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SEQUENCE OF THINKING AND ACTING IN STRATEGY MAKING

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RESEARCH PAPER No 436
May, 2001

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Abstract

This paper gives an answer to the continuing emergent-deliberate debate. Thinking and acting are two outstanding features of this controversy. What is needed in the field is a framework that can explain under what circumstances each of these two features takes place along the strategy-making process. The focus of the paper is on the sequence of thinking and acting in the strategy-making process. A framework is developed to show how thinking co-evolves with action in a succession of strategic activities. Within boundaries, strategic activities are carried forward by social automatic behavior, following a set pattern. Yet, when an action crosses a certain threshold, a different condition of awareness is achieved. Similarly, thought can cross an equivalent threshold, giving rise to consciousness. Either condition enhances the organization's ability to make changes in the direction of its strategic activity.

SEQUENCE OF THINKING AND ACTING IN STRATEGY MAKING

Introduction

There is a running debate in the strategy-making field between the advocates of a synoptic deliberate view of the strategic process (Ansoff, 1991) and the proponents of an incremental emergent view of that same process (Mintzberg, 1990). The bitterness of the controversy and the more extreme statements of their premises suggest that there is no common ground. And the debate continues. While Ghoshal and Bartlett (2000) defend the deliberate perspective, Weick (2000) argues for the emergent position. However far apart these two positions may appear to be, it seems plausible to conceive of change as the outcome of both deliberate and emergent components (Pettigrew, 2000).

Observed change, if it contradicts previous mental schemes, motivates an inquiry into how such change took place. Ghoshal and Bartlett (2000) investigate why certain organizations are more successful than others in becoming flexible and responsive. They find that successful organizations achieve the desired change because they follow a simple, focused and purposeful sequence, phase by phase. For these authors, there is a "right" sequence for each organization. Consequently, they claim that the feasible course for change is determined. Once the initial level has been diagnosed, the plan can be designed to advance phase by phase. Any other attempt that does not acknowledge the right sequence will not be successful.

For Weick (2000) there is no right sequence; change is not a matter of replacing one state with another, but a cumulative ongoing process. He argues that emergent and continuous change is the foundation on which planned episodic change will either succeed or fail. To illustrate this, he bases his argument on how inertia is conceived. If inertia is seen as an inability to change as fast as the environment, then intervention in the form of a plan appears necessary. This conception reflects the big picture captured by upper management. However, if the organization is viewed from a micro level instead, what looked like repetitive action, routine and inertia will suggest ongoing adaptation and continuous adjustment. Furthermore, for Weick, these slight changes and adjustments tend to be a responsive form of adaptation. Added together, these small variations can alter strategy. If there is an underlying program or plan, there is nothing in its content that explains success or failure. It is the sense people make of the plan that matters, that is to say, the extent to which the plan triggers sustained animation, direction, attention/updating, and respectful interaction.

These two positions seem distant, yet some recent contributions suggest that the strategy-making process is neither completely deliberate nor completely emergent. For example, Pettigrew (2000) strongly states that although the duality of emergent v. planned

has helped to develop the field, it should now be ready for retirement. He states that the polemic surrounding this duality prevents us from seeing the complementarities and mutualities of the change process. In his opinion, developing complementary theory has not been a primary concern.

One way to integrate these perspectives is through the linkage between thinking and acting that each of them presupposes. Underlying both the synoptic and the emergent perspective, there is an assumption regarding the sequence of thinking and acting. While for the synoptic view thinking comes before action, for the emergent view it is action that produces thinking.

The two perspectives have arisen from different sources, and this partly explains their different approaches. On the one hand, the planning perspective has developed out of a prescriptive approach. Textbooks such as Koontz and O'Donnel (1972) have provided principles for managers, which have been taught in business schools for the last three or four decades. Underlying these principles, a rational order of the world is portrayed, showing how meticulous analysis may foster orderly management. On the other hand, the emergent perspective, led by Mintzberg, has been constructed from an empirical standpoint. Its supporters have conducted multi-case studies, which can be traced to Mintzberg (1972), where he first suggests an adaptive mode as opposed to planning.

In spite of their differences, both sides seem to agree that the strategy process is a sequence of activities. From the planning viewpoint, it is a sequence guided by the definition of the mission, followed by internal and external scrutiny, leading to the formulation of a strategy and concluding with implementation plans. For the emergent tradition this sequence of activities, shaped by a "stream of decisions", is what constitutes strategy (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). Such a definition of strategy excludes any element of intentionality, with the result that a great deal of what strategy is about is actually left out. Furthermore, to make the definition more operational, "decisions" were replaced with "actions". This is no minor change; the reason given for the change is that actions can be easier to trace, yet actions are not necessarily a logical outcome of decisions.

If the element of intention is not even considered, the connection between decisions and actions becomes problematic (Butler *et al.*, 1990). Actions may take place without decisions, and decisions may not translate into actions. Moreover, decisions are made in a particular context and can help influence the context for decision making.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a connection between actions and decisions; in particular, there seems to be a sequence. The nature of this sequence will determine which approach –emergent or synoptic– best fits the sequence of strategic activities. Inasmuch as decisions lead actions, the sequence will be that thinking produces action, in line with the planning approach. Conversely, if actions are not the result of prior decisions, thinking will be seen as a sense-making process following from action (Weick, 1987).

The link between thinking and acting is a central point in the discussion of emergent versus deliberate strategies. If the sequence of activities includes both action-oriented and thought-oriented parts, then the sequence of strategic activities will be best described by a combination of the planning and emergent descriptions. Yet, under what circumstances does either thinking or acting dominate strategy formation?

We propose to answer these questions by providing a framework that harmonizes the two perspectives. First, however, we will analyze the two extremes in depth. Following that,

we will provide a framework that describes how they interact. Finally, we will compare this framework with other related lines of thought.

The sequence of thinking and acting in two modes

From a synoptic rational viewpoint the direction of the sequence is that action leads to thinking. A plan is the result of intellectual deliberation that supposedly governs activities. Planning approaches range from the prescriptive and fixed type such as we find in Hax and Majluf (1991) to the less restrictive, as in Friedmann (1967:225), where "... planning is defined as the guidance of change within a social system". Despite this range of approaches, planning is based on forecasting, using as much information as possible to take decisions today regarding future events. The directing role of planning is dependent upon abstraction from day-to-day duties, and mental exercise (Andrews, 1971).

> "The executives in the general office, freed from all but the most essential entrepreneurial duties, can determine, in something of a rational manner, whether the new product uses enough of the firm's present resources or will help in the development of new ones to warrant its production and sale." (Chandler, 1962: 394)

Once drawn up, plans are supposed to be applied to day-to-day operations. This phase, identified by Chandler, divides the thinking activity of decision-making (formulation) from the actual doing (implementation). According to this scheme, actions involve allocating and reallocating resources in accordance with the plan. Since the provision of resources depends on the plan, no initiatives take root without a plan.

The division of strategy into formulation and implementation is a methodological construct that helps to seize the uncertainty of reality. By deliberately splitting thinking and acting, it is a powerful reality simplifier and an important tool for developing the strategic process. It simplifies reality by isolating the thinking activity from actions. That is why this type of strategy process has been called rational decision-making (Rajagopalan *et al.,* 1993).

Although the planning approach is well established, the argument that action precedes thinking has also been put forward. Weick (1987) develops the idea that meaning and sense are produced through action, and that strategy acts merely as a guiding symbol. For him, plans are one of many pretexts for generating meaning in organizations. Real strategy lies elsewhere. Action itself is the core, since through action, meaning is created. Using the concepts of confidence and improvisation, Weick explains various ways in which action can take the place of strategy.

Confidence is given by a general sense of order having been imposed. Order is not the result of extensive prior analysis, but of the manager's effort to impose a sufficient presumption of order. This presumption of order leads people to act more forcefully. The more confident the presumption, the more forceful the action. At the same time, improvisation is possible when the range of possibilities is wider, whereas having a plan can limit the scope for experimentation or trial and error. A simple symbol, even a logo, can provide enough sense of direction for improvisation to be possible.

The emergent approach to strategy making can be traced to Quinn (1978), who proposes the well-known logical incrementalism. Indeed, he argues that strategic change is rarely brought about by rational means, but rather by monitoring evolution and making

adjustments as unforeseen events appear. His proposition certainly implies a sequence of thinking and action, but it is also dynamic, with no beginning and no end. Moreover, he adopts the concept of logical incrementalism because there are both cognitive and process limits. Either or both of these limitations may prevent strategic decisions from becoming actions. However emergent-oriented his approach, he recognizes the weight of planning, provided it is understood as a flexible frame of reference. Thinking, seen as planning, interacts with emergent events.

Adopting a more radical incremental approach, Weick (1987) conceives of strategy as an instrument to facilitate action. Any strategy will fit, so long as it makes sense of real situations. Weick develops the idea that meaning and sense are created with respect to action, and that, consequently, strategy acts as a guiding symbol. He claims that action is the triggering element that is endowed with meaning through thought.

In spite of this, thinking also triggers a redirection of strategic activities once the change in mental maps has occured. To discover how organizational renewal works, Barr *et al.* (1992) study how mental models operate in self-renewal processes. They find that managers rely on simple mental models to give sense to the world and, more importantly, that renewal requires a change in these mental models. Change in mental models is mostly an incremental process, followed by an immediate change in mental maps.

While thinking can be paralyzing if too much energy is invested in analyzing and contemplating without actually driving strategic activities (Pfeffer and Sutton, 2000), it is also true that a pure action orientation, with no guidance, is aimless. If events are allowed to unfold without any clear direction or sense, confusion may arise. Indeed, thinking ahead seems a necessary condition for performance improvement, in either stable or unstable environments (Brews and Hunt, 1999).

At this point, we can see that there are two distinct entities, as far as strategy making is concerned. First, there are actions and thoughts, which are triggering elements. Both are seen as having a role, inasmuch as they refocus strategic activities. And second, there is a stream, or sequence, of strategic activities. This flow of activities can be influenced either by thinking or by acting. However, the sequence of strategic activities is contained within a shared framework.

Strategy as a Shared Framework of Reference

What makes the sequence of activities performed in an organization *strategic* is the sense of their being *intended*. Pure actions or thoughts are not a guiding element. A shared framework, however, agreed upon and developed through intentional deliberation, constitutes a context within which strategic activities can be developed.

The idea of a shared framework provides a strong base for strategic activities to happen. “A central idea (call it a ‘mission’ or a ‘company goal’ or ‘basic principles’), embedded in many heads where it is evoked on the occasion of decisions, is more crucial than an elaborate written list of things that are supposed to happen” (Simon, 1993:141).

To explain how such a shared and agreed mindset is formed, we draw on Masifern and Vilà (1998). Strategy becomes “a shared framework in the minds of managers”. It is achieved through a process of deliberation in which mutually contrasting ideas give birth to

an agreed upon approach. One way to do this is first to define an “ideal” strategy, with no restrictions, as the best conceivable response to external impacts. Once this objective function has been defined, restrictions can be added to arrive at a “possible strategy”. “Purposively a gap is created, by envisioning an ideal strategy that gradually settles down to a feasible strategy. The result is a framework of reference that constitutes the shell by which managers decide in real time with coherence” (Masifern and Vilà, 1998:23). This process of deliberation and agreement to guide daily activity is not just any mental framework, but the result of formal decisions, agreement and deliberation.

The shared framework starts from a thinking activity, not from a blank sheet of paper. It is in this primary thinking activity that the ideal future is articulated. The concept of dominant logic (Bettis and Prahalad, 1995; Prahalad and Bettis, 1986) is different to the shared framework. While the dominant logic is built on shared experience and learning, the shared framework in the minds of managers builds on skills of reflection. This distinction is what provides creativity and imagination.

Updating or refocusing the shared framework is feasible at any moment, yet more important is the sense of stability it provides. In fact, actions or thoughts can redirect strategic activities, but within the shared frame of reference. The frame of reference operates like a shell for managers to decide on a day-to-day basis. Sparking actions or thoughts may be compared with this framework to guide strategic activities. Yet, the shared framework is not a trap. As new events unfold it can be reshaped by reaching new agreements through deliberation.

Our approach is different from that of Pfeffer and Sutton (2000). While they study the reasons why thinking is not translated into action, we look at how thinking and acting can become windows of *awareness* or *consciousness*. Neither thinking nor acting are ends in themselves; they can cast light on the sequence of activities that make up the strategy-making process. They are instruments that can bring about changes in the flow of strategic activities, or even in the shared framework.

From the existing literature we have obtained three elements. First, we have identified strategy as a framework of reference that circumscribes strategic activities. Second, the flow of strategic activities themselves. Third, we have categorized actions and thoughts as factors that trigger attention. Substantial actions or thoughts may foster further refocusing of the sequence of strategic activities.

Four levels of analysis, at least, can correlate these components: sequence (Lovas and Ghoshal, 2000); learning (Argyris, 1977); influence on performance; and satisfaction of achievement or dissatisfaction of failure (Hart and Banbury, 1994). I will briefly touch on some aspects of the latter three issues, but I will concentrate on the first one, sequence.

Thinking and acting as a sequence of co-evolving entities

We have seen how, according to the planning approach, thinking precedes action, whereas from an emergent perspective action precedes thinking. However, these two facets have something in common: neither is habitual nor commonly occurring. Each provides enlightenment, direction, and steering. Each provides reasons for adjustments or changes in the sequence of strategic activities. And each can be a powerful organizational alignment mechanism. Thus, thinking and acting can be parallel tools for strategic management.

Although, by construction, a plan should cover all relevant issues, it will not include any that were unknown or unseen at the time the plan was made. Of course, new or unexpected situations can be examined as they arise, and their implications can be incorporated in the plan. Yet, the fact of such rectification suggests that the plan itself is something dynamic. The plan will never be finished; it will be continually updated with each new discovery.

Action, as used in this framework, will be a significant moment within a movement. An action will mean one type of discovery. Discovery will inevitably include failure, such as mistakes, dead ends, interference, and feedback loops, since these are part of the process of finding valuable resources. Although apparently the plan could have prevented failure, it was never possible. Indeed, new discoveries were unknowns when the plan was devised.

These apparently contradictory views are in fact complementary. Either the sense provided by actions or the sprouting of new ideas will be embodied in the flow of strategic activities. Bearing this complementary characteristic in mind, we will attempt to provide a harmonizing framework.

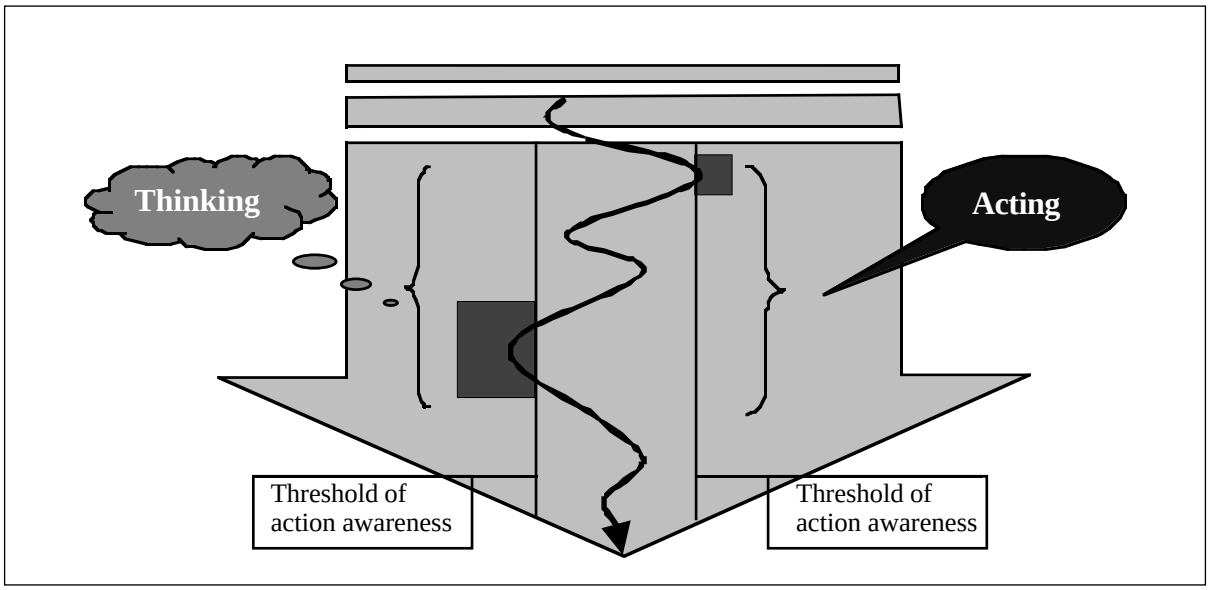
If the strategy-making process is a sequence of activities, these activities could be characterized by two extremes: either primarily dominated by thinking, or mainly driven by acting. Consequently, we can imagine a continuum in between. Strategic activities may lie at any point along this continuum, from being conducted by a higher proportion of thought to being guided mainly by action. What is missing in the field, however, is a scheme that can explain under what circumstances each extreme takes place at an organizational level.

We will adopt the approach of the collective mind, which allows the unit of analysis to be the organizational level. Within this approach, strategic activities are carried out on a regular basis by social automatic behavior (Spender, 1998). For Spender the flow of normal activities develops in what he calls an objectified process, where knowledge is embedded in the sequence of activities and requires the support of a social group delimited in space and mind.

Spender proposes the concept of the “activity system” to link the individual and collective mind. It is through activities that the constitution and reconstitution of society evolves. Moreover, this suggests a distinction between social and abstract knowledge. While the latter can be stored in libraries, the former is embedded in practice and contextualized in a particular field of activity. “In activity systems knowledge cannot be separated from the activity, its quality is only evident in the activity” (Spender, 1998:22).

The strategy-making process can be described as an activity system. While in a stable state, the sequence of activities follows a pattern, its components being a blend of thought and action. Occasionally, sparks of *awareness* produced by actions or sparks of *consciousness* produced by thinking will reroute the sequence. This scheme is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Thinking co-evolving with acting



This scheme seeks to harmonize the abovementioned contradictory views in a comprehensive conceptual framework. The winding arrow stands for the flow of one strategic activity, characterized by a co-evolution of thought and action. Strategic activities comprise both thinking and action orientation in different proportions. These activities are carried out within a shared and agreed framework, represented by the large arrow. Meanwhile, the twofold boundary stands for the thresholds of *awareness* and *consciousness*.

If the sequence of strategic activities lies within the flow of automatic concatenation, then the strategy-making process includes thinking and acting in an objectified or social autonomous process. The more important thing, however, is the mechanics that make it possible to achieve the conditions of *awareness* or *consciousness*.

Within this shared framework, thinking and acting operate as attention-sparking features. Social autonomous behavior characterizes the sequence of strategic activities. The sequence remains consistent with the shared framework in the minds of the actors. The sequence of the strategic activity is altered when either outstanding acting or outstanding thinking flashes attention, calling for redirection to achieve the desired strategy.

The new insights can be of two different kinds. On the one hand, strategic activities can be affected by a planning effort. Thorough planning, forecasting and analysis can be leading elements of deliberation to guide subsequent strategy implementation. This is the type of *consciousness* produced by thinking. On the other hand, emergent action generates episodes which, once assumed, can be leading components of a new redirection. The resulting rationalization is an ex-post sense-giving device. This is the type of *awareness* produced by action

Thoughts that spark *consciousness* are to be pursued intentionally. So, possible courses of strategic activities can be pointed at. Opportunities that give rise to consciousness through thinking must lead to an outpouring of new ideas, making it possible for the organization to grow skills to adapt (Simon, 1993).

What makes thinking or acting crucial is the extent to which new information fits with existing mental schemes. Each, in a different way, poses new challenges, but both open the way to an enhancement of mental models.

In line with Masifern and Vilà (1998), mental models can be updated inasmuch as they redirect strategic activities towards the desired future. However, "the most crucial part of developing learning as one of the successful outputs of strategy making is that of eliciting managers' 'taken-for-granted' mental models in their world" (van der Heijden and Eden, 1998:66). For learning to occur, a certain awakening device must be present, otherwise the mental model will remain unchanged. The mental model, then, is supposed to be flexible enough to give room for change, but at the same time rooted firmly enough to confer direction.

These two characteristics, though seemingly opposed, are compatible within the framework presented here. The two mechanisms we propose for updating mental models are thinking and acting insofar as they generate *consciousness* and *awareness*. Deliberate and frequent exercises of this kind will prevent the mental models from becoming traps and make it possible to deal with uncertainty explicitly. The exercise of deliberately eliciting new ideas and comparing them with the strategies currently in use makes it possible to inspect those strategies and either redirect them or carry on in the same direction. Similarly, using action deliberately as an awareness-creating mechanism, by testing new opportunities, can also foster change. Use of these two mechanisms to test the validity of the existing strategy leaves organizations better prepared to deal with the unexpected. Yet, it remains to be explored what causes these outstanding events –whether thoughts or actions– to occur.

The exercise of provoking *awareness* or *consciousness* is certainly deliberate. We argue that an intentional effort to trigger awareness will be the differentiating element for better preparation and skill development, in spite of the environment. This deduction is supported by Brews and Hunt (1999), for whom purposeful planning is positively related to performance in both stable and unstable environments and to the intentional flexibility to adjust a constituent part of the strategic activity. Indeed, what is outstanding is that the will to provoke enlightenment is deliberate. It seems that neither acting nor thinking should occur on a random basis; on the contrary, they are supposed to be pursued with premeditation.

The force that propels strategy, as seen from an ex-ante viewpoint, cannot be merely a sequence that will evolve through thinking and acting events. The intention to guide the sequence of strategic activities is a third party in this dyadic sequence. Butler *et al.* (1990:15) stress that "…by definition strategy must surely involve a degree of intention to act, a kind of plan which is to be put into effect". However, intention is revealed in two forms in the framework presented here: in the form of stability, represented by the shared framework in the minds of managers, which is aimed at the central idea (mission, company goal or basic principles); and in the form of flexibility, represented by the corrections built into the shared framework.

Without stability, the sequence of strategic activities can flow in any pattern; by itself the existence of a sequence does not indicate the existence of a strategy (Inkpen and Choudhury, 1995). Absence of strategy is perfectly possible if the sequence of strategic activities reveals no consistent interconnectedness. On the other hand, stability should not preclude the flexibility to adapt to the unknown. There can also be an absence of strategy if stability prevents adaptation.

In summary, we have identified thinking and acting as two outstanding ways to create *consciousness* and *awareness.* Both are an integral part of the strategy process at an organizational level. This process has been identified as the sequence of activities, partly thinking and partly acting, that are carried out through social autonomous behavior.

This behavior is framed by a shared understanding in the minds of managers. Either thinking or acting may interrupt the autonomous behavior. Then, if necessary, the sequence is refocused. Furthermore, even the shared framework can be revised, subject to formal and collective deliberation, to build a new agreement.

The artificial separation of emergent and deliberate processes of strategy making does not contribute to the analysis and development of theory in this field. In contrast, a more realistic perspective is gained by integrating views. The main harmonizing element presented here is that thinking and acting are means to discover reality.

Lastly, we have identified the driver that provokes attention-triggering action or thought as the deliberate intention to make such action or thought happen. As the shared framework provides stability and is embedded in the minds of managers, it also fosters creativity and imagination through purposeful thinking or acting. Strategy is both continuity and adaptability. In the following section we will reinterpret some extant streams of research in light of the scheme we have proposed. By doing so we can shed light on our framework.

Examination of some extant lines of thought in light of the thinking-acting scheme

The idea that both thinking and acting can contribute to the development of the sequence of strategic activities is an attempt to move towards a more comprehensive understanding of the strategy-making process. The lines of thought we have chosen are not only compatible with our scheme; they are also attempts to overcome the emergent-deliberate dichotomy. Besides, by examining them we can enrich our framework.

The first piece we will analyze is Chakravarthy (1982). His main argument is that adaptation is enhanced by a condition of balance between organizational resources and environmental circumstances. Indeed, strategic management is the process of continuously adapting to changes in a firm’s environment (Schendel and Hofer, 1979). This dynamic perception of strategic management certainly fits with our framework, since strategy is not the answer to one unchanging problem; it is consistently answering whatever questions turn up.

For Chakravarthy (1982) the ability to adapt is related to structure. The more loosely coupled the components of the organization, the better the chances of deliberation and discussion. Although we do not consider a specific structure in our framework, we do include deliberation, discussion, and agreement while building and reshaping the shared framework in the minds of managers. The capacity to pursue thinking or acting conditions of *consciousness* and *awareness* will be attained when deliberation is fostered within the organization.

In our proposed framework agreement is achieved through deliberation on what strategy to follow; then, each manager, from his position, will act accordingly. However, if new events occur, whether prompted by thought or action, and a need for redirection is perceived, then through deliberation and reflection the strategy can be modified.

Chakravarthy proposes a twofold output of the adaptation process. The first output is adaptive specialization, which involves formulating a strategy. And the second output is adaptive generalization, which involves developing new strategies to face greater environmental complexity. While the former is similar to our description of a sequence of activities flowing in automatic behavior, the latter stands for our description of the capacity to purposefully articulate sparks of awareness or consciousness.

However, Chakravarthy's description accounts for the dynamics of adaptive specialization at the expense of adaptive generalization. While he claims that the former is a necessary condition for the latter, in our framework the two processes can coexist. The sequence of strategic activities is maintained, as agreement is maintained with the shared framework in the minds of mangers. Yet, the change necessary to outperform competitors is only achieved through adaptive generalization. The sparks of *awareness* or *consciousness* produced by purposeful acting or thinking allow for new possible courses. Our framework adds another tool in this line. Through these mechanisms, even though uncertainty is not eliminated, it is made explicit, allowing new events to become opportunities.

Adaptive generalization as defined by Chakravarthy (1982) can also be seen as the capacity of a firm to renew itself. The concept of self-renewal proposed by Huff *et al.* (1992) and Barr *et al.* (1992) brings out beautifully the dynamic nature of strategy. Barr *et al.* (1992) conclude that renewal hinges not so much on noticing new conditions, but on being able to link environmental change to corporate strategy and modify the linkage over time. Moreover, for Barr *et al.* (1992) mental maps are what direct strategic activities; without change in mental maps renewal is never achieved. This approach fits with our scheme, yet it emphasizes the point that it is not just *awareness* or *consciousness* by themselves that redirect strategic activities. It is the consequent change in the shared framework that causes redirection.

Huff *et al.* (1992) describe renewal as the outcome of the interaction between cumulative stress and inertia. They define both terms as summarizing concepts. Inertia is defined as the commitment to the current strategy and anything that supports the current way of doing things. Stress, on the other hand, is defined as the dissatisfaction with the current strategy and imperfections in the fit between the organization and its environment.

These two opposing forces will account for the occurrence of self-renewal. Inertia tends to increase over time. When a strategy is first put into place, it means a certain level of commitment; then, as routines and procedures are developed, the process of institutionalization causes commitment to grow. Huff *et al.* (1992) use the term "cumulative inertia" to refer to this sequence of escalating commitment. Stress, too, may be cumulative. Since no strategy can perfectly foresee all eventualities, stress is generated as unexpected events unfold. Inconsistencies with experience become apparent, and this process is accelerated by the dynamism of the environment.

The tendency of a system to maintain stability will be guided by inertia. And stress, even though it is accumulated over time, will be more associated with specific events that directly capture attention. The stability mode of the system suits our framework, inasmuch as it parallels to the social autonomous sequence of strategic activities. Nevertheless, stress, as it is reflected in specific events, describes the backbone of how actions or thoughts may spark *awareness* or *consciousness*. These two conditions make the system able to renew itself and feedback strategic activities.

Huff *et al.* (1992) suggest that stress and inertia are independent and should be analyzed simultaneously. Similarly, in our framework the attention-triggering events that refocus the sequence of strategic activities are treated separately; while strategic activities stand as the normal flow, the attention-triggering events appear as occasional. For this reason unexpected events cannot be ignored. On the contrary, it is their recognition that provides the opportunity. Whether it is through action or thinking, once recognized and reflected they can become opportunities for renewal.

Conclusion

The conditions of *consciousness* or *awareness* are supposed to be guided. Whether the triggering element is thinking or acting, the will to pursue the awareness is deliberate. Simply letting the autonomous process of strategic activities unfold is not enough if strategic management is to be guided. The role of managers in this framework is to guide the sequence and generate the two types of triggering elements. As in Lovas and Ghoshal (2000), the strategy-making process is guided. The occasional *awareness* or *consciousness* conditions should not be left to occur at random, they should be deliberately made to occur.

Furthermore, the will to pursue the conditions of *awareness* and *consciousness* is directed towards changing mental models. If new ideas or insight are not incorporated into managers' mental models, then no change will take place (Senge, 1992). One reason for reviewing or changing the existing mental models is the degree of dissatisfaction with the current strategy.

With respect to the development of the strategy field, Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) point out that strategy has been obsessed, first, with planning, then position, and now learning, instead of looking at the whole animal. They suggest an effort to go beyond the fragmented analysis from one point of view. Though the task of accurately combining different approaches is difficult and may result in incoherence (Van de Ven, 1992), the attempt must be made.

The focus of this paper has been the sequence of thinking and action in the strategy-making process. This sequence is not unidirectional; on the contrary, thinking co-evolves with action in a succession of strategic activities.

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