

“Lege Artis” – Exploring the Strategizing Craft of Consultants

through the Examination of (Analytic) Strategy Tools in Use

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YOU WRAP ME IN HAPPINESS, ALWAYS

Abstract

Strategy tools are an important part of strategy work. However, there is considerable debate in the management literature about their actual role, deployment, and conceptualization. Scholars claim that there is a lack of fine-grained analyses to explain strategizers' activities with regard to their interactions with strategy, their supporting knowledge base, and associated artefacts or tools, despite growing contributions towards the understanding of strategy work dynamics. This study aims to contribute to this gap by discussing research undertaken through ethnographic methods on the day to day work of in-house strategy consultants.

By interacting with in-house consultants through active participation and observation, this study observes and analyses the enactment of strategy tools in action. The study focuses on the use of strategy tools, the process they are placed in, and the ultimate purposes they serve. A "strategy-as-practice" lens is adopted, theoretically accessing the use of strategy tools through "reflection in action" and sensemaking. By working with and for consultants, this dissertation obtains insights related to both *frontstage* and *backstage* aspects of strategy work, obtaining results that contribute to the skewed existing evaluations on the use of strategy tools.

This study proposes a reflexive account on the roles of strategy tools in everyday work by laying out a variety of data items and rhetorical devices. Analysing data, obtained from observations, interviews, written material, and focus groups, takes the findings into first

and second order analysis. Based on hundreds of pages of observations, 47 interviews, two focus groups, numerous data files, and other follow up talks, the continuous engagement with data is conveyed to the reader through data outputs, including narratives, vignettes, and visual representations, which give space to a vivid display of what was encountered in the field through this ethnographic study.

The findings show that strategy tools are used more than we think, especially in the *backstage* work of strategy teams. In addition, the use of strategy tools tends to be sequential (some strategy tools are used more in specific phases of strategy projects). In addition, their presence in strategy projects is not always evident at first sight – tools tend to be disassembled and reassembled by their users to create new tools, which are thereafter addressed explicitly or implicitly by strategizers and their audiences. Hence, the thesis proposes an “invisible presence of strategy tools”, especially as observed in the work of experienced strategy workers.

By embarking on a journey of Cheshire cats and continuous reconfigurations of sensemaking cues, the reader is invited into what makes the adventurous work of strategy practitioners, and the *lege artis* their work encompasses.

Keywords: strategy tools; strategy analysis; strategy-as-practice; strategy work; in-house consulting; strategy; bricolage; reflection in action; *backstage*; *frontstage*.

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Key Terms¹

In-house consultant (otherwise known as “internal consultant”) – consultant permanently employed by an in-house consultancy (hence, different to an external [or outsourced] consultant who can be employed for a specific period of time, serving particular project[s]). In line with the working definition here, the existing literature offers a broad definition acknowledging in-house consultants as “not only those who were clearly designated as such (e.g., ‘change consultant’), but also other specialist staff who provided advice and facilitation as ‘internal outsiders’ to operational groups, typically on a project basis, and who recognise a core part of their job as involving ‘management consultancy’” (Sturdy & Wylie, 2011:7).

(Management) consultancy – “minimally, involves two human systems where one (the client) believes help is needed and the other (the consultant) assists by providing it” (Lundberg, 1997: 196).

Professional Service Firm (PSF) – a firm that is described by a combination of knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, and professionalized workforce (definition adopted after Von Nordenflycht, 2010).² Consultancies are considered by the author as PSFs with high

¹ Key terms are provided here in alphabetical order.

² Note that the author does not propose a dichotomous definition of PSFs vs. non PSFs as this is considered a problematic treatise.

knowledge intensity, low capital intensity, while also being accompanied by a low professionalization base, whereas audit firms would belong to “classic PSFs (or regulated PSFs)” (p. 166).

Strategizer (used interchangeably with “strategist”) – subject whose actions and interactions contribute to the strategy of an organization (Mantere, 2005). Consultants, middle management, or gurus who contribute to strategy would all be considered strategists following this definition; hence, not exclusively the executive management level (i.e., the executive board, or senior executives). This view is embraced by the strategy-as-practice approach, stating that strategy is a “situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategizing comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity” (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007: 7–8).

Strategy-as-practice (S-a-P) – a movement primarily of the last two decades promoting foci of studies upon strategy practices and practitioners. This movement has established itself as a stand-alone stream within EGOS as well as an interest group within the Academy of Management Annual Meetings. For more on the essence of this movement, refer to the handbooks *Strategy as Practice: Research Directions and Resources* (Johnson et al., 2007) and the *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice* (Golsorkhi et al., 2010), as well as prominent articles to provide direction for the field such as Johnson et al. (2003) and Whittington (1996; 2006).

Strategy praxis – consists of “all the various activities involved in the deliberate formulation and implementation of strategy” (Whittington, 2006: 619). The same notion is further supported and proliferated by Jarzabkowski et al. (2007).

Strategy practices – consist of internal organizational routines, operating procedures and cultures that shape local modes of strategizing, as well as broader based routines and norms deriving from social fields or systems in which a particular organization is embedded, which inform legitimate ways of doing strategy (cf. Whittington, 2006: 620). This conceptualization follows practice theorists’ definitions of practice as “shared understandings, cultural rules, languages and procedures — that guide and enable human activity” (following Bourdieu 1990 and Giddens 1984, as cited in Whittington, 2006: 614).

Strategy tools – comprise “*analytic* approaches (in that they help in analyzing a particular problem and providing a solution to that problem), *processual approaches* (they help in guiding the process, e.g., project management), or *artefactual* devices (e.g., the computer or softwares in use) that are *used* by the organization *for the purpose* of providing strategic outcomes” (working definition).

Strategy workshops – “(or ‘away days’) are episodes, often within a wider strategy process, where executives set aside typically one or two days, frequently off-site, to consider strategic issues” (Johnson et al., 2010: 1589).



Handwritten signature or initials.

*The present letter is a very long one, simply because I had no leisure to make it shorter.*³

(Blaise Pascal, 1657)

1. Chapter 1: Rationale behind the study

1.1. Personal exposure to strategy tools

This study was motivated by my direct exposure to the use of strategy tools in various contexts. I illustrate two of these contexts, which have helped in laying the foundations of my research:

(1) During strategy and consulting courses in my MBA studies in Germany, it was common for MBA students persistently to ask for more business frameworks and methods in the quest for best solutions to case studies and for further preparation towards management practice. Hence, management professors would teach more and more business and corporate strategy tools (e.g., Porter frameworks and 2x2 matrices of various kinds). In their teaching activities, an explicit requisite was for these tools to be used while solving case studies provided with the coursework. Additionally, along with coursework, students would undergo one-day simulations in which groups would operate as consultancies to solve cases. During these simulations MBA students were expected to construct problem

³ Taken from Provincial Letters: Letter XVI, translated by Thomas M'Crie. Adapted from the original in French (Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte). English translation available at <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phi302/texts/pascal/letters-a.html>, entered on 10 Sept. 2012.

trees, build problem statements, and propose solutions to challenging business problems. These cases were very interactive, they were packed with the use of various tools, and the latter ultimately became part of the jargon in various exercises.

(2) The second experience encountered stems from my MBA thesis/project at the Beiersdorf HQ in Hamburg, Germany, where I was to be hired after finishing my studies. I was working within a unit called “Corporate Projects Brands” that focused on how to expand Beiersdorf’s business into new markets, beyond its existing core competences (the latter, deemed to be “providing the best and biggest retail beauty brand in the market” - referring to the major brand in the company’s portfolio: NIVEA).⁴ I assisted my boss, who often reported to the Board about the potential opportunities for Beiersdorf in various markets. The projects undertaken by this unit were highly confidential and seldom discussed extensively within the firm. During my stay with the company, I experienced a sudden interest in Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS).⁵ This tool had become popular shortly after one of the company executives had attended an executive course at INSEAD.⁶ It was striking for me to experience the adoption of the BOS framework across NIVEA not only for the brand as a whole, but also across a whole hierarchy of BOS frameworks (all developed internally within the team), analysing and positioning brand subcategories through the use

⁴ I am reporting the self-proclaimed core competence of the firm, without offering a judgment on the accuracy and alignment of this statement with the actual “core competency tests” (cf. Prahalad & Hamel, 1990).

⁵ Blue Ocean Strategy (BOS) is a strategy framework.

⁶ This happened in 2007-2008, only few years after Kim and Maugborne (2005) had published the book with the same title as the promoted framework.

of the same framework. Together with my boss, we spent many days positioning and repositioning brand subcategories while constructing various BOS canvases⁷ while the team faced increased frustration with the adoption of the tool, which clearly seemed of limited contribution at a brand and subcategory level. During many months, BOS became central to various firm discussions at an executive level, and ad hoc meetings were set to explain further the principles entailed by the BOS methodology.

Both instances provided here illustrate my initial exposure to strategy tools. During my MBA studies, I would acquire more knowledge on strategy tools from a theoretical perspective, whereas during my work I could see various challenges of using such tools in practice. I found it interesting to see how these tools were used much more beyond the initial protocols for their application (as the BOS framework discussed above). I could see bewilderment, frustration, joy, and improvisation during the use of strategy tools. From a practical perspective, I became more and more interested in what would happen in other management domains while boards and executives, managers, and, more broadly, strategists used strategy tools. I considered the use of strategy tools rather problematic, and not straightforward as I would read from traditional strategy books (for the latter Porter, 1980, would be an example). I consulted additional literature to ground and position my thinking. I became particularly acquainted with the writings of Johnson et al. (2007), Jarzabkowski (2003), and Orlikowski (2000) turning the attention towards practice

⁷ "Strategy canvas" or "canvas" is a term proposed by Kim and Magbourne (2005) to visually represent the strategic positioning of a company within a competitive landscape based on several criteria chosen by the individual who is to assess this positioning (i.e., the same individual who is to construct the canvas).

as a useful unit of analysis. These studies hold in common the view that practice constitutes a useful means for the study of management phenomena. They propose the study of practice as an empirical lens rather than as a new theoretical construct. This distinction is important as the practice turn movement was embraced by strategy and information systems scholars, and more generally by sociological researchers, to complement the positivist studies existing in management research. The practice turn proposes a more pluralistic methodology and therefore a more reflexive approach (Johnson et al., 2007; Golsorkhi et al., 2010) which could promise fine grained views of the reality in management practice. Hence, this lens would increase nuances in the discussions of strategy literature to complement many existing, static views of strategy.⁸

1.2. Research problem

This exploratory study problematizes the phenomenon of strategy tools in use. The first question emerging in this regard is to understand if and why such problematization exists. The main premise here is that the use of strategy tools is rather problematic and not straightforward as shown in traditional strategy books (for the latter, Porter, 1980, would be an example). Hence, the starting point is that practitioners question the strategy tools they are about to use, and this questioning affects the decision on whether these strategy tools are ultimately to be used. Without problematizing the use of strategy tools, one would assume they are picked in a very straightforward "quasi-robotic" manner, which in

⁸ Some of these views are presented in the discussion of literature in Chapter 3.

turn would disregard the assumptions about practitioners and their “reflection in action” (cf. writings from Schön, 1983, 1987) and also of the nature of humans and their sensemaking states (cf. writings from Weick, 1979, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1998). In addition, the use of strategy tools is to be deemed problematic due to the lack of professional regulation behind the profession of strategizers (Whittington, 2006; Whittington et al., 2003; Whittington et al., 2011).

The problematization of strategy tools in use is particularly grounded in the approaches of Johnson et al. (2007) and Jarzabkowski (2003), who turn their attention towards what is known as the “practice turn” (Schatzki et al., 2001) in management studies. The primary focus of this study lies in strategy tools, whereas the setting where the empirical enquiry takes place is consultancy.⁹ Here the focus is the understanding of strategy tools in use while “doing strategy work”. This thesis looks closely and attempts to make sense of the strategy processes¹⁰ and practices in place, and the related contribution of strategy tools. Thus, here the interest lies on the *modus operandi* within strategy (consulting) activities. More particularly, this study aims to enquire into the *strategy toolkit*¹¹ consultants operate with during their work.

⁹ The choice of consulting as an interesting site of enquiry is not an opportunistic one. Studies have shown that consultancies play a central role in the creation, dissemination, and further use of strategy tools (e.g., see Clark, 1995, 2004, Kipping, 2002, McKenna, 2006) I delve in more detail on this choice in the next chapter.

¹⁰ Here, “process” is understood as “a sequence of individual and collective events, actions, and activities unfolding over time in context” (Pettigrew, 1997, p.338, similar to definitions offered by Van de Ven, 1992).

¹¹ The notion of strategy tools is defined in literature as a very generic concept (see Clark, 1997; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). This study chooses to adopt a working definition of “strategy tools” that is presented in the definition section and elaborated in detail in Chapter 2.

The research problem of this study is not new to management research.¹² However, the methodological approach towards exploring this problem is novel within this setting: the phenomenon under study is not pursued by detachment from the strategy consultants and reflections on their everyday work. Strategy tools have been studied through a mixed methodology (e.g., dissertations and further work of Stenfors', 2007, Werr's, 1999, etc.), but, to my knowledge, there has to date been no extensive study pursuing strategy tools as they happen in their natural habitat. Nevertheless, this study builds on other adjacent studies, such as the work by Stenfors (2007), Werr (1999), Kaplan (2005), and other scholars in the field who have closely pursued the work of consultants (e.g., Sturdy, Heusinkveld).

The dissertation does not intend to propose a “best practice” approach, nor is it guided by a quest for prescriptive recommendations.¹³ Instead, the study is primarily occupied with providing a fine-grained analysis of how strategy work is done in a single (in-house) strategy consultancy setting, and with identifying the supporting tools on which the body of knowledge of such work is based. Additionally, especially with regard to Porter (1980) and much of the practitioners' literature on strategy methods (such as literature originating from McKinsey, BCG, Bain), this project could be considered an assessment exercise to

¹² For example, Stenfors examines strategy tools through surveys and interviews (see Stenfors' 2007 dissertation, and Moisander & Stenfors, 2009), whereas Werr (1999) in his dissertation uses simulations with management consultants to further explore the use of management concepts.

¹³ Nevertheless, despite not being the focus of this research, prescriptive recommendations are a by-product of the research conducted in this dissertation. For more on practical implications and prescriptive recommendations, visit Chapter 9.

enlighten further the decoupling between what is believed about strategy tools and what is actually done while working with these tools. This decoupling was observed and problematized early on in management literature. What March discusses in the 1980s remains relevant today: there is a discrepancy between “how we talk and how we act”, a discrepancy between “administrative theory and administrative life”:

Administrators manage the way sentiments, expectations, commitments, and faiths of individuals concerned with the organization fit into a structure of social beliefs about organizational life. Administrative theory probably underestimates the significance of this belief structure for effective administration...Whether we wish to sustain the system or change it, management is a way of making a symbolic statement. (March, 1980: 26)

The discrepancy between theory and practice has also been pointed out by current literature streams, such as “strategy-as-practice” (see Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington 1996, 2006) and methodological domains, such as “action research” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001; Genat, 2009). In a recent editorial note in *Long Range Planning*, a theory detached from practice is highlighted within the strategy literature:

We propose that an important part of the next generation of research on strategic planning should be close attention to the phenomenon itself. The decline of strategic planning research has left academic understanding too reliant on dated and stereotypical views going back twenty years or more. The implications of new decentralised and networked forms of organization, of new electronic means of communication, and of the spread of formal business education (including strategy training) throughout almost all managerial ranks, are barely accounted for. Rather than relying on old clichés, we need to get close to contemporary practice. (Whittington and Caillaet, 2008: 244)

This study is congruent to these research streams in that it stresses the current discrepancy between theory and practice, and moreover, it aims to contribute to this gap. This contribution is two-fold: the exploration of strategy work as a phenomenon of interest in its own empirical underpinnings; and the elaboration of theory (Lee et al., 1999) that delves into this phenomenon. The overarching criteria guiding this work abide by what are considered to be “interesting” insights (Davis, 1971).

1.3. Aim of study

By tracking the role of strategy tools in the problem solving processes of strategy practitioners, this project aims to uncover the body of knowledge that is enacted through everyday consulting work. Although it would be short-sighted to claim that such an understanding could be achieved through this dissertation alone, the intention here is to produce empirical evidence that would offer a reflexive account of how “strategy tools” account for consultants’ practices. Moreover, this DPhil study reflects upon strategy tools tracing their fate beyond business school curricula and various training programmes. Literature and business cast doubt on the effectiveness of business school curricula. For example, the Dean of the University of Toronto Rotman Business School, Roger Martin,¹⁴ (currently appointed for the third term in a row as the Dean of the School) reported in an earlier article:

¹⁴ Roger Martin has previously been partner at a major consulting firm, i.e. Monitor.

If you give me a choice of recruiting with the admissions list or the graduating list [from HBS], it would take me a second to decide – I'd go with the admissions list. (Jaschik, 2004: 38).

Nevertheless, the predominant presence of analytic strategy tools in business school curricula has reached the level of what has been accounted for as *orthodoxy* (cf. Knights and Morgan, 1991) within strategy both in academia and business. However, this exercise does not simply enquire into whether strategy tools are encountered in everyday work (since a variety of surveys can account for this fact), but how they are enacted in practice. Such an exercise would, furthermore, have implications for any update of business school curricula on strategy tools, the domains where strategy tools could be considered more necessary within strategy consulting practices, and the types of tools (if any) that would be more relevant to strategy consulting work.

To provide a complementary account, this study is inspired by the work of Latour and Woolgar (1979), who captured science through close observation, as in the “Laboratory Life”. Here I aim to undertake a parallel endeavour at uncovering what constitutes the internal life of strategy by focusing particularly on strategy tools. Hence, this project aims further to uncover “the soft underbelly” of strategy during its making (Edge & Mulkay 1976, as cited in Latour and Woolgar 1979).

1.4. Research context: intersections of strategy with consulting

When interested in the use of strategy tools, I contemplated the setting that would provide a significant degree of exposure to them. Strategy work involves a broad group of actors, such as consultants, managers, and gurus. Not only does it relate to the executive boards and senior manager ranks, but also to subjects whose actions contribute to strategy (Mantere, 2005). In this broad pool of actors, consulting appeared a proper sample for the exploration of strategy tools in situ as this occupational domain has been shown (mainly through the institutional theory stream, e.g., Abrahamson, 1996; Sahlin-Andersson & Engwall, 2002) to play an active role in producing, deploying, and spreading business methods. In addition, historic accounts have documented the contributions of consultants towards various strategy tools (e.g., see McKenna, 2006; Ghemawat, 2002; Clark, 1995; 2004; Kipping, 2002). Nowadays, strategy consulting alone is an industry worth around \$6bn globally each year as reported by Kiechel III (2010: 12) in what could be conceived as “nothing more than (its) ideas, analysis, and general smarts”. After all, historically strategy consulting has been considered the major consulting activity. For example, Kipping (2002) recognizes that strategy consulting, through well-known firms such as A.T. Kearney, Booz Allen & Hamilton, Boston Consulting Group (BCG), was the major consulting activity between the 1930s and 1980s.

Based on my reading of the literature, consulting appeared a puzzling, yet important setting for inquiry, not only due to its exposure to strategy tools, but also due to the complex reality this context represents. More concretely, literature persistently portrays

consulting with (a) its rapid growth and multidimensional development, (b) its large impact upon management, and (c) its uncertainty and equivocality¹⁵ of work. Below, I elaborate on these literature discussions by focusing on their implications towards a common platform that justifies consulting as a valid site for the study of strategy tools.

(a) Parallel to the growth of consulting as a lucrative industry and overall phenomenon, it has grown to become “the world’s newest profession” (McKenna, 2006). Although the consultant may be considered a weak professional (Fincham, 2006), he can certainly be considered a “knowledge worker”,¹⁶ where the latter is defined as “the typical worker of the advanced economy” (Drucker, 1969: 251). In addition, the development of management consulting is multifaceted: not only does it comprise the emergence of a new industry, but also new business models and organizational phenomena. With reference to their business models, management consultancies are organized as standalone entities that offer a broad array of services (e.g., some well-known consultancies of this type are McKinsey or BCG), they are positioned as more niche (specialized) boutiques (e.g., Marakon), and as a more recent phenomenon they may also be seen as a function within

¹⁵ “Ambiguity” and “equivocality” are separate attributions here, following the distinctions offered by Weick (1995). As the author notes, “[t]he problem faced by the sensemaker is one of equivocality, not one of uncertainty” (Weick, 1995, p.27). It is important to distinguish between the two, as in ambiguity, “people engage in sensemaking because they are confused by too many interpretations, whereas in the case of uncertainty, they do so because they are ignorant of any interpretations.” (p.91).

¹⁶ Please note that although there is a tendency to label many professions pertaining to “knowledge” work, such labelling is in many cases overstated (see for example, Thompson & Warhurst, 1998).

an organization (e.g., the latter known as “in-house consulting”¹⁷ – e.g., Deutsche Telekom In-house Consulting or Deutsche Post World Net In-house Consulting).

(b) Consulting has resulted in a lucrative industry supported by high fees, and furthermore, it has contributed to an added value and influence higher than revenues alone suggest (Watson et al., 1998; Management Consultancies Association Report, March 2010).¹⁸ A recent survey revealed that 97 per cent of the top 200 companies in the UK and US have used management consultants (Clark, 2007). Apart from simple quantitative figures of consultants’ numbers serving business, consultants’ advice is shown to have great influence in corporate boardrooms (see McKenna, 2006; Payne, 1986). Due to their influence in strategizing activities, management consultants are aligned amongst other strategy practitioners (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

(c) There are widespread accounts on the quality of advice consultants offer to their clients (for critical accounts towards consulting, see Fincham, 2006; Mintzberg et al., 1998;

¹⁷ This phenomenon is often present in Germany (e.g. Deutsche Post World Net – information on its in-house consultancy is available at: <http://www.dp-dhl.de/en/career/dpdhl/in-houseconsulting.html>; or Deutsche Telekom – information is obtainable at <http://www.telekom.com/dtag/cms/content/dt/en/906080> etc.), where internal consultancies are shown to provide support to strategy projects within the firms they belong to.

¹⁸ In a recent report produced from the Management Consultancy Association (MCA) entitled “The value of consulting”, the British Consulting Industry is estimated to generate fees totalling £9bn (for 2008) and to have contributed to the British industry by around £56bn (See more on the report at <http://www.mca.org.uk/news/mca-report-uk-consulting-industry-generates-benefits-worth-%C2%A356bn-uk-clients>). This report has not been carried out by practitioners alone, but academics have helped build the research design (e.g., Prof. Tim Morris, from the University of Oxford has been involved in the process). Although the estimations on consultants’ added value discussed in this report could be put to scrutiny (not only concerning the British consulting market, but also the global one), the essence is that clients recognize and appreciate the value of consultants’ work and are able to assess it in concrete and tangible figures.

Pringle, 1998; or for positive accounts, see Armbrüster & Glückler, 2007; Engwall & Eriksson, 1999; Payne, 1986), but it is barely questioned how this advice emerges and what consultants do during their strategy work (Fincham & Clark, 2001, 2002; Whittington, 2007). Examining consultancy work is relevant to understanding the dynamics behind the advice given to clients. Therefore, the study of strategy toolkits would elaborate more on how consulting advice emerges and the role of strategy tools in such advice. These findings would be particularly relevant to the primary incumbents of consultants' advice, i.e., their clientele. The following are few excerpts highlighting the experience a consultant has encountered with strategy tools:

I once sat through a presentation in which a consultant, a Harvard M.B.A., showed a client, the manager of a large financial institution in a developing country, how the client company's "competitive advantage" could be analyzed in terms of "the five forces." He even used a graphic borrowed directly from guru-of-the-moment Michael Porter's best-selling work on "competitive strategy." Not for the first time, I was embarrassed to call myself a consultant. As it happens, the client, too, had a Harvard M.B.A. "No," he said, shaking his head with feigned chagrin. "There are only three forces in this case. And two of them are in the Finance Ministry."... What they don't seem to teach you in business school is that "the five forces" and "the seven Cs" and every other generic framework for problem solving are heuristics: they can lead you to solutions, but they cannot make you think. Case studies may provide an effective way to think business problems through, but the point is rather lost if students come away imagining that you can go home once you've put all of your eggs into a two-by-two growth-share matrix.

(Stewart witnessing his experience in the article "The Management Myth" at The Atlantic, June 2006¹⁹ - article which has been extended further in the book with the same title published by the author.)

¹⁹ The article can be accessed online at <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/06/the-management-myth/4883/> (last accessed on November, 2, 2011).

Most good consultancies have an underlying methodology. Over the past ten years we have created what we term the “IBM Global Services Method,” which is a whole series of structures and methodologies for conducting our consulting business, from strategy engagements to technical implementations. This is also the basis of how we train our people and how we can execute on an end-to-end value proposition. It’s an important part of being a world-class consultancy today, but it’s not enough. You have to have a deep understanding of industry. Industry roadmaps are very important. We cultivate, develop, and maintain industry roadmaps, which are points of view of where the industry is going, leveraging the combination of thought leadership and business best practices. We also maintain rich technical frameworks in an effort to shorten time-to-market. The Drive for Business Results—Walking in the Customer’s Shoes

[*Inside the Minds: Leading Consultants: CEOs from BearingPoint, IBM Consulting, AT Kearney & More on the Future of the Consulting Profession and Industry* by Frank Roney (ed), online edition]²⁰

Although the excerpts presented here are not deemed exhaustive²¹ of the interactions found in management with strategy tools, they do represent how management and consultancy are inevitably entrenched with business ideas, frameworks, and methods. Albeit some accounts on consulting appearing cynical (e.g., the one offered by Stewart here or Pinault’s cynical portrayal of his work with major strategy consultancies),²² the excerpts above and the supporting literature show that there exists a relationship of strategists with the strategy tools they use; this relationship is not straightforward – strategists discuss strategy tools with anger, contempt, joy, and frustration; hence, consultants do not merely rationalize their use of strategy tools but do also vividly reflect

²⁰ Available at Books24x7 and entered through Oxford University online library resources on July 23 2011.

²¹ For example, other accounts have offered testimonials of consultants work and their interactions with strategy tools – e.g., *The McKinsey Mind* by Rasiel and Friga (2001), or *The Breakthrough Imperative: How the best managers get outstanding results* by Gottfredson and Schaubert (2008).

²² For more read Luis Pinault’s (2000) book – *Consulting Demons: Inside the Unscrupulous World of Global Corporate Consulting*, where he provides a cynical, but nevertheless brave account on challenges faced while working as a strategy consultant.

on the roles strategy tools serve in their work experience. Such a relationship is the phenomenon that this research highlights and explores in more detail, with the belief that by enquiring into the setting where these tools are embedded, a better understanding will be reached with regard to their use, their adaptation, and the overall place they occupy in general strategy work.

As iterated in the discussion here, consulting represents an appealing setting for this enquiry, even more so if the attention were to be focused on internal (strategy) consulting.²³ The latter represents a setting to which literature has devoted very little space to date. Among the few notable resources to be found in literature are the ones provided by Sturdy (e.g., see Sturdy, 1997; Sturdy & Wylie, 2011). However, internationally, literature on internal consultants remains scarce. This could be explained in line with the development of internal consultancy as a phenomenon that is novel and in its early stages. Nevertheless, internal consultancy as a domain remains under-researched if compared with external consultancy (Sturdy & Wylie, 2011), hence becoming very attractive to the eyes of a researcher.

²³ Note that throughout this study I refer to internal consulting also as in-house consulting. Both terms are used interchangeably.

1.5. General structure of this dissertation

I build the discussion as following: in Chapter 2, I present the research frame for the design of this study by discussing the philosophical assumptions on which the dissertation is based, the definition of main concepts under enquiry, and the theoretical conceptualization prior to the analysis. In Chapter 3, I lay out various views on strategy tools in use, the discussions encompassing academic and practitioners' accounts, major conflicts in the existing literature, and some recurring themes relevant for the research design of this dissertation. I end Chapter 3 by laying out the main research question to be pursued. Additionally, since the nature of consulting work is an important consideration due to the effect it has on the range and type of tools in use, the literature on consulting and its work features are presented in this chapter.

In Chapter 4, the methodology is outlined, encompassing a reflection on the process of undertaking a pilot study, thereafter obtaining the reviewed research design, data collection, and main data items. Given the ethnography pursued in this dissertation, special consideration is given to the site characteristics and procedures taken throughout the study. This chapter places a strong emphasis upon providing a reflexive account in the methodological procedures followed. The stages of analysis have comprised two main layers by using first and second order analyses (cf. Van Maanen, 1979).

Chapter 5 presents in more detail the various measures taken as part of data analysis, as well as first order data. In this chapter, analysis procedures are presented and other

operational aspects such as timeline, main variables, and relationships under focus during analysis, procedures to extract overarching themes of interest, and related challenges. In addition, first order findings are presented. These comprise the description of the nature of strategy projects encountered in the field, in addition to observations on preparatory and delivery enactments seen within strategy workshop pipelines. To provide a colourful view of first order findings, the analyses' outcomes are aided by a vignette (*Vignette A*) and various data displays dealing with emerging patterns of interest. The presentation of data is followed by an overview of a project that was experienced as an outlier in the site, not only by me as a researcher, but also by practitioners involved in it. More concretely, I discuss the major global strategy-making exercise and the sensemaking around scenario analysis within the firm.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the first research question of this dissertation by visiting second order data. Roles of strategy tools as well as triggers of their bricolage are part of the discussion in this chapter. The Cheshire cat metaphor is presented by unravelling the shapes strategy tools take in praxis and uncovering the contexts and triggers of their bricolage.

In Chapter 7, I follow the study of empirical findings by discussing the fluid role played by strategy tools in several strategy project stages, along with a general review of this ethnography. This chapter presents propositions that result following the first order

analysis presented in Chapter 5. These propositions are intended as explorative findings that could thereafter be put to scrutiny in other (confirmatory) studies.

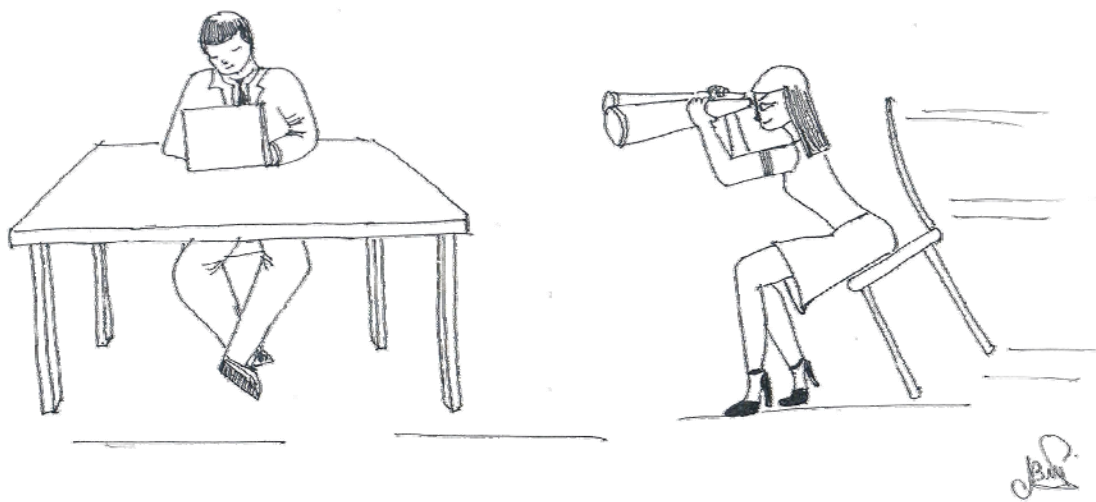
In Chapter 8, I filter consecutive stages of scenario discussion by presenting chronological diagrams and narratives (*Vignette B* follows here). This data is presented so as to obtain a generalizable understanding of sensemaking of other strategy tools.

I end the dissertation by assessing the limitations of this study as well as the future prospects for development in Chapter 9. This chapter also tackles implications for theory and practice, while placing particular emphasis on the latter. The dissertation ends with a postscript following my personal loyalty towards the reflexive style pursued throughout this work. Before the research frame presented in the next chapter, in Table 1 below I display the main messages provided by this chapter.²⁴ The table displays the main research concerns expressed here and their implications for bridging the discussion with the next chapters.

²⁴ The same formatting approach is offered in the end of every chapter, where a conclusive table synthesizes the discussion. This is inspired after consulting the dissertation of Mantere (2003).

Research concerns	Overview	Implications
Why strategy consulting	- Consultancy has seen rapid growth and multidimensional development. - Consulting has large impact upon management. - Consultancy work is seen to be characterized by uncertainty and equivocality of work. - Consultancy has been acknowledged to develop and diffuse strategy tools to various domains. - Additionally, personal experience (with an internal ad hoc consultancy) has provided further motivation towards the roles tools play in everyday work of consulting.	- Understand that there are context specific variables that enable us to uncover whether consulting has particular motives for the use/non-use of strategy tools.
Research problem	- Strategy tools in use when doing consulting work.	- Strategy tools observed as a companion of strategy projects (following a process approach). - A tailored methodology is needed to access strategy tools as they are enacted in situ.
Research aim	- Uncover the body of knowledge behind strategy consulting work with particular reference to analytic strategy tools in use.	- Understand the roles that strategy tools play by the direct witnesses of the consultants that operate with them.

Table 1. Summary of rationale fundamentals for this research



*You have your way. I have my way.
As for the right way, the correct way, and the only way, it does not exist.*

(Friedrich Nietzsche)

2. Chapter 2: Research frame

2.1. Underlying philosophical assumptions

This study adopts a social constructivist perspective. The basic premise upon which this perspective is based is that “reality is socially constructed” (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Weick, 1995). At the ontological and epistemological level, this perspective is aligned to the claim that “[t]he relation between what we see and what we know is never settled” (Berger, 1972: 7). Translated into the consultancy setting, “the reality” in which consultants operate should be understood as continuously enacted by its members. A social constructivist perspective requires an interpretive epistemology, in that the latter allows capturing and collecting multiple accounts of community members (Johnson & Duberley, 2000). Consequently, I chose to adopt a social constructivist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology.

This study is particularly aligned to practice theorists’ approaches that favour close attention to how work is done, the tools used, and the subjects involved (Bourdieu, 1990; Schatzki et al., 2001). The ontological premises of this study are inspired by Wittgenstenian and Heideggerian views, which emphasize the centrality of social practices in constituting

everyday life (Schatzki & Wittgenstein, 1996, Schatzki, 2002; Shotter 1993; Chia & Holt, 2006).

The epistemology and ontology guiding the study are in line with the focus pursued by the S-a-P movement. As shown by one of the proponents of this movement:

[T]o fully realize its potential, “Strategy as Practice” needs to be grounded on an onto-epistemology that acknowledges the various ways through which strategies qua practices may develop as well as the various modes of intentionality and language use that, crucially, underlie strategy making (Tsoukas 2010: 57).

As emphasized throughout this study, the focus lies on “what is actually done in the doing of work, and how those doing it make sense of their practice” (Orr, 1996: 439).

With reference to data analysis, the “inference to the best explanation” – IBE (as in Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010: 319) is followed here.²⁵ Following this approach, the researcher is expected to consider and compare several theoretical explanations of the phenomenon under study, before choosing the best one. In this way, one can build consistency and transparency in how grounds (cf. Toulmin, 2003) – i.e., data, observations and theoretical premises – are connected with claims originating from them (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010: 316). More specifically, context-dependent reasoning (ibid: 323) is pursued here with an epistemological focus on practices of knowing rather than merely knowledge (Cook & Brown, 1999; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006).

²⁵ This approach is also called “abductive reasoning” (cf. Niiniluoto, 1999 and Peirce, 1878 as cited in Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010: 319).

Subjective and empirical contextualization (cf. Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010) are pursued in the examination of findings, with the first (i.e., subjective contextualization) aiming towards a clarification of the thought process undertaken by the subject doing this study (Weick, 1989), and the latter (i.e., empirical contextualization) aiming towards providing as high access as possible to the reader towards the empirical setting. Through multiple and fine grained examples and details from the context, the author provides the reader with empirical authenticity (Cook & Brown, 1999; Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006). By abiding by the latter principle, I aim to provide readers with “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), whereas through the former I aim to present what I personally call “empirical consciousness”. With both principles (i.e., subjective and empirical contextualization), I opt for a qualified level of reflexivity (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) to help with the foundations of theoretical claims brought forward by this work.

2.2. Main concepts

Strategy and strategizing

In line with the actionable strategy approach (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006), strategy is defined here as “... a situated, socially accomplished activity constructed through the actions and interactions of multiple actors” consequential for outcomes of considerable importance to the organization (Jarzabkowski, 2005: 7). Although all the actors in an organization cannot be called “strategists”, their actions and interactions contribute to the strategy of an organization (Mantere, 2005). Strategizing encompasses the day to day work of practitioners who struggle with mundane routines and exceptional projects

(Whittington, 1996). Thus strategy from this perspective is not seen simply as an object, but also as what strategists do (Jarzabkowski, Balogun & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003; Whittington, 2006). At the same time, this is consistent with the view of strategy as an emergent process (Kaplan & Beinhocker, 2003; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). Strategy has been considered to result in “a pattern... a *consistency* in behaviour, *whether or not* intended” (italics in the original, Mintzberg, 1987: 12). Hence, strategizing has not been considered purely contextual, but entailing an inherent pattern of behaviour that could be found in the everyday work of strategists. Another complementary account regards strategy and strategizing as:

...a kind of work. In this sense, strategy is a practice like any other, fundamentally equivalent to other practices such as architecture or nursing. (Whittington & Cailluet, 2008: 244)

In the last years, there has been strong advocacy to understand what strategists do (Whittington, 2006) and how that impacts the crafting of strategy in everyday practice (Whittington & Cailluet, 2008). For this reason, the S-a-P movement has further advocated the pursuit of this research gap (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006). In response, journal articles within S-a-P have proliferated. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) noted that there was an increasing number of articles with a contribution towards conceptual articles in this domain, whereas more recently Vaara and Whittington (2012) announced that more than 60 empirical

articles have contributed²⁶ to S-a-P in the last years. Within these studies, empirics on strategy tools remain scarce.²⁷

The view of strategy as activity demands examination as it is embedded in its practices and, at the same time, its materiality (the latter encompassing strategy tools as constituents).²⁸ Therefore, the three key terms *practices*, *praxis*, and *practitioners* become relevant while holding an actionable strategy approach (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006). Strategy tools are a subgroup that is enacted in both practices and praxis. Within this section, I develop the concept of strategy tools by proposing a working definition that allows improved focus and accessibility to the phenomenon. But first I focus on practitioners with emphasis on the context of management consulting.

²⁶ The authors, in an article published in the Academy of Management Annals review studies published during 2003-2012 and discuss the empirical contribution they entail within “strategy as practice”. The list is available at <http://www.s-as-p.org/news> (entered online on January, 8th, 2012). This study should be carefully assessed since authors specify that strict criteria drove their selection. In their review they include only articles tightly linked to the S-a-P community and a selected number of publication platforms (for more, see the endnote on p. 325-326 of the article).

²⁷ In this list, fewer than 10 articles were counted on the topic of strategy tools [this assessment strictly follows the definition of strategy tools in this dissertation – hence although strategy tools are a subset of strategy practices, as the latter does not only consist of strategy tools. For instance, “workshops” are considered to be strategy practices from Vaara and Whittington 2012, but are not to be considered strategy tools by the definition proposed here earlier (note that a more detailed discussion on strategy tools follows in 2.2).

²⁸ Note that “socio-materiality” is gaining further momentum within S-a-P. Firm evidence comes also from the latest S-a-P overarching theme as part of EGOS 2013, dedicated primarily to the study of socio-materiality (more specifically the 2013 S-a-P theme within EGOS 2013 has been “Strategizing Activity and Practice: Connecting the Material to the Social”). For more, consult http://www.egosnet.org/jart/prj3/egos/main.jart?rel=de&reserve-mode=active&content-id=1334581167609&subtheme_id=1319359703954.

(Management) Consulting

March (2006: 327) defines consulting as “any activity that has its main apparent justification the giving of advice to organizational participants about how to improve the effectiveness of organizations or specific individuals in them”. March includes management gurus or lecturers in this definition. Due to the breadth of the definition presented above and the lack of an institutional connotation to it, another, more pragmatic definition is chosen for this study:

Consultancy, minimally, involves two human systems where one (the client) believes help is needed and the other (the consultant) assists by providing it (in Lundberg, 1997: 196).

Here the latter definition is preferred, therefore focusing on management consultancy which is institutionally recognized, leaving aside any subtle “consultancy” assignments that are done at an individual (freelance) level without demand by any “client” organization or individual. Hence, a transactional approach is highlighted in the definition proposed by Lundberg (1997), as there could be no consultancy intervention without a reciprocal need for interaction and a transaction taking place. Thus, gurus or lecturers on their own would not be considered consultants according to the definition provided by Lundberg (1997).²⁹

Consultants are acknowledged among the actors who directly contribute to strategizing (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009), hence they too belong to

²⁹ This latter definition is narrower than the one proposed by March (2006) and better targets the institutional nature of consulting. At the same time, there could be instances where gurus and lecturers do act as consultants also as part of this definition. That would happen as part of a previously set deal with “the client”, when the latter recognizes the need for consultancy by these gurus and lecturers.

strategizers within a given setting. More specifically, when assessing internal consultancies, by developing the definition above, “in-house consultancy” involves a team that operates as part of the structure of an organization, by predominantly serving in-house clients (i.e., employees or departments located within the same organization), where in-house consultants are permanent employees of the organization. Therefore, they differ from external (or outsourced) consultants who can be employed for a specific period of time, serving particular project(s). More recently, literature has attempted to provide a systematic definition of in-house consultants (otherwise referred to as “internal consultants”). They are seen as:

not only those who were clearly designated as such (e.g. ‘change consultant’), but also other specialist staff who provided advice and facilitation as ‘*internal outsiders*’ to operational groups, *typically on a project basis*, and who recognised a core part of their job as involving ‘*management consultancy*’” (Sturdy & Wylie, 2011:7, italics added for emphasis)

Hence the “internal outsiders” proposed here share many commonalities with what is generically referred to as “management consultants”; they too are hired on a project basis, and their job comprises providing advice and facilitation. Table 2 shows the main distinctions between internal (in-house)³⁰ and external consultants:

³⁰ Note that throughout this dissertation, I also refer to internal consultants as in-house consultants, and interchangeably so.

Main differentiating criteria	Internal consultants	External consultants
Is their work project based?	Yes	Yes
Do they work on billable hours?	Mainly they do not	Mainly they do
Where is their client located?	Mainly inside their organization	Mainly outside their organization

Table 2. Comparison between internal and external consultants

Internal consultants operate on the same level as external consultants, through project-based work. They have a varied pool of clientele, but unlike external consultants, they operate mainly with internal clients (ibid.), although their work is not formally compiled through billable hours but by sponsors within the organizations. These internal consultants were the practitioners consulted through the fieldwork accessed as part of this dissertation. Therefore, their work with and around strategy tools will be pursued further in this dissertation. But before clarifying the various insights obtained from the relevant literature, I clarify the notion of strategy tools by proposing a working definition.

Strategy tools

This study is focused on “strategy tools”, for which multiple definitions are offered. Recent literature views strategy tools as “numerous techniques, tools, methods, models, frameworks, approaches, and methodologies which are available to support decision making within strategic management” (Clark, 1997: 417; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009: 224). These definitions leave unanswered several questions. Is the concept of tools a flexible one that encompasses multiple ontologies or is it attached to a particular ontology, such as material object or more broadly, practice? Are strategy tools to be considered with

reference to individual conceptualization, or should they qualify as such only through a collective shared understanding within an organization or community of users? Is the definition of strategy tools based on ostensive or performative principles (cf. Feldman & Pentland, 2003)? Responding to these questions would inform how better to define the boundaries on which strategy tools are to be examined. Thereafter, a clearer delineation of the strategy tools' definition would allow better comparison of studies which have discussed the use of strategy tools to date, in light of different levels of understanding, and at the same time would also allow facilitating its empirical pursuit.

Table 3 shows definitions found in the literature concerning "strategy tools". The information presented in the table is relevant as there could be no significant comparison of findings in literature without a common basis of reference on what should be considered a "strategy tool".³¹ In various instances the definition of Clark (1997) is followed (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). Here methods, frameworks and concepts are all considered strategy tools, whereas March (2006: 201) states that "[t]echnologies of model-based rationality are the core technologies of strategic management". Following March's definition, abstractions, collections of data, and decision rules that support strategic management are seen as visible components of the technologies of rationality. March proposed in his main argument that these tools have to be balanced by other technologies that free action from the constraints of conventional knowledge and procedures, and introduce elements of foolishness into action.

³¹ Of course, this does not mean that strategy tools cannot comprise a broad range of ontologies. However, any distinction on the ontological basis should be made clear prior to their theoretical and empirical pursuit.

Definition of (strategy) tool	Articles basing discussion on this definition	What qualifies as a strategy tool – tick if the item belongs to strategy tools				Illustration of what is considered a strategy tool following this definition
		Methods, frameworks	Physical entities	Concepts/Jargon	Practices	
Network of human and not human elements (“Andrew the strategist is a heterogeneous network”, p.177)	Callon and Law ³² (1997)	✓	✓	✓	✓	Andrew + fax + fellow managers + secretary + head office + trains to London + his PC + the work of scientists and engineers + the memos that circulate + the time slips filled in by employees (Callon and Law, 1997: 177)
Bain survey (referred to as “management tools” but no definition provided)	Rigby (2010) ³³ ; Rigby and Bilodeau (2007)	✓	x	✓	✓	- Core competence - Strategic planning - Balanced Scorecard
“numerous techniques, tools, methods, models, frameworks, approaches and methodologies which are available to support decision making within strategic management” (Clark, 1997: 417)	- Clark (1997) - Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009) - Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006)	✓	x	✓	x (note: strategy tools are embedded in practices, however they do not replace the latter)	- Various matrices - Porter’s Five Forces - Core competence
“management tools that support strategy work” (Moisander & Stenfors, 2009: 228)	Moisander and Stenfors (2009)	✓	x	x	x	-Balanced Scorecard -Real Options -SWOT

Table 3. Comparison of different definitions of strategy tools

³² Note that in this case, there is no direct definition of strategy tools provided by the authors. However, the discussion points to the notion of the “Strategist” without detaching it from the materials and practices associated with strategy work. At the same time, the arguments transcend from the wider argument of “the social (being) materially heterogeneous.” (Callon & Law 1997, p. 167).

³³ The results of the survey could be found online. See *Appendix A* for detailed illustrations. Articles on the same survey have been published in Harvard Business Review – Rigby and Bilodeau (2007) and California Management Review – Rigby (2010).

From another viewpoint, Callon and Law (1997: 170) refer to strategy tools in a broader and more fluid definition stating that:

[p]eople are networks. Devices are networks. But so, too, are “texts”.³⁴

Callon and Law’s (1997) view on tools clearly follows the “actor network theory” conceptualizing every element of the network as a network on its own, whereas Moisander and Stenfors (2009) have a definition of strategy tools similar to Clark’s (1997) or Spee and Jarzabkowski’s (2009), but without directly involving specific concepts per se as strategy tools. Therefore, reflecting on the assessment of relevant literature, I propose the following working definition of strategy tools, which includes a taxonomic approach to it:

Strategy tools may be *analytic* approaches (in that they help in analysing a particular problem and providing a solution to that problem), *processual approaches* (they help in guiding the process, e.g., project management) or *artefactual* devices (e.g., the computer or software in use) that are *recognized* by the organization *for the purpose* of providing strategic outcomes.

Hence, this working definition is of an ostensive nature (cf. Wittgenstein, 1953/2001; Rand, 1990) as it is illustrative of categories of strategy tools. Moreover, note that this definition does not entail the ultimate performative aspects of strategy tools.³⁵ For example, project

³⁴ Note here a subtle nuance of strategy tools as a subset of the overall bundle of tools with which strategizers operate. More specifically, by default not every tool that a strategizer operates with should be understood as “strategy tool”, but only the ones that are of direct relevance to the strategic decisions and related outcomes. For example, as part of the own work, a strategist would operate in “a desk”. The latter could very well be understood as a tool of the strategist, but not necessarily as a strategy tool (given the indirect relevance of “a desk” to strategy outcomes). The last statement may not be welcomed by some theories or ontological understandings of strategy tools, hence here a more qualified definition of strategy tools is accepted. The main message is that not every tool used by the strategist is to be considered a strategy tool (agency theory, also encompassed in the analogies offered by Callon & Law, 1997, embraces this latter “loose” concept of tools).

³⁵ See Feldman and Pentland (2003) on performative and ostensive nature of routines.

management tools might be used for discursive and analytic purposes, but their original³⁶ intention is related to follow and/or guide processes. In this definition, “recognized by the organization” refers to tools for which written or oral instructions (thus, explicit or implicit instructions) are located in the organization to provide guidance to organizational members on how to use these tools. Although tools could also be used without the “organizational recognition” (e.g., one manager might use a particular strategy tool that is not acknowledged by the organization – i.e., no particular knowledge formally or informally exists in support of this tool within the firm), the working definition here refers to tools that have a clear reference within the organization. In this way, the definition is not loose to fit every approach used within the organization, individually or collectively, but clearly proposes “boundaries” by only recognizing tools which are already acknowledged internally.

So that the subsets of strategy tools proposed in this definition become more tangible, I will provide a few illustrations from the current strategy literature. For example, when Heracleous and Jacobs (2008) discuss how Lego bricks can be used to promote new strategic understanding and consensus among management, they refer to “artefactual” devices. So does Kaplan (2011) when she discusses the power of PowerPoint as part of the epistemic machinery within the organization. Another instance of “artefactual” devices

³⁶ Note that there are historical accounts on the origins and development of strategy tools (e.g., Ghemawatt, 2002; McKenna, 2006). Although various communities might share different understandings and use of strategy tools, the original intention of tools remains stable and less varied than the ultimate use across these domains.

researched in praxis comes from Eppler and Platts (2009) who discuss, through vision cognition theory, the power of PowerPoints and flipcharts as visual representations that stimulate the development of strategy. However, Whittington et al. (2006) consider not only material artefacts and workshops, but also projects as the empirical focus of their study (also in line with Whittington & Vaara, 2012), finding that material artefacts play an important role in strategy, no less important than the analysis that accompanies them. Hence, the latter is a study that addresses a broader spectrum of strategy tools (focusing on material, analytic, and processual devices) in line with the working definition. This differs from the prior definition discussed here (i.e., Clark's, 1997 definition followed the most within the S-a-P literature), in that it specifies various categories of ontologies of strategy tools; abstract approaches and frameworks are included, and so are physical artefacts. I would argue that the latter deserve recognition as strategy tools, as multiple accounts have highlighted the role that artefacts have in strategizing work. For instance, Whittington et al. (2006) highlight the role that flipcharts along with mobile phones and PowerPoint documents play in strategy work.

Note also that this definition does not equalize strategy tools with practices, but recognizes strategy tools to be embedded in the latter. Hence, strategy tools are part of material (either abstract or physical) agencies that in conjunction with human agencies are reciprocally and temporally constituted (Pickering, 1995). These reciprocal and temporal constitutions are expressed through practices, which differ from strategy tools in that the former stretch in time by definition, whereas the latter are entities that could be clearly defined in a single snapshot in time. Social practices here are understood as “bodily and

mental routines” (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). This understanding follows similar conceptualizations of practice by other practice theorists (e.g., Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1991; and Schatzki et al, 2001), whereas the definition of tools here is similar to the one followed in technology studies and those of the literature on the socio-materiality of work, where tools are conceptualized to be the objects around which activity and organizing takes place (e.g., Bechky, 2003; Orlikowski, 1992, 2000).³⁷

Several implications derive from this understanding of strategy tools: (1) tools can entail a fluid ontology, i.e., they can be abstract and be described merely as a way of thinking (e.g., *MECE*³⁸ or *the hypothesis based approach* promoted at McKinsey), or they can be a (material) artefact (flipchart, or PowerPoint presentation); (2) Strategy tools are recognized to be instantiated in *practice* and/or *praxis* (Whittington, 2006) by human agents interacting with them or similarly, they are instantiated in *strategic episodes* (Hendry & Seidl, 2003). For example, the guidelines³⁹ on how to interact with or use a particular tool located in the intranet of the organization constitutes *the practice* for that tool, whereas, how consultants use them in a particular strategic episode (as for example, in a strategy workshop) constitutes *the praxis* of that tool. (3) Tools do not have an absolute or static

³⁷ Note that Orlikowski (2000) departs from the static view of “structures” offered by Bordieu (and from some of her previous work in the same line with structuration theory), by suggesting that such structures are emergent (rather than static). By proposing the notion of “technologies in practice” the author points at both practice, and underlying agency and materiality in these practices.

³⁸ This acronym based tool stands for “mutually exclusive, collectively exhaustive”.

³⁹ Note here the assumption on which these guidelines are constructed; guidelines are based on routines established or intended to be established by the organization. Hence, following the definitions proposed in this chapter, guidelines on strategy tool use constitute the basis of established or intended organizational practices.

meaning – they are socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), they clearly have a life beyond their originators (Gagliardi, 1990), and therefore their understanding becomes *contextual* (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Johnson et al., 2003). Understanding tools is intrinsically linked to their use, the purposes they serve, and the sense their enactors make of them. Tools become a concept deeply entrenched in the circumstances where they are enacted. This view is consistent with previous discussions on the socio-materiality of work (e.g., Orlikowski, 2007). (4) Furthermore, although constituting the unit of analysis, strategy tools could not be empirically pursued in isolation. Neither the actors nor their activities can be analysed entirely separately from the tools in use since that situation provides an interpretive context for the activity (Brown & Duguid, 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991).

It is important to emphasize that, due to methodological considerations (e.g., time with and access to tools in the field), only tools of the abstract form will be examined here. Hence, this study will not focus on material artefacts⁴⁰ but upon analytic strategy tools.⁴¹ With reference to the working definition provided here, analytic strategy tools serve to analyse a problem and offer a solution to that problem. Benchmarking, SWOT analysis, Porter's Five Forces, and scenario analysis are all good examples. Although the choice to examine only analytic tools in practice may sound arbitrary, there are several practical

⁴⁰ A recent valuable study towards the materiality of strategy tools is proposed by Jarzabkowski et al. (2013), allowing the reader to follow strategy practices through the notion of epistemic objects. Authors focus on how managers use material artefacts to strategize and propose a dual process of knowledge abstraction and substitution. They identify five practices for doing strategy with artefacts: physicalizing, locating, enumerating, analysing, and selecting (p. 41).

⁴¹ Terms "analytic strategy tools" and "strategy tools" will thereafter be used interchangeably. Throughout the discussion both terms are used to refer to "analytic strategy tools".

reasons that led to this decision: (a) in the trade-off between breadth and depth, here the latter is chosen – focusing only on analytic strategy tools gives the opportunity to pursue in more detail the research questions laid out in this project; (b) the time constraints of this DPhil project push for a more focused and less all-encompassing approach; (c) analytic strategy tools constitute a great part of business school curricula, and also part of the knowledge capital for the academic profession. Exploring the decoupling of analytic strategy tools as originally intended and as used in praxis becomes a further incentive towards understanding how these tools get used in the organizational domain, after they have been presented in business study curricula. Therefore, the implications from this study are relevant also for business schools' policies when devising teaching platforms and methodologies in both undergraduate and graduate cohorts. As a final note, it should be clarified that focusing on analytic strategy tools alone does not mean that other strategy tools (such as processual or artefactual) have a lower importance or presence in strategy praxis. Therefore, prioritizing analytic strategy tools is not to undermine the importance of other strategy tools, but to enable a more in-depth enquiry of a strategy tool domain.⁴²

2.3. Underlying premises

Do strategy tools make work more productive? Is there an implication that strategy tools should be used more in strategy work? Do strategists who use strategy tools deliver better

⁴² Indeed, as it will be claimed further on in the findings of this dissertation, bricolage accompanies the use of analytic strategy tools, and this unavoidably includes “bundles of tools” which are not confined only to analytic strategy tools. However, for the sake of the research focus established here, arguments will be dedicated and confined to analytic strategy tools.

solutions than those who do not? Are strategy tools indispensable to strategy work? These are important considerations to be addressed, since the findings may be heavily biased and questioned further should strong premises lay at their basis.

This study does not consider the presence of strategy tools indispensable to strategy work, but at the same time it does not consider them incompatible with such work. After all, this enquiry would not take place if there was not an expectation for strategy tools to be encountered in strategy work. Various scholars have acknowledged the role of tools in occupational domains (e.g., Abbott, 1988 discussing the sociology of professions, or Schön, 1983 discussing reflection in action across various professionals, including architects and managers amongst others). In consultancy, Kubr (2002) has also recognized the role of methods in consulting work. Consequently, the underlying premise here is that strategy tools are present in strategy work; however, there is no prior inclination towards the indispensability they should represent towards strategy work. Although the final results of this study draw implications in this direction, there is no a priori propensity to assign a specific “load”, “weight”, or “importance” to strategy tools when assessing them in strategy practice and praxis.⁴³

⁴³ Hence, it is not “the order of importance” but rather the nature of work with and around strategy tools that is in focus here.

Additionally, an underlying premise of this study is that strategy tools are not universal, and they constitute no ultimate response to strategy problems. As Tisdall (1982: 116) in her study of the British management consulting industry notes:

Management consultants regard techniques or 'approaches' as having a valuable role in helping businesses help themselves. But any idea of a universal solution has been largely discredited in the current pragmatic business environment. It is well recognized that concepts, no matter how elegant, must be adapted to the particular needs and resources of the moment, just as the computer system, or advanced technologies.

Not only should we not expect universal solutions from strategy tools, at the same time we should not expect them to produce better solutions. Although strategy tools have been acknowledged to offer frames of reference (such as in March, 2006) to help cope with everyday problems, there are no studies to date that assess the causal relations between strategy tools and the value of solutions they propose.⁴⁴ Hence, here there is no inclination of this kind; strategy tools are studied in relation to their own embeddedness in practice and praxis, without a priori value ascribed to their contribution in strategy projects.⁴⁵

2.4. Territory of study – examining the unit of analysis

In this section I focus on exactly what constitutes the focus of this study. In Miles and Huberman's (1994: 25) terms, I bring here the *case*⁴⁶ of this study, i.e., "a phenomenon of

⁴⁴ Note that at the same time, this is not a study to explore or explain such causal relations.

⁴⁵ This is in line with the true explorative mode of this dissertation, which is described in more detail in Chapter 4.

⁴⁶ Note that there are many positions on what constitutes a "case" or "case study". For more see Ragin and Becker (1992/2000) on different views both on what epistemologically constitutes a case. Here "case" is referred to as an (empirical) unit of analysis (cf. Vaughan, 1992/2000).

some sort occurring in a bounded context". As I represent graphically in Figure 3, the focus of this study is located within the denoted circle. The dotted line shows the boundaries of the *case*. This is to represent the lack of rough boundaries in qualitative research, which appear to be unavoidable here as well. Strategy tools are embedded in practices,⁴⁷ whereas the latter constitutes the "internal life of process" (Brown & Duguid, 2000: 95). The unit of analysis of practice is defined here as recurrent, materially mediated, and situated social activity (Schatzki et al., 2001). Barley and Kunda (2001: 85) call for detailed studies of what people do in order to "articulate relations between work practices, situational contingencies, and organizational patterns". Hence, the unit of analysis here can help uncover the internal life of strategy consulting projects, which in turn would inform on the work of consultants, and hence more broadly, on their occupation as situated in the everyday action.

At the same time, one should take into account that "in practice theory, individual behavior is always embedded within a web of social practices: praxis relies on practices" (Whittington & Vaara, 2012: 288). Hence, one should acknowledge that studying strategy tools in isolation from their users and the underlying agencies is not feasible and of no further value. It is the interaction of users with strategy tools that would allow for an action oriented research project to be fully accomplished.

⁴⁷ By proposing "practice" as a unit of analysis, I make the claim that strategy tools could not be examined in isolation. This is similar to the discussion of "technologies in use" in Orlikowski (2000), which is based on conceptualizations of "practice" from practice theorists (Bourdieu, Schatzki etc.).

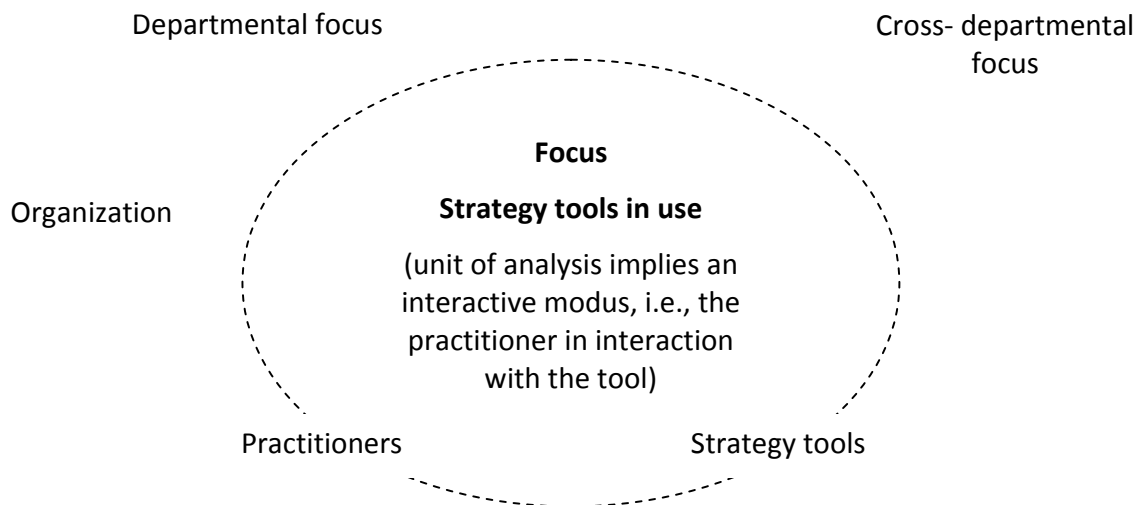


Figure 1 Territory of study – towards a revelation of the unit of analysis

As an example of a distinctive practice,⁴⁸ as detected in the first weeks in the field, there appeared to be a distinct flow associated with strategy workshops (these workshops represent strategy practices in this instance) by the in-house strategy team under study. As stated in an early interview with a workshop facilitator, the unit⁴⁹ recognizes the organizations of strategy workshops through a process in five phases: (1) Initiate (initial client meeting) → (2) Frame (team preparation) → (3) Validate (client validation meeting) → (4) Execute → (5) Follow up. While strategy workshops constitute “a practice” in this particular example followed with the illustrated staged process, strategy tools are embedded in each stage of the process.⁵⁰ This information is only illustrative of a particular

⁴⁸ Note that although the empirical setting is not yet presented at this stage, I provide an illustration extracted from the fieldwork to clarify further what could constitute a practice.

⁴⁹ Note that I use the terms “unit” or “team” to point at the site under study, i.e., the in-house strategy consultancy studied here. Hence, throughout this account I use these terms interchangeably.

⁵⁰ These strategy tools include SWOT, 2x2 matrices, and various other examples which will be elaborated in more detail in the following chapters.

example taken in the field to show how the analysis of data intends to break down the process associated with strategy projects undertaken by this organizational in-house consultancy, into practices and embedded strategy tools.

Compared with existing accounts on the use of tools, here strategy tools are not studied narrowing the conceptualization to schemas and believes. As an example of the latter, Kaplan (2008) recognizes “diagnostic” (assessment of the problem) and “prognostic” (assessment of the solution) schemas by providing a rather simplistic view of the equivocal situation that is commonly the case for strategy (consulting) projects. By contrast, this study traces work praxis and practices, and strategy tools embedded in them, following the steps of Orlikowski (2000) showing a departure from Giddens’ (1984) view of structures as having “no reality except as they are instantiated in activity” (Orlikowski, 2000: 405–406).⁵¹

Consequently “strategy tools in practice” are understood similarly to “technologies in practice” (Orlikowski, 2000). By this view, the notion of emergent (rather than static) structures is embraced, and the materiality underlying these structures is also acknowledged.⁵² At the same time, in line with the epistemology of this study, the enactment perspective is followed. This perspective is the core of sensemaking, which has been introduced to management by Weick (1979).

⁵¹ For more, there is a detailed account of Orlikowski concerning the practice approach in a recent publication: *The Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice* (Golsorkhi et al., 2010).

⁵² Note that Orlikowski (2000) stresses the element of materiality when studying technologies in practice by debating their absence in the discussions of Giddens on structuration theory.

From an empirical standpoint, and more particularly in regard to the volume of data sought in this study, the project here is more ambitious than Kaplan's (2008), Orlikowski's (2000), or Maitlis' (2005) study.⁵³ Through the intensive fieldwork here, the researcher does not adopt a detached participant observant stance, but participates actively by assuming the same role as other employees within the in-house consultancy unit. Despite its advantages, this approach does not come without drawbacks (e.g., difficulty of access and negotiation of role in the field). These drawbacks and mitigations are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4. As its methodological underpinnings, this study makes use of articles such as Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), and Maitlis (2005) where ethnographic methods have been adopted and theory has been developed by narratives and relations found after staged data analyses.

2.5. "Reflection in action" and sensemaking as research lenses for the enquiry

Many approaches recognize the complexity of strategizing. For example, Lindblom (1959) describes it as "the science of muddling through", Cohen et al. (1972) propose the "garbage can model", and Allison (1971) suggests a power-based model of strategic decision making. All these studies hold in common the assumption of people as "boundedly rational" (Cyert & March, 1963). To several scholars, these ideas appear to be based on

⁵³ More specifically, Kaplan (2008) clarifies in her dissertation that several field trips are undertaken. The author notes that her fieldwork physically "took place in the course of seven (3-5 day) site visits to the headquarters location, five (1 day) site visits to one of the branch location" (ibid., 127). Hence, the claims made here are oriented towards the volume of data collection specifically addressing the intensity of fieldwork pursued in this dissertation.

unrealistic assumptions about how strategists “think, behave and feel” (Eisenhardt & Zbaracki, 1992: 35). Indeed, this is a conclusion authors reached by reviewing different choice paradigms such as rationality and bounded theory, politics, power, and the garbage can. Especially in the former, the assumption of “bounded rationality” dedicates little space to include, as authors note, “insights, intuition, emotion” (ibid.). They overlook strategy as a result of “... interactions between people with different types of personalities and abilities” (Langley et al., 1995: 277). When holding a parallel conversation about technology in practice, Orlikowski broadens up the discussion about the agent’s interaction with technology:

A practice lens assumes that people are purposive, knowledgeable, adaptive, and inventive agents who engage with technology in a multiplicity of ways to accomplish various and dynamic ends. When the technology does not help them achieve those ends, they abandon it, or work around it, or change it, or think about changing their ends. (Orlikowski, 2000: 423)

The boundedly rational model, otherwise called “technical rationality”, is characterized by the three dichotomies: means vs. ends; research vs. practice; and knowing vs. doing (Schön, 1983). This distinction is important, as it could help detect the “types of knowing” that constitute management engagement with strategy tools. For example, one could trace the various types of knowledge back to Aristotle, namely: *theory*; *techne*; and *phronesis* (Dunne, 1993). *Theory* is the type of knowledge that can be traced back to basic and eternal principles and causes. It is knowledge in the general sense without relevance in an “instrumental sense”. According to Aristotle (cf. Dunne, 1993) *techne* is not only the basis for the craftsman's ability to produce a certain good, but also for his ability to provide a

rational account of his procedure. On the other hand, *phronesis* is the kind of knowledge that is manifested in practice:

Phronesis itself, then is not a knowledge of ethical ideas as such, but rather a resourcefulness of mind that is called into play in, and responds uniquely to the situation in which these ideas are to be realized. (Dunne, 1993: 272)

Hence, while examining knowledge with regard to strategy tools in action, one puts the emphasis towards *phronesis* in the same line Schön (1983) proposes “reflection in action”. The author has suggested that previous studies of professions within the frame of technical rationality have been emphasizing the role of *techne* by overlooking the role of *phronesis* in professional activity. Technical rationality would present the strategist merely as a problem solver. However, Schön (1983) opens the black box of the study of the body of knowledge in this literature (i.e., technical rationality) through a reflexive account of what constitutes *phronesis* within this body of knowledge, offering an understanding of work beyond that of the traditional view of technical rationality.

Especially through “reflection in action”, this study distances itself from the technical rationality proposed in prior research. Although the strategists may be part of an extended network of human and artefactual devices (for example, see “Andrew, the strategist” as discussed in Callon and Law, 1997: 176-178, where an extended network is associated with the strategist), boxing him/her in or out would unjustly simplify the reality of strategizing. Here the identity of the strategist is described as a “parliament of selves” (Weick, 1995, following a conceptualization by Mead). The strategist acts, but simultaneously and retrospectively reflects on his/her actions. The reflective practitioner is not merely

rationalizing, he/she faces “frustration, joy, accomplishment, anger, jealousy, satisfaction or anxiety” along with many other emotions that are intrinsically bound to any rationalization process. After all, “management consultants are human beings” (Watson et al., 1998: 495). At the same time, through the reflective practitioner approach one could delve more closely into practitioners’ identities, since the latter are “reflexive projects of the self” (Giddens, 1991).

Not only is the reflective practitioner faced with routine problems, but also with previously unknown situations, similar to the ones discussed by the sensemaking approach (Weick, 1993):

...we would recognize as a limiting case the situations in which it is possible to make a routine application of existing rules and procedures to the facts of particular problematic situations. Beyond these situations, familiar rules, theories and techniques are put to work in concrete instances through the intermediary of an art that consists in a limited form of reflection-in-action. And beyond these, we would recognize cases of problematic diagnosis in which practitioners not only follow rules of inquiry but also sometimes respond to surprising findings by inventing new rules on the spot. This kind of reflection-in-action is central to the artistry with which practitioners sometimes make new sense of uncertain, unique, or conflicted situations. (Schön, 1987:35)

In these situations, the practitioner’s approach has to change, requiring the adoption and adaptation of new rules and methodologies. As Schön (1983: 42) states, professionals operate in a “confusing mess”. About the management occupation, the author further states that “managers have become increasingly sensitive to the phenomena of uncertainty, change and uniqueness” (p.239). In the same line, Weick talks about equivocality in his sensemaking approach:

“[t]he basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs” (Weick, 1993: 635).

According to Weick, sensemaking activities of interacting individuals are the core of the processes of organizing. Hence, as a theoretical construct, sensemaking would be the means to aid in capturing “reflection in action”. It is the intersection of the two that provides the potential to uncover strategy practitioners’ interaction with tools in a reflexive fashion, beyond technical rationality. The potential of sensemaking has also been mentioned by the S-a-P approach (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2007; Whittington 1996, 2006) acknowledging that this theoretical view is able to provide a better understanding of strategists’ work.

As a methodological implication, to examine practitioners’ identity as a “parliament of selves”, data collection should involve continuous discussions with the subjects under study. In this way, one could examine in more detail the multiple “roles” practitioners see themselves in during different phases of strategy assignments and during their interactions with various actors. Sensemaking draws on a higher reflexivity of the researcher towards the accounts of the subjects, as “if we are going to talk to practicing managers, we should talk to them in terms of understanding how their actions and non-actions are the sources of the actual realities they face” (Gioia, 2006: 1716). As Schön (1983: 241-242) states:

a manager’s reflection-in-action is fundamentally similar to reflection-in-action in other professional fields. It consists in on-the-spot surfacing, criticizing, restructuring and testing of intuitive understandings of experienced phenomena; often it takes the form of a reflective

conversation with the situation....(at the same time) the phenomena on which he reflects-in-action are the phenomena of organizational life.

Schön (1983) chooses three instances to illustrate reflection in action within management: interpreting market phenomena; interpreting organizational troubles; and learning about product development. Although he engages only tangentially with strategy,⁵⁴ the author makes valid points on the continuous reflection in action on market and competitive situation. The author concludes on management:

[w]hen practising managers display artistry, they reveal their capacity to construct models of unique and changing situations, to design and execute on-the-spot experiments. They also reveal a capacity to reflect on the meanings of situations and the goals of action. A more comprehensive, useful, and reflective management science could be built by extending and elaborating on what skilful managers actually do. (p.266)

This highlights the same exercise as is at the core of this study. Indeed, *lege artis*, which metaphorically addresses the “laws of artistry in management”, could be better captured by reflection in action. As shown through the literature studying management consulting work (presented in the next chapter), consultants operate in high velocity and equivocal situations, where “reflection in action” should be expected much more than in a stable environment.

In addition to sensemaking, “sensegiving” (cf. Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991) is another concept that resonates well with the activities undertaken by consultants. Sensegiving is “the

⁵⁴ Especially in the latter case of product development, the author briefly discusses the managers’ engagement with the product development strategy (p.252-253) and managers’ quest to understand the competitive environment.

process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others towards a preferred redefinition of organizational reality” (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991: 442). For example, the case when Rasiel (1999) emphasizes that consultants need to make clients aware and convince them of their solutions along the way before the final consulting report is presented to them, presents a typical case that can be examined further as a sensegiving activity. Additionally, within strategy consulting, sensegiving could be seen in the leadership practices of partners. Moreover, by intensively participating in the field, there is good chance to grasp sensemaking and sensegiving activities of strategy practitioners. As noted by Maitlis (2005: 23) notes:

(s)cholars ... understand relatively little about how heterogeneous sets of sensemaking parties interact in ongoing and quite ordinary sensemaking processes over extended periods of time.”

Having highlighted the specific features of the sensemaking perspective as particularly appealing for this study, I do not imply that this theoretical approach is above criticism. For example, this approach has been considered overly complex, rather stylistic, and entailing weak theory (see Gioia, 2006, for an extended account). It has also been noted that literature following this approach has overlooked the role that emotions play as enablers or blockers of particular sensemaking activities (Maitlis & Sonenschein, 2010). However, through the enactment (cf. Weick, 1979) view embraced by this perspective, one is able to access the reality of strategy tools in use by considering the multiple accounts provided by the very subjects that interact with them, hence making it a good fit with the epistemology and ontology favoured in this study.

2.6. Main research question

Whereas strategizing practices can be manifold (for example, they can entail meetings, workshops, emails, spreadsheet work, analyses or strategic planning sessions), strategy tools are also a subgroup belonging to strategizing efforts. This study focuses on examining the latter:

“How do strategy practitioners strategize through (analytic) strategy tools in use?”

As clarified earlier, it is important to underline that this study intends to focus only on the analytic strategy tools in place. At the same time, I acknowledge the interconnections of each strategy tool category that in turn adds to the complexity of the idiosyncratic development of strategy assignments.⁵⁵ Note that different bundles of tools do not necessarily belong to mutually exclusive categories; overlap of the (analytic) strategy toolkit of consultants with other toolkits is anticipated here. As a result, the schema and arrows highlighted in red in Figure 2 illustrate the focus of this study.⁵⁶ More particularly, what the project seeks is the *presence and use* of (analytic strategy) tools in particular phases of strategy projects. For example, we might find out that tools are particularly used in the entry phase,⁵⁷ but not necessarily in the final phase of the consulting assignment, or

⁵⁵ Following the definition of strategy tools presented earlier in this study, strategy tools are understood to encompass analytic, processual, and artefactual ones.

⁵⁶ Note that analytic strategy tools might be used well beyond “entry, diagnosis, and action planning”. However, here the study does not aim to follow the “implementation” of strategy plans and analytic strategy tools involved in them.

⁵⁷ The various project phases shown in Figure 2 (i.e., “entry”, “diagnosis”, “action planning”, “implementation”, and “termination”) are coined following Kubr’ (2002; 2005) extensive manuals for the consultancy profession, published under endorsement of the International Labor Organisation (ILO), Geneva.

the other way around. Conversely, it could be found that particular tools are not sensitive to process (in other words, they are not process-dependent) in that they are endorsed and used homogenously throughout the flow of a strategy project, whereas specific tools might be detected exclusively in one phase of the project, e.g., only in the diagnosis phase.

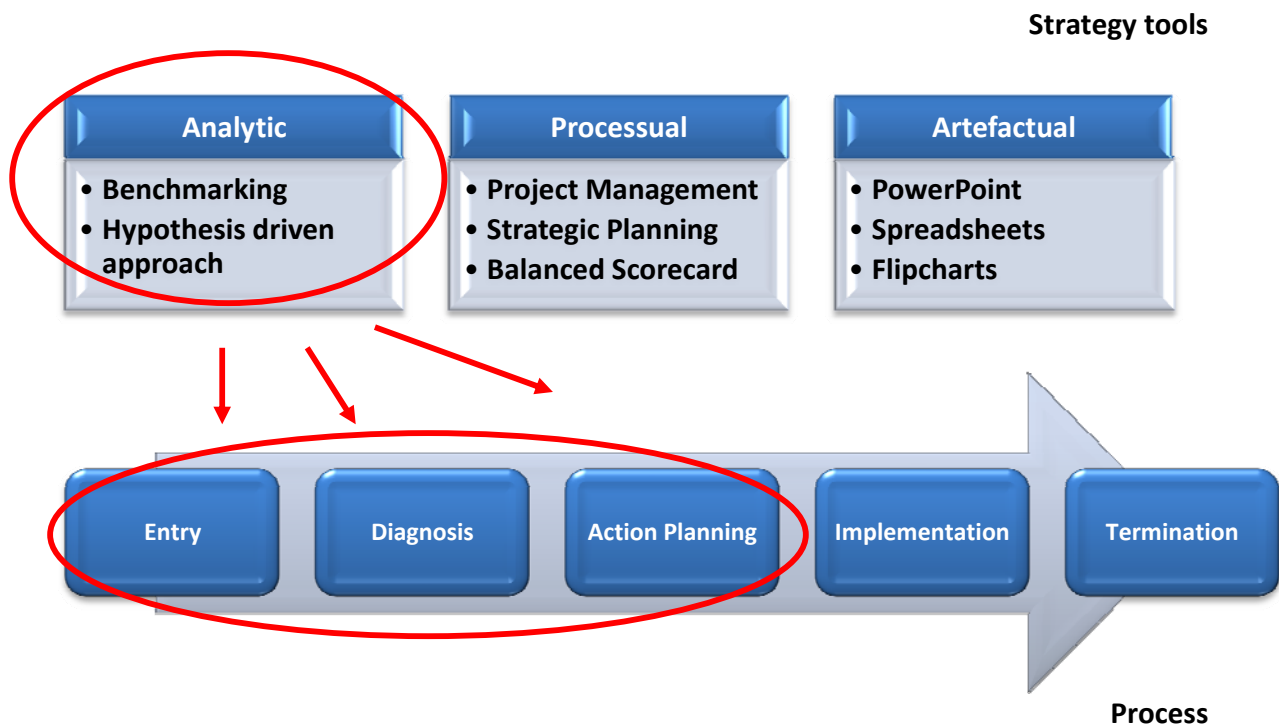


Figure 2 Relationships sought between strategy tools and the strategy assignment

process

Additionally, a process approach helps unveil the dynamics behind the roles that strategy tools serve, by not considering them as static objects that remain motionless when enacted in different strategy contexts. Hence, during this study, I assess how these different subcategories of analytic strategy tools relate to different phases in assignment completion, and how they relate to particular features of strategy assignments (e.g., nature of assignment, ambiguity, nature of relationship with the client, type of assigned team etc.). As March (2006: 203-204) states, the environment presents many difficulties to

organizations (a few examples being uncertainty, causal complexity, or preference ambiguity), and as a result there is a “partial disenchantment” with rational models. However, this “partial disenchantment” might be overrated. Should we attribute this “disenchantment” to the lack of observations on analytic strategy tools, or indeed their lack of use? In addition, does this disenchantment ignore the multiple roles of strategy tools (rather than merely problem solving as assumed here in March’s argument)? Thus, another aspect of interest is studying how different tools are employed with different intentions; for example, they might be used rationally based on the original intention of the tool, or they might be used chaotically, perhaps more similar to a “garbage can model” (Cohen et al., 1972). Or tools might simply be abandoned due to their limited payout in particular circumstances. Additionally, strategy tools serve multiple purposes. Langley (1989) reported that formal analysis used in organizations serves four main groups of purposes (information, communication, direction, and control) and symbolic purposes as well. The author reports that all types of purposes are intrinsically linked and might generate different patterns of use throughout the broad array of organizations. This discussion is followed in more detail while reflecting on literature findings in Chapter 3.

As a conclusion for this chapter, Table 4 lays out the major considerations for the research design as discussed. The implications of the chosen research design are thereafter matched with the existing literature discussed in the following chapter. As a result, informed by lessons learnt from various scholars on strategy tools and their appearances in praxis, in Chapter 3 I present the sub-research questions as they refine and provide further focus for the intended research.

Research concerns	Overview	Implications
Assumptions	- Social constructivist ontology - Interpretivist epistemology	- Inductive study with focus on inference to the best explanation - Reflexivity as a leading criterion for this research
Main concepts	- Strategy (as a social activity) - Strategy tools - Management consulting; In-house (Internal) consulting	- Strategy-as-practice approach - Management consultants as knowledgeable practitioners
Underlying premises	- Strategy tools are present although not indispensable to strategy work	- Focus not only on frequency of tools but also their enactments in practice - Narrowing down the types of practices and processes that strategy tools are associated with
Research lenses	- Sensemaking - "Reflection in action"	- Strategists as "parliaments of selves" - Practitioners are not merely rational individuals but also emotional ones
Leading research question	<i>How do strategy practitioners strategize through (analytic) strategy tools in use?</i>	- Reflection in action on strategy tools - Level of analysis – shifting between individual and group (both micro levels of strategy) - Focus on both variance of strategy tools (Chapters 6 and 7) and the processes they are associated with (Chapter 8)

Table 4. Summary of the research frame for the study



"The Whale" is a graph. Its official title is "Cumulative Customer Profitability" and it also goes by the generic name "skew chart". The Whale is my madeleine. One glance at its distinctive curves and in my mind I'm back, cutting and pasting charts and text, running through airports, hovering over a transparency projector in front of sceptical men in suits, and trading boozy stories with team-mates in an overpriced hotel restaurant.
(Matthew Stewart, featured in *The Independent*, prior consultant and writer)⁵⁸

3. Chapter 3: Theoretical and empirical foundations for strategy tools in use and their presence in strategy work

In this chapter, I first present some background on various strategy tools (e.g., the Ansoff Matrix, SWOT, scenario analysis, Porter's frameworks, BCG, and McKinsey approaches etc.), including a brief history of their emergence, since their history is needed to anchor them in the strategy ideas they each derive from. Thereafter I discuss what practitioners report while reflecting upon these tools. I then focus on the roles played by strategy tools, by presenting contrasting accounts in an integrated literature assessment encompassing both academic and practitioners' literature (Section 3.3). In Section 3.4 I engage with theory by presenting four main conceptualizations of strategy tools, regarding them as cultural devices, heuristics, boundary objects, and discourse. In line with the onto-epistemological principles chosen, I pursue the enquiry into strategy tools by tracing them as cultural devices. I then discuss in more detail the literature describing strategy work, with particular emphasis on both in-house and external consulting. To conclude on the literature findings, I highlight three major theoretical themes (i.e., bricolage, *backstage* and *frontstage* aspects of work and the sensemaking that strategists undertake while reflecting

⁵⁸ Find the whole article on Stewart's account online on <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/business/analysis-and-features/masters-of-illusion-the-great-management-consultancy-swindle-1788556.html> (entered on June, 2013)

upon strategy tools). These major themes are important pillars that help in building three more focused sub-research questions (discussed in Section 3.1).

3.1. A historic view upon the development and use of strategy tools

Research shows that there are many strategy tools⁵⁹ that are an inherent part of the planning process (e.g., Grant, 2003; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2005). After World War II, strategic planning was initially conceived as a formal process (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Since then, various matrices and elaborate analyses have been suggested by scholars and practitioners. For example, there were contributors such as Ansoff (who is also well known to business professionals and consultants through the 2x2 “Ansoff Matrix”) that favoured elaborate analysis as basis for strategy. This stream did favour “a rigorous” process of producing strategy, dominated by planning and control. Along with the Ansoff Matrix, many broadly known tools emerged after World War II, such as the SWOT or scenario analysis. For the latter, Wack (1985) described a detailed exercise at Royal Dutch Shell that anticipated the nature of the 1973 steep increase in the world petroleum prices. Wack (1985: 84) stated that scenario building constituted “less on figures and more on insight”, hence articulating the various roles of strategy tools beyond formal analysis. As the author claimed, changing the managerial worldview was a “much more demanding task” (ibid: 84) than actually building the scenario.

⁵⁹ Before presenting some accounts on strategy tools in use, it is important to note that given the many varying understandings and categorizations of strategy tools, it is difficult to qualify research accounts that are *directly* linked to “strategy tools” as defined here.

One could not extensively discuss the origin and diffusion of strategy tools in management without acknowledging the vast contribution by Michael Porter in what is believed to be the “positioning strategy school”⁶⁰ (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Perhaps Porter’s approach might have contributed most to the enlargement of strategy tool portfolio and jargon. Michael Porter, as the most prominent contributor, could be considered the “father of the positioning strategy school”. *Competitive Strategy* (1980) describes many strategy analysis approaches. The book gives ample coverage to strategic analysis through various tools recommended by Porter. Additionally, an appendix is especially dedicated to analysis techniques. Indeed, at the beginning of his book Porter writes that it would deliver “a comprehensive framework of analytical techniques” (p. xxii). Here is how he refers to various techniques with a particular emphasis on the BCG Growth/Share Matrix and the GE Matrix:

These techniques provide simple frameworks for charting or categorizing the different businesses in a firm's portfolio and determining the implications for resource allocation. Techniques for portfolio analysis have their greatest applicability in developing strategy at the corporate level and in aiding in corporate review of business units, rather than in developing competitive strategy in individual industries. Nevertheless, if their limitations are understood, these techniques can play a part in answering some of the questions in competitor analysis raised (here), particularly if a firm is competing with a diversified rival who uses them in its strategic planning. (Michael Porter in the *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analysing Industries and Competitors*, 1980: 361)

⁶⁰ The “positioning strategy school” is referred to this way, “because it focuses on the selection of strategic positions in the economic marketplace” (Mintzberg et al., 1998: 5-6). It’s main prescriptive advice states “that only a few key strategies—as positions in the economic marketplace—are desirable in any given industry” (ibid, 83).

Later, in a 1987 article in *The Economist*, Porter claimed: "I favor a set of analytic techniques to develop strategy." Indeed, Porter's Five Forces, Generic Strategies, Value Chain, and Diamond are all well-known among strategy researchers and professionals and are, without doubt, considered part of strategists' jargon.⁶¹ The positioning school has given extensive attention to competitors and a company's position within a competitive landscape. This school has presented strategy tools as prescriptions for solutions to business strategy problems. In the same line there have been contributions from consulting (e.g., the BCG matrix, the McKinsey GE matrix, etc.) on the production of various analyses to prescribe strategic decisions. Consequently, this school has not only produced abundant strategy tools, but it has also elevated the role of the strategy planner to that of a "strategy analyst", along with consultants taking such position on many occasions (Mintzberg et al., 1998).

In addition to Porter, consultancies have contributed strategy tools in the same spirit as the positioning school, offering prescriptions on action in relation to market share, market growth, market attractiveness etc. Some illustrations are the BCG Matrix, the GE-McKinsey Matrix,⁶² PIMS,⁶³ etc. The explicit assumption of this school has been that clear strategies

⁶¹ Even a brief survey into current curricula (e.g., academic year 2011-2012) of MBA Strategy coursework in Saïd Business School confirms that lecture notes provide ample coverage of frameworks originating from the positioning school literature. In addition (having extensively participated in marking activities), I have witnessed that the well-thought application of learnt strategy frameworks plays an important role in the marking criteria.

⁶² Indeed, in the author's appendix referred to earlier in this section, in his book Porter (1980) endorses, promotes and further explains the BCG matrix and the GE-McKinsey Matrix.

⁶³ PIMS was based on a database constructed to compare strategic positions of various companies. The overarching methodology of this tool consisted of a variety of strategy variables – market position, quality of

are possible in any given industry. However, this assumption has been put to scrutiny in various accounts: e.g., Rumelt (1991) found that differences in performance of business units within industries did exceed the performance of firms across industries, opposed to the main premise of the positioning school. Although there is a long debate on the issue (see McGahan & Porter, 1997 as a response), the contribution of the positioning school towards vastly popularizing the strategy toolkit cannot be neglected. Nevertheless, in this study, I do not “test” any of the tools proposed by Porter and the positioning school more broadly.⁶⁴ Instead, this dissertation chases many of the strategy tools “prescribed” from the positioning school, attempting to examine their enactment in action and the evolution of their use beyond the “cookbook” approach provided originally by these literature streams.

3.2. The view offered by practitioner-based literature focusing on consulting

The role strategy tools have played in strategy is closely linked to the role of agency consultancies themselves have played in the production and adoption of such tools, and also to their own accounts of them. In this section, I target practitioners’ accounts to understand more about their experiences with strategy tools. Since most of the literature on consulting bases its findings on external consultancies, that sector will dominate the

products, investment ratios – that were used in combination for the calculation of expected returns and profitability (for more see Schoeffler et al. , 1974; Schoeffler, 1980)

⁶⁴ For discussions on the general rigour of techniques proposed by Porter and the positioning school more broadly, see the interesting discussion of Mathew Stewart (2009) – an ex-philosophy researcher turned consultant who provides a rather cynical view of Porter tools (e.g., the Five Forces of Cooking – p. 203) or the discussion of Mintzberg et al. (1998) that puts to scrutiny the rigour and relevance of all tools within the Positioning School.

discussion here. Nevertheless, lessons from external consultancies offer a very good bridge towards the understanding of internal consultancies,⁶⁵ given the similarities between the two. Since there are very few accounts on internal consultancies (Sturdy & Wylie, 2011), literature on external consultancies becomes a good proxy for drawing preliminary expectations on the work features of internal consultants.

At an aggregate level, accounts on the history of consulting show that the domain has held a leading role in changing the way businesses think about competitive positions, especially in the 1970s and 1980s (Ghemawat, 2002). Large consultancies, such as McKinsey, BCG and others, have played a particularly important role in the development of strategy (Payne, 1986; McKenna, 2006). Tools developed by one big consultancy have been shown to be adopted quickly by other consultancies. For example, Payne (1986) has documented how the BCG matrix, developed in the 1960s by Henderson, was quickly adopted in a variety of adapted versions by other consultancies.

The big strategy consultancies have produced a proliferation of literature on their working style and their reasoning on strategy assignment processes and underlying approaches. Detailed accounts are found, especially for McKinsey and BCG. In the 1980s, the former was already publishing aggressively and quickly (e.g., Peters and Waterman (1982), *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best-Run Companies*; Ohmae (1982), *The*

⁶⁵ The literature on external consultancies offers a very good proxy for the assessment of the internal ones due to the similarities the two hold (as noted in detail in Chapter 2).

Mmind of the Strategist), having launched in 1978 the McKinsey Staff Paper series. BCG has provided, especially in recent literature, broad accounts of its traditional thinking on strategy (see Stern et al. (1998, second edition 2006), *Perspectives on Strategy from the Boston Consulting Group*. Bruce Henderson has written extensively on how to approach strategy assignments in a structured way. Here is how he explains “the concept” as a valid approach when planning ways forward to conducting research and building solutions for clients:

A frame of reference is needed to screen the intuitive selection of assumptions, relevance of data, methodology, and implicit value judgements. That frame of reference is the *concept*.

(Bruce Henderson, BCG 1977, On Business Thinking, in *The Boston Consulting Group on Strategy*, 2006)

His role has been considered crucial also in respect to the creation and promotion of strategy tools more broadly:

Henderson was also a pioneer in that he looked at the challenges facing his clients as mysteries to be solved, usually through massive and creative data gathering, then fitting the data to a framework, or supplying such a framework, to explain it. Big-league strategy consultants like Orit Gadish at Bain & Company still describe their greatest intellectual thrill as “cracking the case,” a term they may have picked up in business school but an endeavor to which they bring far more firepower—that is, teams of people—than any professor could.

(*Lords of Strategy*, Kiechel III, 2010: 3-4)

McKinsey is another key word when assessing the promotion of strategy tools by the consultancies. There is a significant amount of practitioners’ literature on McKinsey and its approach to assignments (for example Rasiel, 1999; Rasiel et al., 2001). This literature explains the basic well-known principles used by the company (e.g., MECE – Mutually Exclusive, Collectively Exhaustive; the issue tree; the hypothesis approach). These same

principles and approaches are endorsed by the case study presented by Gupta and Perepu (2007) and even more thoroughly discussed in the case study by Bartlett (2000). Both of the aforementioned cases discuss the use of methodologies as part of knowledge management (KM) practices within major strategy consultancies. This literature altogether provides evidence on the very strong KM infrastructure that McKinsey built, especially in the last three decades. Although this KM infrastructure is shown to have become robust in recent decades, informal information sharing is shown to be the basic viable way to capture and share knowledge that accompanied McKinsey in the longer term. Bartlett (2000: 6) states this clearly in a quote from Matassoni (the firm's Director of Communications by the end of the 1980s):

...Despite all the talk of computerized data bases, the knowledge management process still relied heavily on personal networks, old practices like cross-office transfers, and strong "One Firm" norms like helping other consultants when they called. And at promotion time, nobody reviewed your PD documents. They looked at how you used your internal networks to have your ideas make an impact on clients.

This was also known as "personalized knowledge" in McKinsey where consultants were believed to exchange knowledge: "not only during brainstorming sessions, but also through regular correspondence, telephone conversations and video conferences" (Bartlett, 2000: 12). This information provides further hints at knowledge production and diffusion within consultancy when considering strategy tools as incumbents on such knowledge. An interesting example is mentioned in Bartlett (2000: 12) where it is stated that:

McKinsey employed editors to convert the knowledge that was present in PowerPoint presentations and videos into documents.

Nevertheless, practitioner literature is not only known for promoting strategy tools, it also acknowledges the struggles that consultants have in adopting them. For example, a recent issue of McKinsey Quarterly online entitled “The use and abuse of scenarios”,⁶⁶ claims that, despite the advantages brought by scenario analysis, managers often tend to overlook all potential scenarios (particularly the extreme ones), provide partial scenarios, or even discard scenarios too quickly. The author, director of the McKinsey London office, attributes the “abuse of scenarios” to the people and the processes involved in scenario analysis. He also considers scenario analysis as a tool with political functions, as it gives an opportunity to contradictory opinions within groups to gain voice and be legitimized in the process. Another example comes from two HBS researchers, Gavetti and Rivkin (2005), who discussed analogy thinking among strategists in an article published in *Harvard Business Review*. They claim that analogies are a common way of thinking among strategists. However, the authors believe that strategists rarely consider using analogies well (p. 56), thus they recognize the flaws in employing this type of thinking. Consequently, these examples constitute a further rationale for examining consultants as “reflective practitioners” in the field work proposed from this study.

There are attempts from practitioners’ literature to identify strategy tools in use. The most extensive one is by Bain. Since 1993, the consultancy has built a tradition of an annual public survey of management tools used throughout a wide range of industries. However,

⁶⁶November, 2009 issue at:

https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com/Strategy/Strategy_in_Practice/The_use_and_abuse_of_scenarios_2463

this survey examines tools in use by clients of consultancies and not consultancies themselves, although a high correlation of tool use between the two domains (consulting vs. clients) could be expected. This survey has a very broad definition of strategy tools (as noted earlier in Table 2). These include strategic methods, processes, and mere jargon used by executive managers in a wide range of industries. For illustration, examples such as “core competencies”, “mergers and acquisitions”, and “online communities” are all among the “strategy tools” denoted by the survey.⁶⁷ In another recent executive report produced in the UK on strategy tools in use globally,⁶⁸ it was found that the core strategy toolkit contains the following basic “strategic management tools”: SWOT analysis, key success factors, core competences analysis, scenario analysis, Value Chain, Porter’s Five Forces, resource-based analysis, industry life cycle, PESTEL analysis, and portfolio matrices, with SWOT being the most used tool. Furthermore, this study found that strategy tools’ usefulness varies depending on the strategy process - strategy analysis, choice, and implementation (*Executive Briefing - Building a Strategy Toolkit*, Rigby, 2009: 5). However, the studies presented above provide findings only from survey and interview data. Thus, the data are not corroborated with research in the field.

Former consultants provide accounts in which they reflect on their own work and on the methodologies that they used as consultants. These are ample resources to complement

⁶⁷ As presented earlier, *Appendix A* provides an overview of recent rankings of strategy tools found in the Bain report (e.g., Rigby, 2009; Rigby & Biladeau, 2011)

⁶⁸ This report was based on 2000 questionnaires filled in by business school alumni and consulted further with academics (Written by Jarzabkowski et al. for AIM research - Feb. 2010; the same study published by Jarzabkowski et al. in Jan. 2013 in the *Journal of Management Inquiry*).

the study here, as they provide an account of the personal reflexive approach to the everyday practice of strategy tools in consulting. Among some prominent examples of this kind is Stewart (2009). The author, after gaining a DPhil in Philosophy from the University of Oxford and then becoming a consultant for a period of more than 10 years, explains his frustrations as a Bain and McKinsey consultant. Other interesting examples are Rasiel (1999) and Rasiel and Friga (2001) who discuss McKinsey's problem solving approaches. Their books seem targeted at a post-MBA audience aspiring to a consultancy career in the big management consultancies. Another striking example comes from Pinault (2000) who describes his past challenges as a consultant with his thought-provokingly titled book, *The Consulting Demons: Inside the Unscrupulous World of Global Corporate Consulting*. Although the books mentioned predominantly provide a rather cynical view of consulting, it is important to acknowledge their contribution given the extensive reflexive accounts from their past experiences, and especially the reports of "intimate reflections" over strategy tools in use, as well as strong metaphors to describe many of the tools (one example of this kind is Stewart's extensive discussion of Pareto Analysis, calling the tool "The Whale Chart").

3.3. Roles attributed to strategy tools

Strategy tools have been clearly under focus in various studies on strategic planning and analysis. In a rather old but nevertheless interesting book on strategy tools entitled *Strategy formulation: Analytical concepts*, the authors from Stanford and Purdue Universities, respectively Hofer and Schendel (1978), emphasize the need for and

usefulness of strategy formulation tools. They claim that “(strategy) formulation should be managed and not left to chance” (p.5). In so doing, they highlight problem framing and problem solving provided by strategy tools, as well as their contribution towards assisting in the training and development of future managers, suggesting that the interaction of the latter with analytic strategy tools makes them more acquainted with strategic issues within their organization. In later accounts within this literature, one of the most prominent contributors is Langley (1988, 1989). The author has highlighted the importance of formal strategic planning (Langley, 1988) and has identified various purposes of formal analysis; grouping them into four main groups of purposes – information, communication, direction and control, and symbolic (Langley, 1989). She has concluded that formal analysis and social interaction are inextricably linked in organizational decision making and that such linkage is not antithetical as often assumed from the literature. Interestingly, on the degree of formal analysis, the author suggests the term “analytical sophistication” (Langley, 1989: 628) where she ranks various formal analyses based on, among other factors, the number of pages with quantitative data, and number of graphs or figures. Although this same logic could be adopted today, the level of benchmark for such criteria would have to be lifted to accommodate for technology that has had a huge impact on the level of analysis “sophistication” which can be achieved in a small amount of time.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ For example, see how Langley (1989: 628) awards the highest score (3 out of 0-3) to describe the highest level of sophistication to formal analysis that includes at least 50 pages; five tables, graphs and figures, six people/months; and comprises “[c]omplex or multiple techniques, e.g., statistics, computer models, data from diverse sources”. From personal experience alone, I would assume that this type of “sophistication” could be achieved nowadays in a single day by a single individual simply with the help of tailored software, e.g., SPSS or merely Microsoft Excel.

Other more recent studies have replicated and extended the understanding on the purposes of formal analysis, following the path of Langley (1989), a few examples being Denis et al. (2006) and Feldman (2004). Denis et al. (2006) study a case of complex decision making within public healthcare in the 1990s, and find out that analysis is wisely used to support a very controversial strategic decision. Analysis is thereafter found to fill in “strategic voids”, especially when embedded in shared systems of meaning and also matched with other micro-practices that sustain the legitimacy of such analysis’ promoters (ibid.: 349). The authors do not focus on particular methodologies but rather discuss the role of numbers and analysis as a construct. In a contrasting article, Feldman (2004), on the other side, presents interesting data from a long term review of decisions made in NASA prior to the Challenger and Columbia explosions. Feldman finds that an over-confidence in quantitative analysis, without proper inclusion of qualitative indexes, made NASA suffer the consequences. Nonetheless, contrary to the findings of Denis et al. (2006) that highlight the aid provided by analysis, Feldman (2004) stresses that the configuration of analysis (i.e., the proper inclusion of both qualitative and quantitative analysis) within an organization can be problematic for that organization, to the point of disastrous outcomes (as in the case of NASA).

Even more broadly, when referring to strategic analysis, scholars propose contradictory findings: it has been found that strategy tools serve to communicate direction for strategic action (Chesley & Wenger, 1999); but they are not necessary beneficial to everyday praxis, since they propose a narrow frame of reference making it difficult for the practitioner to

see past the frame (Calori, 1998; Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Seeger, 1984; Worren et al., 2002). Moreover, although there have been claims of the “fall of strategic planning” (Mintzberg, 1994), more recent accounts have attacked this view (see Giraudeau, 2008; Angwin et al., 2009; Whittington et al., 2011). In a recent article on the production of strategy plans, Giraudeau (2008: 294) reports with a single case study that strategy plans indeed constitute an imaginative exercise and suggest that strategists should consider them “documents likely to stir and enhance strategic imagination”. In a more recent account, Wright et al. (2013) explore the “logic of practice” by interviewing, within a business school, managers conducting evening studies. Through the use of personal construct theory (Kelly, 1955), they explore the strategy tool preferences of managers and find that managers think in duality and furthermore tend to favour multiple tools in use. Furthermore, there is also parallel work from accounting literature that has studied the role of visualization techniques and accounting tables. This literature has contributed to the understanding of multiple roles offered by analysis tools, more particularly by emphasizing the role of accounting tables as powerful control tools (Hopwood & Miller, 1994; Townley, 1996). Hence, strategic planning could and should not be understood as a mere rigid exercise, but could be further deconstructed (e.g., Giraudeau, 2008 or Kaplan, 2008) to the roles offered by strategy tools beyond their original intentions of formal analysis. In the same vein, consulting literature has observed that concepts and methods⁷⁰ are used pragmatically in consulting projects (Benders et al., 1998; Berglund & Werr, 2000;

⁷⁰ The concepts and methods discussed from this literature are broader than the strategy tool domain discussed here.

Furusten, 2009; Morris, 2001) and are modified to fit organizational domains (Benders & van Veen, 2001; Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001).

In addition, there has been another domain to study analysis related to its supporting cognition. Simon (1957); March and Simon (1958); Tversky and Kahneman, (1974); Huff (1990); Morgan (1986); and Bolman and Deal (1997) have largely contributed to the understanding of strategy making as a mental process. I group writings of the cognitive school together with the learning accounts, since they both focus on information selection and processing. For example, studies within the sensemaking domain that consider strategy tools “sensemaking devices” (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2008 – unpublished; Astley & Zammuto, 1992) have a strong inclination towards cognition as the underlying process of strategy tool use. Although the phenomenon under study is not different between the cognitive and learning accounts as well as most of their premises, I find that they differ methodologically – the latter provide more interpretive accounts (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2008; Maitlis, 2005), whereas cognitive literature has undertaken various experiments to understand individual and group processes of strategy cognition (see Tversky & Kahneman, 1974 as one of the more pronounced contributions in this direction).⁷¹

⁷¹ Note that also Wright et al. (2013) tend to explore “the logic of strategy tool practice” (p.93), with a clear propensity towards the cognitive aspects of strategy tool picking. The authors’ findings hint towards Kelly’s (1955) *Theory of Personal Constructs* in which bipolar constructs are used by people in order for them to perceive the world. These constructs are shaped recursively (for more, see Wright et al., 2013: 97-98, discussing Kelly’s 1955 in more detail). Nevertheless, this approach is helping bring forward insights on how

March (2006: 203) presented previous accounts to support the claim that tools might lose their usefulness in situations of high complexity and uncertainty. One example of this kind is offered from the account of Hill and Westbrook (1997: 46), who found that although SWOT was used in many of the surveyed companies and consultancies, no one used the results of SWOT analysis at later stages of their strategy formation. Therefore, one would expect that strategy tools are not universally applicable, nor do they deliver in every stage of strategy projects.

Studies report that strategy tools help dialogue and promote the generation of ideas (Chesley & Wenger, 1999; Grant, 2003). Additionally, studies tend to agree (with a quite intuitive finding) that strategy tools are used very much depending on the familiarity their users have with them (Clark, 1997; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2007; Worren et al., 2002). In addition, within a practical domain it has been found that organizational policies adopted by consultancies might also inhibit or promote the use of particular tools. For example, it has been argued that tools adopted in consultancies often have a tendency to become standardized, and subsequently the options for action on the consultants' side are narrowed down – by producing the effect of “cookie cutter consulting” (Pringle, 1998).

strategy tools enter a personal preference system (hence identifying an order in the preference logic, but not how they become internalized, and construed as part of inherent heuristics – note that the latter is the focus of cognitive studies discussed here). Wright et al. (2013) could be seen as a study to highlight the “sensemaking” around strategy tools rather than the “sensemaking” obtained through strategy tools (the latter is the predominant focus of cognitive studies grouped in the literature in this section).

The representations in Figure 3 show some of the major tensions in the literature on strategy tools, focusing on the discussion of this chapter. The first tension, (1), shown in this figure relates to the polarized discussion on the stances taken in literature over how much strategy tools tend to be used in practice. For example, Jarzabkowski et al. (2010 – *Executive Report*; 2013) or Rigby (2009) and Rigby and Bilodeau (2011) – in Bain’s survey of strategy tools in use – both embrace the fact that strategy tools are used frequently and are ever-present in strategy work, whereas other accounts show more scepticism towards this assertion. In similar methodological fashion (i.e., through surveys), various authors discard the view that strategy tools are often used and claim for their underutilization (see Miller & Ireland 2005; Nutt, 2002; Styhre, 2002).

Furthermore, a dichotomy of thought towards strategy tools emerges when considering their use in practice (hence the “performative aspects” of strategy tools). I coin this tension as “plasticity” of strategy tools, referring to their use in praxis (Tension (2) in Figure 3). There are stances to support standardized solutions being offered by strategy tools (such as in Pringle, 1998, discussed above), hence recognizing the “limiting” properties of tools when assessing their contribution to (standardized) solutions, whereas other literature supports the phenomenon of adapting tools along their use (e.g., in Orlikowski, 2000, when discussing technologies in use; or bricolage as recognized by Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006, when assessing strategy tool use [their notion is adopted after *de Carteau*]; or more broadly recognizing the varied use of tools as stated in Campbell, 1997, or Weick, 1998).

Consequently, there is tension in the literature when referring to what is here termed adaptation vs. rigidity of strategy tools in use.

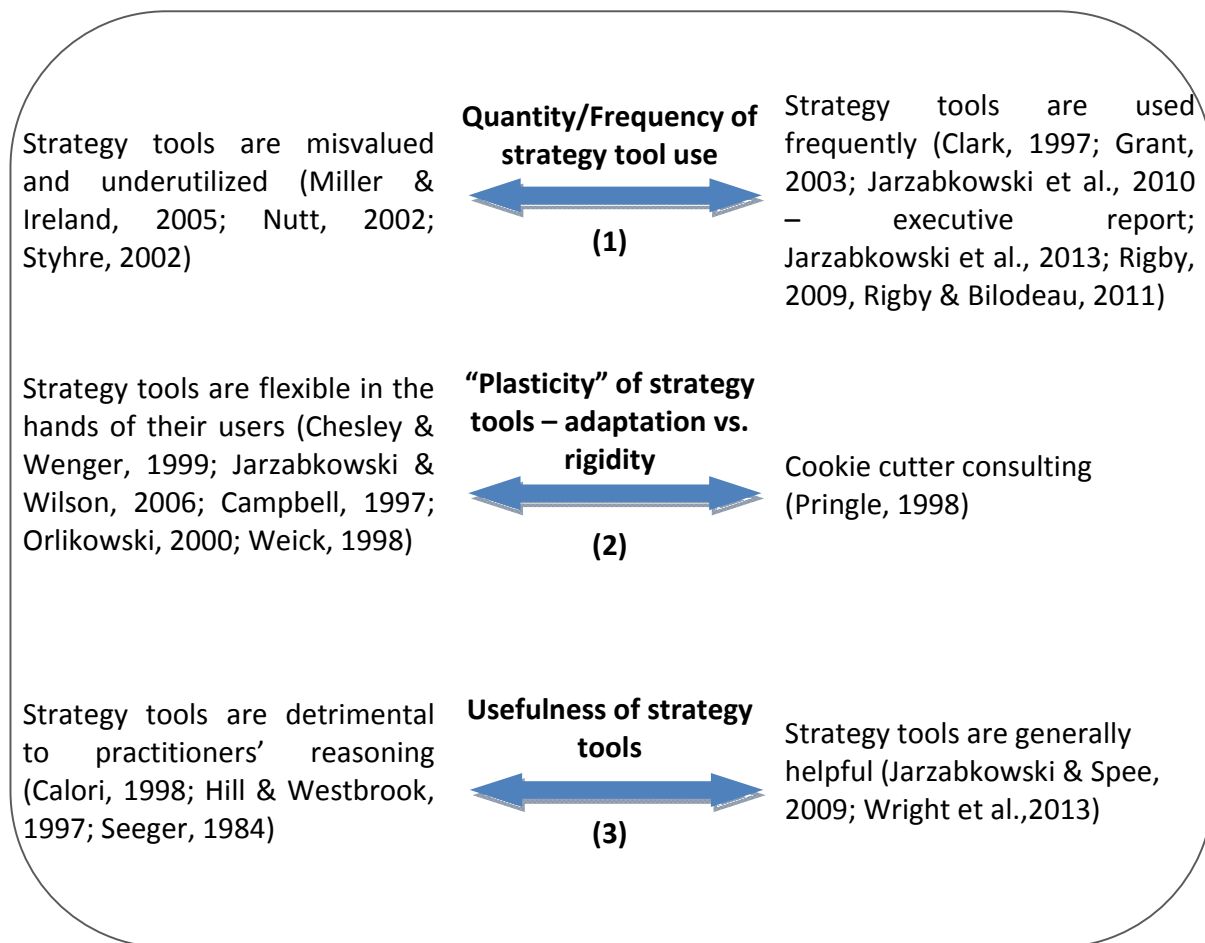


Figure 3 Spectra of strategy tool use⁷²

There also appear to be conflicting stances concerning the usefulness of strategy tools (refer to Spectrum (3) in Figure 3). Some accounts highlight the lack of usefulness of strategy tools (e.g., Hill & Westbrook, 1997, when assessing the use of SWOT or Seeger, 1984 on the use of the BCG matrix), whereas others emphasize their usefulness (e.g.,

⁷² Note that these are multiple dimensions of strategy tools synthesizing stances from both academia and practice. The spectra proposed here are not mutually exclusive, hence acknowledging the unavoidable overlaps that result from the nuanced presence of strategy tools, both in practice and in academia.

Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Wright et al., 2013). The main premise of the accounts questioning the usefulness of strategy tools is related to the (mind) framing offered by these tools, resulting thereafter in narrow-minded outputs. This is encapsulated in Seeger's (1984: 94) *SMJ* example, when he questions the decision of a CEO to divest a particular business unit based on the application of the BCG matrix :

...[The CEO] noted with obvious frustration and sorrow: the staple product of his company—the product on which the firm was founded and with which it dominates the industrial market—was running third in the retail market, by three percentage points. In that market segment, his product was a 'dog', said the CEO, and he would like to divest it. ...[Other] facts counted as reasons why the offending business segment could not in practice be divested, the CEO admitted, but they were obviously insufficient to help him feel better about including a proven 'dog' in his business portfolio. He was feeling a conflict induced by internalizing an oversimplified version of the Boston Consulting Group portfolio matrix.

In addition to the spectra presented in Figure 3, there is another apparent dichotomy that emerges from literature: strategy tools are seen as traditional devices to support rational decisions, hence named “technologies of rationality” (in March 2006), whereas there is also a view that all strategy tools, or part of them, should support creativity. Note that this is a distinction based on the ostensive⁷³ aspects of strategy tools (Feldman & Pentland, 2003). An ostensive discussion of strategy tools means that the focus lies on the original design principles of strategy tools rather than their performative aspects, i.e., how strategy tools are meant to be used rather than how they actually are put to use. For the discussion of

⁷³ To better understand what is implied by the notion of “ostensive” here one should state the original distinction as presented by Latour (2005: 37) clarifying that “the object of an ostensive definition remains there, whatever happens to the index of the onlooker. But the object of a performative definition vanishes when it is no longer performed”. Hence, the performative aspect of strategy tools is related to their actual use in *praxis*, whereas their ostensive aspect is more rigid.

strategy tools as creativity enablers, Stenfors (2007: 3) in her doctoral work uses the metaphor “strategy toys” to denote “strategy tools [that are] used to facilitate creative strategy work”, claiming that there is more need for these types of tools in the organizational realm. This work is inspired by March’s (1991) acknowledgement of the phenomenon of “exploration” vs. “exploitation” in organizations, with the former term calling to strive for more creativity and innovation. In the same fashion, March promotes a “foolish” use of strategy tools (in March, 2006) where the quest for “exploration” is supported further. I visualize the dichotomy discussed here in Figure 4, below.

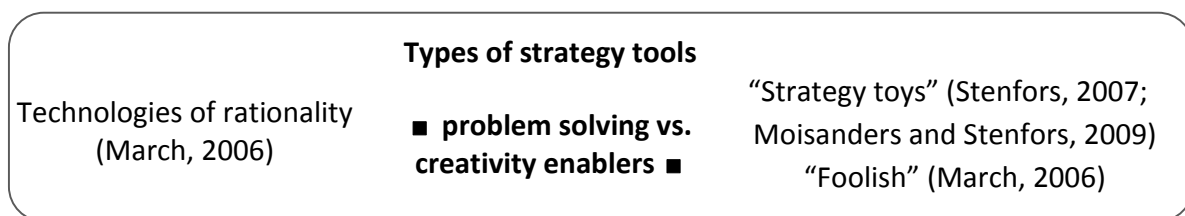


Figure 4 Dichotomy of strategy tool types: Problem solving vs. creativity enablers

This study does not aim to contribute to or reinforce any of the existing dichotomies, as a dichotomous approach would lack the detailed level of understanding of the phenomenon intended in this dissertation. Thus, as stressed throughout this account, the focus is not on the simplistic question: “how much theory practitioners use” (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006: 362), but on the modus operandi of strategy consulting work and its underlying dynamics. An additional literature that is closely linked epistemologically to the learning

literature is the one found from the information systems.⁷⁴ Organizations strongly rely on original management technologies, and they are a very encouraging environment for textual and visual artefacts (Latour, 1996). These artefacts play an important role in the internal communication of an organization (e.g., see Yates and Orlikowski's study on PowerPoint presentations, 2007; or Yates, 1985 on graphical displays).

This literature focuses the attention towards the representational abilities of textual and visual artefacts. Representing the firm, its accounts, products, projects, etc. helps corporate actors to coordinate around common visions of their firm's organization and activities. In a similar fashion, in a recent unpublished paper, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2008) draw on boundary objects (cf. Star & Griesemer, 1989: 10) to show how strategy tools operate across various contexts called "strategy trading zones". The authors indicate through a few vignettes that strategy tools fulfil various roles, such as providing intended rational outcomes (cf. March, 2006), but that they also legitimate actors' views on problems and help to negotiate these between actors. According to this view, the purposes served by strategy tools should be seen as intrinsically bound to the organizational setting, as well as the level of application – e.g., different individuals or teams (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009).

⁷⁴ Due to its different setting of application, this stream is not mentioned in the strategy schools at Mintzberg et al. (1998), but it is included in the discussion here given its extensive discussion of information tools, artefacts and visualization techniques.

As shown above, views on learning draw heavily on interpretative accounts, to which this study is aligned. In this line of inquiry, it would be interesting to unfold whether, within a (strategy) consulting context, strategy tools would seem to fulfil some roles more than others. For example, do consultants draw heavily on problem solving, or legitimization aspects⁷⁵ of strategy tools? What contexts would impede one or stimulate the other? How much do consultants rely on the representative functions of strategy tools?⁷⁶ Especially with respect to legitimization, contrary to the traditional design and planning schools, the interpretative accounts draw away from the analytic roles as main purposes of strategy tools but underlie the “boom and bust” aspects of their use (e.g., Abrahamson, 1996; David & Strang, 2006 etc.).

Several writers (e.g., Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Feldman & March, 1981) have suggested that societal norms of rationality push organizations to adopt formal analysis procedures for the legitimization of their activities and to serve the ultimate goal of survival. If this is the case, then strategy tools are not to be used instrumentally, but ought to have stronger symbolic roles in the organization. Hence, one could face “ostensive” and “performative” roles of tools (Feldman, 2003), where the latter would be greatly influenced by the quest for legitimization when examined from an institutional theory lens. Similarly, David and Strang (2006: 15) have analysed the lifecycle of total quality management (TQM) consulting over

⁷⁵ An illustration of “legitimation aspects” here would be using the tool to justify a solution rather than for the very problem-solving properties this analytic tool entails.

⁷⁶ Note that these are not additional research questions, however they do receive consideration as they are supportive to the underlying “how” sub-questions of strategy tools in the research questions presented earlier.

more than a decade, and concluded that when “fashion fleets” TQM consulting becomes populated with consultants with deep specialized knowledge. On the other side, generalists support the tool during its boom. Calling for expanded lines of enquiry, the authors request a multiple-theory examination of the mechanism of TQM’s evolution in practice, recognizing that “industry directories do not lend themselves to a finer-grained analysis.” On similar lines, Langley (1989: 608) has recognized that the “symbolic” purposes of tools might have been underestimated in her account, given the methodological difficulty of tracking such purposes. Hence, several accounts call for a further exploration of “symbolic” purposes of tools – a quest that is examined further in the empirical chapters of this dissertation.

3.4. Theoretical conceptualizations of strategy tools

The main purpose of this section is not to engage extensively with the literature on the various concepts of strategy tools, but to lay out the main tendencies observed on multiple (yet different) relevant accounts of theoretical conceptualizations of the same phenomenon. Literature streams ascribe cognitive, symbolic, social, political, liturgical, or cultural roles to strategy tools.⁷⁷ These roles are also closely related to the conceptualizations that the literature offers of strategy tools along with their underlying theoretical premises. For example, as presented in the previous section, cognitive studies

⁷⁷ Note that these roles of strategy tools are not exclusive to each category, i.e., they might overlap with each other. It has been shown that objects can simultaneously exist in different forms and purposes (Knorr-Cetina, 1997: 15).

recognize the heuristic properties of strategy tools by deeply acknowledging the importance of cognition in guiding action. On the other hand, cultural or, more broadly, interpretative studies, ascribe communication and symbolic properties to strategy tools by recognizing the role of culture in any social domain. Hence, these discussions of conceptualizations should be considered in line with the underlying premises of their own contributors. In the following paragraphs, I discuss and compare various views by filtering several accounts theorizing on strategy tools.⁷⁸

Strategy tools as cultural devices: Strategy tools have recently been conceptualized as cultural artefacts by Moisander and Stenfors (2009: 231) to highlight the role of epistemic cultures in their enactment. In this way, “the development, introduction and use of strategy tools can be understood as cultural production of new forms of epistemic and managerial practice.” Cultural artefacts are closely linked here with the notion of epistemic objects offered by Knorr-Cetina (1997; 2001). The author considers:

objects of knowledge... [to be] more like open drawers filled with folders extending indefinitely into the depths of a dark closet (Knorr-Cetina, 1997: 12).

This understanding is similar to the approach followed by Langley (1989), although not explicitly discussed as such by the author. However, given the acknowledged roles of strategy tools, the proximity of Langley to a “cultural approach” could be detected. At the

⁷⁸ Note that the accounts here are grouped in relation to their primary contribution towards strategy tools. However, these groups are not entirely mutually exclusive. For example, the theory of strategy tools as boundary objects doesn’t exclude them from the professional and organizational cultures in which they are embedded; hence they are also to be seen as cultural devices.

same time, institutional theorist approaches on strategy tools would fall in the same category. For example, Meyer and Rowan (1977) or Feldman and March (1981) recognize the strong symbolic properties of tools as they become used for legitimation purposes in organizations. Other studies have similarly shown that strategy tools serve socio-political purposes (Hill & Westbrook, 1997; Hodgkinson et al., 2006).

Strategy tools as heuristics: Strategy tools have been acknowledged for their problem framing properties. Huff (1990), March (2006), March and Simon (1958), Tversky and Kahneman (1974), all discuss the mental processing involved with problem solving. By this view, strategy tools serve as frames of reference or “technologies of rationality” (March, 2006). These studies draw on experiments, with the analysis principally on the level of a sole individual and her/his cognition guiding action. Despite their major contribution towards the understanding of the intricacies of human cognition, these studies have little to say on the negotiation of meaning in a broader social domain.⁷⁹

Strategy tools as boundary objects: This view was inspired by the knowledge management literature of a few decades ago (concept proposed by Star & Griesemer, 1989). Within the S-a-P domain, Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009) have proposed the application of “boundary objects” to ascribe the roles of strategy tools as they enable communication between different groups or units in an organization by spanning work boundaries. In this conceptual paper, authors suggest that:

⁷⁹ Note that the various literature streams assessed here are by no means seen as antagonistic, but rather overlapping and complementary. Hence, by proposing a preferred approach within this section, no other stream contribution is disdained but rather assessed through the abductive reasoning lens proposed earlier in this study (see the discussion in Chapter 2, cf. Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010).

"The boundary objects concept thus enables us to shift our focus to what happens when strategy participants use strategy tools to interact across organizational levels" (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009: 230).

According to this view, theoretically conceptualizing strategy tools as boundary objects would enable the detection of how strategy tools, along with their flexibility, allow enabling shared meanings in between different occupational levels and/or units.

Strategy tools as discourse: Barry and Elmes (1997) and van der Heijden (2005) discuss how tools provide the basis for language in strategy conversation. More recently there has been literature to highlight this property of strategy tools (for example, see Vaara, 2010, proposing an emerging "linguistic turn"). This literature is inspired by philosophy of language (see Putnam, 1975; Habermas, 1990). The view of tools as discourse suggests that meaning does not lie on individuals, but on linguistic communities, by suggesting that the latter are held by professionals in those domains (Putnam, 1975).

Table 5 summarizes the discussion of this section. It acknowledges the main illustrative examples of literatures holding various theoretical conceptualizations of strategy tools, predominating methodologies pursued to uncover their understanding and roles, along with the main assumptions these approaches hold. In this table the discussion is focused on strategy tools following the focus of this dissertation (i.e., "analytic strategy tools").

Conceptualization	Illustrations	Prevailing methodology	Main assumptions
Cultural artefacts	Langley (1989); Moisander and Stenfors (2009); Meyer and Rowan (1977); Feldman and March (1981); Hill and Westrbook (1997)	Interviews; Surveys; Observations (A mixed methodology is dominant here)	Analysis, amongst others, holds symbolic properties (Langley, 1989).
Heuristic devices	Huff (1990); March (2006); March and Simon (1958); Tversky and Kahneman (1974)	Experimental	Ceteris paribus, heuristics strongly alter human decision making outcomes.
Boundary objects	Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009)	Conceptual	The use of strategy tools has different implications across organizational levels (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009)
Discourse	Barry and Elmes (1997); van der Heijden (2005)	Interviews	Meaning does not lie merely on individuals, but on linguistic communities (Putnam, 1975)

Table 5. Review of predominant conceptualizations of strategy tools⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Note that the chosen theoretical conceptualization of strategy tools (i.e., considering them cultural artefacts) is highlighted in grey in the table.

Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that the literatures presented in this table offer ample coverage of “tools” beyond merely “strategy tools”. Consequently, as highlighted in the table, this study is particularly inclined to the first view presented. It is the cultural stream that provides a strong basis for this study, since ascribed meanings to strategy tools supported by “reflection in action” (Schön, 1983) and “sensemaking” (Weick, 1979; 1995) are congruent to a cultural “view” on strategy tool use. However, this is not to neglect various other contributions on strategy tools – e.g., tools as business heuristics (Huff, 1990; March, 2006; March & Simon, 1958; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974); tools as providers of common strategy jargon (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hill & Westbrook, 1997); tools as “boundary objects” (see Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). Yet, it is the cultural view on strategy tools that enables access to their shared meaning and enactment in practice. It should be noted that the conceptualization of strategy tools as boundary objects is not chosen here since only a single team and its internal interactions are observed, rather than a heterogeneous group and multi-level interactions. It is in the latter instance that boundary objects would be a reasonable choice of theoretical focus and unit of analysis. Hence, the homogeneity of this team proposes a more “micro” focus of strategy tools in use. With reference to the linguistic turn, this study does not reject such an approach, but due to the deliberate lack of focus on language here, this view is not further discussed or embraced in the analysis of this study. Moreover, these different theoretical conceptualizations of strategy tools are not to be seen as clashing terms, but rather complementary. It is by being informed by different (although occasionally overlapping) philosophical premises that they complement and further complete each other.

3.5. Features of strategy work

The features of strategy work are important in that they provide information about the occupational context strategy practitioners operate in. For example, the nature of projects consultants operate with, the nature of problems they face, and the pace of their work are all important considerations that could a priori inform the use of strategy tools. In this section, I discuss the context of the occupational domain in which strategy consultants operate. There has been a continuous discussion on the proclamation of consultancy as a profession (McKenna, 2006; Kubr, 2005). My dissertation does not directly engage with the professionalism consultancy entails, but tries to uncover the role of strategy tools that contribute to the body of knowledge within consultancy. What are some strategy tools that facilitated the growth of the body of knowledge in consulting? Looking at the development of consulting, several episodes would provide evidence of methodologies that helped in the field's development. For example, in 1958, during the Polaris Missile project, Booz-Allen developed PERT, the computer-based technique for project management. This tool would later be well-known in the consulting industry and give the firm broader recognition (Guttman & Willner, 1976: 182). During the 1970s and 1980s, when strategy consulting firms were developing rapidly, the role of information systems (IS) was evident in the portfolio of services offered by these consultancies, as they would be highly diversified in computer-based analytics tools and methods. At the time, strategy consulting firms were particularly supported by the general trend of companies towards planning, as complex analysis and forecasts were very much in demand by managers. Computer-based systems helped consultancies to specialize in such services (Mintzberg et al., 1998). These

illustrations suggest that, parallel to its development, consulting recognized the benefit of technology-based problem solving approaches. Although the historical development of consulting as a profession is not the focus of this study, it is important to understand the role of strategy tools towards further consolidating the consulting body of knowledge. This can not only be seen through the development of the consulting profession, but also through the everyday routines of consulting work. For example, it has been shown that there consulting firms have a significant variety of projects, practices, and styles (Argyris, 1961; Bennett, 1990). Consultants work under high pressure (Sturdy, 1997) and are usually employed in situations of uncertainty for the client.⁸¹

To achieve persistent success, consultants are expected to solve problems which entail both exploitation and exploration (March, 1999, 2006). Consulting firms continuously aim to create new knowledge, although the rigour of this process is not necessarily the primary criterion. As March (1999: 325) stated:

... [g]ood consulting is rather like good theory. It becomes useful less by being precisely correct than by being interesting in a way that is not redundant with ordinary knowledge.

The complexity of projects undertaken is an important element for gathering information on the heterogeneity of knowledge in consulting. One could consider the complexity and idiosyncrasy as axiomatic and ever-present in strategy consulting assignments. This

⁸¹ The premise is that under certainty the client would be less prone to engage a consultant (Lundberg, 1997; Sturdy, 1997)

complexity coupled with the very fast pace of strategy assignments,⁸² would in turn require fast and pragmatic use of strategy tools supported by sophisticated and compartmentalized knowledge systems to enable cross-sector and cross-functional learning. Particularly when novelty is expected in the consultants' deliveries (e.g., new product development or business model innovation), the path-dependency of knowledge may have negative effects (Carlile & Rebentisch, 2003; Hardagon & Sutton, 1997). However, it is shown that the equivocal environment presented in strategy assignments allows for more divergent rather than convergent thinking (cf. Schein, 1972).

Consultants' expertise is believed to be more biased towards impression management than towards problem solving (Alvesson, 2004; Clark, 1995). Hence, we could expect that strategy tools are either (1) to play a more important role in impression management than problem solving when it comes to consulting; or (2) to serve impression or problem solving purposes depending on the occasion. Hence, the presence of the client becomes an important consideration for the nature of consultancy work. Moreover, the very nature of the clientele base is another element for discovering how knowledge is shaped in consulting. For example, it is known that most consulting work is based on repeat business (Karantinou & Hogg, 2001). Thus, it could be assumed that there is less incentive for consultancies to diversify their knowledge base, and as a consequence, their knowledge

⁸² Already from my pilot study, preliminary talks, and interviews held with consultants during fieldwork, I could find that strategy assignments are dense and compressed, thus requiring fast, precise, and tailor-made answers to a broad spectrum of clients. This is similar to how they are portrayed in literature as discussed earlier in this section (e.g., as in Argyris, 1961; Bennett, 1990 and Sturdy, 1997).

would be more specialized in the clients' domain or industry. Here, one could distinguish the variance depending on the size of consultancies, with large companies being actively engaged in diversifying their client base, and thus less prone to the path-dependency of knowledge and more open to creativity/novelty.

However, it has been persistently highlighted that the interactions between clients and consultants remain less well understood (Mintzberg, 1973; Engwall & Kipping, 2002: 8). Although the nature of consulting clientele is not a focus of this study, it indirectly impacts the incentive consultants would have towards their interactions with strategy tools. For example, considering the amount of repeat business occurring in consulting, as Karantinou and Hogg (2001) suggest, we would expect a standardized approach when dealing with those clients and their problems. This standardized approach could be expected to transfer to the (standardized) ways consultants deploy their tools.

In addition, it is advised that learning is more helpful when people with different knowledge and backgrounds are brought together, especially in project-based learning (Sydow et al., 2004). Based on these findings, one could assume that, given the heterogeneous composition of teams in consulting, learning is likely to be faster and more efficiently achievable in these settings (compared to organizations that operate in one or several industry sectors). With regard to tool use in consulting, literature suggests that there should be no "best approach" and no predefined "formula for success". For example, it has been contended by consultants that "the heavy dependence on 'packaged'

techniques [has] frequently resulted in nothing more than a tightening up, or fine tuning, of current initiatives within the traditionally configured businesses" (Fred Gluck, the head of McKinsey's strategic management practice in 1979, as cited in Ghemawat, 2002: 50).

3.6. Lessons learnt from the literature on strategy tools

Three overarching major problems can be identified from filtering the literature visited in this chapter: bricolage associated with strategy tool use; *backstage* and *frontstage* enactments of work; and sensemaking upon strategy tools. These identified problems will help as lenses in pursuing and interpreting findings obtained in this dissertation.

3.6.1. Bricolage as an underlying aspect of strategy tool use

Bricolage is a term adopted after Lévi-Strauss' (1962) work, *The Savage Mind*. In its original meaning it is used to distinguish between mythical and scientific knowledge. Lévi-Strauss originally showed that indigenous populations use readily available information by continuously combining it to construct myths. Thus, one could discuss reconfiguration of already existing knowledge to assemble seemingly "new" creations. Within the context of management research, bricolage is understood to encompass "the assembly of different knowledge elements that are readily available to the researcher" (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011: 281). The word bricolage means "using whatever resources and repertoire one has to perform whatever task one faces" (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). The essence of this notion in the context here is the fact that tools "are not known as a result of their usefulness; they are

deemed to be useful or interesting because they are first of all known” (Lévi-Strauss 1962, cited in Weick 1993).

Bricolage is considered to be increasingly present in organization theory (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010). Contextualizing bricolage within the phenomenon of strategy tool use, literature converges in that both academic and practitioner accounts acknowledge bricolage as part of this phenomenon (see Chesley & Wenger, 1999; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Stenfors, 2007; Wright et al., 2013). Within the strategy tool domain, it has been shown that adaptation, or bricolage as discussed here, is not to be considered as abuse of tools but as part of strategic creativity (Jarratt & Stiles, 2010). Johnson et al. (2010) also discuss *liturgy* as a common denominator while assessing how strategy techniques are persistently used in strategy workshops.

But how does bricolage relate to sensemaking? The latter encompasses elements of bricolage in action; hence, we could observe sensemaking accompanied with trial and error and bricolage attempts. This is better conveyed by reading how Weick (1995: 168) conceives sensemaking, through the presence of manipulation in action:

Manipulation generates clearer outcomes in a puzzling world and these outcomes make it easier to grasp what might be going on. Manipulation is an operationalization of the advice, ‘leap before you look’ or the advice, ‘ready, fire, aim.’ Manipulation is about making things happen, so that a person can then pounce on those created things and try to explain them as a way to get a better sense of what is happening.

Thus, sensemaking is not to be conceived as an isolated activity, but embedded in, and merged with, bricolage, with the latter occurring as an “action” intermediary element that enables the former. Bricolage therefore occurs in action and is entrenched by the abstractions enabled by the sensemaking of the subject who is engaged with it. Following Weick (1995), bricolage is linked to improvisation in situations of crisis.⁸³

Within the broader consulting domain, bricolage stands in the advocated tools use as promoted by the field. For example, when diffused, these tools are proposed by their creators (i.e., consultants) as universally applicable, easy to grasp, innovative, and encompassing a broad array of interpretations (see Clark & Greatbatch, 2004; Heusinkveld & Vsischer, 2012; Jackson, 1996; Kieser, 1997). The understandable reason behind this “unique selling proposition” is that consultants see themselves as “obligatory passage points” (Berglund & Werr, 2000: 650) for the ultimate application of these tools. Coupled with the practice lens adopted here, sensemaking of strategy tools is to be understood on the basis of “past socializations” that practitioners’ repertoires encompass (Tsoukas 1996: 17). These repertoires consist of recurring cycles of sensemaking (in parallel with the aforementioned bricolage). These recurring sensemaking cycles contribute to

⁸³ Through this discussion, a clear ontological distinction between bricolage and sensemaking is implied. While bricolage is based in action, sensemaking is primarily entrenched with the cognitive level of individuals and groups.

“habitualized” thinking and action that respond to the organizational environment (Bourdieu, 1990). Hence, the *bricoleur* is clearly away from the notion of *ingénieur*.⁸⁴

De Certeau (1984) uses the notion of *bricoleur* to analyse the everyday experience of individuals while interacting with consumer goods to pursue their own needs. Bricolage has also been shown to evolve around making sense of the world and creating an order within its socio-material settings (Linstead & Grafton-Small, 1990). On this basis, following Duymedjian and Rüling (2010) it becomes clear that bricolage constitutes a useful concept in analysing strategy tools in use.

3.6.2. Backstage and frontstage aspects of work

Since there would be no consultancy without the presence of a client (as implied by the definition of consulting provided in this study), we could expect that the working settings in which consultants operate differ to accommodate both the presence and absence of the client. For example, consultants work in their internal teams, prior to facing the client. As a result, do we have reason to believe that work at the front and back (offices or settings) would differ? Performative sociology assists in answering this question. Especially following the work of Goffman (1959), there are two predominant “stages of behaviour” – otherwise

⁸⁴ *Ingénieur* encompasses a belief in the superiority of rationality and scientific reasoning (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010: 139). Hence this notion resembles the professional that is guided by “technical rationality” as discussed earlier here (see discussion in Chapter 2). The distinction becomes clearer, by contrasting the reflective practitioner with the “technical” professional, or “*ingénieur*”.

called “regions of behaviour” (p. 109), i.e., *frontstage* (or front regions) and *backstage* (back regions).⁸⁵ Goffman (1959: 114-115) provides some illustration to his conceptualization:

A back region or backstage may be defined as a place ... [where] costumes and other parts of personal front may be adjusted and scrutinized for flaws. Here the Team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions where no audience is present to be affronted by them; here poor members of the Team, who are expressively inept, can be schooled or dropped from the performance. Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character.

Whereas, according to Goffman (1959: 110), *frontstage* refers to the place where performance is given. By implication, due to the definition of these terms, *frontstage* should always be accompanied by the presence of an audience other than one’s own. At the same time, the boundaries between *frontstage* and *backstage* are not clear cut, and they do appear finer grained than the labels would suggest. For example, following Goffman (1959), even whispering to a colleague sitting close by at a staff meeting might constitute a separate region from that of the rest of the table, bounded by the barrier to perception of the interlocutors’ lowered voices. Hence, the boundaries between regions do not necessarily have to be physical, but must simply constitute sense-boundaries. *Frontstage* is generally understood as a setting where particular attention to decorum and rules takes place. The attention here is towards “another audience”. *Backstage* is a setting where, as the author states, “suppressed facts can make an appearance” (Goffman, 1959: 112).

⁸⁵ “Regions” and “stages” of behaviour hold the same meaning; hence they are used interchangeably throughout this dissertation.

Table 6 provides an analysis of the differences between *backstages* and *frontstages* of behaviour (based on readings of work as provided originally by Goffman, 1959). While *backstage* involves the habitat of the subject, *frontstage* encompasses the facing of one or more other audiences (i.e., meeting with other stakeholders such as clients, workshop delivery, etc.). As a result, *frontstage* is accompanied by a higher level of formality, whereas *backstage* is more informal and relaxed. Goffman (1959) later stresses that the physical setting is to be described as “intimate”, in other words, contextualizing this to the strategists’ habitat, this would involve situations with meetings behind closed doors interacting with one’s own team members, or a strategy practitioner’s own desk. At the same time, it is important to note that *backstage* and *frontstage* should not be understood as black and white instances of stage behaviour, but rather parts of a spectrum where various degrees of staging are present.

What are the implications of perceived regions of behaviour when generally assessing the work of consultants? One could perceive *backstage* and *frontstage* as “operationalized” notions, referring to stages of the strategy project without the presence of the client or sponsor, as *backstage*, whereas *frontstage* occurs when the performance is played in front of the client. Marrying these notions with the sociology of Goffman, every situation where the client is present would unarguably demand a certain rite of performance. Consequently, a strategy workshop as a process would not constitute only *frontstage*, but also *backstage* enactments. Hence, whenever the presence of a client is witnessed, a

“client *frontstage*” setting is enacted, thereafter requiring certain rites of performance to converge with this rite of passage.

Main differentiating criteria	<i>Backstage</i>	<i>Frontstage</i>
Presence of another audience towards which the performance is intended	Mainly no other audience ⁸⁶	Yes
Level of formality ⁸⁷	Low	High
Physical setting	Usually closed, intimate	Clearly accommodating the audience where the performance is to take place

Table 6. Main characteristics of front and back regions of behaviour in a work setting

Literature has acknowledged a particular rite of passage related to the enactment of workshops. Indeed, it is reported that within workshops a special liturgy would prevail (Johnson et al., 2010). Consequently, as part of this liturgy, one could expect particular strategy tools, or indeed a particular use of strategy tools. This becomes an empirical concern in the pursuit of data collection and analysis in the following chapters (with particular emphasis in Chapter 6).

⁸⁶ However, backstage shouldn't be understood to exclude other audiences universally. In other words, although physically the subject is not alone, he or she is nevertheless within a setting where maintaining a distressed posture, or behaviour is consequential.

⁸⁷ Backstage is understood from the author generally to encompass (within a Western society) a language of: reciprocal first-naming, cooperative decision-making, profanity, open sexual remarks, elaborate griping, smoking, rough informal dress, “sloppy” sitting and standing posture, use of dialect or sub-standard speech, mumbling and shouting, playful aggressivity and “kidding”, inconsiderateness for the other in minor but potentially symbolic acts, minor physical self-involvements, such as humming, whistling, chewing, nibbling, belching, and flatulence. The frontstage behaviour language can be taken as the absence (and in some sense the opposite) of this. In general, then backstage conduct is one which allows minor acts which might easily be taken as symbolic of intimacy and disrespect for others present and for the region, while front region conduct is one which disallows such potentially offensive behaviour (p. 129).

3.6.3. Strategy tools as the object on which sensemaking occurs

Several scholars suggest that strategy tools are the means by which practitioners shape the information they face, and in turn enable them to make sense of the outside environment (Grant, 2003, 2008; Gray, 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2004; Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2008; Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2008) further suggest that the use of a strategy tool is shaped by contextual factors (including the problem, the actors and the tool per se). My stance in this study is that tools enable sensemaking, but they too are the object on which sensemaking occurs. Hence, strategy tools should not be black-boxed, but also seen as the very object on which strategizers “reflect in action” (Schön, 1983).

In Figure 5, I show the “sensemaking triangle”, a diagram I built to visualize modes of sensemaking which occur while doing strategy work. Prior work suggests that sensemaking occurs in the interaction of the strategizer with the environment (e.g., Weick, 1995). Relationship 1 shown in this triangle has been extensively pursued in the literature. For example, Maitlis and Lawrence (2007) discuss conditions for which sensegiving is enabled, as well as triggered. The authors do this through the analysis of data from a longitudinal study. The study concludes that a gap in organizational sensemaking triggers sensemaking, and that, among others, “routines, practices, and structures ... give organizational actors time and opportunity to engage in sensegiving” (p. 57). Hence, the latter is also a mere reference of Relationship 3, how strategy tools enable sensemaking and sensegiving.

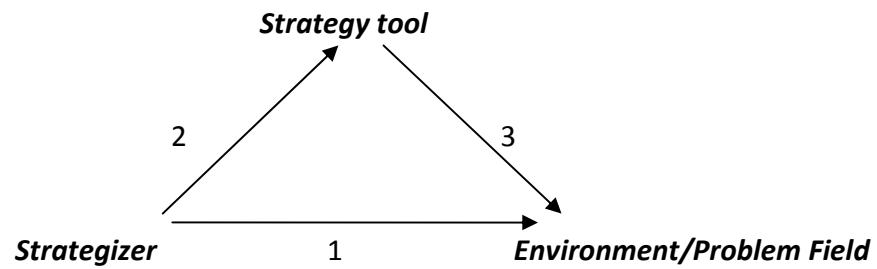


Figure 5 “Sensemaking triangle”: three sensemaking modes surrounding strategy tools in use

Relationship 3, on how strategy tools help make sense of the environment, has also been actively suggested by scholars (e.g., see Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Fiol, 1989; Kaplan, 2011; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). However, Relationship 2 has not been problematized further.⁸⁸ The research here aims to shed light on this relationship by taking into consideration strategizers’ accounts on the sensemaking they deploy around strategy tools. In Chapter 8, I focus specifically on Relationship 2 by further examining its underlying dynamics.⁸⁹ To investigate the understanding, feeling, and thinking of practitioners on their interaction with strategy tools, it is important to delve deeply into their reflections on the matter of their own *modus operandi*. At the same time, sensemaking should not be considered as an isolated abstract endeavour. As Weick (1995: 106) states, “[s]ense is generated by words... to convey something about our ongoing experience.” Due to the vast array of oral and written communication that is increasingly accompanied by visual models and

⁸⁸ The only exception derives from a recent article from Wright et al. (2013) where parts of this relationship are highlighted. However, this is done by focusing on implications for strategy tools that need to be taught in business schools.

⁸⁹ Note that this question is strongly based on an interpretative epistemology chosen here, which does put emphasis on interpretative accounts of subjects (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1967)

representations and images (Styhre, 2010), in addition to words, a “visual” construction of meaning (Meyer et al., 2013) makes for an underlying aspect of sensemaking.

3.7. Revisiting the main research question – the identification of three sub-questions

After examining literature on strategy tools in use and consultants operating with them, I propose a more operational view of the main research question⁹⁰ by dividing it into three sub-questions. These questions target in more detail the aspects of strategy tools that will be developed further, i.e., *backstage* and *frontstage* enactments of strategy tools, the roles served by them, and sensemaking of actors as they shape these tools in their ongoing projects.

RQ1 How are analytic strategy tools used in frontstage and backstage aspects of in-house strategy projects? Chapter 4 will particularly engage with this research question by examining the occurrence of strategy tools in internal meetings as well as staged workshops. Here the conceptualizations of Goffman (1959: 114-115) are followed, recognizing the differing notions of *backstage* and *frontstage*. Here is how the author explains the former:

A back region or backstage may be defined as a place ... [where] costumes and other parts of personal front may be adjusted and

⁹⁰ For the discussion of the main research question, refer to the previous chapter (Section 2.6).

scrutinized for flows. Here the Team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions where no audience is present to be affronted by them; here poor members of the Team, who are expressively inept, can be schooled or dropped from the performance. Here the performer can relax; he can drop his front, forgo speaking his lines, and step out of character.

Figure 6⁹¹ iterates the focus of analysis by recognizing *frontstage* and *backstage* in the strategy projects pursued during this study. As seen in this figure, several strategy projects⁹² are compared by examining strategy tools used in different project phases. *Preparatory* phases include all project phases prior to workshop staging, whereas *execution* phases include phases including “the facilitated client session” (i.e., the staged workshop) and the associated “follow up” project phase.⁹³ Here the focus stands not only in the frequency of strategy tools encountered along projects, but also in the impact of project type and phase on strategy tool use. Additionally, the nature of strategy tool use will be examined in more detail – such as, to what extent do strategy tools in use correspond to a rational model, and to what extent do they follow a “muddling through” or “garbage can” model?

⁹¹ Note that phases here are defined according to company jargon. This is not a counter-intuitive definition, also when comparing with stages identified by Kubr (2002: 21-24)

⁹² Here the original project names are hidden to preserve confidentiality.

⁹³ Note that preparatory/execution phases are not fully mirrored in the *backstage/frontstage* conceptualizations. This dynamic will be examined in more detail in the presentation and discussion of findings (Chapters 5 and 6).

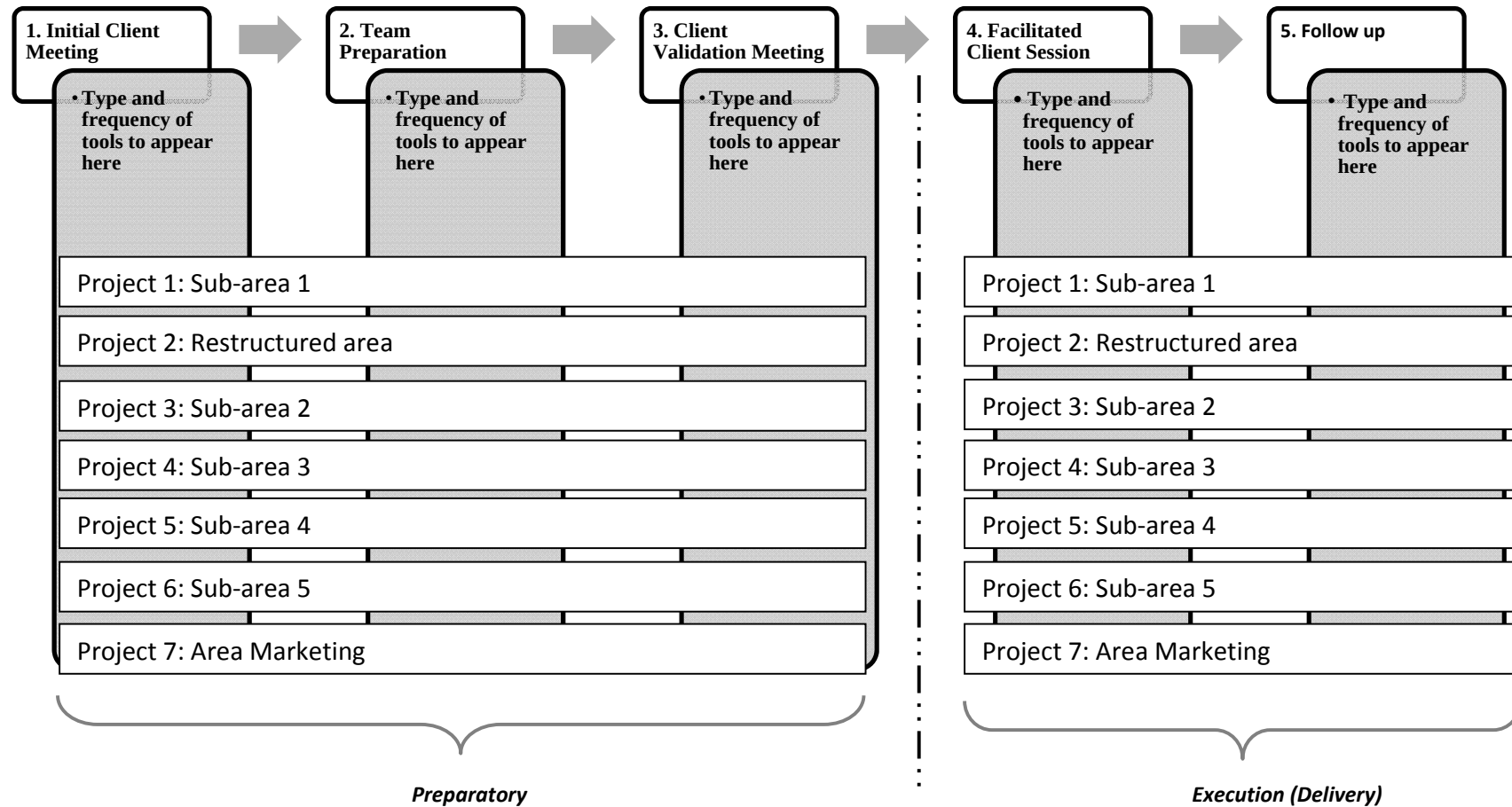


Figure 6 Focus on *backstage* and *frontstage* of strategy work to track strategy tool presence during *preparatory* and *execution* phases

Chapter 6 aims at exploring in more detail strategy tools as they appear to be used in praxis, trying to capture as many variables as feasible in the process in which they are embedded: i.e., how project type (e.g., scale, nature, main stakeholders concerned) calls for the use of some tools more than others; what phases of strategy projects become more standardized in their deployment of strategy tools; and the indications supporting/rejecting such standardization (e.g., unit or company culture favouring the use of some strategy tools in strategy projects).

Figure 6 shows the use of strategy tools in each project phase, which thereafter is to be examined by vertically comparing some⁹⁴ strategy projects witnessed in this study. Thereafter, when general patterns are identified, a horizontal comparison is to take place. Hence, the use of strategy tools in *preparatory* and *execution* phases within strategy workshops will be compared to identify main distinctions and commonalities between the two stages. Strategy tools in use remain the unit of analysis in Chapter 6, with seven different strategy projects constituting the context for the analysis.

RQ2 What roles do (analytic) strategy tools serve in strategy work?

As March (2006: 203-204) states, the environment presents many difficulties to organizations (a few examples being uncertainty, causal complexity, and preference ambiguity) and as a result there is a “partial disenchantment” with rational models.

⁹⁴ Here strategy projects that encompass workshops (i.e., “facilitated client sessions”, as noted in Figure 6) are selected for analysis. In this way, comparison is made possible, with the same project phases entailed in each project.

Questioning this premise, the focus of this question is examining how different tools are employed with different intentions. For instance, their use might be rationally based on the original intention of the tools, or they might be used chaotically, perhaps more similarly to a “garbage can model” (Cohen et al., 1972). Or tools might simply be abandoned due to their limited payout in particular circumstances. As seen in the literature visited earlier, strategy tools serve multiple purposes (as discussed in Langley 1988; 1989).

This research question is examined in detail in Chapter 7. This empirical chapter focuses holistically on all main data sources, as presented in detail in Table 5. Observations, ethnographic interviews, written documents and focus groups are all data items of interest to respond to RQ2.⁹⁵ The variance of strategy tools is of interest here, by focusing also on the variance of the roles that they are used to serve. This is not to be conceived as a taxonomic review of tools, but rather as an exercise that further explores the nature of tools, by primarily relying on their practical enactments. Filtering empirical insights, propositions are brought further in this chapter. Consequently, there is potential to scrutinize findings on the main roles of strategy tools in future research.⁹⁶ As a single case faces threats concerning the generalizability of findings (Yin, 2008), these results can inform future research and enable the latter to question the propositions brought forward by the exploratory study.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Note that Table 5 shows data items for both RQ1 and RQ2, since within this monograph, the same data pool is used to respond to these two research sub-questions, while holding a different focus in the analysis for each question.

⁹⁶ Potentially methods could encompass: survey, multiple case studies, and experimental design.

⁹⁷ Although further testing of propositions is suggested in this dissertation, this exercise is beyond the scope of this DPhil thesis.

Type of data ⁹⁸ category	Concrete illustrations ⁹⁹
Observations	- Research diary; tasks, activities, patterns seen when working daily in the unit - Participation in meetings, workshops (recorded and transcribed; chronologically catalogued). Here attention is given to organizational aspects of strategy workshops, preparatory work, information on strategic analyses, and any specific strategy tools encountered. - Also participation in strategy tools' related training is noted here (there have been two workshops of this kind during the study)
Interviews – ethnographic talks – cf. Spradley (1979)	- Main themes: the contextual elements believed by the interviewees to influence the choice of particular tools; individual and group experience with the use of strategy tools; the role of tools embedded in different practices in the consultancy process; as well as background questions – previous experience and education. - External stakeholders' view as consumers of deliverables handed by the unit, their knowledge and approach vs. work done by the unit and their opinion as workshop participants. - The perspective of "outsiders" (i.e., external consultants) on tools used by this in-house consultancy.
Written documents	- Emails in relation to strategy projects, their project management and cues related to strategy analysis and organization of strategy workshops. - Thematic analysis with the purpose to find strategy tools shown/promoted in global reports - Interaction of individuals with specific tools (SWOT, scenario analysis, etc.). - Focus into the history and development of the unit under study and the strategy tools used most often within the firm. - Training manuals and any other supporting materials on strategy tools.
Focus groups	- Two focus groups organized by the end of the study to probe fieldwork preliminary findings.

Table 7. Main data sources used to respond to RQ1 and RQ2

⁹⁸ Note that Chapter 6 (addressing RQ1) is based on evidence from seven projects (as shown in Figure 7), whereas Chapter 7 (addressing RQ2) is taking a holistic overview on all data collected in this study. This explains the overlaps between these two chapters.

⁹⁹ *Appendices B, C, and D* take a more detailed view at the nature of the data collected and used for this chapter, and in addition used to support findings presented in the forthcoming chapters.

RQ3 What sense do strategy practitioners make and give to the tools they use during their strategy work? Whereas in the previous sub-research questions the focus was on strategy tools, in this research question more agency is given to practitioners and thereafter the focus is closely tied to the relationship they hold with the strategy tools they use. This question builds upon a reflexive epistemology: rather than provide a detached reality on strategy tools in use (as in questionnaires, surveys, formal interviews etc.), this approach aims to capture the reflections of consultants, trying to build a reflexive account on strategy tools in action. By focusing on reflexivity (cf. Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000), activities, events and choices rather than causal variables are examined here. Moreover, by working “with consulting” rather than “on consulting”, this study aims to bring a fine grained analysis of the features of strategy tools in practice. The aim is to provide an account of a “vicarious experience” in the richness and complexity it occurs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 359).

In Chapter 8, contrary to Chapters 6 and 7, one single project is the focus of analysis. This is the Global Strategy Project which encompassed a string of activities that revisited the past strategy of the company and helped define the new strategy of the firm. This project is an outlier when compared with the strategy projects examined in Chapter 6, in that (1) the strategy of the firm had not been revisited in the last 10 years and therefore no standardized process was in place to accommodate the project¹⁰⁰ – hence, many activities within this project could be defined as explorative (March, 1991); (2) the project was taken

¹⁰⁰ Note that this does not imply that there were no proper resources in support of the project.

over not only by the strategy unit examined in the ethnography here, but also by the external consultancy invited for the project. Hence, the heterogeneity of the team could account for further negotiation of sensemaking around strategy tools, which in itself represents a very interesting setting for the study.

The answer to this question will be discussed in detail in Chapter 8, where I focus on multiple *backstage* meetings to negotiate the global strategy of the firm. By focusing on scenarios, I discuss how the understanding of strategy tools (even within the same unit) is not static, but continuously negotiated in each strategy project phase. Hence, sensemaking of strategy tools, as highlighted in the research question, does not merely aim at the reported individual sensemaking on strategy tools in use, but also at finding evidence on how strategy tools and their meanings are negotiated by the team.

Here analysis is closely linked to multiple meetings conducted to negotiate scenarios constructed within the unit. Therefore, analysis of transcripts from meetings coupled with analysis of observations and ethnographic talks provides the main data input for this chapter. Table 8 shows the data used to respond to this research question and the respective analysis for each data source. Note that Table 8 differs from Table 7 due to the subset of data followed here promptly following the presence of an outlier, or what I term “a case within a case”. The findings are presented as a narrative – i.e., as a “confessional tale” (cf. Agar, 1980), with the inclusion of vivid data (*Vignette B*, and chronological

timelines). The main aim for Chapter 8 is to access the process of negotiation of strategy tools and document it as it occurs.

Data	Data count	Further illustrations	Role of data in analysis (primary vs. secondary)
Internal meetings	Seven meetings	Meetings organized within the team (hence, <i>backstage</i>) in cooperation with external consultants to discuss scenario analysis for the new global strategy of the firm	Primary
Observations	Observations compiled in field notes organized in separate documents (these belong to each day in the field, and also to separate events such as meetings)	- Observations of internal meetings - Observations of informal talks - Observations of discussions with project stakeholders	Primary
Ethnographic talks	47 recorded talks ¹⁰¹ of which more than 15 are compiled through “reflection in action”	- “Reflection in action” is adopted here by asking respondents on pieces of work – e.g., PowerPoint slides – to reflect on tools used	Primary
Written documents	- Correspondence - Internal documents	- Emails within the team - Internal project drafts	Secondary

Table 8. Main data sources and related analysis in response to RQ3

¹⁰¹ Details on respondents’ backgrounds are provided in *Appendix E*.

To conclude on this chapter: emphasis was given to various accounts on strategy tools, not only presenting strategy theories and strategy tool roles acknowledged in the literature, but also giving attention to the agency practitioners have. The latter was done by additionally taking into consideration what strategy practitioners, based on their own experiences, have to say about the strategy tools they use. The discussion of literature streams here was aligned to the epistemological stance guiding this study, which embraces a social constructivist view coupled with “inference to the best explanation” (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010), as proposed in the initial framing of this dissertation. This view enables one to consider various literature streams relevant to this topic and compare them, before proposing the choice of methodology in this study.

This chapter laid the foundations for the empirical and theoretical approach undertaken in this study. I provide a summary for this chapter in Table 9. Main themes derived from literature are highlighted in this table, along with the implications for the empirical pursuit in this dissertation. The research questions were discussed using the theoretical constructs of praxis and practice to better explain the unit of analysis, whereas “reflection in action” and sensemaking help to access the use of strategy tools in situ. Here a deliberate discussion of multiple constructs took place. This is in line with the interpretative epistemology chosen, the explorative questions proposed to study the phenomenon of strategy tool use, and the democratic choice of methods that stands at the core of the S-a-P domain (Johnson et al., 2007; Langley & Abdallah, 2011).

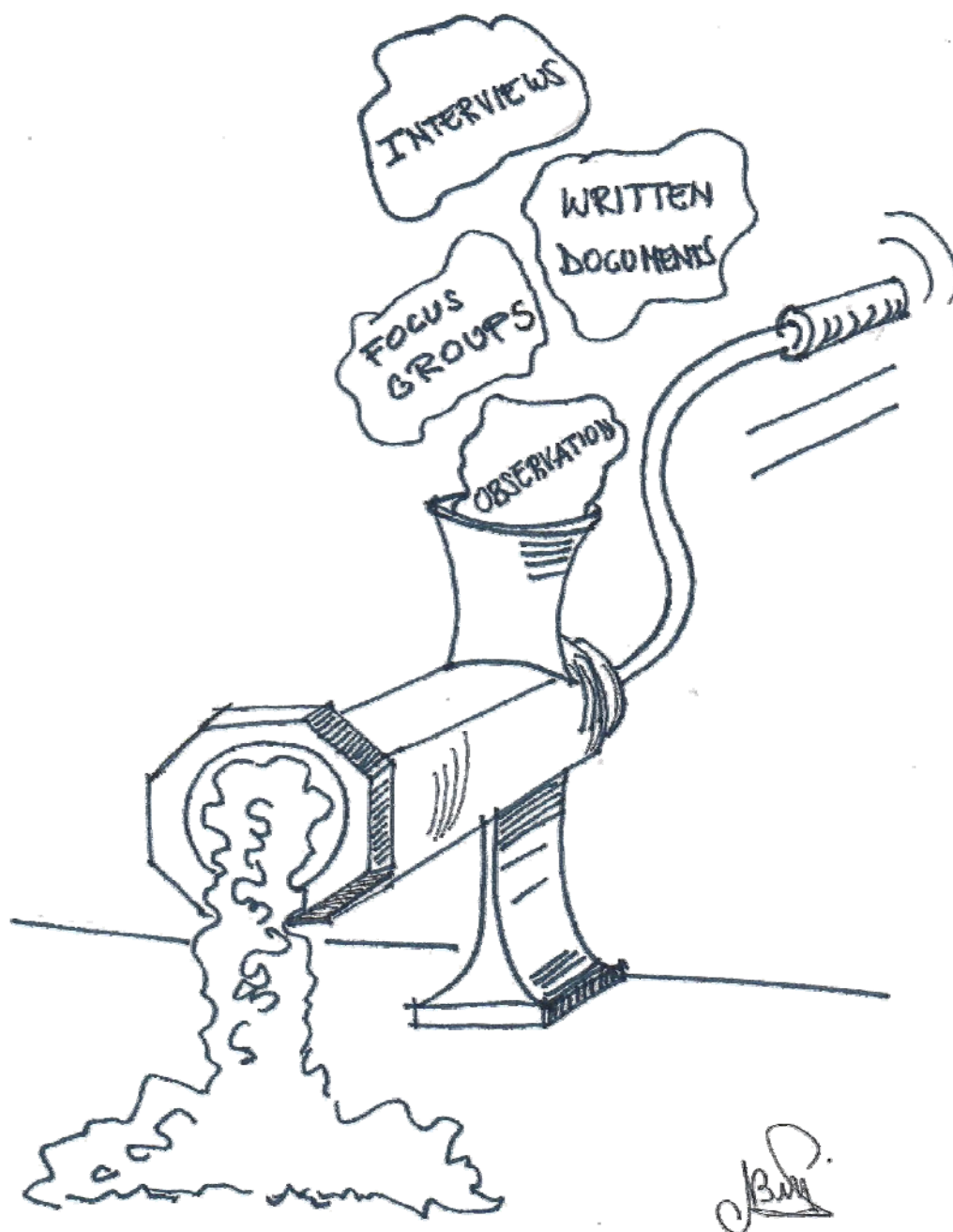
In Table 9, I discuss the main messages from the consultation of literature in this chapter. One should emphasize the importance of the nature of strategy consulting work. Since not only problem solving, but also impression management are at the centre of consulting work (Alvesson 2004; Clark, 1995), these should also be reflected in the roles played by strategy tools. Furthermore, the notions of *backstage* and *frontstage* (Goffman, 1959) enable better epistemological access to the enactment of analytic strategy tools in praxis. In addition, strategy tools are found not to be used rigidly and in isolation, and they show certain plasticity in action. Hence, bricolage (De Certeau, 1994) with strategy tools becomes a helpful lens to observe such enactment. The questions here are not whether bricolage is present in the enactment of strategy tools, but remaining loyal to the explorative design, they intend to shed light on how this bricolage is manifested.

In addition, this chapter illuminated a literature gap related to the sensemaking that the strategizers engage with while reflecting on their strategy tools in use. By problematizing sensemaking at this level, a less skewed answer could be obtained while discussing the “strategizing craft” these strategy practitioners possess, since the decision on whether to use a strategy tool and/or how to use it ultimately has consequences for the strategic decision making involved.

But prior to exploring the findings on RQ1-3, Chapters 4 and 5 set out the methodological underpinnings of this research.

Work aspects	Main findings	Implications
Working with clients	Impression management rather than problem solving are the main expertise venues of consultancies (Alvesson 2004; Clark, 1995)	- Strategy tools, if used, are to be associated not only with problem solving properties, but also with impression management properties. If this is the case, one should understand how and when this occurs.
Bricolage	Bricolage accompanies work praxis	- The types of bricolage with strategy tools, alongside the triggers of such bricolage, become the more interesting aspect for the research here.
Staged work	Work has different properties if occurring <i>frontstage</i> or <i>backstage</i> (Goffman, 1959)	- Strategy tools should be followed both <i>frontstage</i> and <i>backstage</i> to explore how their enactments differ: <i>RQ1 How are analytic strategy tools used in frontstage and backstage aspects of in-house strategy projects?</i> - Different set of tools might be used at different “stages” of work and/or the same tools might be used differently depending on the <i>backstage/frontstage</i> where they are to be enacted. <i>RQ2 What roles do (analytic) strategy tools serve in strategy work?</i>
Strategy tools as the object on which sensemaking occurs	“Reflection in action” (Schön, 1983) in parallel to (as well as prior to) the adoption of strategy tools	- The examination of sensemaking around strategy tools enables one to understand the reasons behind rejecting/accepting particular tools. <i>RQ3 What sense do strategy practitioners make and give to the tools they use during their strategy work?</i> - Sensemaking of strategy tools affects the sensemaking of the environment/problem field.

Table 9. Main findings from literature and related implications



The most common tools ethnographers use are pen and paper.

(Fetterman, 1989: 73)

4. Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1. Considerations on choice of methods

Scholars have highlighted that up to now the study of strategy tools has been detached from the context in which they are used (Burt et al., 2006). Such a detachment would result in an incomplete and flawed depiction of the reality of strategy tools in use. When considering the existing imbalance between studies on the intentionality of strategy tools (to be found mostly in books and literature with normative guidelines on the use of tools – e.g., those by Porter, or independent gurus, or manuals from consulting firms) and those on the actual use of strategy tools, this study gives preference to contributing to the latter. For this purpose, a qualitative methodology is deliberately chosen here.

A qualitative methodology is the best alternative when confronted with quantitative methods which reveal little about how strategy tools are used in practice. In more concrete terms, I adopt an exploratory methodology in preference to deductive/hypothesis testing for the following reasons: first, as derived from the basic premises of this study, here the aim is to obtain “actionable strategy knowledge” (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006). Thus, given the explorative nature of questions and their focus on the everyday praxis, qualitative methods are more useful here. Second, one of the major reasons for this

research is shedding light on the actual use of strategy tools in a consultancy domain. Only a few studies have offered empirics on strategy tool use in practice (e.g., Werr, 1999; Stenfors, 2007),¹⁰² and their methodologies cover only a partial depiction of reality (interviews, simulations).

Furthermore, published reports on strategy tool use have generally adopted questionnaires and surveys (e.g., see Bain's annual survey on strategy tools in use;¹⁰³ or Jarzabkowski et al., 2010, *Executive Report on the use of strategy tools*; or a recent article based on the latter survey study, by Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). These studies uncover aspects of strategy tool use (for example, the claimed frequency of strategy tools), however, due to methodological drawbacks (e.g., see Bryman, 2008 on the methodological drawbacks of surveys), they do not portray the richness and complexity of the actual use of strategy tools in practice.

Third, there is little theory on strategy tool use in (internal and external) consulting (as persistently claimed by the S-a-P approach – see Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; & Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006), hence methods that give good prospect to theory generation and elaboration (cf. Lee et al., 1999) should be given preference.

¹⁰² Both PhD dissertations organized as monographs (unpublished).

¹⁰³ Revisit *Appendix A* concerning illustrations.

4.2. Pilot study to inform methodological choice

A pilot study informed the choice of method in this study. In 2009 I conducted 17 interviews with strategy consultants to understand the role of strategy tools in their work¹⁰⁴ comparing strategy practices of first tier strategy consultancies with those of small strategy boutiques. In these interviews, respondents referred to the team approach on tool use often as “context dependent”, “ad hoc”, “depending on the project”. Here is a representative extract from a respondent, who during the interview stated that the approach to strategy assignments:

depends client to client, project to project, and to a certain extent depending on who is executing a project.

This is consistent with the literature discussed in this study embracing the varied used of strategy tools (e.g., as in Orlikowski, 2000; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Campbell ,1997; Weick, 1998, discussed earlier), hence not particularly counter-intuitive to existing literature on strategy tools. At the same time, this approach resonates with the phenomenon of bricolage, since the *bricoleur* “does not subordinate each of [the tasks] to the availability of raw materials and tools conceived and procured for the purpose of the project” Lévi-Strauss (1962: 17).

¹⁰⁴ This is an unpublished paper – presented at the EGOS Colloquium, Barcelona 2009.

However, it was interesting to observe early in the study that there was a reluctance to offer accounts on strategy tools when interacting with various consultants. This was consistent with previous research highlighting the issue, especially recognizing that consultants have been shown to be reluctant to offer information on their work with the clients (Lyll, 1977 in Gagnon, 1984; Payne & Lumsden, 1987). Another methodological drawback appeared here: even when willing to share their experiences, consultants would neglect to give detail on their use of strategy tools. This informed the choice of methodology further on: relying on consultants' opinions of their interactions with strategy tools would mean that access to their real interactions with strategy tools would be lacking. This is aligned with a methodological caution called for by various methodology authors (e.g., Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Hence, the pilot study undertaken here confirmed that to "study the underbelly" of strategy under making (Edge & Mulkay, 1976, as cited in Latour & Woolgar, 1979), another methodology was necessary, a methodology that would offer closer access to the enactment of strategy tools in practice. Due to the nature of its questions, this research demanded a more reflexive (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2000) methodology, both in data collection and display. To respond to these specific requirements, ethnography was chosen as a proper methodological venue.

4.3. Ethnography as a method to access "strategy tools in use"

This study relies on ethnography (Agar, 1980; 1996; Van Maanen, 1988; Hammersley, 1990) within a single site to depict strategy tools in use. Literally, ethnography means

creating a picture of a group's "way of life" (Wolcott, 1988: 188). The purpose of ethnographic design is to obtain a holistic representation of the subject of study with particular focus on the portrayal of participants' everyday experiences by observing and interviewing them and relevant others (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Ethnography as a term relates to both a process and outcome of research (Agar, 1980). Here both venues are pursued, hence data collection relied on ethnography, and at the same time, presentation is formatted following the ethnomethodological fashion.

In this study, participant observation and interviews have been used through a multiple-data collection methodology within a single site. Throughout this dissertation, I frequently refer to this experience as *fieldwork* (Wolcott, 1999). Participant observation was considered an advantageous method in gaining proximity to the phenomenon under study, i.e., strategy tools in use. This method is advantageous over many other methods in social research, as witnessed here:

[Participant observation] gives us more information about the event under study than data gathered from any other sociological method. Participant observation can thus provide us with a yardstick against which to measure the completeness of data gathered in other ways, a model which can serve to let us know what orders of information escape us when we use other methods (Becker & Geer 1957: 28).

Not only have the benefits of participant observation been acknowledged among sociological researchers, but they have been deemed important within the phenomenon under study through a S-a-P lens. Balogun et al. (2003) recognize that to study under this lens requires a close proximity with subjects under study, and in turn, deep and elaborate

accounts of the field context. Moreover, favouring an ethnographic approach with an action research inclination, the authors suggest that:

the more distant the researcher, the harder it can be to interpret what we have already described as the key methodological issue: the ability to recognize and draw out embedded tacit knowledge across multiple contexts in response to the depth/breath/diversity methodological gap. (Balogun et al. 2003: 202).

For a more pragmatic approach towards data collection, Balogun et al. (2003) further suggest employing different tactics such as: interactive discussion groups, self-report methods, and practitioner research. As will be elaborated later in this section, this study deploys two of these techniques.¹⁰⁵

Focusing on a single site is a valid choice when interest lies in day-to-day activities (Dougherty, 2002). Therefore, the choice of ethnographic design is not coincidental here: this method allows the opportunity to delve into the everyday experiences of practitioners (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) by observing them when “they relax ... and step out of character” (Goffman, 1959: 115). Prior studies in other occupational domains have indeed uncovered that there are differences between stage and backstage behaviour (e.g., see Woods, 1979, and Hammersley, 1980, on how teachers are shown to have significantly different behaviour in the classroom and the staffroom).

¹⁰⁵ Focus groups are included in interactive discussion groups as suggested by Balogun et al. (2003), whereas self-report methods include personal diaries and templates which, as will be discussed later on in this chapter, have all been included in the data collection methods used in this study.

Although it might appear challenging to provide a detailed account of the ethnography pursued here, I prioritize a reflexive account in order to obtain greater reliability in the power of findings. Contrary to my position, in ethnography “methodolatry” (cf. Janesick, 1994) is frequently discussed, referring to ethnographic studies that fall short of describing in detail the methods pursued when obtaining and analysing data. Indeed, as Stewart (1998: 2-3) reports:

"If one looks for research method discussions in the leading anthropology journals (e.g., *American Ethnologist*, *Man/Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*), one will, by and large, come up empty. In the more sociologically rooted journals that routinely publish ethnography (e.g., *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *Qualitative Sociology*), method is discussed, but briefly. Articles seldom explain the character or the management of the Data... Discussions focus on concerns, such as rater reliability checks that are much less important in ethnography than, say, the observer's relations with the actors" (*italics in the original*).

Abiding by a strict loyalty to ethnographic methods, I acknowledge challenges that arose not only in data analysis but much earlier, in the negotiations for field access, managing my role in the site, fulfilling access requirements, and developing a relationship with site members. The following sections take a close look at various challenges encountered in the site following a chronographic approach (beginning with the negotiations and handling preparations prior to entering the field).

4.4. Negotiations for entry

As the “entry period” in ethnography is critical and important for both the researcher and the organization (Spradley, 1980), I allotted myself a considerable period to prepare for my

entry into the field. Negotiations for entry took place over 11 months. During this period several sites meeting the sampling criteria (i.e., teams that worked in strategy consulting) were approached and negotiations followed. Sites fulfilling sampling criteria were approached with the support of internal Saïd Business School (SBS) professors and external contacts. Contacts followed principles of purposeful sampling (Given, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Usually a tailored project outline¹⁰⁶ was sent to each site considered for entry. Negotiations took place with the following companies:

- Accenture
- BCG
- IBM
- McKinsey & Company
- Vanguard (strategy boutique based in London).¹⁰⁷

None of the negotiations resulted in a finalized deal on the execution of fieldwork. Instead, successful negotiations took place with a Big Audit firm (unnamed here and throughout this report due to the non-disclosure agreement [NDA] in place).¹⁰⁸ A number of pragmatic and theoretical reasons contributed to the successful deal with this company. In respect of the former, it is worth mentioning the open approach of the sponsor¹⁰⁹ dealing with the

¹⁰⁶ Note that the research project outline has been transparent in laying out aims and research questions for the project, hence considering subjects in the site as knowledgeable agents (i.e., converging with the notion of “reflective practitioners”, as proposed by Schön, 1983)

¹⁰⁷ The list shows companies ranked in alphabetical order, neither following the order of negotiations taking place, nor following the size or reputations of the companies in question.

¹⁰⁸ The research project outline has been transparent in laying out the aims and research questions for the project, hence considering subjects in the site as knowledgeable agents (similar to the notion of “reflective practitioners” cf. Schön, 1983).

¹⁰⁹ Note that hereafter, I refer to the head of the team as “sponsor” given the gatekeeper role offered by her in this research. At the same time, one should distinguish between this sponsor and “workshop sponsors”,

ongoing communication we had, the generally good fit that was found between me and the hosting team,¹¹⁰ and the welcoming and prompt response from the HR contacts within the firm. In fact, out of all the companies contacted in the negotiations for entry, this was the first company to respond incredibly fast to the negotiation requests and take the necessary measures towards hosting me and my research in due course. A meeting took place in November 2011, after an official request sent the month before.¹¹¹ Thereafter, a deal was finalized within two weeks of the meeting and I could officially start my fieldwork in December 2011. Moreover, the openness of the hosting team and flexibility allowed during the preparation of the NDA, were, in the early stages, positive signals.

4.5. Research site

The site under study was a strategy (in-house) consultancy within a Big Audit firm.¹¹² This unit consisted of 12 employees, of whom three were located in North America.¹¹³ The unit had been part of the organizational structure for many years and was expanding during my time in the field. Communication within the team was daily both within the offices in

where the latter term refers to the clients of the team, in other words, the practitioners that had commissioned the organization of workshops by the team members in focus here.

¹¹⁰ One implicit reason which played a role in allowing quick access is the educational background of the sponsor, who attended the same university as the one in which this degree was undertaken. Early on, this proximity of backgrounds was highlighted by the sponsor, possibly suggesting that this, implicitly, was a key factor in allowing quick access to the team.

¹¹¹ The official letter requesting access is listed under Appendices in *Appendix F*. Note that similar letters were sent to various firms as negotiations for entry. These were tailored to accommodate the “purposeful sampling” required in this situation.

¹¹² The exact firm size is not disclosed here, however the Big Audit firms are well-known each to provide employment to well more than 100,000 employees worldwide.

¹¹³ More details on the composition and main aims of the unit are presented in *Appendix G*.

London, and virtually so that team members from the US offices could be included. Therefore teleconferences were not a rare occurrence. This research site was aligned with the sampling criteria which aim at obtaining a case where the phenomenon under study (strategy tools in use) could be explored in more detail. The unit was led by a managing partner, and it had frequent communication with the chief operating officer (COO) of the company. This in-house consultancy undertook various ad hoc strategy projects during the year (the range in the last three years varied from 20 to 30 projects).¹¹⁴ The ad hoc projects undertaken by the unit were focused on strategy and innovation, and almost all of its members had prior experience as consultants in major consultancies. Most of these ad hoc projects were organized as strategy workshops aimed at the leadership of the company. These workshops received special attention during this study, as they represented a distinct enactment of strategy practice (Whittington, 2006) frequently organized by this in-house consultancy.

Recent literature on workshops has emphasized that workshops could be seen as “strategic episodes” representing specific features such as distinction in time – a beginning and an end – and that they involve a degree of removal from everyday practice (cf. Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2010). Moreover, strategy workshops in this unit corresponded to a particular “liturgy” (Johnson et al., 2010: 10) associated with their implementation, and therefore the research focus was on the connection of strategy tools

¹¹⁴ Based on intranet search and validated by discussion with team members.

with different features and phases of the workshop liturgy, followed by the in-house consultancy (as will be further discussed in Chapter 6).

4.6. Uncovering in-house consulting as an interesting research site

This in-house consultancy offered the opportunity to delve into the examination of strategy practices, but it was also constrained in that it hosted only a specific type of client (i.e., clients internal to the firm). However, it represented a very interesting site since there is an asymmetric representation of internal consulting in research: while multiple accounts have witnessed the proliferation of in-house consultancy in recent decades, research has not mirrored this same development. For example, it has been reported that in-house consultancies were the fastest growing segment of consulting business at the beginning of the 1980s (Johri et al., 1998). More recently, internal consultancy has been found in various countries: a survey within the German market found that three-quarters of publicly traded companies had in-house consultancies (Mohe & Kolbeck, 2003); another survey of the 500 largest organizations in Sweden found out that around one-fifth of these firms had established internal consulting structures (Pemer & Werr, 2009). At the same time, there is little research on professional service firms, let alone in-house consulting (Wylie et al., 2010).¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Additionally, from a preliminary research in EBSCO (as of December 2012), there were few academic articles found in this domain (in a time span of the last 20 years, by enquiring “internal consulting” or “internal consultant” in the title, abstract or author submitted keyword, only 35 articles appeared as a result).

But what deserves further consideration in the research design is how the notion of “in-house” consulting differs from external consultancies, and more generally professional service firms (PSFs), so that methodology can be adjusted accordingly. As signalled in the definition section, there are differences between internal and external consultants, especially when referring to the type of client they operate with (respectively, internal vs. external). In general, PSFs are argued to create a specific context for management so that they prove unsuitable for bureaucratic management models (Greenwood et al., 1990; Løwendahl, 2005). In this context, internal consultancies are helpful structures so that organizations can efficiently deal with complexity in international settings (Johri, et al., 1998). In-house consultancies often compete with PSFs for clients and employees (Maister, 1993). However, despite its advantages, Ejenäs and Werr (2011) point out that in-house consultancy faces four main challenges: defining its strategy as distinctive compared with external providers; building and maintaining its reputation; maintaining sustainable connections with the partner firm; and fighting to attract new talent (a challenge also faced by external consultancies). Although these are important aspects, in this research one would expect reputation management and human resource practices to have particularly distinctive features when comparing internal with external consultancies, but not to transcend significantly different features of practices related to strategy.

Does operating in the same structure and culture as the client mean that internal consultants’ ways of working are significantly different from those of external consultants? This is a question that does not have a definitive answer to date, and is an aspect to be

considered in this research. From a functional focus, internal consultants may be substituted for external consultants, since they provide similar services, such as problem solving and implementation (Johri et al., 1998). Following this perspective, one could expect in-house consultancies to operate in the same (and/or similar) ways as other PSFs. However, the research questions of this dissertation are not oriented toward consultant-client relationships. Hence, any existing nuances that distinguish external from internal consultancies are not the main focus here.

4.7. Managing my role in the site

The communication with the site in question proved efficient from the first steps; shortly after the first contact with the unit, preparations were made for successfully entering the site. This involved meeting the sponsor, obtaining introductory documents usually issued as deliverables by the team, and more broadly consulting Internet resources for general descriptive information about the firm, whereas, at the beginning of my fieldwork, I was given a complete induction to the team and members' tasks. The latter involved reading through various documents in induction binders, where examples of deliverables were offered along with team member profiles and expertise. Additionally, I was introduced to confidential partner documents, so I had an overview of ongoing restructuring within the firm. I noticed that a high level of clearance was given to me, which allowed confidence to be built in the initial stages in the field.

Since no initial discussions on confidentiality occurred upon initiation of fieldwork, a confidentiality agreement was issued upon my personal request. As Whyte (1955: 317) notes, “the field worker cannot afford to think only of learning to live with others in the field. He has to continue living with himself.” Thus, I had decided that my entry into the field should be through “informed consent” (Marzano, 2007).¹¹⁶ At the beginning of the negotiation, I was presented with a confidentiality agreement which had the same layout as the agreement presented to other employees. However, given my special circumstances, I requested a new agreement with better terms of disclosure. The sponsor was very comprehensive on the issue and set a meeting with a firm lawyer. During the meeting, I requested ample access to data from the company and the right to observe and record during my work. In return, I promised to conceal the identity of team members and any detail which would directly link to their current projects, explicitly or implicitly. In parallel, appropriate measures were taken with the University to comply with the ethical rules devised on the matter. Hence, an ethical approval was obtained.¹¹⁷ Early on in the field, I explained my role to the unit members both informally and formally.¹¹⁸ Although the issue of “self-disclosure” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 91) is a sensitive one in ethnography, I decided early on in the study that I would be very open about the aims of my research. Following a high reflexivity style when communicating my research intentions to the team, I showed high transparency, hence promoting a very open approach towards

¹¹⁶ See *Appendix H* with a copy of the consent form and related background information offered.

¹¹⁷ See an excerpt from the ethical approval in *Appendix I*.

¹¹⁸ For the latter, see *Appendix J* showing a common email I sent to all team members to introduce my research intentions and also to lay out my intentions for future contacts with them in relation to my research design.

the team under focus.¹¹⁹ As a result, I was welcomed as a new addition to the team from the early days of my fieldwork.

I was immersed in the site for six months working four days a week. Not only did I experience the working week, but also the commuting experience shared nowadays by many employees in the modern corporate world, and could well be counted among the one of 10 commuters who spend more than two hours getting to work on a working day in Britain (Lyons & Chatterjee, 2008).¹²⁰ My working day would encompass a trip back and forth to London Mondays to Thursdays for the duration of six months. During my working days, I was appointed to undertake various tasks supporting ad hoc members of the team and specific projects.¹²¹ Fridays were used to catalogue data and keep pace with the classification and analysis of observations. On a few occasions I worked from home due to the requirements of specific projects. For example, sometimes I had to participate in international conference calls starting at 7am. Such conference calls were followed from home, as I was not located close to the headquarters. My working day consisted of approximately the same working hours as the team I worked with, from eight to 11 hours a day. The days with heavier workload were the ones where my presence was required to finalize a task, rather than to work on observations or intended ethnographic talks. Hence, I

¹¹⁹ Feminist studies provide a compelling argument towards open research disclosure with study participants: they claim that the researcher cannot expect honesty and openness from participants, if one does not show openness oneself (see Oakley, 1981).

¹²⁰ Following estimations from 2007-2008 by the same authors.

¹²¹ A list of my tasks undertaken during my working days in the field is shown in *Appendix K*.

did participate in the work undertaken by the team as an employee and a team member, and in meetings I would be introduced as such.

In the first weeks working with the team, I had to build trust with team members, in order to become closer to their experiences and interactions. This involved what Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 83) call “impression management”, which encompasses not only the external image and presentation (such as attire, jargon, and use of the same artefacts as other team members – for example, a company laptop), but also being appointed to take care of everyday tasks. Hence, my presence in the field demanded continuous management of “self” (Goffman, 1959), with fluctuating results. For example, during the first month with the team, I was appointed to take care of online polling to be undertaken during a strategy workshop, with members being company executives from around the world. This task was to be accomplished through the use of new proprietary software that the team had no prior experience with. Questionnaire design and software inscription were all part of the task.

These tasks helped me build a level of credibility and trust in the early stages with the team. So did the social events organized by the unit, which allowed me to further gain proximity to team members and talk with them informally. Indeed, by the end of the first month in the field, the sponsor confided during a recorded talk:

It seems like you have been with us for a long time, but it's a good thing (Sponsor, O111-18).¹²²

Inclusion in the field was certainly favoured strongly by business skills and knowledge of the business domain. Such skills are shown to enforce the working identity of an ethnographer and:

"this way, the fieldworker can demonstrate that he or she is not an exploitative interloper but has something to give" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995: 88).

By actively participating in and contributing to everyday activities, the trade-off between gathering observations and helping the natives became increasingly obvious. For example, I had to manage my role as a team member, giving an opinion or contributing to a discussion, or I had to work extensively for several demanding periods on a few occasions. Although this helped me negotiate my role as a member of the team, I had to cope with the trade-off of taking notes of observations, meetings, and other events. As a result, I favoured my position as a researcher, hence avoiding giving evaluations or opinions as much as I would have done had I not been a researcher. This was not entirely unproblematic. Being seen as an "expert on strategy tools", not only brought opportunities of access, but also showcased challenges in the research. Several times, team members asked my opinion in meetings I participated in. Declining to offer an opinion on a few occasions led to further probing from team members to obtain my opinion. This was also

¹²² Note that from now on, aside from the source that has supplied the view in citations and observations (i.e., the clarification of positions such as "[fieldwork] sponsor", "workshop facilitator", "strategy analyst" etc.), I accompany each citation with the index based on my repository of data. To read this index, one needs to make use of the detailed indexing diagram presented in Figure 7 – Data source tree. For example, the citation provided here is obtained from observations (O1) as part of daily work (1) and related to everyday tasks (1). Refer to Figure 7 for more details on the indexing structure.

communicated to me informally. For example, during an introductory lunch with a team member, I was invited to be active in my contributions. Although one could consider the continuous persistence of the team an act of valuing opinion, this was a continuous pressure which threatened the balance between research and work in the field.¹²³

Hence, I had to carefully control the level of my “intervention” within the field. Resisting the risk of becoming “a native” (see Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; and Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, who discuss the problematic outcome of the researcher becoming a native), I had to cope during my presence in the field by shifting within the spectrum between being an observer and a participant. As a result, I aimed to become what is considered to be typical for an ethnographer, a “marginal native” (Freilich, 1970), or, in other words, I aimed to be both an observer and a team member, acting as an active participant observer (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Spradley, 1980). Furthermore, time was an important variable to describe the oscillations of my “negotiated presence” in the field. Whereas in the beginning of my fieldwork, there was a clear focus on becoming a participant in the eyes of the natives, towards the end of my fieldwork, I gave more consideration to the enhancement of my role as an observer, allowing the emerging findings to crystallize. Hence, the overall observer/participant balance encompassed various trade-offs that needed to be assessed and reassessed during fieldwork.

¹²³ Note that I explicitly distinguish between “work in the field” (to denote the work that I had to undertake for the organization) and “fieldwork” (to denote work for my research within the field).

4.8. Data collection

Data collection consisted of four main entries: observations, interviews, written documents, and focus groups. Data were organized and catalogued systematically on the Friday of each week. Contact summary forms and document summary forms (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994) were developed and catalogued alongside this fieldwork. Multiple data sources were used to complete and complement each other, here taking the stance that “deep immersion in social settings associated with ethnography and detailed conversation analyses’ of `audiotapes’ are not competing, but complementary, methodologies” (Miller, 1997: 159). The four data entries are presented hereafter in more detail:

4.8.1. Observations

Observations consist of documents based on “lived reality encountered in the field setting” (Creswell, 2003: 14). In addition, observations seem to demand, by default, the presence of participation:

Observation without participation in other people’s lives may involve ethnographic methods but is not ethnography (Fetterman, 1998: 37).

Due to my position as an “active participant observer” (Spradley, 1980), I strongly relied on observations as the basis for my ethnography. The major bulk of observation data gathered for this study is based on my participation in strategy projects. Following such praxis, the data collected derived from participation as follows.

- Daily work: the first audience to have been addressed in this research was "*the self*" (c.f. Miles & Huberman, 1994: 280, italics in the original), hence a research diary

with daily notes taken in between tasks in the working days. Field notes were compiled and completed on the same day (Bernard, 2002). These were not mere interpretations or observations, but in various cases these notes were personal reflections on ongoing phenomena, and insights on information and contacts gathered during this fieldwork.¹²⁴

- Participation in *strategy workshops* (two strategy workshops were experienced in person). Since some workshops took place in sites other than the headquarters, often even out of Europe, attending more workshops in person was not deemed financially or practically possible.
- Participation in *meetings* – both routine team meetings,¹²⁵ and meetings intended for the ongoing strategy projects (in total more than 30 meetings were attended, with half of them consisting of routine team meetings); not only was I participating in meetings, but I was also appointed by the sponsor to chair¹²⁶ several, in rotation with other team members, a positive reinforcement for the team's perception that my work contribution was in line with that of other team members'.

¹²⁴ As introduced earlier, *Appendix C* consists of an excerpt from my research diary.

¹²⁵ During routine team meetings, each member would report to the rest of the team the various individual tasks undertaken since the previous meeting, and in addition sub-team groups would report on ongoing projects and their progress. In addition, special topics were examined in various meetings, this usually upon request of team members (such illustrations are: my presence in the field and preliminary findings; knowledge resources within the company's structure; new initiatives – firm-wide as well as departmental – with implications for the team).

¹²⁶ Chairing meetings encompassed the preparation of an agenda and therefore continuous prior communication with other team members to tailor the forthcoming meeting to their expressed expectations.

- Participation in two training workshops designed to disseminate new or existing tools and methods (note that these are different from the strategy workshops reported earlier in this section as these are undertaken with the main purpose of training based on a new tool or practice).

Collecting notes was done not only with pen and paper but also directly onto a computer. Since the working environment enabled the continuous presence of a computer, I had the chance to take notes quickly which proved very practical, given the daily time constraints which resulted from my dual role in the field (as both a researcher and a co-worker). In addition, note taking required certain flexibility. During a previous ethnographic piece written for my *Advanced Qualitative Methods* class,¹²⁷ I had acquired a good degree of creativity while conducting research. For example, due to my covert status during my term project, I had allowed myself to take notes as sms drafts in my telephone. This way my activity would be barely noticeable, and appear a habit well in keeping with the other members'. In this fieldwork I could discreetly take notes using various sms drafts, on some occasions in the presence of team members. I did not engage often in this activity, but I did so especially when immediately taking notes of phrases or exchanges between team members seemed imperative in the situation, and no other resources were accessible at the time.

¹²⁷ I had undertaken work as a covert field worker while in an environment previously unknown to me: *WeightWatchers* (Oxford). During this prior ethnography I had become a *gold member* (title obtained through a well-organized ceremony) of the organization maintaining my covert status throughout the period of my stay in the field.

My collection of field notes was guided by goals of impartiality (Bernard, 2002). Most importantly, this led to an acknowledgement that my observations were not to be treated as a single source of information on the context, but they were to be continuously put into question through triangulation with other data sources in a continuous quest for objectivity. Nevertheless, observations were given a strong focus among the various data sources, since collecting observations on occasions allows a deeper delving into the phenomena under study than do interviews since “attitudes or habits that natives espouse virtually without thinking are distinct and clear to the stranger” (Fetterman, 1998: 17).

In relation to the incurred timeline, a good amount of observations were collected in the first weeks in the field. This stage is crucial in data collected through ethnography (Geer, 1969). By getting more and more acquainted with the work setting and the team members through both formal and informal events, I had the chance to continuously question and redefine my observations. In addition, since recollection bias is a recognized effect spoiling ethnographic data gathering (Fetterman, 1998), attention was devoted to fast recording of observations, in situ or soon after the working day, while travelling back from work.

4.8.2. Interviews

Beyond data gathered directly by participation in strategy projects, data collection encompassed interviews with key staff involved in the projects, including partners, executives, and junior consultants. In total 47 interviews were undertaken, while during the extended stay several follow up talks took place after exiting the field. Talks were

undertaken as ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979) with team members as well as relevant others¹²⁸ (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) concerning ongoing projects. The ethnographic interview here is understood similarly to a “friendly conversation” (Spradley, 1979: 58). This is similar to what others call a “qualitative interview” (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Warren, 2001). This type of interview is a direct inheritor of the Chicago school and is seen as a very strong component that complements other data collection means used in ethnography, such as observations (Warren, 2001). I see interviews as conversations I had with respondents, not only due to the methodology I embrace, but also to the “closeness” I had achieved with the respondents due to the continuous work with the team. Hence, I considered them as colleagues with whom I could also share and validate the impressions I had on my exposure to their working environment.

In line with Spradley (1979), the ethnographic interviews conducted here consisted of both descriptive and structural questions. For the former, elements of projects were enquired, general working patterns belonging to the team members, whereas for the latter, questions about “how informants had organized their knowledge” (ibid: 60) were conducted, for example, what types of strategy tools team members used the most and how they classified them from their own viewpoint. During my questions around strategy tools, I focused attention on specific bundles of tools as they had emerged from my prior

¹²⁸ Within this context, relevant others are understood to be: organization members or outsiders that had direct interaction with the team due to ongoing projects (these included: participants in strategy workshops, organization members – IE – that interacted with the team, and external consultants that were outsourced on an ad hoc basis).

consultation with literature (especially as they emerged from the literature discussed in Chapter 3, with detailed discussions provided especially by Mintzberg et al., 1998; 2008; Ghemawatt, 2002; and McKenna, 2006) as well as MBA education,¹²⁹ accumulated, and ongoing, strategy knowledge. I lay out a very detailed table I prepared, to extract the origin of various strategy tools in relation to the strategy literature on which they are based.¹³⁰ By continuously filtering the strategy tools identified, I found in five distinct groups of strategy tools to be pursued in my research:

(1) MBA curriculum frameworks – these included Porter’s frameworks (e.g., Five Forces, Value Chain, Diamond etc.), broadly diffused frameworks in both academia and business (e.g., SWOT, PESTEL, various 2x2 prioritization matrices, etc.), and consultancy originated frameworks (e.g., the BCG matrix, the McKinsey GE matrix, etc.). These are tools that one could generally encounter in case study manuals or interview preparation self help books when joining consulting (for example, Rasiel, 1999, and Rasiel et al., 2001 are two examples that explain McKinsey tools to aspiring consultants).

¹²⁹ During my DPhil, I served some time as a teaching assistant for strategy courses in various degrees (MBA, eMBA, and Diploma levels). These experiences help me refresh my acquaintance with strategy tools taught in up to date Strategy curricula.

¹³⁰ This table of various strategy schools and the strategy tools they have contributed to is shown in *Appendix K*.

(2) “Cognitive frameworks”¹³¹ – these are generally frameworks for broadly framing problems and organizing analysis and solutions with clear and straightforward rules of thumb. Trees of various kinds are included in such groups (e.g., issue trees, value trees, hypothesis trees). Although I have not found these frameworks to be taught in academia apart from a few exceptions,¹³² I did find in my pilot study (refer to discussion in section 4.2) that these are tools used frequently in consulting domains. Self help books also point to these types of tools (see for example, Rasiel, 1999, and Rasiel et al., 2001).

(3) Creative tools¹³³ – these are tools that help promote new ideas (e.g., brainstorming, Five Hats etc.). Generally these are tools that are found in facilitating manuals especially for the purpose of workshop and meeting support. I referred to these types of tools also based on more recent work that demands furthering of research towards “strategy toys” (cf. Stenfors' PhD dissertation, 2007) which are understood as tools that help creative strategy work.

(4) Home-grown tools – based on consulting the literature and the vast creativity of consultancies with strategy tools (see discussion in literature), here questions were

¹³¹ This is my own labelling to this category, simply based on an intuitive assessment of this group of strategy tools.

¹³² As an exemption, see this Cambridge engineering class online http://www-diva.eng.cam.ac.uk/energy/mpjteaching/issues/hyp_tree/hyp_tree.html (this is a helpful interactive guide created by Matthew Juniper, University of Cambridge – with short “how to” videos shown along clear examples).

¹³³ As the earlier note, this is my own labelling of the category, simply based on an intuitive assessment of this group of strategy tools.

prompted about tools that could be claimed to originate from within the firm. Although the border of “innovativeness” towards such tools could be difficult to delineate clearly (i.e., difficult to assess the innovativeness of “repackaged” ideas), here the attention was on frameworks that the firm could claim to have a stake in creating, and consequently also a level of ownership. This was not only to chase tools that had copyright or (trade)marks claimed from the firm, but all tools that the firm marketed as home-grown, or grown from within. Here the exploration did not take into account home-grown tools that were created or used outside the strategy domain.¹³⁴

(5) Miscellaneous – any other strategy tools – this was a space dedicated to broaden the discussion on strategy tools, based on the knowledge and experience of the respondents. When asking about this category, attention was given to strategy tools that respondents not only knew about, but were also keen to use in their everyday work.

It should be noted that the attention here lies exclusively on analytic strategy tools. Hence, strategy tools conceived to guide processes (such as project management), or artefacts (such as physical electronic devices, digital platforms, etc.) are not included in the categories presented earlier.

¹³⁴ For example, the Advisory Service Line of the firm would have tools that were developed towards process optimization or supply chain.

As stated, using the question prompts mentioned above in the prepared interviews, questions oriented generically towards analytic strategy tools were asked, covering each category. In parallel, there was a second type (Type II) of interview format that consisted of questions about the phases a strategy workshop goes through before being staged.¹³⁵ Whereas structural questions had a low variance across interviews, descriptive questions changed greatly due to the different type of projects undertaken by team members. In these interviews, interviewees were encouraged to meander in their responses, using prompts when possible (Spradley, 1979). Below is an excerpt from an interview with a workshop facilitator, showing several prompts inviting the respondent for further clarification:

Facilitator: Yes, and I have a method which is not unlike what anybody else uses here, but I have my own way of... implementing and approaching the method, so.

Interviewer: OK. You mean individual, not the one you share with *(name of colleague hidden here, due to confidentiality)*, for example, it's your own way of dealing with the project?

Facilitator: Yes. And we all work from kind of the same methodology and, to be candid, most of our consultants work from a very similar methodology when they work with clients.

Interviewer: You mean in terms of workshops...?

Facilitator: Well in terms of doing business, and our consultants do a lot of workshops. Their business is having, having meetings...

Interviewer: Consultants, you mean the advisory team...?

Facilitator: Yes, the advisory team. Yes, their business... (I22-1-9K16)

Additionally, specific protocols were developed to interview the external consultants engaged for a major project (discussed in detail in Chapter 8 of this thesis) which was initiated during the third month of fieldwork and continued for the duration. In these

¹³⁵ Revisit *Appendix D* for the types of interviews conducted and their respective formats. In addition, refer to *Appendix L* for excerpts from both Type I and II interviews.

interviews, external consultants were questioned on their previous experience with strategy tools and the training provided by their firm to interiorize analytic strategy tools.

As a further component in building protocols for interviews, the “reflection in action” (Schön, 1983) lens demanded that various ongoing problems were followed with enquiry. Consequently, several (Type II) interviews (approximately one third of interviews), were held referring to ongoing drafts of documents (usually PowerPoint slides), and in these cases respondents reflected on the material at hand. Here is how one interviewee reflects during this type of interview:

Respondent: ... well you're the only one I've gone into detail actually with this.

Interviewer: OK.

Respondent: I haven't gone into detail with anyone else.

Interviewer: Sorry.

Respondent: No, no, no, that's good, no, that's good. It puts it clear in my head as well. (Strategy analyst, I22-1-6K24)

For practical reasons, slide numbers were called on loudly during this type of interview.

After transcribing these interviews, the material transcribed was attached to the original slides the interviews referred to.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ *Appendix M* shows excerpts from two interviews: one (Type I interview) of a generic nature – interviews taken mainly at initial stages of fieldwork pertained to this type – whereas the second shows an interview mainly referring to slides of an ongoing project (hence, the latter consisted of more descriptive questions using various prompts to clarify on the context in question, as discussed earlier for Type II interviews).

4.8.3. Written documents

Written documents included externally (i.e., public materials) and internally targeted documents. Some examples of the former consisted of brochures and booklets produced by the team, other departments, and service lines. Examples of the latter include white papers, organization charts, team structure and organization, manuals of strategy tools, guidelines, and archival documents, on past projects aided by the team or in which the team had participated. Additional documents on the corporate and business strategy of the firm were consulted. Also consulted were protocols, reports, archival data, and training manuals. These included PowerPoint documents, spreadsheets, and other documents in proprietary software. The material collected reflected the company's culture, policies, and procedures. For example, I encountered a company manual on the use of strategy tools to understand in-house incentives towards their use within the firm and to identify any propensity towards home grown or external tools. Additionally, data was gathered from emails¹³⁷ received and circulated while working as part of the team.

Written material included a vast amount of information (data encompassing more than 20GB of space and hundreds of pages of internal documents) that in many cases required continuous filtering between what was directly relevant to this research, what was only marginally relevant, and what did not contribute to the research questions posed here. At the same time, the presence of written sources enabled the inclusion of rather

¹³⁷ Being part of the team, I was sent many routine emails on weekly and bi-weekly meetings, workshops, or even any social gatherings.

“unobtrusive” data (Webb et al., 1966; Webb & Weick, 1979) that complement more obtrusive data such as observations and interviews. Triangulation (Jick, 1979; Patton, 1990) is achieved by the deployment of these multiple data sources.

4.8.4. Focus groups

To improve internal validity,¹³⁸ multiple sources of data were coupled with further consultation with informants. Two focus groups (Morgan, 1988; 1997) were undertaken towards the conclusion of fieldwork. This was deemed necessary to support the primary methods of data collection in this study, observations and interviews, in line with Morgan’s account (1997: 3) that testifies to their use as “follow up data”.

The first focus group consisted of my presentation of preliminary findings. This was well attended, showing that team members had a great interest in the preliminary findings of the study. Preliminary ideas were probed and discussed with team members.

The second focus group consisted of a session I facilitated for the purpose of presenting a category of strategy tools at the request of team members. During this session, team members worked on exercises with these tools, and shared with other team members their

¹³⁸ Please note that “validity” here is not understood in its positivist notion (for example, as from Yin, 1984), but through discussions that review its equivalent for an interpretivist study (for example, see Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, for their discussion of “thick description” cf. Geertz, 1973).

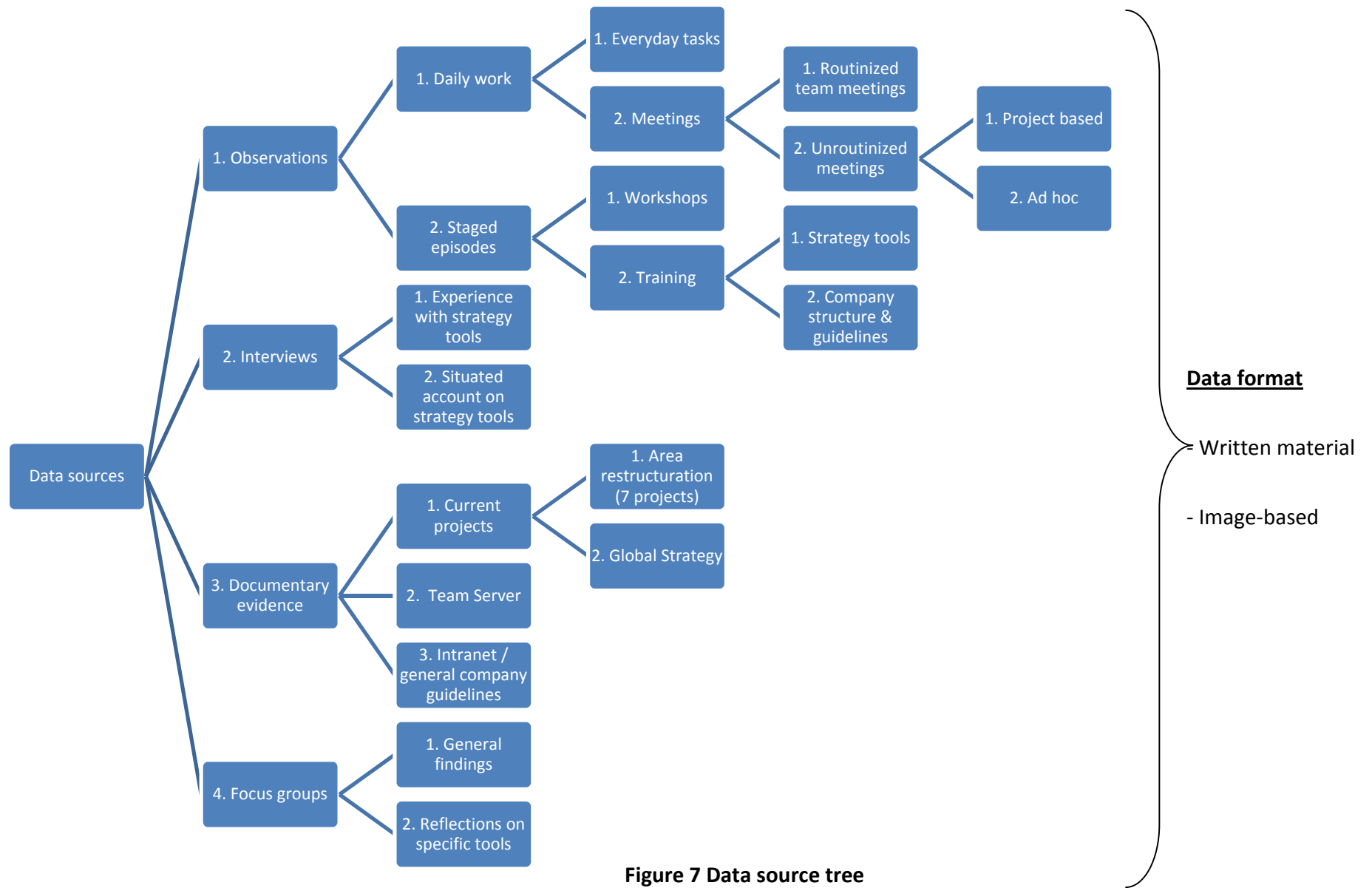
experiences with strategy tools of this nature as well as concerns related to their use. Both focus groups lasted around 1.5 to two hours, and were transcribed. They both had a very good turnout (all team members – except for one who was on a business trip – participated in the first session; all team members including two new who were new participated in the second). Focus groups contributed to the data gathered through observations and individual interviews, as they offered platforms where team participants would learn about each other's opinion on strategy tools and also bring forward their considerations of tools as a whole team.

Table 9 shows in more detail a structure of how observations, interviews, and written documents have been organized and catalogued. In addition, this table provides illustrations of specific entries for each item of data collected during the fieldwork. Due to the vast amount of data collected, careful and diligent organization of data items was necessary so that analysis would follow without major challenges. Consequently, a data source tree was compiled (shown in Figure 7).

Data category	Way of cataloguing/organizing data	Concrete illustrations
Observations	- Daily observations captured through notes - Participation in meetings, workshops (recorded and transcribed; chronologically catalogued) - Weekly summary of main reflections upon fieldwork (compiled weekly, each Friday after having worked in the field the previous days)	- Research diary; tasks, activities, patterns seen when working daily in the unit - Attention given to organizational aspects of strategy workshops, preparatory work, information on strategic analyses and any specific strategy tools encountered - General patterns on processes, practices, and embedded strategy tools are aimed for here. Also participation on strategy tools' related training is noted here (there have been two workshops of this kind during the study)
Interviews	- Recurring interviews (open and semi-structured)- generally as ethnographic interviews/talks (Spradley, 1979) with each member of the team around their experience with current and past projects - Interviews with clients¹³⁹ - Interviews with outsourced consultants working together with the unit	- Main thematic: relationship of strategy tools with the process; the contextual elements believed by the interviewees to influence the choice of particular tools; individual and group experience with strategy tools; the role of tools embedded in different practices in the consultancy process; as well as background questions (previous experience, education etc.) - Their experience as consumers of deliverables handed by the unit, their knowledge and approach vs. work done by the unit and their opinion as workshop participants - The "outsider's" perspective on tools used by this in-house consultancy
Written documents	- Copies of emails - Global reports produced by the unit - Minutes of meetings, seminars, and workshops - Official circulated reports on seminars workshops produced by the unit - Documents on origins of tools and any parties involved in their development and promotion.	- Emails in relation to strategy projects, their project management and cues related to strategy analysis and strategy workshops - ITA with the purpose to find strategy tools shown/promoted there - Interaction of individuals with specific tools (SWOT, scenario analysis etc.) - Attention towards recommendations proposed and any intermediary tools to justify those recommendations - Focus into the history and development of the unit under study and the strategy tools used most often within the firm - Training manuals and other supporting material
Focus groups	- Both focus groups recorded and transcribed	- Preliminary findings prompted during focus groups along with discussion on roles of tools - Emphasis put on identifying and resolving tensions between claims and preliminary findings

Table 9. An overview of categories of data collected

¹³⁹ In the particular research site chosen for this project, "clients" are parties internal to the organization.



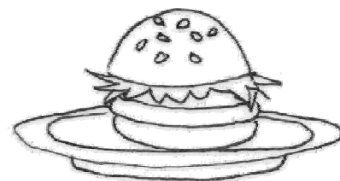
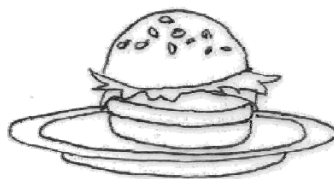
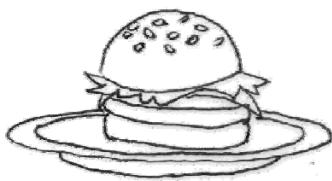
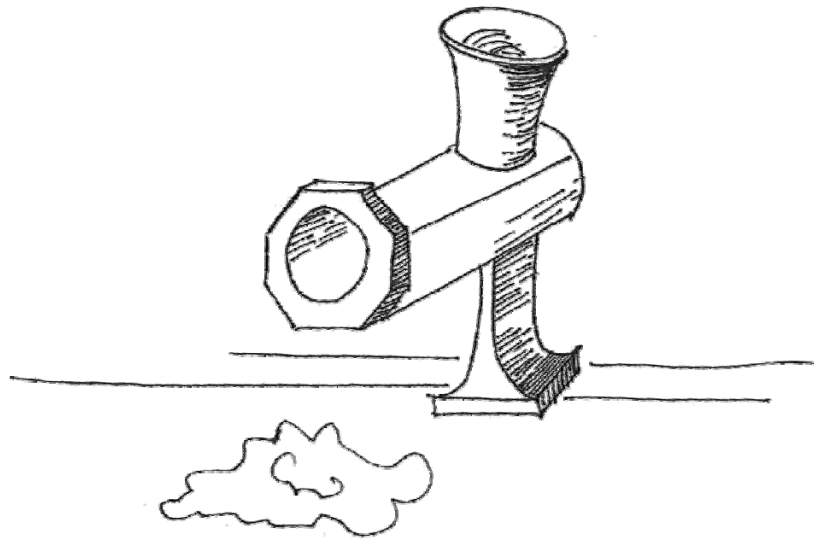
The data source tree shown in Figure 7 displays a structure of the data collected as they were clustered in relation to how they were captured and in relation to the indexing that was added for their further cataloguing. To provide an example of the indexing used throughout the data gathered and analysed, the index¹⁴⁰ 3.1.1. refers to material pertaining to 3. Documentary evidence, 1. Current Projects, 1. Area restructuring (7 projects). This tree helped in retrieving data, which is particularly difficult given the overwhelming amount of information collected through ethnography (Stewart, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

As a conclusion to this chapter, I present Table 10 highlighting the major discussions engaged with while laying out the methodology. Choice of methods, data collection, and site specifications were discussed here, leaving a detailed description of data analysis procedures to be presented in the following chapter.

¹⁴⁰ Note that this index system is used throughout in this dissertation to clearly indicate the data source used when reporting verbatim citations from fieldwork.

Methodology aspects	Main considerations	Implications
Choice of methods	- Pilot study - What method provides better access to understanding the use of strategy tools	- Ethnography (Agar, 1980) appears as the most appropriate overarching methodology for this study. - Criteria for sampling should orient towards the most appropriate site for entry coupled with “purposeful sampling” (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Given, 2008). - Negotiation of entry becomes crucial in successfully tackling with an appropriate site.
Data collection	- Use multiple methods of data collection - Carefully negotiate own role in the field	- Observations should not be undertaken alone, but coupled with interviews and written documents. - Additionally, focus groups could be used as media to validate findings here. - Meticulous cataloguing of data is necessary to keep up with the multiple channels of information within the field. - Attention towards not becoming “a native” as a general concern of ethnographies.
Site characteristics	- In-house consultancy within a Big Audit firm represents an interesting site	- Since no significant difference is observed in literature between the practices of internal and external consultancies, findings obtained from the former could be generalized further to the latter and strategy work more generally.

Table 10. Overarching methodological concerns and related implications



Handwritten signature or initials.

RQ1

RQ2

RQ3

5. Chapter 5: Data analysis

While the previous chapter engaged with methodological rationale and issues related to data collection and cataloguing, in this chapter I present, in more detail, analysis procedures and considerations on variables of interest. First and second order analyses (inspired by the work of Van Maanen, 1979) are the main venues in which findings are obtained here. These analyses are discussed along with operational issues such as research timeline, data sampling, major methodological challenges, and personal biases. In this chapter I also present first order data before the full empirical study is completed in consecutive chapters (in Chapters 6 to 8).

5.1. Data analysis procedures

Fetterman (1989: 20) provides a description that bears a very strong resemblance to my own experience analysing the data at hand after the (six-month) fieldwork undertaken:

Fieldwork ends when the researcher leaves the village or site, but ethnography continues. Some ethnographers spend as much time formally analyzing and reanalyzing their data and writing their ethnographies as they do conducting fieldwork.

Indeed, the analysis phase was the longest, spanning more than one year. This is not to be understood as a very clean process where data catalogued were taken out of their files and folders, but rather as a “dirty process”, during which analysis consisted of rewriting data collected, reorganizing information, and choosing one software over another (for example,

I tried different configurations of data while storing and analysing data from Excel, QSR Nvivo, and RQDA [the last being an extension of the open source software “R”].¹⁴¹ The common thread while undertaking the analysis was the recursive endeavour of questioning the data and categories obtained, in line with the iterative style described throughout in interpretive qualitative studies (Schram, 2006). Schram (2006: 15) describes qualitative research as “contested work in progress” and the qualitative predisposition as “embracing complexity, uncovering and challenging taken-for-granted assumptions” (p. 7) and resulting in the researcher being “comfortable with uncertainty” (p. 6).

As part of the data collection and analysis, staged sampling took place.¹⁴² I consider sampling to be an insufficiently discussed issue in management articles published nowadays. Since I dealt with a naturalistic enquiry where intervention was intentionally dismissed throughout the study,¹⁴³ control was an aspect that deserved attention towards the various steps of data collection and analysis. Due to the overwhelming amount of data collected, sampling within data, otherwise known as data reduction (Miles and Huberman

¹⁴¹ This software is used extensively today as witnessed from my own practical experience. Indeed, I learnt about this software by the analytics team (within my research site) based in US. The particular software extension used for this research is authored by Ronggui (2011).

¹⁴² I refer to sampling within the case under study rather than the site selection per se here. Although I have acknowledged earlier that the selection of the case involved purposive sampling (Given, 2008), such sampling does not stop here, but also in the analysis conducted with sections of collected data.

¹⁴³ It should be acknowledged that, although intervention was intentionally dismissed here, this is not to mean that it hasn’t unintentionally occurred, i.e., my presence in the field clearly acts as an intervention mechanism to team members and other participants in daily work, even without my propensity to change the course of events (hence, opposed to what would happen in a quasi-experimental design within a naturalistic setting).

1994; Guest et al., 2011), required continuous shifting prioritizations and choices as the study developed. As explained by Miles and Huberman (1994: 11):

Data reduction is not something separate from analysis. It is *part* of analysis. The researcher's decisions—which data chunks to code and which to pull out, which evolving story to tell—are *all analytic choices*. (italics in the original)

Graziano and Raulin (2010) discuss the considerations that affect sampling of data at various levels (e.g., situations, study participants, and behaviours). I briefly discuss sampling considerations and related decisions:

(1) Sampling of situations: projects and meetings

During the first weeks in the field, there was no targeted guidance of sampling since more time was given to acclimatization with the field and the work undertaken by the team under focus. However, as fieldwork progressed, focus lay on strategy workshops, a standardized practice within a company, as well as ad hoc and routine meetings.

(2) Sampling of interviewees

Each team member was interviewed during fieldwork, with informal ethnographic talks (Spradley, 1979) occurring throughout the study. At the beginning of the study, snowball sampling¹⁴⁴ was additionally used. As research progressed and so did the ongoing analysis,

¹⁴⁴ "Snowball sampling" otherwise known as "referral sampling" relies on recommendations from respondents to contact people belonging to their social networks. The people recommended are deemed to

research became focused on targeting subcategories of participants from whom data needed to be collected and checked (MacQueen & Milstein, 1999).

(3) Sampling of behaviours

Towards the second half of the fieldwork, the data collected signalled a convincing difference between *backstage* and *frontstage* behaviour with strategy tools, hence sampling behaviours both *backstage* and *frontstage* became a natural requirement of the research. The setting allowed me to sample an ample amount of information *backstage* (through the work with the team on a daily basis) and also to acknowledge various notions of *backstage* (the team, working a sub-team, or occasionally with contracted consultants). Since in the setting (e.g., *backstage*) the same team might behave differently in various repetitions of similar events, projects enabled this variation to unfold and provided insight into the reliability of findings extracted from a single event.

During my fieldwork, given the cumbersome amount of data captured in the site, Miles and Huberman (1994: 64) advise as a rule of thumb “to always code the previous set of field notes before the next trip to the site”. However, with the intense everyday work pursued in ethnography, coding every day was difficult here. Organizing the data and coding them by the end of each week appeared more feasible, and was therefore adopted as my

meet a specific range of skills that respondents believe to be useful for the researcher (Morgan, 2008). Although originating from statistical methods (Goodman, 1961) this method was deemed very helpful here.

method. Data reduction was enabled through several meta-matrices (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994). Such organization enabled me to visualize a large amount of data more easily through the analysis stages. Therefore, several meta-matrices were drawn¹⁴⁵ to organize the occurrence of strategy tools in relation to the circumstances of projects, organize the information in relation to observations of meetings and everyday work, and in relation to themes extracted from interviews about the use and general experience with strategy tools. This method is similar to what Yates and Orlikowski (2002) suggest as genre analysis, pursued more recently by Kaplan (2011) in the analysis and further coding for the identification of categories on patterns of PowerPoint use within an organization.

Following the design of meta-matrices, initially a first order analysis took place. This involved the preparation of an initial report with a narrative similar to journalistic narratives or stories. Such a process often involves extensive use of the accounts or words of research site members (Agar, 1980). In this first research report, I aimed at condensing dominant themes deriving from interactions with, and observations from, the site. This represented a first order analysis (cf. Van Maanen, 1979). In this stage, data was analysed by identifying main themes based on patterns identified with relation to specific strategy tools and their “location” (i.e., use) in a strategy project, their roles in the project. In parallel, to respond to the process related component in the research question, processes in place were examined and strategy tools traced during those processes. The analysis took

¹⁴⁵ This was undertaken through the use of excel spreadsheets and R software. The latter is an open-source software which helps in undertaking analysis for both quantitative and qualitative research. A special software add-in (called RQDA) was used to pursue the use of qualitative research through this software.

place by first considering recurring themes in the observations gathered and in associated interviews. More concretely, data analysis pursues:

words; context; internal consistency (opinion shifts during groups); frequency and intensity of comments (counting, content analysis); specificity; trends/themes; iteration (data collection and analysis is an iterative process moving back and forth). Miles and Huberman (1994: 91)

As part of its initial measures in its initial development, analysis was undertaken following inductive thematic analysis. This type of analysis is concerned with the identification of themes that appropriately describe a phenomenon (Daly et al., 1997). Taking into account primary concerns such as logical consistency, subjective interpretation, and adequacy (Schutz, 1970) within phenomenological research, various recurring themes were identified. They preceded the identification and further build-up of codes.¹⁴⁶ Analysis was guided by ethnographic content analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994: 7), otherwise known as inductive content analysis (ITA – cf. Guest et al., 2011), and structured coding (ibid.). Ethnographic content analysis was particularly helpful in the analysis of most sources (observations, talks, narratives, written material, focus groups), whereas structured coding was particularly relevant based on responses from semi-structured interviews (hence, helpful coding when analysing interviews of Type I).¹⁴⁷ Through structured coding, one could follow the flow of questions to construct a list of codes based on the questions posed to interviewees, thereafter enabling a faster analysis (Guest et al., 2011).

¹⁴⁶ A list of themes identified early on in the analysis is presented in *Appendix N*.

¹⁴⁷ For more background on interview types, refer to *Appendices D* and *M* that explain and illustrate their formats in more detail.

At a later stage, a second order analysis (Van Maanen, 1979) took place with the purpose of developing an explanatory and theoretical model.¹⁴⁸ Chapters Six to Eight discuss in more detail the journey the data took during a second order analysis. Despite the clear guidelines provided on various techniques for analysis I have followed (primarily Miles & Huberman, 1994, Bryman, 2008), it should be taken into account that “no analysis strategy will produce theory without an uncodifiable creative leap, however small” (Langley, 1999: 691). Nevertheless, a “disciplined creativity” took place in the analysis with its main axis based upon “trustworthiness”, which is one of the main elements naturalistic enquiry is to be undertaken by (Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). If this criterion were to be compared with positivist studies, it would equalize to terms like validity and reliability (Stewart, 1998). In addition, several of the tactics for generating meaning from data (Miles & Huberman, 1994) are noted in detail in Table 11 along with illustrations of tactics deployed.¹⁴⁹ These procedures varied in relevance depending on the research question under examination. For example, building a logical chain of evidence was particularly relevant while composing the narratives for the Global Strategy Project (discussed in detail in Chapter 8), whereas when uncovering the invisible presence of strategy tools through the Cheshire cat character, the use of metaphors was a very helpful means in developing concepts of interest (this metaphor is presented and discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

¹⁴⁸ Note that the model presented in the dissertation here is at early stages in terms of confirmatory theory, hence not a fully conclusive explanatory model but more to be considered at its propositional stage. This is comprehensible, given the exploratory route pursued in this study.

¹⁴⁹ Note that the list provided by Miles and Huberman is more exhaustive, however only tactics relevant to this research are presented in Table 10. For a more detailed background refer to Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 245).

The overall analysis was undertaken through an iterative process where sampling among the vast amount of data was "theory driven" (cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994: 27), allowing for the phenomenon of strategy tools as they were enacted to be followed in various instances (including workshops – *backstage* and *frontstage*; meetings; written material etc.). Theoretically, the analysis of data had the overall focus of sensemaking, bricolage, and staging of work.

This analysis was not undertaken without continuous scrutiny of comparing contradictory statements and evidence, and filtering congruent elements. This analysis process was “not unlike putting the pieces of a puzzle together, except that the pieces are not all given but have to be partially fashioned and adjusted to each other” (Klein & Myers 1999: 79). The aim was to place findings within relevant literature, but at the same time continuously interrogate findings whether they fitted well with relevant bodies of research. In addition, I had the opportunity to share preliminary findings with key informants (during the focus groups and other informal talks), benefiting from helpful comments that help elaborate the themes, relations, and generally conclusions drawn from the fieldwork.

Tactics to generate meanings from data	Motives and patterns of tactic deployment followed by concrete illustrations
Assessing plausibility	- this was an overarching tactic in all stages of data analysis and proved also useful in data collection (designing interview structures and carefully going through member checking) - analysis juxtaposed contradictory statements where applicable with triangulation used as a mitigation technique for enhanced plausibility
Clustering	- useful in assessing fluctuating roles of strategy tools (RQ1 and RQ2) - themes and codes at a more developed stage were clustered into categories to better address all three research questions - strategy tools were organized in clusters based on their main roles and in addition based on their embeddedness of various clusters along strategy workshop processes
Making metaphors	- used especially in early stage analysis - metaphors such as “whatever works” – used to communicate findings to respondents; or “Cheshire cat” used to encapsulate theoretically the invisible presence of strategy tools in use
Making contrasts/comparisons	- especially relevant for RQ2 when assessing roles of strategy tools - stages of categorization of data took place to find out representative groups while referring to strategy tool roles. In this analytic process boundaries of categories were continuously redrawn
Partitioning variables	- a theoretical framework was drawn early on in the analysis to inspect in more detail groups of variables, tailored to each research question - Figure 9 shows a clear example of partitioning of variables and their connectedness to each research question
Noting relations between variables	- Table 11 shows how groups of variables are addressed by each research question
Building a logical chain of evidence	- especially prevalent in addressing RQ1 and RQ3 - towards RQ1: laying workshop flows, and associated praxis - towards RQ3: chronological narration of the Global Strategy Project and associated strategy tools
Making conceptual/theoretical coherence	- this tactic pertains to later stages of analysis – especially with reference to second order findings (procedures explained in more detail in Chapter 4)

Table 11. Tactics deployed to generate meaning from data

The interaction with various researchers, peers and practitioners, with whom I could consult along the way, was of further help to this process. I had the opportunity to present all three chapters in various forums (three EGOS conferences, one AoM event, and various S-a-P workshops). These, together with consultations within the Novak Druce Research Centre and other forums within the faculty (SIM conferences and meetings, ND presentation etc.), helped round up (and down) results and make best use of existing literature in the interpretation of findings. At the same time, I understand that the “reflective practitioners” addressed here were as much interpreters and analysts as myself, hence I recognize that the story that I am reporting here is a full product of interaction with these practitioners (Klein & Myers 1999). I follow up in this chapter by uncovering further operational concerns such as study timeline and related methodological challenges.

5.2. Project timeline

Figure 8 represents the general timeline of the study, including prior pilot work and fieldwork started in December 2010. The intense fieldwork stage lasted for six months. After this stage, two sessions were organized in the field: a focus group used as a validation exercise for the findings of this research and a training exercise organized upon request from the participants. Both sessions are included in the data collection of this research (hence recording with informed consent has taken place in both). The gatekeeper was very open and supportive throughout this research. Additionally, ties were maintained to ensure updating with progress in the field.

Main focus \ Year	2008 - 2009			2009 - 2010			2010 - 2011			2011 - 2012			2012-2013
Timeline \ academic terms	Michaelmas*	Lent*	Easter*	Michaelmas	Hilary	Trinity	Michaelmas	Hilary	Trinity	Michaelmas	Hilary	Trinity	Michaelmas
Research Objective													
Problem Statement													
Literature Review													
Research Question													
Pilot study													
Research Design Finalization													
Data Collection													
Data Analysis													
Theoretical Framework (Findings)													
Finalization of writing													

Figure 8 DPhil Project Timeline *

* MPhil study period – time when the pilot study took place

5.3. First order analysis procedures that extract ethnographic themes

I consider a first order analysis a natural undertaking when carrying out ethnography. One goes through a staged process of developing theoretical insights that is not necessarily pure and straightforward, but similar to a tangled net. During this tangled itinerary it is important to distinguish between first and second order concepts, a process that is consistent with Van Maanen's (1979: 541) recommendations:

Both the descriptive properties of the studied scene and the member interpretations of what stands behind these properties are first-order concepts. At the empirical level, then, both behaviour and member depictions of such behaviour must be viewed within the framework of the observed.

The author describes first order data as “presentational and operational” (ibid: 542). The latter consists of observed activity per se, whereas the former consists of the appearances that the field subjects put forward as these activities are discussed with the researcher. Within the specific setting of this study, one could discuss the organization of workshops, meetings organized within the team, and meetings organized with the workshop sponsors as examples constituting operational data. It is fair to conclude that “reflection in action” enables access to the presentational data here.¹⁵⁰ On the other hand, media such as

¹⁵⁰ As an example, a diagram designed by an interviewee during an interview would constitute presentational data, as it is part of appearances that the field subject puts forwards while being interviewed on the field's activities. More concretely, Figure 10 consists of presentational data as it has been obtained during an interview with a workshop facilitator.

observations and recordings of meetings especially aid in accessing operational data. The discussion of first order analysis is very similar to the notion of “sensitizing concepts”.¹⁵¹

A definitive concept refers precisely to what is common to a class of objects, by the aid of a clear definition in terms of attributes or fixed bench marks. ... A sensitizing concept lacks such specification of attributes or bench marks and consequently it does not enable the user to move directly to the instance and its relevant content. Instead, it gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look (Blumer, 1954: 7).

According to Van Maanen (1979) it is the duty of the researcher to distinguish between the two and corroborate so that sound second order concepts could be developed. Taking these guidelines into consideration, I analysed the data obtained from various sources, through a coarse filtering of data starting during my stay in the field, whereas a more fine-grained filtering and sensemaking of data was pursued as the analysis progressed.

Before the presentation of major themes encountered in the study, it is important not to consider strategy tools as free of value to their own users,¹⁵² i.e., users who do not inherently lack judgment and/or knowledge of the use of such tools. It is important to highlight that this study deals with knowledgeable users, who can offer accounts of their relationships with the tools they use. Below I present a few anecdotes that demonstrate some of the knowledge obtained by the users and how they reflect upon the tools they

¹⁵¹ This notion is originally attributed to Blumer (1954: 7).

¹⁵² Indeed, this is in line with the essence of the interpretative approach proposed here in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1).

use, emphasizing the value load assigned to the strategy tools by their own knowledgeable users.¹⁵³

(An example with regard to the 7S framework provided by an HR director) you know, did Peters and Waterman sit down and write the 7Ss as 7Ss? I don't think so, I think there were a lot of cold towels wrapped around heads and scratching and thinking... (I21-1-4K12)

(An example where the sponsor explains how a home grown tool – A tool to examine the sources of business growth for this PSF - came to existence) I think this came from an article, from an HBR article, I think.... I really think it's a proven approach that we've adapted for us.... (I21-2-15S5)

These are only a few illustrations of the various respondents' accounts that helped build a solid representation of the relationships they had with strategy tools, how strategy tools were placed in various stages of strategy projects, and how these tools played multiple roles in consulting work. Nevertheless, however coarse the initial filtering of insights, a preset framework of reference was used to guide the analysis. Following the main research questions and the literature on which they were based, I constructed a scheme to show the main variables under focus. Note that since this is not a confirmatory study but an exploratory one, boundaries of variables are not very clearly defined as would be the case in positivist studies. The following section discusses in detail the variables under focus.

¹⁵³ These are illustrations of presentational data (cf. Van Maanen, 1979) discussed earlier.

5.4. Variables under focus

Figure 9 shows a visualization of the major attributes examined in the coding process during the first order analysis. There are, in the grey box on the left, the user attributes that inform the use of strategy tools, and in the grey box on the right, the strategy tool attributes that inform their use. The large outer box (bordered by a dashed line) is designed here to show the organizational context where the user and their strategy tools lie. More specifically, the organizational context encompasses considerations of project type, department, etc., all of which comprise the setting in which practitioners use their strategy tools.

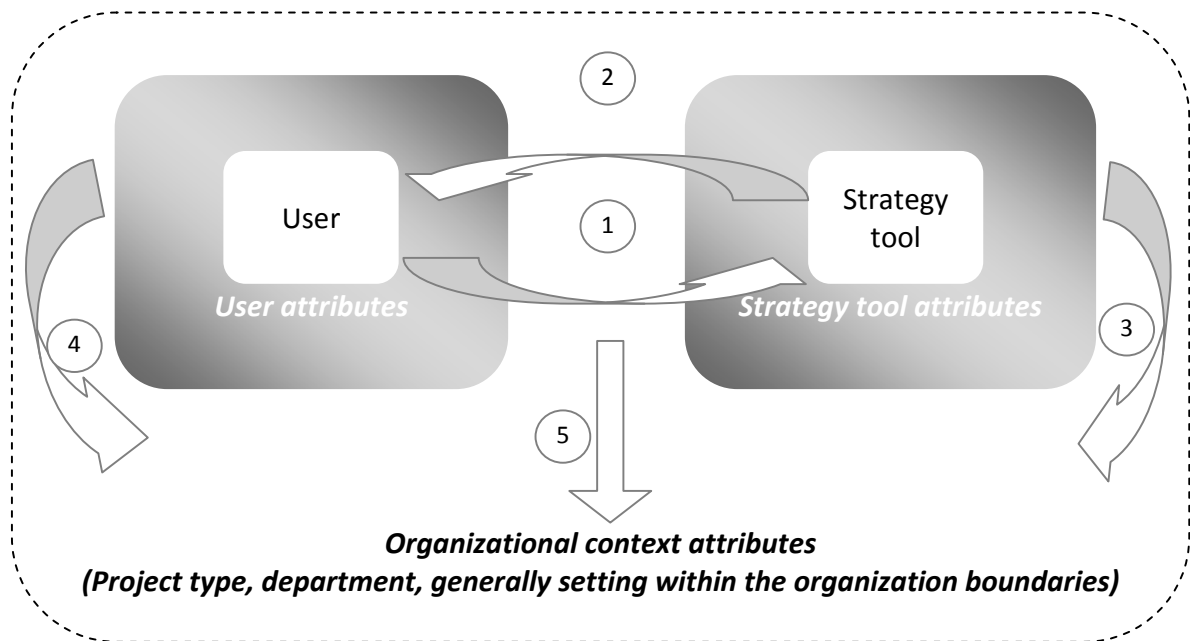


Figure 9 Attributes examined during the coding process

The analysis here pursues the user attributes and how they inform ultimate tool use. At the same time here, how the strategy tool attributes inform their use, or merely their lack of use, by practitioners is of interest. Consequently, one should acknowledge the purposes that these strategy tools serve in use (i.e., type of projects or activities – for the latter

workshops serve as an example in the setting of this study). Later, I discuss in more detail the various elements of Figure 9 with concrete illustrations.

User attributes (here all elements inherent to the user of strategy tools are taken into account):

- experience (prior exposure to strategy tools internally and externally)
- style (preference for using some strategy tools over others)
- professional background (for example, engineers, or professionals other than managers and economists, could have a very different approach to strategy tools).

Strategy tool attributes (although these attributes here are also related to the perception of practitioners towards the tools they use, the focus here is primarily on how the tools alone affect practitioners' perception and use of them):

- ease of understanding (directions encompassed by the tools are clear and easy to understand for the users)
- flexibility of use (the plasticity tools show for being adapted and/or adopted in various strategy situations).

Context attributes (in other words, attributes to entities other than the ones belonging to the practitioner-strategy tool that serves as unit of analysis):

- stage in strategy project (pre, during, and post workshop)
- organizational culture.

Following the presentation of various variables under consideration, and also taking into account the explorative rather than confirmatory study undertaken here, I discuss below the major relationships¹⁵⁴ that are examined in the first order analysis: Relationships 1 and 2 highlight what informs the use of strategy tools, taking into consideration user attributes as well as strategy tool attributes. More precisely, Relationship 1 highlights how user attributes inform the use of strategy tools. Such attributes relate generally to professional background, experience (or expertise), and character traits of practitioners. Although this study could not provide findings for the latter, here the aim is to consider all the attributes which could be explored by the ethnographic methodology in use.¹⁵⁵ Relationship 2 highlights how strategy tool attributes inform their use. For example, does ease of understanding allow SWOT to be used more in the organizational context? Or is it ease of understanding and flexibility that inform its ultimate use?¹⁵⁶ Consequently, one should distinguish among the pool of various strategy tools to extract different patterns of use, along with what informs such patterns of use. Here it is important to take into account any inherent multicollinearity of various variables. For example, both ease of understanding and ease of use are also influenced by consultants' experience (for example, we could expect that consultants previously exposed to SWOT are more likely to use it with ease than those

¹⁵⁴ These relationships are also numbered accordingly in Figure 9.

¹⁵⁵ For example, it is too ambitious to uncover character attributes that contribute to the choice of one type of strategy tools vs. another. This could be done by experiments or quasi experiments, hence it is out of discussion for this specific study.

¹⁵⁶ These questions are only used for illustration here. Note that these are not necessarily exclusive relations, for example both ease to understand and the ease to use may inform the use of SWOT, hence these questions should not be considered in isolation. Here such questions are posed separately to highlight the importance of separate variables (in this case, ease of understanding and ease of use) that need to be considered when undertaking the analysis.

who have no prior exposure to this tool). Relationship 3 highlights the impact that strategy tools have in the context of use. Hence, this could be understood as the level of intervention strategy tools have in the organizational context (be it a project or everyday work). More precisely, here attention is on the purposes that strategy tools serve within the organizational context (for example, during workshops, as is discussed in more detail later on in this dissertation). Relationship 4 denotes how the user affects the context, i.e., project or organization, independently of strategy tools. This is a broad domain of examination and, although interesting to pursue, was not captured through the research. However, it is shown here to acknowledge that such a relationship is present, despite the lack of intention to pursue it further throughout this study. Relationship 5 denotes how the use of strategy tools impacts the context, which in the setting of this study translates into the main research question posed here, i.e., how strategizers craft strategy through the use of strategy tools. This is the most difficult relationship to tackle since quantifying, or even observing, the impact of frameworks is difficult not only to achieve, but also to define. For example, do we define “the crafting of strategy” by observing how strategic recommendations conveyed through the prior or simultaneous use of strategy tools later become accepted? Or do we instead adopt a more operational and pragmatic view by simply observing that strategy tools enable further strategic recommendations, although later on sponsors or other staff may not endorse such recommendations? In my discussion I opt for the second. This is due to the multiple dimensions of this complex issue: (1) “Crafting strategy” should be understood closely to the ontology one attributes to strategy

itself. Since “strategy” here is defined¹⁵⁷ from an S-a-P perspective, it should be accepted that using strategy tools also means doing strategy. Hence such discussion does not imply that strategy tools could enable good or bad strategy,¹⁵⁸ but simply that their use is accepted in the doing and crafting of strategy. In addition, (2) it is the nature of strategy consultants’ work not to pursue further whether their recommendations are later implemented by their client. Hence the final project step (“Follow up”), in consultancies described in this chapter, directly limits the further impact of consultants and their strategy tools in contributing towards strategy. Table 11 shows how the various relationships are accounted for in relation to each research question as originally posed in this dissertation.

As shown in Table 12, addressing RQ3 encompasses a multiplicity of considerations, ranging from strategy tool and user attributes to the impact of strategy tools and in addition, their use, upon the strategy project environment. Having addressed the main variables in focus, the analysis becomes more structured and targeted.

¹⁵⁷ See discussions of strategy’s definition both in the section of Key terms (p. xiii) and Section 2.2 (Definitions).

¹⁵⁸ Although this is possible: for example, a limited SWOT might prevent the company from tapping into market opportunities. However, in this study I don’t adopt judgments on what constitutes good (or bad) strategy but allow for a more micro-approach to the impact of strategy tools.

Relationship	Implications for RQ1 <i>frontstage /backstage</i>	Implications for RQ2 roles played	Implications for RQ3 sensemaking
1 – user attributes informing use of tools	x	x	x
2 – tool attributes informing their use	-	x	x
3 – impact of strategy tools in the environment	-	x	x
4 – user affecting the context	-	-	-
5 – how <i>the use of strategy tools</i> impacts the context	x	x	x

Table 12. How attributes examined connect to research questions

Legend to Table 12:

(x) applicable – i.e., this particular relationship has (direct) implications for the specific research question ;

(-) not applicable – i.e., this particular relationship has no (direct) implications for the specific research question

5.5. Extraction of major themes: the quest of translating data into theory

Although this thesis is presented in a structured and quasi-linear way, much of its iteration encompasses a continuous tweaking of research questions to better target “interesting findings” (Davis, 1971). The translation of major themes to theory followed the same trajectory, prioritizing the building of answers from the bottom up, from patterns to categories, from the addressing of sub-research questions to the overarching one, in a quest guided by “disciplined imagination” (Weick, 1989). By theory here is understood:

an ordered set of assertions about a generic behavior or structure assumed to hold throughout a significantly broad range of specific instances (Sutherland, 1975: 9).

Although qualities of theory such as plausibility, rationality, and a considerable level of aesthetics are desirable (Weick, 1989: 517), given the explorative focus of this research, the quest for theory here favours the interpretation of findings respecting their truthfulness and perspicacity (Stewart, 1998). “Because interpretive research implicitly assumes that every person conducting a research study will have a unique interpretation of the results” (Labianca et al., 2000: 241), data analysis should not be judged only upon its reliability, but in addition, to the veracity of findings (Shah & Corley, 2006). Propositions encountered in Chapter 7 or sensemaking mechanisms around strategy tools – presented in Chapter 8 – are all obtained by an iterative theoretical development process combined with continuous abductive reasoning (cf. Niiniluoto, 1999, and Peirce, 1878, as cited in Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010: 319). The reader is invited to follow and, at the same time, challenge the grounding of the theoretical contribution route chosen in this dissertation.¹⁵⁹

5.6. Major themes extracted from the first order analysis: a foreword

The first order themes, extracted from the first order analysis, are discussed in turn in each empirical chapter. Here I present briefly their essence, before a more detailed description follows in their respective chapters.

- *Strategy workshops* – their enactment as an institutionalized practice within the firm, the clearly delineated pipeline that workshops followed, the role of the team in support of

¹⁵⁹ Further discussion aimed at theoretical contribution is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

these workshops, and in addition, their *backstage* and *frontstage* enactments along with the strategy tools associated to them (discussed in more detail in Chapter 6).

- *The invisible presence of strategy tools* – their presence along various stages of strategy workshops, the roles they serve and more importantly, how those roles unfold during the pipeline of strategy workshops. This theme will thereafter contribute to propositions on patterns observed (discussed in more detail in Chapter 7).

- *The Global Strategy Project accompanied by sensemaking of scenarios* – this theme is discussed as an outlier that serves as a contrast to the (institutionalized) strategy workshops. Here focus lies on the stakeholders involved, the sense made of a strategy tool the team is not accustomed to using (scenario analysis), the main activities where these strategy tools occur, and the supporting strategy tools used during this sensemaking process (discussed in more detail in Chapter 8).

Before jumping to Chapters 5, 6, and 7, the empirical chapters developing the second order concepts extracted by the first order analysis, I briefly discuss the understanding of second order concepts provided here:

Second-order concepts are those notions used by the fieldworker to explain the patterning of the first-order data. Descriptively, many second-order concepts are simply statements about relationships between certain properties observed to covary in the setting and may occasionally converge with first-order interpretations.... Typically, the more theoretically engaging second-order concepts represent what could be called "interpretations of interpretations" (Van Maanen, 1979, 541).

As stated by Van Maanen, the “interpretations of interpretations” highlight relationships between properties and/or phenomena. More specifically, in Chapter 6 I focus on the relationship between *frontstage* and *backstage* team sessions and tool use in those sessions. Note that in this chapter, the strategy projects were analysed following preparatory and delivery enactments. Although chronologically this constituted a division into two major stages within a strategy workshop, Chapter 6 discusses the settings in which strategy tools are used, by finding out that there are different patterns of strategy tool use in both *frontstage* and *backstage* settings, based on a further analysis of data collected. The triggers of such occurrence and related patterns are discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, with special emphasis upon the mirroring of findings into theory.

In Chapter 8, I revisit the main research question to stipulate propositions on how users interact with strategy tools, focusing on both strategy tool attributes and their users' attributes. On the other hand, in Chapter 8, I focus on sensemaking surrounding on one particular tool (scenario construction) with the aim of generalizing the model to sensemaking of further tools and propose the mechanism for further testing in similar settings. In addition, an important note needs to be made before following the theoretical trajectory of the next chapters: in convincing the reader on the legitimacy of extracted findings, data are a crucial component that inevitably faces a challenging trade-off in qualitative research – the data on which findings are based in the study report face the limited space a manuscript possesses (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Golden-Biddle &

Locke, 2006). The reader will undoubtedly pose the question “*Where’s the rich story?*” (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007: 29, italics in the original).

To solve this challenge, in the remaining chapters I interchangeably display extensive chunks and smaller pieces of data, throughout what I aim to represent as a colourful account, including narratives, snapshots from interviews, observations and documents, as well as photographs from the habitat of the subjects of this study. In addition, displays will consistently be comprised of tables and matrices, tools which are persistently demonstrated to be useful in showcasing data (Miles & Huberman, 1995; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). It is by the use of various discursive devices (data in text and also images presented in various formats – narratives, tables, images, and schemes) that I aim to convey a colourful representation of findings.

5.7. Strategy workshops as established practice – preparatory and delivery enactments

Early in my stay in the field, I gathered that strategy workshops constituted a great part of the day to day job of the team. Prior to entering the field, there was a signal from the sponsor highlighting the importance of strategy workshops within the firm. In my meetings to negotiate my entry in the field, the sponsor had confessed to me: “my boss loves workshops” (Sponsor, O1-0-12). I would understand the meaning of this statement only when immersed in the fieldwork. While I was with the team members, I could indeed witness how important workshops were among various strategy practices in place. Strategy

workshops were not a new practice within the firm, nor were they an old tradition. However, following a neo-institutionalist jargon, they could be conceived as already institutionalized (cf. Meyer & Rowan, 1977; DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) within the firm. They were a widely established practice of which the in-house consultancy had vast experience,¹⁶⁰ especially following the promotion of such practice by a global managing partner who was a direct leader of the team.¹⁶¹ It was during my initial talks when the sponsor confided to me that workshops had been introduced to the firm by her immediate boss¹⁶² who was also acting as global partnership leader.¹⁶³ I gathered that workshops had been introduced as a more efficient alternative to meetings that at that stage appeared to be too burdensome to the organizational routines globally. After a few workshops had been tested, they gained widespread recognition within the firm.

I think when we first did it people loved it because it's really getting people... it was the first time people actually really got together and talked about things that maybe they had individual conversation on and also for the buy in aspect of it that make sure everyone understands, again going back to that and says, "I'm committed, I will do it." (Sponsor I21-2-15S5)

The sponsor counterpart leading the same team for the Americas region stressed the importance of strategy workshops, confirming the prior accounts gathered from various

¹⁶⁰ Based on my consultation of team documents, more than 15 strategy workshops had been held by the Unit in the year prior to my joining. This was also corroborated by talks in the field.

¹⁶¹ The Sponsor would directly report to the Global Managing Partner in most of the occasions, although on a few occasions witnessed in the field, the sponsor would report directly to the Chief Operating Officer (COO).

¹⁶² Note that the Global Managing Partner came from an auditing and consulting background.

¹⁶³ Note that an interview took place with the global partnership leader mentioned here, confirming the initiative to launch and establish strategy workshops within the organization (refer in more detail to entry no. 9 in the table reviewing interviews undertaken with various contacts, as shown in *Appendix E*).

contacts in the London team. The excerpt below shows the Americas leader's account on the use of workshop by the Americas team:

We probably do six to ten pretty major workshops a year. By major workshops I mean like one to two day, 30 to 50 people, type sessions. We'll probably do anywhere from six to ten of those a year. (I22-1-19S2)

The same source clarifies later on during the interview:

It's not like if a business unit wants to do a strategy project that they have to have a workshop, but I think when we do have a workshop we've got a pretty standard approach we use, both in terms of the overall process to do the pre-work that's got to get done, the workshop itself in terms of design and what are some modular consistent design components that we often reuse across workshops... So I mean we definitely over the years have gotten much more standardized terms of having the way that we do this within *the firm*.¹⁶⁴ (I22-1-19S2)

Strategy workshops would be tailored, depending to the strategic issues under examination, to an area, sub-area, service line, account group,¹⁶⁵ or combination of the above. In rare cases¹⁶⁶ (such as the global strategy encountered in the fieldwork here), workshops would be tailored to the general executive committee within the firm. In these instances a special protocol would follow, given the high rank of participants in these events.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Name of firm removed here due to the confidentiality agreement.

¹⁶⁵ It is usual in PSFs to group accounts for better segmentation. For example, Top-End Accounts are the ones dealing with major clients, usually pertaining to Fortune 500.

¹⁶⁶ During my stay with the team, only one such instance was observed, however the team was exposed to ad hoc calls that would encompass a wide range of stakeholders and strategy issues.

¹⁶⁷ These so called "high rank" participants represented leaders of the firm, including the CEO, COO, and Service Line Leaders. This small group of individuals generally required very tight meeting schedules, hence also a "compressed" workshop model which required additional planning by the team. Such was the case witnessed during the Global Strategy project.

Strategy workshops were discussed as appropriate settings for generating new ideas, and solutions could be generated. Here is how a workshop facilitator describes the help provided by the team with the organization of workshops:

we help them [the sponsors] think through the whole process and this enables us to keep reminding our sponsors that workshops shouldn't simply end with a document, workshops are a prelude to actions ... how I share it with my clients is I say a workshop is built on these principles. You've got to discuss an issue, and it could also be [to] discover, because when you bring a lot of people together they learn a lot by discussing, and then you debate. (I22-2-9K16)

As respondents stated in ethnographic talks, there was a clear propensity towards the genuine help provided by workshops rather than forced settings that would be simply used to legitimize decisions taken out of the workshop room. Therefore, workshops were seen as valid sites contributing to the solution of strategic problems. Here is how a workshop facilitator defends the functionality of strategy workshops through her experience:

Respondent: I think the biggest thing around challenge is making sure that we don't do what I call "cosmetic workshops", I get irritated by those.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Respondent: So it's just a term I coined.

Interviewer: Superficial?

Respondent: Yes, exactly, that you're going for a ride and people feel that there's something being done to me because I feel I'm being taken to a workshop and they already know the answer. That to me is the ugliest format of a workshop we could ever run. (Workshop facilitator, I21-1-20K17)

The flow of strategy workshops was well delineated. Figure 10 represents a picture taken from a conversation with a workshop facilitator while in the early stages of my research. This picture is taken from an ethnographic talk with the facilitator. To explain the flow of

strategy workshops within the firm, the workshop facilitator presented on a whiteboard a clear pipeline associated with workshops and, as a result, well delineated “workshop phases” that started well in advance of the staged workshop days.

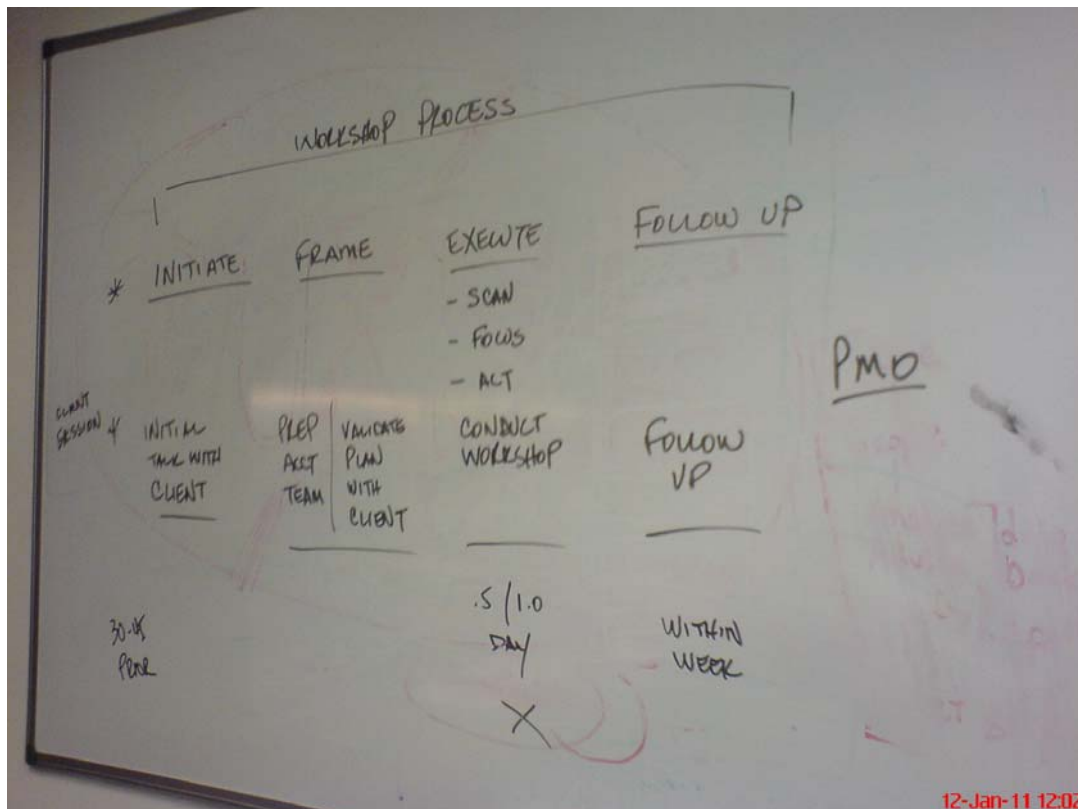


Figure 10 Photograph of notes written on board from one Workshop facilitator

(Interview with workshop facilitator, Director, I21-1-1K21)

As seen in the picture, four phases were seen by the facilitator as parts of workshop preparation and delivery (as captured verbatim by the facilitator and appearing on the whiteboard, these phases were expressed by the key action words “initiate”, “frame”, “execute” and “follow up”).

Generally in line with this finding,¹⁶⁸ I could obtain from team documents a thorough description of the process associated with strategy workshops. Figure 11 presents an excerpt showing a generic workshop pipeline constructed by the team as extracted from team documents. This pipeline was the same observed during the projects followed in situ; hence not only was it witnessed in company manuals and documents but in the ongoing team praxis.

Therefore, in terms of processes rather than problems faced, it was identified that the variance amongst strategy workshops was not high and thereafter a high level of standardization in conducting workshops helped to detect *preparatory* and *delivery*¹⁶⁹ phases (these two phases are separated by a dotted line, as shown in Figure 11).

¹⁶⁸ The only contradiction of the facilitator's account with what emerged from documentation consisted the phase described by the action word "frame" (in Figure 11): instead documents stated that this phase consisted of two distinct steps, i.e., account team preparation and client validation meeting.

¹⁶⁹ I refer to *workshop delivery* elsewhere as *workshop execution*, done throughout this dissertation interchangeably so.

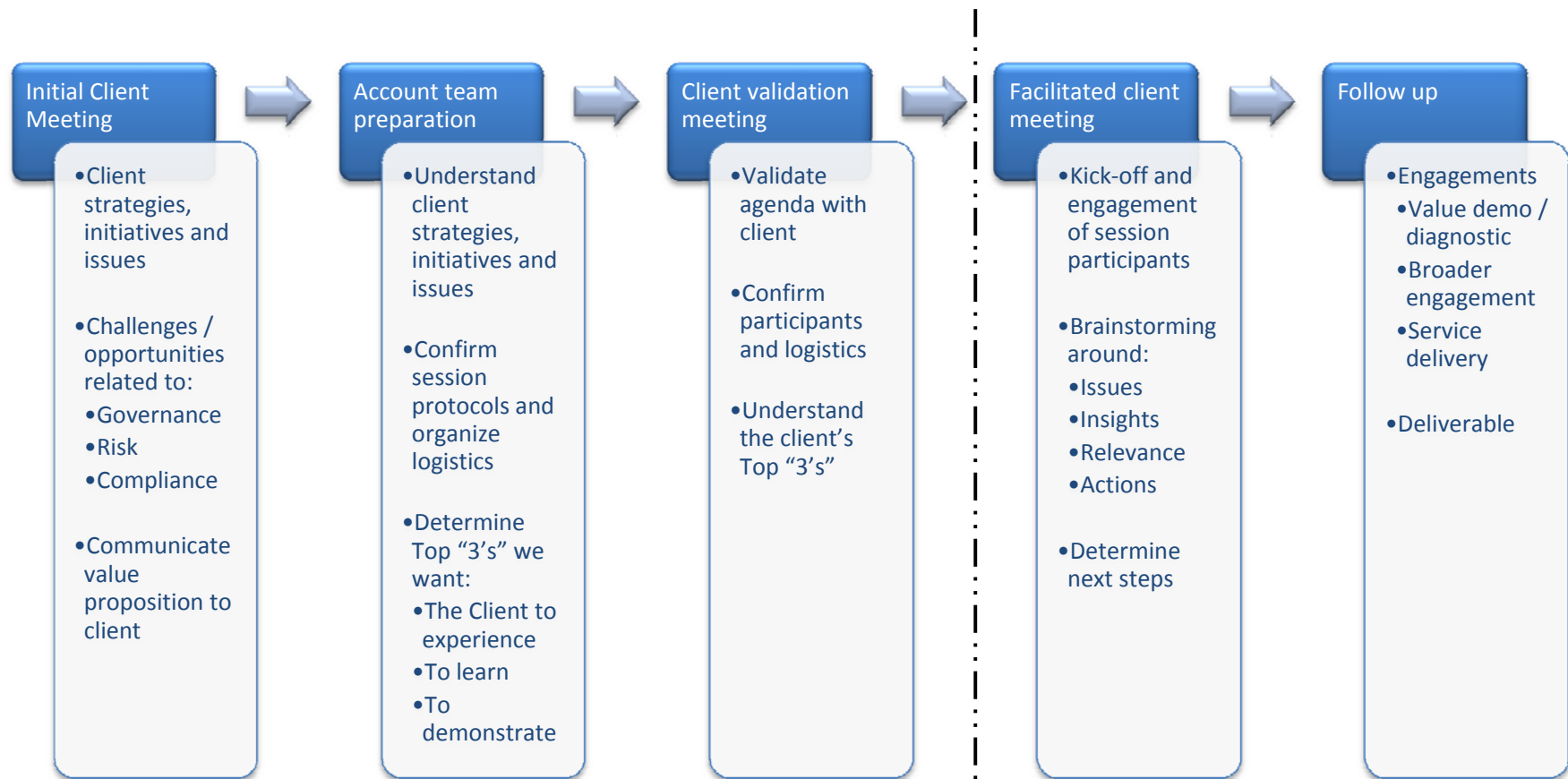


Figure 11 The pipeline¹⁷⁰ of strategy workshops *

* Dotted line added here to distinguish between (*strategy workshop*) preparatory and execution phases.

¹⁷⁰ This is based on PowerPoint presentations obtained from the team files. Team members confirmed such a pipeline in personal interviews.

In the preparatory phase, during the initial client meeting, the team head would meet the workshop sponsor (i.e., the client). Usually in this meeting a workshop facilitator from the team would join. Thereafter, a briefing would occur within the team to an assigned sub-team (usually two or three team members would be deployed in the preparation of a single workshop due to the multiple projects running simultaneously). Workshop delivery would follow in the pipeline, consisting of the actual workshop delivery (i.e., the facilitated client meeting) and the related follow up extracted from workshop findings.

At the same time, although the projects I experienced in the field confirmed the same pipeline identified in ethnographic talks and company documents, the problems for each project were not “usual”, nor were they clear upon takeover of the project from the sponsor. Hence, two types of workshops were encountered in the field: (a) area restructuring and definition of sub-area strategic priorities;¹⁷¹ and (b) ad hoc projects.¹⁷² In type (a), the team would have a very clear process of approaching the workshop preparation pipelines with notes from previous workshops revisited and reworked. For the second project type, (b), due to particular and complex problems encountered, considerable time would be consumed within the team identifying the problems and ways to approach them. Hence, team dynamics during the “account team preparation” phase would vary strongly depending on the workshop under

¹⁷¹ Seven projects of this kind were experienced first-hand during fieldwork. They are discussed in more detail in this chapter, as well as the following one.

¹⁷² Three projects of this type were experienced first-hand during fieldwork, with support provided to the Team extensively for both. In Chapter 8, one of these projects (The Global Strategy Project) is discussed in greater depth.

preparation. Nevertheless, all members stressed the importance of kick-off and preparation as crucial to the successful undertaking of the workshop.

In addition, reflecting on the standardized flow of workshops and the strategy tools nested in them, I could detect that there was a considerable level of standardization in relation to strategy tools in use within each strategy workshop phase, where the general layout of such workshops was also repeated in a similar pattern.¹⁷³ Later, I discuss in more detail the two main categories of stages identified in the workshop pipeline, i.e., preparatory enactments (workshop enactments preceding the staged workshop), and workshop delivery enactments. This discussion is then focused on strategy tools associated with each phase.

5.7.1. Workshop preparation – preparatory enactments

As discussed earlier, preparatory enactments refer to all the stages that precede the execution of a workshop. Thus, workshop preparation would encompass the praxis prior to what was considered in company terms the facilitated client meeting. The initial client meeting, account team preparation meeting and client validation meeting are all encompassed in what are considered here to be *preparatory* phases vis-à-vis the workshop *execution* (or in the PSF's

¹⁷³ A general descriptive layout of strategy workshop features is presented in *Appendix O*.

jargon, workshop delivery).¹⁷⁴ These early stages were considered important to team members, since the quality of later stages was deemed highly dependent on early preparation. Here is how one workshop facilitator explains the importance of preparatory enactments (while in a "reflection in action" interview), emphasizing its importance to the successful completion of workshops:

I drew it up there (showing the "account team preparation" stage), and the main message really was that the majority of your work should be done at that point, you know, that is really where you need to be spending, you know, a good sort of thirty percent of your time here. And obviously, and if you've done all that prep then this bit (showing the "facilitated client meeting" stage) will go dead easy and, you know, you're going to be screwed unless you do some kind of follow up because no one will get the benefits from your workshop, so you want to spend a good ten/twenty percent in this bit. And it was just like, and I think that was the biggest message that they got from the course.¹⁷⁵

(Workshop facilitator, IE, I21-2-43, reflecting on own training on workshops offered to other practitioners within the company.)

One of the documents that was designed during workshop preparations was the "Facilitators' Agenda". This agenda was a very interesting document traced through the help of initial talks in the field. Its main purpose was to provide guidance to workshop facilitators on the workshop flow and planned activities with workshop participants. This type of document was compiled by facilitators in cooperation with other team members.¹⁷⁶ Typically it was consulted on with a

¹⁷⁴ This latter concept refers to the two last workshop stages, i.e., facilitated client meeting and follow up.

¹⁷⁵ "The course" here refers to a training done by this workshop facilitator to other practitioners within the firm.

¹⁷⁶ Note that this agenda was first discovered during talks with two workshop facilitators and a senior strategy analyst.

senior strategy analyst.¹⁷⁷ Here it should be emphasized that the facilitators' agenda was a team document that was not circulated or disclosed to workshop participants. The only exception was the workshop sponsor: occasionally, this document would be consulted on with the sponsor when agreeing the general terms of the workshop (see Stage 3, Figure 11, Client validation meeting). This agenda was a *backstage* document important to workshop facilitators. Therefore, by being engaged with editing internal documents in support of the team, I could easily notice various strategy tools and also specific guidelines on how they were to be enacted during the workshop. Here dimensions of tools and guidelines for their use were made explicit, together with supporting material (e.g., how groups were to be organized, what dimensions they had to work on, how were they to be presented, who was to guide on them).

Table 13 was compiled by analysing seven workshops and the facilitators' agendas supporting them. I follow each agenda element by clarifying the background, associated strategy tools in each instance, as well as illustrations extracted from these projects. As annotated in this table, the facilitators' agendas would directly address strategy tools in the seventh and eighth columns of the table, namely while referring to "outputs" and "format/production". These two columns showed detailed instructions on strategy tools that facilitators would expect to be used during the carefully planned sessions.

¹⁷⁷ Revisit *Appendix E* for more details on the background of this senior member of the team that had been with the company for more than four years.

However, at the same time, an interesting phenomenon was observed. While there was a careful preparation of the arsenal of strategy tools to be later presented to a wider audience in workshops, the teams were not very careful in picking strategy tools in their *backstage* enactments. It was observed that the internal meetings faced a very ad hoc approach to a pragmatic choice of tools, without the careful approach seen towards the strategy tools which appeared in the facilitator's agendas.

A vignette is chosen here (named *Vignette A* and shown in p. 182-184) to provide a dynamic illustration of strategy tools adopted during a closed-doors team meeting. This vignette is chosen because it is a typical illustration of the tackling of complex problems faced by the in-house consultants in the field. At the same time it provides a clear first-hand presentation of the adoption of strategy tools *backstage* by the team. The examples provided here illustrate the creative ways strategy tools are used in practice, while departing from their ostensive configurations (Latour, 2005); thus they show their multiple nuances as part of their performativity in praxis. Vignettes help to highlight key associations of concepts and further more help in delineating a conceptual model (Carlile, 2002). They offer a means to represent detailed accounts (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1997) of how strategy tools are employed in practice.

Discussion element	Discussion topic (leader)	Start time	End time	Objectives	Inputs	Outputs	Format / production notes ¹⁷⁸
Clarification on each agenda item background	Here the agenda item title and the appointed leader of the discussion are assigned. ¹⁷⁹	Clear starting point of the session in the agenda.	Clear ending point of the session in the agenda.	Detailed goals that the facilitator has for the session. This is expressed in terms of outputs, formats etc.	What feeds into this session (e.g., prior information obtained by participants, prior discussion in the workshop etc.).	What will be produced by the end of this session with emphasis on its main objective (i.e., common understanding, agreement, or decision of participants).	How the session will be organized with reference to format (e.g., plenary, group, or individual session); and/or how will the output from the group/individual be presented further on in the workshop (group representative, slides, flipcharts filled in by facilitators etc.).
Do strategy tools emerge in this agenda item?	No.	n/a	n/a	Occasionally. ¹⁸⁰	Occasionally.	Typically here (with emphasis on the deliverable to be produced by the workshop team).	They appear here but with emphasis on the format/ medium with which frameworks are to be used and conveyed.
Illustration 1 (Area workshop)¹⁸¹	2b. Report out – What is the new business environment [Workshop facilitator]	2:00	3:00	- Participants reach collective agreement on the new business environment within [Area] - Keep conversations focused on ‘future’ market; steer clear of dwelling on how bad the market is and has been	Final summary from breakout teams with answers to the questions they were presented in the breakout instructions	Draft output framework: <i>‘Opportunities and threats’</i>	Format: - Table teams report back (6 - 8 minutes per team) and final summation (5 - 10 minutes) Production notes: - Breakout team leaders will be making their presentations from their assigned plenary table locations.

¹⁷⁸ As shown in the illustrations here, “format” refers to how individuals or teams would be organized in the workshop, whereas the heading “production notes” refers to how they would share their findings with the rest of workshop participants.

¹⁷⁹ Usually the appointed leader is either one of the workshop facilitators, or the sponsor of the workshop. The latter is engaged especially in the opening and closing sessions of the workshop.

¹⁸⁰ “Occasionally” hereafter refers to three or fewer projects out of the seven projects observed here.

¹⁸¹ The occurrence of strategy tools is highlighted in italics in the respective columns.

Table 13 (cont'd)

Discussion element	Discussion topic (leader)	Start time	End time	Objectives	Inputs	Outputs	Format / production notes
Illustration 2 (Sub- area workshop – D311.)	3a. How will we achieve market leadership? ([Workshop facilitator] / breakout teams 'shift and share')	9:30	10:45	- Participants explore how we will achieve our stated goals for the top three initiatives by identifying specific areas / activities that would drive us towards our goals - Each team will be assigned one of the prioritized initiatives and will be asked to identify how we could potentially achieve our growth ambitions. <i>Each initiative will be discussed in the context of the 'Growth Drivers' framework:</i> <i>Drive higher rates and profitability</i> <i>Win new clients in priority markets</i> <i>Increase revenue with existing clients</i> <i>Introduce new services</i> <i>Investments/Acquisitions</i> - Additional questions for discussion are included in the guidance for each breakout assignment - Ensure discussion is carried out with a focus on 'what we need to do' and not 'how' or 'when'. Any enablers discussed should be 'parked' for follow up.	- Output from the previous breakout discussions - Individual team Instructions with framing questions to guide each breakout team discussions - Ensure teams understand that we are asking them to think boldly in terms of what we need to do, not how to do it	- Each breakout team develops a point of view on <i>the Growth Drivers framework</i> and the questions posed in their breakout instructions - Each team is prepared to share their findings with the group-at-large using the report out template	Format: 3 breakout teams (75 minutes total). Participants to refer to breakout instructions entitled 'Assignment 2: How we will achieve market leadership?', and the supporting template - Each team has an assigned team captain who will remain with their topic during the 'shift and share' - Breakout teams will work on their assignments (30 minutes) in their breakout rooms. Each team will then 'shift' to the next breakout room (except the team captain) to learn what other groups are thinking and provide input on their topics (second shift @ 20 minutes and the last shift @10 minutes, total 30 minutes). - Teams make a final shift, returning to their original breakout teams for 15 minutes to refine and finalize their assignment. Production notes: [Workshop facilitator] to refer the participants to the template in the assignment pack. Explain that there will be a foam board with the template available for each breakout team. They will use this to report out.

Table 13. Elements of the facilitators' agenda with annotations

Vignette A – internal meeting adopting various strategy tools

- Meeting duration: two hours
- Participants: three team members (two strategy analysts and a strategy director), and researcher as team member but purposefully acting primarily as participant observant
- May 2011: the team has been approached by a service line leader to help with tackling two departments that are undergoing strategic change. Although the problem is not set out clearly by the workshop sponsor, the team has to design a workshop bringing together a strategic integration of two departments the workshop sponsor leads.

Early in the meeting, workshop members discuss the nature of the problem trying to identify the pre-read¹⁸² structure as well as the structure of the workshop. While discussing, an assistant director proposes to start drafting ideas in the whiteboards located in the room. Strategy tools are used as platforms valid to their discussion. Figure 12 shows a picture taken from this meeting, identifying a mind mapping combined with a fish-bone analysis. The picture taken represents only one of the various white boards and strategy tools in use during the meeting. Team members interchangeably work with various whiteboards, while feeling comfortable with the frameworks in use. Nevertheless, trial and error accompanies the selection of strategy tools in the intimate environment of this informal meeting held by the team. Various configurations of tool use appear: tools used sequentially and also embedded in each other.

¹⁸² “Pre-read” documents consisted of highly elaborate information preparing workshop participants on forthcoming workshops.



Figure 12 A whiteboard where the team draws a mind map in combination with a fish-bone analysis

Representative examples for these types of configurations are more concretely the following:

Type (1) configuration: Mind Mapping (Tool A) → Issue Tree (Tool B) → Hypothesis Development (Tool C). Two other configurations occur as following: Type (2) configuration: A fish-bone (cause and effect) analysis (Tool D) is used as a base for the structure of the Mind Mapping (Tool E in the same figure). In addition, as denoted in Configuration 3, the total meeting interaction of strategy tools resulted in the use of four different tools, although there was barely an explicit discussion of these tools, but the discussion focused on the output expected from the meeting, which was the preparation of the workshop and first steps in its design.

As observed, three types of configurations were encountered in this vignette, but also extending to a variety of other situations. The types of configurations are laid out below and visually represented in Figure 13.

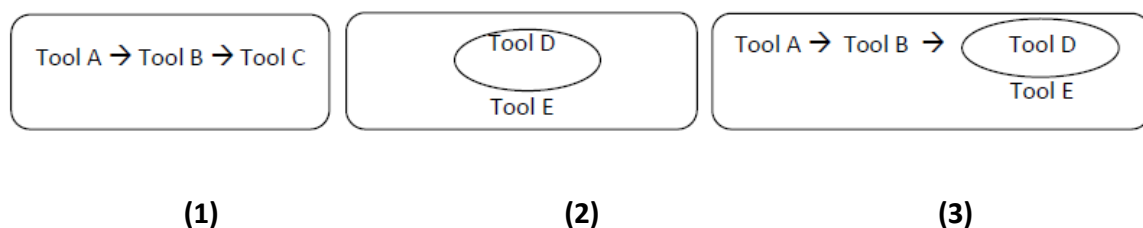


Figure 13 Various configurations of strategy tools in use during a backstage meeting

In the scheme represented in this figure, three observed configuration types are shown, namely: sequential (1), simultaneous (2), and combined use of strategy tools (2) within this same preparatory meeting. Figure 13 encapsulates only a snapshot of strategy tools in use: this

snapshot informs about the various instances of strategy tools in use in other circumstances, informed by the categories of various configurations as below:

- example of sequential tool use (Type 1 configuration)
- example of simultaneous tool use (Type 2 configuration)
- example of combination of the above configurations (Type 3 configuration).

These configurations are further substantiation of the Cheshire cat metaphor, which will be discussed later in this chapter, highlighting the various representations of strategy tools in use.

5.7.2. Workshop delivery – execution enactments

Facilitators' notes had an important role in structuring the *(front)staging* of workshops. Indeed, the backbone of strategy workshops seemed to be consistent throughout repeated instances. A team member shared in an informal talk, while addressing the staged workshop in connection to the facilitator's agenda:

We have a standardized method in workshops - breaking out groups to fill in standardized templates. (O-56)

Nevertheless, despite the discipline and very structured approach towards the staging of workshops, unforeseeable circumstances were faced in various workshops. The adjustments of workshops seemed a natural part of every episode. I could observe spontaneity in workshops (here referring to workshop delivery). In addition, spontaneity was confirmed in the

ethnographic talks conducted, as well as in the workshop briefings occurring in team meetings.

Below is a representative account:

Interviewer: Does it happen that you follow the schedule or do you have sometimes unforeseen circumstances that you have?

Respondent: Oh you always do, always. ... This is not, this is merely a guideline.

Interviewer: So you try to follow the latter?

Respondent: Yes, this is merely a guideline and it helps get you through the day or the work, or the two days in this case.

(Discussion with workshop facilitator, Director, I22-1-9K16).

Similarly, a strategy director discusses the workshops varying from the originally planned ones:

In terms of the workshop process and what happened on the days, I would probably say 80% consistent and 20% different, so the discussion about a market leadership vision, yes that happened at every workshop. (Senior strategy analyst, I21-1-14S11)

Hence, despite the subtle variations from the originally planned workshops, the facilitator's agenda offered a guideline that was considered an important reference document in the eyes of the team aiding with the organization of the workshops. From here on, the team would respond to changes required as one day of the workshop would unfold:

So what are the typical enablers that we need to get right in order for us to be able to successfully execute on this? At the moment these are just suggestions because we will decide at the end of day one... (Strategy Director, I21-1-5S8)

Building on evidence shown earlier,¹⁸³ one could observe that although there was a clearly delineated pipeline of workshops and strong individual and team preparation behind each workshop, improvisations occurred at various stages. Here is an excerpt from a conversation

¹⁸³ More precisely, Table 13 and findings corroborated with the analysis of talks and observations.

taken from the team members as they discuss their experience with their latest workshop, while briefing the rest of the team during a team meeting:

Strategy director: We ended up changing a lot throughout the two days in terms of the agenda because it all very much depends, from our experience we know it all very much depends on how the discussion is going, obviously, if people are very interested in discussing a certain aspect, we're not going to take them away from that, we're going to continue that discussion somehow. So we amend and tailor the agenda as we're going throughout the two days. So the end agenda turned out to be quite different from our original agenda but we got to where we wanted to get to in the end and I think [the workshop sponsor name] was quite happy, everybody was very keen, we agreed a lot of action items that needed to be done, and so you're left on a real high note in that sense. In terms of lessons learnt, I think again I've been [to] quite a few of these now, you have to be flexible because things change, and things change like that, and you just have to be flexible and go with the flow and I think that helps a lot and I think [workshop facilitator] is very good at that, [workshop facilitator name] is very good at sussing out the situation, making the changes, he's very calm about the whole thing so it make it very easy to make the sense – [other strategy director, having worked for the same workshop] you can jump it because I know you were, oh my god he's changed it again, you were a bit...

Other strategy director: It was three seconds after...

Team head: Yes, but I think that's an important point because you need to go in being very structured because you need to, because you have instruction of the discussions and you have to know where you're going and you have to understand how to get to the next point, but I think once you're in the situation you need to be flexible and you just need to...
(Team meeting, O11 26-2)

It appeared that many of the final tweaks in a workshop depended on the workshop facilitators in charge. All workshop facilitators involved with the team workshops had two or more decades with the company.¹⁸⁴ Their contribution to the improvisation and smooth running of workshops

¹⁸⁴ Revisit *Appendix E* to obtain a clear picture on the background of workshop facilitators operating within the team.

was emphasized throughout a variety of sources. But most importantly, despite the adjustments occurring with the organization of workshops, strategy tools were an important consideration. Although the enactment of strategy tools would face adjustments (e.g., I was involved personally in the continuous reassignment of participant teams for several agenda sessions), hence showing flexibility in their adoption and adaptation, the tools that were laid out earlier in the facilitator's agenda would be consistent throughout the various strategy workshops planned.

In Table 14, I address strategy tools embedded in the executed workshops in more detail. I compare these tools with the ones encountered in the workshop preparation praxis. Note the interesting findings that emerge as one runs through Table 14: although strategy tools seem non-existent in the initial client meeting and client validation meeting, they seem to be ever-present in all other workshop phases. At the same time, despite having repetitive encounters with the same strategy tools during workshop delivery, the preparatory activities prove to be messier (cf. Schön, 1983), therefore leaving more room for the use of a broader spectrum of strategy tools. This interesting phenomenon is discussed in the section on second order findings later in this chapter. Therefore, as the first order analysis progressed, one could observe a disciplined bricolage during a *frontstage* workshop, a discipline that contrasted with the loose approach observed while working behind closed doors, *backstage*.

Workshops (seven)	When the workshop took place	Workshop preparation occurrence of strategy tools	Workshop delivery occurrence of strategy tools
Project 1: Sub-area 1 (China)	December 2010 –	- Initial client meeting ¹⁸⁶ n/a	- Workshop (“facilitated client meeting”) (7) ¹⁸⁸ Strengths and weaknesses (single session)
Project 2: Restructured area (Asia-Pacific)	April 2011	- Account team preparation (3) Mind map	(7) Opportunities and threats (single session) ¹⁸⁹ (7) Growth opportunities (own strategy tool)
Project 3: Sub-area 2 (ASEAN)		(3) Force-field analysis	- Workshop Deliverable (7) Current State/ Future state
Project 4: Sub-area 3 (Oceania)		(7) 2x2 matrices	(7) Growth opportunities (prioritizing matrix)
Project 5: Sub-area 4 (Korea)		(7) MECO chart (pre-read)	(7) Prioritized enablers (heat map)
Project 7: Sub-area 5 (FSO)		(6) Growth scenarios ¹⁸⁷ (pre-read)	
Project 6: Marketing (Asia-Pacific) ¹⁸⁵		- Client validation meeting n/a	

Table 14. Description of seven strategy projects and strategy tools embedded in them

¹⁸⁵ Given the restructuring of the whole region (“Area” in firm jargon) of the company, marketing was considered a relevant and immediate problem, demanding a separate workshop in line with the others pursued in the same region.

¹⁸⁶ Note that each workshop stage following the company pipeline (refer to Figure 11) is addressed here in turn.

¹⁸⁷ Note that despite the scenario exercise described in detail in Chapter 8, here growth scenarios refer only to financial growth projections dictated by request of the workshop sponsor (usually the head of the sub-area into consideration). Hence, this was not a solid exercise but rather a dictated extrapolation of various financial futures to be expected by the company.

¹⁸⁸ Count for each workshop. For example, “7” here refers to the named strategy tool occurred in seven projects out of the seven assessed.

¹⁸⁹ Notice how the aforementioned sessions appear here as a modified SWOT.

In addition, it should be noted that workshop delivery not only encompassed the actual workshop, but also the follow-up steps (consisting of the deliverables sent by the team to the participants and workshop sponsor). In Figure 14, I show an example of a strategy tool used in a deliverable by the team.¹⁹⁰ Here is how the user describes the use of this particular tool in a "reflection in action" interview:

We're on page 41 [referring to the deliverable slide containing the tree shown in Figure 14] which is driver trees and this just splits up the revenues very, very simply into what are the drivers of ultimately of revenues, what is its volume, meaning how many hours are worked and it's the fees that you're managing to secure for each. Then where are we seeing hours going up and down in the different service lines? Where are we seeing fees go up and down in the different service lines? ... So the next step would be to drill down even further in these and see what's going on. (I21-2-11S33)

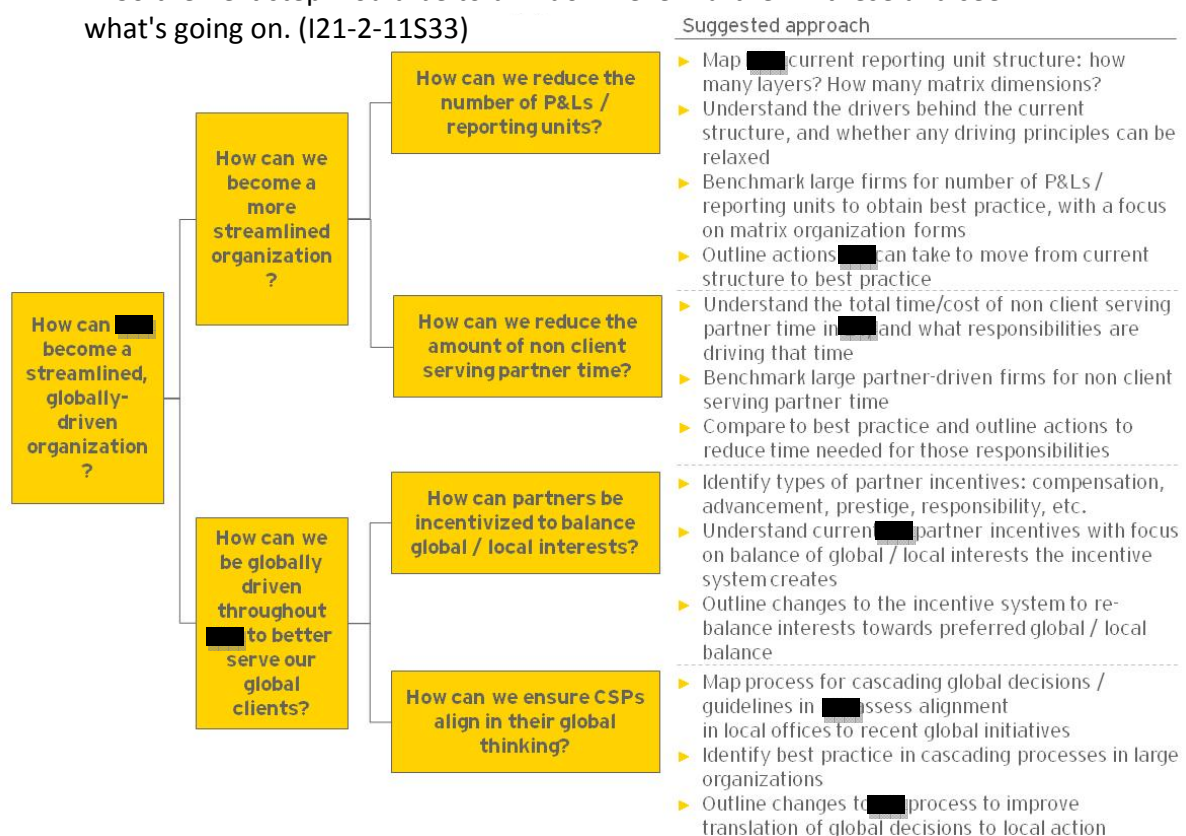


Figure 14 Analytic strategy tool used in a deliverable

¹⁹⁰ To further validate the finding, this was also shown to the team during Focus Group 1.

As shown in these sections, strategy tools are embedded in a variety of situations, at different stages (Goffman, 1959) and project phases. However, highlighting the broad array of circumstances that accompanies the enactments of strategy tools only confirms prior studies that have reported such occurrences on various levels (such as Campbell, 1997; Chesley & Wenger, 1999; Clark, 1997; Grant, 2003; Jarzabkowski et al., executive report, 2010; Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006; Orlikowski, 2000; Rigby, 2009, 2010; Weick, 1998, discussed earlier). Therefore, to denote that bricolage accompanies the use of strategy tools makes for an easy and simple characterization of their nature in praxis. As a consequence, in this chapter I attempt to discuss in what conditions such bricolage is more likely to happen and how it unfolds while we focus on strategy tools in use.

To conclude on these first order findings, I could generally observe various configurations of strategy tools both in preparatory and execution enactments of strategy workshops: an issue tree coupled with a gap analysis, and followed by hypotheses developments; or SWOT discussed only partly (SW, SWO, etc.) during strategy workshops. *Vignette A* concurs with other circumstances encountered first-hand in the field where I could witness that there was a contrasting approach to strategy tools *backstage* (while the team or team members discussed – whether alone or in groups), compared with workshops where there was a more risk-averse approach to the choice of tools, resulting in less experimentation with strategy tools than was encountered in the earlier stages. These findings are corroborated by consultations of workshop facilitator documents and documents on strategy workshop process flows. The all-encompassing finding in the first order analysis presented in this section confirms that (1) although multiple configurations of strategy

tools are adopted and adapted in strategy work, their enactments are not always explicitly present, therefore representing bricolage; (2) consequently, the Cheshire cat¹⁹¹ metaphor is chosen hereafter to address this peculiar phenomenon of strategy tools in use. This metaphor stands for the “blinking image” of strategy tools as they are used: while strategy tools are visible to users and audiences in a few instances, in many other instances they are invisible, and hence they resemble Cheshire cats. This metaphor will be further explored in Chapter Six, by unveiling second-order nuances of findings.

5.8. The fluctuating presence of strategy tools and sensemaking around them – the continuous chase of “invisible strategy tools in use”

Following the very first ethnographic insights extracted from the field, it could be observed that team members would initially be adamant that generally strategy tools had little presence in their work:

So I think on the whole if you're talking about conventional strategy house framework, I would say (our exposure is) very low. We're talking 10% maximum. If you're talking about things like mind mapping and that kind of approach, I think maybe it's slightly higher but I still think it's on the lower side (Associate director, I21-1-14S11).

However, when specifically targeting singular strategy tools, it would emerge that indeed they became used. The same team member later confides:

I have a strategy background...so I know what the frameworks are, but I must admit within the Team I think we've used in every single project probably 10% of the common frameworks. In terms of more the analytics that you mentioned... I do more of that side. So again, I don't

¹⁹¹ The metaphor is chosen following Lewis Carroll's character in *Alice in Wonderland*.

see that as frameworks, I see that as more analysis in terms of Excel modelling that kind of approach rather than framework (Associate Director, I21-1-40S11)

Another team member confesses along the same lines:

On the [current] Vision project,¹⁹² that document I sent through to you, I use a force field analysis and [company proprietary] metrics... I think I use, thinking about it, I use a fair amount of tools. So for the Vision project things like PESTEL, things like Porter's Five Forces have come up, force field has come up, balance score card has come up, as you know, scenario, vision techniques, so all of that stuff is a framework that I use within my head. (Director, I21-1-17-S14)

Early on in the process, it was possible to witness the use and adoption of strategy tools in various settings. As highlighted earlier in this dissertation (Chapter 6 – see *Vignette A*) strategy tools were adopted in internal sessions with closed doors, as well as in workshops where a more diverse audience was present. Hence, strategy tools were adopted both *backstage* and *frontstage* with differing roles. A document that held a considerable load within the team¹⁹³ was also the “pre-read”. This type of document was an established part of strategy workshops. It consisted of condensed information delivered to workshop participants prior to the staged workshops.

I think I had about 12 different files for [Sub-Area] and in each file I had 12 different worksheets and I needed to get data from all of them. I had something like 144 worksheets to extract about, you know, 100 pieces of data from each worksheet.

(Interview with assistant director in charge of preparing pre-reads, I22-1-6K24)

¹⁹² “Vision project” was how the Global Strategy project was referred to by the team members and major stakeholders (and sponsors) within the organization.

¹⁹³ This practice was briefly introduced in *Vignette A*.

But deliverables such as the pre-reads mentioned here were not the only documents where strategy tools would be present. To reconfirm the Cheshire cats discovered in Chapter 6, strategy tools would be multifaceted. Figures 15–18 provide examples of strategy tools as they are located in various settings, respectively in a personal notebook (Figure 15), and as part of a flipchart during a closed session in one of the focus groups organized (Figure 16), a framework destined for clients participating in a strategy workshop (Figure 17), and a detailed assessment of barriers of entry as part of a team meeting exercise while assessing the global strategy scenarios to be encountered by the firm by 2020¹⁹⁴ (Figure 18). These are not exhaustive examples, but they are shown here to illustrate the fluctuating presence of strategy tools in various domains. Below, I offer a more detailed background on the capturing of these pictures:

Figure 15 – This is an issue tree that was provided by the consultant by personal request. This issue tree was spotted by chance, and fully unaccounted for by the consultant during the previous talks held. This tool is based on the ongoing work on production of scenarios as part of the global strategy formulation (project included in the project portfolio of the team during my research stay, discussed in detail in Chapter 8). Note that this framework was not shared with the team, but was only used for personal reference in a scenario building exercise.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ This project is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

¹⁹⁵ In fact, had this tool not been found during observations, it would be highly improbable that I could have encountered it, other than in claims provided during ethnographic talks.

Figure 16 – This picture is taken from a focus group conducted with the team.¹⁹⁶ The crumpled paper shown in the photo indicates that the strategy framework was discarded after the team had worked with it. Interestingly, as encountered also in Figure 16, this strategy tool was not explicitly present in the deliverables presented by the team, although its input would be conveyed at later stages of discussion.

Figure 17 – Contrary to the previous instances, this picture shows a case where the framework is used in the presence of the client during a strategy workshop (hence, in line with the argument proposed here, this represents a neat and clear-cut view of the strategy tool here).

Figure 18 (a – b) – These pictures were taken directly after participating in a meeting with the team. During this meeting, the team contemplated the construction of future scenarios for the firm, in cooperation with an outsourced major consultancy team. The intensive discussion was accompanied by the use of various assessments and frameworks although never directly addressed explicitly by either of the team members. Here is a list of barriers of entry, followed by a S-C-P¹⁹⁷ analysis.

¹⁹⁶ During the exercise this Figure is concerned with, the team was contemplating various factors affecting their attraction of new talent into the firm, an issue that was ever-present as I witnessed during my entire stay with the team.

¹⁹⁷ As earlier presented, this tool is based Joe Bain's economics book, 1956.

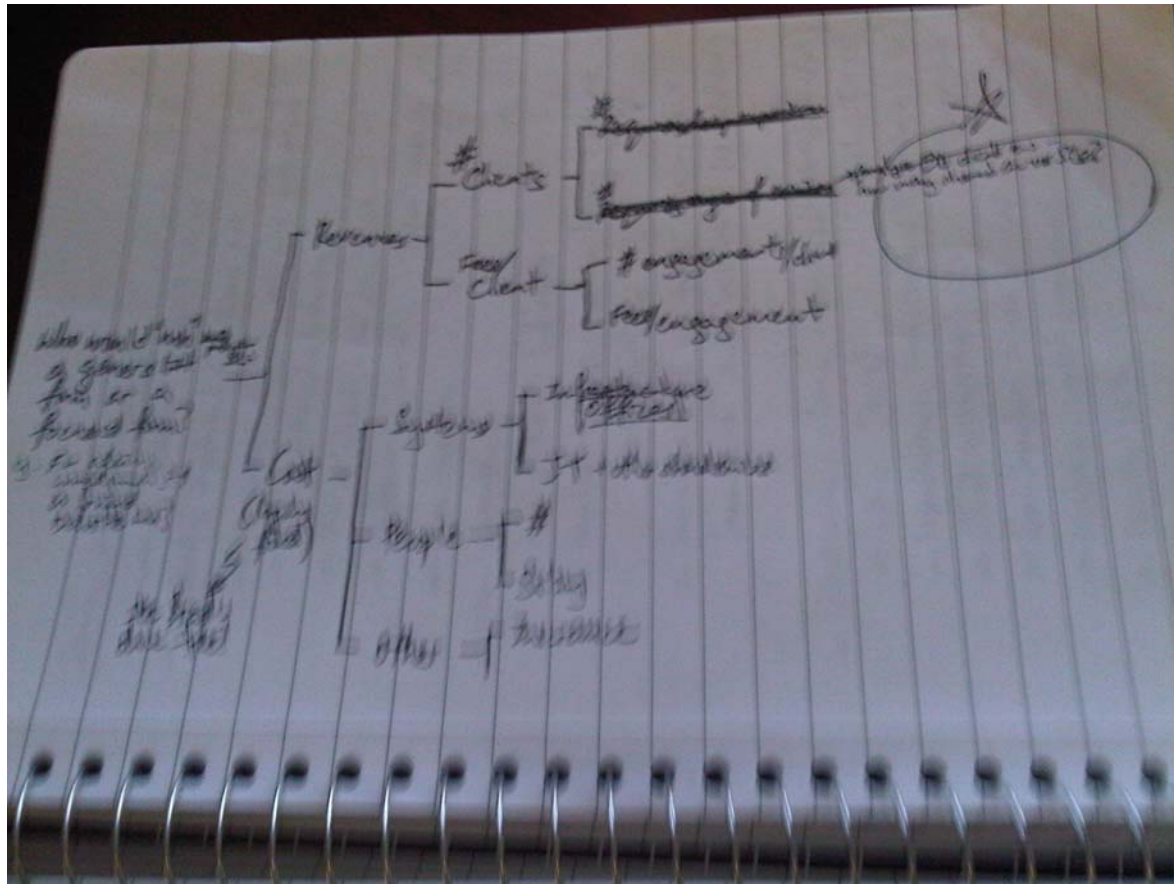


Figure 15 Picture¹⁹⁸ of personal notes using an issue tree¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁸ Picture rendered illegible to preserve confidentiality of respondent and issue in question.

¹⁹⁹ This particular type of tree is also known as a cost tree.

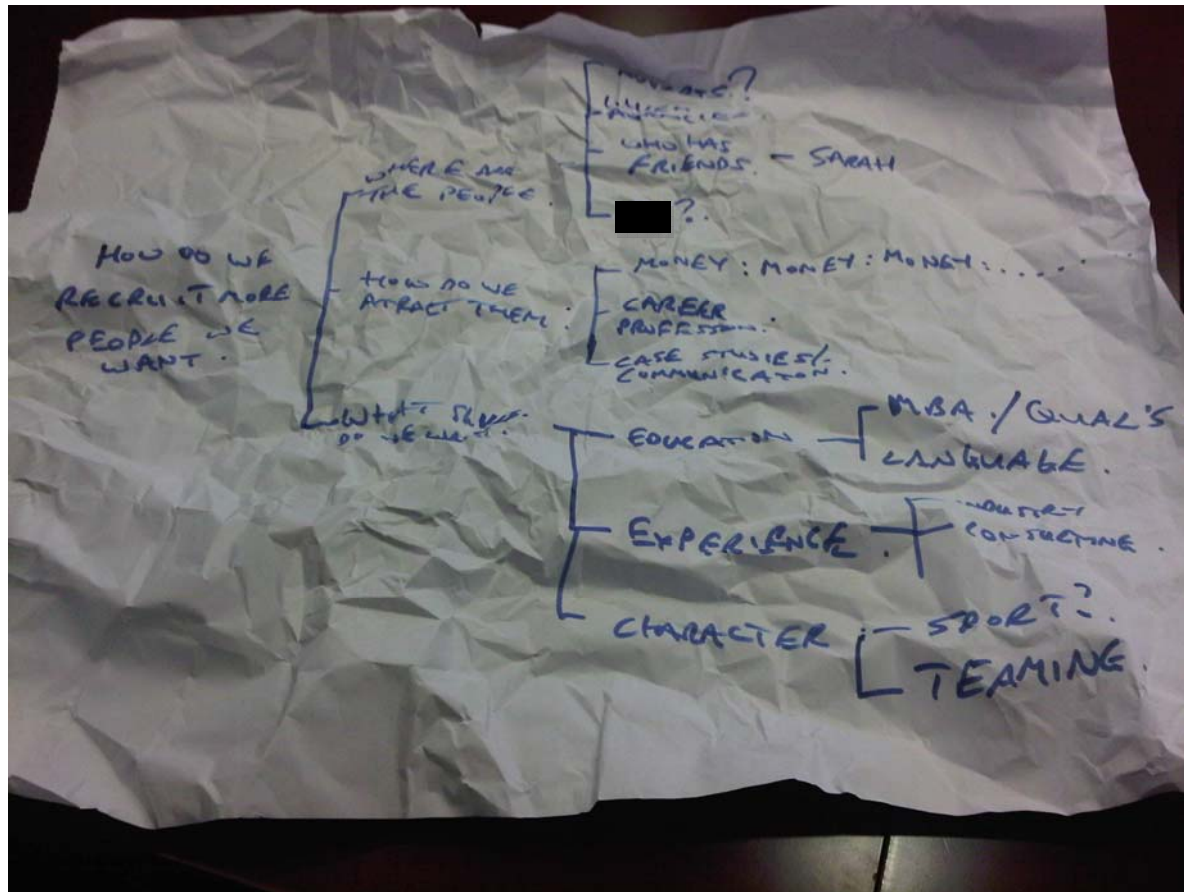


Figure 16 Issue tree used during a focus group²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ The team for this specific exercise was discussing a current problem it faced – recruiting. Note that the black sign is included here to preserve the anonymity of the firm pursued here, due to the confidentiality agreement with the unit.

01. Defining an Emerging Growth Platform (1 Large Board)

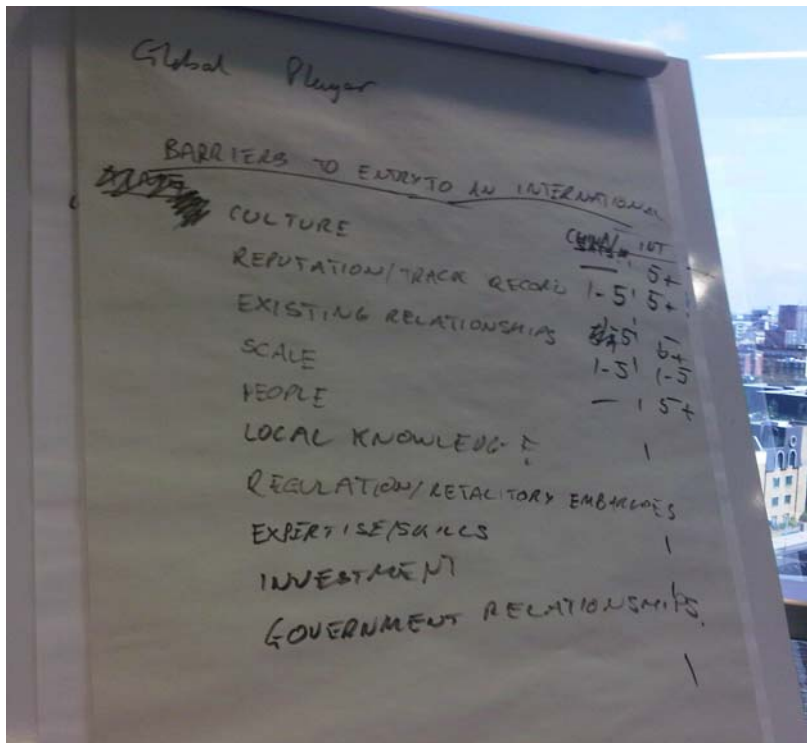
Emerging Growth Platform

Opportunities for building EGPs lie at the intersection of a company's actual or potential capability set, current or emerging client needs and forces of change in the external environment.

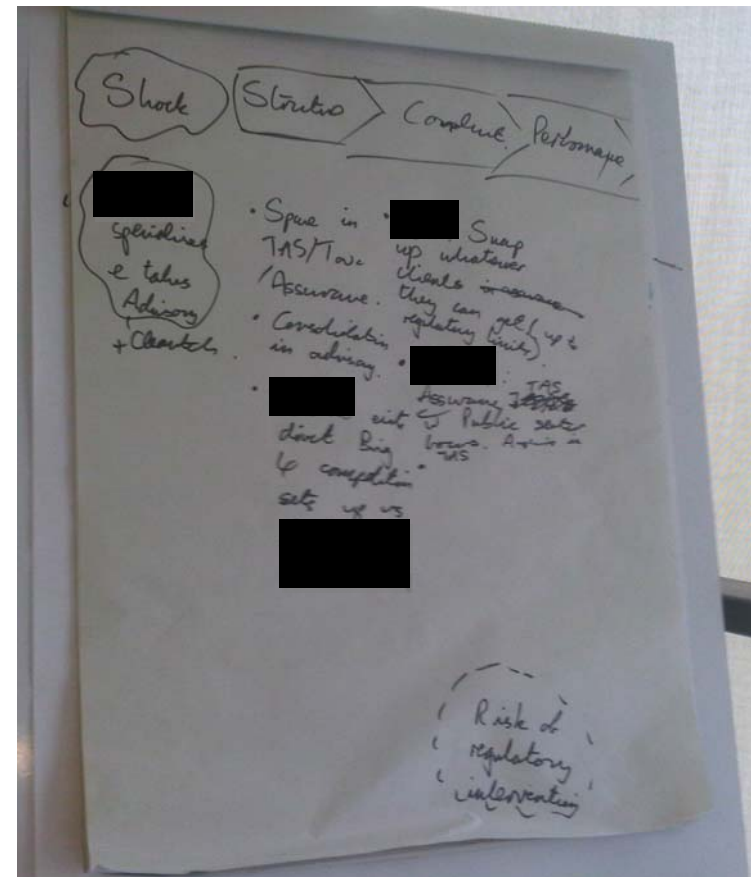


Figure 17 An emerging growth platform discussed during a strategy workshop with clients²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Clients in this case were presented with a large whiteboard (as also indicated in the heading of this exhibit), and were challenged to contemplate about the issues proposed by the framework (i.e., an emerging growth platform) here.



(a)



(b)

Figure 18 (a – b) A detailed discussion of entry barriers followed by S-C-P (Structure-Conduct-Performance)

All figures shown here are vivid examples extracted from the field to demonstrate the broad range of circumstances when selecting and applying strategy frameworks. As shown in the first order analysis here, strategy tools were used in a variety of situations. These illustrations further depict that strategy tools were present during preparatory enactment practices both behind closed doors individually – as they appear in personal documents (as shown in Figure 15), but also in teams (as shown in Figure 16 and 18 a-b). As a result, not only was their presence traced in preparatory enactment phases, but so was their presence witnessed during the execution phases.

Furthermore, workshop delivery was accompanied by strategy tools that workshop participants experience first-hand (as shown in Figure 17). All these illustrations on the multiple presence of strategy tools are consistent with the results obtained by semi-structured interviews in the pilot study presented in Chapter 4. But a closer inspection of strategy tool roles is needed, as discussed in Chapter 6.

5.9. Context of the Global Strategy Project – a first order narrative of practitioners making sense of strategy tools in use

How does negotiation of meaning occur for strategy tools? Here, such negotiation is understood to be conducted through sensemaking (Weick, 1993). An illustration of ongoing sensemaking practices is provided through one vignette (Miles & Huberman, 1994) based on multiple sessions witnessed in the field. This project is an outlier when compared with the strategy projects taken on a continuous basis by the internal team (especially when

compared with the seven area and sub-area strategy projects that were discussed in this chapter earlier), in that: (1) the strategy of the firm had not been revisited in the last 10 years and therefore no standardized process was in place to accommodate the project.²⁰² Hence, many activities within this project could be defined as explorative (March, 1991); (2) the project was taken over not only by the strategy unit examined in the ethnography here, but also by the external consultancy hired for the project. As a result, the heterogeneity of the working group could account for further negotiation of sensemaking around strategy tools, which in itself represents a very interesting setting for the study.

²⁰² Note that this does not imply that there were no proper resources in support of the project.

Vignette B²⁰³ – Making sense of scenarios for the Global Strategy Project

The questionable “taken for grantedness” of strategy tools was highlighted during the scenario development exercise undertaken by the team together with the external consultancy engaged for the strategic planning in the organization. Here, multiple sessions took place to clarify how to tackle scenarios and to develop a methodology in that direction. There was no clear direction initially on how to develop scenarios, although the team had good understanding on the scope and general format of scenarios. As one of senior team members put it:

I think scenario analysis is incredibly helpful. I think it's definitely going to grow within our firm and I know that [the COO] wants to do more of it. Where I've seen it used I think it's been incredibly successful and yeah, I think our team needs to get more training and I think it should be used more.

Whereas the team's Americas counterpart confided:

We have used it from time to time. We probably haven't used it in its purest form because the organization hasn't had a lot of appetite for really doing broad based uncertain future scenario analysis type work. I mean we've used it in certain projects more to ... I'm just getting people to think broader about the market environment along very specific dimensions like tax legislation, what happens if we go to a territorial system vs. this other type of system? So we'll end up picking very specific dimensions and even if it's not truly an uncertain outcome, which is what the real intent of scenario analysis is, we'll use a construct of scenario analysis to just get people thinking broadly about different possible futures but it's not a tool we use a lot. I've probably used it, I don't know, four or five times in the past five years. (Global strategy director – Americas, I21-1-19S2)

This project started while in my third month in the field. In February, the project sponsor confided to me:

²⁰³ Note that this is the second vignette displayed to better highlight findings on strategy tools in use.

You are very lucky, because you happen to be in the launch of our global strategy project (Sponsor, O1-32).

Soon afterwards, I was informed that suddenly the company's leadership had decided to rework its global (corporate) strategy. This project took the team by surprise, although its necessity had been proclaimed earlier by these practitioners. Nevertheless, there had been no traces of this project earlier on in the field. During my previous months of fieldwork with the same team, I had encountered continuous support offered by the team to various service lines operating in the company. I had witnessed that the team generally supported the making of business level strategies within various geographic areas where the company operated. The unit was informally coined as the "Global Strategy" team,²⁰⁴ and the team's name never made more sense than when the Global Strategy Project was launched.

Early on in the project, a major external consultancy was hired to help in designing the global strategy. However, during talks with the various internal stakeholders in the project, I was informed that the external consultancy was simply asked to deploy its "review capacities", hence use these as extra resources, since the internal consultancy team was already engaged in a few other ongoing projects. The external consultancy was initially used by the firm to process the vast amount of information at hand, and therefore design a "fact book" on the current state of the firm. Consequently, the external consultancy was used to help with designing scenarios which would help executives reflect on the future of

²⁰⁴ Note that due to political dynamics within the leadership of the firm, another label was used to formally address the team within the organizational chart.

the firm and on potential future implications. Scenario analysis seemed to start as a very ambiguous exercise. One (senior) team member revealed right after one of the internal scenario analysis sessions, in a personal informal talk:

We are all guinea pigs here, so [calling my name], if you have some valuable templates of scenario analysis we would be very appreciative.
(Strategy director, O2-78)

The way in which scenarios were produced was continuously redefined throughout the entire strategy making exercise.²⁰⁵ This process of negotiation occurred through the continuous interaction of the in-house strategy team members with the external consultants. As a result, scenario analysis was “rediscovered”.²⁰⁶ This rediscovery of scenarios was apparent among team members, despite expertise and hierarchy. Here is how the head of the team referred to the prior use of scenario analysis through a retrospective account:

It was again not the purest way of doing it but it was fairly interesting.
(Sponsor, O89)

Whereas another senior team member discussed on the experience:

What's most interesting is to customise it to our situation because talking about it in a vacuum and say[ing], "This is what it is", like the textbook approach, it's not helpful. So it is very helpful when the Team, as we did today in the meeting... customise it and adapt it to the situation. (Strategy director, I21-2-41S8)

²⁰⁵ Please note the deliberate use of “strategy making” rather than “strategy planning” here – accounts claim that strategic planning exercises are detached from strategic making exercise (as in Mintzberg, 1994; Mintzberg et al., 1998) however, the particular case witnessed here consisted in the firm revisiting its strategy a decade after its last design, hence not constituting mere formal planning systems, but “strategy making” instead.

²⁰⁶ The term “rediscovered” rather than “discovered” is used intentionally here since practitioners had some knowledge on scenarios (from their education and general knowledge), despite their lack of first-hand experience with them.

Such adaptation of the tool in practice required continuous sensemaking among team members before scenarios could be chosen for presentation to their executive committee (i.e., a leadership rank including board members of the firm).

This vignette was not intended as an exhaustive representation of the project in question, but it was used to present a glimpse of the situation occurring within the team while faced with the use of a less familiar strategy tool, along with its adaptation and adoption in praxis. At the same time, this vignette sets the stage for the following (first order) chronological accounts that provide a more fine-grained representation of the same project. In the following pages a construction of events is shown in two diagrams. In the first (Figure 19), main events are shown chronologically, whereas in the second (Figure 20), focus is on strategy practices and tools used during the same timeline. As shown in these chronological figures, several entities were built up to support scenario analysis: these included not only work streams and an assigned project manager, along with outsourced consultants working for the exercise, but also data bundles gathered in various interim deliverables (such as “The fact book” or “Data repository”).²⁰⁷ Alongside these entities and deliverables, multiple practices were set up (such as internal meetings with the external consultancies, the executive committee (EC) event, and one-on-one interviews with EC members). Along with scenario sensemaking, buy-in from executives was negotiated so that scenarios would be an acceptable process in the future strategy.

²⁰⁷ For the lattermost, I was in charge of being the contact person and at the same time, in charge of the continuous maintenance and update of the folder. This at the same time allowed me more access to the scenario exercise, since I would be often contacted by various stakeholders within the Global Strategy Project.

Hence scenarios became not an isolated strategy tool, but a fully organized activity that demanded support from other material gathered by the responsible team in this project. At the same time, being a member of this habitat, I could observe at first hand that despite the abundance of resources dedicated to this exercise, the process, being a new one for the team, was highly iterative and unpredictable. It was accompanied by continuous reconfigurations of the intended end product, as well as ongoing discussions among stakeholders. As a result, scenarios were rewritten, their definitions redefined, and the supporting documents continuously tweaked.

This process, given the multiplicity of actors involved and the rank of priority it gained in the global company agenda, relied strongly on the buy-in obtained by major sponsors (such as the executive committee which included service line leaders as well as the company CEO, COO, and global partner's director). Hence, there occurred sensemaking and sensegiving activities (cf. Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) around global scenarios.

The findings presented in this section will be further explored in Chapter 8.

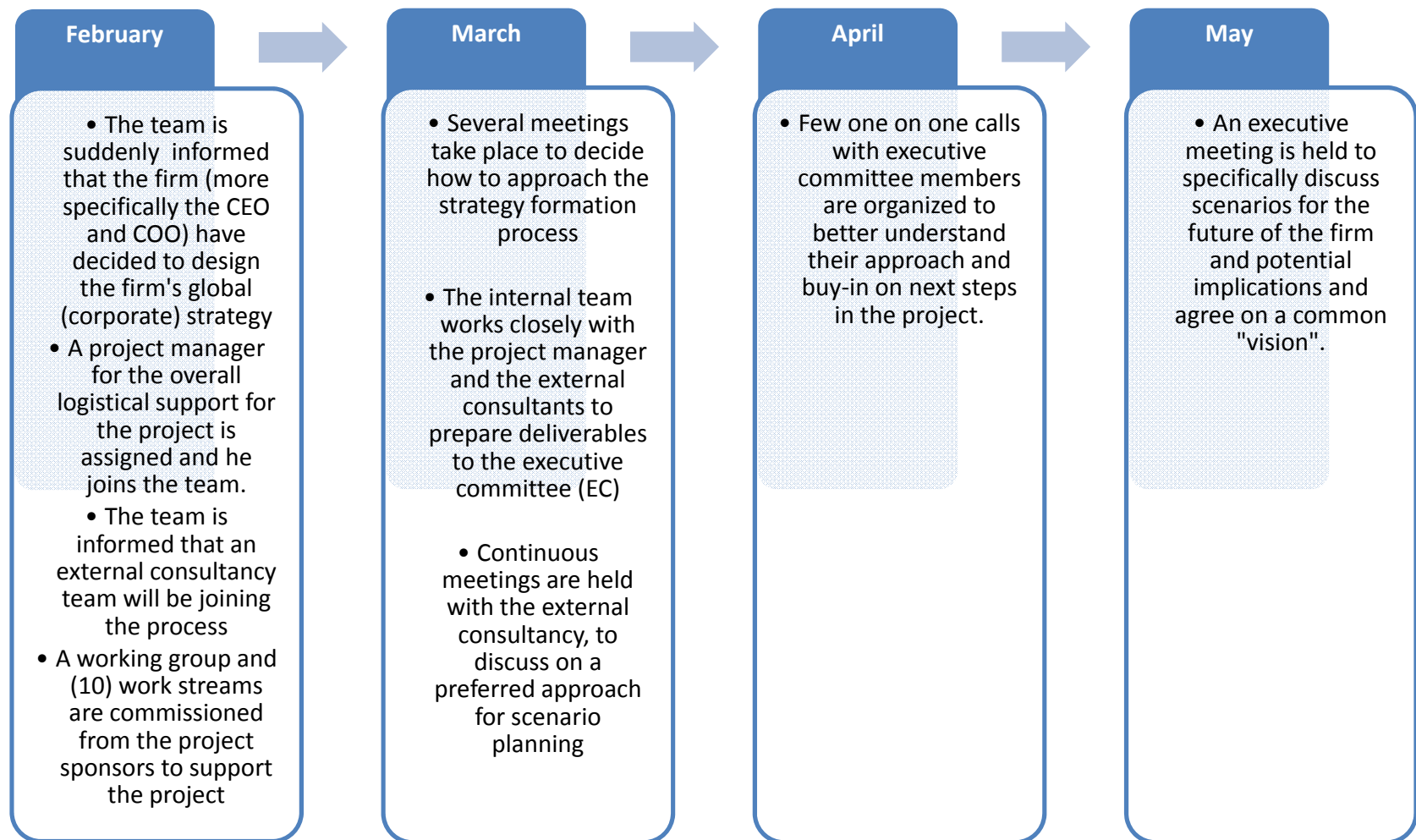


Figure 19 Construction of events – “Global Strategy” project

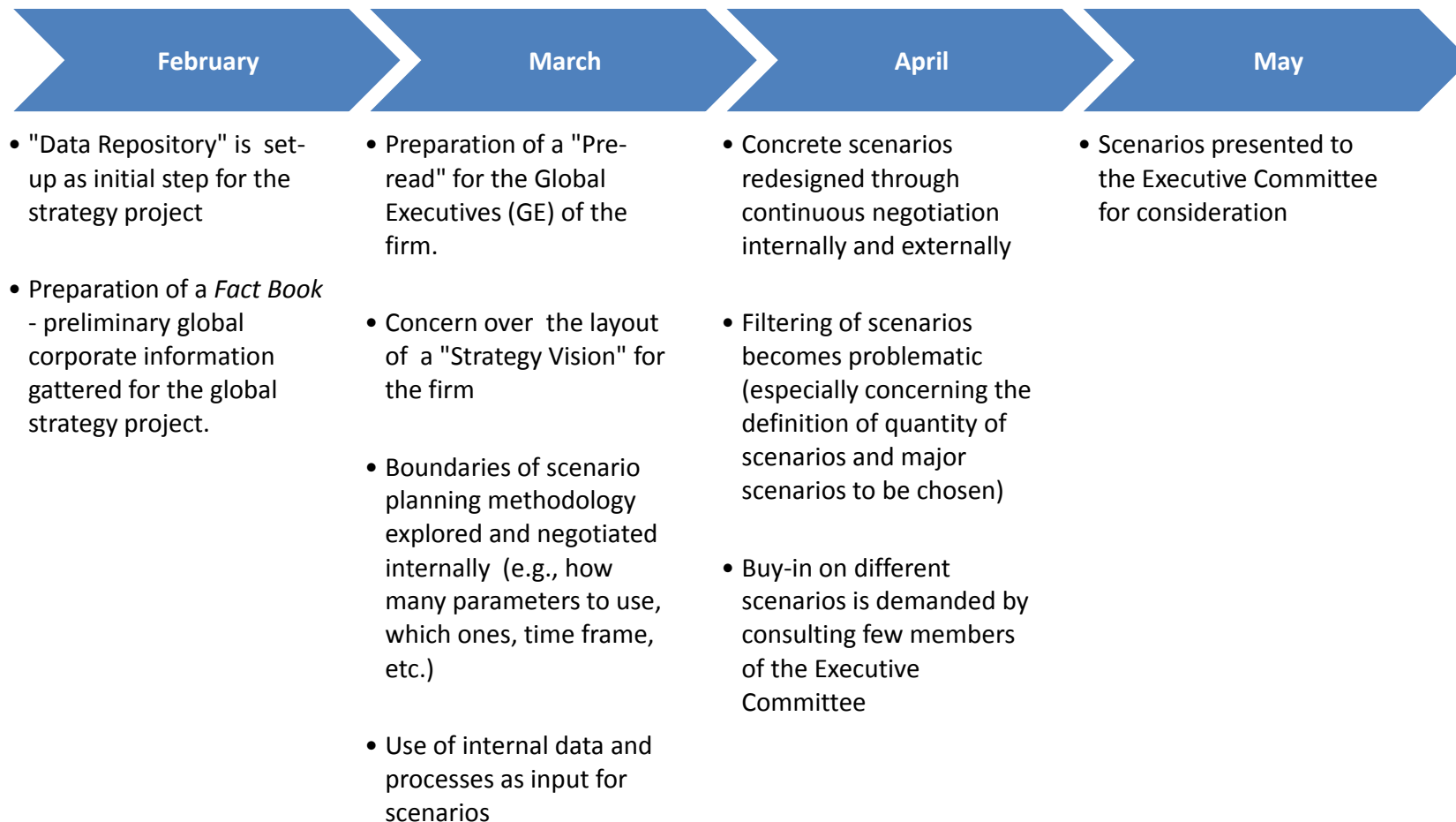


Figure 20 Main strategy tools and supporting deliverables used during the praxis of the Global Strategy Project

(Particular practices and tools are shown here and how are they used during each month).

5.10. Methodological challenges

At various stages of its development, this study faced several major practical and theoretical obstacles. In this section I explore these challenges in more detail, along with associated mitigating techniques.

(1) Reluctance of consultants towards explorative research

Previous literature has echoed research problems pertaining particularly to consulting. Consultants have been shown to be reluctant to offer information about their work with the clients (Lyall, 1977, in Gagnon, 1984; Payne & Lumsden, 1987). In many cases, researchers have chosen the consulting site first rather than first deciding on the research question and design (Gagnon, 1982). These issues might explain why little research is pursued in this setting. Challenges of this type echo also with the issues presented in this study in its initial stages, particularly with the negotiations for access. As a result, the sample chosen here is, as shown, in line with purposive sampling (Given, 2008; Miles & Huberman, 1994), favouring the site that allowed for quick and favourable access.

(2) Difficulty in capturing practices and praxis and the cumbersomeness of associated data

Accessing strategy practices and praxis has been continuously discussed as challenging, since it involves understanding tacit and deeply embedded phenomena (Whittington, 2001). Balogun et al. (2003) point at these difficulties and suggest more collaborative research. This is taken into account and followed here. However, it should be acknowledged that providing a “dirty hands” approach vs. “clean models” (Hirsch,

Michaels, & Friedman, 1987) involves a high cost (e.g., this type of study is shown to be time consuming, see Dawson, 1997) which could not be neglected in the trade-offs encountered in this research. Such trade-offs encompassed difficult methodological decisions. For example, since dealing with extended texts can overload human processing capabilities (Faust, 1982, in Miles & Huberman, 1994), I favoured systematic and self-conscious data displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994) and within case sampling (Graziano & Raulin, 2010). The filtered data was thereafter coupled with analysis of data from multiple sources to obtain triangulation (Jick, 1979; Patton, 1990).

(3) Unobservable phenomena²⁰⁸

Sensemaking of (analytic) strategy tools entails observable and unobservable dimensions. For example, analysis of explicit documentation alone would offer little in understanding and knowing real situations (Bou & Sauquet, 2004; Tsoukas, 2006). Bou and Souquet (2005) illustrated this clearly while citing a consultant's question during their study: "The methodology tells you what steps to follow, but not how to do it. For instance, it tells you that you have to design a questionnaire, but how should the questionnaire be designed?" As knowing is an "enacted capability" (Orlikowski, 2002), close interaction and observation of the everyday work of a consultant are needed. On the practicalities of how to undertake such research, Tsoukas (2005: 121) suggests that:

²⁰⁸ This addressed challenge has few overlaps with the previous one; nevertheless it is distinct in that it does not address logistical aspects of tracing practices and praxis as such, but the very abstract phenomena concerning them relying on practitioners' reflections ("sensemaking" is a good example of the latter).

Through instructive forms of talk (e.g., “look at this,” “have you thought about this in that way?,” “try this,” “imagine this,” “compare this to that”) practitioners are moved to review the situation they are in, to relate to their circumstances in a different way.

New knowledge could be achieved when the skilled performance of practitioners is punctuated in new ways through social interaction (Tsoukas, 2001). Moreover, the guidance of senior practitioners is critical in the process of understanding knowing (Tsoukas, 2005). Thus, putting the (senior) practitioner in a more “reflective position” through frequent and in depth talks and interviews on their current and previous assignments could offer more insights on the less visible knowledge in use by consultancies.

(4) Methodological bias

Ethnography has been pinpointed as a weak methodology by various scholars (Stewart, 1998). As LeVine (1981: 180) puts it:

Like other scientists (and other animals) the ethnographer struggles for knowledge with fallible instruments for knowing. His distinctive sources of information come equipped with distinctive biases, and his task is to design data collection strategies for superseding these biases, usually by finding different sources, with different biases.

LeVine shows one aspect of the methodological challenges which, as indicated, could be fought against by triangulation. Additionally, reflexivity (Stewart, 1998) is another means which has been chosen in this study to further expand on the researcher’s quest to acknowledge existing biases and make them present in the discussion of fieldwork. Hence, here the research findings are presented through a reflexive approach similar in style to an

“impressionist tale” (cf. Van Maanen, 1988). Nevertheless, a narrative here is not used as the sole means for data display, but rather to support extracts from observations and talks held in the field, together with documentary evidence. In addition, data sources were considered in their interconnectedness, hence enabling a setting where I could be “in conversation” with the data (Shank, 2006).

(5) The interconnectedness of variance and process in collected data

Apart from the challenges discussed above, another issue generally related with ethnographic data concerns data display (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Data chosen to support the methodology here encompass process data displays. However, due to the “eclectic” nature of qualitative data, it is difficult to keep the discussion of variance and process separate (Langley, 1999: 693). Hence, to manage this challenge, both “visual mapping” and “temporal bracketing” (ibid.) are chosen as tactics for data display in this study. These visualizations are coupled with the use of vignettes and narratives. As becomes more explicit in Chapter Six (e.g., Figures 11–13) the processes could not be assessed in isolation from the variance associated with strategy tools used, or in isolation from the narratives that contribute to “thick description” (cf. Geertz, 1973). Such interconnectedness of process with variance was coupled with the reflexive (cf. Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2000) approach to capture detailed accounts from the field. The latter could be undertaken successfully through the use of narratives (Langley, 1999) and vignettes (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Carlile, 2002; Van Maanen, 1988) that are purposefully used in the following empirical chapters.

5.11. Personal biases

Along with methodological challenges expressed in the previous section, true to my reflexive research modus, I make more explicit other thoughts and personal biases that I feel the reader should access. To better convey the research messages to the audience consuming this research, I need to clarify the boundaries of what I prefer to call my “methodological conscience”. By this, I refer to my personal background which led to the choices of data presented here in light of the vast amount of information collected, as well as the choices of methods preferred and ultimately undertaken. Therefore, this self-coined “methodological conscience” helps in making explicit to the reader the existing bias I acknowledge holding prior to, as well as while conducting, this research task.

This account is consistent with the underlying philosophical assumptions presented earlier in Chapter 2 concerning the pursuit of “subjective contextualization” (Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010). However, it does not focus on my ontological and epistemological preferences discussed earlier,²⁰⁹ but rather it clarifies some personal biases without which the results obtained here could have been slightly (or considerably) deviated. Therefore, I briefly discuss these biases, although I acknowledge that this endeavour could be only partially successful in practice.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ This has been undertaken in Section 2.1 of this dissertation, hence would be discussed further here.

²¹⁰ Note that research skills and experience are also acknowledged to encompass “implicit knowledge”, which due to its own characteristics, is difficult or impossible to be codified here or elsewhere (cf. Polanyi, 1958).

There exist a magnitude of ethnographic styles, both in how data is collected and how it is presented (Bryman, 2008; Stewart, 1998; Van Maanen, 1988). My inclination lies towards a very reflexive account of how the data has been both collected and presented. Such preference is driven by my beliefs in what constitutes the quality and credibility of qualitative research which I believe to be driven by the work of authors such as Bogdan, Bryman, Cresswell, Golden-Biddle and Locke, Mantere, Taylor, and Van Maanen. These authors have been my systems of reference when learning about the practicalities of undertaking qualitative studies and the underlying philosophy of science boundaries. I encountered, and learned to admire, their work during my MPhil at Cambridge, as well as in my DPhil studies. Having a previous background in finance (I majored in banking which did not encompass strategic management as a separate subject in its curriculum), I initially resisted the idea of qualitative research and the lack of dominance of quantitative methods in relation to any type of research question. However, I had to give up my initial ideology after realizing that my research questions and interests could not be satisfied other than through an explorative method.

My methodological choices were driven by clear questions, such as: in what way could I discover how strategy tools are used in practice? How else could I follow strategy tools as they were being used and experienced? It was during my stay in Hamburg that my research questions found more theoretical grounding while browsing through the book *Strategy as Practice* (the first handbook on strategy as practice, by Johnson et al., 2007) in the city's public library.

However, ethnography was not my preferred option originally (as a matter of fact, during my DPhil, I opted to design a quasi-experimental study along with some simulation work, as a contingency should my negotiations not have ended successfully, and I still resist the idea of being ultimately called an ethnographer). This does not reflect my lack of belief in the phenomenological pursuits of knowledge, or the anthropological claims on the need for ethnography (e.g., see Malinowski, Goffman).

My research questions were derived from a need to understand rather than interpret the phenomenon of strategy tools in use. I felt that “listening” was a virtue which still needed to be present in data visualized or talked about in management research. As I came to understand and thereafter criticize management research, I found many existing accounts to be deterministic, and moreover written with an overtly masculine jargon, which maintained a distorted view of reality (for reference on this, see as an example the article “Voicing seduction to silence leadership”, an article from Callás & Smircich (1991) in *Organization Studies* and the broadly “dominating” and “masculine” response article from Mintzberg (1991)). Hence my writing should not be assessed “value free” of the biases encompassed in my own background as a researcher or even potential ethnographer.

I finalize the discussion in Chapter 5 by presenting the following table (Table 15) to highlight the main concerns and implications upon methodological choices made.

Methodology aspects	Main considerations	Implications
Data analysis	- First and second order analysis (Van Maanen, 1979) to deal with the overwhelming amount of data collected through the ethnography.	- Question codes by several encounters with the data. - Organize intermediary analysis (e.g., through meta-matrices – cf. Miles & Huberman, 1994) to better enable the extraction of findings. - Inductive thematic analysis (ITA) needed to organize analysis around themes explored for each research question.
Interpretations of findings	- Extrapolate findings through the iterative process of questioning the data.	- Abductive reasoning (cf. Niiniluoto, 1999; and Peirce, 1878 as cited in Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010: 319) as a general axis for the extraction of findings.
Methodological challenges	- Reluctance of consultants towards explorative research. - Cumbersomeness of data associated to practices and praxis. - Unobservable phenomena. - Methodological bias. - The interconnectedness of process and variance in collected data.	- Accordingly tackle various challenges stemming from the phenomenon under study while preserving the same onto-epistemological grounds.

Table 15. Data analysis and related implications



“Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”
“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.
“I don’t much care where—” said Alice.
“Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat.

(*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland and through the Looking-Glass*, Carroll (2010: 41))

6. Chapter 6: Chasing the Cheshire cat – the invisible presence of strategy tools

Strategy tools are often portrayed as failing in praxis: considered as technologies of rationality they are held to be less useful in complex organizational settings (March, 2006). In addition, they are shown to diminish in their role and importance even in situations of mundane strategy work (e.g., Hill & Westbrook, 1997) resulting in their under-utilization (Miller & Ireland 2005; Nutt, 2002; Styhre, 2002). In widely reported accounts in management, Mintzberg is among the scholars who pinpoint the “fall of strategic planning” (cf. Mintzberg, 1994). Below is what encapsulates Mintzberg’s argument with regard to rationalizations on the “failure” of this approach:

This whole planning exercise . . . was programmed in great detail: the delineation of steps, the application of checklists and techniques to each of these, the scheduling of this whole thing, everything nicely accounted for. Except for one minor detail: *strategy formulation itself*. Nowhere was anyone told how to create strategy. How to collect information, yes. How to evaluate strategy, yes. How to implement it, for sure. But not how to create it in the first place (Mintzberg, 1994: 66).

Despite the strong wording of Mintzberg’s argument, various studies claim strategy tool use in everyday strategy work, although strongly basing their claims on survey studies

(Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013) or Rigby²¹¹ (2009, 2010). In addition, there are some accounts to support the actual use of technologies of rationality, not only in mundane situations, but also in situations that involve novelty and complex settings (Farjoun, 2008).²¹² In this chapter my main premise departs from previous accounts by emphasizing that discarding the role and contribution of strategy tools is primarily related to referencing them as “black boxes”. Considering them as black boxes, one could easily reach conclusions that undermine strategy tools’ role. Such “black boxing” is evident not only in studies of strategy tools as technologies of rationality, but also in more interpretative studies using surveys (Clark, 1997; Grant, 2003; Jarzabkowski et al., 2010; Rigby, 2009, 2010). Therefore, when considered as solid entities, strategy tools miss their animated presence in strategy work. At the same time, the apparent black-boxing does not only confine itself to strategy tools as entities, but also to the relationships strategy practitioners hold with them. As the empirical findings of this dissertation suggest, strategy tools are not rigid devices, rather they are found to be disassembled and assembled continuously in strategy work, with the overall result being their nuanced and multifaceted presence in various consecutive phases of strategy processes. Hence, an “invisible presence” of strategy tools is observed, demanding a closer empirical and theoretical inspection. This chapter engages with this presence by calling for caution towards claims by March (2006), Mintzberg (1994), and Hill and Westbrook (1997), which

²¹¹ Although introduced earlier, this is a reminder that this survey is produced by Bain & Co. and presented in *Appendix A*.

²¹² For more, visit Chapter 3 for the detailed discussion of dichotomies apparent in literature discussing strategy tools in use.

over-simplify both the nature of strategy tools in use and the underlying dynamics within the contexts contributing to their enactments.

6.1. Chapter rationale: Why “invisible presence” of strategy tools?

At first sight, the main finding of this chapter might sound oxymoronic. However, the “invisible presence” of strategy tools is one of the main phenomena highlighted from the second order analysis. To shed light on this phenomenon, I discuss in more detail the subtlety with which strategy tools are enacted by following practitioners’ praxis. Hereafter I develop the understanding and discussion of what is intended as “invisible presence” of strategy tools, and further on, I explain how uncovering the *backstage* and *frontstage* settings of strategy work allows us to observe the nuanced presence of strategy tools.

As previously discussed, in-house strategy consultants are recognized as strategizers (Johnson et al., 2003) or “strategy professionals” (Whittington et al., 2011). These strategizers are shown to operate in epistemic cultures (Kaplan, 2011) where, as part of their occupation, they deploy narrative texts and artefacts. In this chapter the initial focus is on the descriptive component related to the enquiry of strategy tools in praxis. Here I discuss the first sub-research question. More concretely, this chapter engages with *RQ1: How are analytic strategy tools used in frontstage and backstage aspects of in-house strategy projects?* By answering this question, the main aim is to support theorizing (Johnson et al., 2007). In addition, I aim to understand the phenomena in process rather than in variance terms (Langley, 1999), hence the focus on the former.

Through a first²¹³ and second order visit of preliminary findings (Van Maanen, 1979) based primarily on comparing and analysing seven strategy projects,²¹⁴ I determine that strategy tools are used more than we think (comparing the findings with studies such as Hill and Westbrook (1997), March (2006), Mintzberg (1994) etc.), especially when we do not exclusively qualify their “face value”²¹⁵ as “presence” while tracing them in praxis, but instead we take into account the subtleties with which they get used. Such subtleties are found in a broad array of situations which are explored in more detail in this chapter.

In the following section, I present second-order data by describing workshops encountered as a well-established practice within the firm. In view of the fact that the team had first-hand experience of the organization and delivery of workshops, I could closely assess its enactments, especially focusing on strategy tools embedded in them. Thereafter, in Section 6.3 and beyond, I assess the findings at a second level order by analysing in more detail patterns of strategy tool use, potential explanations, and related implications. Strategy tools are tracked as they are used in various stages of strategy workshops (consisting of their preparation and delivery), following with *backstage* and *frontstage*²¹⁶ (Goffman, 1959) as theoretical frames to trace their presence.

²¹³ Note that first order data relevant to this chapter have been presented in Chapter 5

²¹⁴ To recall the concerned analysis in more detail, refer to Figure 7 and Table 7, shown in Chapter 3 – Section 3.7.

²¹⁵ I metaphorically use “face value” to highlight the explicit (hence, usually easy to detect) presence of strategy tools, for instance as directly referred to by its widely known name (e.g., referring to “SWOT” as “SWOT” rather than using less known terms, or even not refer to the tool at all, at any stage of its use or thereafter during strategy work).

²¹⁶ It is important to highlight that Goffman’s (1959) approach is not a predetermined theoretical frame to assess findings, but a natural solution towards understanding strategy tools in use. Therefore, Goffman

6.2. Where did the Cheshire cat go? *Backstage* and *frontstage* enactments of strategy tools

Members of the unit were specialized in designing and delivering strategy workshops. These strategy workshops constitute strategic episodes (Hendry & Seidl, 2003), following Luhmann's social systems theory. According to the latter, episodes provide a mechanism by which systems can suspend their routines and initiate a reflection on and change of these structures. Recent literature on workshops has emphasized that, while analysed as “strategic episodes”, they represent specific features such as distinctions in time – a beginning and an end – and they involve a degree of removal from everyday practice (cf. Hendry & Seidl, 2003; Hodgkinson et al., 2006). Hence one would expect that the *frontstage* of strategy tools in use would differ from their *backstage*, as strategy workshops in this unit correspond to a particular “liturgy” (cf. Johnson et al., 2010: 10) associated with their deployment on stage. Indeed, findings in this study support such an expectation. Behind this “liturgy”, considerable degrees of specialization and expertise were observed to be held within the team organizing and delivering workshops. This specialization stretched into various stages (as they were identified and recognized by team members – described in Figure 6). As highlighted in this figure, strategy workshop preparation and delivery clearly display *frontstage* and *backstage*. During the *frontstage*, strategizers interact with their clients,²¹⁷ whereas in the *backstage*, they interact with one another in

(1959) resulted from an abductive reasoning (cf. Niiniluoto, 1999; and Peirce, 1878 as cited in Ketokivi & Mantere, 2010: 319), which was a reasoning pursued from the initiation of this dissertation (see Chapter 2).

²¹⁷ “Client” is the notion used here, following the natives’ terminology, given their role as in-house consultancy. These clients do represent organizational stakeholders outside of the team under study. Interaction with these “outsiders” takes place in staged behaviour.

their internal meetings, and occasionally with external outsourced cooperating parties or their clients.

In the field it was observed that, although strategy tools became used in a pragmatic “pick and mix” approach and in patterns of bricolage, i.e., artisan-like inventiveness (de Certeau 1984, xviii), repertoires of use were persistent in both preparatory and execution enactments accompanying *frontstage* and *backstage* strategy work. As shown in the first order analysis (Section 6.2) of facilitators’ agendas, observations, and talks held in the field, bundles of tools were repeatedly encountered *backstage*, such as prioritizing (2x2) matrices, SWOT, issue trees, hypothesis based approaches, mind maps, scenario analysis, brainstorming, and occasionally Porter’s Five Forces or PESTEL. In the *frontstage* the use of strategy tools was more implicit, and whenever the contrary, tools proposed needed to be simple and easy to adopt for participants (tools such as 2x2 matrices, SWOT, McKinsey 7S were encountered more at this stage). Through this ethnographic pursuit, it emerged that strategy tools appeared salient especially in the *backstage* phases of strategy work.

Figure 21 represents graphically the saliency of strategy tools at each stage, after assessing the corroborating evidence from interviews and observations. As also encountered in the findings proposed here, the use of strategy tools in internal meetings is vivid and varied, even more so than the meticulous use and selection of these tools while facing the client (as shown, especially salient during the workshop delivery phase).

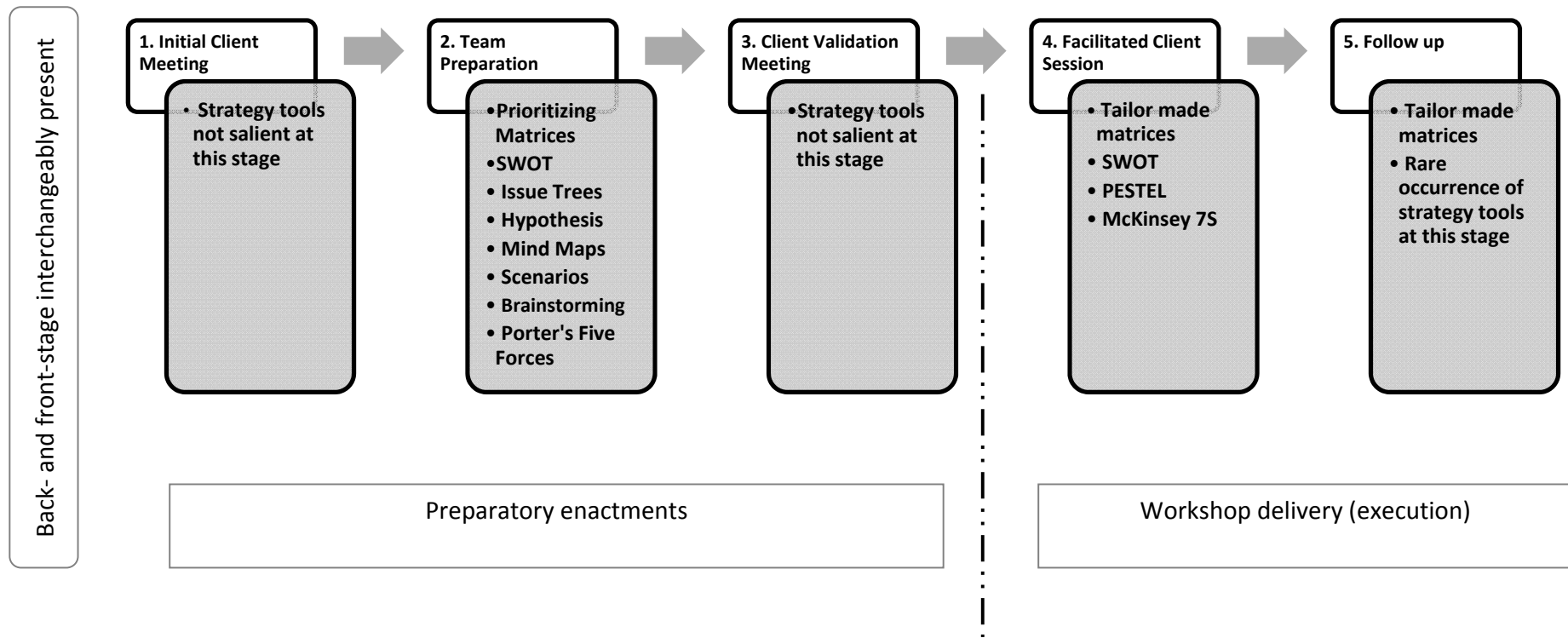


Figure 21 Process flow for strategy workshops and the use of strategy tools in stages

The excerpts obtained by talks held with team members offer additional testimonials of how strategy tools were seen as guiding tools in framing thoughts in early phases of strategy workshop preparation, but not particularly salient in the final stages of strategy workshops:

Let's discuss about the current project: so I could be interviewing a country leader or managing partner about the trends in the market and the state of the business. We usually have a set of five or six open questions but beyond that I always like to prepare the follow up questions and that's when I'll think of the tools that I've come across in academia or since and say, "Okay, let's take Porter's Five Forces," for example. "Okay, what's the threat of competition (competitor rivalry)?" You make sure you've got a question around competition in there ... It's more a guide to discussion rather than to analysis ... (Strategy analyst, I22-2-22S1)²¹⁸

As shown in this account, strategy tools are used implicitly to frame discussions and interview questions, but their role is not seen as salient in deliverables to executives, i.e., when results of discussions and workshops would be further fed to executives. Not only is the presence of strategy tools in deliverables seen as only instrumental at first sight, but the invisible presence is also attributed to them when knowledgeable practitioners justify their use:

They (strategy tools) don't appear as much in the deliverables as they do in the process of making them unless you have used the tool very much with your client, so you know, you've worked together on this in order to create this deliverable so it still has to be in the deliverable, but

²¹⁸ Note that these quotations are not meant to be exhaustive here, but they aim at portraying the colourful use of strategy tools, developing further the first order findings proposed in Chapter 5. Hence, note the deliberate emphasis not on counting, but rather on the broad representation of strategy tool traits as part of their varied bricolage.

otherwise we do sometimes use them as a way to guide our thinking without necessarily putting it on the page. So for example, the structure conduct performance one that I was talking about earlier, we have occasionally used in the Team just when we're thinking about making up scenarios and similar ones... It helps us to figure out which level different things are sitting on but we haven't actually ever put that on a page. (Consultant, I21-3-12S26)

As discussions proceeded, strategy tools would be seen as detrimental to the format and content of the message to be conveyed further to leadership executives, as seen below with the justification of the use of SWOT:

SWOT never featured in my presentation because it was something which we did in the process but we felt it was too basic to put it. (Strategy Analyst, I22-1-16S13)

The excerpts presented above show a few of the circumstances that pinpoint the invisible use of SWOT and Porter's Five Forces (in various settings such as in workshops, preparing presentations or deliverables, and individual framing of thoughts). Hence, in the same way that "the consultant explained that [SWOT] had only been used as a method of initiating discussion" in Hill and Westbrook (1997: 50), here the tool seems particularly helpful to trigger thoughts especially in the preparatory enactment phase, while *backstage* in preparation for strategy workshops. However, rather than discard such valuable property as Hill and Westbrook (1997) suggest, I argue that by simply focusing on "final stage"²¹⁹ appearances of strategy tools or concrete and tangible occurrences of their enactments (such as deliverables or meetings with clients), we risk neglecting their presence in other

²¹⁹ Note that when addressing "final stages" of strategy projects throughout this dissertation, here the same reference to the project timeline as the one proposed by Kubr (2002; 2005) is followed (timeline first denoted in Chapter 2). Therefore, in line with this project process, "implementation" and "termination" are seen here as "final stages".

stages of strategy work. This undeniable presence is also reported by practitioners, consciously so, as shown in the various instances here. Therefore, we risk uncovering only the tip of the iceberg in strategy tool use if we look at only one aspect of the presence of strategy tools where the client is encountered. Indeed, strategy tools enacted in the *backstage* appear ever-present and multiple (as deducted from all observations, talks held, and also captured images). They too, contribute to final recommendations produced in strategy projects, although their contribution could be deemed less explicit and clear.

To capture the notion of bricolage occurring with strategy tools in use, I use the metaphor of the Cheshire cat. This metaphor facilitates the understanding of strategy tools as they appear and dissipate in various phases of strategy projects. Theoretical analysis, among the deployment of other rhetoric devices, is also well supported through the use of metaphors (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By conceptualizing strategy tools as Cheshire cats, they are there (i.e., in strategy work) as frames of reference rather than tangibly and explicitly so. The following excerpt from an interview with a senior team member conveys the essence of this claim:

There's all kinds of filters and prioritization, whether it's suitable, acceptable, feasible, whether it's the parameters of revenue, of growth, whatever, so all of those ideas. Lots of what I do, this is a *[original company name hidden here]*²²⁰ structure which is when you...you know, again, it's a way of structuring thoughts. So if you actually have an idea in terms of, "We need to go into emerging markets for example, how do we do that? What impact does that have?" So how this moves into strategic implementation, is you look at what I call the change levers, so

²²⁰ This was the previous PSF where the respondent had worked as a consultant.

process, organization, people, technology, strategy, which is markets and customers and processes. I've forgotten them myself, process, organization, people, technology, organization and something else but I've forgotten, but there's kind of six levers of change that I use. (Strategy director, I21-17S14)

As seen from this reflection, the way in which the practitioner conveys a strategy tool is not rigid but continuously encompasses the contemplation of its various elements. Additionally, not only does the Cheshire cat need to be chased in *backstage* phases of strategy projects, but it does so also during workshop delivery while *frontstage*. However, here the nature is distinct from the previous occurrence. Whereas *backstage*, the cohesiveness of the internal team guides the use of various strategy tools, in staged episodes the varied clientele calls for simplicity:

So for me a SWOT is a tool for data capture. It's a tool for framing your thoughts and it's a tool, certainly in workshops, that works well to capture that simplistic framework, but if I have ever used that tool I would not present that to an executive because I would synthesise the results of that and then feed the recommendations back. (Strategy director, I21-2-17S44)

One of the reasons accounted for by team members was the lack of familiarity of other stakeholders with a broad variety of tools. This was considered an important factor impeding the use strategy tools with clients. As the team head suggests in one talk, remarking on strategy tools in workshops:

All of the frameworks that we're using are very, by definition, they have to be simple. You know, we don't want to make it too complex... (I21-1-3S7)

In this regard, emphasizing the need for simplicity and prior exposure of clients towards these tools, workshop facilitators helped to uncover the presence of strategy tools during workshops:

I think if you talk to [workshop facilitator] and [workshop facilitator] more because they've had the most exposure to that, and I think with gap analysis and the two by twos, I think most people can get away with doing those, they're easy in terms of laymen, in terms of using those tools (Workshop facilitator, I21-2-43)

However, the use of strategy tools does not only encompass qualifying some and dismissing others. Team members who were largely engaged in workshop organization shared about workshops how strategy tools were adopted and *bricoleured*. One example is shown below while reflecting on the SWOT element present in each strategy workshop ongoing area restructuration:

In this particular one we don't use the term opportunities and threats, but it's the same, it's kind of the same thing so yes, technically we're doing a SWOT. ...So we use strengths and weaknesses approach just to help structure the discussion and identify the right things and this will change depending on the workshop and who's involved, so for this particular one, because it's an area wide workshop, all of the market segments are defined by sub-areas. Market segments could be countries. They could be regions within a country, cities within a country. It depends on how the sub-area defines it. (Senior strategy analyst, I22-1-5S8)

Simplicity was persistently a praised trait of strategy tools in use. However, such simplicity of strategy tools should not be mistaken for rigidity:

During the workshop days we need to improvise all the time (Senior strategy analyst, I21-2-22S21).

With workshop improvisations came also adjustments related to strategy tools. Consequently strategy tools would be part of these improvisation patterns encountered in strategy workshops organized by the team. The strategy tools were therefore seen as inextricably linked to the continuous commodification of solutions (Suddaby & Greenwood, 2001) provided by strategy consultants. As the literature on management methods

suggests, strategy tools are indeed used in various situations to constitute what is known as ‘productivizing’ (Huczynski, 1993: 217) of knowledge. Seen in context here, such productivizing is not only present through the tangible appearances of strategy tools, but also in their shadows as Cheshire cats. Nevertheless, it is of foremost importance that while replying to the research question addressed in this chapter, more clarification and detail are obtained on how the triggers act at the basis of bricolage of strategy tools in *backstage* and *frontstage* settings.

6.3. Bricolage with strategy tools: at what level?

In this section, along with a description of the bricolage situations and related triggers, I present and discuss in light of theory further illustrations building on the material demonstrated earlier in this chapter. By examining the two major enactments identified in the previous chapter (workshop preparatory and delivery enactments),²²¹ here I look more closely into the settings in which strategy tools are adopted. Hence the theoretical notions of *backstage* and *frontstage* (Goffman, 1959) become important in this chapter. But first, I identify the factors that prompt bricolage. These triggers are highlighted in more detail in Table 16. Triggers²²² that promote bricolage are shown in this table, include features of the sessions taking place, features of individual members interacting with strategy tools, and features of strategy tools. As shown in this table, situations occurring without the presence of the client (hence, *backstage*), or dealing with what were considered by team members

²²¹ As shown throughout this dissertation “delivery” and “execution” are terms used interchangeably.

²²² These triggers are shown here and are to be discussed in more detail in the following section.

as complex problems,²²³ were very supportive of the bricolage of strategy tools. At the same time, in situations of working in the comfort of one's own company (hence, without other team members), as well as when the subject has prior exposure to strategy tools, tools were more likely to be adopted and adapted (hence there was more likelihood of bricolage occurring). Furthermore, the simple to use and easy to understand tools were more likely to take part in bricolage.

Experience, or seniority as addressed here, accounted for a good part of Cheshire cats. Workshop facilitators and team members with extensive experience in strategy consulting²²⁴ (i.e., experience encompassing more than 10 years work in PSFs) showed a high level of comfort with the tools in use. This level of comfort could be confirmed through ethnographic talks even more than through observations, since the latter would only partially detect strategy tools in use due to their invisible enactments. As a representative example, I refer to a quote on prior exposure towards strategy tools as shown in Table 16 (provided by a strategy director, I21-2-17S44).

²²³ Note that "complex problems" here are similar to what is accounted for as problems encompassing "exploration" (March, 1991) type of situations.

²²⁴ Revisit the team background table in *Appendix E*.

The subtlety of strategy tool use and bricolage was identified by close inspection of commonalities in strategy work that appeared far from random. For example, in a conversation with a strategy consultant, the latter confessed how a strategy tool is reminiscent of another tool (i.e., Structure, Conduct, Performance [S-C-P]²²⁵ reminiscent of Porter's industry analysis) and encompasses its elements. Although this bricolage is not further problematized by the consultant, such confession reminisces and corroborates with other bricolage enactments in praxis:²²⁶

S-C-P, so it's something we often use instead of Porter because it is more flexible. It is very, very simple and they stand for structure, conduct, performance. The structure is the Porter analysis, so it says, what is the market structure? Almost always then you can do that by Porter if you like or you can do it in any other method.

"Conduct" then says, "And how does this affect the way that the competitors in the area are behaving?" So let us say we have a regulatory framework that is meaning that you have to swim within that particular area then the conduct part of the framework will then look at how is that affecting people's behaviour with it or similarly if there is a monopoly situation, how is that happening?

Then performance is, "And therefore what do their financials look like? What does their growth look like given the structure conduct performance?" There is then a feedback loop. Given that people are performing in a certain way the market structure is changed because with very high profits made in a certain area that will now change the structure of the market. You will have a large or a very profitable or a very powerful, the people start buying one another. (Consultant, I21-2-12S4)

²²⁵ Note that the quoted S-C-P is following Joe Bain's approach. For more see Bain's (1956) book: *Barriers to new competition*.

²²⁶ Although this tool is explained while in a reflection in action interview, the same tool is also encountered in praxis while it is being adopted during closed doors meetings as part of the "Global Strategy" project (project which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8).

Factors contributing as prompts for bricolage with strategy tools	Feature of focus	Description	Pronounced illustrations
Sessions with closed doors (<i>Backstage</i> environment)	- Enactment praxis backstage - Present in multiple meetings - Strategy tools written and rewritten on whiteboards and flipcharts - “Pick and mix” approach towards the choice of tools (often not originating from within the firm)	Typically, backstage sessions would offer the team a setting where the problem could be explored comfortably and necessary planning of workshops/follow ups would occur (hence these activities fell under “enactment practices”). Such meetings would usually initiate as assignment from the team leader for the particular project. Usually a sub-team from the Internal Consultancy would work together for around one to two hours. Other follow up sessions would be organized upon request of the team leader or usually when no clear individual tasks were recommended from the session. <i>Backstage</i> praxis usually was accompanied by writing and rewriting of frameworks as they were proposed by their team members. There would be no predefined “firm-specific” way to recommend the use of some frameworks explicitly. Not occasionally, during such ad hoc meetings, team members would propose a particular framework not hesitating to state explicitly that this was a proprietary framework encountered in the firm they had previously worked for.	- For visual representations, refer also to Figure 12, where the team member has been drawing on the whiteboard following a proprietary framework of the firm the unit member was previously employed in; or Fig. 18 taken during an internal meeting, while the team discusses situation-conduct-performance, referring in addition to Porter’s industry analysis.
Highly complex problems	- High equivocality in determining the problem	Although complexity of problems sounds as a vague and relative term, this was seen as a highly important factor prompting the use of strategy tools. Usually sponsors would present the issues they were tackling in the beginning of the project. In many cases, sponsors would not have obtained a clearly defined problem (hence, qualifying such occurrence to pertain to complex problems) and that would be followed by continuous consultations with the unit so that a better defined problem would be obtained prior to the initiation of the project (usually a strategy workshop).	- As shown in <i>Vignette A</i> (Chapter 4), the team departed from a little defined problem dealing resulting from the briefing provided by the workshop sponsor.

Table 16 (cont'd)			
Factors contributing as prompts for bricolage with strategy tools	Feature of focus	Description	Pronounced illustrations
Working individually ("In the comfort of one's' own")	- Strategy tools located in personal notebooks or proprietary tailor-made software	Scribbling or even sophisticated software would serve as companions of internal consultants when exploring problems. Such praxis would usually take place at ones' desk, in the comfort of one's own.	- I use mind maps on a daily basis. (Senior strategy analyst, I21-2-14S11) - Refer also to Fig. 15 where the consultant is shown to have scribbled through the personal notebook.
Prior experience with strategy tools	- Prior exposure to strategy tools (especially if previous experience was in external consulting)	As this factor intuitively suggest, team members with prior experience with particular strategy tools would tend to use them in their everyday work.	- I've learnt these tools from picking them up as I go. A lot of the tools I learnt, I learnt when... actually I picked up during my training. In terms of actually strategy, I've probably spent a lot of time in change management and business improvement, so the strategy stuff has been more around modelling, so the strategic analysis in terms of when I was in consultancy before, in [consultancy] (Strategy director, I21-2-17S44)
Strategy tools features enabling more adoption ("simple to understand, simple to use along with flexibility")	- Ease of understanding and use were important criteria guiding adoption and adaptation of tools both <i>backstage</i> and <i>frontstage</i>	Strategy tools that had a wide spectrum of application (e.g., SWOT, 2x2 matrices) found more adoption.	- If there's anything that jumps out at me it's that, that kind of thing, and it also gives you flexibility to use those, use that, those axes in any way you want to. Right, so that's one other thing. (Workshop facilitator, I21-3-29)

Table 16. What factors contribute to bricolage with strategy tools

As shown in this quotation, as well as the instances highlighted in the analysis, the adoption and adaptation of strategy tools accounts for various settings that make for “Cheshire cats” in action. Hence the dimensions of these cats are observed in more detail hereafter with the purpose of extracting theoretical insights.

6.4. Dimensions of the Cheshire cat in action

Authors have suggested that strategy tools are used more when professional acumen is higher (Gunn & Williams, 2008; Jarzabkowski & Giuliatti, 2007). In this study, I did not encounter this, but instead found that strategy tools used by higher level professionals (in this study, they were workshop facilitators and senior team members) are less visible, since adaptation of tools becomes more creative and intuitive. As observed, tools appear and disappear as Cheshire cats. Chasing them would ensure a less distorted picture of strategy tools in use, as they contribute to strategy recommendations and outcomes. These Cheshire cats appear in both *frontstage* and *backstage* praxis enactments.

The findings here resonate with claims in the literature that experienced practitioners take shortcuts while applying new knowledge (March, 1981). Such instances are also referred to as “insights” (Cohen & Levinthal 1990: 131) or “rapid solutions of problems” (ibid.) that are made possible by the available knowledge of practitioners. It is their very knowledge acumen that allows them to reach solutions at a fast pace. The study here especially contributes to our knowledge of the latter, by pursuing the various enactments of strategy

tools inside the consultants' own habitats, and their internal team discussions. It is indeed *backstage* where:

the Team can run through its performance, checking for offending expressions where no audience is present to be affronted by them (Goffman 1959: 114-115).

By using the Cheshire cat metaphor, I do not merely suggest the occasionally invisible presence of strategy tools, but by support of ethnographic data, I shed light on its dimensions. I find that strategy tools are enacted differently in the *back* and *frontstages* of strategy projects; in both stages they appear and disappear as they get assembled, disassembled and combined with one another (consistent with bricolage); and it is also the attributes of their users (such as experience, discussed above) that make Cheshire cats come and go. But when are we most likely to obtain a Cheshire cat? Table 17 points to the triggering factors that I group in two categories: extrinsic (including people's attributes, as well as setting, i.e., *frontstage* or *backstage*); and inherent (attributes related to the features of strategy tool design). As shown, Cheshire cats are not only prompted by people's attributes, but also by the stage in which they are embedded.

But as various extrinsic and inherent attributes contribute to bricolage with strategy tools, so the variety encapsulated in Cheshire cats also transmits into various roles played by strategy tools as strategy projects unfold. The next section is especially dedicated to uncovering these roles while highlighting the settings related to them.

Conditions for a Cheshire Cat	Attribute category
<u>People's attributes</u> - Previous work in consulting - Seniority - Preference to use strategy tools <u>Environment - stage</u> - <i>Backstage even more than frontstage</i> ²²⁷	Extrinsic (contingent upon the contextual setting)
<u>Strategy tool attribute</u> - Easy to understand - Flexible to use	Inherent (pertaining to the strategy tool per se)

Table 17. Conditions for a Cheshire cat

6.5. Implications of Cheshire cats

Various papers have discussed the usefulness or success in practice of these tools, or conversely, their failing (eg., Hill & Westbrook, 1997; March, 2006). However, here attention is not towards the dichotomies of success vs. failure, “technologies of rationality” (March, 2006) vs. “strategy toys” (Stenfors, 2007), or tailor-made tools vs. “cookie-cutter” approaches (Pringle, 1998), for all these approaches over-simplify the presence of strategy tools in use. Instead, findings are consistent with bricolage suggested on the use of strategy tools (the term has been conceptually adapted to strategy tools by Jarzabkowski and

²²⁷ The interesting issue of Cheshire Cats observed more persistently *backstage* rather than *frontstage* is intrinsically linked to the presence of the “client” as a counterpart when strategy tools get adopted. Hence, the more interesting question to be pursued theoretically in further outlets is “why the client makes consultants shy away from the explicit use of strategy tools?”

Wilson (2006) adopting De Certeau (1994) conceptualizations). However, such bricolage is broken down in this study, in order to identify various routes and configurations strategy tools follow while instantiated in strategy work.

This chapter (in addition to Chapter 4 on methodology) stresses the methodological advantages ethnography brings to this specific research enquiry. Therefore, I suggest that the choice of ethnography is not a random choice for the pursuit of strategy tools in action, but is indispensable to uncovering their *frontstage* and *backstage* (Goffman, 1959) presence in strategy work. Findings provide a reflexive account of the experience in the field, and proposing the Cheshire cat metaphor which serves better to encapsulate the idea of the partially invisible presence of tools in action. Such invisible presence is discussed by comparing *backstage* and *frontstage* work and providing a detailed account from interactions within the site under study.

In this chapter, the study advances our understanding of strategy tools in use, by highlighting an important context overlooked in literature: the role of *backstage* in strategy tool deployment. As found here, strategy tools are encountered with great variety especially in the *backstage* of strategy work. There is a “pick and mix” approach to the use of strategy tools, similar to the bricolage approach (Campbell, 1997; Weick, 1998) suggested in literature. Strategy tools become embedded with one another – they are flexible, modifiable, recreated, moulded, and remoulded during the sessions. The enactment of strategy tools in practice involves the sense the users make of them along with their use: the assembly and disassembly of tools, depending on the strategy project

context and problem faced. Hence, when empirically pursuing them, we risk overlooking their presence without a long immersion in the field and taking into account the “reflection in action” (Schön, 1983) of natives interacting with these tools. Such a risk would result in findings based on wrong assumptions about strategy tool use, such as to announce “for a product recall” (as in Hill & Westbrook, 1997) or indeed, “failure” (March, 2006; Mintzberg, 1995).

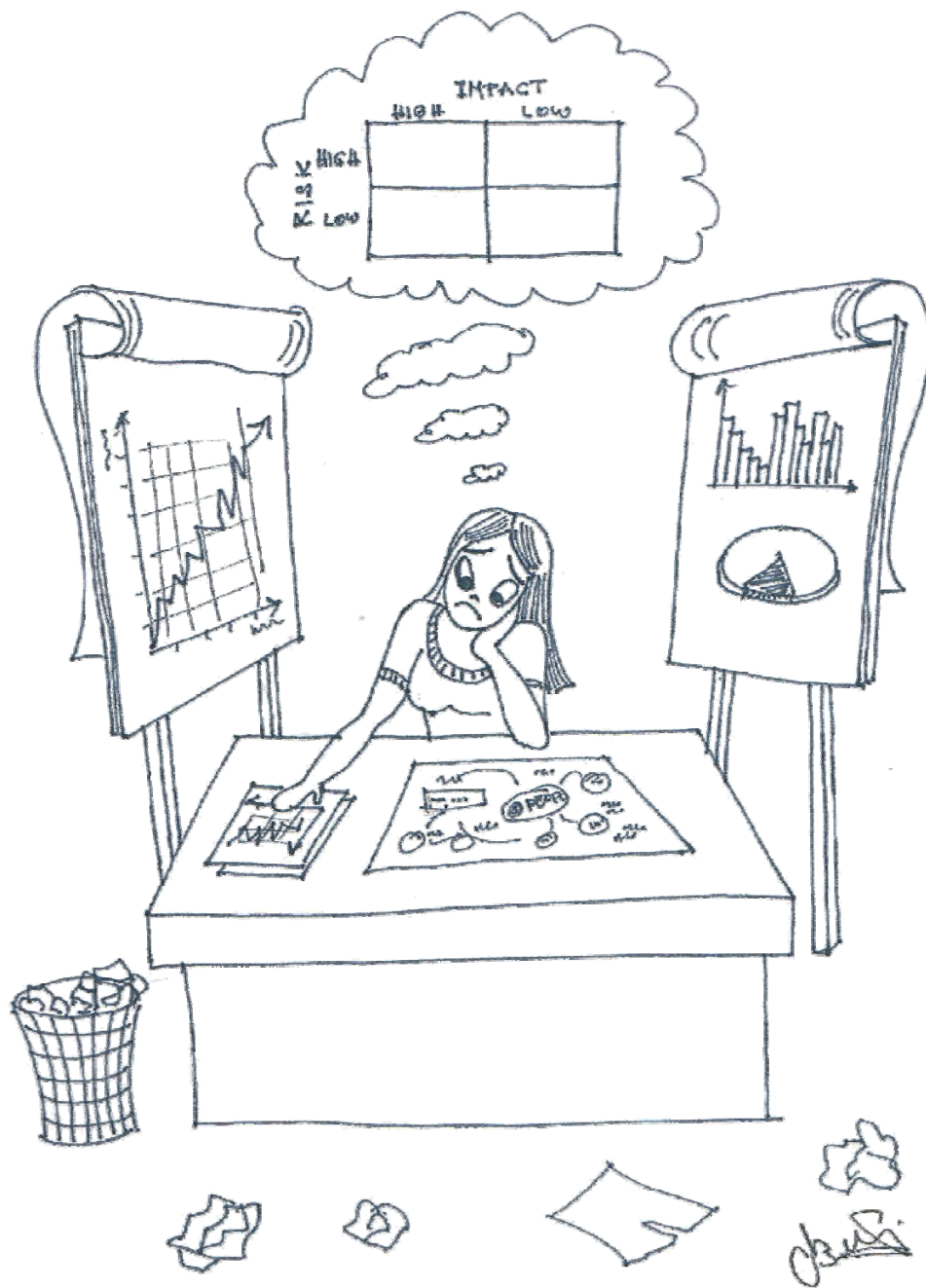
The Cheshire cat metaphor was used here to depict the various *extrinsic* (contingent upon the contextual setting) and *inherent* (pertaining to the strategy tool per se) attributes that drive the adoption and adaptation of strategy tools. This metaphor highlights the invisible presence of strategy tools identified here, not only as bricolage, but also by strategy tool enactments in practice both *frontstage* and *backstage*, and especially so in the latter. Two methodological choices strategically helped in uncovering the less obvious presence of strategy tools: the study of *backstage* (Goffman, 1959) enactments of tools and the consideration of strategy tool users not as naive subjects, but as “reflective practitioners” (Schön, 1983) who actively make sense and provide elaborate accounts of tools they use.

This approach is not to suggest that strategy tools are much more important than we think they are, but that their use deserves attention, since a close inspection would allow us to obtain a less distorted picture of actual strategy tools in use and uncover their presence in crafting strategy in all their subtlety. In Table 18 I present the main findings of this chapter and related implications; these themes are developed further in Chapter 8.

Strategy tools as Cheshire cats in strategy work	Main findings	Implications (Questions of further interest)
Bricolage	The bricolage accompanying strategy tools in use is multi- layered, resulting in Cheshire Cats	How does this bricolage unfold? Underlying interplay of: - Triggers - Various settings of bricolage
Contextual conditions for a Cheshire Cat	- Extrinsic - People attributes - Stage attributes - Intrinsic - Strategy tool attributes All the above variables influence the emergence of the Cheshire cat	- Validate findings through testing (e.g., quasi-experimental research design; or targeted surveys) - How can we through companywide practices “control” the occurrence of Cheshire cats and should we be inclined to do so?²²⁸

Table 18. Strategy tools as Cheshire Cats and their implications

²²⁸ This implication is especially valuable for pursuit by external consultancies (vs. internal consultancies), in that amongst their main activities stands the selling of solutions and creating additional business by intervening in organizations (Wright, 2002; McKenna, 2006).



7. Chapter 7: Uncovering the fluid roles of strategy tools

The previous chapter showcased the first discovery related to the patterns of strategy tools in use, recognizing their bricolage with respect to various extrinsic and intrinsic attributes. In this chapter, this bricolage is examined in further detail, while coupling first and second order data. Here I discuss the second research question: *RQ2 – What roles do (analytic) strategy tools serve in strategy work?* This research question is answered with first order analysis data and further developing the findings presented in Chapter 6. The Cheshire cats discovered in Chapter 6 need to be studied while lively and active so that understanding of strategy tools in action might be obtained in its fullest. Thus, in this chapter I lay out a closer analysis of Cheshire cats, especially while focusing on their “liveliness”, hence investigating not only invisible, but also visible instances.

Furthermore, this study is not primarily concerned with the seven strategy projects compared in Chapter 6, but examines a broader pool of data, hence taking a holistic view of the Cheshire cat phenomenon and the underlying fluidity of strategy tools which accompanies it. As a result, to bridge findings and theory, generalizable findings are suggested. This is undertaken by laying out various propositions. These propositions refer to endogenous (e.g., simple design features of strategy tools) and exogenous factors (e.g., interiorization of a tool by a consultant; the presence of “tool masters”) that would act as independent variables towards strategy tool use. These propositions are not restricted to the roles served by strategy tools, but also aim at uncovering the various phenomena observed in the close relation the practitioner has to the strategy tools in use and the

lessons learnt from observing this relation. In addition, the roles of strategy tools are uncovered as they emerge in relation to various settings *frontstage* and *backstage* in strategy work enactments, following the journey of data analysis initiated in the previous chapter. This chapter also contributes empirical evidence that illuminates the practitioners' attitude towards strategy tools in use. Therefore, there is an attempt to find and discuss *lege artis*, metaphorically, the "laws of artistry in management".

Consequently, propositions brought forward in this chapter need to be put to scrutiny at a later stage, where exploratory rather than confirmatory analysis will be given priority. Ethnographic research can be aided by the use of propositions, especially when there is a concern "to uncover covarying patterns in observed behaviour" (Sanday, 1979: 537).²²⁹ Therefore the use of propositions is not coincidental, but aims to extract patterns of strategy tool use that could be compared and checked with situations in other accounts and settings. Hence, these propositions help the metamorphosis of ethnographic insights, providing an opportunity for hypothesis development and potential theory testing in future studies.

²²⁹ In an *Administrative Science Quarterly* paper, Sanday (1979) discusses three patterns of conveying the messages obtained by ethnography, based on the varying foci of ethnographies. These foci are labelled as "the whole", "the meaning", and "behaviour".

The pool of strategy tools, used not only in workshops but also in everyday work, was very large,²³⁰ encompassing more than 70 tools as acknowledged by the practitioners in the team interacting with them. This broad pool accounted also for multiple points of reference that practitioners relied upon while facing new strategy problems. In this way, strategy tools were not only many in number, but their continuous disassembling and further assemblage accounted for new combinations (as discussed in more detail in the previous chapter), hence contributing to new tool enactments in praxis. But first I visit the unpredictability of strategy tool use prior to commencing a strategy project.

7.1. How are strategy tools considered by their users? Revisiting the fluid presence of strategy tools in strategy projects

To uncover the roles of strategy tools in non-detached fashion, it is important to extract how they are seen by their users. The sense that practitioners make of their strategy tools is the one to ultimately guide their use, as shown in the findings of Chapter 3 after having visited literature on the topic. In Table 19 I show with related illustrations from data extractions how strategy tools were described by their users. The illustrations provided in this table are informative of the enactments of strategy tools in practice.

²³⁰ See *Appendix P* for a list of strategy tools supplied by team members (note that the pool of strategy tools provided by the users is broader than the focus here, since it includes also brainstorming and facilitating tools. This is due to the qualification of strategy tools as such directly by their users).

The first order analysis shows that practitioners' considerations of the tools that they use are very much context dependent, especially with reference to the workshop pipeline,²³¹ in line with the fluctuating role of strategy discussed earlier in this chapter. In the initial client meeting and client validation meeting, strategy tools are not to be (explicitly) identified or considered, whereas in other stages of the workshop pipeline (i.e., within the account team preparation, facilitated client meeting, and follow up) they are apparent and hold obvious roles in the process. Strategy methodologies would emerge during the initial phase (a consultation of the client's SWOT – however methodologies are not necessarily present at this stage). They would follow on during team preparation especially in the piece produced for the workshop participants – called “the pre-read” documentation (strategy analysis distributed to workshop participants prior to the strategy workshop) and during the actual workshop.

²³¹ As shown earlier in Figure 6 and discussed in more detail in this chapter, the workshop pipeline consists of: Initial Client Meeting → Team preparation → Client validation meeting → Facilitated client session → Follow up.

Stage in workshop	Initial Client Meeting	Account team preparation	Client validation meeting	Facilitated client meeting	Follow up
How are strategy tools seen	- Less obvious presence of strategy tools here	- Strategy tools as frames of reference/templates - Strategy tools as discussion promoters	- Less obvious presence of strategy tools here.	- Strategy tools as discussion promoters - Strategy tools as filtering mechanisms - Strategy tools as visualizing media	- Strategy tools as visualizing media
Description of typical instances in which strategy tools are used	Strategy tools almost invisible here.	Typically when preparing documents (“pre-reads”) or on own notebooks – as a typical example in Figure 13); typical in internal meetings.	Strategy tools almost invisible here.	Typical in workshops or internal meetings (hence where oral communication is present).	Particularly in deliverables, where conclusions on findings (and agreements) from workshops are presented.
Illustrations from coding		- ...and this one is from a market position against the GDP forecasts. So this is a very bastardized version of the matrix. [Strategy analyst illustrating on the presence of a matrix in a Pre-Read, I22-1-6K24] -		- A lot of times in like breakout sessions for example, smaller group sessions, I find that when we need people to be creative - that it's better for people to draw a freeform and not to have matrices to organise information, that kind of thing. Where I think we're going to use many of these forms, so for example some of the matrices we're using are to help people...because it lends itself to here's the idea and here's, we think it will take, we think it will have medium to high impact and take three years or two years or whatever. So people have some sense beyond words, they see it visually for those kinds of things. Or if you're looking at things like impact and degree of difficulty to get it done, but two by two, something like that is helpful. (Workshop facilitator, I21-2-2K23)	- But when we've identified here how we can help them then, we're not doing any selling here, this is all a matter of helping them to sort through their thinking and to come to some conclusions. Once they reach those conclusions, there's a part that we have in helping them to address them and we need to be actively involved in doing that. (Workshop facilitator, Workshop facilitator, I21-1-9K16) -

Table 19. How are strategy tools considered by their users in various stages of workshops

During the workshop (as noted in Chapter 6), there were clear facilitators' notes that guided how teams were to be organized, exercises to be used, and the input and related output expected from the session. During the strategy workshops, specific sessions were used to assess strengths and weaknesses and then discuss opportunities. Threats were not discussed on a separate session, although they were implicitly part of the discussion. By discussing with facilitators, it was clear to me that there is a high degree of improvisation with regard to tools brought in the discussion. Gap analyses and various matrices were brought on the spot by facilitators in cases where the discussion seemed stuck on a particular topic or prioritization of options was needed.

As shown in Table 19, strategy tools become particularly salient to strategy practitioners in the phases of "Account team preparation", "Facilitated client meeting", and "Follow up", while they lose importance during the "Initial client meeting" and "Facilitated client meeting". However, the saliency and non-saliency of strategy tools in their fluid presence along the strategy project does not represent itself in the same shape: during account team preparation, analytic strategy tools are present in team discussions or problem framing instances, typically during personal notebooks, in pre-reads, and also in internal meetings (for the latter, *Vignette A* reconfirms this account); whereas in later phases such as during the staged workshop and follow up, the prevailing roles of strategy tools rely on their visualization properties. At the same time, the highest variance of strategy tools' roles is observed during workshops. Hence, it becomes relevant to bring these first-order findings

to a journey where they are further translated into theory. The propositions presented in the following sections engage with this endeavour.

7.2. The unpredictability of tool use

By looking into the overall bulk of data gathered in this research, it became clear from the observations and talks collected that the firm this observed team belonged to did not have any inclination to dictate the choice of particular tools over others, other than through the manuals located in various knowledge repositories. Practitioners confessed while confirming observations that the company did not have a say in the choice of strategy tools they used in their daily undertakings. Not only was there not observed any strong bias on the part of the firm towards particular strategy tools, but also the strategy tools in use were not seen to be closely related to the strategy tools promoted by the firm's manuals. The excerpt below is a representative quote from a team member confirming this "liberty" in the choice of strategy tools, and also the firm's lack of a role in dictating the use of some tools more than others:

I tend to implement the tools that I've learnt along the way. Hand on heart, whether they are the tools of the firm, I don't know. I will prompt the use of them as opposed to the firm telling me, "This is what we use." (Analyst, I21-1-40S11)

The unpredictability of strategy tool choice totally confirmed pilot study findings prior to this study. Therefore, I lay out Proposition A to encapsulate the main finding pinpointing this direction:

Proposition A. Before a new strategy project starts, the consultancy team has no explicit propensity towards the choice of one strategy tool versus another.

Proposition A may sound counter-intuitive as a general “standardization” of tool use should be expected for the sake of increased efficiency in consulting. For example, literature witnesses that consultants tend to adopt standardized approaches which result in the effect of “cookie cutter consulting” (Pringle, 1998). Other accounts state that “consultants who compile a new management concept also construct the business problem for which the offered solution fits” (Kieser 2002: 180) or that consulting is prone to “presenting fads as solution to problems” (O’Shea & Madigan 1997: 189). All these accounts go against a creative problem-solving approach within consulting assignments and support instead a more predictable problem solving. This does not affirm that we are dealing with “foolish” tools (cf. March, 2006) or “strategy toys” (Stenfors, 2007), but instead that we are dealing with a “carefree” approach towards the broad pool of strategy tools and the choice of tools relevant to the occasion. This approach might be due to various reasons listed below.

(1) Strategy projects encompass a broad spectrum of settings and problems. As stated in the literature review, various accounts pinpoint the variety of projects, practices, and styles of consulting firms (Argyris, 1961; Bennett, 1990). Hence, using fixed preset tools for a strategy assignment would go against the varied nature of problems encountered in strategy projects.

(2) Another aspect important in this setting is the professional identity of consultants. Consultants work under high pressure (Sturdy, 1997) and are usually sought after in situations of uncertainty for the client. Given the pressure faced, consultants present seemingly “new” approaches to their clients. As March (1999: 325) states:

[g]ood consulting is rather like good theory. It becomes useful less by being precisely correct than by being interesting in a way that is not redundant with ordinary knowledge.

Therefore, providing already set approaches to business problems would go against clients’ expectations from their consultants. In this way, having preset protocols or guidelines for problem solving would be detrimental to the quality of consultants’ advice as seen from a client perspective. This second argument is also supported by accounts that problem solving stands as a core pillar in the legitimization of consultancies as a profession (McKenna, 2006; Wright, 2002), in line with the view acknowledging the consulting machine to engage with productivizing (Huczynski, 1993).

Both mechanisms suggested here could be potential underlying explanations for the lack of procedures in place for the use of one strategy tool as opposed to another in the context of a strategy project.

7.3. Strategy tools – used on their own or in combination

From examining the data in the first order analysis, it emerges that when a strategy tool is used at any phase of a strategy project, it is very likely that its use will not be isolated, but that it will be used in combination with other strategy tools. In other words, when strategy tools are detected, they are not alone, but seen used along other strategy tools. The configuration of tool use differs. For example, tools could be used sequentially, simultaneously or in any other combined configuration.²³² As shown throughout these findings (particularly *Vignette A*, facilitators' agendas, the images provided, and other accounts extracted from observations and talks), strategy tools are not a rigid device in the hand of the practitioner. Instead, as confirmed in studies highlighting the artisan like inventiveness, bricolage was shown here to be a general companion of the practitioners' interactions with strategy tools.

These findings lead to the following proposition:

Proposition B. When a strategy tool is used at any phase of a strategy project, it is very likely that its use will not be on its own, but in combination with other strategy tools.

Beyond the combination of strategy tools with others, in other settings it has also been shown that strategy tools are used in combination with artefacts and texts (some empirical studies such as Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Samra-Fredericks, 2003;

²³² Note that Figure 14 shown in the first order analysis is illustrative of the vignette discussed here, extracted from an internal meeting observed.

Rouleau, 2005, confirm the interaction of strategists beyond strategy tools focusing also in other socio-material devices), hence providing a further basis for the suggested proposition.

7.4. What determines the (frequent) use of a strategy tool?

Even though there is contradictory evidence about the frequency of strategy tool use (see Section 3.3 in Chapter 3), in this section I discuss what determines the frequent use of a strategy tool, whenever this frequency is encountered.²³³ Literature suggests that the simplicity of strategy tools is very unlikely to contribute to their use. For example, Wright et al. (2013: 93) suggest that:

[c]onsidering the messiness of engaging with the world, we would expect managers to prefer strategic tools that are anything but “simple”.

During conversations with team members I could detect that academically grown tools (e.g. Porter’s approaches – Value Chain, Five Forces etc.) had a high level of awareness and acceptance, although not a high frequency of use. Nonetheless, these tools had the tendency to be adopted in various new forms in practice (for example, the discussion of one or several elements of Porter’s Five, hence the discussion of the elements of the framework only partially and/or implicitly, or following them as guiding principles implicitly while holding interviews with executives etc.). Additionally, when examining the most

²³³ Note that the focus in this section is on the features of strategy tools per se rather than strategists’ features.

frequently encountered tools within the team's strategy discussions, such tools were: 2x2 matrices (on filtering prioritizing opportunities – e.g., impact vs. ease of implementation – in most cases accompanied with the revenue potential of such opportunities, hence, a third dimension added); and SWOT analysis – encountered in various documents located in firm outlets, where readymade SWOT analyses were produced for multiple clients.

Here is how a strategy analyst reflects upon the use of SWOT within the organization:

I think SWOT is probably the most common. Even though it's the simplest framework it's probably the most commonly used and commonly accepted. So we'll often do a SWOT as part of a pre-read. Yeah, people recognize it and I think people understand how it can be used. So yeah, SWOT's probably the one we use the most. (Strategy analyst, I21-1-14S11)

Therefore, there were some tools (such as matrices and SWOT mentioned here) that could be extensively used within the firm,²³⁴ however, these were the exception rather than the rule. Most importantly, on these occasions strategy tools did not seem to be at the centre of strategy discussions. Here is how a team member reacts concerning the use of SWOT, PESTEL, and Porter's Five Forces while reflecting on past career:

I've used them a lot. For me they're quite standard, so SWOT, PESTEL or PEST, Five Forces.... I find those very useful. They are structured tools that are simple to use that people can get around them and a lot of people, not everyone, but a lot of people in both industry and professional services will understand (Strategy director, I21-1-17S14).

²³⁴ Note that also the examples of 2x2 matrices and SWOTs discussed here as frequently used, did not have a high reliability of format in their use, i.e., their use would be context dependent and encompass bricolage, as highlighted with the Cheshire cat metaphor proposed earlier in this dissertation.

As shown from these accounts, simplicity seems a criterion of choice from the subjects consulted, and this simplicity is understood here in various layers such as “the ease of understanding a tool” and “the flexibility entailed by the tool itself in various situations”. Consequently, by coupling the various ethnographic insights and translating them into propositions, another proposition is obtained:

Proposition C. The easier to understand a strategy tool is, the more it tends to be used.

This proposition targets the design features of strategy tools. Here the respondent is focusing on the user-friendliness and ease of understanding of a few strategy tools. Although one should not neglect the “fashionable” aspects of tool use, as institutional theory suggests (e.g., see Abrahmson, 1996; David & Strang, 2006), one should also consider the features of tools that contribute to their survival. SWOT has been part of the management jargon for more than 50 years; however, it remains an integral part of management work (e.g., see Jarzabkowski et al., 2010). Hence, despite the fashionable and path-dependency aspects of tool use, one should question the features of such tools, and how these contribute to their frequent use and ultimate survival in strategy work. Although these arguments should be tested in an experimental setting, interviews and observations gathered in this study do confirm that inherent tool features have a strong influence on their use. On the other hand, contrasting strategy tools that are easy to understand with those that are less so, team members felt that some strategy tools that belonged to the latter group deterred practitioners from using them:

Respondent: I think scenario planning is quite difficult. I'm not an expert in scenario planning but I'm aware of ...

Interviewer: It's good because you're naturally connecting with ... it's part of the questions that I will pose relating to the strategy project linked to strategy and scenario planning.

Respondent: Oh right. Scenario planning is not something I have knowledge of really. I've done scenario planning but on a very informal basis, so think of the future, think worst, best.

Interviewer: Different futures, uh huh. (Strategy director, I21-1-17S44)

Along with simplicity, flexibility of use was found to be a determining factor contributing to strategy tool use. Therefore, I suggest the following proposition:

Proposition D. The more flexible a strategy tool is to various situations, the more it will tend to be used.

Flexibility here is understood as the strategy tool's ability to adapt to a variety of situations. Hence, flexibility is understood to enable a tool for more bricolage, a result opted for by practitioners in their daily work. For example, SWOT could be used in various levels of strategy analysis: one could undertake SWOT analysis for the company as a whole, for a specific service/product, or even for a specific project assessment. SWOT could be broken down altogether analysing all elements in turn, or it could also be undertaken partially. Here is how one interviewee discusses SWOT:

SWOT I've done all through my career. I do it in workshops. I do it in change management. I do it in strategy. (I21-1-17S24)

However, as discussed earlier, SWOT did not necessarily “survive” into deliverables. As one team member reflects on its use:

It's essential. It's easy moving between quadrants. You can develop and adapt that and I've always used it but it's so basic it almost doesn't

deserve space at the final product, that's why. (Strategy analyst, I21-1-16S13)

Propositions C & D point to different features of tool use such as ease of understanding and flexibility of use. They are clearly contradictory to the argument of Wright et al. (2013)²³⁵ that rejects “simplicity” in situations of complexity. Moreover, it is not counter-intuitive to imagine that, despite the increasing complexity in the “messy reality” in which practitioners operate (cf. Schön 1983), this complexity is not necessarily mirrored in the limited heuristics and ways of thinking a human mind could adopt,²³⁶ hence providing more basis for the rejection of Wright et al.’s argument.

These strategy tools’ features in turn could be directly dependent upon other elements – e.g., easiness to understand is positively linked to the clarity of guidelines offered by the tool and the simplicity entailed by its elements, whereas flexibility would relate to the configuration of strategy tool elements with one another. Hence, when “engineering” of tools encompasses a certain fluidity of tool elements, this will in turn contribute to a more frequent use of the tool. Here is how a team member reflects upon the frequent use of 2x2 matrices attributing this use to their simplicity and flexibility of use and additionally, the ease of understanding from consultants:

²³⁵ Note that the authors base their findings on research conducted upon 46 managers studying within a business school (hence, out of the habitat of the latter) to evaluate a pre-set list of strategy tools, coined by the authors as “12 popular strategic tools found in leading strategy textbooks and assessed in strategy capstone courses at the business school” (Wright et al., 2013: 99).

²³⁶ Indeed, scholars have pinpointed the heuristics deployed by strategy practitioners (e.g., March, 2006), acknowledging the help provided by such heuristics in various situations. For more well-known arguments and empirics in this direction, refer to Tversky and Kahneman (1974), Kahneman and Tversky (1984).

Probably the ones that come up a lot are the various matrix type tools. They're probably the ones I remember the most and probably the ones that come up again and again, because especially impact vs. feasibility, two by two, that kind of thing. Then you go from that two by two to the various three by three, four by four, it just keeps going, right? But those are probably the ones which are most widely applicable.

I've worked with clients who are not used to working with consultants and so we've always tried to be very unconsultancy when working with them but that was one of the tools which surprisingly you can use with them. They actually quite like because it just seems to be a fairly simple, logical way to think about things, you know, "In here there's a graph, there's two axes." So that's probably the one which has come up the most. (I22-1-13S9)

The diagram in Figure 22 represents illustrations from tools, combining statements from Propositions C and D.

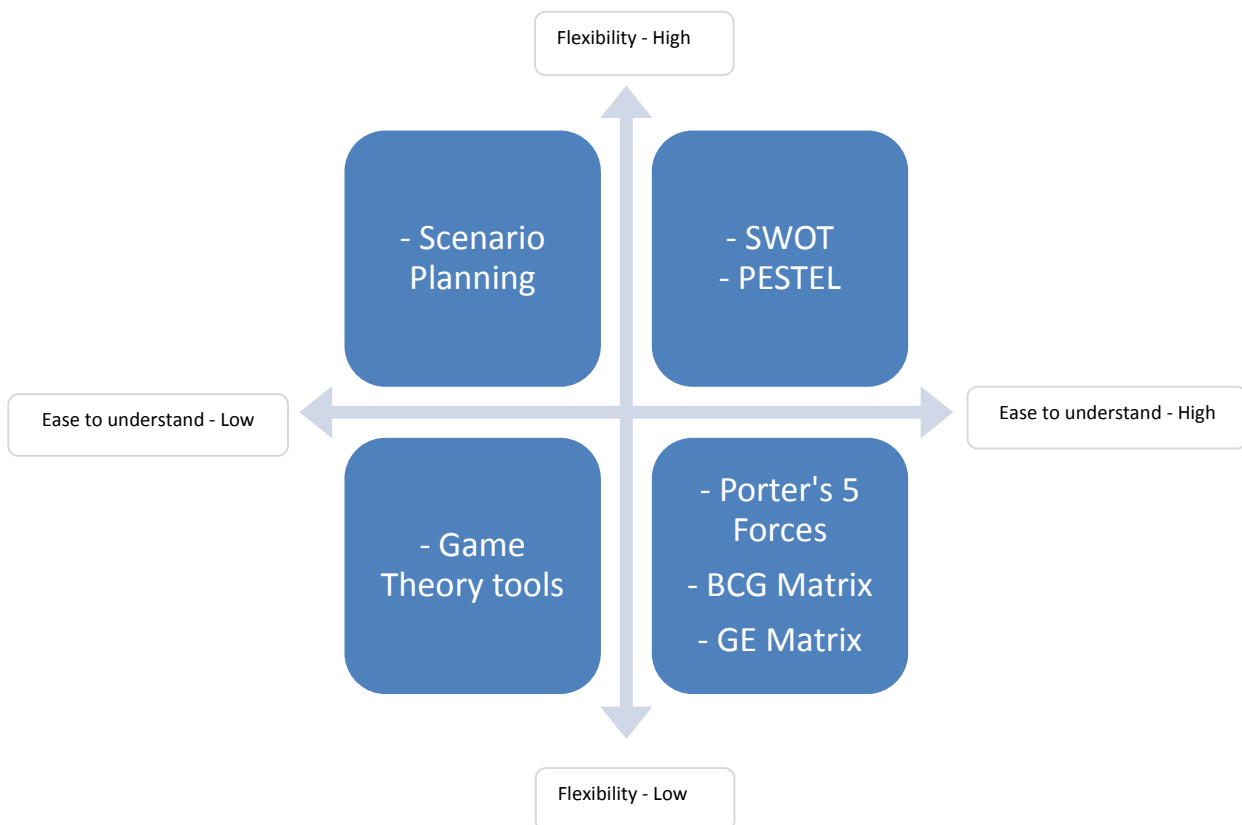


Figure 22 Plotting strategy tools in relation to Propositions C & D

The diagram shows that the features of tools provide a further argument for their frequent use. Consequently, SWOT or PESTEL, tools which could be considered both flexible and easy to understand, could be expected more frequently in management work, whereas game theoretic tools, which entail a less pronounced flexibility and ease of understanding could be expected to be encountered less often in management work. These propositions could be scrutinized in further comparative cases or surveys to identify whether indeed the same pattern is observed as posited here.

7.5. Roles that strategy tools serve

In this section, I discuss the major roles served by strategy tools in the field. Up to now it has been shown that strategy tools are adopted and adapted to fit various problems and settings. Strategy practitioners assess this phenomenon of the varied use of strategy tools in praxis by giving their own reflections on the issue. Here is how a consultant recognizes the fluid role of strategy tools by briefly discussing a few of them:

I mean most tools have two faces, they're the generation tool and the communication tool and they have two faces. Some tools are very good for one and useless for the other. So the S-C-P framework for example is pretty useless for communication. It's very good for generation. I would say the same about Five Forces actually, it's not that good for communication whereas something along the lines of a Value Chain I would say is good for both, very good for both. (Consultant, I21-2-12S4)

However, witnessing the fluidity of strategy tools was accompanied by the examination of the various roles played by them alongside the strategy projects. Therefore, through coding

and analysis, after examining data matrix displays (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I was able to find that there are four primary roles that strategy tools serve: (1) framing problems;²³⁷ (2) visualizing; (3) prioritizing/filtering; and (4) stimulating discussion.²³⁸ These roles are shown in more detail in Table 20. As shown here, strategy tools serve multiple roles, however it is important to note that these roles are often overlapping and not exclusive. For example, matrices are shown typically to enable both visualizing and prioritizing. Indeed, various practitioner accounts have praised this tool.

Among others, a book is proposed by practitioners discussing only the promotion of 2x2 matrices, suggesting more than 50 types of matrices that could strongly enable executive solutions. The book, entitled *The Power of the 2x2 Matrix* and written by Lowy and Hood (2004), is a clear vote for the practical value of this tool. In a marketing-like support of the same book, Nonaka discusses on the book cover that “applied properly, the 2 x 2 matrix is a most powerful and groundbreaking tool”. Nevertheless, here the argument does not follow the same discussion of practitioners’ notes on strategy tools. Instead, it is interesting to highlight the use of strategy tools in relation to the settings in which they become embedded. For example, the strategy tools attributed to framing problems, such as typically issue trees, problem trees, and various other tree schemes that help in setting boundaries of a strategy problem, were among the ones that lay beneath the surface as

²³⁷ This is not a ranking in order of importance, but rather a layout of all major roles found to be played by strategy tools as found out from the first order analysis.

²³⁸ Note that these category names are in most cases obtained verbatim from coding of ethnographic talks and thereafter coupled with material obtained from observations and written documents.

Roles that strategy tools serve	Instances of strategy tools typically serving this role	Illustrations from coding	Main pattern of their use	Instances where they are captured ²³⁹	Typical illustration (as observed in praxis)
- Frame problems	Issue tree, Problem tree, Cost tree	... I wrote down like the six key metrics that they were looking at which were sort of the pricing, volume, TNR, TIGF, number of partners, and one or two other ones...then I did kind of hypothesis, a tree, a logic tree, and then.... (Strategy analyst, I22-1-6K24) Yeah, issue trees and hypothesis tree. ... Those are used, I would say, an increasing amount. People who use them find them quite useful. People sometimes internalise the thinking and it's a very common tool...I use them... (Consultant confessing also on personal exposure of these tools and reflecting upon their general use, I21-1- 11S3)	- Preparatory enactments/ <i>Backstage</i> (usually used by the practitioner when alone)	- Daily work (individual level); - Interviews	Own notebook of consultant (Figure 13 shown earlier is a typical case); Compilation of information decks (pre-reads)
- Visualize	Matrices, MECO Charts, Bubble charts	... if you have an idea, for example, but you want to understand what the relative impact is and how long it would take or something like that, that a two by two or a three by three matrix works really well because it lends itself to here's the idea and here's, we think it will take, we think it will have medium to high impact and take three years or two years or whatever. So people have some sense beyond words, they see it visually for those kinds of things. Or if you're looking at things like impact and degree of difficulty to get it done, but two by two, something like that is helpful. (Director, Workshop Facilitator, I) Two by two, three by three matrices are very, very popular because it's a way for people to visualize. (Director, Workshop Facilitator, I21-1-2K23)	- Workshop delivery/ <i>Frontstage</i> Used in written document distributed to workshop participants	(Especially pursued in "reflection in action" type of interview)	Pre-Read document & Summary document after a workshop

²³⁹ "Captured" here does not only refer to interviews. Note that interviews are not the only proxy for detecting the roles of strategy tools. At the same time, as discussed earlier, interviews are not exhaustive to show the roles of strategy tools, hence other data items (observations) and written documents are considered here to rightly identify the multiplicity of roles served by strategy tools.

Table 20 (cont'd)					
Roles that strategy tools serve	Instances of strategy tools typically serving this role	Illustrations from coding	Main pattern of their use	Instances where they are captured	Typical illustration (as observed in praxis)
-Prioritize/ filter	2x2 Matrices, Heat maps	... What I'm hearing is they need to prioritize. So then I pull this out and I can just draw this on a flipchart, the way I just did for you, and get them to do that. And other times I can do it in a much more formal way, it's, in this case it was planned, we did this. (Director, Workshop facilitator, I21-1-9K16) ... at this point typically what I have done is: I have facilitated a session with a group and found different options through brainstorming, and how would we go doing things to tackle this problem. And perhaps we would come up with around 20 items. And on most projects is pretty obvious which ones you're going to go with, but on some projects it's not obvious and there is much more debate, so I find the 2x2 as a filter tool for me to get to a short list of solutions from a broad brainstorming. (Director, Workshop facilitator, I21-1-20K17)	- Workshop delivery - Facilitated sessions (<i>frontstage</i>)	Interviews with workshop facilitators	Workshop facilitator probing & filtering ideas after workshop sessions
- Stimulate discussion	SWOT, Brainstorming, Porter's Five Forces	So we use strengths and weaknesses approach just to help structure the discussion and extract the right things and this will change depending on the workshop and who's involved... (Senior Analyst, I21-1-5S8) I think the frames have to enhance the conversation and add value to it and actually help it along. When I talk about using some of these frames to collect information from a group section, part of that is to make it more efficient and effective because if I put, if I've listed a weakness, the first group goes and they say well here's a strength, OK, and it is, maybe the strength is a leading audit position, right? (Director, Workshop facilitator, I21-2-43)	<i>Backstage and frontstage</i> (structure ideas gathered from a group); very rarely present in written documents	"Reflection in action" type of interviews – running through the workshop pipeline with team members.	Strategy workshops

Table 20. Roles served by strategy tools

part of the iceberg of dense strategy work. That is to say that it was difficult to trace these tools in deliverables. Rather, the presence of these tools that enabled problem framing was present in personal notes and even helped as rules of thumb and heuristics (cf. Kahneman & Tversky, 2000), but more so invisibly as dissipated shadows of Cheshire cats.

On the other side, tools for prioritizing and stimulating discussions were the ones that appeared more explicitly in forums such as team meetings and workshops. As denoted earlier, deliverables did not encompass a “dense” use of strategy tools. Nonetheless, strategy tools such as matrices and bubble charts, and tools that enabled displays of vast amounts of data in a comprehensive manner, took space in deliverables produced.

7.6. Negotiated meaning of strategy tools

Within the site under study, there was not a clear a priori direction on the strategy tools to pick for discussion or analysis in a strategic project. Additionally, on the occasion when strategy tools were suggested during project discussions, their meaning was not stable or taken for granted. Instead, I could detect that strategy tools tended to be negotiated when they were being used, with their meaning assessed and negotiated depending on (1) the context of the project (e.g., how much ambiguity is associated with the project) and (2) the team involved in the project. For the former, literature suggests that in situations of high certainty the client would be less prone to engage a consultant (Lundberg, 1997; Sturdy, 1997). Hence, consultants could be expected to get engaged in situations of higher ambiguity and uncertainty. For the latter, the varied background of consultants and

strategists working in strategy projects contributes to the less pronounced “taken for grantedness” of the static meaning of strategy tools. Taking into account these settings, the following propositions predict how consultants address the complexity of problems they encounter and strategy tools they use:

Proposition E. The more complex the problem, the more the consultancy teams will negotiate the use of strategy tools for that problem.

Proposition F. The more complex the design features of a strategy tool, the more its meaning will tend to be negotiated prior to its use.

Proposition E is counter the argument proposed by March (2006), suggesting that strategy tools are dismissed in situations of high complexity. As observed in the field, strategy tools are negotiated in situations of exploration (March, 1991). However, findings do not support March’s dismissal of “technical rationality” in complex situations (March, 2006), where the complexity of design features of a tool (as presented in Proposition F) was observed to be negatively correlated to the ease of understanding of a strategy tool (as presented in Proposition C), hence thereafter contributing to its dismissal or further negotiation. However, unlike Proposition C, here the focus does not lie on the frequency of tool use, but on the nature of such use. These propositions become an interesting topic of enquiry for the following chapter (Chapter 8), where the situation demanding scenario analysis needed

considerable negotiations, which could not only be attributed to the complexity of the project at hand, but also the complex features of scenarios as strategy tools.²⁴⁰

7.7. Tools as providers of “guiding business principles” – a situational toolkit of strategy tools in use in workshops

As shown in Chapter 6, pre-reads and facilitators’ agendas were part of the preparatory enactments of strategy tools. These tools were not dictated by the company culture or directly by the sponsor. It was the practitioners who had the ultimate choice and who would furthermore negotiate the use of strategy tools. In this situation where strategy tools were not imposed upon their users, the decision about their use relied on the users. In this context, workshop facilitators appeared as knowledgeable users and also contributors of strategy tools.²⁴¹ Therefore, I layout Propositions G and H to shed light into what drives the use and improvisation of strategy tools:

Proposition G. The more “strategy tool masters” belong to a strategy consulting team, the more strategy tools will tend to be used within that team.

²⁴⁰ Note that Propositions E and F become very good references for the continuous enquiry of “complexity” encompassed by particular context settings or strategy tools’ design features. This enquiry is followed in detail in Chapter 8 where the Global Strategy Project represents a situation of complexity, and at the same time, the use of scenario analysis is considered to encompass complex design features as seen by the team members. This interesting encounter is explored, amongst others, in *Vignette B* in Chapter 8.

²⁴¹ In *Appendix P*, where all team members were contributors of strategy tools in the list provided, facilitators of strategy workshops were the ones who contributed the highest number of strategy tools, when compared with other team members.

Proposition H. The more a strategy tool is interiorized, the more it may be used in an improvised manner or further adopted by its beholder.

By comparing Proposition H with Proposition G, by definition it should be expected that “strategy tool masters” would be more prone to the improvisation with strategy tools. This is confirmed persistently from data collected in the field. A further evidence in support of a hidden presence of tools during strategy discussions relates to their role as providers of “guiding business principles” or alternatively as “a situational toolkit”.

Although frameworks originating from academia such as Porter's tools (e.g. Five Forces, Value Chain) were not extensively used in the firm, an interesting phenomenon was reported by several interviewees (especially seniors and workshop facilitators, hence generally “tool masters”): the principles/elements of these tools were taken in consideration as forms of guidance when holding a discussion. For example, the discussion would focus on threats of substitutes or new entrants, but not explicitly refer to Porter’s Five Forces when communicating with the client. This was a phenomenon I captured at an individual level while talking with “tool masters” such as workshop facilitators. Various workshop facilitators confirmed that this “hidden” phenomenon appeared in strategy assignments, reconfirming the Cheshire cats examined earlier in this dissertation. This phenomenon might relate to the interiorization of tools by the subjects using them, but at the same time also relate to the less pronounced role of strategy tools as communication devices, more as problem framing techniques, and as guidance for strategy discussions.

These latter propositions are well aligned with what is found in theory, especially within the practice approach which claims that different interpretations of practices arise from the distinct past experiences and histories of practitioners (Bourdieu 1990: 54). From this starting point, the “masters” encountered here, such as workshop facilitators, relate to analytic strategy tools due to their prior exposure towards strategy tools, consisting in their witnessed as well as accomplished pre-existing applications along with the interpretations they hold for these tools. In more recent findings, Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012) discuss “dispositional dimensions” of framing management concepts by the practitioners interacting with them, highlighting “experiential insights” and previous social practices as a rationale that helps practitioners make sense of and justify uses of concepts. Although their study is based on the broader concept of “management concepts”, the subset of strategy tools and their interiorization suggested here is well aligned with “open ended” practices that are encouraged by seniority as found by Heusinkveld and Visscher (2012).

As Polanyi (1969, 148, cited in Tsoukas, 2005) states, “we may say that when we learn to use language, or a probe, or a tool, and thus make ourselves aware of these things as we are our body, we *interiorize* these things and *make ourselves dwell in them*” (italics in the original). The interiorization of a tool is beneficial to the user as it enables the subject to acquire new experiences and carry out the task at hand more competently (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 2000). Thus, understanding this interiorization of tools would better explain the fast-paced solutions offered generally by consultancies. Here is how during a “reflection in action” type of interview, the strategy director discusses the implicit use of tools.

So for the Vision project things like PESTEL, things like Porter's Five Forces have come up, force field has come up, balance score card has come up, as you know, scenario, vision techniques, so all of that stuff is a framework that I use within my head. (Strategy director, I21-1-17S14)

In the site, I could detect that problem framing tools such as mind mapping, issue trees, and hypothesis approaches were broadly interiorized by external consultants and a few team members who had been previously exposed to external consultancy. The phenomenon of using problem framing tools is typically expressed by external consultants, whereas within the in-house consultancy setting, this is less pronounced, depending on the prior external consultancy exposure of the team member. Additionally, during interviews it was highlighted that external strategy consultants have a stronger reference to strategy tools, although they confer with internal consultants, since they do not assign preference to strategy tools a priori to a strategy project.

Sources of interiorization consist of intranets, training, and informal knowledge sharing among consultants. Here is an account of a consultant (captured during the pilot study), witnessing the benefit of the latter:

If you want the latest, if you want the things that will come to your pack immediately you talk to some people who have done something similar. Or there is a good system, so you can search, you can look out for who has worked for this project and you can connect to them even if they are not in your office and they can send you the material ... There is a platform, but more important is again sharing person to person.

Here the premise is that external consultancies have more standardized processes of strategy tool interiorization, which in turn contribute to their greater use of strategy tools,

as opposed to internal consultancies. During the fieldwork presented in this study, it was detected that external consultancies have more elaborate databases of strategy tools and their use. During the first day in the field, one external consultant engaged within the in-house consulting team confided the difference in procedures he encountered, by stating that the databases at his strategy consulting were much more elaborate and organized than the ones at the hosting (client) firm.

Among the external or internal consultancies, it could be detected that there are consultants who are “strategy tool masters”, i.e., individuals who have interiorized tools at a high level and tend to have a very good literacy with strategy tools. These “masters” not only use tools with confidence, they also have the tendency to guide their team towards a more methodological approach. During fieldwork, strategy tool masters were usually workshop facilitators or consultants with great experience in strategy. Given their position and reputation within the firm, “masters” could guide the use of a few tools in preference to others. For example, workshop facilitators were in charge of designing workshop agendas and they could consequently influence the team or workshop facilitators further on the use of some tools versus others during strategy workshops.

In addition, the interiorization of tools was accompanied by the use of a multiplicity of tools, albeit not explicitly so. While focusing on multiple instances of strategy tools in use, data led to the findings that (1) strategy tools play a fluctuating role during the pipeline of

strategy workshops; and (2) strategy tools play multiple roles during their adoption. These roles are not mutually exclusive. While assessing these findings in more depth, and mirroring them in literature discussions, it is important to question our understanding of the various roles served by strategy tools, why some tools play certain roles more than others, and understand the variables that would contribute to these roles.

*Proposition 1. Strategy tools play multiple – nonexclusive and fluid – roles
during their adoption and adaptation*

This study does not propose a new taxonomy of strategy tools as this exercise would defy the main message proposed here concerning the nonexclusive and fluid roles played by strategy tools. Here the focus remains on the exploration of roles served by strategy tools completing the puzzle that allows us understand their use in more depth.

Eppler and Platts (2009), through their study of interactive visual methods in strategic planning, find that managers rely heavily on visual representations to understand and generate strategy. Moisander and Stenfors (2009) claim that strategy tool designers misunderstand the epistemic culture of users, exaggerating problem solving and rationality. However, my findings do not support such claims. Instead it is the ongoing sense users make around strategy tools in use that solves and “designer” inherited problems in strategy tools.

The propositions introduced in this chapter offer an operationalized view of how strategy practitioners interact with strategy tools. Propositions refer to endogenous (e.g., simple design features of strategy tools) and exogenous factors (e.g., interiorization of a tool by a consultant, the presence of “masters” or external consultants) that would react as independent variables towards strategy tool use. As a result, this chapter contributes empirical evidence on the consultants’ attitude towards strategy tools in use. This chapter attempts to capture *lege artis*, metaphorically, the “laws of artistry in management” by sensemaking and “reflection in action”. Aspects of relationships between consultants and strategy tools, and underlying patterns of behaviour are discussed here. Although further questions of a process view nature on patterns of behaviour towards strategy tools yet remain unanswered, this chapter contributes to a more contextual approach to strategy tools in action.

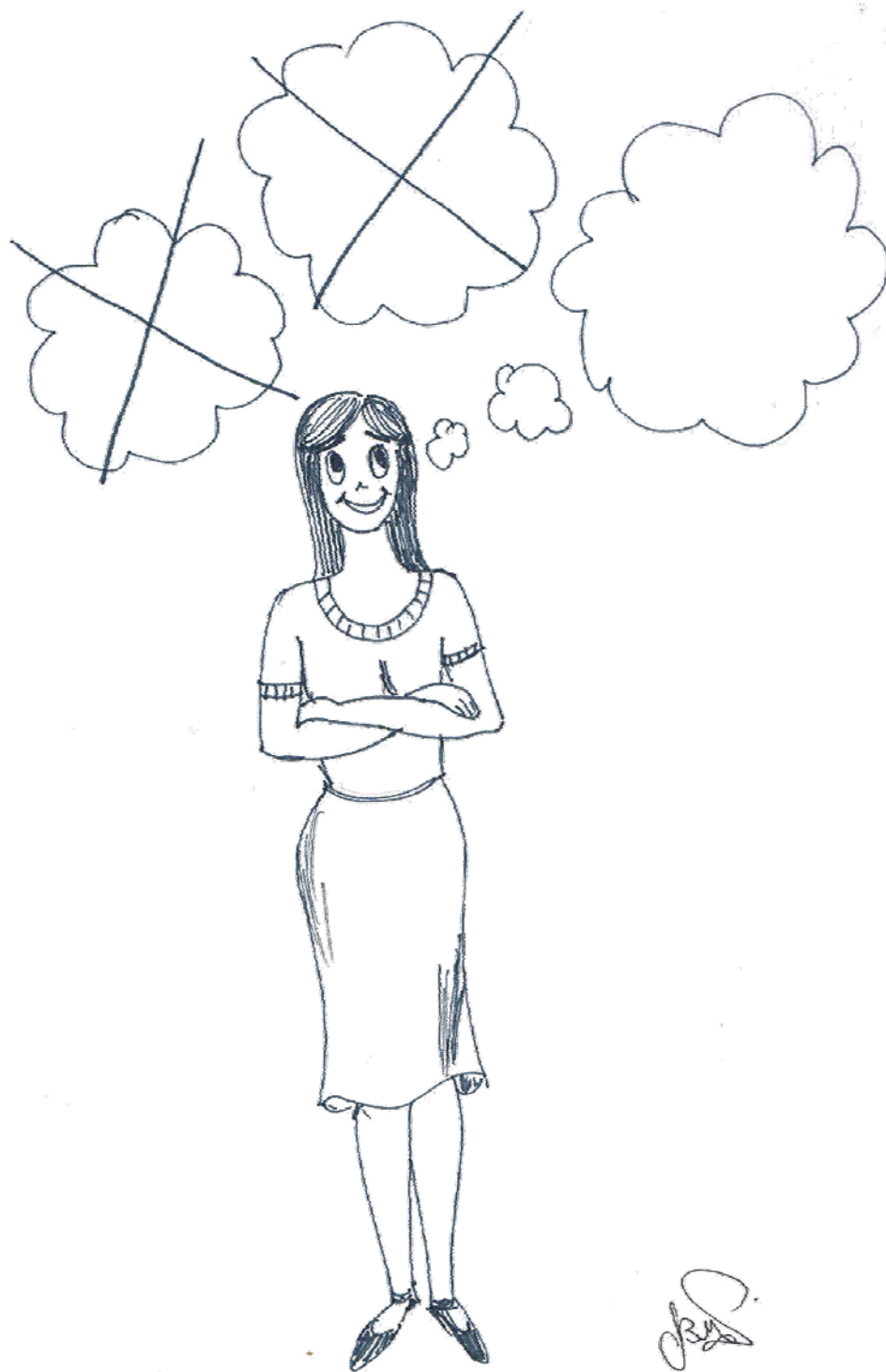
Propositions suggested here should not be seen as fixed stipulations but instead considered as ethnographic insights. These insights should be put to scrutiny to enrich valid conclusions on strategy consultant behaviour towards strategy tools in use. The interrelations could be examined further by a survey or experimental design. However, at this exploratory stage, the propositions suggested aim to advance the empirical understanding of strategy tool use in a strategy (consultancy) setting.

Table 21 in the following pages concludes the discussion in this chapter. Along with the proposed ethnographic insights, operational venues onto scrutinizing these propositions are suggested, taking into account a variety of methods (such as surveys, experimental design, ethnographies), in addition to potential research questions and future research.

Main patterns of strategy tools in use	Main findings (Propositions where applicable)	Implications (Questions of further interest)
Strategy tools embedded in a strategy project	Proposition A. Before a new strategy project starts, the consultancy team has no explicit propensity towards the choice of one strategy tool vs. another. Proposition B. When a strategy tool is used at any phase of a strategy project, it's very likely that its use will not be on its own, but in combination with other strategy tools.	- What role does the company culture have in promoting some tools more than others? - Are internal consultancies significantly different from external consultancies in the inward organizational promotion of strategy tools?
What contributes to the higher use of strategy tools?	Proposition C. The easier to understand a strategy tool, the more it tends to be used. Proposition D. The more flexible a strategy tool is to various situations, the more it will tend to be used. Proposition E. The more complex the problem, the more the consultancy teams will negotiate the use of strategy tools for that problem. Proposition F. The more complex the design features of a strategy tool, the more its meaning will tend to be negotiated prior to its use.	- Studies should test the validity of these findings especially through experimental and/or quasi experimental designs. These studies could contribute in relation to the "value added" obtained from a variety of strategy tools in various situations (i.e., complex problems vs. more "commonly" accounted problems in a strategy setting etc.).

Table 21 (cont'd)		
Main patterns of strategy tools in use	Main findings (Propositions where applicable)	Implications (Questions of further interest)
Individual propensity towards strategy tool use	Proposition G. The more “strategy tool masters” belong to a strategy consulting team, the more strategy tools will tend to be used within that team. Proposition H. The more a strategy tool is interiorized, the more it may be used in an improvised manner or further adopted by its beholder.	- Survey research design could provide a first validation confirming on the concept of “strategy tool masters”. Nevertheless, other fine-grained studies are necessary. - Experimental designs pre/post strategy trainings could delve in more detail into the interiorization of strategy tools and the related implications.
Roles played by strategy tools	Proposition I. Strategy tools play multiple (non- exclusive and fluid) roles during their adoption and adaptation	- Obtain fine-grained ethnography-inspired studies that scrutinize the findings proposed by Proposition J.

Table 21. Main patterns of strategy tools in use



Sensemaking starts with chaos...
(Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 2005: 411)

8. Chapter 8: Strategy tools in use – a sensemaking process

This chapter draws attention to only one project initiated during my fieldwork. This is due to the project representing a “particularly revelatory” case (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007: 27), hence a case within a case. Methodologically, it represents an instance that appears “ideal or exceptional” (Schofield, 1990: 217-221) in that it highlights a practice which, contrary to the standardized strategy workshops discussed in Chapter 6, is new to the team; therefore few processes are already in place for this practice. As such, this is a very interesting opportunity to delve in more detail into the sensemaking processes surrounding strategy tool use, a thematic that was first touched upon theoretically in Chapter 3.

Consistent with the structure of this thesis, at the beginning of this chapter I initially discuss first order findings and proceed by generalizing from the observed phenomena. I argue that strategy tools are entrenched with multiple episodes of negotiations before they are remoulded and reconsidered, or even discarded. Concerning presentation of findings, data are presented here as a narrative – i.e., as a “confessional tale” (cf. Agar, 1980). The main aim is to access and document the process of negotiation of strategy tools as it occurs. Here I focus on RQ3: *What sense strategy practitioners make of/give to the tools they use*

during their strategy work?²⁴² This research question is particularly reinforced by the “sensemaking triangle”, which was discussed in more detail in Chapter 3 (Section 3.6.3 – refer to Figure 5 concerning the “sensemaking triangle” and related discussion). While answering this research question, the aim is to provide an account of a “vicarious experience” in the richness and complexity it occurs (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 359).

8.1. Sensemaking around strategy tools to inform strategy tool use

As discussed previously in this dissertation, firms vastly rely on strategy tools (Glaister & Falshaw, 1999; Grant, 2003; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2007; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). Academics and practitioners have portrayed strategy tools as useful devices in the hands of their users (Gireaudau, 2008; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2007). It has been proposed conceptually that bricolage accompanies the use of strategy tools (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006), hence practitioners change, adjust, and remould strategy tools prior to their use. This was also supported by the findings proposed here in the two previous chapters.

In line with the approach followed in the previous empirical chapters, the premise of this chapter is that strategy tools are not straightforward devices; both by design and application, strategy tools show themselves to be flexible instruments in the hands of their

²⁴² Note that this question is strongly based on an interpretative epistemology chosen here, which does put emphasis on interpretative accounts of subjects (cf. Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

users. Taking into account that strategy tools are “far more flexible in their uses than their usual image suggests” (Giraudeau, 2008: 303), hence, since they are part of the bricolage (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006) accompanying strategy work, strategy tools should not be considered neutral devices in the hands of their users. Therefore, here they are considered together with the emotional²⁴³ load they carry when they are being used, focusing not simply on strategy tools per se, but on the relationship their users have with them.

In this chapter, I propose a narrative on the episodic use of scenario analysis, by showing the ongoing sensemaking surrounding strategic tools that accompanied the project on the making of the global strategy of the firm. Hereafter, focus relies on the Global Strategy Project – to examine how strategists negotiate and make sense of strategy tools, prior to and in parallel with their use. Departing from previous accounts, a central premise in this chapter is that prior to mediating solutions and outcomes to strategy problems, that is, prior to the sensemaking mediated by strategy tools, strategy tools are the very object on which sensemaking occurs (by the very practitioners interacting with them). Such sensemaking, which occurs as a process rather than an outcome, is indispensable in informing which tools are to be ultimately used and how, hence affecting the final outcome of strategists’ solutions.

²⁴³ Note that although “emotions” as a theoretical concept are not discussed in detail in this dissertation, here “emotional load” stands emphatically for the consequence of the problematic relationships strategy practitioners have with the tools in use.

Sensemaking on literature has focused on how strategists make sense of the environment (Weick, 1995) and how they help make sense of the environment (see Astley & Zammuto, 1992; Fiol, 1989; Kaplan, 2011; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007). Nevertheless, the sensemaking of practitioners around analytic strategy tools has received little attention. Therefore, in this chapter strategy tools are not black-boxed, but are also the object on which strategizers “reflect in action” (Schön, 1983).

8.2. Enactment of strategy tools and the relationship practitioners have with them

Following the reflexive account proposed here, special attention is dedicated to studies that have uncovered the use of strategy tools. As one example, by opening up “strategy drafts” with a single case study it is shown that strategy plans indeed constitute an imaginative exercise and suggest that strategists should consider them “documents likely to stir and enhance strategic imagination” (Giraudeau, 2008: 294). The author notes that strategic plans went through various stages of “drafts of strategy”. However, it is also acknowledged that there is a risk that in literature strategy tools “may end up being too rigid and simplified to describe well enough the complexity of actual business practices” (Giraudeau, 2008: 305). Indeed, this has been showcased by *Vignette B* here.

Kaplan (2011) discusses how strategy making is enabled not only by the use of analytical tools, but also by the support of the PowerPoint as part of the epistemic machinery of the firm. More specifically, PowerPoint is shown to allow for collaboration and cartography among participants. In Kaplan’s (2011) study of PowerPoint, various drafts are followed as

they enable or exclude various participants and messages. “Ownership of the deck” was highlighted to be an important element in further legitimizing the messages of PowerPoint documents (ibid: 333). In another account, Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) provide a process of communication by examining a recursive talk-text relation in a strategic planning, by proposing a process of recontextualization and decontextualization by focusing on participation and communication of actors within strategic planning exercises.

In this account I do not analyse the political or communication aspects of strategy tool use, although they are shown to be a sensitive matter (Kaplan, 2008; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). Instead, the findings here provide an overview of how ambiguity is dealt with during the use of strategy tools, by following the interaction at the level of teams and individuals directly engaged with the use of the tool.

As shown in this chapter, it is the continuous negotiation of strategy tool meanings by strategy practitioners that aids the practitioners in obtaining sensemaking of these tools. Such sensemaking is routine-embedded but also episodic. In the former sense, strategy tools persistently used within the team become part of the organizational and team liturgy (Barry & Elmes, 1997), but their sensemaking is also episodic, in that strategy tool meaning is revisited and tool boundaries become redefined during strategic episodes such as workshops and meetings.

8.3. How does sensemaking around strategy tools unfold?

Following the course of events, I construct a process of sensemaking as observed (shown in Table 22). Here the focus is on main activities which involved and demonstrated sensemaking at each stage. As shown, the process of sensemaking initializes with the extraction of cues both internally and externally.

Initial discussion of scenario analysis methodology	Negotiation of scenario analysis meaning with the external consulting team	Trial and error using scenario analysis	Consensus on scenario analysis (after obtaining buy-in from project sponsors and firm executives)
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Gathering information: - initially documents that would facilitate the construction of scenario analysis are sought within the team - in addition, information is collected from existing global trends and their implications for the firm - Sensemaking from extracted cues (Weick, 1995) at each of both teams internally (the in-house consultancy and the external consultancy engaged for the project)	External templates demanded from the external consultancy in support of the construction of scenarios - Extracted cues are sought after information offered by the external consultancy hired (information trends, competition etc.)	- Bricolage of scenarios happens by trial and error with various dimensions, time-frames and outcomes - Sensemaking on scenarios is supported by the notion of “discontinuities” which is adopted after the recommendation of external consultants	- Several executives shift the aim of scenario analysis (beyond being conceived as a risk assessment exercise) - Sensegiving from project sponsors and executives helps stabilize the notion of scenarios and share a unified collective sensemaking of scenarios

Table 22. Process of sensemaking of scenario analysis during the Global Strategy Project

Sensemaking starts with chaos (Weick et al., 2005). In the first stages of encountering a tool that strategists are little familiar with, they develop a flux of impressions (ibid.). As

Chia (2000: 517) states, practitioners start with:

... an undifferentiated flux of fleeting sense-impressions and it is out of this brute aboriginal flux of lived experience that attention carves out and conception names.

This flux allows an opportunity for the initiation of a process of engagement with the tool at hand. Consequently, in Stages 2 and 3 negotiation on the meaning of the strategy tool takes place. Multiple stakeholders are involved in these negotiations. As a result, bricolage takes place through the various trial and error rounds concerning the same strategy tool.

The sensemaking of scenarios is stabilized after the consensus reached with the buy-in of scenarios from several executives consulted on the matter, whereas in phase (4) sensegiving unfolds. Sensegiving is:

the process of attempting to influence the sensemaking and meaning construction of others toward a preferred redefinition of organizational reality (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991: 442).

For example, the case when Rasiel (1999) emphasizes that consultants need to make clients aware and convince them of their solutions along the way before the final consulting report is presented to them represents a typical case that can be examined further as a sensegiving activity. But in the Global Strategy Project, both sensegiving and sensemaking activities of scenarios were observed. Whereas at the beginning of a project, the level of ambiguity was higher, collective sensemaking occurred in both the internal consultancy and external consultancy. It is known that, during initial project phases, as teams are formed and come together for the first time, they seek to reduce their ambiguity by making sense of the project and the creative demands it holds (Huff, 1988). As the strategy tools were negotiated further, continuous interaction with the sponsors enabled

sensegiving on the use of particular tools, such as scenario construction which was later considered a legitimate tool to be used for internal purposes. This process was marked by a continuous need for communication. Whereas initially, scattered and fragmented data obtained by consultants was a major hurdle in constructing future scenarios, later communication appeared to be the main barrier towards the enabling of sensegiving of scenario analysis. Challenges with scenario analysis – as reported from an external consultant supporting the scenario analysis exercise – lay in communication with the internal consultancy, as well as with the project sponsors.

I think one of the challenges in scenario analysis is probably communication, at least in our material. So we had this whole debate between – is it dimension driven and what are dimensions and are dimensions the same as megatrends and are they ...? Sometimes you find you're talking about the same thing but it doesn't sound like you are until you talk it through so we talked to them yesterday and this morning trying to figure out if we were on the same page and sometimes it's not so easy to tell if you are, it takes a while to get there. (Consultant, I22-1-13S9).

To attempt further theorizing it is also important to discuss that such a sensemaking process, as shown in Figure 23, is not static or fully sequenced. That means that the internal and external extracted cues start at a particular time at the launch of the initiative to use scenarios (as shown here with a start point in t_0) and then they accompany the moulding of scenarios until the final adoption of this tool.

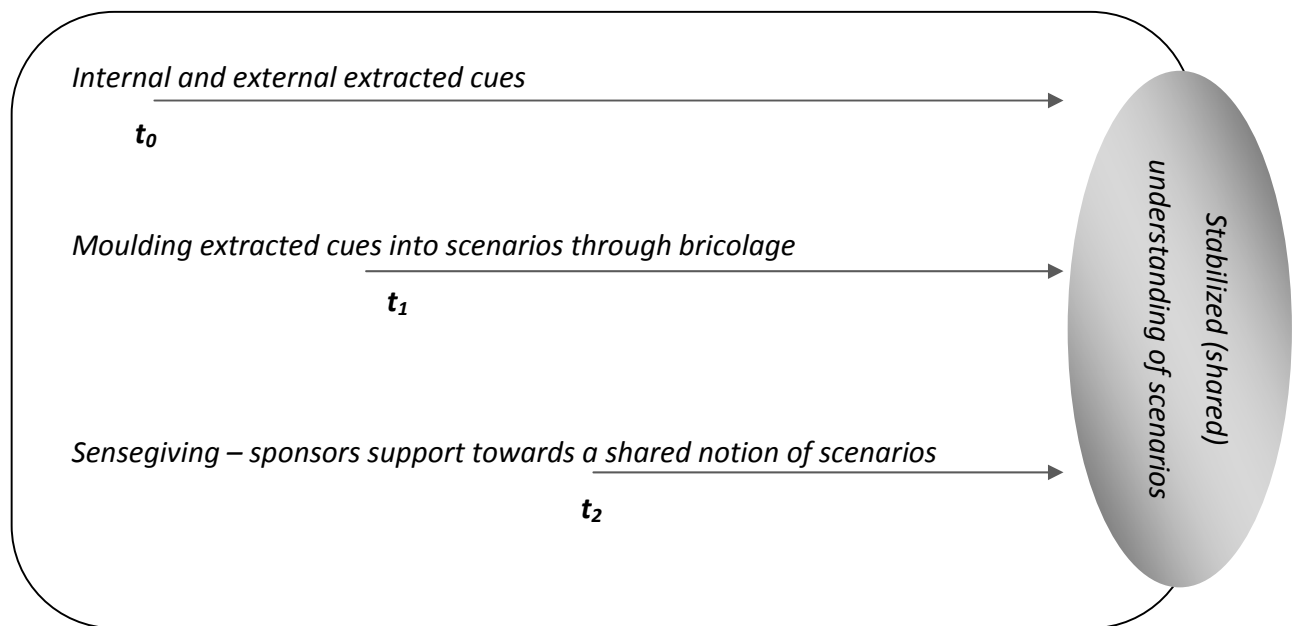


Figure 23 Sensemaking process and time as a variable of consideration

Later on at a time I call here t_1 , through trial and error with various scenarios types, bricolage is in place. Further on at t_2 , sensegiving is brought into the process through the influencing discussions of the sponsors. Hence, t_0 , t_1 and t_2 are time points when stages are brought into the sensemaking process of strategy tools, to become part of it throughout the whole process.

8.4. Reflections on major findings of this chapter

Although the data displayed and discussed here were only a minor fraction of strategy tools encountered in the ethnography undertaken for this study, the choice of scenario analysis for this discussion was deliberate, to highlight a case of an explorative (March, 1991) encounter with a strategy tool. This case enabled observation of how “sensemaking” (Weick, 1979; 1995) occurred around strategy tools. As Weick (1995: 13) notes, the sensemaking phenomenon is not merely interpretation, as in the former “the activity

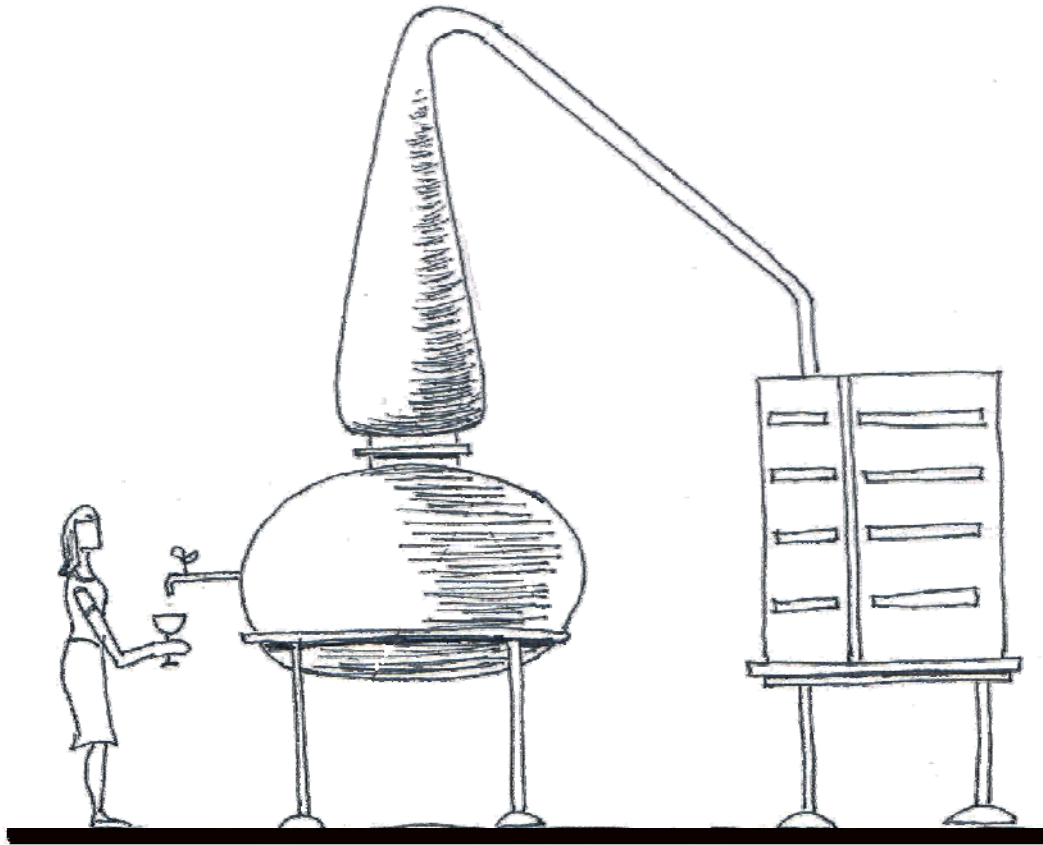
rather than the outcome is in the foreground”. Such process is less about discovery than it is about invention (ibid.).

With the account provided here, I contribute to our understanding of strategy tools used by discussing a process of sensemaking that occurs around them. Hence, strategy tools are not simply intermediary devices on which strategy outcomes are achieved, but they are also the direct object of “reflection in action” (Schön, 1983) around which practitioners rationalize, feel, and behave. Strategy tools cannot and should not be followed separately from the “confusing mess” in which they professionally operate (Schön 1983: 42). Instead, a clear picture could be obtained by taking into account their presence, and the importance of sensemaking processes surrounding strategy tools, which consequently leads to the choice or rejection of certain tools or elements thereof.

The following table (Table 23) discusses the major findings of this chapter and their implications:

Aspects of sensemaking of strategy tools	Main findings	Implications (questions of further interest)
Process	Strategy tools are not taken for granted by their users, but they are continuously made sense of and negotiated; and their ultimate use is dependent on such negotiation. Sensemaking around strategy tools is multi-staged and problematic.	Apart from the outlier case presented in this chapter, obtain multiple cases that contribute to a nuanced understanding of sensemaking processes accompanying strategy tool use.
What contributes to sensegiving of strategy tools	Stakeholders can have an important role in obtaining the ultimate stabilized meaning of strategy tools, not only encompassing practitioners in direct interaction with strategy tools, but also executives and clients “consuming” these tools.	Obtain more accounts from the side of other stakeholders (executives and clients consuming strategy tools).
Generalizability of a sensemaking process to other strategy tools	Ongoing sensemaking of strategy tools enables the ultimate adoption and adaptation of strategy tools.	Complement this study with other comparative studies to find any potential “tension points” to uncover broader representations of sensemaking around strategy tools.

Table 23. Sensemaking of strategy tools – triggers and process



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9. Chapter 9: Conclusions – an integrated approach to the hidden role of tools in strategy work

9.1. Conclusions upon revisiting the findings

In the analysis proposed in two stages through Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I focused on three research questions. In Table 24, I show the main findings regarding each research question and the general implications with regard to the main research question:

How do strategy practitioners strategize through (analytic) strategy tools in use?

This dissertation was conceived to “study the underbelly” of strategy under making (Edge & Mulkay 1976, as cited in Latour & Woolgar 1979). The phenomenon in question demanded a methodology that would offer closer access to the enactment of strategy tools in practice. Hence, due to the nature of its questions, this research demanded a more reflexive methodology (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000), both in data collection and display. To respond to these specific requirements, ethnography (Agar, 1980; 1996; Van Maanen, 1988; Hammersley, 1990) was chosen as a proper methodological venue. Balogun et al. (2003) support this type of tactic within S-a-P by suggesting interactive discussion groups, self-reporting methods, and practitioner research. Two of the three methodological venues proposed by these authors are followed within this dissertation.²⁴⁴ As a result, through observations, by engaging in multiple ethnographic talks (Spradley, 1979), two focus groups, and numerous written documents, I could obtain strategy tools in their richness.

²⁴⁴ More precisely, I refer to interactive discussion groups (i.e., focus groups) and self-reporting methods (i.e., diaries and other reflexive data capturing devices shown in Chapters 4 & 5).

Research concerns	Main findings
- RQ1 How are analytic strategy tools used in frontstage and backstage aspects of in-house strategy projects?	Different motivations drive the use of strategy tools in various strategy projects, depending on phase of strategy project as well as staged events. During <i>backstage</i> there is a more inquisitive approach, hence a trial and error attitude when applying strategy tools; whereas at <i>frontstage</i> there is a quest towards simplicity, with a more polished approach to strategy tools in use. As a result, bricolage gives life to “Cheshire cats” that are encountered throughout the <i>frontstage</i> and <i>backstage</i> aspects of strategy work, showing their grin only to the trained eye.
- RQ2 What roles do (analytic) strategy tools serve in strategy work?	The roles of strategy tools should be considered closely with the patterns of their use – their role is dependent upon the stage/setting/region of work where these tools are enacted. As a result, the same strategy tool might be used differently in various strategy project phases, and equally different stages might need the adoption of particular tools more than others. In addition, strategy tools serve multiple roles, such as to frame problems, visualize, prioritize/filter, and stimulate discussion.
- Q3 What sense do strategy practitioners make/give to the tools they use during their strategy work?	Prior to being used, strategy tools need to be negotiated and their notion needs to be stabilized. A “stabilized” or shared sense of strategy tools is enabled also by the sensegiving practices of the sponsors. Adapting strategy tools depends on the accessibility of cues (internal and external), the features of the tools, and length of the sensemaking process surrounding these tools.

Table 24. Main findings shown in relation to each research question

During my time with the firm, I could more and more understand that strategy tools were not to be identified through explicit labels or definitions stable to the team. Hence, these strategy tools were not to be chased by simply considering their labels and acronyms in data repositories within the company, neither were they to be chased in textbook guidelines on specific tools. Although the latter constituted important systems of reference to inform on strategy tool typologies, it was the contextual enactments and sensemaking

proposed by team members that better helped validate the presence, or indeed absence, of strategy tools.

In addition, in praxis, strategy tools picked up for the facilitation of discussions within the team were selected ad hoc, depending on the background of team members involved in the discussion and project stage, and the inherent features of these tools. Tools could be dropped if they were considered valuable to the discussion giving space to a “whatever works” approach, letting simple and flexible tools be preferred in a broad spectrum of instances. During strategy discussions, the team was oriented towards obtaining optimal solutions to intricate problems, rather than focusing on strategy tools per se. In general, there was no single specific strategy tool used rigidly and persistently to approach problem solving in strategy projects. Hence, Cheshire cats emerged in all their glory! They would blink and disappear, playing with the eye of a focused researcher. Consequently, there was a “pick and mix” approach to the use of strategy tools, similar to the bricolage approach (Campbell, 1997; Weick, 1998) mentioned in academia. Strategy tools became embedded with one another – they were flexible, modifiable, recreated, moulded and remoulded during strategy projects.

Furthermore the process of “sensemaking on strategy tools” was discussed through the case of scenario analysis during a strategy planning exercise within the observed unit. For this project, in-house strategy consultants worked together with outsourced consultants to

design scenarios to be used by executives within the firm. This account contributes to our understanding of strategy tool use, not bracketing such use into a straightforward process, but elaborating it as a sensemaking process which is driven directly by strategy tool users. It was shown that the relationships practitioners have with strategy tools are not unproblematic. Instead, the relationship of practitioners with strategy tools comprises a continuous process of negotiation during which the meaning of strategy tools is negotiated by the practitioners interacting with them, their elements are rewritten and redefined, and their assumptions questioned. Hence, “opening up” strategy tools (cf. Whittington & Cailluet, 2008) does not only comprise reconsidering the roles these tools serve in strategizing praxis (for example, see Gireaudau, 2008, or Kaplan, 2009), but also how they are picked, negotiated or discarded. Hence, here the focus lies on “what actually happens when individuals use a strategy tool, rather than simply assuming their usage” (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009: 223). Here the starting point of strategy tools use does not stand in the ultimate (material) use of the tools, but rather in the initial considerations of practitioners of these tools (which might materialize or not thereafter in the use of strategy tools). The enactment of strategy tools in practice involves sensemaking the users make of them along with their use. It is the continuous negotiation of strategy tool meanings by strategy practitioners that aids the latter in obtaining sensemaking of these tools.

In conclusion, by answering the main research question, I aimed to build on the S-a-P movement (Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski et al., 2007; Johnson et al., 2003; Johnson

et al., 2007; Whittington, 2006) following strategy tools as they are used in “praxis”²⁴⁵ (Whittington, 2006). An important element missed in the S-a-P literature to date relates to the sensemaking surrounding strategy tools prior to their use. I “opened up” the use of strategy tools in combination with a “sensemaking triangle”, an ever-present sensemaking activity that surrounds strategy tool use.

9.2. Theoretical contribution and generalization

In this dissertation, I discussed findings through theoretical lenses such as sensemaking (cf. Weick, 1979, 1990, 1993, 1995); bricolage (Lévi-Strauss, 1966; Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011); and Goffman’s (1959) *backstage/frontstage* perspective. I could not neglect that the theoretical explanations provided here are also products of the time we live in. By this, I mean that these concepts belong to a certain management fashion (Abrahamson, 1996) circulating in management theory and writing nowadays. For example, sensemaking is shown to have continuously proliferated in published research in the last years (Weick et al., 2005; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). This is in part due to a general trend, of many organizational research streams, to move beyond explanations of a fully causal relation between phenomena towards a more interpretive, narrative, and/or process based approach of knowing (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010). In addition, the notion of bricolage has gained prevailing understanding and use in management scholarship (Duymedjian &

²⁴⁵ Here “strategy praxis” is understood to consist of “all the various activities involved in the deliberate formulation and implementation of strategy” (Whittington, 2006: 619)

Rüling, 2010). Therefore, this dissertation is an undeniable by-product of the research developments of our times. However, this is not to undermine the importance of methodological and theoretical procedures which stand up to the benchmark required nowadays. For example, here the quest was towards producing “mid-range theory”, i.e., giving priority to accuracy but understanding its weaker scoring towards generality and simplicity (Langley, 1999).

A reflexive approach was followed here, where “a constant movement back and forth between theory and empirical data is necessary” (Wodak 2004: 200). Hence, I showed in this study a preference towards “abductive” theorizing.²⁴⁶ This approach is considered to obtain both meaningful and plausible findings, in superiority to inductive and deductive approaches (Farjoun, 2008).

With reference to the plausibility of findings that is among the main criteria for judging ethnography (Stewart, 1998), “member checking” was a procedure to help “data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions [that] are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 314). I considered of equal importance the continuous interrogation of data in the quest for misalignments and contradicting relationships.

²⁴⁶ See discussion on “abductive” theorizing in Chapter 2.

This dissertation was conceived as a further contribution to the S-a-P domain which has highlighted the need towards empirical contributions on strategy tools in use (as in Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Various scholars (Kaplan, 2011; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011; Jarraat & Stiles, 2010) have discussed the use of material objects (a subject not touched upon in this study, but nevertheless holding a strong position while assessing the use of strategy tools in praxis). After all it is the blending of material objects with strategy tools that constitutes what is known as “the stuff of strategy” (Whittington, 2007). The contribution of this dissertation is not only aimed at providing another glimpse of what constitutes the daily work of strategists and the role of their supporting artefacts and problem solving approaches, but also in explaining the mechanisms behind such use. Prior studies have questioned the meanings and roles of strategy tools in use (Kaplan, 2011; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011) and this study proposes findings contributing towards the same research domain. Such a contribution is considered particularly embedded in a reflexive account (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000) which is supported by the continuous quest for authenticity, plausibility, and criticality (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993).

I tend to disagree with Miles and Huberman (1994: 147) who “consider qualitative analysis to be a very powerful method for assessing causality”. Instead, I do believe in the strong exploratory power of qualitative analysis, and the work proposed here aims to contribute in that way. I believe that the assessment of causality is over-ambitious because the data collected and analysed in qualitative studies allow description and interpretation to a considerable degree of the “black box” that is often pinpointed as a weakness of

quantitative approaches. However, at the same time, enlightening what occurs in the “black box” could not justify the high generalizability of the phenomena observed and interpreted. Although it could well be that qualitative studies aim to achieve “assessment of causality” this is an ideal that encompasses many hurdles, and is scarcely possible within the boundaries of qualitative research.

It is important to discuss also the level of theory development claimed here. Hence, one could ask if the material proposed in this work pertains more to “theory development” or to “theory elaboration” (cf. Lee et al., 1999). In my research, I tended to favour the latter, by delving into the nature of strategy tool use. In Figure 24, I visualize the actual and aimed contribution of this piece of research. Based on a diagram proposed by Corley and Gioia (2011), I position my research towards strategy tools in use, to encompass contribution of practical application and involve incremental to revelatory originality. Hence, the movement between x_1 and x_2 is to denote a spectrum of positions on which the various contributions of this research lie, rather than a fixed coordinate where all the contributions proposed here could be located.

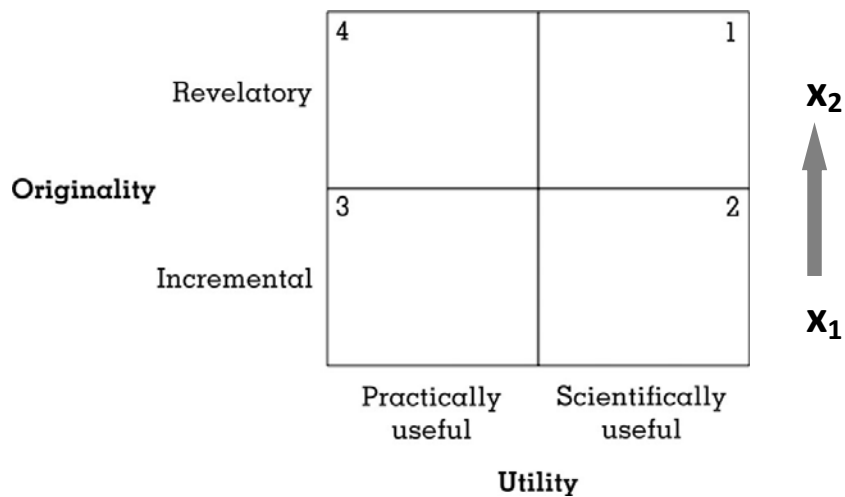


Figure 24 Mapping theoretical contribution of this research
(following a diagram proposed by Corley & Gioia, 2011: 15)

In addition, although there is ongoing debate about the validity and reliability of interpretive research, one could still discuss how findings are representative of the phenomenon of interest (Lee, 1999). Authors suggest that this could be obtained by “prolonged engagement” in the field as well as “persistent observation” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This was a main criterion of the research conducted in this study. Here the aim was towards analytic generalization (Tsoukas, 1989) focusing not only on theoretical but also practical implications for other scholars. With the theoretical implications, the study does not only aim to provide original theoretical insights, but also “improve the current research practice of informed scholars” (Whetten, 1990: 581). As a result, the reflexivity and lack of *backstage* understatement are two practical lessons obtained first-hand in this dissertation.

With reference to the plausibility of findings, which is among the main criteria for judging ethnography (Stewart, 1998), “member checking” was a procedure to help to ensure that

“data, analytic categories, interpretations and conclusions are tested with members of those stakeholding groups from whom the data were originally collected” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 314). I considered of equal importance the continuous interrogation of data in the quest for misalignments and contradicting relationships.

9.3. Limitations and mitigating aspects

Even though methodological challenges have been addressed in detail in the analysis chapter (Section 5.7), here I discuss over-arching issues related to the overall study. Comprehensibly this study faces unavoidable limitations (e.g., it focuses on a single site as opposed to a multi-site comparison; it provides a strong descriptive base rather than causal relationships), here the trade-off between “dirty hands” vs. “clean models” (Hirsch et al., 1987) is resolved by clearly favouring the former. Should we neglect the arduous task of following strategy tools as they happen, the Cheshire cat could still be grinning at us, somewhere.

The sampling of the site examined here was driven by the quest for exploration rather than testing of theory. In this sense, the main aim was towards “extreme or unique” and “revelatory” sites (Yin, 1984: 43; emphasis removed). Nevertheless, despite its advantages, a single case study is not free of various drawbacks, since the lack of a comparative base, makes the empirical generalization of findings questionable (Yin, 2008). However, here it is worth noting that comparative studies have very different objectives from single case studies, as well as making different kinds of theoretical contributions (Langley, 1999).

The naturalistic enquiry of a single site is open to the danger of ex post facto fallacy since it constitutes low constraint research (Graziano & Raulin, 2000). However, in this research, instead of drawing conclusive statements, propositions were developed for enable testing at a future stage. In this way the limitations of dealing with low constraint research are acknowledged and thereafter mitigated by the development of these propositions in the form of ethnographic insights.

More importantly, I acknowledge the existing resistance towards a single case ethnography. However, this method is becoming more and more accepted in recent literature circles. As Van Maanen (2011: 229) recently emphasized when referring to the insight provided by ethnographies when exploring various work domains and organizational daily settings:

... without close and detailed studies of these worlds, our conceptions of them would be pitifully inadequate. Ethnography shines a light, sometimes a very strange one, on what people are up to and such doings are rarely if ever predictable or in line with what either “current theory” or “the experts” might say.

In addition, note that throughout this study I deliberately abstained from using “case” or “case study” as a reference system when referring to this site, not to align this dissertation to positivist connotations of case studies ever-present in qualitative research (e.g., as presented by Yin, 2008).

9.4. Implications for practice

By proposing “implications for practice”, one should identify the various domains encompassed in the notion of “practice”, hence here implications cover a broad spectrum encompassing consultants (and strategy practitioners, or strategizers, more broadly), but also business schools, or other training settings (e.g., vocational institutions set up by [strategy] consultancies or other large private institutions).

The implications for practice are manifold, including guidelines on strategy tools built from the practical observations gathered here (as shown, for example, in Figure 25), but at the same time using the lessons we have learned as to how we can enhance clients’ insights of how strategy tools enable recommendations provided to them by consultants. In Figure 25, I provide a practitioner orienting document to support training, or more generally guidance for consultants or manager professionals concerning the use of strategy tools. There have been attempts in the past to propose integrating frameworks with a strong match between tools and strategy problems. For example, Schwenk and Thomas (1983) proposed an integrated approach for matching strategy problems with decision supporting mechanisms such as devil’s advocacy, scenario analysis, the Delphi procedure etc. Checklists have been introduced to help with minimizing errors in health care management (see Gawande, 2009); and generic methods have been proposed to minimize sampling biases in statistical analysis (Donaldson, 2010). Whereas all these accounts aim at optimizing decision making as informed by tools and methodologies in use, the guideline here is conceived not as a rigid view towards rejecting or accepting the use of frameworks, but as a mere guideline

that informs and orients consultants on circumstances particularly advantageous to the selection and application of strategy frameworks.

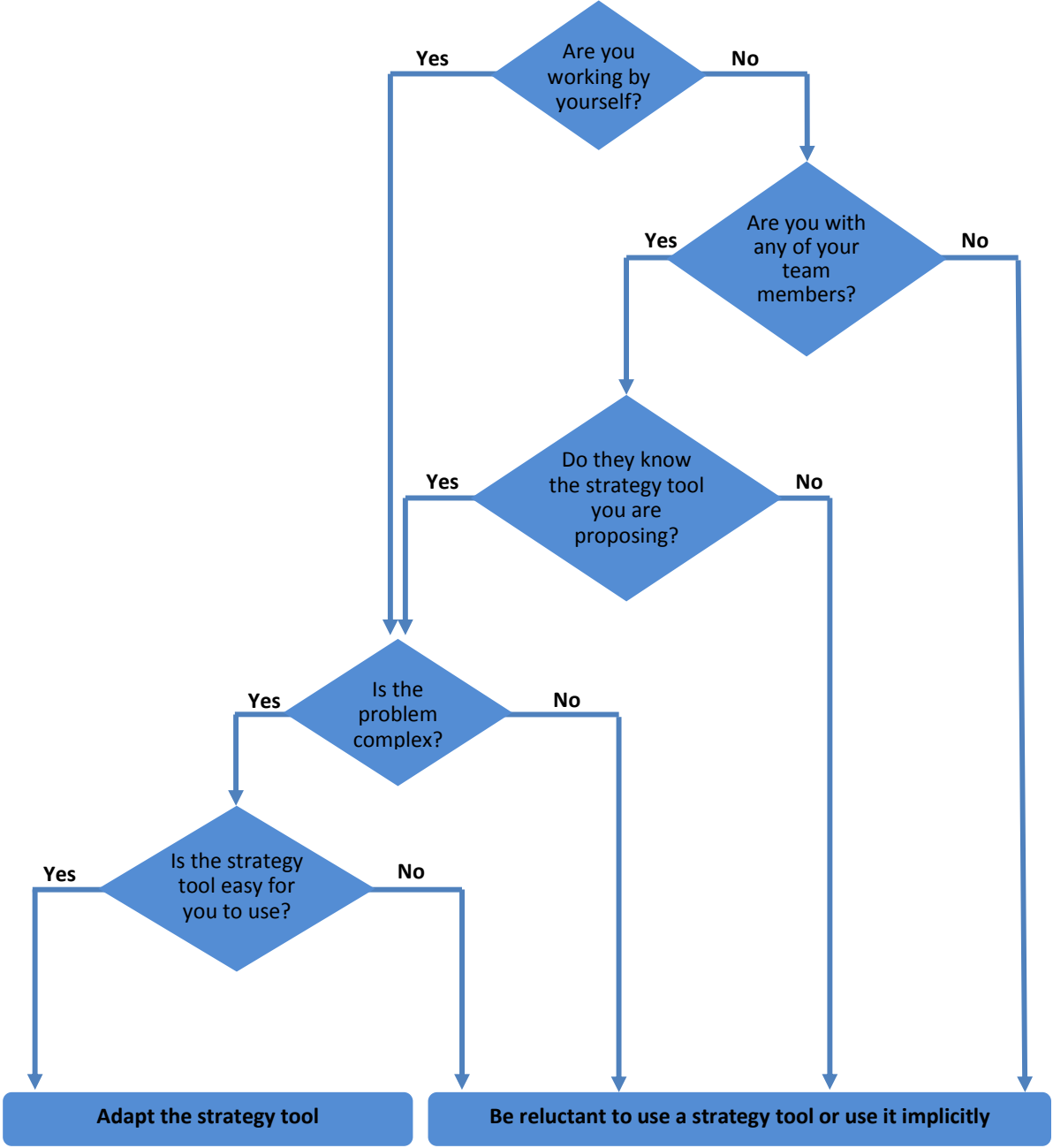


Figure 25 A practical guideline: When is a strategy tool to be deployed in practice?

As shown in Figure 25, by jointly assessing the implications of the empirical evidence presented here (especially the positions laid out in Chapter 7), one could observe various conditions supporting the adoption and adaptation of strategy tools, as follows:

- working in the comfort of one's own company
- working with a team that is comfortable with the framework proposed
- dealing with a simple problem
- dealing with a framework that the practitioner feels able to apply with ease.²⁴⁷

The presence of these conditions encourages the use of strategy tools (encompassing their adoption and adaptation). On the contrary, should none of these conditions be present, the practitioner is advised to be reluctant to use the strategy frameworks, or indeed use them implicitly (i.e., without direct reference to these frameworks when interacting with the other parties involved in the dealings with the particular strategy problem in question).

The proposed algorithm should be treated with caution since this work and its findings come with their own boundaries, hence there are unavoidable limitations to this guideline (e.g., since it is based on strong descriptive research rather than causal relationships), and at the same time, the findings provide a rather deterministic view on future steps with strategy frameworks. However, such a view is deliberately chosen here, in order to favour

²⁴⁷ Note that these last two points concern the viewpoint of the practitioner rather than a third party.

propagation of findings to a broader practitioner public and have an alleviating impact on the everyday praxis of the latter.

To conclude on this normative aspect, as persistently emphasized in this chapter, the diagram proposed here is not to determine fully²⁴⁸ how practitioners should interact with strategy frameworks, nor to discard the opportunity for bricolage and trial and error approaches when experiencing strategy frameworks.

In addition, through this research, by offering examples of how strategy tools are used in practice, future managers, consultants, and strategists could learn more about the conditions enabling or constraining strategy tools. For example, tools that enable filtering could well be used across many meetings to review strategy decision making, or more specifically workshops designed for this purpose.

9.5. Venues for future research

There are various venues that theory could take following the path of this study. These include adjacent themes (i.e., organizational culture, clientele, and type of consultancy informing strategy tool use) encountered in this ethnography, along with research areas such as emotion, and strategizers' identity and the interconnections with strategy tools.

²⁴⁸ This would contradict the very interpretivist stance held during this dissertation.

Nevertheless, there are also areas that promise to put more challenges in the path of development. For example, a taxonomy of strategy tools would not help in developing theory on strategy tools further, since it is the fluctuating role of tools as described earlier in this dissertation that enables strategy tools to jump from one category to another. Hence, the nature of their use detected by the presence of bricolage, implies that strategy tools are fluid or plastic moulds in the hands of their users, and any attempt to define them statically would be a failed practice. However, in the remainder of this chapter, I focus on promising research areas, hence leaving aside research domains that hold little or no promise towards the understanding of strategy tool use as a complex phenomenon. I start with the discussion of adjacent themes encountered in this research.

9.5.1. Adjacent themes

Several other themes emerged during the data analysis, which will be pursued further outside this dissertation. Due to the limited amount of data gathered for these adjacent themes (especially since this dissertation pursues one single site), it is considered wiser to leave their discussion and development to forums beyond this thesis. Nevertheless, these are important aspects of strategy tool use that could enable a better understanding of strategy tool use in the long term. I describe them briefly in Table 25.

Theme	Preliminary proposition	Implications for research
Company culture and its role in strategy tool adoption	Despite the prior exposure of practitioners towards strategy tools, the company rejected the “academic” or “textbook approach” as scarcely useful	This would promote the “invisible presence” of strategy tools as discussed also elsewhere (along major findings) in this dissertation. Additionally, this explains why there was continuous resistance toward the development of home grown tools (as emphasized, especially in the first focus group organized with the team).
External strategy consultants vs. internal consultants on their work with strategy tools	Proposition: external strategy consultants are more likely than internal consultants to work by/with strategy tools	Focus should be given to a comparison of training structures of external consultancies vs. internal ones to understand the major differences especially when confronting dynamics by which training in both operates (comparative study needed to prove the intermediate proposition provided from the research here).
Clients’ stance towards strategy tools	Proposition: clients will generally inhibit the use of strategy tools (unless the very project assignment is about working on a specific strategy tool).	Focus should be given here to the importance of differences between internal vs. external client settings, to find out how exactly clients trigger or inhibit the use of strategy tools.

Table 25. Adjacent themes and their implications

Despite not being pursued further here, I provide a brief discussion of the main observations and claims obtained by examining these three adjacent themes.

Company’s culture effect upon strategy tool use

Since strategy tools are shown to be shared within an organizational community (Werr et al., 1997), the organizational culture should be expected to play a strong role in dictating or renouncing the use of particular tools. Hence, during the coding process, first order analysis was undertaken in relation to the company culture. This was not intended as an

exhaustive analysis of the company culture, considering the limitations of the overall concept of organizational culture per se²⁴⁹ and also taking into account the small number of people interviewed along with the particularities of the sample they represented (i.e., the internal consultancy under study as a sub-item of a major audit firm).

After all, this is a company of more than 100,000 employees and any scattered view of its culture will not do justice to the “amalgam” of cultures that this global Big Audit firm represents. However, here the intention is to highlight a couple of attributes of its employees, so that a bigger picture can be offered as an initial context for the choice of strategy tools found to be used within such a context.

As a professional service firm primarily servicing audits, this firm consisted of a large pool of auditors who had not necessarily taken business studies in their initial (under)graduate education. This is how an HR director would describe in detail the background of auditors within this firm, while arguing for a need for more strategy training:

So you'd enter at 21, we'd put you through three/four years of training here, you take your examinations, and part of that examination syllabus is related to business, commerce, and broadly the domain of strategy, but in the main it's about, you know, getting the numbers right, it's about accounting standards and so on ... A lot of our guys have the equivalent of two degrees, so they'll have a first degree in zoology or English or whatever and a chartered accountancy qualification which is the equivalent. So, but what they haven't got is that commercial examination, so ... (HR director, I21-1-4K12)

²⁴⁹ For a good overview of these limitations, refer to Taras et al. (2009).

Many of the Area, Market, or Service Line Leaders who would be participants in the workshops witnessed here came from this same pool of employees. Sometimes strategy tools were viewed as “rather academic” in the interviews conducted. By being immersed in the company day to day activities it was understood that this phrase had a relatively negative connotation. As witnessed in one interview with one HR manager:

... from my understanding, [there] is a huge focus on the practical and academic is almost a swearword. So if somebody says to you you're a bit academic, you know, you should really be pretty insulted. (HR manager, I21-1-42)

Another team member’s account gives further hints to how “academic” is viewed.²⁵⁰

I'm currently working with someone who's got an academic background and he finds it very difficult to translate the concepts he has in his head into simple words that the client understands (Strategy director,²⁵¹ I21-1-7.8K14)

At the same time, the company was described in many interviews as generally reactive (rather than proactive),²⁵² pertaining to a rather short-term view of the future in its reflections upon the competitive landscape it faced. Hence, many workshops encompassed a short term (immediate) view of the future, giving less preference to long term futures or scenarios as strategy tools in use.

²⁵⁰ Note that this may also resonate with the possible negative connotations that the British society makes with the “academician” profile in the country.

²⁵¹ In this interview two strategy directors were present. Although this was not a planned occurrence, the programmed interview was conducted as previously laid out, with each of the strategy directors interviewed in turn as the interview topics went along.

²⁵² Interestingly, much of this phenomenon was discovered by “accident” only after the tape recorder was stopped after having discussed with a senior member of the team (I22-2-37). The interviewee discussed in confidence that the company culture was seen as a reactive one, highlighting issues of short-sightedness in the strategy of the firm and the related accountability of leadership within the company. According to the interviewee, this explained also the rather slow response in promoting the “Global Strategy” project.

Clients' stance towards strategy tools

Prior to initiating the discussion, first and foremost, it is important to emphasize the particular setting where this in-house consultancy was operating. The team under focus was offering professional services to other PSF professionals within a major audit PSF. The many layers of the setting faced by the unit added to the peculiarities of the equivocal problems faced by the consultants.

The client dealt with here was different from the type of client encountered by team members in their previous work, where the latter encompassed more industry (i.e., generally non PSF) clientele. This is how a director within the team spoke about the nature of the client faced as in-house consultant, compared with personal prior experience:

Respondent: We worked very closely with the customer segments, so we didn't sit ... you know, I consider us to be, dare I say it ...

Interviewer: Corporate level?

Respondent: Yeah, don't ever tell this to [the sponsor] but we still sort of sit a little bit in an ivory tower, whereas in [the previous job] I was right in with the sales teams and the development teams. (I21-1-17S14)

Therefore, working at the corporate level with workshop sponsors and participants who, despite belonging to an enormous company base, constituted clients from the same industry and company, made for a client pool that was consistently known to the team. Hence, repeat business was a trait of the work done by the team that could not be overlooked when assessing its work patterns.

External consultants' vs. internal consultants' propensity towards strategy tool use

Auditing firms are known to use external consultancies on top of their internal ones (Selim et al., 2009). Therefore, the presence of external consultants in the field was natural and not surprising. However, more a surprising observation was the clearly distinct approach on strategy tools from both teams.

A pronounced distinction between internal and external consultants' attitudes was their propensity towards daily use of strategy tools. External consultants were more likely to adopt and adapt strategy tools (both implicitly and explicitly) than internal consultants. More importantly, internal consultants with prior external consultancy background (three members of the team) had a broad prior exposure to strategy tools and explained it as a reason behind the use of strategy tools. In line with this account, an in-house team member revealed, on the adoption of strategy tools within the internal consultancy:

[T]he stuff that I've seen from the tools coming through while I've been here ... they come from strategy houses. (O22-54)

Hence, both external and internal consultants' statements converge by supporting a higher exposure of external consultants to strategy tools and consequently also a higher adoption of strategy tools by external (strategy) consultancies. The proposition laid out here is a result of careful consideration of findings. Nevertheless, although there is a proposition developed here towards such interaction, the data is not "thick" (cf. Geertz, 1973) enough to develop robust insights in this regard.

9.5.2. Other areas of future research

Research on emotions and strategy methodologies

I started this dissertation concerning the problematization of strategy tools (Chapters 1–3) by discussing the fact that the relationship between practitioners and the tools they use is neither a straightforward nor a rational one. Consequently emotion becomes an important variable while assessing the problematic relationship of practitioners with their tools in use. Emotions could be considered a missing link in this relationship, since scholars emphasize that technologies of rationality leave no space for the consideration of the former (Schön, 1983; 1987; March, 2006).

A need for linking emotion with strategy tools is also a consequence of the emerging *behavioural strategy*, based on the common platform where cognitive and social psychology supplement as valid lenses towards the study of strategic management and its praxis, especially when considering the contextualist school of strategy²⁵³ (Powell et al., 2011). In one of the problems identified in their conceptual paper, the authors suggest in line with existing cognitive studies (e.g. March & Simon, 1958; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974 etc.) that:

to cope with complex judgments and decisions, people use simplifying heuristics that are prone to systematic biases. (ibid., 1377)

²⁵³ The authors frame the discussion by discussing tendencies foregoing in three major schools or branches of strategy, i.e., the reductionist (governed mainly by positivism and objectivism), pluralist (governed by nominalism and pragmatism), and contextualism (governed mainly by phenomenology).

Although this is not surprising, especially in light of the cognitive school,²⁵⁴ it is useful to emphasize the research windows it opens, shedding light into the interplay of emotions with strategy. In this context, it will be interesting to find out how emotions (and, not less, the notions of “mood” and “affect”) impact and/or are downplayed or accentuated by the interaction of practitioners with strategy tools. In addition, it is important to find out how such interaction influences strategizing, especially in complex situations.²⁵⁵ Indeed, in complex situations, knowledge governing strategic decisions is itself governed not only by the physiological conditions of the practitioner, but also by the mass of information gathered, of which strategy tools are also a vital part. This is how Barnard (1938: 302) explains the platform of decision making in situations of non-logical²⁵⁶ thinking and decision processes:

The sources of these non-logical processes lie in physiological conditions or factors, or in the physical and social environment, mostly impressed upon us unconsciously...They also consist of the mass of facts, patterns, concepts, techniques, abstractions, and generally what we call formal knowledge or beliefs, which are impressed upon our minds more or less by conscious effort and study.

The understanding of complex judgment in organizations is listed with three other core problems of behavioural strategy in the account provided by Powell et al. (2011). Within this core problem, I consider the close inspection of emotion’s impact upon the

²⁵⁴ Refer to Chapter 3 (and more particularly Section 3.4) for a detailed overview of strategy tools seen from a cognitive school perspective.

²⁵⁵ Many scholars point at complex situations as platforms where “judgmental” rather than “logical” decision making is needed (Simon, 1987), or as situ where “exploration” rather than “exploitation” (March, 1991; 1999; 2006) is demanded.

²⁵⁶ “Non-logical” here refers to what Simon (1987) considers “judgmental”. In other words, these thinking patterns resonate with intuitive thinking present in high-complexity situations, as claimed by the authors (cf. Barnard, 1938; Simon, 1987)

relationship of strategizers with their strategy tools in use to be a very valuable addition in strategy research.

In addition, not only has the need for emotion to be present in strategy research been argued by scholars in strategic management more broadly, it has also been demanded by the S-a-P school (e.g., see Golsorkhi et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2007). Therefore, a study inspired by emotion in strategy would complement the various research streams discussed here.

Research on strategizer's identity and the interaction with strategy tools

Identity becomes a multidimensional concept, especially in light of notions such as *frontstage* vs. *backstage*, "reflection in action", and sensemaking, all important theoretical devices within this dissertation. One of the main properties of sensemaking is related to identity construction (Weick, 1995) referring to the presence of the "parliament of selves" (ibid., following a conceptualization by Mead). At the same time, identity is an integral aspect of impression management and staging (Goffman, 1959). A good integration of these theoretical notions could take into account that individuals play an active role in the creation of their identities (Ibarra, 1999; Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010). Therefore, the strategizers' agency and exposure towards strategy tools could consequently be studied with the purpose of obtaining a deeper understanding of identity construction in strategy work.

Table 26 highlights main elements in the discussion of this chapter.

Conclusions	Main considerations
Positioning theoretical contribution	Claims towards revelatory theory (Corley & Gioia, 2011), for a better understanding of strategy tools in use, especially in relation with their enactments (i.e., present through bricolage and Cheshire cats), sensemaking, roles, and underlying fluidity. S-a-P as a main outlet for positioning contribution.
Limitations	- Single case study - Naturalistic enquiry - Exploratory approach²⁵⁷
Implications for practice	A guideline to inform strategy tool use in every day work (see Figure 25), especially in support of practitioners that are not “strategy tool masters” (cf. Chapter 7), hence junior strategy practitioners.
Implications for theory – areas for future research	- Adjacent themes - Research on emotions and strategy methodologies - Research on strategizer’s identity and the interaction with strategy tools - The value added by strategy tools to strategy work

Table 26. Main considerations of Chapter 9

²⁵⁷ Note that these limitations become especially vulnerable if considered from an ontological viewpoint that clashes with social constructivism.



*Author: A fool, who, not content with having bored those who have lived with him,
insists on tormenting the generations to come.*

(Charles de Montesquieu)

10. Postscript to the reader of this dissertation

At the end of this journey, I acknowledge that my findings are continuously grounded and shaped, and that one day this dissertation will stand still and dusty in the Bodleian shelves. Nevertheless, I hope that I have conveyed to the reader a truthful piece of the mosaic of yet little known aspects of strategy tools in praxis during the time I lived and experienced, with interest, their use. Hence, these are hardly conclusive notes, but reflections on a continuous journey ...

11. References

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12. Appendices

Appendix A – Results from the Bain & Co. 2009 and 2011 reports²⁵⁸ on strategy tools

The tables presented here are retrieved from Bain & Co's two last biannual studies. In the first table (Table 27), the top 10 most used tools for 2009 are shown,²⁵⁹ whereas in Table 28 the top 10 list of strategy tools in four consecutive studies is shown. Table 29 shows strategic planning positioned high in the list in all the studies. As shown from the discussions and definitions provided in this dissertation, strategic planning is not to be considered an analytic strategy tool, but rather a processual one (following the taxonomic definition of tools provided earlier here).²⁶⁰

In Figure 26, a more up to date report on the use of tools is shown, following Bain's publication of results in a 2011 study. In this table, the 25 most popular tools (following Bain's prioritization and findings), and the use and satisfaction from several tools are plotted in a two by two matrix.

²⁵⁸ An extensive overview of the report is found at http://www.bain.com/management_tools

²⁵⁹ Bain & Co bases these findings on a bi-annual survey distributed to its broad client base (The company claims a database of more than 11 000 respondents comprising executives that serve as their clients. For more on this, see <http://www.bain.com/publications/articles/Management-tools-trends-2011.aspx>, last accessed Dec. 9th, 2012).

²⁶⁰ For further reference on the taxonomic view of strategy tools pursued here, see Figure 1 of this dissertation.

Top 10 tools

1	Benchmarking
2	Strategic Planning
3	Mission and Vision Statements
4	Customer Relationship Management
5	Outsourcing
6	Balanced Scorecard
7	Customer Segmentation
8	Business Process Reengineering
9	Core Competencies
10	Mergers & Acquisitions

Table 27. Top 10 tools in use from industry clients in 2009

1993	2000	2006	2008	2010
1 Mission and Vision Statements	1 Strategic Planning	1 Strategic Planning	1 Benchmarking	1 Benchmarking
2 Customer Satisfaction	2 Mission and Vision Statements	2 CRM	2 Strategic Planning	2 Strategic Planning
3 TQM	3 Benchmarking	3 Customer Segmentation	3 Mission and Vision Statements	3 Mission and Vision Statements
4 Competitor Profiling	4 Outsourcing	4 Benchmarking	4 CRM	4 CRM
5 Benchmarking	5 Customer Satisfaction	5 Mission and Vision Statements	5 Outsourcing	5 Outsourcing
6 Pay-for-Performance	6 Growth Strategies	6 Core Competencies	6 Balanced Scorecard	6 Balanced Scorecard
7 Reengineering	7 Strategic Alliances	7 Outsourcing	7 Customer Segmentation	7 Core Competencies
8 Strategic Alliances	8 Pay-for-Performance	8 Business Process Reengineering	8 Business Process Reengineering	8 Change Management Programs
9 Cycle Time Reduction	9 Customer Segmentation	9 Scenario and Contingency Planning	9 Core Competencies	9 Strategic Alliances
10 Self-Directed Teams	10 Core Competencies	10 Knowledge Management	10 Mergers and Acquisitions	10 Customer Segmentation

Table 28. Top10 tools in use from industry clients compared in different years

(1993, 2000, 2006, 2008, 2010) - Highlighted the use of “benchmarking” through the years

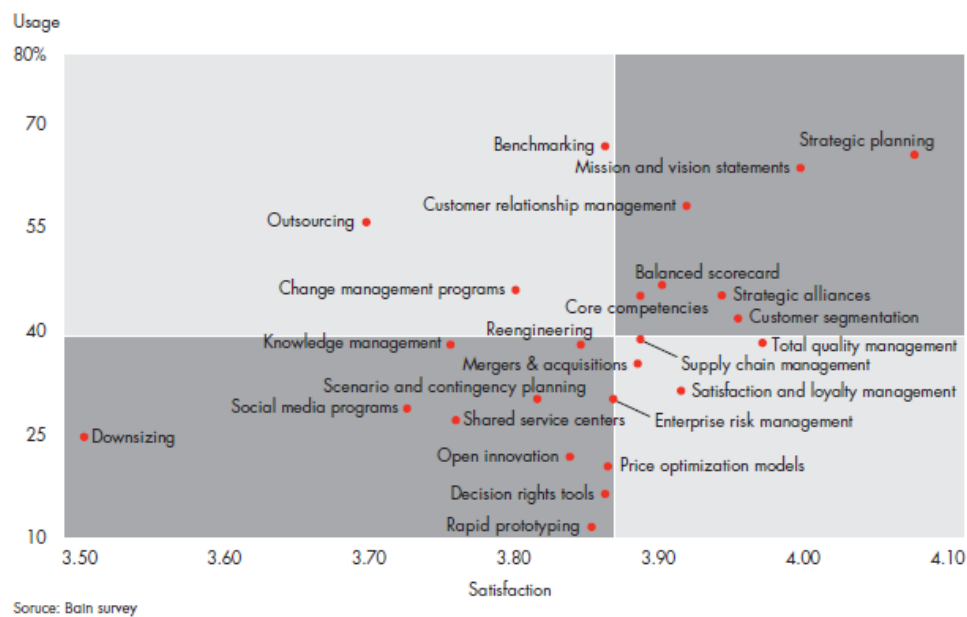


Figure 26 Matrix showing client use and satisfaction of tools in 2010
(scale 1-5, showing ascending order of respectively, use and satisfaction)

Bain & Company's top 10 Management Tools				
1993	2000	2006	2008	
1 Mission and Vision Statements	1 Strategic Planning	1 Strategic Planning	1 Benchmarking	
2 Customer Satisfaction	2 Mission and Vision Statements	2 CRM	2 Strategic Planning	
3 TQM	3 Benchmarking	3 Customer Segmentation	3 Mission and Vision Statements	
4 Competitor Profiling	4 Outsourcing	4 Benchmarking	4 CRM	
5 Benchmarking	5 Customer Satisfaction	5 Mission and Vision Statements	5 Outsourcing	
6 Pay-for-Performance	6 Growth Strategies	6 Core Competencies	6 Balanced Scorecard	
7 Reengineering	7 Strategic Alliances	7 Outsourcing	7 Customer Segmentation	
8 Strategic Alliances	8 Pay-for-Performance	8 Business Process Reengineering	8 Business Process Reengineering	
9 Cycle Time Reduction	9 Customer Segmentation	9 Scenario and Contingency Planning	9 Core Competencies	
10 Self-Directed Teams	10 Core Competencies	10 Knowledge Management	10 Mergers & Acquisitions	

Table 29. Top 10 tools in use from industry clients – focus on Strategic Planning

Appendix B - An excerpt from field notes

(Excerpt extracted from research diary on Dec. 13th, 2010 - Lunch with Ann and Ian)²⁶¹

...Nobody uses the pre-reads – Ann and Ian mentioned during lunch

Me: Is there anything else they read during the workshop? (My thought: If there is something else, perhaps the pre-read becomes redundant then.)

Ann: I have been at a workshop and nobody had pre-reads with them.

Ian: I wonder if they have time to read those pre-reads.

...Me: What are the sources you use for your megatrends?

Ann: No particular ones, EY Knowledge (xxx)

...

So this is the major bulk of your work (to Ann, about megatrends)

Ann: Yes, that is all about it.

(Ann to me) So I guess you can work from home, Alma (the unit head) can be comprehensive of that.

Me: Part of my methodology is also being with the team, but let's see how that develops.

Me: Alma seems such an energetic person.

Ann: Yes, she is. And she is very precise.

Me: I found her very prompt in the responses to me and my professors.

Ann: Yes, she is very responsive. And very concise (clarification to myself - don't know if I am emphasising too much the latter.)

----During the day, I had the chance to browse further into the binder of global market planning and analysis (the unit) – headed “Examples of Deliverables” – xxx – June 2010. There I could see the backgrounds of unit members. For example, people were noted how long they had been at E&Y – Alma: 18.5 years, Annette, 4.5 years,...

²⁶¹ Real names of individuals have been replaced to preserve confidentiality.

Appendix C – Interview structure for two types of interviews conducted

Type I Interview – Generic, semi-structured

i. Background

- Probing on various personal levels (type of work, years with EY, type of work – practice, function etc.)

ii. Nature of work

- Personal role within the team/firm (probing for illustrations on types of activities, deliverables etc.).
- Personal involvement with strategy workshops (probing for types of workshops, role in the overall pipeline of the workshop, team and organization policies towards the organization of workshops, rigid protocols of practice or illustrations of spontaneous practices occurring in and around workshops).
- Type of projects you mostly get involved (geography: global/regional/area activities, length of projects, size and configuration of teams cooperating, ownership over projects)
- Experience with the unit (working with individual members of the team, particular projects with the unit etc.)
- Some background on the firm (culture – workshops, way of doing projects, turnover of HR, communication)
- Particular methodology followed (in workshops, in analyses/deliverables) by the firm (e.g. SWOT, scenario analysis, 7S Framework, other?)
- Particular methodologies/frames you prefer to use (working in groups/facilitating/leading; show list from Advisory)

iii. Experience with particular groups of strategy tools (probing for specific illustrations extracted from the current or past experience of the interviewee)

Type II Interview – Structure for “Reflection in Action” type of interview (i.e., interviewee mainly focusing on one document and explaining its production and/or meaning, with reference to personal, as well as team involvement with it), hence no predefined structure for this type of interview. In addition, the reflexive approach of Type II interviews consists of my own reflections – a tactic helpful in validating with respondents my preliminary findings. Below I provide an excerpt from an example where I share my ongoing reflections with one senior team member who had few years working for the company:

Interviewer: I also participated in the EGP workshop (innovation and strategy workshop), so the company wanted to identify new areas where to invest in the middle and long term. It was organized in January and I could see that people like the way the workshop was organized: it was very structured, very prompt, no major last minute changes, but what I could observe... since it was a strategic innovation workshop, I could see a bit of resistance in terms of bringing creative type of environments so that people could be stimulated more. I'm not saying this as a criticism to any of the people involved but just in terms of understanding the culture. Then afterwards I asked one of the facilitators (name of facilitator concealed here), he explained to me that people have this resistance even towards brainstorming because the majority of them are with accounting background, so they are already framed into the criticism bit and the structure bit rather than the freedom that brainstorming requires as its first stages, so then I understood the background of this workshop as quite conservative in my own opinion.

Senior Analyst: You're absolutely right and I had to deal with that when I first came. It's a very different culture and I was in financial services and I'll talk about that later, but it's really... a lot of stakeholder management has to take place prior if you want to be constructive and even then when we had this global workshop – 50 people sitting offsite which is critical – we warmed them up and our management warmed them up, etc and seasoned professionals and it's unbelievable. They come with preconceived ideas and we had breakout groups and each of us were allocated and change I think seven people roughly. So I sat with one facilitator and I knew that individual ahead of them (but it wasn't judgmental) and they're just stuck. All of the other six people, they were the most senior people within the company, coming from different geographies, different angles but they were all the same page apart from that other leader and because he was at a higher level, and he had stayed here for longer, he effectively skewed the whole discussion towards that and it was counterproductive but you have to deal with that. (Interview with Strategy Director, I)

Appendix D – List of interviews, position occupied by respondents and related content

Table 30 presents a list of interviews with detailed information on interviewees, including their position and belongingness to the firm, along with the detailed information on content of talks undertaken.

Nr.²⁶²	Interviewee – In-house (I) or External (E)	Position	Nr. of talks	Content
1	E	Consultant	1	Strategy project; experience with strategy tools within own consultancy and comparison
2	I	Consultant (recently hired - under training/ junior)	3	Initial experience with the firm; impressions on its culture; knowledge of strategy tools and their use; Strategy project
3	I	Senior Strategy Analyst	2	Strategy workshops, firm culture around workshops; best practices and challenges with strategy tools (past experience and experience with the firm)
4	IE	Principal / Partner	1	Use of strategy tools in workshops and analyses; the use of the proprietary frameworks
5	I	Director / Workshop facilitator	1	Workshop facilitation techniques
6	IE	Director / Methodology	1	Proprietary knowledge database and how it is being diffused and accepted within the firm; best practices and challenges.
7	I	Director	1	Previous experience with the unit; experience with strategy tools; strategy project.
8	I	Strategy Analyst	2	Strategy tools in use; culture of the firm around strategy tools; personal preference on strategy tools

²⁶² Here names are hidden to preserve confidentiality. Consecutive numbers are assigned based on alphabetical order of original names of interviewees.

Table 30 (Cnt'd)				
Nr.	Interviewee – In-house (I) or External (E)	Position	Nr. of talks	Content
9	IE	Leader – Global Partners	1	Interaction with the team and the strategy project
10	I	Managers - Advisory (former team member)	1	Strategy tools in use within Advisory; Strategy tools used when part of the unit
11	I	(Global) Partner – Unit leader/sponsor	3	The unit overview of roles, projects, history; nature of work; establishment of workshops as a common strategy practice for the unit and beyond; strategy tools in use by the team.
12	IE	Director / Workshop facilitator	1	Facilitation techniques; naming some integral parts of facilitator's toolkit; contrasting client facing with the approach within the firm.
13	I	Strategy Analyst	2	Preparation of pre-reads; visualization techniques; preference and experience with strategy tools.
14	E	Consultant	1	Impressions on the use of strategy tools within the firm; strategy tools preferred to use within own firm
15	IE	Director / Workshop facilitator	2	Facilitation techniques; strategy tools preferred to use; project management tools in use
16	IE	Director / Global HR Team	2	Strategy training provided by the firm; strategy tool needs from executives; personal reflections on strategy tools
17	I	Middle management / Analytics	1	Nature of work; type of analyses conducted
18	I	Assistant Director - Program Execution Services (Manager of the Global Strategy project)	3	Ongoing briefing on the strategy project.
19	E	Consultant	3	External consultancy approach on strategy tools; impressions on the strategy project so far; impressions on strategy tools used by the host firm
20	I	Director	1	General introductory talk and discussion of visualization techniques used in analytics

Table 30 (Cnt'd)				
Nr.	Interviewee – In-house (I) or External (E)	Position	Nr. of talks	Content
21	IE	Director	1	(Met upon recommendation from HR director). Experience of workshops organized from the unit; strategy tools used personally and from his team; reflections on strategy tools
22	I	Manager / Analytics	1	Nature of work; type of analysis conducted
23	I	Strategy Analyst	3	Strategy tools used in the past; Strategy tools preferred to use;
24	I	Associate Director	4	Previous experience; impressions on strategy tools in use within the firm
25	IE	Manager - Advisory	1	Use of Strategy tools within Advisory
26	I	Director (Workshop Facilitator)	(& 2	Strategy workshops; facilitation techniques; experience and interaction with the team
27	E	Consultant	1	Use of strategy tools in own firm; overall impressions on the strategy project
28	I	Associate Director	1	Previous experience with corporate strategy; The firm culture; strategy tools preferred for use personally and within her team
TOTAL INTERVIEWS			47	

Table 30. List of interviews, including interviewee's background and interview content

Appendix E – Team background details

Position	Time with the firm	Previous Experience	Qualifications
Global partner	18.5 yrs	- 18.5 yrs with the same firm	- MA - MA - Leadership Programs
Director	15+ yrs	- music/ salesman - 15 years in facilitation	- MA communications
Director		- 10 yrs in facilitation – programme management	- M. Management
Director	4.5 yrs (+ 2 yrs)	- 2 yrs as senior manager with the firm - 2 yrs in strategy out of the firm - 2 years as consultant with the firm - 4 yrs as consultant out of the firm In total - 6 yrs out of the firm	- MBA - MA
Senior strategy analyst	4.5 yrs	- 5.5 yrs, senior manager (planning) out of the firm - strategy consultant (1 year) out of the firm In total – 6.5 yrs out of the firm	- MBA - BA
Strategy Analyst	2 yrs	- 6 yrs in external Strategy consulting (out of the firm)	- MA
Strategy Analyst	2.5 yrs	- 3 yrs, corporate strategy outside of the firm - 1 yr, supply-chain strategy outside the firm In total – 4 yrs out of the firm	- MEng - Diploma - PMP
Senior Strategy Analyst	0.8 yrs	- Management consultant 8 yrs - Strategy development 3 yrs - Acting managing director 1 yr - Strategy head 4 yrs In total more than 14 yrs out of the firm (extensive external consultancy and strategy experience)	- Chartered Accountant - MPhil in Financial Economics
Strategy Analyst	0.5 yrs	- Strategy consulting 4 yrs (prior external consultancy experience)	- MEng
Strategy Analyst	0.5 yrs	- 2 yrs prior experience as business analyst - 3 yrs as strategy consultant	- B.A. Commerce - Partly CIMA Qualification
Assistant	1.5 yrs	- 10 yrs in administration	- B.A. Law

Table 31. Background of team members

Document obtained through partially retrieving information from team folders – dated 2009 and partially incorporating information from interviews collected.

Appendix F – Initial requests to gain access to the field outlining potential research projects



Research Proposal
Better Knowledge Management by Understanding Strategy Consultants' Practice

Suela Haxhiraj
BSc, MBA, MPhil

Rationale

Consulting firms often approach problems using various strategy methodologies and frameworks (hereafter referred to broadly as “strategy tools”). While there is a wide availability of strategy tools (proprietary or external) to guide choices in various business assignments, little is leveraged the knowledge about how consultants use them in their daily operations, their reflections upon their use and the actual contribution of these tools. Capturing users’ experience with strategy tools can provide valuable insights into how to amplify their value and better tailor them to business strategy assignments, with implications also for training, knowledge management and talent management within the consultancy.

Research Questions

- In what ways strategy tools are perceived, valued and used by strategy consultants in their day-to-day work?
- Following consultants’ perspectives, what are the identifiable patterns in the use of platforms which support strategy tools (e.g. interaction with codified/personalized knowledge networks or the interaction with firm practices and related activities such as business case competitions, training workshops etc.) and how could they inform the improved applicability of these tools?

Value proposition

Strategy tools provide a better structuring of choices for complex problem-solving, however their added value is very much dependent upon users and their experience with these tools. This study will enable me extract the valuable insights generated by consultants which will improve the application of strategy tools. This will require *active participant observation to generate insights of consultants’ day-to-day use of strategy tools in their actual problem-solving processes*. Fortune 100 firms are currently making use of ethnographic methods to capture the everyday realities of their knowledge users.

Alternative project paths

There are several options for the investigation of the aims set above. Although I am flexible and will tailor the project to specific needs expressed by the consultancy, I can envisage three options:

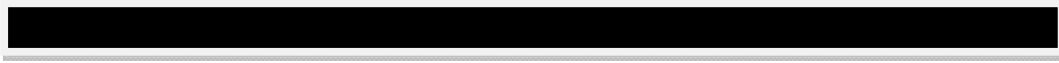
- (1) Follow *one major project* through all its stages while taking a practical role in addition to my role as a researcher. The scope of the project would be to closely examine the consultants’ experience with the use of strategy tools and their reflections upon their use. Here additional interviews with major stakeholders (e.g. senior executives) in the process will be crucial in providing insights related to the research questions.
- (2) Follow intensively *several assignments* (across different services provided by the consultancy). This would be conducted similarly to project (1) but would focus on multiple assignments to generate more reliable findings.
- (3) A *comparative study with information gathered and interviews held in several consulting companies* (contingent upon access provided by other consultancies or liaisons offered by the consultancy itself). The consultancy can consider this project a “benchmarking attempt” to locate the strengths and potentials of its knowledge management platforms compared to other consultancies in the field.

Project timeline

- This project is expected to last 6 months (with potential extension depending on the interests of the company). A final report will be presented to the consultancy by the end of month 6. There will be regular project reviews and discussions of interim findings (e.g. following month 2 and 4).

Appendix G – Detailed overview on the fieldwork site

(some data disguised to enable anonymity)



Appendix H – Informed consent and background information offered for the research

Note that the “inform consent” document has two pages. In the first, participants are offered some information on this research, whereas in the second they find the consent

Research Proposal

form. **Better Knowledge Management by Understanding Strategy Consultants' Practice**

Suela Haxhiraj

BSc, MBA, MPhil

Rationale

Consulting firms often approach problems using various strategy methodologies and frameworks (hereafter referred to broadly as “strategy tools”). While there is a wide availability of strategy tools (proprietary or external) to guide choices in various business assignments, little is known about how consultants use them in their daily operations, their reflections upon their use and the actual contribution of these tools. Capturing users’ experience with strategy tools can provide valuable insights into how to amplify their value and better tailor them to business strategy assignments, with implications also for training, knowledge management and talent management within the consultancy.

Research Questions

- In what ways strategy tools are perceived, valued and used by strategy consultants in their day-to-day work?
- Following consultants’ perspectives, what are the identifiable patterns in the use of platforms which support strategy tools (e.g. interaction with codified/personalized knowledge networks or the interaction with firm practices and related activities such as business case competitions, training workshops etc.) and how could they inform the improved applicability of these tools?

Value proposition

Strategy tools provide a better structuring of choices for complex problem-solving, however their added value is very much dependent upon users and their experience with these tools. This study will enable me extract the valuable insights generated by consultants which will improve the application of strategy tools. This will require *active participant observation to generate insights of consultants’ day-to-day use of strategy tools in their actual problem-solving processes*. Fortune 100 firms are currently making use of ethnographic methods to capture the everyday realities of their knowledge users.

Project practicalities

In the course of my stay with the team I believe I would have the chance to have a clearer understanding of how these strategy tools become endorsed by the unit and in what context (e.g. look at the use of tools in workshops, meetings, etc.). In my talks and meetings with you, I will mostly focus on your experience generally with strategy tools and any tools in particular (e.g. scenario planning, SWOT, etc.) and also use the opportunity to get to know each-other better.

Ethical Concerns

All discussions are covered by a signed non-disclosure agreement with your company. Additionally, this research is designed conform the ethical considerations from the University of Oxford and under approval by University of Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee. Upon your consent, recording is to be requested before each talk to enable accurate capturing of accounts. Therefore, all discussions will be taken forward only through informed consent. Confidentiality of all members and accounts will be preserved and not released either explicitly or implicitly in the future reports provided by this study.

Project timeline

This project is expected to last 6 months (with potential extension depending on the interests of the company). A final report will be presented to the consultancy by the end of month 6. There will be regular project reviews and discussions of interim findings (e.g. following month 2 and 4).

Additional notes

Should there be concerns regarding my research and interaction with you, I would kindly ask you to contact me at any time under Suela.haxhiraj@sbs.ox.ac.uk or the Novak Druce Centre for Professional Service Firms, Saïd Business School, OX1 1HP, Oxford.

Research Consent

Based on this research background, I do request your consent in gathering your opinion following my research focus. Whether you decide to participate in the research or not, it will not affect your employment in any way. You have the right to and/or request further information on it. It is also your right to withdraw from this study at any time without further clarification or background offered.

The University of Oxford is committed to the dissemination of its research for the benefit of society and the economy and, in support of this commitment, has established an online archive of research materials. This archive includes digital copies of student theses successfully submitted as part of a University of Oxford postgraduate degree programme. Holding the archive online gives easy access for researchers to the full text of freely available theses, thereby increasing the likely impact and use of that research.

If you agree to participate in this project, the research will be written up as a thesis. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published with open access meaning available to every internet user.

If you have a concern about any aspect of this project, please speak to the researcher concerned (Tel. 07590283405) who will do her best to answer your query. If you remain unhappy and wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Oxford (ethics@socsci.ox.ac.uk; +44 (0)1865 614871; Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee, Oxford University, Hayes House, 75 George Street, Oxford, OX1 2BQ, UK).

If you consent to being interviewed and to any data gathered being processed as outlined below, please print and sign your name, and date the form, in the spaces provided.

- All data will be treated as personal under the 1998 Data Protection Act, and will be stored securely.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed by an independent transcriber upon a confidentiality agreement.
- Data collected may be processed manually and with the aid of computer software.
- Your identity will not be released either explicitly or implicitly in reports and publications arising from this research.

Please print your name:.....

Signature:.....

Date:.....

Appendix I – Research ethics approval letter

Confer University of Oxford ethics rule, an ethics approval is needed to undertake research involving human participants. The ethics approval for this approach has been awarded by the Social Sciences & Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee, as following.

Research Ethics Approval

Ref No.: SSD/CUREC1A/11-306

Lege Artis - Exploring the Strategizing craft of strategy tools in use

The above application has been considered on behalf of the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-divisional Research Ethics Committee (IDREC) in accordance with the procedures laid down by the University for ethical approval of all research involving human participants.

I am pleased to inform you that, on the basis of the information provided to the IDREC, the proposed research has been judged as meeting appropriate ethical standards, and accordingly approval has been granted.

Should there be any subsequent changes to the project, which raise ethical issues not covered in the original application, you should submit details to the IDREC for consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Vernon', with a stylized, flowing script.

Kerry Vernon

cc: Dr Richard Whittington, Saïd Business School
Kate Goodman, Saïd Business School

Appendix J – Email sent to members of the unit in the first weeks of my fieldwork

Suela Haxhiraj/Firm To 12 team members
email address cc University address
04/01/2011 12:58 Subject First introduction & research focus – Suela

Dear All,

having started the New Year, I am starting this email by wishing you all the best in your lives in 2011!

As some of you might already wonder about my presence in the office, I thought of sending this initial informative email before I do contact you further for personal meetings which could be very helpful to my research [in the previous weeks I had a similar communication with *(name removed due to NDA)* and *(name removed due to NDA)* in the US].

After starting to get acquainted with your unit for the past weeks, and also having signed my non-disclosure agreement with *(the firm – name removed due to NDA)* just today, I thought this is the proper time to kick off my research!

In brief concerning my background: I am currently a second year PhD student at Saïd Business School, faculty of the University of Oxford researching strategy under the supervision of Professor Richard Whittington. I have previously studied strategy and innovation at the University of Cambridge (MPhil), I hold an MBA in International Management undertaken in Germany (in Pforzheim & Hamburg) and have previously studied Finance/Banking (4 year Diploma - Tirana, in my home country Albania). In between my studies I have been working for Beiersdorf Headquarters in Germany (Hamburg) at a similar Strategy/Marketing in-house consultancy team undertaking research on market expansion opportunities for the firm. Before that, I have briefly been working in Albania for AGNA Group - a FMCG firm best known for being the Pepsi

subsidiary in the country. I have also been working one year for OSCE (at the Tirana office) - a political European organisation based in Vienna.

(The sponsor – name removed due to NDA) has enabled me to join your team so that I could pursue some research on the use of strategy tools in practice (of course doing some work in return on issues you deal with in your daily work in strategy and innovation & related activities). I refer as "strategy tools" to all frameworks, methods, approaches that are used to facilitate strategic analyses and discussions (my working definition is slightly longer but I am trying to simplify it here). I want to understand at what parts of the process (or strategy project/activity) these tools seem to be more appreciated/helpful (e.g. problem framing, problem solving, communication of solution to the "client" etc.). In the course of my six months with the team I believe I would have the chance to have a clearer understanding of how these strategy tools become endorsed by the unit and in what context (e.g. look at the use of tools in workshops, meetings, etc.).

I will end my explanations here, knowing that you might already have a lot to do. I will follow up by organizing chats/meetings with you so that I could ask you on your experience generally with strategy tools and any tools in particular (e.g. scenario analysis, SWOT, etc.) and also use the opportunity to get to know each-other better.

Looking forward to meeting you in the coming days/weeks.

All the best,

Suela

Suela Haxhiraj, BSc MBA MPhil, DPhil Candidate

University of Oxford, New College | Novak Druce Centre for Professional Service Firms

Appendix K – List of tasks performed in the field as a team member

Main tasks

- Take minutes in interviews with Area/sub-Area executives
- Take care of ballot software and associated design and layout of questions for workshop
- Execute ballot software at live polling – strategy workshop
- Be responsible for a knowledge database in support of the “Global Strategy” project
- Design agenda and conduct team meetings (the first to do so upon recommendation and support from the team)
- Review the strategy tool database within the firm
- Undertake training of team members on a sub-group of strategy tools

Additional tasks

- Support in slide design for ongoing pre-reads/workshop handouts
- Extract material from previous reports/workshop outputs
- Support in client meeting briefing (when outsourcing studies for various sub-areas)
- Any other ad hoc task upon need during daily work

Appendix L – Overview of strategy research streams distinguishing their stances on strategy tools

(based on classification of strategy schools and sources presented by Minzberg et al., 1998, Table 32 is compiled)

Strategy School	Design School	Planning School	Positioning School	Entrepreneurial	Cognitive	Learning	Power	Cultural	Environmental	Configuration
Main Premise	Structure follows strategy.	Strategy formation as a formal process; “Predict & prepare” (Ackoff 1983, p. 59)	Few key (generic) strategies are desirable in any given industry.	Strategic making dominated by the active search of new opportunities: Entrepreneurship at the core of strategy.	Strategy formation as a mental process; Managers as information workers.	Strategy formation as an emerging process.	Strategy formation shaped by power and politics.	Strategy formation is a process of social interaction based on the beliefs and shared understanding of organizational members.	Environment is the central actor in the strategy formation process.	Most of the time an organization can be described as a stable configuration of its characteristics.
Strategy tools in focus	SWOT	Ansoff matrix; SWOT; Scenario building	Porter’s Five Forces; Value Chain; BCG matrix, experience curve; GE Matrix; PIMS; Game theoretic approaches	Business model innovation tools.	Heuristics (problem solving); mapping; mental structures to organize knowledge; metaphors.	Core capabilities; strategic intent, stretch, and leverage;	Negotiation and coalition tools (e.g., Stakeholder Analysis); Political manoeuvring	7-S Framework	Benchmarking	Change management tools (e.g., change maps; TQM; BPR; stakeholder management tools)
Main premise on strategy tool use (if applicable)		The clear steps of strategic planning, if followed meticulously, can provide an optimal strategy.	Upon thorough analysis, a clear strategic prescription would follow.		Cognitive bias should be taken into account when examining heuristics.	Part of knowledge on strategy tools is not codifiable (hence, tacit)	Roles of strategy tools are multiple, including the political and social.	Strategy tools are embedded in the organizational culture and are part of organizational business jargon.		

<i>Table 32 (Cnt'd)</i>										
Strategy School	Design School	Planning School	Positioning School	Entrepreneurial	Cognitive	Learning	Power	Cultural	Environmental	Configuration
Strategy practice in focus	Strategy formulation (as separate to implementation)	Strategic Planning & Control	Undertake meticulous analyses and follow prescribed strategies fit to the company's position.	(Visionary) leadership.	Information processing.	"Grassroots" model of strategy development ; dynamic capabilities	Political processes (negotiation and coalition) underlying strategy practices.	Cultural recognized as an important factor to guide strategy internally.	Strategy practices in response to isomorphism	
Main contributors	Chandler (1962); Learned et al. (1965)	Ansoff (1965); Steiner (1969)	Porter (1980); Strategy boutiques (McKinsey, BCG)	Schumpeter (1934, 1947)	Simon (1957); March & Simon (1958); Tversky & Kahneman, (1974); Huff (1990); Morgan (1986); Bolman & Deal (1997)	Lindblom (1959); Nonaka & Tacheuchi (1995); Quinn (1980); Mintzberg (1978)	Allison (1971); Pfeffer & Salancik (1978)	Barney (1986; 1991); Wernerfelt (1984)	Hannan & Freeman (1977); Meyer & Rowan (1977); Oliver (1991)	Mintzberg (1979, 1983); Miller (1979, 1996); Miles & Snow (1978); Pettigrew (1985)
Main contributors of strategy tools	n/a	Ansoff; Business Schools	Porter; consultancies; military institutions			Prahalad & Hamel (1990)	Freeman (1984) – on stakeholder analysis; Henderson (1979) on political manoeuvres	Waterman et al. (1980) – 7S Framework		

Table 32. Overview of strategy schools distinguishing their stances on strategy tools

Appendix M – Excerpts from Type I and Type II interviews

Excerpt from Type I interview

(Talk with strategy director, team member, I21-1-17S24)

Interviewer: So in terms of Porter's Five Forces or SWOT, I would just draw into the bundle that is brought up from academia, have you had exposure in the past and exposure I mean not only knowing about them, but also in terms of adopting them in your own projects and what do you think about these tools?

Respondent: No, I've used them a lot. For me they're quite standard, so SWOT, PESTEL or PEST, whatever you want to call it, Five Forces.

Interviewer: Even PRESTEL I think is one of the latest developments, bringing religious as one of the factors and it was interesting for me to see included in there.

Respondent: They'll be one, PRESTEL with an 'H' on the end of it next time for happiness. It's going to be crazy, but yeah, PESTEL or whatever you want to call it, I find those very useful. They are structured tools that are simple to use that people can get their around and a lot of people, not everyone, but a lot of people in both industry and professional services will understand.

...

Interviewer: In what context have you been using them in the past? What I mean is that do you use them in a meeting or when you undertake analysis on your own or when you do a workshop, like if you can draw one or two examples.

Respondent: SWOT I've done all through my career. I do it in workshops. I do it in change management. I do it in strategy.

Interviewer: So is it something that you come up with a suggestion that, "Well, at this point we should do a SWOT," or is it something that has been part of the culture of the

organizations? I mean it can be various reasons but I want to understand the circumstances more.

Respondent: I don't really come from a pure strategy background so I tend to implement the tools that I've learnt along the way. Hand on heart whether they are the tools of the firm, I don't know. I will prompt the use of them as opposed to the firm telling me, "This is what we use."

Excerpt from Type II interview

(Talk with Strategy Analyst, I22-1-6K24)

Respondent: So OK, from my perspective I was asked to help put together the pre-read which is for the workshop they're in next week. Input from the pre-read was a variety of places, there was some financial data in terms of performance, there was [outsourced provider – removed here due to NDA] data which is a competitor paper, take on some of the technical data and then [senior unit member] interviewed about twenty, twenty-five market leaders from Asia-Pacific just on the current situation. *(Showing at a document)* Yes, so this is just, this feeds in to the area workshop which they are at, they are only centred on the Tuesday, they have a week to review, there's going to be the area workshop and then I'm not exactly sure of the output because I haven't, you've seen it and I haven't yet, what exercises are but I think it's what, defining in terms of what they need to do and their goals.

Interviewer: It was the strengths and weaknesses of them trying to focus later on, so it is the approach that I saw that it's scan, focus and act.

Respondent: OK.

Interviewer: ... which was surprising for me that all the workshops have that kind of framework. And I talked also to [team member]... So I mean also in the EGP there was the same approach. This was interesting for me. So in the beginning it's more looking at the

environment, what you do, preparing them with a pre-read and also check on the strengths and weaknesses, and then you try to align them with your priorities and focus and then...

Respondent: Yes.

Interviewer: Yes, so that's very briefly. And then deciding on the ownership, like who should do what and so on, so going through the details.

Respondent: OK, so I mean then there's the subarea workshops for which you're going to have to replicate, kind of cut this up into different subareas which are happening in...

Interviewer: February and March.

Respondent: The end of February, pretty much in March. And then kind of parallel to this which has been kind of working along but is starting to ramp-up now, is the financial model with the VBM teams are making and that's going to feed in to I think the subarea workshops or the subarea workshops are going to either use that in to the model to then get outputs.

Interviewer: Do you have any role in it, like for the team or you or...?

Respondent: For that I was actually involved in the very initial discussions with Gerard in terms of I put together a deck to discuss in terms of what the requirements were for the model. It was then, he then chose obviously a quite, a more complicated extended model version and...

Interviewer: He ran sort of the complex one.

Respondent: The complex one, so that was outsourced to the VBM team, just because we don't have the bandwidth really to do it really in our team and they're obviously specialists in this area as well. So they were working on it quite a while at the start here and then it has been handed down now over the last month or so, and they're going to start picking up again now. The best person to talk to on that is [team member name] because he's kind of coordinating their work, so I haven't been involved really since the start with that work stream.

Appendix N – List of themes in the analysis of data

STRATEGY TOOLS

- Mind maps/cognitive tools
- Value Chain
- Porter's Five Forces
- SWOT
- Scenario
- Megatrends
- Balanced Scorecard
- Game Theory
- P(R)ESTEL
- Hypothesis approach/testing
- Trees (issue; hypothesis etc.)
- MECE
- Matrices
- MECO
- McKinsey 7S
- Brainstorming

REFLECTIONS ON HOW THE TEAM WORKS

- The history of the team/how it has changed over time
- Team configuration/what are team members roles/specialization fields

PATTERNS OF STRATEGY TOOL USE

- Simplicity/ease of use
- Flexibility of tool use
- Implicit use of tools
- Training/internalization of tools
- Purposes of tools
- Tool attributes
- Backstage/frontstage
- Bricolage
- Tools most used/tools recognized as not used
- People attributes
- Sources of strategy tools/use of server/home grown tools
- People attributes
- Sponsor role

ON WORKSHOPS

- How did workshops become an established practice
- Templates /structure of workshops
- Functions of strategy tools in workshops
- Pipeline
- Who does what
- Workshop type and scope
- Challenges
- Process: Preparation of workshops/staged workshops/post workshop
- Sponsor role
- Preparation of workshops: Sponsor role/facilitator agenda
- Staged workshop: Improvisation/facilitating style/sponsor role

REFLECTIONS ON THE COMPARISON WITH THE EXTERNAL CONSULTANCY

- Style of work
- Strategy tools used

ORGANIZATIONAL PHENOMENA

- Company culture
- Role of the team
- Outsourcing

MISCELLANEOUS

- Effect of interview
- Role in the field

Appendix O – Descriptive table for strategy workshops organized by the team

This descriptive table (Table 33) is based on 7 strategy workshops organized from the team during 2010-2011.

Feature	Strategy workshops held by the team
Number of participants	15-25
Position of participants	Service Line Leaders (Area and Sub-area level); Functional leaders for the specific area (e.g., Marketing, Auditing, Transaction Services, Tax etc.).
Length of workshop	1.5-2 days ²⁶³
Preparation time	2 months
Purpose	Define Area / Sub-Area Strategy

Table 33. Typical features of strategy workshops held by the team

²⁶³ Seldom was it the case to undertake longer workshops; however these outliers were dedicated to “innovation” themes usually away from the “strategy workshop” format facilitated by the team.

Appendix P – Total list of strategy tools obtained by interacting with the team

The total list of tools submitted after requesting team members to submit methods and frameworks they were aware of from their past and present experience (shown in Table 34). Hence, the tool categories here are devised following discussions with team members. Note I group the tools in 3 categories not used (N), dormant (D), active (A), while assessing the frequency of their use from the unit:

*- **Not used (N)**, are tools whose use has not been witnessed during fieldwork with the team, nor has it been reported in ethnographic talks with interviewees in regard to concrete past and present projects and underlying activities;

- **Dormant (D)** are tools that, although mentioned by team members in this list, their use has not been witnessed during fieldwork with the team, nor has it been reported in ethnographic talks with interviewees in regard to concrete past and present projects and underlying activities

- **Active (A)** are tools that not only have been reported by the organization, but they have also been used during projects witnessed during fieldwork.

** Y/N code is used here referring respectively, “Y” as applicable here (standing for “Yes”), and “N” as not applicable (standing for “No”).

Nr.	Strategy tools listed (categories in bold)	If in use - Used rarely in the firm (Dormant – D) / Used frequently in the firm (Active – A)* - (N) if not used	Used in internal meetings (Y/N)**	Used in workshops (Y/N)**	Used in deliverables (Y/N)**
1	Ansoff's product-market matrix	N	N	N	N
2	Barriers to Entry/Exit	D	Y	Y	N
3	BCG Matrix / Product life cycle	N	N	N	N
4	Benchmarking	A	Y	Y	Y
5	Competitive analysis	A	Y	Y	Y
6	Corporate Strategy	A	Y	Y	Y
7	Diamond	N	N	N	N
8	Game theory	D	N	N	N
9	Growth-Share matrix	D	N	N	N
10	Industry analysis	A	Y	Y	Y
11	Johnson and Scholes Suitability, Acceptability and Feasibility	D	N	N	N
12	Market segmentation	A	Y	Y	Y
13	Market sizing	A	Y	Y	Y
14	Marketing (marketing mix, Payne's six markets model, competitive strategies, etc)	D	N	N	N
15	MECE mapping	A	Y	N	N
16	Mind mapping	A	Y	N	N
17	PESTLE	D	Y	N	N
18	Porter's Five Forces	A	Y	N	N
19	Porter's Generic Strategies	D	Y	N	N

Table 34 (cont'd)					
Nr.	Strategy tools listed (categories in bold)	If in use - Used rarely in the firm (Dormant – D) / Used frequently in the firm (Active – A)* - (N) if not used	Used in internal meetings (Y/N)**	Used in workshops (Y/N)**	Used in deliverables (Y/N)**
20	Resource audit (McKinsey 7 S, or 9 M)	A	N	Y	N
21	Scenario analysis	A	Y	Y	Y
22	Strategic Choice: Suitability, Feasibility, Acceptability	D	N	N	N
23	Strategic planning processes (rational model, etc.)	A	Y	N	N
24	Strategy maps	A	Y	Y	N
25	SWOT	A	Y	Y	Y
26	Various IT strategy kits / matrices	N	N	N	N
27	Cost/Benefit analysis	N	N	N	N
28	Customer account profitability analysis	N	N	N	N
29	Direct product profitability analysis	N	N	N	N
30	Financial measures: ROI, RI	D	Y	Y	Y
31	Real options	N	N	N	N
32	Balanced Business scorecard	A	Y	Y	Y
33	Change management	N	N	N	N
34	Experience curve	N	N	N	N
35	Fishbone cause and effect	A	Y	Y	N

Table 34 (cont'd)					
Nr.	Strategy tools listed (categories in bold)	If in use - Used rarely in the firm (Dormant – D) / Used frequently in the firm (Active – A)* - (N) if not used	Used in internal meetings (Y/N)**	Used in workshops (Y/N)**	Used in deliverables (Y/N)**
36	Force-field analysis	A	Y	Y	N
37	Impact levers/Assessment: People, Technology, Process, Organization and Strategy	A	Y	N	N
38	Lean and Six Sigma	D	N	N	N
39	Lifecycle mapping	D	N	N	N
40	Market approach (4/7 Ps)	D	N	N	N
41	Non-financial measures: scorecards, CSFs, etc.	A	Y	Y	N
42	Pareto Analysis	D	N	N	N
43	Pricing waterfall	D	N	N	N
44	Process Mapping	A	N	Y	Y
45	Root cause analysis	A	Y	Y	N
46	SIPCO or SIPOC- Supplier, Input, Process/Activity, Customer, Output	A	Y	N	N
47	Six sigma - DMAIC	D	N	N	N
48	Value Based Management	D	N	N	N
49	Value Chain	D	N	N	N
50	Value Drivers	D	Y	N	N

Table 34 (cont'd)					
Nr.	Strategy tools listed (categories in bold)	If in use - Used rarely in the firm (Dormant – D) / Used frequently in the firm (Active – A)* - (N) if not used	Used in internal meetings (Y/N)**	Used in workshops (Y/N)**	Used in deliverables (Y/N)**
51	Waterfall process charts – (as SIPCO/ SIPOC but here as a process charts)	A	Y	N	N
52	4Rs	D	N	Y	N
53	Application mapping	D	N	N	N
54	As-is and To-be models	A	N	Y	N
55	Brainstorming techniques, eg. SCAMPER, Association techniques	A	Y	Y	N
56	Coarse filtering	N	N	N	N
57	Conducting focus interviews	D	Y	N	N
58	Conscious competence model	N	N	N	N
59	Customer voice	N	N	N	N
60	Day in the life	N	N	N	N
61	Effective time management	D	N	N	N
62	Finer filtering	D	Y	Y	Y
63	First burst	D	N	N	N

Table 34 (cont'd)					
Nr.	Strategy tools listed (categories in bold)	If in use - Used rarely in the firm (Dormant – D) / Used frequently in the firm (Active – A)* - (N) if not used	Used in internal meetings (Y/N)**	Used in workshops (Y/N)**	Used in deliverables (Y/N)**
64	First pass business model	N	N	N	N
65	Goal directed project management	A	Y	N	Y
66	Medelow's power interest matrix	N	N	N	N
67	Minto Pyramid	A	Y	N	Y
68	Morphological box	N	N	Y	N
69	RASCI	D	Y	N	N
70	Risk analysis	D	Y	N	N
71	Six hats thinking (de Bono)	A	N	Y	N
72	Stages of team development	D	N	N	N
73	Stakeholder mapping	D	Y	Y	N
74	Stakeholder validation	D	Y	Y	N

Table 34. Empirical details on each (analytical) strategy tool (observed) in the field