HOW CAN PLURALISTIC ORGANIZATIONS PROCEED WITH STRATEGIC CHANGE? A PROCESSUAL ACCOUNT OF RHETORICAL CONTESTATION, CONVERGENCE AND PARTIAL AGREEMENT IN A NORDIC CITY ORGANIZATION

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Key words:

change, pluralistic organization, rhetoric, strategic change, strategy

Abstract

This study examines how pluralistic organizations confronting fundamental differences in values can proceed with strategic change. By drawing on a longitudinal case analysis of strategic change in a Nordic city organization, we show how the proponents and challengers play a 'rhetorical game' in which they simultaneously promote their own value-based interests and ideas and seek ways to enable change. In particular, we identify a pattern in which the discussion moved from initial contestation through gradual convergence to increasing agreement. In addition, we elaborate on four rhetorical practices used in this rhetorical game: voicing own arguments, appropriation of other's arguments, consensus argumentation, and collective-we argumentation. By so doing, our study contributes to research on strategic change in pluralistic organizations by offering a nuanced account of the use of rhetoric when moving from contestation to convergence and partial agreement. Furthermore, by detailing specific types of rhetorical practices that play a crucial role in strategy-making, our study advances research on the role of rhetoric in strategy process and practice research more generally.

HOW CAN PLURALISTIC ORGANIZATIONS PROCEED WITH STRATEGIC CHANGE? A PROCESSUAL ACCOUNT OF RHETORICAL CONTESTATION, CONVERGENCE AND PARTIAL AGREEMENT IN A NORDIC CITY ORGANIZATION

Scholars have for quite some time focused attention on the need to create consensus (Kellermans et al., 2005; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990), alignment (Walter et al., 2013), or shared views (Kwon, Wodak & Clarke 2014; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017) as a basis for strategic change. However, the difficulties involved in reaching agreement through such efforts have been demonstrated time and again. This is especially the case with pluralistic organizations (Denis, Lamothe & Langley, 2001; Denis, Langley & Rouleau, 2007; Denis, Dompierre, Langley & Rouleau, 2011) involving multiple actors with distinctively different values and ideological assumptions. For example, Denis et al. (2011) have shown how pluralistic organizations may end up in an "escalation of indecision," which implies inability to move on with strategic change. Nevertheless, pluralistic organizations also seem to be able to proceed with change, even when internal disagreement persists. How this happens in conditions characterized by divergent or opposing values is still only partially understood.

In this paper, we seek to resolve this theoretical conundrum by challenging conventional assumptions about consensus or shared views. Thus, we wish to add to recent studies that have pointed to the skillful use of strategic ambiguity (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Sillince, Jarzabkowski & Shaw, 2012), coorientation (Cooren, 2010; Robichaud, Giroux & Taylor, 2004; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004) and joint accounts (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017) as means to enable change amidst different views and interests. However, what is lacking in these studies is a nuanced understanding of the different types of rhetorical arguments and moves that enable actors to simultaneously hold on to their fundamental values and voice their different views while creating the common ground necessary for proceeding with change initiatives. It is this 'rhetorical game' that we wish to elucidate in this research. Our study therefore focuses on the following research question: How does rhetorical argumentation help achieve partial consensus on the need for change in a pluralistic organization with stakeholders who have different values?

For this purpose, we draw on the New Rhetoric (Fisher, 1988; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Toulmin, 1958), which provides us a theoretico-methodological perspective with which to study how rhetorical arguments are used in practice. To be able to deal with underlying values or assumptions, we

specifically focus on how differences in them are at times spelled out and at other times concealed when dealing with strategic change (Feldman et al., 2004; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Heracleous, 2006).

Our analysis is based on a longitudinal study of strategic change in a Nordic city organization between 2004 and 2012. By drawing on extensive observation, interview, and documentary material, we show how the rhetorical arguments of the proponents (those proposing change initiatives) and the challengers (those initially challenging the initiatives) shaped the direction of strategic change over time. We identify a pattern in which the discussion moved from initial contestation through gradual convergence to increasing agreement. In this paper, we highlight this pattern by focusing on health care reform, which was a central controversial issue promoted by the mayors and top management in and through strategy work. In addition, we identify and elaborate on four rhetorical practices used in the rhetorical game between the protagonists and the challengers: First, our analysis indicates that the ability to voice one's own viewpoints provides a basis for discussion and 'safety valves' for maintaining one's convictions. Second, we show convergence in the proponents' and challengers' argumentation as they appropriate elements from each other's arguments – although often in an instrumental manner that suits their own value premises. Third, we underscore the central role of consensus arguments, which often tend to involve enthymemes, that is rhetorical arguments that hide the value premises, thus allowing the ambiguity needed for construction of common ground. Fourth, our analysis shows how 'collective-we' arguments paved the way for at least partial commitment based on joint experiences, again usually bypassing essential differences in values. Rather than proceeding in a linear manner, these arguments were used in parallel and repeated in cycles, thereby underscoring the multifaceted and dynamic nature of rhetorical argumentation in pluralistic organizations. Thus, our analysis also helps explain how an 'enabling argumentative dynamic' was built-up and how it allowed strategic change to proceed.

On this basis, our analysis makes two contributions. First, it contributes to research on strategic change in pluralistic organizations (Denis et al., 2001; 2007; 2011; Feldman et al., 2004, Feldman, 2005) by helping explain how actors move on with strategic change despite fundamental differences in values. In particular, we offer a nuanced processual account of the use of rhetorical practices in moving from contestation through convergence to increasing agreement. Our analysis specifically highlights how the actors simultaneously promote their own value-based interests and ideas and seek ways to enable change

by revealing, concealing, or bypassing underlying value conflicts. Thus, it extends previous research on how partial agreement or consensus may be created (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Sillince et al., 2012; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017) in and through several types of rhetorical means that each play a specific role in this process. Second, our analysis contributes to research on the role of rhetoric and discourse in strategy process and practice research more generally (Balogun et al., 2014; Bednarek et al., 2017; Jarzabkowski, Sillince & Shaw, 2010) by advancing understanding of rhetorical strategy work as a game involving skillful use of a variety of rhetorical practices and arguments, each of which has specific characteristics and serves particular functions in discourse.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A RHETORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON STRATEGIC CHANGE IN PLURALISTIC ORGANIZATIONS

Strategic change in pluralistic organizations

Strategic change has become an increasingly central theme that has been studied from several perspectives in organization and strategy research (Floyd & Wolf, 2017; Kunisch et al, 2017; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008; Hutzschenreuter & Kleindiest, 2006; Golsorkhi et al, 2015). While early studies tended to concentrate on socio-political issues in decision-making (Farjoun, 2002; Mintzberg, 1978; Nutt, 1987; Pettigrew 1973, 1992; Van de Ven & Huber, 1990), more recent work has focused on the social and socio-cognitive aspects of strategic change – often under the umbrella of sensemaking (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis, 2005; Sonenshein, 2010; Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). Furthermore, there is a growing stream of work on the discursive or rhetorical aspects of change (Balogun et al, 2014; Bednarek et al, 2017; Jalonen, Schildt & Vaara, 2018; Kaplan, 2011; Mantere, 2013; Laine & Vaara, 2007; Sillince et al, 2012; Vaara, Sorsa and Pälli, 2010). If anything, this body of work has highlighted the problems and challenges – often stemming from adversarial confrontation between actors with different interests and values – posed to implementation or realization of strategic change.

More specifically, research focusing on pluralistic organizations has shown how difficult it is to achieve strategic change because of the number of stakeholders and underlying differences in interests and values in such settings (Denis et al., 2001; Denis et al., 2007; Denis et al., 2011). For instance, in their study of 'escalating indecision,' Denis et al. (2011) present a severe organizational pathology where multiple change efforts are conducted without closure, impact, or implementation. Their analysis demonstrates how

opposing pressures, indecision, power fragmentation, and divergence are persistent forces that are difficult to overcome and thus often impede change. However, there are also interesting new perspectives that have illuminated how various stakeholders may be able to collaborate successfully; for instance, Kornberger et al. (2017) elaborate on how "Open Government" requires balancing between the 'decentralizing' principles of involving a number of stakeholders and the 'centralizing' principles of administrative bureaucracy. Such perspectives can also be linked with the age-old idea of 'muddling through' in public organizations, which implies compromise and taking 'small steps' in decision-making (Lindblom, 1959; Parsons, 2002).

How can strategic change then be achieved in pluralistic organizations? The literature on strategic change, which is not limited to pluralistic organizations, offers at least four interrelated perspectives: creation of shared views, use of ambiguity to deal with different meanings, development of coorientation towards common concerns, and creation of joint accounts. First, a key argument in research on strategic change has been the need to develop consensus or even commitment to strategic change (Wooldridge et al, 2008). This view underscores the need to deal with disagreements and conflicts and to develop shared views that can then provide the basis for change. A well-known model in strategy research has been developed by Wooldridge and Floyd (1989). Here consensus has two crucial elements: shared understanding as a basis for consensus and then commitment to this understanding in future actions. Research on sensemaking and sensegiving has in turn concentrated on development of a cognitive reorientation (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991) or shift in the interpretative schemes (Bartunek, 1984) of the organizational members as a basis for strategic change. In this view, the essential question is how actors move from different viewpoints and meanings towards new shared meaning as a key enabler of change (Bartunek 1984; Corley & Gioia 2004, Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991). This requires sensegiving by key actors such as top (Gioia & Chittipeddi 1991) and middle management (Balogun, Bartunek & Do, 2015). Discursive analyses have in turn highlighted how shared views may be realized by different means, including discursive strategies (Kwon et al., 2014; Wodak et al., 2011). However, creation of full-fledged consensus may be very difficult in pluralistic settings characterized by fundamental differences in values.

Second, others have placed less emphasis on consensus or fully shared views and have instead focused on the role of ambiguity or equivocality in strategic change, often drawing from seminal work on strategic ambiguity (Cohen & March, 1986; Eisenberg, 1984, 2007; March, 1994). While the conventional

view has been that ambiguity is harmful as it may signal lack of full agreement and even serve as a source of conflict, more recent work has underscored its enabling effects (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Aggerholm, Asmuss & Thomas, 2012; Bednarek et al, 2017; Brown 1998; Donnellon et al. 1986; Sillince et al., 2012). This is likely to be the case especially with pluralistic organizations where the underlying differences in values may impede full agreement or consensus. Central to the ambiguity perspective is that what is discussed remains sufficiently abstract, hence allowing the various actors to accommodate different meanings and underlying values attached to it.

In an interesting study about strategy work in a university, Jarzabkowski et al. (2010) have illuminated the use of ambiguity as a discursive resource in strategy-making. In particular, they discovered four rhetorical positions associated with ambiguity: situated-narrow, situated-wide, accommodative-wide, and accommodative-narrow rhetoric. Situated-narrow rhetoric is argumentation that emphasizes the interests and position of the actor while situated-wide rhetoric acknowledges the conflicting interests and varying perspectives of actors. Accomodative-wide rhetoric brings multiple actors with different interests together by abstracting strategic goals while accommodative-narrow rhetoric narrows the definition of a strategic goal so that it is in the best interest of different actors for the time being. Sillince and his colleagues (2012) have examined the internationalization of a university organization and show that there are three types of ambiguity that influence strategic action: protective ambiguity that safeguards particular interests, invitational ambiguity that encourages participation in particular actions, and adaptive ambiguity that appeals to a specific audience at a particular point in time. In their study of a pluralistic cultural organization, Abdallah and Langley (2014) in turn found that strategic ambiguity played a mobilizing role by allowing actors to come together in pursuit of change, but that over time the same ambiguity led to internal contradiction and overextension. All these studies thus underscore the instrumental use of ambiguity in change but also its problematic consequences.

Third, still others have maintained that rather than full agreement or fully shared views, some kind of coorientation toward the same ideas may suffice (Cooren, 2010). In particular, researchers drawing on the Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) have offered the idea of coorientation as a means of proceeding with change even without clear agreement (Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Robichaud et al., 2004; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004). In this view, developing a way for actors to focus on a common

discursive or material object without full agreement or fully shared views is essential. This perspective has gained ground precisely in the analysis of pluralistic organizations (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000; Schoeneborn & Blaschke, 2014). In their theoretical paper, Robichaud at el. (2004) have demonstrated how coorientation is achieved through a metaconversation where multiple actors with different viewpoints may come together; this ideally results in coorientation among organizational members. Although not following the CCO perspective, the analysis of Aggerhom et al. (2012) mentioned above as well as the studies by Fenton and Langley (2011) and Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) describe similar mechanisms linked with strategic plans; a focus on these texts allows actors to develop statements that provide strategic direction but can nevertheless be interpreted somewhat differently.

Fourth, Spee and Jarzabkowski (2017) have recently combined insight from the ambiguity and coorientation literatures to suggest that the notion of 'joint account' is a key factor in reaching agreement amidst multiple viewpoints. 'Joint accounts' provide a mean for actors to pursue change without abandoning their different viewpoints. Their empirical analysis of strategic planning in a university organization highlights the key dynamics that explain how actors produce joint accounts in some settings and fail to do so in others.

Although these studies help us to better understand how change is possible even if the parties involved do not agree or share the same interests, they have not fully addressed the key issue of how fundamental value conflicts are handled while pursuing change. This is, however, crucial to be able to better understand how pluralistic organizations can move on with strategic change. In what follows, we argue that progress in achieving change in such circumstances is likely to require a dynamic of revelation and concealment, implying a range of rhetorical arguments and moves that enable actors to simultaneously hold on to their values and voice their different views while creating common ground in order to proceed with change. This is why we will next outline a rhetorical perspective on strategic change in pluralistic organizations.

Rhetorical argumentation to deal with differences in values

Research has focused increasingly on the role of discourse and rhetoric in strategic change (Balogun et al., 2014; Mantere, 2013), including work at various levels of analysis ranging from broader discourses (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005) to organizational-level narratives (Barry & Elmes, 1997;

Dalpiaz & DiStefano, 2018; Fenton & Langley, 2011) to micro-level analysis of strategy discussions and conversations (Samra-Fredericks, 2005; Westley, 1990; Whittle et al., 2014). Importantly for our purposes, the studies referred to in the previous section offer empirical evidence of the role of rhetoric in strategic change – both in longer-term organizational change processes (Jarzabkowski et al, 2010; Sillince et al, 2012; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017) and in specific meetings or conversations (Kwon et al., 2014; Wodak, Kwon & Clarke, 2011; Aggerholm et al, 2012).

To be able to zoom in on the various rhetorical practices used to deal with differences in values in strategic change, we draw on the New Rhetoric (Perelman, 1977; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1959), which focuses on a variety of means used for persuasion and convincing in discourse. It specifically allows us to focus on argumentation within the context of a larger discursive community with pluralistic values and ambiguous goals rather than on persuasion of a specific audience (Cheney et al., 2004; Mueller et al. 2004; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010). In particular, in what follows we concentrate on the rhetorical arguments and moves used to deal with fundamental differences in values in pluralistic organizations pursuing strategic change. For this purpose, we focus on how these values or differences in them are or are not reflected in their arguments.

Classical Aristotelian rhetoric is based on the idea that just as logical inferences are deductions and inductions, arguments in rhetoric have to be rhetorical syllogisms, i.e. complete rhetorical arguments with premises and conclusions (Aristotle, 1954). But because complete arguments based on clear premises and conclusions are usually not practical for communication with an audience, reasonable arguments tend to be enthymemes, i.e. arguments in which some of the assumptions are implicit (Aristotle, 1954). While complete arguments or syllogisms comprise a complete set of elements, 'enthymemes' include only some of them. In recent decades, new rhetorical perspectives have in many ways challenged classical rhetoric, but interestingly enough they have placed incomplete arguments at the center of rhetorical analysis (Fisher, 1988; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Toulmin, 1958). The more philosophically oriented stream of research has focused on the structure of rhetoric: on whether and how the argumentation deals with the underlying assumptions on which it is based. This is the case with Toulmin's (1958) famous model, which focuses on rhetorical fields of argumentation (Walker, 1994). As in most rhetorical models, his general model includes data, claims, and warrants, but he also introduces the concept of 'backing,' which refers to the grounds

upon which the argument is built within a particular field of argumentation (Toulmin et al., 1984). This view has also inspired organization scholars (Green, 2004; Green et al., 2008; Harmon et al., 2015; Ketokivi, Mantere & Cornelissen, 2017), who have emphasized the linguistic origins of rationality and the active role of managers in organizational behavior and change. In particular, this perspective has recently been used by Harmon and his colleagues (2015) to examine rhetorical legitimation in organizations. Drawing on Goodnight's (1993, 2006) earlier work, they explained how argumentation in 'intrafield' rhetoric happens within a given field without dealing with underlying assumptions while in 'interfield' rhetoric it opens up such assumptions and deals explicitly with them.

To understand the revelation or concealment of the underlying values from such a perspective, it is also useful to note research on enthymemes in organizational change (Feldman & Sköldberg, 2002; Feldman et al., 2004; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001). Interestingly, much of organizational rhetoric tends to be enthymemic because the underlying premises are often implicit of concealed, and thus organization scholars have focused attention 'revealing' the underlying basis or argumentation (Feldman et al., 2004; Heracleous and Barrett, 2001). Scholars have also pointed to the more or less deliberate use of enthymemes in organizational change. For instance, Feldman and Sköldberg (2002) examined the role of stories about strategic change in two city organizations. They focused on revealing an underlying 'logic' in four stories by bringing out implicit but powerful meanings. In a recent study of change in the public sector, Morrell and Hewison (2013) have in turn shown how political argumentation is characteristically enthymemic and that texts such as the one on which they focused typically use enthymemes to establish relations of entailment, i.e. the seemingly inevitable moves from a starting premise to a conclusion.

These insights inform our analysis of the rhetorical practices used by proponents and challengers when dealing with fundamental differences in values in struggles over strategic change. We specifically examine the various rhetorical arguments used with a focus on how they deal with underlying values and what parts they emphasize or leave unsaid. Thus, we are interested in the purposive, but not always purposeful, use of rhetorical arguments to conceal or reveal the underlying values in strategic change. On the one hand, the actors need to voice their concerns and values in order to impact the direction of strategic change, often in an adversarial spirit, either by proposing (proponents) or challenging (challengers) change proposals. On the other, they also need to develop ways in which they can work together to allow change,

which may imply using ambiguity to conceal the value premises of their arguments (Sillince et al, 2012; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017). This may also be related to coorientation (Robichaud et al., 2004) or joint accounts (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017) in establishing common ground or even commitment as part of the rhetorical 'game.' This leads us to formulate our research question as follows: How does rhetorical argumentation help achieve partial consensus on the need for change in a pluralistic organization with stakeholders who have different values?

METHODS

Case setting and context

Our analysis is based on an intensive longitudinal study of strategic change in a Nordic city organization. The case provides a revealing setting for our study as it highlights the role of rhetorical strategy work in a context where strategic change was forcefully promoted but also contested. The case organization struggled with the challenges common in pluralistic contexts, including budgetary problems and issues related to the very purpose of the organization.

Our research project started with interest in exploring how managers use strategic rhetoric in public organizations. We were fortunate to obtain full access to the organization and observe their strategic activities, including formal and informal strategic planning meetings between 2004 and 2012, and to gather extensive material about strategy work in formal and informal settings. Our case involved widespread discussions about the organization's strategy; these enabled us to zoom in on how a wide variety of rhetorical arguments were used to promote or challenge strategic change over time. Although our case has its own specific features, we believe it can yield findings that will permit generalization upon due reflection.

Due to increasing unemployment as well as to the problems involved in maintaining the extensive service network developed in previous years, the Nordic city organization faced unprecedented economic challenges in the beginning of the 2000s. New top managers (including a new mayor and department heads) were hired and also assigned the task of altering the city's direction. They concentrated on balancing the city's debt-driven finances and on reorganization of its organization and operations. A key part of all this was strategic planning. While the city had engaged in strategic planning before, the new mayor and his team launched a new kind of process in 2004 aiming at strategic change. Our observation period began at this

stage, and we followed this cycle and the two subsequent strategic planning cycles at close range until the end of 2012.

The central point in this strategic change process was the *restructuring of services* provided by the city. As is typical in Nordic countries, city organizations have typically offered extensive affordable services to their inhabitants – reflecting the idea of a welfare state. The new mayor and the other proponents focused on these services and their reorganization in this strategic change process, and this was seen as essential to cut costs but also to allow financing the city's infrastructure development. Others, the challengers, were against any changes that would jeopardize the services and challenge the welfare setup. The key issues in this strategic process included health care reform, school network reorganization, privatization of the city's support functions, creating markets for private daycare centers, building a new parking center in the historic square, and constructing new high-end condos in the downtown harbor area. In what follows we will focus on the key issue of health care reform, which was linked with fundamental decisions and actions during and after our observation period.

The aim of the mayor and his team was to make health care more cost-effective; financial concerns were the underlying value premise of the proponents in the ensuing discussions. In particular, they aimed at a balanced budget. This was to be achieved with cutbacks and by shifting a larger share of the costs of health care, which had long been seen as an inherent part of the Nordic welfare system, to the city's inhabitants. In contrast, the value basis of the challengers was linked with taking care of the inhabintants and seeing to their needs, in other words protecting the Nordic welfare system in the city organization. In challenging the ideas of the proponents, the challengers appealed to universality and equality and suggested other alternatives such as an increase in taxation.

During our observation period, the key strategic decision-makers included the mayor and the executive team, the city council, the city board, and the departmental executive teams. They all participated in the strategic planning processes led by the mayor and his colleagues. The city's executive team consisted of the mayor, deputy mayor, director of finances, HR director, heads of three departments, and a representative of personnel. In addition, other key people, such as the strategy director, frequently attended the meetings. By and large, the mayor and his closest colleagues in particular were the proponents of the service restructuring, while more critical views on the planned changes were expressed in the city council

and the city board and also in the departmental executive teams. There were also changes in the key decision-makers during the period in which we observed the city's strategic planning processes. Elections take place every four years and they obviously had an impact on political coalitions. The civil administration of the city, however, is not elected and the contracts of the mayor and other public managers are tenured. Some changes, however, took place among the key decision-makers of the city organization during our observation period. In particular, in 2007 the mayor and one of the heads of departments, who had been the key proponents of the service restructuring, left the city organization. However, the new people elected to these positions, including the new mayor, were also proponents, and thus the push for strategic change continued. The second change worth mentioning was the hiring of a new strategy director in 2009 to strengthen the strategy work that had been started earlier. These actors insisted on the changes and thus their presence had an impact on the argumentation. Nevertheless, we did not find evidence that specific changes in top management altered the overall characteristics of the argumentation of either proponents or challengers.

Empirical material

We gained full access to these strategic planning activities on the basis of an agreement according to which we were to provide feedback and protect the identity of specific people in our research project. Accordingly, we met with and interviewed the key decision-makers, participated as observers in strategy meetings, and gathered documentary and other material. This allowed us to construct an extensive database and also to establish contacts with key people that proved crucial for clarification of specific issues, verification of our findings, and other forms of feedback. Our data comprise extensive observation, interview, and documentary material as summarized in Table 1 below.

Insert Table 1 about here

First, we interviewed the participants involved in the strategy work. In practice, these interviews covered all the key participants in strategic planning between 2004 and 2012. We interviewed all of the actual participants, but also other people closely associated with strategic planning during these years to complement our understanding of the processes of strategy work and the implications for strategic decisions. We conducted 96 interviews by interviewing altogether 56 individuals, 33 of them twice and 7 three times. The interviewees included 35 men and 21 women. The interviews lasted from 45 minutes to 2

hours. We followed a 'storytelling' approach (Czarniawska, 2004). The interviewees were asked to narrate their experiences of strategic planning and strategic change: for example, to describe the key events in the strategic change process, what they saw as successful/challenging and why, who the architects of the key ideas were and who were invited to comment on the strategy drafts, how strategy was communicated and to whom, and what they expected from the future. We also asked the interviewees to explain specific issues and events that we had observed in the meetings. All of the interviews were later fully transcribed.

Second, we gathered extensive data on the city's strategic planning meetings. With the exception of 2004-5, we attended all the key strategic planning meetings until 2012, in practice covering three key cycles of strategic planning. They included the executive team's meetings, which were the main arena for strategic planning. In these meetings, the executive team focused on strategic analysis of their situation, discussed various strategic ideas, developed these ideas into strategic initiatives, adjusted and revised strategic initiatives to overcome resistance and make the strategies more acceptable, and above all crafted detailed plans. We also attended the meetings of the city board, the city council, various committees, and the executive teams of each department. At these meetings executives typically presented drafts of strategy and politicians and middle managers discussed them and gave feedback. Altogether, we observed 136 strategic planning meetings and seminars. These observations ranged from 30-minute meetings to two-day seminars. All but one of the one-day seminars were fully recorded and transcribed.

Third, we obtained all available documented material including memos, presentations, implementation reports, and drafts of the strategic plans. Altogether, this material comprised more than 300 documents and thousands of pages. Although our analysis focused on strategic change, it was also important to examine linkages to other documents and thus develop a fuller understanding of the origins of specific strategic ideas and arguments and how ideas and texts were reinterpreted in new contexts.

Fourth, we also obtained a large number of personal documents. These included the diaries and emails of some of the key decision-makers, notes of key individuals, and other relevant material. Finally, it should also be noted that we developed close relationships with the principal decision-makers. This was partly due to the agreement to provide feedback, which we did on several occasions. In addition, we learned to know some of the key managers very well; some of them also shared an interest in our research, which led for example to joint presentations to other managers. All these contacts and formal and informal

meetings provided us valuable opportunities to gain more insight into their practices and to assess the credibility of our findings.

Empirical analysis

Although our analysis was in the beginning inductive, it became abductive in orientation, involving development of specific theoretical ideas alongside increasingly targeted analysis of the empirical material (Locke et al., 2008; Mantere & Ketokivi, 2013; Van Maanen et al., 2007). In practice, the analysis proceeded in stages with multiple iterations.

First, we developed an overall summary or our researchers' narrative (Langley, 1999) of the key events and decisions that related to strategic planning between 2004 and 2012. This helped us develop an overall understanding of the key themes and arguments used in the unfolding strategic change process as well as the roles of various actors in this process. After some iterations, we focused on the following interrelated issues: health care reform, school network reorganization, privatization of support functions, creating markets for private daycare centers, building a new parking center in the historic square, and constructing new high-end condos in the downtown harbor area. Figure 1 below summarizes key decisions and actions made during three cycles of the strategic change process in the case of the health care reform.

Insert Figure 1 about here

As is often the case with strategic change, there are people driving the change, opposing the change, and those who are not involved or cannot be involved (Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Quick & Feldman, 2011). In our case, we found it useful to focus on the tension between those who proposed specific changes and those who were challenging these proposals as we discovered a clear tendency to defend convictions throughout the observation period (cf. polarization effect, Myers & Lamm, 1975) even though ways to move forward with change were being sought simultaneously. We want to emphasize, however, that at the level of the individuals this distinction was not clear-cut as some people acted at times as proponents and at other times as challengers.

Second, we focused on rhetoric to identify specific ways in which participants used language to advance, resist, or slow down the three cycles of the strategic change process. From the start, we were inspired by the New Rhetoric (van Eemeren et al. 2014; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) and accordingly searched for and identified several argument types used by the actors in the meetings as well as

in the interviews and in documents such as strategic plans. After some iterations, benefiting from the comments of the editor and reviewers, we found it very useful to look at this material from the perspective of how the differences in values were reflected or not reflected in their argumentation.

This led us to identify and elaborate on the four most relevant rhetorical practices used by the proponents and challengers to deal with the underlying value conflict while proceeding with change: voicing one's own arguments, appropriation of other's arguments, consensus argumentation, and collective-we argumentation. The focus in this analysis was on the claims made in the arguments and whether they revealed or concealed the underlying value premises. 'Voicing own arguments' was an important part of the discussions. In our case, the proponents' arguments often focused on financial concerns reflecting the economic viability of the city as the central underlying value. In contrast, the central characteristic of the challengers' arguments was a focus on maintenance or development of the city's services with welfare or care as the underlying values. We then discovered that 'appropriation of other's arguments' played an important role in the discussion because it implied convergence by including the other's arguments in one's own argumentation. Interestingly, this was often done 'superficially'; the initial value bases of the arguments were not followed, and the rhetoric of the argument was given new meaning that cohered with one's own value premises. A third key type was 'consensus argumentation,' which played a crucial role in the discussions – especially in statements written into the strategic plans. Interestingly, these consensus arguments were often enthymemes that hid the value premises, thus allowing the ambiguity needed for the proponents and challengers to establish common ground (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Sillince et al., 2012; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017). Finally, there were also 'collective-we' arguments that involved expressions of new shared ideas developed in the discussions, leading to development of commitment, even if partial, among the actors. The value premises were also often bypassed in these arguments. The logic of these arguments is depicted graphically in Figure 1 below.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Third, we then turned our attention to how the proponents and challengers used these arguments over time. We again focused on the six issues in which the underlying value conflict was particularly salient: health care reform, school network reorganization, privatization of support functions, creating markets for private daycare centers, building a new parking center in the historic square, and constructing new high-

end condos in the downtown harbor area. We discovered that similar types of rhetorical practices were used across these issues and that the patterns in their use were if not identical, at least very similar. Because of health care reform was by far the most frequently discussed and debated issue and because the other issues were oftentimes linked with it, we focused on the health care issue in more detail when reporting the findings in the paper. Thus, we examined the use of the arguments closely and thoroughly in the case of health care reform but also compared the findings with those of the other issues. Table 2 below offers a summary, including examples, of this coding.

Insert Table 2 about here

Fourth, we carried out a final round of analysis focusing on the use of the rhetorical practices over time across the key issues. The key findings of this analysis are summarized in Table 3 in the findings section. In essence, we could map the use of the rhetorical arguments on three key phases in our empirical case. While analyzing the rhetorical practices across three cycles in the six issues central to the strategic change process, we detected a general pattern; argumentation moved from initial contestation through gradual convergence to increasing agreement. Thus, we developed understanding of how the four rhetorical practices and their variants were used by the proponents and challengers over time, which led to the development of our process model as graphically depicted in Figure 3 in the discussion section. It should be noted that what we will summarize in the findings section regarding strategic change is necessarily a simplification of the rhetorical practices used. However, we believe that it provides an empirically grounded representation of the dynamics of rhetorical strategy work that can also characterize other pluralistic organizations undergoing strategic change.

Our analysis involved methodological challenges. Arguments are ontologically and epistemologically complicated to study and capture. It is particularly challenging to place specific linguistic inferences in a broader context and establish patterns in strategic argumentation. This analysis is necessarily interpretative and subjective. However, being able to constantly compare evidence from several data sources helped us deal with the challenges. In fact, linking the interview material and the various versions of the strategic plans to what was happening in the meetings proved crucial in assessing the plausibility of the findings. Also, it should be noted that the entire analysis was challenging language-wise. It was conducted in the local language and the main results were translated into English; hence some meanings

and nuances were unavoidably lost. The richness of the material, however, offsets some of these difficulties. It allowed us to deal with specific problems through constant comparison of several examples. Finally, we were also fortunate to be able to discuss our interpretations with several key managers who have acted as our key collaboration partners, and these discussions have been very valuable for us in the evaluation of alternative explanations and verification of our own interpretations.

FINDINGS: USE OF RHETORICAL ARGUMENTATION TO ENABLE STRATEGIC CHANGE IN CYCLES OF STRATEGY WORK

Our analysis revealed how rhetorical argumentation moved from initial contestation through gradual convergence to increasing agreement in three cycles, thereby allowing the actors to proceed with strategic change even if they had fundamental difference in values. Table 3 below offers a summary of the use of the four types of arguments across the key issues related to strategic change.

Insert Table 3 about here

We also identified and elaborated on four types of rhetorical practices used by the actors in distinctively different ways in these cycles: voicing own arguments, appropriation of other's arguments, building consensus arguments, and use of collective-we arguments. In what follows, we will focus on the issue of health care reform, which was arguably the most important part of the change process.

First cycle: Initial contestation in argumentation

The first cycle was characterized by initial contestation of the rhetorical argumentation. Voicing own arguments was central, but first consensus arguments were also formed in strategic plans, and they paved the way for the initial decisions and actions regarding strategic change in health care.

Voicing own arguments. The proponents used a variety of arguments based on instrumental-rational reasoning about the causes and consequences of health care reform. Most often these arguments included calculations, probabilities, and definitions that focused on financial or economic concerns and the city's budget deficit. The proponents typically voiced their arguments as follows:

> How public resources are allocated within the wellbeing cluster will pose a considerable challenge in the near future. The relative amount of public funding and production will decrease. Cities will optimize and prioritize their own health services. (Strategic guidelines for health care, document [proponent orientation], 2004)

> The essential problem is that social and health care spending accounts for most of the city's funds. And in a way, it's also easiest to save where most of the money is used. (Manager [proponent], interview, 2006)

These arguments were very effective in steering the discussion toward changes framed as a "necessary reform" in health care and in specifying the decisions and actions required, for example increasing service fees and even allowing queues to build up[1]. By so doing, the proponents succeeded in making financial aspects a central concern of the discussion. In particular, their argumentation was based on a rhetorical structure that clearly spelled out the financial reasons for the health care reform. The financial viability of the city organization was therefore a key underlying value, although it was not always given explicit attention in the argumentation.

The challengers, who were concerned about the implications of health care reform for the city's inhabitants, found themselves in a difficult position vis-à-vis these arguments. They were, however, skillful in providing counter-arguments that spelled out the underlying values – usually emphasizing the wellbeing and needs of inhabitants. This was often achieved by constructing 'value hierarchies' based on an understanding that some values are more important than others. In our case, those resisting the changes argued that "taking care of all the people" would be more important than "short-term cost savings." This argumentation was therefore "care-based" and "ethical" in nature as the values could be linked with "moral concerns." In particular, the challengers promoted values such as "joint responsibility" and "community" when initiatives concerning service cuts were discussed. These value-based arguments proved effective in resisting the cost cuts proposed by the proponents in health services – or at least in steering the discussion away from the most radical changes.

However, on the whole, few people could challenge the financial reasoning of the proponents. There were, nevertheless, exceptions in which the challengers used financial argumentation to counter the reasoning of the proponents. The following is a typical example where the focus is on the short-sightedness and long-term costs of service restructuring:

> We can improve on the figures by making the systems fit into a shirt that's one size smaller. But solutions like this may mean that the cuts will have implications somewhere else and before long

[1] Proponents argued that "building up queues" in the city's service units would make inhabitants start to look at private operations for services, thus lessening the costs for the city and developing the private sector offerings.

> we'll be spending ten times the original amount. This is especially the case with social and health care services and schools. (Politician [challenger], interview, 2007)

Building initial consensus arguments. Although there was a clear tendency to defend convictions in the first cycle by voicing own arguments, the pressure on the city council to draft and decide on a strategic plan by the end of May 2005 had an impact on the argumentation of proponents and challengers alike. The strategic plans were the key documents requiring reification, and strategy work tended to result in carefully crafted consensus statements. These arguments were often visible in declarative statements – statements that seemed to indicate clear agreement but were based on deliberately concealed premises. Because it involved careful crafting of 'compromises' that could be accepted by both sides, work on such statements was often tedious. Thus, in the first cycle, the strategic plan included key statements. The following was one of the most important:

> Promoting wellbeing requires a new way of thinking. The inhabitants together with their communities will assume larger responsibility for their own wellbeing. (Official strategic plan, 2005).

Although the need for reorganization of the health care services was recognized in this key statement, the intention of the proponents to cut costs was left implicit. Moreover, the challengers could also interpret it as a promise to continue development of the services. Such concealment of premises or their implications was often deliberate and characteristically enthymemic. The mayor explained it to us as follows:

> We can't write into strategy, we can't write that we need a 20% cut in services for inhabitants. We can't do that. We have to dress it up with roses. Otherwise it won't succeed. (Mayor [proponent], interview, 2006)

The mayor's explanation of the use of enthymeme in the strategic plan illustrates the rhetorical move made by the proponents when their financial reasoning was challenged by the challengers' care-based rhetoric but also the possibilities for goal-oriented action afforded by this rhetorical move to users of the strategic plan. Especially the proponents saw this statement as a license to move on with concrete changes in health care. As the mayor put it:

> Based on the financial analyses that had been made, it was absolutely clear to us, but apparently not to all decision-makers, that no one could say they did not understand the state of our city's finances. That the situation was critical and will remain so, but that it can be turned around through financial stringency. (Mayor [proponent], interview, 2006)

Decisions and actions. Although health care reform resulted in the first decisions and actions after approval of the city's strategy, their implications were limited. As indicated above, plans were made to increase service fees in health care and to prepare inhabitants to consider using private health services in addition to those offered by the city. There was also a decision to reorganize the services into larger budget units. The department of health care calculated that it would not be financially sustainable to provide services for fewer than 20,000 inhabitants. Hence four social and health care service districts were formed – northern, southern, eastern, and western – to achieve synergy and reduce costs. The department also hired consultants to help improve the cost-efficiency and effectiveness of the services. This resulted in organization-wide work to identify "customer needs" and define "criteria for analyzing and improving the service processes."

Second cycle: Gradual convergence in argumentation

Although the proponents and challengers continued to argue for and against the health care reform in the second cycle, there was also gradual convergence in argumentation in and through appropriation of others' arguments combined with increasing development of consensus arguments.

Voicing own arguments. In the beginning of the second cycle, the proponents continued to push for change in the health care services by repeating arguments similar to those of the first cycle. Furthermore, concrete initiatives were now linked with this overall argumentation. When the mayor and the department heads began to consider what concrete action would be "in line" with the strategic plan, they focused on cutting personnel by "*approximately 200 man-years between 2006-2008 to reach the target of reducing personnel costs by 18 million euros*" (Local newspaper, 2006). Thus, in March 2006 the city board decided to undertake negotiations with the labor unions; these talks focused on laying off employees with short-term contracts, forbidding the hiring of short-term substitutes, and not hiring new staff to replace retirees. While these negotiations were in progress, the protagonists suggested also laying off tenured employees. The proposal was a radical one, as "*none of the small or large municipalities have laid off people in the past 10 years*" (Mayor [proponent], interview, 2006).

Those challenging the health care reform continued to advocate provision of care to all city inhabitants. Furthermore, because of the new initiatives of the proponents, the challengers also focused attention on those whose jobs were on the line. In particular, the labor unions challenged the proposal

regarding personnel cuts prepared by the administration of social and health services. One of the key arguments used was that the effects of cuts in basic services would actually have "the greatest impact on the least fortunate 20% of the city's inhabitants because they used 80% of the department's resources" (Middle manager [challenger], strategy seminar, 2007).

This opposition blocked the radical plans to lay off personnel and was thus a setback for the proponents. The department head put it as follows:

> We said that we can't implement the council's decision [related to the strategy agreed upon in the first cycle] without laying off personnel. The resulting process proved 'bad and dirty.' And in the end, no-one was let go. If we were a business, the city board and the committee would have supported the managers and made the unpleasant decisions. (Department head [proponent], interview, 2007)

The financial reasoning in the proponents' argumentation and the care-based reasoning in the challengers' argumentation thus continued to cause conflict and hamper implementation of concrete changes. This led to the emergence of a new rhetorical practice.

Appropriation of other's arguments. Although personnel cuts were not made, the head of the Department of Social and Health Care, one of the key proponents for change, found another way to cut costs: outsourcing. He discovered that a key reason for the rising costs was that the services of one of the suppliers – a hospital run by the municipality consortium – were not sufficiently cost-effective and argued that the city could control expenditure better if the necessary service was purchased from a commercial company. In practice, this meant that elderly patients in need of specific operations (e.g., surgery) could be transferred from the acute care unit run by the municipality consortium to a care unit run by a commercial health care company that provided care to elderly patients on terms that reduced costs. Moreover, this would mean that patients would spend fewer days in the hospital and go home sooner.

The action motivated by the argumentation is interesting because it illustrates a rhetorical practice essential in promoting strategic change: appropriation of other's arguments. The following quote from an interview with the department head who proposed outsourcing illustrates the new rhetorical practice that emerged in argumentation:

> We know that when people older than 75 years are taken to a hospital, they lose 20-30% of their operational abilities within 3 to 4 days because they can't function in an unfamiliar environment. And by pampering [keeping] them in social and health care [the municipality consortium hospital], we do a disservice to these elderly inhabitants because we take away the independence necessary for recovery [from surgery, which would happen differently in a private care unit]. And now [if

> outsourced] we would take them home as soon as possible and help them there." (Department Head [proponent], interview, 2007)

Our interpretation is that the proponents began to adopt the care-based themes of the antagonists to create new meaning for strategic change. In the quote above, the proponent emphasizes the "care" provided by arguing that the elderly stay independent when the service has been outsourced. Hence the care-based argumentation was an attempt to release the tension built up in the discussion. In particular, the appropriation of care-based rhetoric helped persuade the challengers that the proposed curtailments in services would not harm inhabitants.

However, the proponents' rhetoric was often instrumental rather than a reflection of a shift away from their underlying focus on financial concerns. In fact, the proponents also started to develop arguments in which "safeguarding the welfare society" or "protecting the wide availability of health care services" were used as additional persuasive elements for securing financial viability, in effect implying cutbacks. The following is a typical example:

> I think that if we want to maintain this welfare society, we must adapt the various demands on resources to what we can actually afford, make the organization as effective as possible and then benefit from it. And that's why we need a strategy. (Manager [proponent], interview 2007)

Consensus arguments. In the second cycle, the parties also developed new consensus arguments that provided essential support for decisions and actions. For instance, the new strategic plan – an update of the previous one – included the following objectives:

> One of the central internal challenges facing the city is the need to respond to the justifiable needs of inhabitants for service while keeping the city's finances solid. (Excerpt from the strategic plan, 2007)

> Alternative ways to organize services will be sought so that inhabitants have an opportunity to choose service providers based on their needs and financial situation. (Excerpt from the strategic plan, 2007)

These statements provided a foundation for new decisions and actions concerning health care, including outsourcing. However, just as in the previous cycle, the arguments were often enthymemes, and the underlying conflicts in value premises were mostly concealed. While these arguments did provide a basis for consensus, they also proved problematic precisely because of their ambiguity. For example, a department head put it as follows:

> We have to spell out what we mean by them. If we don't reach a shared understanding, then we'll just be letting everyone decide for themselves what 'well-being,' 'basic service,' or 'basic security' mean. Then we won't be following the strategy, will we?" (Department head [proponent] in a strategy meeting, 2007)

Decisions and actions. During the second cycle, concrete decisions and actions were taken to promote and implement change, including the outsourcing of some of the health care services mentioned above. These and other related changes also yielded material results. Furthermore, additional steps were made to reorganize the units offering the health services and thus make their processes more effective. In particular, the services were further grouped into five areas of responsibility: health care, geriatry, wellbeing, social care, and administration. The key managers also identified core processes that cut across all areas of responsibility and focused on making them more cost-efficient. Furthermore, the new updated strategic plan enabled further tightening of the criteria for service eligibility, thus making the inhabitants more likely to use private (not publicly funded) services as well.

Third cycle: Increasing agreement in argumentation

In the third cycle, the proponents and challengers continued to use a variety of arguments. These included voicing their own arguments, appropriation of others' arguments, and developing new consensus argumentats, but interestingly new kinds of collective-we arguments also gained ground.

Voicing own arguments. Although proponents and challengers had already found shared views on some of the issues related to strategic change, the two sides continued to voice their own arguments and express their value premises throughout our observation period. In particular, the proponents continued to emphasize the benefits of additional outsourcing apparent in reorganization of the city's real estate functions, implying that health care and other areas would benefit from similar moves. The challengers resisted such radical moves. In the following typical examples, the proponents and challengers continued to voice their own views, which reflected fundamentally different value premises:

> We have outsourced property management and municipal engineering as well as depot operations and some of these have even been sold. The city has accepted this [approach] and we've been able to resolve most of the problems faced. (Director [proponent], 2010)

> What does this strategy mean for individual inhabitants? If we scale down the kindergartens and schools [in addition to health care], and if we downsize maintenance of our infrastructure, for example waiting for more snow to fall before plowing it. All these strategic decisions will have an impact on inhabitants' health. And I think discussion about balancing the budget doesn't always reveal this. (Politician [challenger], 2010)

On the one hand, continued argumentation of this kind had a significant impact on the ongoing changes. On the other hand, these arguments also served as "safety valves" by allowing the proponents and challengers to air their own views even while they were working on compromises or consensus arguments as described below (see the two following subsections).

Appropriation of other's arguments. Appropriation of each other's arguments became increasingly important in rhetorical work during the third cycle. While in the previous cycles proponents had concentrated on cutbacks and outsourcing in health care, their rhetoric now focused attention on "investment" as an essential part of restructuring and the need to secure the financial resources for it. In particular, the proponents argued that to attract both new business and inhabitants, the city needed to invest in infrastructure (including a new parking center and high-end condos, see Table 3). Hence this new discussion focused on savings in current health care services to finance the building of infrastructure. The following is a typical example from a discussion in the city council's strategy workshop:

> [W]e should alter structures in a [financially] sustainable way so that actions and operations will be more profitable and effective. […] We are improving the productivity of operations and making our structures more effective in this budget. This means that our staff will have to be on board and that we take enough time to implement the changes properly […] And it means that we invest in vitality [building infrastructure] but at the same time examine our operations, practices, and service network from the perspective of increased productivity. (CFO [proponent] at the council's strategy seminar, 2009)

The challengers noticed that the focus of the proponents had shifted from cost cuts to investment. In this situation, the challengers concentrated on the question of how the city would "invest" in a "sense of community" (i.e. that the city appears welcoming and attractive to all) and thus take better care of its inhabitants. These arguments were brought to the table as follows:

> The sense of community, it's self-evident that this should be emphasized as a value at all levels, whether it's a question of associations, families, city reps, whoever, it's an essential force that carries us forward. […] This means that we invest in preventive services [health care]. We all know how much will be saved in the future if we can address problems while people are young. You can save regardless of age, but the earlier we intervene, the better. (Politician [challenger], council's strategy seminar, 2009)

With such arguments, the challengers aimed to broaden the scope of what was considered an investment in the city's future; this allowed them to promote preserving and further developing the city' health care services, which would otherwise have been targets for additional cutbacks (as suggested by the proponents). This proved to be an important means for convergence in the argumentation, even if it was often very

instrumental. Nevertheless, skillful use of such rhetoric had important implications for both forcing the actors to recognize elements of each other's argumentation and for allowing them to continue pursuit of their own fundamental values.

Consensus arguments. All this also led to development of increasingly important consensus arguments, which eventually played a central role in driving strategic change. In particular, the "sense of community" theme became a key part of the argumentation as in the following sentence:

> The city supports a sense of community and the activities of communities. (Official strategic plan, 2009).

While "sense of community" refers to the key theme of investment in the city's future, it created crucial common ground for decisions and actions without forcing the proponents and challengers to abandon their fundamental values. However, it was interpreted very differently by the proponents and challengers as explained above. Moreover, other formulations written into the strategic plans and communicated to inhabitants were often enthymemic and ambiguous in nature, which limited the ability of the actors to move forward as much as they would have wanted. Not only the proponents but also the challengers lamented this inherent ambiguity in plans:

> "One of the CSFs (critical success factors) related to the strategic goal of strengthening the sense of community is to prevent alienation. But it is not at all specific, or we didn't discuss thoroughly what kind of alienation we should prevent, how, and where we'd find the necessary resources." (Middle manager [challenger], interview, 2009)

Collective-we arguments. During this cycle, another new type of argumentation also emerged: collective-we arguments. These arguments paved the way for widespread commitment to decisions and actions regarding health care reform. This kind of rhetoric became increasingly important at the end of the observation period in reaching agreement about how to formulate the ideas and decisions in the strategic plans and how to "sell" them to inhabitants. This was the case in the following example in which key managers built a joint argument for the investment needed to increase the city's viability:

> DH1: Are we vibrant in the sense that people come here because we have good [health care] services and this is an area of well-being? The other choice is that we drift and become a periphery with low income people and poor services. All that is international and great will go to the capital city region and everything else will wind up here.
> DH2: We should choose to change direction so that we don't become a periphery.
> DH3: The strategy is about that. With its strong attractions, the city is a garden in the metropolitan area. Should we invest in developing this strategy further? This would also create resources for

> services such as health, education, and culture, which are now under critical investigation. Are we able to persist and live with an unbalanced budget until the investments begin to pay off?
> (Top managers [both proponents and challengers] at an executive team meeting, 2009)

The focus of 'collective-we' in this example indicates their joint concern for the city's position in the future. In such discussions, opening up a discursive space for joint reflection seemed to promote generation of novel ideas. It also helped to establish 'we-spirit' conducive to collaboration. In such conversations, the participants therefore seemed to share concern for the city's survival but also to recognize the need for new ideas to which they could commit. The following is a typical example from a strategy discussion in the city council:

> P1: Ageing puts pressure on our health services and we need to choose how we see the growing role of markets in providing health care. If we don't develop our own services, it's an inescapable development.
> P2: We could think of developing a new system for doctors' clinic and attract young doctors to work here,
> P3: Working in a new system might be difficult for young doctors but if we have the political will, it's surely possible to change the practice.
> P4: So [the name of the city] could be more proactive than the other cities with this issue!
> (City council meeting [both proponents and challengers], 2009)

In this example, both proponents and challengers work together to create a 'we-spirit' and introduce issues that will become common concerns. With the reference to participants' agency in addressing the growing role of health care markets, P1 invites local reasoning from the other proponents. The way in which the participants (P2-4) engage in discussion shows that they are taking part in creation of a joint argument for investing in future health care services.

Towards the end of the strategic change process, key actors could also appreciate the considerable benefits from construction of 'collective-we' arguments:

> The upside in this difficult process was that the council members and civil servants sat at the same table. Many hadn't done that before. The council members got to ask the administrators questions and the administrators had a chance to explain why these issues are important, what difficulties are involved, and so on. (Chief of strategy [proponent], 2010)

Thus, the 'collective-we' arguments became important parts of the discussion by creating a basis for joint commitment amidst continued confrontation in other spheres. As a result, specific ideas about health care reform were given particular emphasis both in the strategic plans and in the concrete decisions and actions.

Decisions and actions. In this third cycle, the changes agreed upon in the earlier cycles were followed by others with an increasingly widespread impact on health care services. In particular, significant changes

related to outsourcing and cutting costs were made but they still remained limited in scope, largely because the challengers succeeded in appropriating the proponents' rhetoric on "investing in the future." Other changes included launching a regional center for coordination of health service appointments. Another center was established for the various health and social care service providers to help inhabitants find the services they needed. Since both of these centers helped inhabitants find private health services (not publicly funded), the scope and costs of the city's own service offerings were reduced, thus significantly advancing strategic change – however in a way that the needs of the inhabitants were taken care of. In the end of the city council's term in 2012 there was also an extensive appraisal of the strategic changes in which the actualization of the strategic goals, critical success factors, key performance indicators, and target levels was communicated throughout the organization.

A PROCESS MODEL: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF RHETORICAL PRACTICES IN BUILDING PARTIAL CONSENSUS ON STRATEGIC CHANGE

The purpose of this paper has been to uncover the rhetorical practices needed to proceed with strategic change in pluralistic organizations. In particular, our analysis offers a nuanced processual account of the use of rhetorical argumentation when moving from initial contestation through gradual convergence to increasing agreement. Figure 3 below offers a graphical description of these dynamics.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Our analysis shows that the proponents and challengers were able to define and redefine what is appropriate and acceptable for themselves and their audiences as the change process unfolded. Thus, they could create and maintain an *enabling argumentative dynamic* where negotiations in several iterations were based on previous ones – in our case in and through three cycles of strategic planning rounds. The direction of this change was largely defined by the initiatives of the proponents, although the challengers were also able to affect this trajectory significantly. Our analysis specifically shows that the actors – both proponents and challengers – were willing to participate in 'rhetorical game' as long as their involvement seemed to have an impact. As a result, the discussions – involving arguments, counter-arguments, and new emerging arguments – paved the way for concrete decisions and actions that were also followed up by discussing the information provided on the results of activities. Thus, the emerging perspective is different from the view

that people may participate in debate and insist on decisions while being indifferent to the generation of a substantive action (March, 1994).

As Figure 3 above shows, actors can use a variety or argument types, each of which plays a specific role in the process; the bullet points denote the extent of their significance in advancing strategic change. In the case of voicing own arguments, reproduction of specific claims and values was the effect. These arguments played an important role throughout the change process but were less central at the very end. Appropriating each other's arguments was crucial for achieving convergence, even if it usually meant concealing underlying differences in values. In our case, this became salient in the second cycle. Building consensus arguments was in turn the key for development of common ground in strategic change. Although they could already be used in the first round, they exerted a greater impact in the latter rounds. Finally, collective-we arguments were an essential means of creating (at least partial) commitment to change, shown in our case at the very end of the process. Although our findings reveal a clear pattern in the use of such arguments in an unfolding strategic change process, they should be seen as tentative because other cases may differ significantly from our setting. Nevertheless, the key takeaway is that a variety of arguments are likely to be needed, and that some of them such as appropriation are likely to play a key role in achieving convergence midway through such a process, while others such as collective-we arguments are crucial in achieving increasing agreement.

The more specific nature of these arguments is also noteworthy (see Table 4 below).

Insert Table 4 about here

First, our analysis highlights the central role of voicing own arguments. In our case, these arguments often expressed – and very clearly so – the underlying value premises, especially in the case of the antagonists. The juxtaposition of financial concerns and care for inhabitants often proved salient when the arguments of the proponents and challengers were compared. Although adversarial and uncompromising arguments had an important role at the beginning of the strategic change process, they were also voiced throughout subsequent discussions. Thus, these arguments were not only used for positioning or bargaining in the conversations, but also seemed to serve as 'safety valves' for voicing viewpoints and convictions.

Second, appropriation of others' arguments was another key part of the unfolding strategic change process. In strategy conversation, participants have to deal with others' arguments in their own rhetoric.

Our analysis, however, highlights how this can involve instrumental appropriation of ideas and concepts that may result in significantly different meanings. The discussion of investment is a case in point. While the proponents initially envisaged investment in infrastructure to attract business and well-off inhabitants, the challengers envisaged something quite different, i.e. investment to secure and develop health services to take care of current and future inhabitants. Play with arguments of this kind became increasingly important as the strategic change process unfolded.

Third, our analysis reveals the key role of consensus arguments. Such arguments served as crucial 'compromises' and representations of joint positions that were often carefully spelled out in key moments of strategy conversations and written down in strategy texts. Since they frequently left the underlying assumptions implicit, the arguments were oftentimes enthymemes. This was useful as it allowed the actors, who had fundamentally different stances, to avoid contradicting their value premises. Thus, these arguments were often ambiguous in nature (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Sillince et al., 2012; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017), allowing the actors to interpret them in somewhat different ways. This practice enabled "both the new and the multiple prevailing meanings to coexist within a joint account of the proposed strategy" (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017). Interestingly, our analysis indicates that their nature changed from initial compromises to reflections of shared views over time.

Fourth and finally, the actors also used 'collective-we' arguments. These arguments were often characterized by a 'we-spirit' in construction of a 'collective-we' beyond the proponent-challenger confrontation. Such rhetoric seemed to be especially important in building up commitment to specific ideas, decisions, and actions. These arguments often bypassed the fundamental differences in the underlying assumptions and values. In all, they seemed to play an increasingly important role in the latter stages of the strategic change process.

In summary, our analysis shows that these rhetorical practices were used throughout the strategic change process simultaneously and in various combinations as part of a 'rhetorical game.' Thus, rather than moving from different viewpoints to clear consensus, shared views, or agreement (Kwon et al., 2014; Wodak et al., 2011), the actors were able to use a variety of rhetorical means to simultaneously hold on to their value bases and move on jointly with change (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017). Thus, as our analysis shows,

both proponents and challengers were able to exercise significant influence in a variety of ways by using skillful argumentation at an appropriate time and place – much like what is called *kairos*[2] in classical rhetoric.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This study has focused on the question of how rhetorical practices help achieve partial consensus among stakeholders with different values on the need for change in a pluralistic organization. Our empirical analysis has allowed us to develop a process model that details the role of specific rhetorical arguments in such processes. It therefore contributes to research on strategic change in pluralistic organizations by offering a nuanced account of the use of rhetoric when moving from contestation to convergence and partial agreement. Furthermore, by detailing specific types of rhetorical practices that play a crucial role in strategy-making, our study advances research on the role of rhetoric and discourse in strategy process and practice research more generally.

A nuanced processual account of the use of rhetoric when moving from initial contestation through gradual convergence to increasing agreement

Prior research has time and again showed how fundamental differences in values tend to form obstacles to strategic change in pluralistic organizations (Denis et al., 2001, 2007; 2011; Feldman et al, 2004). This issue is not a trivial matter as pluralistic organizations are characterized by fundamental differences in the views, opinions, and values of people representing different professions or adhering to different ideologies. This is especially the case with public organizations (Bednarek et al, 2017; Feldman and Sköldberg, 2002; Feldman et al, 2004; Morrell & Hewison, 2013, Mintzberg, 2017) of which city organizations are prime examples (Brandtner et al, 2016; Kornberger et al, 2017; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). Unlike for-profit organizations, they lack a common value base to build upon, which implies a need for more fundamental negotiations and sensemaking when dealing with strategic change (Kornberger et al, 2017; Kornberger & Clegg, 2011).

However, conventional views on strategic change that expect people to alter their views or "give in" and make "compromises" appear inadequate for understanding how strategic change is dealt with and evolves in such settings. Thus, an emerging stream of research has pointed to means such as skillful use of

[2] *Kairos* meant the right or opportune moment or time for the ancient Greeks. Thereafter, scholars of rhetoric have used *kairos* as an overall term to refer to the ability of actors to argue successfully for specific ideas at an appropriate point in time.

ambiguity (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Sillince et al., 2012; Sonenshein, 2010), coorientation (Cooren, 2010; Robichaud et al., 2004; Taylor & Robichaud, 2004), or creation of joint accounts (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017). Our analysis adds to this stream of research by offering a 'rhetorical game' perspective which elucidates how the actors simultaneously promote their own value-based interests and ideas and seek ways to enable change. We specifically demonstrate how this game may form a pattern where initial contestation leads to gradual convergence and finally increasing agreement. Furthermore, our analysis identifies and elaborates on four rhetorical practices that together make it possible for actors to move on even if they do not fully agree on the changes or their implications. The process is, however, not linear. Instead, it involves a variety of struggles, ambiguity, and contradiction. Nor does it end in a clear-cut consensus, shared views, or agreement as we are accustomed to think in strategy research (Kwon et al., 2014; Wodak et al., 2011). In fact, our case clearly illustrates that the proponents and challengers may continue to use various kinds of arguments in the unfolding change process without reaching overarching unanimity.

More specifically, this view enriches the findings about ambiguity (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Sillince et al., 2012; Sonenshein, 2010) by pointing out a range of means the actors can use to deal with ambiguity in conditions of fundamental differences in values. In this view, ambiguity is not only about differences in interpretations of strategy statements – as in the case of consensus arguments or 'collective-we' arguments – but an omnipresent feature of argumentation that is also maintained by constant voicing own views and appropriation of other's arguments. Hence, our findings are consistent with studies that consider ambiguity an inherent part of strategic change (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Jarzabkowski et al 2010; Sillince et al., 2012). What our analysis adds to these studies is that it details the various types of rhetorical practices needed to deal with ambiguity to pursue strategic change in pluralistic organizations.

Our analysis also resonates with recent research that highlights the key role of joint accounts in enabling the multiple meanings to coexist during strategic change in pluralistic organizations (Robichaud et al., 2004; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2017). Consensus arguments and 'collective-we' arguments can be seen as two important forms of joint accounts and our analysis shows how they can be produced and used in part because of a rhetorical structure that allows the actors to conceal or bypass their fundamental differences in values. However, our analysis highlights the multifaceted nature of the rhetorical work involved. This is manifested for instance in continuous voicing own arguments in which the differences in

values are explicitly juxtaposed. This is an important insight because it shows that the rhetorical work is ongoing and involves aspects that seem to co-exist – even when the actors succeed in producing joint accounts in the form of consensus arguments or 'collective-we' arguments.

Advancing understanding of rhetoric in strategy process and practice research

By elaborating on the rhetorical work in strategic change, our analysis also adds to research on the role of rhetoric in strategy-making – as called for in strategy process and practice research (Balogun et al., 2014; Burgelman et al, 2018; Golsorkhi et al, 2015; Jarzabkowski et al*.,* 2010; Mantere, 2013; Vaara, 2010). More specifically, by viewing strategy-making as a 'rhetorical game' and in elucidating key rhetorical practices used, our analysis helps to understand how rhetorical work is not a separate but an integral part of strategic change. If anything, our analysis also highlights the inherent complexities and contradictions in such work. On the one hand, a multiplicity of discourses and rhetorical arguments is likely to characterize strategy work, which is oftentimes 'messy.' On the other hand, the actors can themselves make use of the multiplicity of arguments and thus 'play' with contradiction and ambiguity when dealing with the problems and challenges. In fact, as our case illustrates, this is necessary to be able to proceed with change. Thus, the view that emerges from our analysis supports and adds to the studies pointing the key role of discursive ability or competence in strategy-making (Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Sillince et al, 2012; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017).

Our analysis also pinpoints how specific arguments can serve particular functions in strategic change. Importantly, each of these rhetorical practices has a specific role in rhetorical strategy work. In particular, voicing own arguments involves juxtaposition and may reflect an adversarial logic, appropriation of others' arguments contributes to convergence, building consensus arguments creates common ground, and finally 'collective-we' arguments contribute to commitment, even if partial. Unravelling these different functions is important because it allows us to better understand the specific implications of particular rhetorical arguments and thus their role in discourse about strategic change.

Finally, our analysis also shows that how these rhetorical practices can create an enabling argumentative dynamic that allows organizations to proceed in strategic change although actors have inherently different interests and political persuasions. This dynamic can thus be seen as forming a particular kind of 'discursive space' (Maguire & Hardy, 2010) that allows the proponents and challengers to move on

with change, even if it is considered controversial. This dynamic may also be considered an 'inter-field argumentative' sphere that connects the rhetorical fields of proponents and challengers with different value-bases (Green, 2004; Green et al., 2009; Harmon et al., 2015). As our analysis shows, essential in this dynamic are rhetorical arguments and moves such as appropriation that facilitates convergence and collective-we arguments that promote and serve as markers of increasing commitment. By illustrating the importance of such a dynamic and detailing some of the key practices that allow shifts in the discussions, our analysis offers a conceptual basis that may not only benefit analysis of strategic change but can also inform other areas of research concerning rhetorical argumentation in organizations.

CONCLUSION

Strategic change is never easy, but pluralistic organizations represent a specific challenge because of the fundamental differences in values that the actors tend to have (Denis et al, 2001, 2007, 2011). Our analysis has illuminated some of the key rhetorical practices needed by the actors to proceed with strategic change. The resulting view is not the familiar linear progression of argumentation from different viewpoints to shared views or consensus nor the more ceremonial view of people participating in argumentation just for the sake of participation or figuring out who "wins." Instead, it appears that collaboration from different policy positions is difficult, involving a myriad of arguments used as part of a game where the actors together can move on even if they do not fully agree on the changes. By opening up this blackbox of rhetorical argumentation, our analysis adds to recent research in this area (Abdallah & Langley, 2014; Bednarek et al, 2017; Robichaud et al, 2004; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017) and hopefully encourages others to follow suit in detailing the variety of rhetorical and discursive means used in strategy work in and around pluralistic organizations.

This study has limitations that should be taken seriously. The public organization and the Nordic cultural setting undoubtedly influence our findings. However, it should be noted that we have aimed at analytical generalizations, and it is likely that similar kinds of rhetorical arguments and dynamics also characterize rhetorical strategy work in other pluralistic contexts and beyond. It would therefore be important to examine strategic change in other organizational and cultural contexts and to compare the findings. This would lead to a better understanding of rhetorical and other social practices and add to our knowledge of the dynamics of these processes. Such studies could also reveal other rhetorical practices that

would complement the picture. While we have focused on rhetorical arguments, it would be interesting and important to connect these arguments with multimodality and various socio-material practices and genres (Kaplan, 2011; Levina & Orlikowski, 2009; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015). While our analysis points to a specific temporal pattern in the use of various arguments, future studies could go further in detailing the temporal dynamics involved. Moreover, we have focused on overall tensions between proponents and challengers; instead of such a dualistic setting, future studies could aim at a more nuanced analysis of the subject positions of the people involved for example by drawing on the idea of crowded advocacy, a concept developed by Dodge (2017). Our analysis also underscores the need to examine the orientation of rhetorical strategy work more closely, which can entail an analysis of rhetoric-audience interaction and how it evolves over time. Finally, we believe that the idea of an enabling argumentative dynamic is useful for rhetorical analyses of change in various contexts and thus hope that scholars will be inspired by this add-on to the rhetorical analysis of strategic change.

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Table 1 Empirical material

	First cycle: 2004-2006	**Second cycle: 2006-2008**	**Third cycle: 2009-2012**
Strategic plans and related documents	Strategic plans and their drafts, numerous other documents (operational plans, policy papers, budgets, evaluation reports); presentations (including 46 Power Point slide shows by the strategy consultants and the liaison officer responsible for writing the strategy)	Strategic plans and their drafts, numerous other documents (operational plans, policy papers, budgets, evaluation reports); presentations (including PowerPoint slide shows by the city's executive team, and middle managers)	Strategic plans and their drafts, numerous other documents (operational plans, policies, budgets, evaluation reports); presentations (numerous PowerPoints and VUE presentations by the mayor, the strategy director, and other managers)
Interviews	37 real-time interviews with the members of the top management team, the city council and board, the chairs of the city's committees, the labor union chairs, the upper middle managers	30 real-time interviews with the members of the top management team, the city council and board, the chairs of the city's committees, the union chairs, the upper middle managers	30 real-time interviews with the chairs of the city board and council, the members of the top management team, the upper middle managers, the chairs of the city's committees
Meetings	No direct observations	63 meetings observed real-time in the top management team, city council, city board, and different departments; extensive documentation	73 meetings observed real-time in the top management team, city council, city board, and different departments; extensive documentation
Personal documentations	Diaries and emails of key decision-makers; key individual's notes on strategy process	Diaries and emails of key decision-makers; TMT members' personal notes of discussions in and between meetings	Emails of key decision-makers; the strategy chief's personal notes on discussions in and between meetings, mayor's blogs
Other material	Extensive media material	Extensive media material	Extensive media material

Table 2 Coding of rhetorical practices used to proceed with strategic change in health care

Rhetorical practice	Orientation toward change	Examples of argumentation
Voicing own arguments	Proponents	"We began to cut costs from a machine that was already affordable [fairly efficient]. And decreased over hundred man-years, and that is a big achievement. And behind such a decision there has to be a strategy that expresses the rationale, like, hey, this is where we live and breathe [strategy of cost cuts aiming at a balanced budget]." (1st cycle) (interview) (*financial concerns: an explicit value premise)*
		"Our critical success factor is to avoid debt because debt is not a natural resource." (2nd cycle) (meeting) (*financial concerns: explicit value premise)*
		"Well, the euro is the best consultant when the amount of debt is increasing, and tax revenue and state grants are not sufficient for producing the services required by the law and stipulated by parliament. And these [cuts] must be made. It's a matter of simple logic." (2nd cycle) (interview) (*financial concerns: an explicit value premise)*
		"We need to decide how we express that we strive to balance the budget in the long term by making this investment now." (3rd cycle) (meeting) (*financial concerns: an explicit value premise)*
		"I think it's not sensible to contrast investment in the city's development with services. If the question is asked like this, of course people will choose services" (3rd cycle) (interview) (*financial concerns: a value premise)*
	Challengers	"I emphasize community and everyone's responsibility toward each other. And now our strategy focuses on the individual [criticizing the protagonists]." (1st cycle) (*care of inhabitants: an explicit value premise*)
		"I think there should be something about the city respecting itself and its inhabitants in the strategic goals. It means that when there is such respect, the city is for its inhabitants." (2nd cycle) (meeting) (*care of inhabitants: an explicit value premise)*
		"It's important to include values in the strategy discussion. For example, that common interests take precedence over individual interests." (2nd cycle) (interview) (*care of inhabitants: an explicit value premise)*
		"I read from here that the goal is that our average productivity is the best compared with the big cities. And then this is monitored on the basis of, it says here, the service network is reduced. Is this really the way to achieve productivity?" (3rd cycle) (meeting) (*care of inhabitants: an explicit value premise)*
		"The wishes concerning the restructuration of our health services are unreasonable when taking into account the wealth and health of our inhabitants." (3rd cycle) (interview) (*care of inhabitants: an explicit value premise)*
Appropriation of other's arguments	Proponents	"The basic manifestation of a civilized society is the way in which it cares for the poorest and weakest. I still believe in this and I see that the city's strategy is in line with this premise [even if it means savings and cutbacks]." (2nd cycle) (meeting) (*care of inhabitants emphasized, financial concerns concealed: an underlying value premise)*
		"In basic services the inhabitants' basic wellbeing is important and the services have to be produced so that wellbeing is secured. But not by asking inhabitants about what nice things they want [and thus increase the costs]." (2nd cycle) (interview) (*care of inhabitants emphasized, financial concerns: an underlying value premise)*
		"The economic balance should be achieved with a long-term perspective, not with short-sighted cuts." (3rd cycle) (meeting) (*financial concerns brought up, but mitigated)*
		"We are going to streamline the [organization] and if needed, we will also invest in some of the areas of responsibility [services for inhabitants]." (3rd cycle) (interview) (*financial concerns brought up, but mitigated)*
	Challengers	"I don't think the strategic goal should be that services cost more. The point is to provide both affordable and impartially offered services for as many as possible." (2nd cycle) (meeting) (*financial concerns recognized, care of inhabitants brought up, but mitigated*)

		"The economic analysis should be about finding the resources for the important services. And not always about us not having resources!" (2nd cycle) (interview) (*financial concerns recognized, care of inhabitants mitigated)*
		"It would be good to have some indicators about the impact of the investment we make. For example, […] what is the indirect impact on the whole community. Some investments may indeed decrease our costs in the longer run but some may not." (3rd cycle) (meeting) (*financial concerns emphasized, care of inhabitants: underlying value premise*)
		"Although I think we need to invest in infrastructure, I see that well-functioning health services are our city's business card." (3rd cycle) (interview) (*financial concerns emphasized, care of inhabitants: underlying concealed value premise*)
Consensus arguments	Strategic plans	"Strategic goal: The basic needs of inhabitants are met. Critical success factor: Managing service demand" (1st cycle) (document) (*underlying value differences concealed)*
		"Strategic goal: City focuses on core functions and inhabitants' contribution to individual responsibility is increased. Critical success factor: Taking care of basic security and core functions as well as arranging basic services" (2nd cycle) (document) (*underlying value differences concealed)*
		"Strategic goal:" City secures the prerequisites for inhabitants' wellbeing by focusing on core functions. Critical success factor: Services are offered through emphasizing inhabitant's individual responsibility and initiative. City focuses on core functions in service repertoire" (3rd cycle) (document) (*underlying value differences concealed)*
	Proponents	"Although we clearly did more [on strategy work] than before, I think that perhaps we should also have put even more effort into the strategy draft because there should be stronger consensus about the future." (1st cycle) (interview) (*critical reflection on consensus arguments in strategic plan*)
		"Eventually strategic policies mean that we want to go to a specific direction. For example, if we decide to improve productivity in social and health care, it actually means something. After that you can't [just] promise or propose whatever you like." (2nd cycle) (interview) (*underlying value differences concealed)*
		"The sense of community was a goal that came from the council and it was extremely important for them." (3rd cycle) (interview) (*underlying value differences concealed*)
	Challengers	"Strategy work was rather limited in the city board and council and the timetable was too tight. What is our credibility if we don't even understand what these fine strategy statements mean?" (1st cycle) (interview) (*critical reflection on consensus arguments in strategic plan*)
		"There is a lot of talk that the change is coming but the change has begun already years ago. And it is better to anticipate than to respond to change." (2nd cycle) (interview) (*underlying value: differences concealed)*
		"In the strategy, there are those issues related to services and economy that are relevant for the inhabitants and city's success more broadly (3rd cycle) (interview) (*underlying value differences concealed)*
Collective-we arguments	Proponents	"We need to decide what kinds of decisions, investment, knowledge, and politics are needed to make our strategy credible. […] We have to convince those outside the city to believe that we are doing things so well that inhabitants, businesses, and tourists will favor this city. (3rd cycle) (meeting) *(underlying value differences bypassed)*
		"In the city council, we took up for example discussion about investment and willingness to develop the city. And we asked whether we dare decide about it [the investment] and if we do, do we dare to do what we have decided. This discussion took a lot of time." (3rd cycle) (interview) *(underlying value differences bypassed)*
	Challengers	"It's our number one strategy to emphasize markets in our social and health service production. And those companies, they make massive profits for their owners. […] We should think about the conditions in which we strengthen the markets and the extent to which we want to do it. And consider whether it is positive development." (3rd cycle) (meeting) *(underlying value differences partly reconciled)*
		"We should take a stance regarding how we respond to, for example, inhabitants' complaints that our health services don't function well. […] We need to decide whether we finance the services more or outsource them. […] Often, it's more cost-efficient to do it in-house. And then this is not according to our strategy, but it could be reasonable operationally and cost-wise." (3rd cycle) (interview) *(underlying value differences partly reconciled)*

Table 3 Use of rhetorical arguments in key issues of strategic change

Issue	Focus	Cycle 1: Initial contestation	Cycle 2: Gradual convergence	Cycle 3: Increasing agreement
Health care reform	The proponents strived for a health care reform that would cut costs, make operations more effective, and encourage inhabitants to pay more for the services; this included changing the organizational structures, rationalizing operations, and outsourcing. The challengers aimed at protecting and if possible, developing the services offered to inhabitants, thus making them initially opposed to the ideas of the proponents.	Voicing own arguments by emphasizing the need to reorganize and cut costs in health care (proponents) and by maintaining or developing health services (challengers) (high importance) First consensus arguments on the need to reorganize health care; these are limited in scope (medium importance)	Voicing own arguments by emphasizing the need to reorganize and cut costs in health care (proponents) and by maintaining or developing health services (challengers) (high importance) Appropriation of others' arguments (e.g., outsourcing of health services based on their positive impact on services offered) (high importance) Consensus arguments pushing forward concrete decisions and actions (high importance)	Continuous voicing of one's own arguments by emphasizing the need to reorganize and cut costs in health care (proponents) and by maintaining or developing health services (challengers) (medium importance) Appropriation of others' arguments (e.g., protection of health services based on a need to invest in the future) (high importance) Consensus arguments pushing forward increasingly widespread decisions and actions (high importance) Collective-we arguments forming a basis to joint commitment to the process and content and strategic change (high importance)
School network reorganization	The proponents aimed at reducing costs and focusing operations in fewer schools. In practice, this meant mergers and closing of specific schools. The challengers strived for maintaining the	Voicing own arguments by emphasizing the inefficient use of educational resources (proponents) and by expressing the concern for the pupils and how they would manage in larger school units (challengers). (high importance) (high importance)	Voicing own arguments by emphasizing the cost efficiency in concentrating the educational expertise and specialization (proponents) and by expressing the concern for the growing inequality between the pupils (challengers). (high importance)	Retrospective collective-we arguments showing commitment to the decisions already made (mostly supporting the implementation of the decisions) (high importance) (Closing down the schools and merger decisions were made in 2005-2007)

	school network, which meant that they were usually resisting the merger and shutdown plans and initiatives.	First consensus arguments on the need to provide high quality education impartially for every pupil. (medium importance)	Appropriation of other's arguments dealt with offering each pupil equal opportunities for success in studies (proponents) and questioning the calculations and estimates by providing updated detailed numbers about population estimates and unit costs (challengers). (high importance) Consensus arguments about the importance of decision makers to pledge their commitment to decisions about closing and merging specific schools. (high importance)	
Privatization of support functions	The proponents aimed at making the city focus on its core functions and on developing the support functions by means of privatization or selloffs. The challengers were especially in the beginning opposed to privatization because this was seen as a threat to the city's ability to offer comprehensive services to inhabitants.	Voicing own arguments about saving costs when creating markets and enabling tendering of support functions (proponents) and about the need of the support functions for the supply chain (challengers) (high importance) First consensus arguments about the importance of establishing city's ownership policy. (medium importance)	Voicing own arguments by emphasizing core functions and services (proponents) and by focusing on providing services support functions within the city organization without complicating the supply chain by tendering support functions in open market (challengers) (high importance) Appropriation of other's arguments by emphasizing the benefits of formation of new companies to maximize the profits for the city to finance e.g. health services (proponents) and by emphasizing the rising market price and falling quality of support functions (challengers). (high importance)	Retrospective collective-we-arguments showing commitment to the decisions already made (mostly supporting the implementation of the decisions) (high importance) (The decisions about the privatization of support functions were made in 2006-2008)

			Consensus arguments about the importance of streamlining of city's governance system. (high importance)	
Creating markets for private daycare centers	The proponents strived for opening daycare operations for new actors, which would also reduce the city's role in maintaining daycare centers. The challengers aimed at developing the city's own daycare centers, thus making them initially opposed to the private daycare operations.	Voicing own arguments by emphasizing the unit cost of daycare (proponents) and the importance of professional and regulated daycare for children (challengers). (high importance) First consensus arguments about the parents' latitude to choose a suitable daycare service. (medium importance)	Voicing own arguments by focusing on increasing costs of public daycare (proponents) and on decreasing quality of daycare offered by corporations (challengers). (high importance) Appropriation of other's arguments emphasizing benefits of specialization that leads to improved quality in private daycare (proponents) and cost savings in following common daycare policy (challengers). (high importance) Consensus arguments about regional development of network of daycare providers. (high importance)	Continuous voicing of benefits in creation of daycare markets to supplement city's daycare service (proponents) and importance of regulation in securing the quality of daycare (challengers). (medium importance) Appropriating other's arguments emphasizing policy in regulating the private daycare corporations (proponents) and investing in future by improving city's daycare (challengers). (high importance) Consensus arguments about private daycare corporations supplementing city's own service offering. (high importance) Collective-we arguments about family friendly city brand. (high importance)
Parking center in the historical square	The proponents aimed at creating a new parking center at the historic town square to support business development; this was seen as an important investment for the future. The challengers resisted this project that was seen as less important than	Voicing own arguments emphasizing improvement in the city infrastructure to attract people (proponents) and prioritizing city services (challengers). (high importance) First consensus arguments on the upkeep of city center. (medium importance)	Voicing own arguments focusing on city's growth and offering business opportunities in the city center (proponents) and on climate change and decreasing private motoring (challengers). (high importance) Appropriation of other's arguments focusing on the strategic plan's vision of the upkeep of city center. (high importance)	Continuous voicing of one's own arguments about the business opportunities (proponents) and sustainability (challengers). (medium importance) Appropriation of other's arguments (e.g. accessibility to the center). (high importance) Consensus arguments pushing forward the contracts with parking firms. (high importance)

	investments in health care and education.		Consensus arguments pushing forward historical square planning decisions. (high importance)	Collective-we arguments making the city vital and attractive. (high importance) (The decisions about the construction plans of the parking center in the historical square were made in between 2009-2012)
New high-end condos in the downtown harbor area	The proponents strived for developing a new residential area; this was seen as an important investment for the future. The challengers were initially opposed to these plans, which were considered to have less priority compared with health care and education.	Voicing own arguments emphasizing the offering of high-quality living with amenities to attract tax payers (proponents) and focusing on impartiality in land use (challengers) (high importance) First consensus arguments about the upkeep of harbor area. (medium importance)	Voicing own arguments emphasizing importance of changing the population structure (proponents) and offering opportunities also for the current inhabitants (challengers). (high importance) Appropriation of other's arguments by focusing on equal opportunity to buy the high-end condos (proponents) and by investing in high quality residence also in other suburbs (challengers) (high importance) Consensus arguments pushing forward harbor area planning decisions. (high importance)	Continuous voicing of one's own arguments about the need to attract new inhabitants (proponents) and developing also other city suburbs (challengers). (medium importance) Appropriation of other's arguments (e.g. investing in future with new habitation) (high importance) Consensus arguments pushing forward the contracts with construction firms. (high importance) Collective-we arguments making the city vital and attractive. (high importance) (The decisions about the construction plans of the harbor residential area were made in between 2009-2012)

Table 4 Rhetorical practices used to proceed with strategic change in pluralistic organizations

Rhetorical practice	**Role and use over time**	**Characteristics of rhetorical arguments**	**Typical structure in arguments**	**Implications**
Voicing own arguments	Central especially in the beginning of strategy discussions, but also important later	Providing explicit arguments highlighting one's own values and differences compared with the other side's arguments	Underlying assumptions and differences in values made *explicit*	Ability to position oneself in negotiations Ability to maintain convictions and support among constituencies in particular arenas
Appropriation of other's arguments	Central when moving on with the discussions	Instrumental adoption of each other's rhetoric to create convergence	Underlying assumptions and differences in values *often concealed or mitigated*	Convergence in discussions Developing new arguments and meaning (with ambiguity)
Consensus arguments	Central when moving on with the discussions	Using enthymemes to hide differences in values (with ambiguity)	Underlying assumptions and differences in values *often concealed*	Developing common ground by avoiding exposure to value conflict Developing new arguments and meaning (with ambiguity)
Collective-we arguments	Increasingly important in the latter part of the process	'Collective-we' constructions linked with shared ideas emerging from discussions	Underlying assumptions and differences in them *often bypassed or partly reconciled*	Developing 'we-spirit' Commitment (even if partial) to joint decisions and actions

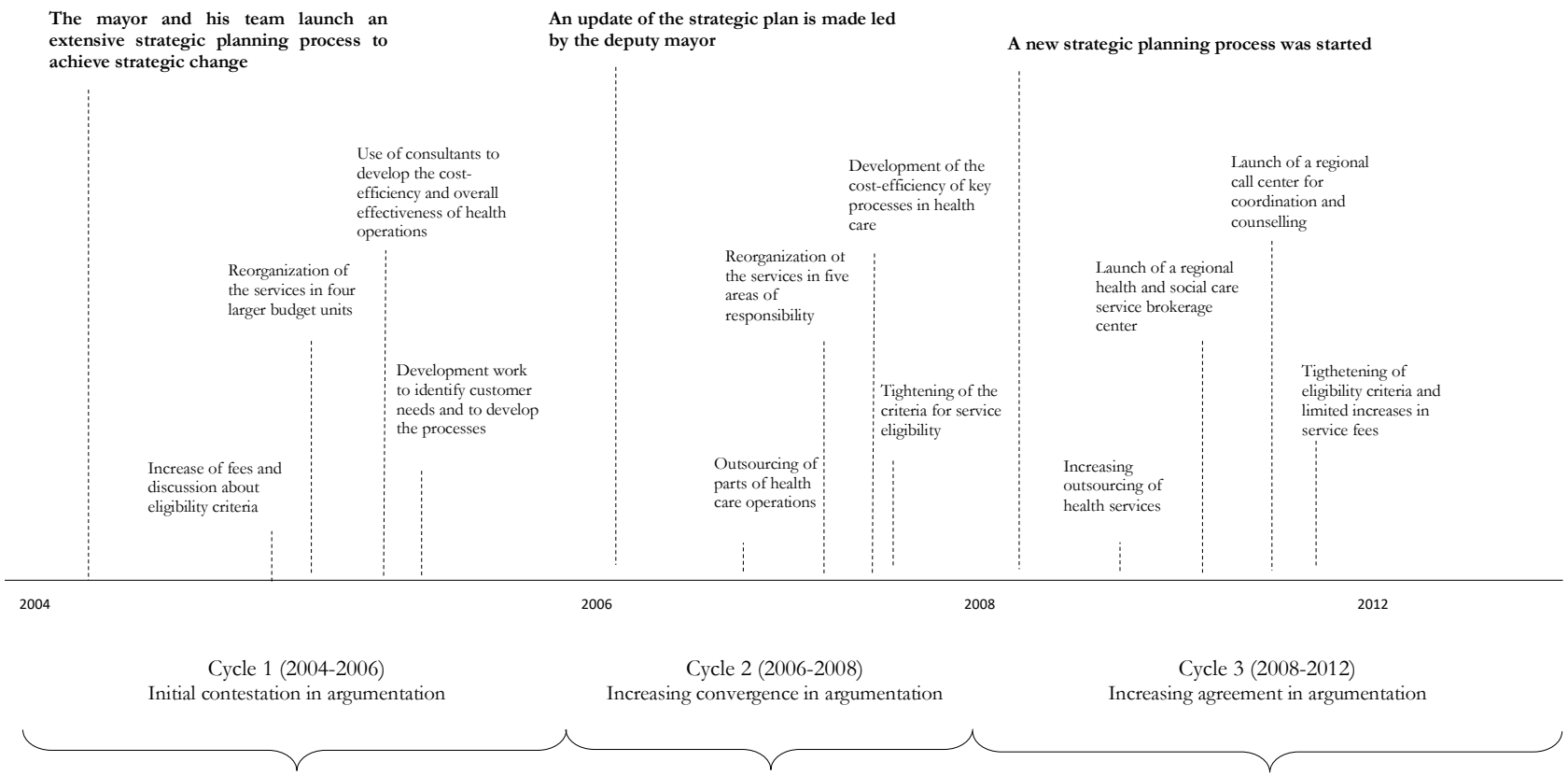

Figure 1 Timeline of events with a focus on health care reform

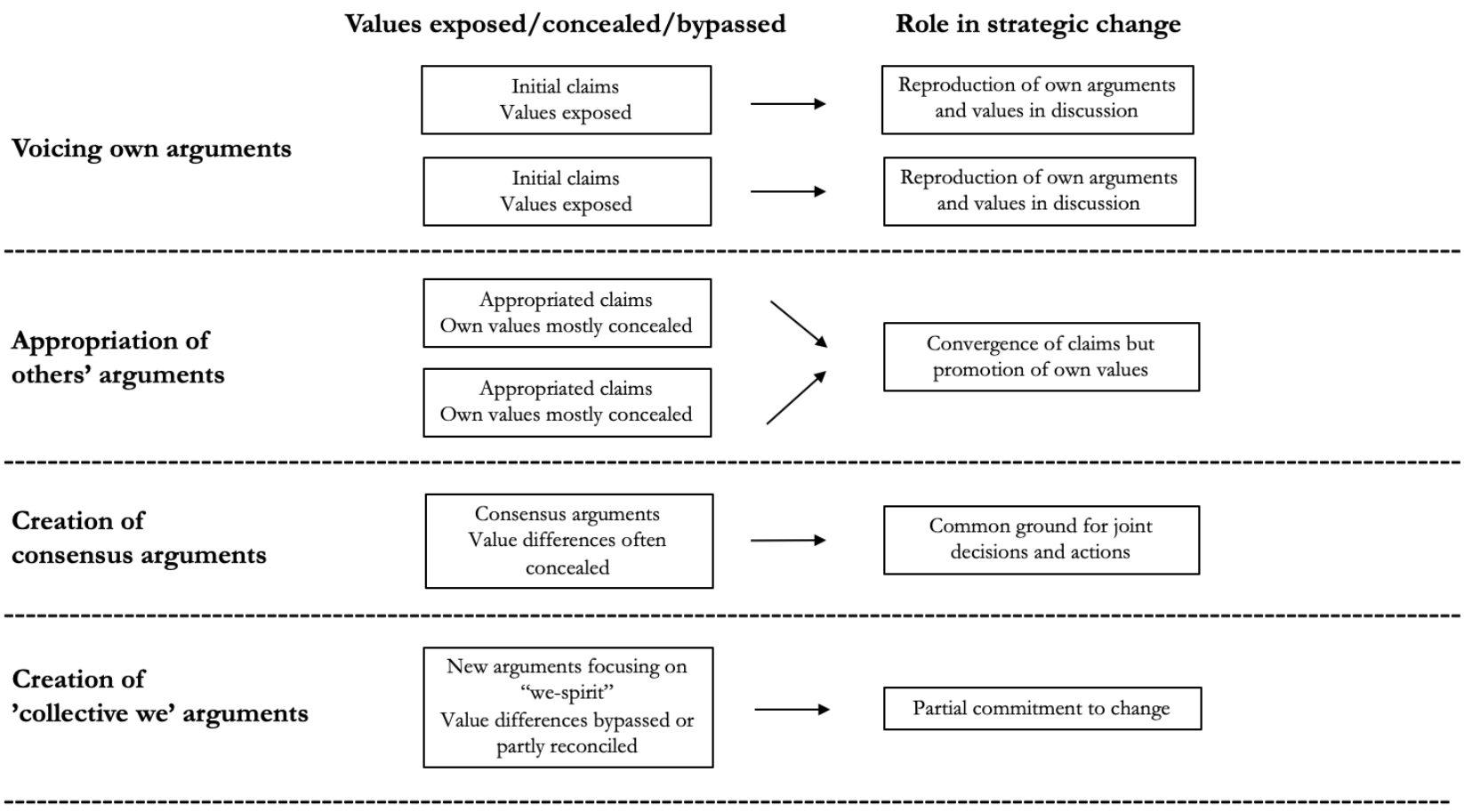

Figure 2 Structure of rhetorical arguments and their function in strategic change

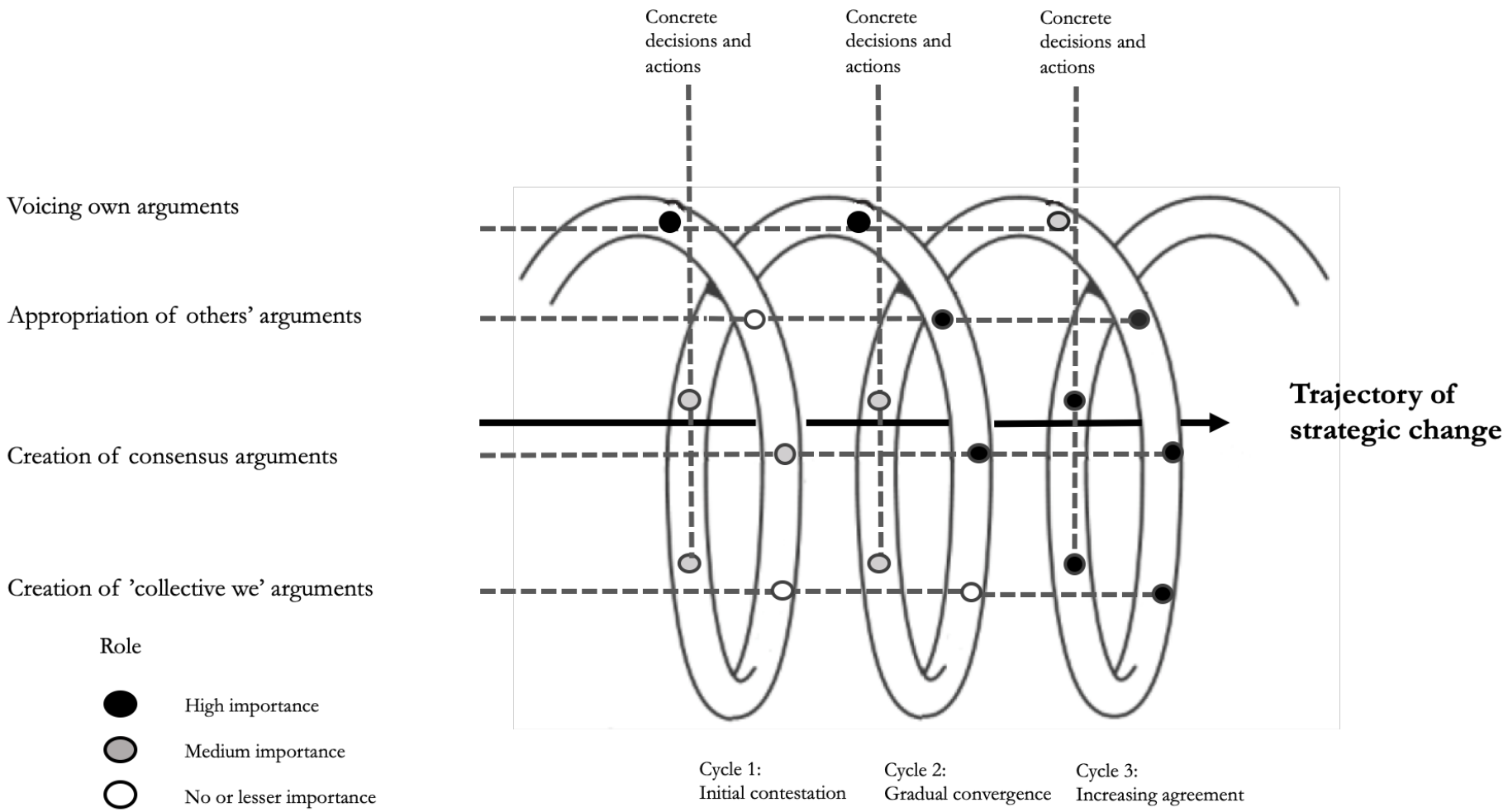

Figure 3 Use of rhetorical argumentation when moving on with strategic change in pluralistic organizations