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Struggling over subjectivity: A discursive analysis of strategic development in an engineering group

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ABSTRACT

We have seen growing interest in discursive perspectives on strategy. This perspective holds great promise for development of an understanding on how strategy discourse and subjectivity are intertwined. We wish to add to this existing research by outlining a discursive struggle approach to subjectivity. To understand the complex subjectification and empowering/disempowering effects of organizational strategy discourse, this approach focuses on organization-specific discourse mobilizations and various ways of resistance. Drawing on an analysis of the discourses and practices of 'strategic development' in an engineering and consulting group we provide an empirical illustration of such struggles over subjectivity. In particular, we report three examples of competing ways of making sense of and giving sense to strategic development, with specific subjectification tendencies. First, we show how corporate management can mobilize and appropriate a specific kind of strategy discourse to attempt to gain control of the organization, which tends to reproduce managerial hegemony, but also trigger discursive and other forms of resistance. Second, we illustrate how middle managers resist this hegemony by initiating a strategy discourse of their own to create room for manoeuvre in controversial situations. Third, we show how project engineers can distance themselves from management-initiated strategy discourses to maintain a viable identity despite all kinds of pressures. Although our examples are case-specific, we believe that similar discursive dynamics also characterize strategizing in other organizations.

KEYWORDS discourse ▪ discursive struggle ▪ hegemony ▪ identity ▪ power ▪ strategy

Introduction

In recent years, we have seen an increasing interest in the 'strategy-as-practice' perspective (e.g. Whittington, 1993, 2003; Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2005). This research stream has focused on social practices constituting strategizing, and can as a whole be understood as a plea for serious analysis of this micro-level of strategy. This should also include discourse analysis (e.g. Hendry, 2000; Samra-Fredericks, 2003; Vaara et al., 2004; Jarzabkowski et al., this issue). In fact, a discursive perspective provides opportunities to map out and critically examine some of the most fundamental questions in strategy and strategizing that are not easily approached with more traditional perspectives. This is the case with 'subjectivity', which can be understood as a discursively constructed sense of identity and social agency in specific contexts. In their seminal article, Knights and Morgan (1991) examined how strategy discourse can transform 'individuals into subjects whose sense of meaning and reality becomes tied to their participation in the discourse and practice of strategy' (p. 252). Since then, other discursive analyses have also touched upon subjectivity. Nevertheless, empirical studies focusing on the discursive construction of subjectivity and its various implications in organizational strategizing are still rare in this area.

In this article, we wish to add to this research by examining subjectivity in strategy discourse from a discursive struggle perspective. Our theoretical research question is: what kinds of struggles over subjectivity characterize organizational strategizing? Following the example of Mumby (1997, 2004, 2005) and others, we approach organizational discourse as a dialectical battle between competing groups. From a discourse struggle perspective, discourses have a great deal of power over individuals, but at the same time individuals can also draw from specific discourses for their own purposes. Central to this perspective is the view that discourse and subjectivity are closely linked. On the one hand, specific discourses produce subject positions for the actors involved. On the other, actors employ specific discourses and resist others precisely to protect or enhance their social agency or identity.

We examine these discursive struggles in the context of an engineering and consulting group. In our empirical analysis, we focus on two questions: how do the actors discursively make sense of and give sense to 'strategic development'?; and: how do they construct specific subjectivities for

themselves and others? Our analysis is based on extensive data including interviews of people representing different positions in our case company, various kinds of documentary material, and data gathered by participant observation. In this article, we report three examples of competing ways of making sense of and giving sense to strategic development, with specific subjectification tendencies. First, we show how corporate management can mobilize and appropriate a specific kind of strategy discourse to attempt to gain control of the organization, which tends to reproduce managerial hegemony, but also trigger discursive and other forms of resistance. Second, we illustrate how middle managers resist this hegemony by initiating a strategy discourse of their own to create room for manoeuvre in controversial situations. Third, we show how project engineers can distance themselves from management-initiated strategy discourses to maintain a viable identity despite all kinds of pressures. Although our examples are case-specific, we believe that similar discursive dynamics also characterize strategizing in other organizations.

In our view, this analysis makes two contributions to the strategy-as-practice literature. First, it draws from the seminal work of Knights and Morgan (1991), but extends it by introducing a discursive struggle perspective on subjectivity. This approach opens up a new way of looking at how discourses around strategizing involve battles over agency and identity, the fundamental importance of which is easily overlooked with more traditional approaches. By providing examples of how top managers, middle managers and employees make use of specific discourses, this analysis helps to uncover some of the central control-resistance dynamics in organizational strategizing. Second, by uncovering such political dynamics, this analysis also adds to our understanding of the fundamental reasons for why specific strategies do not 'take' (e.g. Hardy et al., 2000), why strategizing often fails (e.g. Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003), or why it frequently leads to unintended consequences (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005).

Discursive perspectives on strategy

Drawing on the seminal work of Pettigrew (1973, 1992), Mintzberg (1973; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985) and others, strategy scholars have paid increasing attention to the social aspects of strategy and strategizing. In particular, the 'strategy-as-practice' stream of research has helped us to uncover important processes and practices that have received little attention in 'mainstream' strategy research (Whittington, 1993, 2003; Johnson et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski, 2005). These include a better understanding of how

strategizing always takes place in specific social contexts and is therefore socially structured (Whittington, 1993; Hendry, 2000) and how strategy processes consist of various kinds of social practices and micro-activities (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2003, 2004, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003; Whittington, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Mantere, 2005).

Parallel to or as a part of this strategy-as-practice stream, researchers have become interested in discursive perspectives on strategy. In simple terms, we can distinguish three types of discursive studies in this area. First, there are several theoretical analyses examining strategy as a body of knowledge. In their seminal article, Knights and Morgan (1991) took a genealogical perspective to strategy discourse. Most notably for our purposes, they focused on subjectivity, that is, on the inter-relationships between strategy discourse and the agency and identity of managerial and other organizational actors. They concentrated on the practices that transform people 'into subjects who secure their sense of purpose and reality by formulating, evaluating, and conducting strategy' (Knights & Morgan, 1991: 252). They specifically argued that strategy discourse has the following kinds of power effects:

> (a) It provides managers with a rationalization of their successes and failures; (b) It sustains and enhances the prerogatives of management and negates alternative perspectives on organizations; (c) It generates a sense of security for managers; (d) It reflects and sustains a strong sense of gendered masculinity for male management; (e) It demonstrates managerial rationality to colleagues, customers, competitors, government and significant others in the environment; (f) It facilitates and legitimates the exercise of power; (g) It constitutes the subjectivity of organizational members as particular categories of persons who secure their sense of reality through engaging in this discourse and practice.
>
> (Knights & Morgan, 1991: 262–3)

Their work (Knights & Morgan, 1991, 1995) has inspired others to engage in critical reflection on strategy discourse. For instance, Thomas (1998) has argued that a critical examination of strategy should concentrate on the role of discourse in sustaining organizational inequalities through a process of ideology. In a similar spirit, Levy et al. (2003) have proposed a critical theory-inspired Gramscian perspective to go further in the exploration and analysis of the hegemonic nature of strategy discourse and the associated practices. Drawing on Deleuze, Lilley (2001) has focused on how strategy discourse influences our way of looking at organizations. Grandy and Mills

(2004) have provided yet another interesting analysis of the naturalization of strategy discourse by drawing on Baudrillard's ideas.

Second, some have then taken a narrative perspective on strategizing. In their landmark analysis, Barry and Elmes (1997) have examined strategy as a form of narrative. They have emphasized the fictive nature of the narratives as well as the 'multiple realities' that are constructed through narration. In an empirical example, Dunford and Jones (2000) have described the way in which sense was made of organizational changes in three organizations. The stories differed, but they all included specific anchors through which meanings were given to the past, present and future. There are also other studies that have come up with interesting findings concerning the role of narration in organizational change, although not always explicitly focusing on 'strategizing' (e.g. Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Beech & Johnson, 2005; Collins & Rainwater, 2005).

Third, still others have examined the discursive practices involved in strategizing. Hardy et al. (2000) have illustrated how the use of discursive resources involves circuits of activity, performativity and connectivity, thereby explaining why specific statements do or do not 'take'. By exploring strategy documents, Eriksson and Lehtimäki (1998, 2001) have demonstrated how strategy rhetoric often reproduces specific and problematic assumptions concerning strategy and the role of specific actors. Maitlis and Lawrence (2003) have shown that failure in strategizing may result from the interplay of discursive elements and political behaviour. By drawing on critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 2003), Vaara et al. (2004) have in turn studied the discursive practices through which specific strategies such as 'airline alliances' are legitimated and naturalized. Samra-Fredericks (2003, 2004a, 2004b) has taken a conversation analysis perspective on strategy talk. In her analyses, she has focused on the rhetorical skills that strategists use to persuade and convince others – and to construct subjectivity as strategists. She (Samra-Fredericks, 2005) has later shown that Habermas's theory of communicative action and ethnomethodological theories can pave the way for fine-grained analysis of the everyday interactional constitution of organizational power relations in strategizing. Her empirical analysis can, in fact, be seen as a rare illustration of the 'power effects' pointed out by Knights and Morgan (1991). Still others have worked on the rhetorical aspects of strategizing in specific contexts. For example, Mueller et al. (2004) have identified specific rhetorical 'widening' strategies that were used to justify desired changes in a professional health organization. Drawing from Foucauldian discourse analysis, Ezzamel and Willmott (2004) have in turn shown how the reading of strategy statements provides the basis for organizational power relationships.

This research holds great promise when it comes to understanding some of the essential discursive dynamics in organizational strategizing. This is especially the case with issues such as subjectivity, which are difficult to study with more traditional methods. While several of the studies have touched upon subjectivity, the fact remains that there is still a lack of empirical studies examining how particular actors mobilize specific strategy discourses to enhance, protect or resist particular subjectivities in organizational strategizing. Whilst there may be several theoretical and methodological perspectives that illuminate these issues, we outline in the following a discursive struggle perspective that appears particularly useful for this purpose.

A discursive struggle perspective on subjectivity

While there are many approaches to discourse analysis in general (e.g. van Dijk, 1997) and organizational discourse analysis in particular (e.g. Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Westwood & Linstead, 2001; Phillips & Hardy, 2002), our analysis draws from the critical discourse studies tradition. This approach has grown out of the seminal work of Foucault on the one hand (e.g. 1994) and the development of specific methodologies in applied linguistics on the other (e.g. Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2002; Fairclough, 2003). While many types of studies can be included under the broad umbrella of critical discourse studies, a general characteristic of such studies is to focus on the role played by language in the construction of power relationships and reproduction of domination. This is arguably a particularly suitable perspective for our analysis of subjectivity.

A critical discourse perspective has been put to use in various fields of human and social sciences, and the applications have differed significantly. In critical organizational discourse analysis (e.g. Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Thomas, 2003; Mumby, 2004; Fairclough, 2005), the role given to the social context has varied. In our analysis, we want to emphasize that one cannot understand specific texts and discourses without considering the social context in question. According to this view, discursive practices are among the most important social practices defining our social reality and are still overlooked in many areas such as mainstream strategy research. However, there are other important social practices which should not be underestimated. In strategizing, these range from routinized sensemaking patterns and behaviours in organizational decision-making to explicit traditions and methods in organization-specific strategy processes (e.g. Jarzabkowski,

2005). In fact, we argue that the role of specific discursive practices becomes salient precisely when they are linked with the other social practices constituting strategy and strategizing in specific contexts.

Critical organizational discourse analyses have also varied in their orientation toward micro-level linguistic elements. Most of these analyses have focused less on the textual micro-elements and more on the linkages between discourse use and organizational action (e.g. Phillips & Hardy, 2002; Mumby, 2004). In our view, it is important to analyse textual elements in sufficient detail to understand their subtle effects on subjectivity (see also Fairclough, 2005). However, the level of analysis must obviously depend on the research question and design. In this article, our focus is on the subjectification tendencies found in organizational actors' talk about strategy and strategizing in a specific organizational context. Here, we will focus on specific discursive processes and practices through which subjectivity is constructed and (re)constructed in organizational strategizing.

In any case, organizational discourses have ontological power; they define concepts, objects and subject positions (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). Concepts are the very means through which people give meaning to specific phenomena. Discourses also create objects in the sense of legitimation and naturalization of specific ideas, for example, concerning the nature of strategy processes. Most importantly for our purposes, discourses also create subject positions. In a sense, they provide a 'structure of rights'; what may or may not be done in a specific discursive and social space (e.g. Davies & Harré, 1990). For example, most versions of strategy discourse give voice primarily for top management while silencing others. Other discourses may then promote a more participatory approach to strategizing.

What is important in this kind of analysis is an explicit focus on the linkage of discourse and power in the organizational context. Following the example of Mumby (1997, 2004, 2005), we approach this linkage as a dialectical battle between competing groups. This allows us to see how discourses define subjectivities, but also how the use of specific discourses is part of the battle over power, hegemony and individualized sense of identity. As Mumby puts it:

> Framed discursively, a dialectical analysis focuses less on identifying the meaning of particular discourses, and more on the interpretive struggle among discourses and practices. Analyses explore how social actors attempt to 'fix' meanings in ways that resist and/or reproduce extant relations of power.
>
> (Mumby, 2005: 24)

These dialectics often involve a dynamic between control (using a specific discourse as a means of control) and resistance (trying to cope with or directly resist specific discourses and their implications, e.g. for subjectivity).

For this purpose, we put forth the concept of 'discursive struggle' as a theoretic lens that helps to focus attention on the multiple and multi-faced discursive dialectics in strategy discourse. The point here is that these discursive struggles not only deal with competing views concerning organizational strategies, but also involve more fundamental questions related to the subjectivity of the actors involved. These include their right and opportunities to engage in organizational decision-making, their autonomy as organizational actors, and ultimately their identity as respected and important organizational members. This opens up a perspective that helps us to understand the inherent discursive politics involved in organizational strategizing. On the one hand, the mobilization of a specific discourse can serve as a means of managerial control. On the other, these discourses may be resisted precisely because they undermine the subjectivity of particular organizational actors. This resistance can take the form of open criticism, be shown in the ignoring of hegemonic discourses, or be manifested in alternative discursive articulations.

For an empirically grounded illustration of such dialectics, we now turn to our case analysis where we examine the discursive construction of strategic development and its implications for subjectivity. Here, we will focus on the following empirical research questions: how do the actors discursively make sense of and give sense to 'strategic development'?; and: how do they construct specific subjectivities for themselves and others?

The Elling Group as a site of discursive struggle

Our analysis is based on a longitudinal case study design (e.g. Yin, 1994). The main idea is to study a particularly interesting case to understand the discursive construction of subjectivity in organizational strategizing more generally. In this sense, following the tradition in discourse analysis, we aim at analytical rather than universal generalizations (e.g. Tsoukas, 1989).

We focus on 'strategic development' in the Elling Group.[2] This case can be seen as a revealing example of how managers and organizational actors make sense of and give sense to 'strategic development' in very different ways. Here, we define 'strategic development' broadly to include all kinds of activities and processes related to the deliberate or emergent development of the business and organization. Consequently, we are not only dealing with the formal strategy process or the official strategy rhetoric, but

also with other talk around 'strategic development'. We focus on distinctive articulated ways of representing organizational reality, that is, 'discourses' in this organization. This definition of organizational discourses resonates with the view adopted by Watson: 'discourse is a connected set of statements, concepts, terms and expressions which constitutes a way of talking or writing about a particular issue, thus framing the way people understand and act with respect to that issue' (1994: 113). The point is that these discourses are alternative and competing ways of socially constructing organizational reality around strategic development. They are also closely linked with other, more material organizational practices such as the financial control of specific units and customer projects as well as resource allocations for specific development activities.

Established in the 1950s, the Elling Group is an engineering and consulting group based in northern Europe. The company has a long tradition in providing extensive engineering projects for specific industries, typically involving the design and construction of new plants. It is considered to be the leading company in its sector globally, with a reputation for providing state-of-the-art technological solutions and professional expertise. From the perspective of the company, this has meant relying on the ability to manage technologically and organizationally complex customer projects. 'Competence', 'efficiency' and 'quality' related to project work have been the cornerstones of the company's strategy.

However, things have changed in recent years at both the customer end and internally. Technological development has changed working procedures and provided new alternatives for customer solutions. The investments made by the customers of the Elling Group have not increased as hoped for, which has reduced demand for the traditional services of the group. The competition has also increased. New competitors have entered the field and offered new alternatives for the customers. Local companies, which offer their services at a lower price, have also intensified competition.

The group has transformed itself into a multinational listed corporation. This has been shown in an accentuated emphasis on 'shareholder value'. Financial difficulties faced in recent years have further reinforced profitability concerns and resulted in streamlining and cost cuts. New demands coming from the customers and top management have intensified project work in most units of the corporation. For example, project schedules have become much tighter. At the same time, increasing efforts have been made to develop new products and services. This is also the case with the Repco unit which is the case-in-case unit that our analysis focuses on. Repco forms one important division of the group. It concentrates on specific kinds of engineering products and services that have traditionally been sold in extensive long-term projects.

In this situation, managers, project engineers and other key actors have actually shared rather similar views concerning the need to increase the profitability of the corporation as well as the necessity to develop their operations and services. Against this background, it has been surprising – and disappointing – to management that new strategic ideas such as 'value added services' have not taken off and that the personnel has not proved to be altogether committed to the strategic plans. Hence, this case is a particularly interesting one; it reveals that such problems are linked with fundamental concerns about subjectivity and power.

Methods

We have examined the 'strategic development' processes in this company by compiling several kinds of empirical material on a longitudinal basis, focusing on the period 1998–2004. This includes participant observation, all kinds of company documents, and targeted interviews. First, participant observation has been used. The first author has designed and carried out management training programmes for the company since autumn 1998. Altogether, 160 middle managers and other professionals have attended the 13-month programme, which has run eight times. Strategic development has been an essential part of these training programmes. The corporate management and the HR people have seen these programmes as important arenas for communicating the corporate strategy and for teaching new concepts and skills needed in strategic planning. In these programmes, the participants have, for example, prepared strategic plans for their own areas of responsibility. In these sessions, they have together with the facilitators (including the first author) also reflected on the implementation of these plans as well as on how particular theoretical ideas have worked in practice. The sessions have provided numerous examples of concrete discursive struggles among the participants in these programmes. In addition, this training activity has led to invaluable informal contacts with the organizational members that have helped us to map out typical patterns of discourse use in this organization.

Second, various kinds of documents concerning company strategy are another important source of empirical material. Many of these are publicly available, but they also include material that the first author has, with the approval of the case company, been able to gather during this research project. These documents have been especially important in examining specific features of the 'official corporate strategy' and in then placing the organizational members' comments about 'strategic development' against this background.

Third, material has been generated from semi-structured interviews with Repco personnel by the first author of this article. Although these were conducted on a cross-sectional basis, they focused on the changes taking place between 1998 and 2004. Altogether 20 people out of the 60 working in the Repco unit were interviewed. The interviewed persons included the manager of the unit, five other key persons that form the middle management of the unit, 10 project engineers, and four people in other positions. A 'story telling approach' was followed in the interviews, placing special emphasis on the interviewee's own experiences (e.g. Vaara, 2002). The idea was to let the interviewees talk as much and as freely as possible about 'strategic development' and their role in it. However, the interviews also included specific questions. These questions focused on their work, the corporate strategy, the strategy of the unit, the development work in the unit, and the specific strategic activities in this unit, and their experiences of all this. On average, the interviews lasted for two hours. They were all tape-recorded and fully transcribed.

All this provides an extensive discursive database for examining various discourses and discursive practices around 'strategic development'. In particular, these data have allowed us to combine discursive material with ethnographic information, which is arguably a particularly fruitful starting point for analyses of strategy discourse (e.g. Samra-Fredericks, 2004a, 2005). Combining these data has not, however, been unproblematic. In particular, the interviews obviously reflect more what is said in the interview situation rather than 'naturally occurring talk' in the organization more broadly. Nevertheless, precisely by comparing the observational, documentary and interview data we have been able to distinguish recurrent examples of discourse use, that is, instances that characterize the actors' discourses more generally.

Critical discourse analysis is usually abductive; that is, 'a constant movement back and forth between theory and empirical data is necessary' (Wodak, 2004: 200). This is also the case with our analysis. Our research design allowed us to contrast the corporate management strategy discourse with strategic development talk in the case unit, and these comparisons have been an essential part of the refinement of our theoretical ideas. In the first stage of our analysis, we focused on the overall differences in the corporate management, middle management and project engineer discourses on strategic development. We concentrated on typical features and patterns, but used specific examples to analyse particular discursive practices in more detail. These analyses focused on specific textual elements – for example, recurrent concepts or metaphors – as well as on particular features in discourse use – for example, rhetorical micro-strategies or modality shifts.

This kind of analysis is not methodologically unproblematic as it involves a constant comparison of specific textual elements within a substantial textual database. In our case, the participant observation and the informal contacts with the company helped a great deal in placing specific texts in their wider social and intertextual context.

In the second stage, we focused on discursive struggles over subjectivity. This proved to be a very complex research task, which in itself reflects the intricate linkages between strategy and subjectivity. In practice, we focused on specific examples highlighting the key hegemonic battle at play: corporate management control versus organizational resistance. This does not, however, mean that all the discursive struggles are linked with this conflict. Neither should it be interpreted as a sign of ever present animosity between specific groups of people. Rather, this focus reflects our willingness to focus on and single out some of the most central discursive elements and patterns that characterize the discursive struggles at play in this organization. We examined numerous examples, from which we singled out typical and particularly telling illustrations of discourse use. Finally, we chose to focus on three central discursive patterns to be reported in this article, each of which is exemplified by illustrative texts.

Appropriation of strategy discourse to gain control

We begin by demonstrating how corporate management can mobilize and appropriate a 'new strategy discourse' and how this reproduces managerial hegemony that is resisted by others. While the group management had been working on 'strategy' and 'strategic planning' before, the corporate management focused its attention on 'strategic' issues in the aftermath of a market slowdown in 2001. Since then, a 'new strategy discourse' has been communicated through both formal (e.g. official presentations to internal audiences and external stakeholders, an in-house magazine, annual report) and informal (e.g. various kinds of meetings and discussions) channels. This discourse has been a way for the corporate management to reorganize decision-making and planning processes (largely on the basis of traditional top-down approaches), to tackle the key challenges of the group (as they have seen them) and to promote the new objectives defined within this discourse (e.g. focus on 'value-added services' and 'consulting').

While this discourse has been promoted by various channels and taken various forms, we will here focus on specific examples from the In-House Magazine and management training programme to highlight some of the

most salient hegemonic elements. This is how the new strategy was introduced in the In-House Magazine:

> The renewed strategy process was implemented with Consulting Company Ltd, making use of their strategy model. The objective was to introduce a new method for developing the Group's strategy for the period 2001–2005, and at the same time identify new business ideas. Hundreds of pages of bullet point presentations were generated in the course of the strategy process. The complete strategy documentation amounts to more than 100 pages. A condensed version of the strategy will be cascaded throughout the company in the form of presentations. Because of the confidential nature of the strategy documentation, it cannot be presented in detail in the In-House Magazine. Therefore this article is limited to presenting the mission slogan and the values in brief. The strategy will be cascaded throughout the Group to every employee.
>
> (In-House Magazine 12/2001)

This is an informative example in several respects. First, through arranging objects such as 'strategy process', 'model', 'strategy documentation', 'new business ideas', 'mission slogan', 'values', and categories of social actors (top management, employees, the consulting company) the text reproduces a particular order seemingly controllable by top management. Second, the introduction of the new strategic planning model (as a progressive model of organizational decision-making) is legitimated in a particular way. This is done by reference to a well-known management consulting company ('Consulting Company Ltd'). Third, the emphasis on 'preparation' and 'documentation' emphasizes the planning-intensive nature of strategizing. At the same time, it underscores the central role of those who supposedly have the best knowledge and are most capable of conducting such analyses and drawing conclusions, that is, the corporate management and the consultants. Fourth, there is also a strong emphasis on secrecy (e.g. 'confidentiality'), which further underscores the role of corporate management as key strategists and the passive role ascribed to the organization. Fifth, the others are given a 'condensed' version of strategy. This means in effect that not many organizational members are given an opportunity to see the full document. The metaphoric expression of 'cascading' further positions the employees as passive recipients rather than active agents participating in the preparation of the strategy. In many senses, the corporate management's strategy discourse has thus drawn from traditional conceptions of 'strategic

planning' (e.g. Ansoff, 1965) characterized by a 'top-down' approach rather than more recent ideas about a 'bottom-up' approach (e.g. Mintzberg & Waters, 1985; Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000).

While the corporate management's strategy discourse has tended to undermine the possibility of others to participate in official strategic decision-making, its content has also had other problematic implications for the subjectivity of specific actors. In particular, the corporate management's strategy discourse has included elements attempting to limit the opportunities of specific actors to engage in development work. The following is an example of how 'innovation' has been linked with the strategy process:

> Side by side with the strategy process, a separate innovation stream was pursued with the aim of creating new products and business ideas transcending the borders between business groups. Representatives of all business groups participated in this process.
>
> (In-House Magazine, 12/2001)

This corporate discourse seems to paint a picture of organization-wide participation in corporate-led innovation processes. Within the corporate discourse, such innovations have, however, been primarily those that the corporate management has seen as 'value-added services' or 'consulting' rather than conventional project work. This has had a major impact on units that have traditionally relied on project work such as the Repco unit – not so much because of a disagreement concerning the need to develop new products and services but because of this self-declared right of corporate management to define and control what these products and services should be and how they should be developed.

Importantly, all this has happened in the context of increasing financial control which has itself been legitimated in the official strategy. The following is one of many examples of corporate management explaining this focus:

> We [top management] can only anticipate the expectations of the clients and personnel. The only issue that we do not have to guess are the expectations of the owners. That we know; it is a fact. The owners want earnings per share. That means profitability and growth and above all no surprises. Whatever we say we better live with it.
>
> (President, speech in a management training programme, 2004, participant observation)

This is a telling example in two senses. First, targets set by top management are legitimated by unambiguous references to 'owners'. Here, as well as

elsewhere in strategic communication, the President draws from the powerful 'shareholder value' discourse and positions top management (personal pronoun 'we') as 'owners' representatives' with a particular organizational role and identity. The President emphasizes alignment with owners by presenting owners' expectations as a 'fact'. 'Clients' and 'personnel' are then portrayed in another manner: as actors whose expectations can only be 'anticipated'. The modalizing term 'only' provides an 'extreme case formulation' that underscores the inability of top management to do anything else than to 'anticipate' (for similar findings, see Samra-Fredericks, 2004a). This means that there is little direct communication between management and clients or personnel. This prioritization of shareholders over 'clients' can, however, be seen as undermining the importance of customer contacts in project work, an issue that we will come back to in the following sections. Second, 'no surprises' and 'we better live with it' invoke a patriarchal discourse where an intimidating father expects obedience from others (i.e. 'personnel') (e.g. Holmer-Nadesan, 1996). Such limits are, however, something that the people in the Repco unit, emphasizing the need for continuous and somewhat unpredictable innovation processes, have found difficult to accept, as explained in the following sections.

The strategy discourse of corporate management has promoted their own status as strategists whose decisions and actions determine the future of the organization. At the same time, they have increasingly sought support from other people in their discourse. In fact, 'participation' has recently become a major topic of discussion in this group, too. This has typically involved the in-built distinction between 'strategy formulation' and 'strategy implementation'. For example, in an important presentation, the president emphasized that:

> The definition of the strategy is relatively easy but the implementation is the hardest issue . . . The most important things in strategy are actions.
>
> (President, management training programme, 2004, participant observation)

The point here is that this discourse can be seen as a plea for participation in 'implementation' – a classical challenge in strategic development in this as well as in other organizations. Such 'participation' has elsewhere been called 'participation by command' (e.g. Eriksson & Lehtimäki, 1998, 2001). By using this vocabulary, the President has reproduced the traditional patriarchal view that it is the role of the corporate management to make the key decisions and then other organizational members to 'implement' them,

a worldview that has been difficult to accept by those who have valued the relative independence of project work and the ability to invest in development activities in these contexts.

In all, the launching of the new strategy discourse can be seen as an attempt to gain control over the organization. With this discourse, the corporate management has legitimated its authority position in the midst of uncertain market development, but at the same time undermined the agency and subjectivity of others. This is a major reason for active or passive discursive resistance in the Repco unit as well as elsewhere, as discussed in the following sections.

Creation of room for manoeuvre

Next we turn to illustrate how middle managers have initiated their own strategy discourse to create room for manoeuvre in a situation where the corporate management's strategy discourse does not support their development activities. In our case, the manager of the Repco unit and his closest colleagues have approached strategic development in a way that differs radically from the conception of the corporate management. Their discourse has drawn from an entrepreneurial ethos, emphasized the need for local strategy work, and underscored the importance of participation. Often, this discourse has also involved criticism of the corporate management's strategy in terms of both the objectives and the organization of the strategy process, but the managers have been cautious in terms of voicing this criticism vis-à-vis top management.

Characteristic of Repco management discourse is that concrete strategic development work has been seen as a key activity – regardless of whether it has been sanctioned by top management. In fact, in the interviews these people explained how they had to start the work 'in secret', as in the following:

> All of us were busy in the current customer projects and we did not have any spare time for development work. So we started conducting the new product development in secret. We were able to do this because we had financing from the National Technology Agency [because they did not receive resources from corporate management].

In this example, expressions like 'no spare time' and 'in secret' depict strategic development as hard and demanding work. Importantly, the key

actors – that is, the middle managers in the Repco unit – are portrayed in a heroic manner.

The following is then a typical example describing their view of the official strategy process led by corporate management:

> The [corporate management] strategy does not disturb us . . . It's just fine if it doesn't go against what we have thought . . . However, we must constantly, if not really confront, then convince management that we are doing the right things here.

What is central in this quote is the seemingly nonchalant approach to top management's strategy discourse. Corporate strategies are seen as 'not disturbing' and later the lack of contradiction is portrayed as 'just fine'. Both denial and diminishing are discursive practices that effectively create an impression that the interviewee is not especially concerned even if the strategies are contradictory. However, 'if not really confront' presupposes that they could also defend their ideas more aggressively, if needed. It is also clearly indicated ('constantly convince management') that there is a need to remind the corporate management of specific ideas and needs. In this way, trying to influence the corporate management becomes an essential part of their strategy work.[3]

Overall, middle managers' view on strategizing has resembled a 'bottom-up' approach. An interviewee described this in an illuminating way:

> This is like strategic control from the unit, and the [corporate] management has gradually become mature enough to understand these [their strategies].

Note how their approach to strategic development is captured in the interesting notion 'strategic control from the unit', which underscores the importance of local development work. There is a passing reference to the lack of 'maturity' in top management's strategic thinking, which undermines the importance of the official strategy discourse. It also reproduces a view that Repco managers – rather than top management – are pioneers in business development (being 'ahead' or 'more mature'). Consequently, the image built through this kind of discourse is that the middle managers are the progressive strategic entrepreneurs whose views and actions should be given priority.

The unit management has worked hard to make all the people within the unit and also others in specific units participate in coordinated strategic

development work. 'Participation' has also become a central theme emphasized in their unit – as well as in the interviews. This is how the head of the unit summarized their approach:

> I began to arrange this kind of meetings in our unit . . . So that we could figure out together what kind of competence is needed in the future . . . then we had workshops of this kind for the whole unit . . . and then we have had personal discussions. I want to hear it from everybody personally what kind of issues they are interested in and what kind of personal development challenges they would be ready to take. It's not right that I just order people to do something. The awakening has to happen individually.

As is evident, this participation differs radically from the corporate management 'participation by command' mode (see the previous section). Notions such as 'figure out together', 'workshops', and 'for the whole unit' construct a collective approach to strategizing. This collective subjectivity is, however, also linked with the individual level as in 'personal discussions' and 'personal development'. 'It's not right that I just order people to do something' includes a presupposition that the head of the unit could exercise his hierarchical power in strategizing, but is not willing to do that in the name of participation. Interestingly, the Repco management discourse has at times included religious elements (e.g. 'awakening' above). The following is another typical example:

> It has been kind of an enlightenment that we do not speak about projects in my unit any more; we talk about the lifecycle of the plant . . . We have tried to spread this to the shop floor level . . . There are sixty of us, and ten have been awakened so there are fifty that have to be awakened . . . We have now started to spread the gospel.

These biblical metaphors ('enlightenment', 'awakening', 'gospel') are clear examples of the strong sense of community among these key people. At the same time, such expressions tend to reinforce a particular kind of power relationship between the management of the Repco unit and the project engineers. In fact, the subjectivity constructed for the key managers at Repco paradoxically resembles that of top management whose approach they are keen to criticize. Note how the metaphor of 'spreading the gospel' also distinguishes between 'true believers' and those that have to be 'awakened'. This is an important distinction that reflects the challenge of Repco management vis-à-vis the project engineers many of whom do not

seem to be easily 'awakened'. This is an issue which we will examine in more detail in the following section.

In all, while this Repco discourse reflects specific convictions concerning the corporate strategies and the appropriate organization of strategy processes, it can and must also be seen as a means to resist corporate management hegemony. In fact, the discourse of the unit manager and his colleagues has served as a basis for autonomous strategic development work and the legitimation of actions that have not been supported within the framework of the corporate management discourse.

Distancing to maintain viable identity

In our third example, we illustrate how specific engineers distance themselves from management-initiated strategy discourses to maintain viable professional identity in the midst of increasing pressures. For these people, the development work conducted in the context of the projects is the key strategic activity in the organization. The corporate management's approach to strategy has been seen as superficial, but also problematic as it has tended to undermine their professional identity and reduce their ability to develop new products and services in the project context. Neither has the Repco unit management's call for participative unit-specific strategic development gathered much support because it has been seen as far removed from the actual challenges of project work.

The project engineers have themselves emphasized the role of root-level development work within the projects as in the following example:

> In that project I had to create a procedure for an 'XYZ' system. I was the first one to do that in our company and had to dig up [information] from a number of places. We also have experts within this field, and I had to interview a lot to put it together. People later asked me to provide them with this procedure . . . I am not saying this to stress my own importance but to emphasize our way of working.

In such examples, the interviewees have described how the project engineers confront new situations, and how these challenges can be tackled by hard work (e.g. 'dig up', 'interview a lot to put it together'). This is a typical example in terms of the pronounced individualism involved (e.g. with the personal pronouns). These and other expressions also reproduce a masculine identity linked with this male-dominated engineering profession. Importantly, in these examples as in numerous others, the focus is on development work

conducted in the project context, to underscore the difference from the corporate management or Repco unit discourse, which focus on the need for separate strategic planning sessions and development projects.

The project engineers have emphasized the role of 'experience' in strategic development. The following is a typical example from an interview:

> As a matter of fact, the customer trusted us so much that during the project we sat down together and he asked us to handle this new issue that had emerged from the EU directive, so that he doesn't have to worry and start asking somewhere else . . . It was new to us to provide a total solution for this particular area . . . We had this one guy, Howard, who had done parts of it within a previous project . . . and now Howard was given the task of figuring out what we should do . . . So it was Howard who developed this solution . . . and he did this development work within a customer project . . . and this was the beginning of a new competence area within the project work.

Here, the interviewee constructs the project engineers as 'trusted partners' for the customers with impressions such as 'customer trusted us', 'we sat down together', and 'he asked us to handle this so that he doesn't have to worry'. The point is that it is the seasoned project engineer who is in the unique position to be able to engage in a dialogue with the customer. Experience comes in both as a basis of trust and as capability to solve the problems. With these and other similar references to 'experience', 'customer contacts', 'knowledge' and 'capability', the project engineers have legitimated their position as central actors with respect to strategic development. Such examples have also (re)constructed images of heroism, related to the difficult technological and financial challenges. This heroism has been further accentuated by the lack of support given by management and the increasing cost pressures. Through this kind of discourse they have thus (re)produced a positive self-image in the midst of all kinds of changes.

In their discourse, the project engineers have often questioned the rationality of top management's strategy discourse. The following is a typical example criticizing the focus on 'value-added services' or 'consulting':

> In my view our [the company's] problem is that there is no understanding . . . if you look at the annual report or what the President says, it is consulting . . . but if you ask the customer, it is our strength that we can take care of large projects and see them through as scheduled.

Within the project engineers' discourse, any attempts to redefine their role as trusted partners of the customers have been seen as threatening. This is

exemplified by the vivid comment of a seasoned project engineer who was horrified with the image of becoming a 'consultant':

> The consultants piss me off . . . I have seen consultants there. They drink coffee in the meetings. They are nice guys, but they don't know anything. I haven't got the slightest idea what they are doing. But if the customer pays for it, why not? And obviously we [the group] are also going in that direction. We don't develop people to become project professionals. Instead we develop 'presentation skills'. We must be able to speak for more hours with less knowledge. But in my opinion, if you know your subject, you can convince people without any particular presentation skills.

With the personal pronoun 'they' the interviewee distances consultants from 'himself' ('I') and 'us' ('we'). By using the present tense form he translates his situational experience of consultants into consultant practice. By defining consultants as 'being' he attaches a subjectivity of 'performer' to project engineers. He attributes skills like 'speaking' and 'presenting' to consultants but does not count those skills as part of 'knowing your subject'. He uses a masculine metaphor 'piss me off' and irony like 'nice guys, but they don't know anything' to underscore the difference between experienced project professionals (who can genuinely help the customer) and consultants (who are seen as mere actors without any valuable skills). On the whole, these reflections manifest typical ways in which project engineers have resisted the 'castrating' effects of the official strategy discourse.

Characteristic of the project engineers' discourse has indeed been a very critical view on the corporate management's overall approach to strategy process, which was often seen as 'empty rhetoric' as exemplified in the following:

> I have seen the fine-looking green book that they have waved around, and there are these fancy posters on the wall.

> I wonder if they [the corporate management] have themselves understood what they mean with their circles.

Note how in the first quotation the references to 'fine-looking green book' and 'fancy posters on the wall' are effective means of distancing and how the imagery of 'waving around' categorizes the official strategy work as unimportant. Questioning the competence of top managers in the second quotation is then a straightforward example of the trivialization and de-legitimation of official strategy work. Such criticism has served an important purpose for the reconstruction of the positive self-image of the project engineers. However, it has rarely been voiced outside the project engineers' own spheres.

These project engineers have also tended to dismiss the bottom-up development work in Repco. Although they have acknowledged the efforts made to secure the future of the unit, they have on the whole been sceptical of the new plans developed by the Repco management. In fact, their strategic development activities have often been constructed as 'pottering about', with little possibility of having a real impact on key decisions. At worst, the unit manager and his collaborators have been portrayed more as 'clowns than real managers; if they resist top management, they will be transferred to other positions'.

In all, it is important to note that the project engineers' discourse is not only an expression of deviant opinions about the corporate objectives or about organizational decision-making processes, but also a means of resisting managerial hegemony. By reverting to their discourse, the project professionals have attempted to protect their professional identity and autonomy – and partially succeed in doing this. Namely, by not surrendering to the strategy discourse of the corporate or unit management, they have limited the ability of the management to control the actual project work – discursively and otherwise.

Discussion

In this article, we have focused on the following research question: what kinds of struggles over subjectivity characterize organizational strategizing? In our analysis, we have drawn from the seminal work of Knights and Morgan (1991), which establishes the intimate linkage between strategy and subjectivity. However, to proceed further, we have focused on the dialectics of control and resistance and the specific discursive ways in which these are manifested in concrete organizational settings (e.g. Mumby, 1997, 2005; Thomas & Davies, 2005). Our key argument can be formulated as follows: in these struggles, strategy and other discourses assign particular kinds of subjectivities for organizational actors, with empowering or disempowering effects. Specific discourses can be mobilized to attempt to gain control as well as to resist such attempts. This frequently leads to a situation where actors promote competing discourses that provide inherently different views on organizational strategizing. These discourses play a key role not only in practices explicitly related to organizational strategizing but also in enhancing the self-identity of the actors more generally.

In our empirical analysis, we have focused on two inter-related questions: how do the actors discursively make sense of and give sense to 'strategic development'?; and: how do they construct specific subjectivities

for themselves and others? We need to emphasize that we can only offer glimpses of the myriad discursive processes and practices involved in the Elling Group. What we have reported here are specific examples of competing ways of making sense of and giving sense to 'strategic development', with particular implications for subjectivity. First, we have illustrated how the introduction of a new official strategy by corporate management can be seen as an attempt to gain control of the organization. While the exact features may vary greatly from case to case, such appropriation of strategy discourse by top management is likely to be very common in contemporary organizations. In fact, this is probably one of the most typical ways in which hierarchical power relationships are re-established with respect to decision-making in contemporary corporations. In this case, it involved the reproduction of conventional strategy discourse (see Knights & Morgan, 1991) with its top-down conceptions of strategy work. In many ways, this discourse was instrumental in legitimating change initiatives led by top management, but at the same time involved such hegemonic tendencies that many other organizational members could not but resist. This is a major reason for why the new corporate management discourse never fully 'took' in the organization. Our point here is that this is not uncommon but very typical; attempts to gain control are bound to trigger acts of resistance of various kinds. Discursively, this resistance often means invoking alternative discourses.

Second, we have shown how middle managers can initiate unit-specific strategy discourse to create room for manoeuvre in situations where their development activities are not supported by the corporate management's strategy discourse. Their own entrepreneurial discourse emerged as an alternative that helped to resist the hegemonic discourse of the corporate management and re-establish the subjectivity of these middle managers as 'strategic actors'. In particular, this discourse provided a means for legitimating specific actions that seemed to contradict the official strategy discourse of the corporate management. What is particularly interesting in this case is how legitimacy was sought by referring to 'pioneering' or 'more progressive' approaches than those of the corporate management. While our case unit can be described as a particularly active one, we argue that these kinds of discourses, which provide alternatives to the official strategy, are likely to be found in most other corporations as well.

Third, we have illustrated how project engineers can distance themselves from management-initiated strategy discourses to maintain viable identity in the midst of difficult changes. In this case, the subjectivity constructed in management-led strategy discourses seemed particularly threatening for their professional identity as competent project professionals.

In this situation, their own strategic development discourse was an interesting mixture of the traditional project-based discourse of the company and a sceptical attitude towards the new strategy initiatives of the corporate or middle managers. When legitimating their traditional role as key people in business development, they frequently referred to their 'expertise', 'experience' and 'close customer relationship' thereby focusing attention on the concrete business operations instead of 'abstract strategy rhetoric'. Again, such resistance by specific worker groups is likely to characterize many contemporary organizations. This has already been shown in other contexts (e.g. Holmer-Nadesan, 1996; Ezzamel et al., 2001; Doolin, 2002; Contu & Willmott, 2003), but this tendency is likely to be particularly salient with respect to strategizing due to the key role of strategy discourse in organizational decision-making.

It must be emphasized that these dialectics of control and resistance are not merely abstract instances of organizational rhetoric, but closely linked with the social context and the material conditions at hand. These specific discourses reflect the specific social positions and concrete challenges of the actors involved. They are in the end not too surprising, either; rather, they mirror the age-old tension between top driven control on the one hand and the right of self-determination and self-realization on the other. This does not, however, undermine the constitutive effects of such organizational discourses. On the contrary, as this case vividly illustrates, traditional strategy discourses tend to privilege top managerial decision makers and limit the opportunities of others to participate fully in organizational strategizing. This frequently reproduces the classical confrontation between the top and lower levels of organizational hierarchy.

It is also important to underline that not all discursive action is fully conscious or intentional. This means that specific discourses can be reproduced almost automatically without a complete understanding of their implications. In this sense, top managers and other organizational actors can easily remain 'prisoners' of the established discourses and other social practices such as 'top-down approaches' or 'participation by command'. In fact, it is probably often the case that top management are not fully aware of the problematic disempowering effects of their strategy discourse, especially as these are often conveyed through subtle discursive practices. Hence, as illustrated by this case, overt or covert resistance to a new official strategy discourse may often come as a surprise to top management.

Finally, this kind of analysis also helps us to deepen our understanding of the role of other organizational members in discursive strategizing. Their role is easily reduced to responsiveness/non-responsiveness: 'consent' or 'resistance' without taking into account the generative power of their

discourse. In particular, this case highlights the crucial role of middle managers. Rather than being mere 'translators' of corporate strategies (see, for example, Floyd & Wooldridge, 1997, 2000), they can act as agents creating new discursive and social practices for unit-specific needs. They are thus central political actors whose discursive and other actions play an important role in organizational strategizing (see also Brown & Humphreys, 2003; Balogun & Johnson, 2005). At another level, the project professionals' discourse is an essential vehicle through which they can not only work for or against specific managerial agendas but also promote specific ideas that they consider important and maintain viable professional identity. This analysis thus helps to better understand the overwhelming discursive complexity in organizational strategizing that should not be underestimated in any analysis of organizational strategy processes.

Conclusion

The starting point of this article has been to focus on the discursive construction of subjectivity, which is a topic that deserves a great deal of attention if we want to better understand the underlying socio-political dynamics in organizational strategizing. This is a major challenge, especially for the strategy-as-practice stream of research that seeks to add to our knowledge of the social and hence also discursive processes constituting strategy and strategizing in specific settings. In our view, this analysis makes two contributions to the strategy-as-practice literature. First, we think that the article makes a contribution in outlining the discursive struggle perspective on subjectivity. In our analysis, we have drawn from the seminal work of Knights and Morgan (1991) on the linkage between strategy and subjectivity. However, we have tried to further develop this approach so that we can better understand the ways in which subjectivities are constructed and reconstructed in organizational strategizing. We have done this by introducing the discursive struggle perspective that has been applied in other organizational contexts (e.g. Mumby, 1997, 2005), but not really used in the strategy domain. This is an interesting and useful perspective as it helps us to focus on the constant dialectics of control and resistance in organizational strategizing and thereby better comprehend how organizational strategizing links with broader issues of hegemony and resistance. In our analysis, we have reported three examples of how organizational actors make sense of and give sense to 'strategic development', with fundamental implications for agency and identity. These examples manifest three specific but typical ways in which organizational actors mobilize discourses in struggles over

subjectivity: launching and appropriation of strategy discourse by top management to attempt to gain control over the organization, initiation of an alternative strategy discourse to resist top managerial hegemony and to create room for manoeuvre by specific unit managers, and distancing from management-led strategy discourses to maintain viable identity at the project engineer level.

Second, this kind of view on strategic development discourses also provides additional explanations to why some of the strategic ideas do not 'take' (e.g. Hardy et al., 2000), lead to 'failures in strategizing' (e.g. Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003) or have 'unintended consequences' (e.g. Balogun & Johnson, 2005). In this sense, our analysis contributes both to more socially (e.g. Floyd & Wooldridge, 2000; Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005) and discursively oriented analyses (Hardy et al., 2000; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003) examining 'misunderstandings', 'communication problems' or 'lack of commitment' in strategy processes. In simple terms, our analysis shows how the reasons for such problematic experiences do not only lie in opposing views concerning the strategic direction of the organization but also involve very different ideas concerning what 'strategic development' or 'strategizing' should be all about. Central here is the role and identity given to specific actors. In brief, most people want to see and portray themselves as 'strategic actors', and efforts – intentional or unintentional – to limit this role are likely to confront discursive and other social resistance.

While our study has pointed to specific discursive dynamics, there are many issues that will require closer scrutiny in future studies. In particular, there is a need for closer analyses of alternative and competing strategy discourses in different settings. In this article, we have sketched some ideas about how the 'official' corporate strategy, middle managers' views on strategy, and the discourse of specific professionals are linked together. Future studies could go much further into this direction, for example, by examining various kinds of encounters with methods such as conversation analysis (e.g. Samra-Fredericks, 2004a, 2005). It would also be important to continue to examine the various subtle means though which subjectivities and organizational power relationships are discursively constructed in specific texts. Such analyses could draw from more linguistically oriented discourse analysis (e.g. Kuronen et al., 2005). Finally, it would also be interesting to analyse the ways in which popular management literature, academic research or media texts reproduce subjectivity in strategy and strategizing.

Finally, there are also practical implications that should be taken seriously. First and foremost, this analysis illustrates the central role that discourses play in organizational strategizing. The main point is not to dismiss the role of discourses as mere 'communication', but to understand

that the very act of talking about strategy involves important implications in terms of the role and identity given or not given to specific actors. This should lead to sensitivity when it comes to organizational strategizing and the design and organization of specific strategy processes. Second, this analysis shows that hegemonic and non-participative approaches rarely lead to the enthusiasm and commitment called for in the 'implementation' of specific strategies, but tend to instead result in resistance in different forms. Although this is not a surprising finding per se, this analysis should help us to understand some of the underlying reasons that relate to fundamental questions concerning the agency and identity of specific organizational members. Third, this analysis also illustrates that all actors are easily bound by existing discourses – traditional ways of approaching strategy. This is a serious problem as far as it means – as it often does – precisely the reproduction of hegemonic and non-participatory approaches. Hence, there are good reasons for all involved in strategizing to attempt to go beyond the traditional top-down approaches and to search actively for ways to encourage participation – even in situations where the interests of particular actors may seem contradictory. This can be seen as a specific challenge for strategy experts – including all those involved in the strategy-as-practice community.

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Notes

1 The authors are listed in alphabetical order.

2 The names of our case company (Elling Group) and our case unit (Repco) are pseudonyms.

3 Importantly, the Repco management has lately succeeded in 'getting its message heard' at the corporate management level. This has also led to material consequences, and the Repco management has obtained more time and money for development work. In the unit, this has reinforced belief in their own approach to strategy.

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