutional voices enacted in the meetings, the documents linked meetings together, enabling the adaptation of meeting discussions to views beyond those represented by the participants. The written documents produced in strategy meetings had a different role in bridging between meetings than the spoken strategy; this will be elaborated in Chapter 11.2 below.

Second, and as described in Chapter 7, these enactments applied the voices to the issues at hand; the voices did not reveal themselves as general interpretations of the city or its future, but as contextually meaningful interpretations, applied and made relevant in specific meetings – as situational sounds of institutional voices (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008). Enactments of these institutional voices applied them in relation to the strategic issues they discussed and refracted them through the views of central participants in strategy regarding the City organization and its future. Hence these institutional voices were visible not as abstract entities, but as emergent patterns of similar arguments used to interpret and influence the strategy work of Bay City. Combinations of these situational sounds were developed into new expressions of the organizational strategy both in the form of written documents and later discussions of these situational sounds in other settings. These institutional voices were therefore important to understanding development of the strategy discussions.

Third, the dialogue in strategy meetings also built substantially on other features of the organizational context. Strategy work was structured and divided by the strategic themes (such as those described through the three strategic themes studied in this work) which were constructed during the strategy discussions. The ongoing dialogue between these voices was central to development of the organizational strategy; the voices were used in strategy meetings to make the institutional environment relevant to the issues discussed (Chapter 8) and these discussions led to agreement on situational settlements which reconciled these voices (Chapter 10).

In addition to these contextual inputs for strategy discussions, the aims and projected outcomes of strategy discussions guided the dialogue. The strategy discussions aimed explicitly at making concrete conclusions on specific issues, with the ultimate goal of formulating the strategic plan of Bay City. The participants formulated suggestions for texts to be accepted in later meetings, negotiated appropriate meanings (and anticipat-
ed misunderstandings) for formulations, related the sounds of institutional voices together, and formed an institutional settlement; a conclusion of the discussion, which could be used as the basis for later discussion. These settlements could be more or less exact, ranging from an ambiguous agreement to disagree to written and verbal reports on agreement and monological suggestions for the strategy. In this way, the institutional dialogue in strategy meetings brought together a polyphony of voices and used them to enact the central issues of strategy work from several different perspectives.

These institutional settlements were situational instead of organizationally shared; the institutional voices enacted in different meetings and strategic themes were slightly different in tone (see chapters 9 and 10) and appeared as complementary, conflicting or incommensurate in different situations (Chapter 9). This situational ambiguity in the use of institutions was central to assessment of the acceptability and implications of the candidate strategies (Chapter 8). The ability of strategists to concentrate on the situation at hand – instead of always seeking meanings which would be directly useful across the whole strategy process – enabled them to discuss each topic in concrete terms and express their ideas freely. These settlements, then, were written into summaries of meeting discussions, and employed in later discussions (see chapter 10).

11.2 Written and spoken strategy

The alternation between meeting discussions and documents described above describes the continuous creation of a collective strategy through the evolution of two forms of strategy that have different roles in strategy work: written and spoken strategy. Formulations and drafts meant for inclusion in the formal strategic plan – a concise written document, written in the rationalistic language prescribed by strategy textbooks – were complemented by the polyphonic use of overlapping, partially shared voices which built on the written strategy and applied it to the complex organizational context.

The written strategy evident in efforts to achieve monology in the strategic plan and the polyphonic spoken strategy emerged in my analysis as connected dimensions of strategy work; their coexistence and interplay enabled the strategists to maintain sufficient clarity of meaning while adapting the written strategy in their talk to fit a broader variety of needs. The written and spoken strategies were mutually constitutive; all strategy work focused on the creation of the strategic plan, while this text became meaningful only through its use in subsequent interactions.
The **written strategy** of Bay City consisted of a formal strategic plan written and accepted for use by the management of the organization and a collection of memos, presentations and drafts for the strategy text written and circulated by the participants. The written strategy of Bay City aimed for simplicity, clarity and acceptability to all central stakeholders. The strategists carefully analysed the various possible readings of suggestions for the text and sought to formulate it in a way which would be interpreted in similar fashion by politicians, managers and citizens alike and be acceptable to all these groups. The written strategy was seen as ideally monologic; the accepted texts adopted the genre of corporate strategy, which emphasized rational choice, a controllable future and positive developments.

This written strategy gained its meanings and power through continuous interpretations and adaptations in later discussions. It was formed by the domain of **spoken strategy** crafted during strategy work – in the utterances of the strategists in the observed meetings and in other interaction observed and referred to in our data (most visibly in our research interviews). The participants constantly introduced new themes, adapted them to the context of the strategy under development, negotiated their meanings and interpreted them and finally adopted the accepted strategic plan for use. The participants built their talk on the use of several voices in different combinations – they combined different ideas, interpreted and commented on the views of others, anticipated future reactions to suggestions and balanced their views openly between alternatives. In discussing strategy texts, “strategists breathe[d] life into them and [made] them meaningful for their present purposes” (Samra-Fredericks, 2003: 143). The written strategy thus gained its meanings from the spoken strategy.

Despite its attempts at clarity and monology, the written strategy was crafted in a polyphonic dialogue and remained loaded with strong and often conflicting meanings. Similarly, the polyphonic spoken strategy was by no means without rules; as described in Chapter 9, the interaction revealed continuous negotiation of appropriate interpretations of the strategic plan and the regulation or silencing of unwanted interpretations. Application of a strategy text is a rhetorical act, where active interpretation and the ability to convince an audience of the interpretation taken are required. These meanings developed with time, and even when consecutive strategic plans changed little, interpretations of them could change significantly.

Together, these spoken views of the strategy gave life to a broader, richer view of the strategy. They formed the collective strategy as an ongoing dialogue; the various voices
used by participants together crafted the discursive context in which the strategy gained its meanings.

11.3 Chains of interactions in institutional dialogue

As the strategy work proceeded from meeting to meeting, suggested formulations based on situational sounds of the institutional voices were re-enacted and adapted to new situational settings and laminated over time into the text of the strategic plan. Similarly, negotiation of these sounds influenced the interpretation of the strategic plan without passing through the text of the strategic plan. I will next look at the construction of the strategic plan and interpretations of it over the course of time.

The meeting discussions were focused on producing and developing suggested formulations for the strategic plan. During or after each meeting, these were usually written down in documents (meeting minutes, PowerPoint summaries or drafts of the strategic plan); sometimes the participants simply repeated their own views of these formulations in later meetings. As these formulations were repeated in later meetings (as described in Chapter 10), they became a part of the shared reality of the strategy discussions; they were commented on, criticized, adapted to fit other formulations and developed further. Each suggested formulation included certain definitions, interpretations and prioritizations of Bay City and its strategy – they carried specific sounds of the institutional voices from discussion to discussion.

These sounds combined the institutional voices in situationally relevant ways and often required adaptation to fit into the broader construction of the strategic plan. While the sounds of the institutional voices mostly repeated similar, yet evolving perspectives across different meetings, there were at times significant differences in the sounds of specific institutional voices across meetings and in the strategies suggested by them. Relations between different situational settlements were defined in discussions; the strategists could regard the meanings and relations between different institutional voices as similar without the differences between interpretations interfering with agreement on a collective strategy. The organizational strategy was composed of the strategic plan and its accepted meanings. Both of these were crafted through a continuous process of negotiation, which is described through the dimension of temporal chaining.

Through chaining, strategists re-enacted discussions in previous meetings and anticipated future discussions: These practices connected meetings with different partici-
pants, all of whom would never meet together, into a collective discussion. Chaining describes the conclusions which strategists drew from the relations negotiated between institutional voices in meetings and how they re-enacted these sounds in later meetings, adapting them to fit new situations. Similarly, this account enriches the previous description of the broadening and narrowing of institutional dialogue by describing the longer cycles of broadening and narrowing of dialogue across meetings as these sounds of voices were discussed in successive meetings and adapted into the text of the strategic plan.

This description resembles Boden’s (1994; see also Samra-Fredericks, 2003) description of forming collective meaning by the lamination of successive interactions that repeated similar meanings. For example, the suggestion of the Strategy Manager (described as an appropriation on page 137) that Bay City could improve its financial situation by attracting environmental technology companies was commented on favourably in successive meanings and was included in the strategic plan as a central theme. Following the chain of successive re-enactments of similar sounds of institutional voices shows how strategists negotiated the acceptability of this suggestion as a strategy formulation and took turns at adapting the developing formulations in order to make them more broadly acceptable and supposedly more attractive as themes in the strategic plan of Bay City. Over time, this chain led to formulation of a central element in the 2009 strategic plan: the description of sustainable development as a fundamental part of the future of Bay City.

The parallel processes of broadening and narrowing dialogue (see chapter 8) created space for renewal and reinterpretation; monologization of different voices into a coherent strategy document condensed the acceptable meanings of the strategy and coordinated the accepted relationships between the institutional voices by regulating the acceptable interpretations of the organizational goals and environment and formulating the acceptable compromises between the different institutional demands. On the other hand, broadening of the interpretations into a new polyphony in strategy discussions created opportunities for the renewal of strategy and its application to the different situations faced by the divisions and service units.

Similarly to individual meetings, each round of strategy discussions formed a cyclical process that alternated between polyphonic meeting discussions and written documents which strategists treated as monological. This cycle repeated itself between the previous, approved, version of the strategy document and preparation of the next ver-
As the organization began a new round of the strategy process, the previous strategy was assigned a new role; it was transformed from a monological management tool to be accepted and applied to an object of assessment. New interpretations were now encouraged; the organizational members taking part in strategy work were now expected to leave the previous formulations of the strategy aside and offer their interpretations of the organization in its environment and of its desired goals as well. The focus of the discussion shifted from single-voiced application of the strategy to a more polyphonic mode, where multiple interpretations were accepted and encouraged. This broad discussion was again narrowed down as the strategy discussions neared their end; by the time the new strategy document was presented to the city council for approval, the pressure to finalize the strategy document made it difficult to propose changes. After formal approval, the strategy was again treated as a ready-made object to be ‘applied’ or interpreted, not as a plastic, processual entity to be assessed and rewritten.

11.4 Crafting a collective strategy through institutional dialogue

To conclude my discussion, I will collect my findings into an account of the process through which the emerging collective strategy carried across different meetings into an accepted strategy document and later interpretations of this document. This processual account describes how participants in the strategy discussions in Bay City balanced between ambiguity and dominance, maintaining the dialogical nature of the strategy discussion, constructing and building upon the pluralist pressures made relevant to the strategy. My explanation of this process builds on the three dimensions of institutional dialogue discussed in the Findings: broadening and narrowing the dialogue, relating the institutional voices and chaining the interactions together. This model combines my empirical accounts of these dimensions to show how they were used to maintain a dialogue between institutional voices and build it towards a collective strategy. It also links these dimensions together by describing the relations between these dimensions.

This account underlines that pluralism in strategy work is an enacted phenomenon. Although the discussions refer to the complex institutional pressures emanating from societal discussions outside the organizational context, these pressures enter the organization by being made relevant in the context of strategy discussions, linked with local meanings and the future of the organization. The ability of strategists in Bay City to engage in institutional dialogue – to alternate between the institutional voices and use them as situationally relevant sounds – was central to emergence of the collective strat-
egy. This collective ability enabled them to craft the institutional voices together into a collective strategy and maintain the relations between the perspectives in the face of recurring tensions. Dialogism thus helps us understand how institutional complexity is created in the organizational context, as a strategic challenge for the organization. Figure 2 below summarizes the process of institutional dialogue through which the collective strategy emerged.

**Figure 2** The process of institutional dialogue in crafting a collective strategy

In this study, institutional dialogue emerges as an ongoing process where the practices related with the three studied dimensions overlapped and interacted with each other. The process alternated between the increasing ambiguity of unrelated perspectives, which emerged from the broadening of dialogue through the introduction of new voices to the discussion, and the narrowing down of the same dialogue towards focusing on a single dominant view of the strategy. As described above, the strategy work performed...
in each strategy meeting was guided by previous discussions, documents and planned topics of discussion. Additionally, the strategy work was influenced by the anticipated future interpretations of the strategy in the organization. The enactments of the institutional voices in spoken interaction and the written documents crafted to summarize these discussions were used in chaining successive meetings together into an institutional dialogue which constructed the organizational strategy as an ongoing process. Since each meeting built on a history of previous utterances and aimed at influencing organizational action in the future, there was no specific beginning or end to the dialogue; although the graphical model describes these dimensions separately, the overlap and influence between them was significant. I will next go through each of the dimensions influencing this process in turn, beginning with the practices of broadening the dialogue and concluding with narrowing it into a finalized strategic plan. In addition to discussing the simple path through the process represented by the linear movement from broadening through relation and temporal chaining to narrowing, I will below describe the nonlinearities included in this model, such as repeating cycles between the dimensions of institutional dialogue, the appropriation of previously legitimate meanings towards new ends and the exclusion of suggestions from strategy.

The dimension of **broadening the dialogue** (described in detail in Chapter 8) refers to the practices of introducing new perspectives to strategy discussions based on the institutional voices and linking them with the particular context and issue at hand. Looking at the practices of broadening enables us to understand how the institutional context of the strategy discussions was built through institutional dialogue. These practices were used to introduce new perspectives and interpretations which the participants considered worth discussing. Not all of these were held by the participants themselves; in addition to the participants’ own views, practices of broadening were used to anticipate the interpretations of others and include them in discussion of the strategy.

As argued in Chapter 7, as institutional voices were enacted in each interaction, they were adapted to the situational contexts in strategy meetings; they were used in response to the other perspectives expressed in these meetings with the goal of affecting the views of other participants and ultimately the strategic plan of Bay City. The voices emerged as situational sounds (Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008): partial, contextualized applications of broad institutional ideas to the issues discussed in strategy meetings. Several sounds of the institutional voices often coexisted in strategy meetings or even in individual utterances. By supplementing the discussion with alternate interpretations,
discerning new voices in the discussion (‘differentiating’) and introducing new institutional voices as abstract, ambiguous solutions (‘abstracting’), the participants defined perspectives on the strategy which needed to be reacted to – taken into account, fused with other perspectives or silenced.

Practices of broadening the dialogue fed into the second dimension of dialogical practice; the repeated ways in which participants related the institutional voices together. The clarity and shared meanings emerged in the practices of relating (detailed in chapter 9), which describe the ways in which discussants brought the institutional voices together and constructed them as complementary, conflicting, or incommensurate in this interactional context. Firstly, broadening practices introduced new uses for later adaptation. Secondly, the ways in which these broadening practices were performed related these voices together. The dimensions of relating and narrowing worked together in negotiation of the institutional voices into contextualized sounds and in their adaptation into the contents of the strategy.

Not all of the new sounds of institutional voices created through practices of broadening were successfully related to other sounds; instead, many faded from use either directly or over time; other attempts at relating voices did not gain the acceptance of other participants in the discussion and were not repeated. The emerging collective strategy comprised those sounds of institutional voices which the strategists successfully related together into an accepted and useful account of the future of Bay City. Through being related together in a way which contributed to resolving the strategic issues at hand, some of these gained enough traction to be formulated as suggestions for the strategic plan. Over time, these sounds changed and gained new meanings as they were related to other uses of institutional sounds. These relational changes in institutional meanings are described below as temporal chaining.

The practices of relating describe the development of institutions in the situated dialogue between institutions as they are applied to the local interactional context. As strategists related these voices to each other, they constructed situational settlements – formulations and sounds which used the voices together in ways that resolved their complexity in relation to the situational context. In these situational settlements, discussants constructed situational compromises between the institutional voices, often merging them in support of the same formulation or use of voices in resolving an issue. Situational settlements of institutional voices did not require harmony between the
voices used, but instead often built on differences between prescriptions or the lack of clear relations between voices.

The situational settlements influenced later discussions through practices of temporal chaining that combined different situational settlements into a chain of speech interaction (see chapter 10). These practices were ways of recounting previous discussions and anticipate later criticism. Strategists used situational settlements made in one strategy discussion in later discussions and adapted their suggestions to the anticipated reactions in later discussions. These practices combined each discussion with the broader strategy project and the views of those strategists absent from the meeting. Through such combinations, meanings accepted and deemed relevant in previous situational settlements were re-enacted in new situations and spread to the mutual knowledge of the strategists. Although the criteria by which such lamination occurred are beyond this study, the findings illustrate that to achieve this, these sounds needed to appeal to different discussants and in different situations.

New sounds of the institutional voices built on the previous institutional settlement, adapting them to new situational contexts, often significantly changing them. For example, the Welfare State voice took on a different sound when it was used to describe sustainable development as the guardianship of the natural environment than in its more modern incarnation in the same discussion to legitimize the harnessing of sustainable development to improve the attractiveness of the city. Both were applications of the same voice, but to very different ends. In this way, chaining was used to create agreement, craft compromises and allow for useful ambiguity between the different sounds of the institutional voices.

The ambiguity of meanings between situational settlements enabled the use of the strategic themes (and also of the institutional voices) in situationally sensible ways while connecting these situational settlements into an ostensibly coherent strategy. These temporal chains connected treatment of suggested themes in polyphonic strategy meetings, and the formulations of these themes into documents such as drafts of the strategic plan meeting minutes, and Power Point presentations, laminating them into increasingly robust drafts for the strategy document. This ostensive coherence did not preclude conflicts between strategic themes as these themes were recombined to address new strategic issues in situationally sensible ways. When such conflicts could not be resolved, they often led to the exclusion of themes from the situational settlements – and thus also the collective strategy.
As strategists related the perspectives together and adapted them to formulate and interpret the strategy, they employed practices of narrowing (described in detail in chapter 8) to conclude the discussion through fitting together and closing out sounds, decreasing the breadth of dialogue. This was a central part of the strategy discussions, which aimed at formulating a strategic plan – to offer an acceptable interpretation of the situation of Bay City in relation to the issue at hand and to coordinate activity. Strategists narrowed down the dialogue by coordinating their use in strategy work, combining them into a situational hybrid, and by discussing them through concrete, situated examples which enabled them to fit the voices together. These practices were focused on the situational sounds of these voices; they narrowed the dialogue in the discussion at hand and showed by example how discussants could decrease the breadth of dialogue in later discussions.

Despite their situational settlements, these voices remained separate; in the next situation, the interpretations and thus relations between these voices would vary, as strategists used the sounds in new ways. In this way, the practices of relating the voices both brought the institutional voices together and maintained the boundaries between them. In this way, strategists in Bay City built on both similarities and differences in their interpretations when they sought shared understanding. The discussion closed in order to open again; each meeting in the strategy process was followed by another and after the City Council accepted each strategic plan, it was interpreted, opened and applied to different situations – and in these re-enactments the institutional meanings were transformed over time into something new. Thus the work of opening, relating, chaining and closing was never finished.

Although the dimensions of institutional dialogue are here described separately for reasons of analytical distinction, they formed overlapping and alternating parts of the same utterances in the observed strategy discussions. As speakers broadened the discussions by bringing up new sounds of institutional voices, they related the new sounds to other institutional voices in the context of the discussion (as complementary, conflicting, or incommensurate to other voices) and linked them in the temporal chains of previous and anticipated discussions. Hence the development of collective strategy rarely proceeded linearly through this model; instead, institutional meanings were frequently criticized by subsequent speakers, projected as unacceptable to other parties or not repeated at all.
Institutional meanings were not included in the collective strategy for a broad variety of reasons, many of which are described through the practices of narrowing (elucidated in Chapter 8), constructing voices as conflicting or incommensurate with each other (cf. Chapter 9) and through the appropriations of previous sounds for new ends (cf. Chapter 10). These exclusions from further dialogue – and ultimately from the collective strategy – were important outcomes of the institutional dialogue in the same way as the linear path through the process, representing a successful addition or change to the institutional meanings making up the collective strategy. Lamentably, these exclusions fall to the margins of my account, which concentrates on the continued and constructive dialogue in order to explain the construction of a collective strategy. The excluded institutional meanings are described in the incompatibilities and silences of this story; the topics and suggestions which did not hold the participants’ attention or which were not seen as important or as suitable solutions to strategic issues. These exclusions from the collective strategy are an interesting topic for further research; however, concentrating on them would have called for a different, more detailed approach. I will return to the opportunities for further research in the next chapter.

In Bay City, the emergence of a collective strategy was made possible by the ability of participants to engage in dialogue – express different views, reach across disagreements and build their dialogue in an attempt to create new understanding. They were able to voice several views of the City in parallel and use them together in various constellations to construct polyphonic accounts of the City and its future. The collective strategy emerged through the working out of the strategy at the border of agreement and disagreement, as an ever-incomplete collection of meanings, which were discussed, disagreed on, partially agreed on, and written into a strategic plan, only to be reopened for further interpretation. In discussing the perspectives they considered relevant to the organizational strategy, participants made them visible to each other and found ways of coordinating them. Through dialogical practice, these perspectives were set in relation to each other as perspectives on the collective strategy, which could be understood and used together in varying ways. The collective strategy was the process of managing this ability for constructive disagreement and an ability to work together.

In Bay City, a collective strategy emerged as an ongoing process built around a collectively created epistemic object: the strategic plan. The organizational strategy is composed of the formal strategic plan, together with spoken strategy maintained in the continuous dialogue between the central decision-makers. Together, the written and spo-
ken strategy described the strategy of Bay City; the collective, partially shared understanding of the nature of the city organization, what choices guided its actions, and how its decision-makers (and even inhabitants) should see its environment and future. The collective strategy was thus partially expressed in the accepted strategy text, together with the interpretations of this text negotiated in detail in the strategy meetings and visible in the drafts, discussions and later decisions by the central strategists (politicians and managers). When deciding on the strategy of Bay City, strategists did not only decide on the text of a single document; regulation of the correct interpretation of this text was equally important.

The creation of a collective strategy built on a combination of clarity and ambiguity; the strategists brought the institutional sounds together to form a collective set of meanings – rules of the language game of strategy – and built their applications of these rules on the sufficient ambiguity of the situational sounds of these voices. Over time, this combination of ambiguity and clarity served to avoid conflict and enabled the organization to react to the persistent institutional complexity while maintaining the ability for coordinated action.
12 CONCLUSIONS

In juxtaposing experiences with each other, in letting them play off each other, it is my interpretive political aim (in the broadest sense) to make concurrent those views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to each other and that attempt to distance or suppress other views and experiences. (Said, 1994, p. 37)

Inspired by the accounts of Mintzberg & McHugh (1985) and Mantere (2013), my work has collected together strands of previous work on the collective nature of strategy. The theme of collective action is central to the Strategy as Practice stream, especially its use of theories of practice and discourse. As argued in Chapter 2, the collective nature of strategy has rarely taken centre stage in this discussion. This work brings to the fore the question of collective strategy (Mantere, 2013) by conceptualizing strategy as an ongoing achievement crafted through dialogue. I have used my ten-year observation of the strategy work in Bay City to elucidate the micro-level practices by which strategists negotiated their views into a partially shared and flexible entity.

This study has described the creation of collective understanding in strategy work, arguing that different voices are necessarily present in the creation and consumption of the organizational strategy and that ambiguity is an inherent part of this process. It contributes to the discussion of Strategy as Practice by describing how participants use different perspectives together in strategy work – specifically, how participants draw on the complex institutional environment and use the various institutions together to form a collective organizational strategy. I will next present my contributions, structured as answers to my two research questions. First, this study contributes to our understanding of the creation of a collective strategy in a pluralistic organization by presenting this process as an ongoing achievement, as an interdiscursive phenomenon and as polyphonic coordination. Second, this study elucidates the impact of a complex institutional environment on the practice of strategy by showing how institutions are used in strategy work as locally meaningful enactments, arguing that institutional complexity can be resolved through organizational enactments of societal institutions and demonstrating the constructive aspects of institutional complexity for strategy work. Last, I will discuss the limitations of this work and the opportunities for further research arising from it.
12.1 Creating a collective strategy in a pluralistic environment

This study contributes to our understanding of the processes of negotiation by which strategy is created as a collective entity that guides action in the organizational context (Mantere, 2013). I have employed Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue (Bakhtin, 1984, 1986c) to study the balancing of different perspectives of the strategy while maintaining a common direction, constructing a model of the dialogical practice which enabled strategists to avoid conflicts between their views and constructively combine them into a collective organizational strategy. I have suggested institutional dialogue as a mechanism by which strategists enact and fit together different views in strategy discussions, crafting a shared understanding of the strategy (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Vaara, 2010) while maintaining sufficient ambiguity to reach agreement and adapt the strategy to situational needs (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2001; Denis et al., 1996; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). The proposed approach to strategy discussions as an ideational dialogue enables us to better understand the situational balancing of parallel perspectives together to continuously form and reform a collective organizational strategy. This account answers my first research question, which read ‘How do participants in strategy work achieve a collective organizational strategy despite the unavoidable pluralism of perspectives?’ I will next discuss three facets of the contribution this study makes to the Strategy as Practice discussion – the construction of collective strategy as an ongoing achievement, as an interdiscursive phenomenon, and as polyphonic coordination – and relate these to the previous literature.

12.1.1 Collective strategy is an ongoing achievement

First, my findings have shown how the collective strategy achieved in Bay City was an ongoing achievement, despite the strong consensus orientation in the observed strategy discussions. Building on the discussion on polyphonic organization (Hazen, 1993; Kornberger et al., 2006; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008; Vaara, 2010), I have conceptualized the creation of a collective strategy as an ongoing dialogue between different views of strategy. Dialogue, with its focus on different views and positions as voices (Hazen 1993), is a fitting approach for studying pluralist settings where these voices and the gaps between them are central to organizing efforts (Kornberger et al. 2006).

A focus on the dialogical practices elucidates the minute changes in the formulations, false starts and corrections which are central to the construction of situational settlements and their chaining. This account complements Mantere’s (2013) account of strategy work as negotiation of the rules of a local language game by elucidating the
practices by which these negotiations take place in the broadening and narrowing of
dialogue and the relating of the voices to each other to form situational settings. In ad-
dition, my account of the temporal chaining by which situational settlements were con-
structed complements the previous accounts of strategy drafts as “provisional settle-
ments” (Kaplan & Orlikowski, 2013), “interim decisions” (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 
2015) or “provisional strategy objects” which “act as propositions from some users” in
the further negotiation of “partial agreement” into acceptable strategic plans (Belmon-
instead of aiming for full agreement on the strategy – the participants combined the
development of a clear formulation of the strategic plan with flexibility of interpreta-
tions in guiding subsequent action. This flexibility enabled the strategists to find points
of agreement on the strategy, while maintaining the ability to adapt it to suit their di-
verse situational needs. Over time, the flexibility of interpretation even enabled them to
change the meanings and use of central strategic themes (see e.g. the account of chang-
ing use of self-responsibility in chapter 10).

In this processual account, collective strategy emerges not as a final achievement, but
as a continuous process of enactment based on incompletely shared, continuously ne-
gotiated rules. Even when successful, it resembles an improvised play more than a co-
ordinated, professional performance. The maintenance of dialogical relationships be-
tween the different institutional voices and understandings of the organization facili-
tated creation of a collective strategy in several ways. It upholds a suitable amount of
ambiguity in the strategy document (thus allowing more flexibility in its application
during its use), increases the legitimacy of the City organization (also through incorpo-
rating institutional demands) and maintained the commitment of the different internal
groups such as political factions and specialized employee groups to the strategy (by
incorporating the perspectives they advocated into it).

\section*{12.1.2 Collective strategy is interdiscursive}
Second, my account of collective strategy as dialogical balancing between dominance
and ambiguity increases our understanding of the interdiscursivity of strategy work
(Vaara, 2010) where several discourses interact in negotiation of an organizational real-
ity. This account elucidates the role of strategy work as an unavoidably interdiscursive
phenomenon, where participants draw on several discursive perspectives to formulate
their views of the goals and influence the future direction of the organization. My ac-
count of Bay City shows in detail that strategists regarded the four discursive perspec-
tives represented by my institutional voices as legitimate perspectives on strategy work, which were used to construct institutional demands on the organization. Strategists then used these perspectives in situationally meaningful ways to create agreement on goals and to resolve their demands in the daily work of discussions. This dialogical account increases our understanding of the interdiscursive nature of strategy work, explaining the ongoing contestation and adaptation between the different views.

My analysis describes how the dialogic use of institutional voices in strategy work in Bay City avoided both the monologization of the strategy into a single-voiced account of the organization, its environment and goals, and its break-down into the coexistence of several interpretations with ambiguous relations. Unlike accounts of the entry of the strategy discourse (Hodge & Coronado, 2006; Knights & Morgan, 1991; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011; Oakes et al., 1998) into a dominant position, my findings show how the central institutional voices were used together to constitute the City organization. Their use in Bay City was balanced, with no perspective gaining dominance. Like Hodge & Coronado’s (2006) account of the weaving together of opposing discourses in forming a major public policy document, the description of institutional dialogue shows how the discourses used in strategy work interacted and contributed to each other as they were used. The strategists routinely used several discourses together to voice their own suggestions and interpretations, enact the views of others and to anticipate later interpretations of issues discussed. In this way, the various discourses affected each other’s use, and brought new aspects of each other into focus as ways of understanding the City organization and its future. This account advances the understanding of the relative dominance and interdiscursive use of the various discourses of strategy by showing how several institutional discourses were mobilized together to advance similar aims. For example, my discussion of self-responsibility charts how the Market voice increased in prominence over time. This voice guided the use of the Welfare State voice in strategy work to produce a new account of the future resources of Bay City; together, these voices legitimized an increasingly market-based renewal of public services.

Previous accounts of ambiguity which inhibits strategy work have described how participants appropriated the strategy in divergent ways, leading to divergent uses and priorities (Abdallah & Langley, 2014), and how decision-makers were locked in a recurring cycle of decision-making without the shared conceptions needed to implement the decision (Denis et al., 2011). In Bay City, such breakdowns were avoided by acknowledging the existence of different institutional voices and the pluralist pressures they creat-
ed on strategy work. This enabled the speakers to continuously relate these institutional voices to each other in compromises and comparisons, which resulted in situational settlements of the ambiguity between these voices. Over time, the participants worked these settlements into a coherent strategy story through successive re-enactments and adaptations of previous settlements. The account of institutional dialogue enables us to better understand interdiscursivity in strategy work by presenting the discourses as situationally enacted, malleable resources for meaning construction, which are used in ever-changing ways.

12.1.3 Collective strategy is polyphonic

Third, the continuous alternation between polyphony and monologization served to balance the polyphonic view of management (Kornberger et al., 2006) with the coordination of action expected of an organizational strategy (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009). In addition, the monologizations brought the voices together by forcing strategists to relate them to each other to form a coherent story. Interpretations of the strategic plan in later discussions – which I have called spoken strategy – remained polyphonic. Despite its apparent single-voicedness, the strategy document included compromises and discontinuities between different voices. These could be interpreted in different ways, to fit the needs of the circumstances. The interpretations were, however, guided by the strategy discussions and presentations conducted by central strategists in the divisions, which described the appropriate ways to interpret the strategy.

The relations between the institutional voices were constructed through their continuous enactment in relation to different topics of discussion. This related the voices to each other and the context of city strategy in situational and evolving ways. These enactments built on elements of previous enactments, combining them and adapting them to the situation in creative ways. The strategy process emerged from these successive enactments as a relational negotiation of meanings, which underwent continuous change as they were redefined and adapted to different situations. In this way, the strategy texts and its legitimate interpretations developed incrementally through continued adaptations made in strategy discussions.

The existence of legitimate pressures based on several different institutional interpretations of the organization was uncontested by the strategists; they often employed several different voices in the same utterance and compared them with each other. In addition, strategists adapted their utterances to the topic of discussion and the audience
and also to possible criticism. The voices were confronted with each other in slightly different ways in discussions related to the studied themes. In this way, none of the institutional voice achieved a dominant position in the strategy. Instead, different institutional voices were emphasized in relation to each strategic theme and all voices could be said to be important, even dominant, in the city strategy.

The polyphony of voices used to make sense of the themes made them resilient. When strategists enacted one voice with a negative meaning (e.g. in the account of the Economizing view of self-responsibility as “terribly radical” on p. 79), the strategists fell back to another, positive voice (in the same example, the Community voice was used to describe the theme as “people [being] more responsible for themselves”). Since the theme used to formulate the strategic goal had a polyphony of meanings based on different institutional voices, delegitimizing this goal required delegitimation of all the self-responsibilities – an endeavour that was difficult to achieve with a single voice.

The contextuality and relationality of the institutional voices I have illustrated exemplifies the dialogism inherent in the strategy process in Bay City. Strategists often incorporated several voices in their utterances, for example in alternating between describing their own views and the alternative views others might take. In addition, the drafts and formal strategy documents included several institutional voices, crafted in ways that avoided conflicts between them.

Many practice theorists take collectivity in the sense discussed here as a given. Theorists such as Schatzki (2001), Reckwitz (2002), and Jarzabkowski (2004) describe daily social praxis as messy and imperfectly shared, requiring skill and continuous adaptation. As I argued in Chapter 2, studies of strategic practice have rarely focussed on such accounts. The ideal description of reality prevalent in strategic plans and strategy talk legitimizes the messy collective action and connects the practical interpretations made by participants in different situations into a rationalized account. On the other hand, my findings illustrate how creation of the strategic plan is an equally messy endeavour and how the practical interpretations make the strategic plan relevant.

In conclusion, the strategy work performed in Bay City differed significantly from the prescriptions given in management textbooks. The strategists in Bay City did not treat the city strategy text as a single-voiced expression of managerial intent or consensus between strategists. Instead, the strategic plan was employed as the starting point of an interpretative process that adapted the strategy text to the situational needs of the
strategists, service units or individual City employees. The direction of the City organization was not decided by the fiat of a CEO or Top Management Team. Instead, it was guided by polyphonic discussion and the management of acceptable interpretations of the strategy text. In addition, significant changes were sometimes achieved not by altering the content of the strategy, but by changing these accepted interpretations of the strategy. This account of strategy emphasises the power to give meanings as a central way of exercising power in the strategy process. This power of definition here becomes the inseparable combination of a political and a sensemaking process; the meanings enacted in strategy dialogues are political accounts of the organization and its tasks at the same time as they are tools that help strategists make sense of the world and solve practical problems.

This study has also shed light on the workings of the strategy process in city organizations. City organizations in Western democracies are political organizations, where different professional interest groups strive to work together. The strategy discourse is a relatively recent addition to administrative processes in local government, and its use in this context has implications which differ from the private-sector uses of strategy. This study shows city strategy as distinct from classical private-sector accounts – as a political process, an execution of representative democracy that makes use of strategic themes and practices crafted in the private sector while redefining their functions through its own tradition and practical needs. However, my findings reiterate the possibility that when observed closely, the strategy work in any organization may differ from the rationalist model in similar ways to the work I observed in Bay City.

12.2 **Strategy work under persistent institutional complexity**

In answering my second research question, which reads ‘How do participants in strategy discussions reproduce the institutional environment as relevant to their strategy work?’, my work contributes to the research on strategy as practice by describing the impact of a complex institutional environment on the practice of strategy. This approach builds on the recent attempts at bridging between the Strategy as Practice literature and institutional theory (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Suddaby et al., 2013; Vaara & Whittington, 2012), which show strategy work as embedded in institutionalized meaning systems, bringing the constraints and enablers of the broader world into organizational strategy work. I add to this perspective by describing complexity as a dialogue of institutional ideas, where broader societal ideas speak through contextualized discussions between people in organizations (Hazen, 1993;
Kornberger et al., 2006; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008). I have applied Bakhtin’s theory of dialogue to understand how different institutional logics are brought together in strategy discourse. This relational and processual view of dialogue allowed me to focus on the use of institutions in context, as they were enacted in the talk and text related to strategy work in Bay City.

In so doing, this study adds to the stream of research emphasizing the central role of language in strategy work (Mantere, 2010; Samra-Fredericks, 2003, 2005; Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). By outlining the continuous dialogue between institutional voices, I describe how in enacting the institutional environment the speakers made it contextually relevant and actively managed the relationships between these enacted institutions. The institutional complexity that both constrains and enables strategy work is enacted in the organization through the use of language; material constraints are not directly present in the strategy discussions, but are constructed as meaningful and strategic through language use.

12.2.1 Institutions are used in strategy work as locally meaningful enactments

First, my work contributes to the discussion on the role of institutional environment in strategy work by adding to the accounts of institutional theory as complementary to strategy as practice (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Suddaby et al., 2013) with an account of the importance of societal institutions in the everyday negotiation of meanings in strategy work. I argue that local enactments of these institutions in interaction enable the situational resolution of persistent institutional complexity and form the basis for decision-making and reaching agreement. This formulation of ‘societal institutions’ as grounded and employed in the daily organizational praxis (see also Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015) helps us to understand how strategists enact the complex institutional pressures into a locally relevant network that constrains and directs the creation of strategy. I argue that the daily praxis and institutions are in constant interaction through the dialogue between institutional voices and complement our understanding of the intersection of institutions and strategy work by looking at the use of institutional meanings in interaction (Zilber, 2002) and specifically the enactment and negotiation of institutional complexity (Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015; Tracey, Phillips, & Jarvis, 2011) as part of the strategic planning. This account bridges between the Strategy as Practice literature with recent work on how organizations respond strategically to multiple institutional prescriptions (Pache & Santos, 2013;
This study elucidates the enactment of institutions in interaction by applying the previous literature on dialogue as constitutive of organizational reality (see also Bakhtin, 1984; Hazen, 1993; Kornberger et al., 2006; Sullivan & McCarthy, 2008) to describe the enactment and continuous negotiation of institutional complexity in strategy work, as the use of societal institutions as locally relevant voices to contribute to the planning of the organizational strategy. My analysis describes how strategists adapted the institutions both to their understanding of their own organization and to the context of strategy work. In so doing, they made the institutions relevant to creation of a strategy and as a part of the discursive world of strategy.

The perspective of institutional dialogism taken in this work presents strategy work as an ongoing negotiation between institutional voices, which enacts the societal and field-level institutional pressures in strategy discussions. Much like Greenwood et al. (2011) described, the institutional voices emerging from my findings related the organization to its broader institutional environment by constituting a complex institutional environment which could not be resolved into a fixed constellation. The strategists in Bay City accepted the legitimacy of several voices and constantly adapted them together; as the situations and interpretations introduced to the strategy discussions changed, the relations between voices were edited accordingly, which entailed changes in both the current strategy text and its accepted interpretations.

This study has elucidated the continuous interaction between the institutional voices. In Bay City, this interaction rarely led to recognition of conflicts between institutional voices; instead, constructive compromises between the voices were actively constructed. The creation of the label ‘active citizen’ is a central example of such compromises: it was used to position self-responsibility outside the agency of the City organization and interpreted in a positive light through the application of several voices. As this example illustrates, my findings describe how speakers adapted broader institutional ideas into new organizational and interactional contexts, presenting simplified versions of them and concentrating on what seems relevant to the situation at hand. Strategists adapted these broad ideas in order to do things; to bring new understandings to the situation at hand, and to solve the problems presented in discussions and to find ways to proceed with the strategy work in ways which they considered aligned with their own and the organization’s interests. The institutional dialogue aimed at balancing the use of these...
institutional voices with each other in ways that fulfilled to the best extent possible the demands posed by each voice enacted in the discussion. These situational negotiations are compared with each other in successive meetings and adapted to create a coherent strategy. The strategy created through these negotiations was renewed continuously and it continuously renewed the organization in the eyes of the strategists.

### 12.2.2 Institutional complexity can be resolved through local enactments of societal institutions

Second, this account of institutional dialogue sheds light on our understanding of the impact of institutional complexity on organizational action (Greenwood et al., 2011; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Kodeih & Greenwood, 2013; McPherson & Sauder, 2013). Greenwood et al. describe institutional complexity as a situation where “the prescriptions and proscriptions of different logics are incompatible, or at least appear to be so” (Greenwood et al., 2011, p. 318). Their account hints that institutional complexity depends on the interpretations of these “prescriptions and proscriptions” in the situation at hand; two institutions are in tension when actors feel that they cannot fulfil the demands of both at the same time. Hence, institutional complexity can be usefully conceptualized as an effect of local enactments of broader institutions. The findings of this study, in turn, offers an account of the situational settlements of the complexity which “appeared” in the strategy work of Bay City and the chaining of these situational settlements over time into a collective strategy which offered a sufficient agreement on the institutional environment to guide collective action. This perspective sheds light on the plasticity of the institutional meanings which guide organizational action and enables us to investigate the creation of organizational responses to institutional complexity in the discursive practice of strategy.

The account of institutions as local enactments takes a similar perspective as the recent literature on institutional bricolage (Christiansen & Lounsbury, 2013; Phillips & Tracey, 2007), often defined as “applying combinations of the resources at hand to new problems and opportunities” (Baker & Nelson, 2005, p. 333). Both the accounts of institutional bricolage and the dialogical view described in this study aim to describe how central social objects are formed as locally meaningful assemblages of different institutional perspectives. A key difference between these two perspectives, however, is that the bricolage literature describes these crafted assemblages as separate, relatively stable entities. The dialogical view taken in this study offers a way to describe the processes by
which these assemblages are continuously formed and adapted and to study how the ambiguity of these assemblages works to maintain them.

12.2.3 Institutional complexity is constructive for strategy work

Third, this work describes the institutional complexity to which strategy work is subjected as a constructive resource for such strategy work. My work builds on the work on persistent institutional complexity (Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015), describing the process of institutional dialogue as the contextual negotiation of several locally relevant institutions in situationally meaningful ways. I describe institutional complexity as a continuously negotiated phenomenon, complementing previous research concentrating on the field-level negotiation of institutional complexity (Greenwood et al., 2011), stable organizational settlements segregating different logics by professional groups (Goodrick & Reay, 2010; Reay & Hinings, 2009) or interactional contexts (Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015), and the blending of central elements of institutions into new, local hybrids (Currie & Spyridonidis, 2015; Lindberg, 2014; Pache & Santos, 2013; Wry et al., 2014).

The use of these voices in strategy discussions dialogically related them to each other, and related the institutional pressures to the organizational goals. This account describes strategy work as a process where institutional voices are continuously negotiated to craft and recraft the text and interpretations of strategy. In Bay City, these negotiations led to situational settlements of institutional complexity; strategists enacted the institutional voices in meetings as perspectives on particular issues, expressed in situated accounts. On this level, they were often successful in resolving the complexity. These situational settlements were chained together as participants commented on and adapted suggestions made in previous meetings, and over time these chains constructed successive strategic plans and their accepted interpretations.

Importantly, the chains of situational settlements retained much of the complexity between voices; the situational enactments of the institutional environment on which the settlements were built differed from each other in ambiguous ways. Instead of clarity, these chains thus produced shared but flexible accounts of the institutional basis of the strategy. The strategy retained sufficient ambiguity to enable the participants to fit the institutional demands of the organization together in ways which guided later interpretation but left sufficient leeway for situational adaptation. Hence my findings lend support to the findings of Smets et al. (2015) that the presence of persistent institutional
complexity may aid organizations in attaining goals which are complex or difficult to reconcile.

Strategy work in Bay City thus entailed putting the institutional voices into evolving and often uneasy relations between each other. The strategy discussions occupied a middle ground between the dominance of a single institutional perspective and the ambiguity of several unrelated perspectives that could not be usefully compared or prioritized. The dialogical use of the institutional voices therefore enabled the strategists to balance between their different demands in situationally useful ways.

My work enriches earlier accounts of strategy work as contextualized discursive work by showing how it is embedded in a complex web of social institutions that are enacted in strategy work. I have concentrated on the enactment of institutionalized meanings as contextualized and continuous enactment, which often happens under conditions of persistent institutional complexity. The above account of institutional complexity thus enables us to look at strategy work as the creation of a collectively accepted account of the organization, its goals and legitimate actions taken to reach these goals. My account thus calls attention to the contextual and processual nature of institutional complexity and its resolution, offering the concepts of situational settlement, temporal chaining and positive ambiguity to the discussion on the management of persistent institutional complexity.

The way these institutional voices were weaved together enabled the strategists in Bay City to manage the persistent institutional complexity that characterized the decision making in Bay City. They were able to build a strategy with sufficient ambiguity to enable situational flexibility in interpretations and balance incommensurate demands placed on the city organization. At the same time, my findings on institutional dialogue demonstrate the challenges posed by an ambiguous strategy. The views of the suitable interpretations of the strategy text held by different strategists often varied significantly and assessing them was seen as problematic due to the difficulty of finding settlements to the institutional complexity which would be both organizationally accepted and broadly applicable to practice. Strategists in Bay City expended a significant amount of effort to analyse each other’s views – a practice which the open admission of different legitimate views made easier.

The above account of the dialogue of institutional voices helps us understand the constraining and enabling effects that institutional complexity has on strategy work in plu-
realistic settings. It enriches the view of strategy work as embedded in a complex institutional environment (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Suddaby et al., 2013; Vaara & Whittington, 2012) by describing how strategists enact the complex institutional environment during strategy discussions and negotiate the resulting tensions between enactments. In addition, this approach helps us understand the positive and negative aspects of ambiguity in strategy work. As strategists enact the complex institutional environment in situationally meaningful ways, they find ways to interpret the strategy that combine situational technical needs with the legitimacy granted by the institutional accounts. At the same time, the need for situational enactment of the institutional environment demonstrates the risk of slipping into too much ambiguity; if the strategists fail to reach sufficient agreement on the relevance or interpretation of some of the institutional demands in their discussion, they are exposed to conflicts and difficulties in reaching decisions linked with persistent institutional complexity.

Institutional dialogism opens up the systemic language institutional theory uses to describe and study institutions. It takes seriously the notion (Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015) that complexity can be a constructive phenomenon that can be used to achieve personal and organizational goals. This directs our attention towards something that could be called 'institutions-in-use', to paraphrase Orlikowski (2000; see also Jarzabkowski, 2004): institutional meanings and practices enacted in the flow of organizational action, instead of the abstract field-level generalizations often studied in interaction. In this way, my approach to institutions lends support to recent practice-based studies of institutions (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Smets, Greenwood, et al., 2015; Smets, Jarzabkowski, et al., 2015).

Bay City may well be an extreme case in the beneficial effects of dialogue in strategy work; many constituencies were involved in the strategy process, with varying perspectives to acknowledge, and the demands placed on the city organization by the legislation and their societal institutional position were complex. The various roles of the City organization underscore the importance of polyphony; the City must credibly act as a provider of high-quality services to its citizens, be a shrewd negotiator that advances the interests of the local community in regional and national discussions and act as the bureaucratic hand of the society in relation to social services, school admissions and the like. However, the centrality of institutional dialogue in Bay City has lead me to argue that similar practices may well be observed in strategy work performed in less politicized organizations, spanning from public-sector organizations to corporate settings.
12.3 Limitations and avenues for further research

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that the theoretical and methodological choices taken in this study come with certain important limitations. I will conclude by discussing these limitations and charting the opportunities for further research which this study presents.

First, while this study has discussed the polyphonic dialogue of institutional voices in the strategy work of Bay City, the account given on these pages adopted an external ‘researcher’s perspective’, which is in effect a monological representation of this polyphonic reality (Bakhtin, 1984). Instead of showing on these pages the polyphonic engagement of the institutional voices used in Bay City (see e.g. Bakhtin, 1984; Rhodes, 2001; Belova, King, & Sliwa, 2008), I have chosen to illustrate their use and implications for the strategy work through my own analytical account. This choice imposes a limitation on my study; an external perspective is limited to reporting these voices and their use to the reader, instead of directly showing how the dialogue between them unfolds. While this is an important limitation of my work – the imploration to ‘show, not tell’ is a recurring comment during review processes – the contextuality and the trans-individual character of the ideational dialogue I have studied made this choice difficult to avoid. As discussed in Chapter 6.3, the construction of these four institutional voices was a simplification of a rich and unfinalizable context, which does not lend itself to written presentation in sufficient detail to enable a reader unfamiliar with the context to interpret it in a similar way as the participants to the discussions. Instead, I have constructed out of them an outsider’s classification in order to analyse the actions of strategists in context in a way which allows me to contribute to previous theory. During my analysis, I have controlled for personal and theoretical biases e.g. by iterating between different theoretical perspectives, data types and empirical perspectives. However, these partial correctives cannot completely remove this limitation.

Second, the process model of institutional dialogue presented in this study could be employed in the study of strategy work in other organizations faced with institutional complexity. Further research on the practices organizations employ to achieve a collective strategy, and their eventual problems in doing so, could shed light on the differences between organizational contexts and the variety of outcomes. It would be especially useful to adapt these results to contexts where attempts to create a coherent, collective strategy encountered persistent conflict or failed. Additionally, it would be interesting to follow alternate outcomes to the collective strategy as a balancing act between
dominance and ambiguity, or alternate social practices which could lead to a similar outcome.

Third, the enactment of broader institutional phenomena as local institutions offers a promising avenue for further research relevant to the institutional grounding of strategic practice. In the context of Bay City, I have treated the institutional voices as local creations, without analysing the changes in the societal discussions on which the local use of these voices drew during the period of observation. Nevertheless, my findings offer hints that the meaning and use of the strategy in Bay City evolved over time, based on the changing institutional environment. The use of the central labels in strategy work, such as sustainable development, changed over time, and the use of strategic goals to coordinate organizational action evolved with the themes of the public discussion in the broader Finnish society.

Further research could explicate the influence of the institutional environment on organizational strategy by following the adaptation of the local use of institutional voices based on observable changes in the public discussion, political pressures or legislative changes. Public sector organizations, such as the context of city strategy chosen for this study, would be a suitable context for understanding the changing institutional prescriptions and pressures on organizational action, their interpretation in organizations, and the decisions guided and legitimated by the organizational enactment of broader institutions. Such studies could shed light on the influence of societal and field-level developments on organizational action and improve our understanding of the construction and strength of institutional pressures on the actions of public organizations.

More broadly, the perspective of institutions as locally meaningful voices in dialogue would be useful in positioning this phenomenon in relation to the emerging literature on the link between institutional theory and social practice (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Lok & de Rond, 2012; Smets & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Suddaby et al., 2013), and could also elucidate the organizational responses to institutional complexity (e.g. Bjerregaard & Jonasson, 2014; Raaijmakers et al., 2015; Vermeulen et al., 2016). City organizations are for a promising context for such studies; despite the external similarities of the legislative, economic and social situations of different municipalities and regional authorities, their reactions and ability for collective decisions vary starkly. Due to the variety of empirical contexts and such responses, we do not yet know enough about why such differences arise.
Last, the account of power in institutional dialogue could be specified in further research. As noted in Chapter 10, this study did not focus on attempts to influence the strategy process to advance specific political interests. As a political organization in the specific context of the Finnish public sector, Bay City stands apart from the private-sector organizations to which the contributions of strategy research are often directed. Despite or because of the democratic and collective ideals, the processes of decision-making in public organizations remain highly politicized (Andersen, 2008; Hodge & Coronado, 2006; see e.g. Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). The influence of different perspectives varied during the period of observation (for instance, the perspective of resource scarcity gained strong influence after the beginning of the economic crisis in 2008), as did the relative strengths of the political factions (for example the Finns, an emerging populist party rose to prominence in the City Council during the period of observation).

This gives rise to an opportunity for further research on the connections between the political action inherent to strategy work and the collective dimension charted in this work. While previous work has done much to illustrate that these are necessarily intertwined (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hodge & Coronado, 2006; Knights & Morgan, 1991), we have limited understanding of how participants in strategy work use the various perspectives together in dialogue to influence the emerging strategy according to their interests. A further study could combine the model of institutional dialogue created in this study with elements of Critical Discourse Analysis to explore e.g. the following questions: What made specific groups of participants effective in influencing the text and interpretation of the strategic plan? What kinds of subject positions were constructed in strategy work for absent parties influenced by the strategy – e.g. citizens, the state, and private companies? Another interesting study could elucidate the finding (discussed in Chapter 11.3) that changes in the interpretations of central words or phrases in strategy discussions could change the meaning of the strategy. Such debates on changing the application of the strategic plan without changing the text of this plan would be specifically interesting to a practice view of strategy.

Similarly, the dialogical perspective taken in this study has not emphasised the interpersonal power dynamics of the strategy discussions. Although my findings have illustrated that the influence wielded by individual strategists affected the negotiation of the collective strategy, this study has not included an analysis of the implications of the institutional dialogue for the relative power of individual participants, departments, political parties and other factions in the strategy work. For instance, my discussion of
temporal chaining showed some evidence that individual strategists conversant in the tools and rhetoric of the strategy discourse were able to effectively influence the decisions made, while the words of others were not repeated in discussion. Additionally, some participants (such as the Strategy Manager whose work is discussed in Chapters 9 and 10) were able to leverage their central position to guide the agendas of strategy discussions and the lamination of previous suggestions into strategy text. The influence of these differences could be further explored in subsequent studies, concentrating on the mobilizing of influence of individuals and their positions in interactions. Ideally, these interactional dynamics should be followed over time and linked with specific decisions.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX 1 OPENING AND CLOSING THE INSTITUTIONAL DIALOGUE

The following excerpt from the Management Team meeting in 2007 contextualizes my analysis of the opening and closing of the institutional dialogue, described in Chapter 8. I present it here in full in order to enable the reader to contextualize the quotations presented in this chapter.9

1. M1 But if we look at these core tasks. I don't know – should we get started through negation, thinking about what [services] we won’t do... That could be quite, or the use of the word ‘no’ is quite heavy when we think about the strategy. When, when we express things so that we don’t.. rule out anything, it's more difficult to make choices. But if we use the word ‘no’, these limits will be clearer and perhaps... faster clarify the goals of the document, and our goals. But the word ‘no’ in a final document is pretty... it may put a pretty negative stamp on it. But in this discussion it could be good for us to think it through this way, so... if the city concentrates on its core tasks, what doesn’t it then do? Does it maintain skiing tracks? ....

2. M2 Then we’ll just end up with these questions, and that way you really won’t

3. M3 we won’t

4. M2 make headway here. That's the end of it right there. Every thing has its champions, and well, hum...

5. M1 That’s true

6. M2 You can’t make a strategy this way.

7. M3 mm...

8. M2 So you need to say it in a different way so that

9. M1 You need to say it in a different way. I said that in the final version we might not

10. M3 Yeah

11. M1 In order to get our thoughts going – what are these core tasks? If they are maintenance of skiing tracks, and well.. pandering to people in their active age and everything else possible, then well somehow, somewhere we need to draw the line, say what we mean by it if we aim for the concentration on core tasks. What’s our goal then?

12. M4 The well-being of people

13. M2 and an active life and

14. M3 And then we should get a common denominator to [the services that] re- main. But that’s just the problem. I’ll talk a bit about basic security: I was looking for a definition to it last week when I had some time to go through this. And I had written a note to myself that basic security starts from our interpretation of the constitution, and I found this summary which says that it is [reads aloud from his notes]: “essential subsistence during a period of unemployment or incapacity – the municipality will guarantee this to citizens. Subsistence...”

15. M2 The state, the state!

16. M3 Subsistence to those who need it due to their age or limited ability to func tion – that the municipality guarantees, and basic education to everyone

9 The speakers are designated with the following identifiers: M1 – Acting Mayor; M2 – Director of Educational Services; M3 – Director of Technical Services; M4 – Representative of the Central Administration; M5 – Representative of the Social and Health Services Division.
regardless of wealth – that the municipality guarantees. *Everything above this is not a part of basic security.*

17. M2 [gives a small laugh]
18. M5 [gives a small laugh]
19. M3 Here’s your answer to the skiing tracks.
20. M5 I really need to respond to that – it isn’t [a sufficient answer]. I mean, the next sentence after those is already so broad that when I was handling complaints to the administrative court, or responses to complaints which questioned our adherence to the Law on Basic Security and the derived lower-level legislation, I saw that there’s so many paragraphs [in these statutes] for us to follow that the interpretation becomes like a line drawn on water, so to say.
21. M3 The clue here is that we need to find and use concepts which we understand in the same way.
22. M2 mmm [approvingly]
23. M3 We need to spell it out. If we can’t get to that, we say that wellbeing, basic services or basic security and then leave it to everyone to think about it in their own, slightly different ways, then we won’t have a strategic direction.
24. M1 That’s right. So one sheet of strategy and a tome for explaining our terminology. That’s approximately how it would go.
25. M3 Here’s another way it could look. I thought about it yesterday, and well in any case we’ll pare down our own service production, that is, narrow down our range of services, and then how this happens could be left to everyone’s own responsibility. That may have been a slightly dangerous formulation, but I hope you get it. That what remains is done well and we’ll devote more to attractiveness, and put in more [resources] to services improving that [attractiveness] when we trim elsewhere.
26. M1 Hum.
27. M2 But don’t we have in the current strategy – which isn’t always very...
28. M3 And we take care of everyone’s preconditions [of wellbeing]. That’s the fourth perspective.
29. M2 ...consistent – this prevention thing [the goal of decreasing future service needs through preventive services]. Isn’t it pretty important in any case?
30. M3 Yeah, yeah.
31. M2 So that we don’t just do things and then need to put most of our resources to fixing the ensuing problems, but from a citizen’s perspective agree to increase preventive work in addition to increasing self-responsibility. And getting to this is the road to the future, as we discussed at some point. That’s the most difficult road [to take].
32. M1 Yeah...
33. M2 There are always so many perspectives to service production. That’s why I’d rather see the emphasis exactly on the attraction factors and, following that, business policy and such things.
34. M1 Yeah. Well, we’ll have to think about [putting an emphasis on] business policy, but let’s try to focus [the first goal] for a minute and then proceed. But is there – I’ll make a stupid question. Seeing as there are these two things in this, erm, goal, should we see one of these as a critical success factor to the other? So would the goal be to increase the self-responsibility of citizens, or that it increases – we’ll have to discuss whether we want an active or a passive form there – but then its critical success factor would be how we succeed in concentrating on our core tasks.
35. M3 Yeeahh.
<A brief discussion about passive and active formulations.>

36. M5 So this core task question is interesting in that sense. We’ve discussed that in some context – that from a core task perspective, what would remain if [all public services are] minimized, and then how you would broaden that selection. And well, that’s an interesting perspective, but then you run very quickly into a situation where you start to have conflicts of interest between different stakeholders. So, so, I understand very well that when we’ve, well, taken away some of our services and added to our attraction factors, we may have there taken away services from what it is that improves our attractiveness. So we’re decreasing our attractiveness by reducing quality – then that will not improve our attractiveness.

37. M3 If we try to simplify this further, then I guess that we should here divide our service production, or our service repertoire – whatever the package turns out to be, into two categories and take care of one part as we do now, and take the other part to be the one where the self-responsibility of people in acquiring services is increased. How we describe the border between the categories, that’s what we’re discussing now. What’s the term that best describes this border? And now, we can’t solve it through dividing services into two camps on the level of detail that [the management team] controls. Because [the border] often runs inside the services, that there are parts of them we could give up but...

38. M2 Exactly.

39. M3 ...so that the basic service remains.

40. M2 Now that’s what we should be talking about. That every service can be studied from the perspective of how we can bring about more efficiency, and how...

41. M3 So for instance this prevention, then... Weeelll damn it, of course exercise prevents health problems. That means we need the ski tracks.

42. M2 And yesterday they told us in [the local newspaper] that we’ve done a good job of it.

43. M3 But well, falling on a street, falling down on a slippery street causes a hell of a lot of health problems too, so when we start to untangle these things, we’ll end up in a mess straight away. But we should quickly describe that limit on a kind of a general level, and then just document somewhere what we mean by it more clearly.

44. M1 So hey – is this taking shape in that case... Do we have a flip chart somewhere?

<A flip chart is found, the acting mayor starts to draw on it.>

45. M1 [T.A.] just suggested this, that there are... I’ll use this now... and then... abbreviate self-responsibility... isn’t this what it means. So then... would this be the strategic goal, then, and then these would actually be the critical success factors. Would this work into two... Is that what you mean?

46. M3 Ehmm... No, I didn’t mean that, but that I think it would, all that could be said in the strategy. I wrote down this formulation early last week, that the basic security of citizens is taken care of and self-responsibility in acquiring other services is increased.

47. M2 That’s exactly what I think we had in the first version.

48. M3 I guess that’s how it reads. [Laughs.]

49. M2 [Gives a loud laugh] But the politicians took it away. [Continues laughing]

50. M3 I don’t think we need to re-invent everything here.

51. M2 That feels familiar. I guess that’s how it is, we approved it back then. That’s all good.
52. M3 Yeah. That is, if we could define what we mean by basic security.
53. M2 Should we offer this to them [the city council] again? If we do, it should be formulated so well that...
   *Interlude while a video projector is set up and the City budget displayed*
54. M1 I need to check what we wrote about this earlier...
   *The discussants read through the City budget*
55. M1 Here it is: basic services for citizens are taken care of.
56. M3 [The concept used] there is 'basic services'. That's, like, a broader concept.
57. M1 [Reads out from the City budget:] 'Services are organized in a customer-oriented way and increasingly in cooperation with other actors. Variety, opportunities of choice and self-responsibility are emphasized in the service offering.'
58. M5 Sounds like [name of the Manager for Health and Social Services]. [Laughs.]
59. M3 [We could] just leave the middle part out.
60. M1 But
61. M3 But let's define 'basic services' then.
62. M1 Should it be 'basic services' or 'basic security'?
63. M3 I think 'basic security' is narrower and 'basic services' broader. So I don't know why they [politicians] wanted to put 'basic services' there.
64. M1 Just because it is...
65. M3 So why does this [civic] society exist? Take... to take care of the things we can't sort out if everyone takes care of them separately.
66. M2 But they [the City Council] discussed this quite a bit, or they understood this basic security thing, the legal requirements you mentioned first, in that sense. The concept of basic security is narrow. It should be defined...
67. M5 Legal experts show me all the time that it's broader than you can guess.
68. M1 Huhh. [humourless laugh]
69. M2 Yeah, that's what we think too.
70. M1 Yes, yea-ah.


The concept ‘strategy’ has become a ubiquitous part of the Western worldview; it has taken over spheres of life far from its original homes in war and business, and is used to manage a variety of collectives, including churches, the Red Cross, and the Boy Scouts. The rational and apparently simple language of strategic plans as a ‘common direction’ or a ‘shared understanding’ seeks to cut through the complexity of organizational life and the different, often competing perspectives people take as they go about their business. However, such sharedness remains elusive: many or most organizations operate in environments defined by multiple objectives and diffuse power, and the formulations of the management are reinterpreted, challenged and appropriated by a polyphony of other voices. Even in such environments where the maintenance of a shared understanding of goals and direction appears impossible, people find ways of acting as if they were in agreement; they manage to coordinate their actions and understanding of strategic priorities.

Building on a strategy-as-practice approach, this study investigates how people achieve such coordination despite unavoidable differences in views and ambiguity of meaning. I draw on a 19-year study of strategy work in a Finnish city organization to study how participants introduced broader institutional perspectives to the strategy work as related but different perspectives on the city and its future and used them as institutional voices in dialogue. This study focuses on the ways in which these institutional voices were used in tandem to craft a collective strategy and how this resultant strategy was interpreted and reinterpreted according to situational needs.

My findings describe how participants in the strategy work in Bay City related the pluralist institutions with each other and used them in context, and how participants weaved these institutions into partially shared, flexible practices and meanings, ultimately creating a strategy text which was used to coordinate organizational action in a variety of ways, without complete agreement of its meanings. I describe this meeting of perspectives as an ideational dialogue between locally relevant institutional voices, which enabled the creation of a collective strategy.

This account makes three contributions to our understanding of the practice of strategy. First, it elucidates the institutional nature of strategy work by describing the role of local enactments of societal and field-level institutions in strategy work. Second, it introduces the notion of institutional dialogue and institutional voices to advance the conversation on institutional complexity, demonstrating the constructive aspects of institutional complexity for strategy work. Third, it provides a polyphonic account of how a collective strategy is formulated in an ongoing process balancing diverging interests.