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**The performativity of strategy tools as activation devices:
A case study of strategy development within a UK
financial institution**

Thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

By
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Declaration

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To my wonderful parents, John and Azi

May your souls rest in peace

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Abstract

Strategy tools have mainly been conceptualised through a functional perspective, which views tools as passive instruments that aid managerial decision-making. Studies within strategy-as-practice provide an alternative view to this, by arguing that in practice, strategy tools are devices that enable actors to achieve a variety of purposes that transcend the instrumental purposes that dominate mainstream strategy studies. In this thesis, I argue that both views still portray tools as being used instrumentally. In both cases actors are seen to use tools as a conduit through which they may achieve either analytical purposes or more socially related purposes. The common factor across both views is the focus on the intentionality of the managers in using the tools to achieve a certain purpose. Rather than focus on what strategy tools are used for, this thesis explores the other side of the coin by focusing on what strategy tools do. I do so by exploring how the materiality of strategy tools may impact on the strategizing practices of managers during the strategy development process. The aim of the study is to explore the possible performative roles that strategy tools may play during the strategy process and the implications of these roles for the work of strategizing. In this study, tools are viewed as non-human actors – that is, they are not simply conduits that are utilised instrumentally for achieving a variety of purposes in organisations, rather they actively influence the actions and interactions of managers and therefore contribute to the formation of strategy. This inquiry is based on a longitudinal study (2012 – 2015) of the process of strategy making within a large UK financial institution. Focusing on what the members of the Strategy department do during the development and use of a strategy tool referred to as the Horizon scan and tracing the developmental trajectory of the tool throughout the process. The thesis draws on theoretical insights situated at the intersection of economic sociology, the sociology of financial markets and the sociology of technology, more specifically: the notions of performativity and affordances. The methodological approach is qualitative and is based on in-depth semi-structured interviews, direct observations of meetings and workshops and documentary data. The analysis reveals that the strategy tool performed four main interconnected roles which include: enlist participants, reorient temporally, consolidate and persuade. Through performing these roles, the tool shaped the strategizing practices of the strategists in a patterned way, such that the actions and interactions of the strategists reflected the underlying theory within the tool. The findings also reveals that the four roles performed by the tool were underpinned by two main affordances – modular and temporal affordances.

Based on the findings, the thesis introduces the concept of an Activation device which refers to strategy tools that instigate or trigger certain actions that result in a co-evolution of the strategy theory within the tool and strategizing practices, where the ‘doing’ of strategy comes to resemble the theory within the tool. The study concludes by presenting a theoretical model of how strategy tools as activation devices shape how strategy is practiced. It therefore contributes to the recent materiality turn in strategy and the nascent literature on performativity in strategy, by reconceptualising the roles of strategy tools and demonstrating empirically, how strategy tools influence strategizing practices through the performative effects they generate.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Research Background and Motivation:

Strategy tools are pervasive strategy artefacts and are widely utilised in a variety of contextual settings (Carter, Clegg and Kornberger, 2010; Jarratt and Stiles, 2010; Whittington, 2007). They are ubiquitous to the extent that they are considered as institutional practices that transcend industries and sectors (Suddaby, Seidl and Le, 2013). They are commonly considered as aids for managerial decision-making. Some examples include the SWOT, Porter's Five Forces, BCG matrix and the Balanced Scorecard. Strategy tools have been shown to perform several functions such as enable the production of knowledge; they have been used for communication and coordination purposes, at other times they may be used for symbolic purposes and they are said to be the basis through which competitive advantage may be achieved (Clark, 1997; Frost, 2003; Grant, 2003; Kaplan, 2011; Langley, 1989; Wright, Paroutis and Blettner, 2013). They are not only viewed as institutional practices but they also constitute other institutionalised strategy practices such as meetings and strategy workshops (Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel, 2015; Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Healey et al., 2013; Paroutis, Franco and Papadopoulos, 2015) and are considered to be 'the stuff of strategy, without which strategy work could hardly happen' (Whittington, 2007, page, 1579). Strategy tools such as those aforementioned, are mainly disseminated through business schools and consultancies (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013b; Wright et al., 2013), with other tools developed internally within organisations. Annual surveys conducted by Bain and Company since 1993 illustrate the widespread use of management tools on a global scale and therefore affirm that strategy tools are a constituent part of strategy work (Rigby and Bilodeau, 2013). Strategy tools are thus

important both to management scholars who develop tools and disseminate them, through various means, and the practitioners that utilise them.

However, despite being widely utilised in practice, strategy tools have been criticised by several scholars and debates related to their usefulness are prevalent within the literature. Critics argue that they promote inflexibility, they are a source of frustration due to outcomes not being utilised in subsequent stages of the strategy process and they sometimes do not lead to sustainable profits (Hill and Westbrook, 1997; Mintzberg, 1981; Mintzberg et al., 1998; Porter, 1996). The tensions within the literature concerning the usefulness of strategy tools may be largely due to the functionalist perspective of mainstream strategy studies, where ex-ante functions of tools are defined and they are evaluated based on these functions (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009). For instance, tools are widely viewed as being used for instrumental purposes such as analysis and problem solving (March, 2006), they are considered to be useful when these purposes are achieved. Such arguments focus on the textbook purposes of tools (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009) and when tools fail to yield anticipated outcomes based on these a priori purposes they are deemed to be ineffective or outdated (Hill and Westbrook, 1997; Jacobides, 2010). Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) also highlight the prevalence of a functionalist perspective within the literature; they note that such studies focus on the correct use of strategy tools – that is, the proposed way to apply the tool as prescribed by the developer of the tool – and any deviation from the prescribed use of the tool will lead to incorrect outcomes (ibid). Kaplan and Jarzabkowski (2006) mention that some of these debates concerning the usefulness of tools have taken place in the absence of an understanding of how strategy tools are utilised in practice. Proponents of strategy as practice thus argue for the study of the use of tools in practice (Whittington, 2003; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009).

Strategy as practice in comparison to mainstream strategy studies considers strategy to be what people do, rather than what an organisation has (Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, 2007;

Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008; Whittington, 2006). Therefore, the focus is on the actual practices of actors as they use strategy tools. These studies present a contrasting argument to that proposed by earlier mainstream studies. For example, Jarratt and Stiles (2010) examine how senior managers use strategy tools during the development of competitive strategy and show that tools are adapted according to the operating environment of the organisation. By demonstrating that in practice strategy tools are adapted during use, Jarratt and Stiles (2010) contradict the functionalist perspective of most mainstream studies, which tended to portray tools as being used strictly as prescribed by their proponents or developers. Strategy as practice scholars have also examined tools in light of their usefulness, how tools are utilised in practice, the compatibility of the logic of the tools to the logic of individuals and organisations and the purposes for which tools are used (Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel, 2015; Jarratt and Stiles, 2010; Moisander and Stenfors, 2009; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009; Wright et al., 2013).

The recent materiality turn in strategy involves an interest in the features of strategy tools and how they may enable or constrain strategizing (Dameron et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011; Le and Spee, 2015; Paroutis, Franco and Papadopoulos, 2015; Werle and Seidl, 2015). These studies draw on the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1979) and concepts such as boundary objects (Star and Griesemer, 1989), epistemic objects (Knorr Cetina, 1997, 1999; Rheinberger, 1997, 2005) and activity objects (Engeström, 1995) as a means to gain new insights into how strategy tools are utilised in practice. For example, while mainstream studies mainly propagate tools as being used for instrumental purposes, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) argue that strategy tools have interpretive flexibility which allows them to be adapted ‘improvisationally’, thereby enabling tools to be utilised for a variety of purposes which transcend instrumental uses. Using the notion of affordances, they focus on the interactions between the agency of strategists and the affordances of strategy tools and highlight several ways in which tools enable the actions of actors through their affordances.

For example, they mention that managers may use tools as interpretive devices that enable managers to channel the attention of others towards specific issues and also make sense of these issues (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). They assert that strategy tools are ‘material devices through which actors pursue multiple ends’ (ibid, page, 539).

The practice approach to the study of tools has certainly advanced our understanding of strategy tools by providing insights into the use of tools in practice. However, most of the recent studies on strategy tools focus primarily on how the affordances of strategy tools either enable or constrain the actions of actors, very few studies take into consideration other alternative outcomes that may unfold from the use of tools in practice. More specifically, how strategy tools *influence* the actions of actors rather than enable their actions has had little attention within the strategy literature. In other words, most studies have mainly portrayed the use of tools in practice as a unidirectional interaction in which human actors adapt tools in order to achieve a variety of purposes. My argument that strategy tools influence the actions of actors is underpinned by studies such as Chesley and Wenger (1999) and Lozeau, Langley and Denis (2002), who argue that when strategy tools are used, a process of mutual adaptation may take place in which both the strategy tool and the organisation are adapted.

In Chesley and Wenger’s (1999) examination of the use of the Balanced Scorecard, they argue that for tools to be successfully adapted within an organisation there has to be a co-evolution of both the tool and the organisation. They show that while using the BSC, managers made changes to the label of the tool in order to make it more compatible with the organisation (Lozeau et al., 2002), since the original labels proposed by Kaplan and Norton (1996) were not directly related to the organisation. An example of one of the changes made to the tool was a change in the finance label. The original BSC consist of a label referred to as ‘financial perspective’. The federal agency in Chesley and Wenger’s (1999) study was not concerned with profit making, as a manager noted, but with budget management. Therefore, the financial

perspective label was changed to ‘financial management’. Chesley and Wenger (1999) note that the changes made to the BSC were ‘changes in the depiction of the model, not the model per se ... Therefore, at the level of the model ... nothing substantive was changed’ (Chesley and Wenger, 1999, page, 64). Such uses of tools are referred to as ‘customisation’, where the tool is ‘adapted to make it more compatible with the organisation without destroying its aims ... Customisation [involves] adapting the [tool] *and* adjusting the organisation’ [emphasis in original] (Lozeau et al., 2002, page, 539). These studies show that strategy tools are not only adapted during use, but they also influence organisations in return. An understanding of how these tools influence what people do is needed. In other words, there is a need for a micro-level analysis of the dynamics of the mutual adaptation that takes place when strategy tools are used in practice.

1.1.1 Motivation for the research

This research was motivated by a desire to contribute to the extant literature on strategy making, in particular to gain an understanding of the roles strategy tools play during the process that may go beyond our current understanding. The gap identified from a review of the extant literature on strategy tools further motivated the need for this research. Inspiration from studies in human-computer interaction (HCI) and science and technology studies (STS), sparked the idea to consider strategy tools from a different perspective, in relation to what had previously been considered within the strategy literature on tools. In these studies, particularly STS, objects, artefacts or material entities have been shown to intervene and shape the actions of human actors. As such the curiosity to identify what strategy tools actively do and the implications of their doing constitute the general motivation for this study.

1.2 Research objectives and questions

The aim of this PhD thesis is to extend the existing knowledge of strategy tools by exploring the more active performative roles strategy tools (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Doganova and Muniesa, 2015) may play during the strategy making process. We know from the extant literature how tools may enable the actions of human actors and how these actors adapt tools in practice, what is still quite ambiguous is how strategy tools, in turn, influence the activities of the human actors and therefore intervene in action (Callon and Law, 1997). This thesis, therefore examines the interactions between the strategists and the strategy tools they use (Chapman, Chua and Mahama, 2015). It seeks to move beyond the functionalist perspective of mainstream studies and the top-down ideology of the use of tools aforementioned and also expressed clearly by Muniesa (2008). In his study on financial markets, Muniesa (2008) examines the role of the telephone in trading rooms and the effects this technology has for the functioning of financial markets. Muniesa (2008) provides an explanation that succinctly captures the way in which strategy tools have mainly been conceptualised in the strategy literature and it is this view that this thesis also aims to shift from.

Muniesa highlights that many approaches to considering the role of objects or artefacts in practice, have mainly considered them as ‘play[ing] a role in a purely instrumental sense, i.e., as an aid to an otherwise fully purposeful, plainly human action’ (Muniesa, 2008, page, 291). This description is reminiscent of the definition of strategy tools that has been utilised widely in the literature. In order to avoid this view and the opposing view of technological determinism, Muniesa (2008) proposes the use of the performativity program for the study of the role of objects and artefacts such as strategy tools. Similarly, others such as Chapman et al. (2015), highlight that studies in strategy as practice have tended to overlook the role of objects

and artefacts and attribute agency solely to human actors. This is understandable, as it may be difficult to conceive of the idea that non-humans such as artefacts and objects have the capacity to act. This is mainly due to the general conceptualisation of agency, which is generally associated with intentionality. However, scholars in science and technology studies (Callon and Law, 1997; Latour, 2005, Law, 2008) argue otherwise. According to Latour (2005), an actor is able to modify the state of affairs of a setting or what other actors do and thereby makes a difference. Chapman et al. (2015, page, 266) notably point out that majority of the strategy research ‘associates strategy with the agency of people. Limiting agency to only intentional human actors limits what we can understand about strategy as practice ... [There is therefore a] call for research to “dissociate the notion of strategy from well-articulated, prior intentions”, as “intentions follow actions ...” Dissociating strategy from intentionality will allow for the agency of material objects to be accounted for in strategy practices, leading to the study of how, in the performing of strategy, agency is distributed between humans and material objects’.

This view is quite similar to Mintzberg and Water’s (1985) seminal work on deliberate and emergent strategies. Where intended strategies are sometimes realised and sometimes unrealised. And what is realised in reality is a combination of that which was intentional/deliberate and that which was emergent/unintentional. From this, we find that a number of studies still portray strategy tools as objects that are used in a somewhat instrumental way for a variety of purposes and have largely ignored the possible performative roles such objects may play during the strategy process.

This study thus seeks to understand the role of strategy tools in relation to the people that use them and therefore seeks to develop a conceptualisation of strategy tools that takes into consideration the active roles that they perform as actors during strategy making. To achieve this objective I adopt the performative approach (Callon, 1998, 2007) to studying the role of objects suggested by Muniesa (2008). The findings of this thesis will contribute to both the

recent materiality turn in strategy and the recent focus on performativity in strategy (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Gond et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011; Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Vaara, Sorsa and Palli, 2010). Based on a review of the literature in the previous section, this study seeks to address the following research questions:

‘How do strategy tools actively contribute to the formation of strategy and what are the implications of this for the work of strategy making?’

To address the research questions, the study draws on theoretical concepts from sociology, including economic sociology (Callon 1998, 2007), the sociology of financial markets (MacKenzie, 2006a, 2006b), science and technology studies and the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1979; Hutchby, 2001). The analytical lens developed provides a means through which the strategists and the tool are seen as acting relationally. The research thus highlights the micro-dynamics of the interactions that take place between the strategists and the tool as they collectively and progressively form strategy. In this research, strategy tools are conceptualised as knowledge artefacts – that is, carriers of strategy theory (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006) and are considered to be performative (Cabantous and Gond, 2011). By arguing that strategy tools are performative (Carter et al., 2010), I mean that they do things and what they do generates effects (MacKenzie, 2006a). In addition, based on the materiality turn in strategy they are also viewed as devices that have affordances. Strategy tools are thus viewed as both theory (in the form of a knowledge artefact) and a device.

1.3 Research approach

The empirical basis of this study is a large financial institution based in the United Kingdom. The case study is an insurance company, which is a business unit of a much larger financial institution. The insurance company, referred to as METALife, has a dedicated strategy department that work with the CEO and Senior executives to formulate the strategy for the company. This study examines the practices of the members of the strategy department, as they utilise a particular strategy tool (referred to as the Horizon scan) during the strategy making process. Emphasis is laid on the relations between the strategists and the tool and how these interactions culminate in the adaptation of the company's strategy.

The research design for the study entails a qualitative approach and the use of an inductive research strategy. This choice underpins the purpose of this research, which is an exploratory study. Inspired by a biographical approach to the study of objects (Appadurai, 1986; Kopytoff, 1986; Pollock and Williams, 2010) the data collection involved tracking the trajectory of the strategy tool throughout the strategy process (D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009). This involved studying the tool 'in action' (Latour, 1987), following its development along the strategy process, as well as focusing on the key actors that participated in shaping the tool. This was done in order to identify the main roles played by the tool as actors in their own right. For this research ethnographic techniques of data collection were used. The specific data collection methods utilised for the study include direct observations of meetings and workshops (20), in-depth semi-structured interviews (42) and documentary and archival data (200 pages). The analysis of the data was based on principles of induction and also involved the use of existing theory (Kaplan, 2011; Werle and Seidl, 2015). The results of the analysis form the basis for the discussion and theoretical model proposed.

1.4 Research contributions and implications

This thesis seeks to further our understanding of strategy tools by adopting a sociological perspective (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Whittington, 2007) as a means to reconceptualise the role of strategy tools during the strategy process. The study therefore makes three main contributions to the extant literature:

1. The research provides an empirically grounded, systematic study of how strategy tools are developed and utilised in practice. It therefore enriches the current understanding of how these tools impact on strategizing (Dameron et al., 2015) by showing that strategy tools shape the strategizing practices of managers in a patterned way that reflects the underlying theory of the tool. This occurred as the tool progressively performed the four main interconnected roles identified from the analysis. Furthermore, the findings also reveal that the four roles performed by the tool were underpinned by two main affordances of the tool – modular and temporal affordances. The study therefore contributes to the recent literature on materiality in strategy.
2. The research also contributes to the literature on strategy tools by demonstrating that when strategy tools are utilised, a process of mutual adaptation takes place (Chesley and Wenger, 1999; Lozeau et al, 2002) during the interactions between the strategists and the tools. This research presents a theoretical model that depicts the micro-dynamics of this mutual adaptation in which the strategy tool performs the four main interconnected roles of: enlisting participants, temporally reorienting their thinking, consolidating information from across the organisation and performing the role of a persuasive device. The findings thus provide a conceptualisation of the performative roles of strategy tools and how they may enable the enactment of strategy theory.

3. Some scholars argue that when tools are used, a process of dissociation may occur, in which there is a separation between the theoretical underpinnings of the tool and the tool itself (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). The findings from this research suggest that when strategy tools are utilised in practice, what happens during their use may differ from one context to another. In other words, a process of dissociation may not always occur. Rather, using MacKenzie's (2006b, 2007) four levels of performativity, the findings of this thesis demonstrates that when strategy tools are utilised in practice any one of the four levels of performativity may occur: generic, effective, counterperformativity (which is similar to the process of dissociation) or Barnesian performativity.

Firstly, this research shows that when strategy tools are utilised in practice they are not only used for analytical purposes (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009; Wright et al., 2013), neither are they simply a conduit through which actors are able to achieve a variety of intended purposes as Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) argue. Rather this study shows how strategy tools may influence the actions of strategists and therefore actively participate in the strategy formation process. While most studies have focused on *what strategy tools are used for* during strategy making, this thesis is concerned with *what strategy tools do* during the process. In this research strategy tools are viewed as 'non-human actors actively involved in the making of the organisational realities in which they are used' (Moisander and Stenfors, 2009). In line with Moisander and Stenfors' (2009) argument, this research contributes to the extant literature by providing a theoretical model, which shows that strategy tools may perform the roles of: enlisting participants and therefore building a network of different actors with different knowledge expertise thereby enabling collaboration for the generation of new ideas; they temporarily and temporally reorient strategists thinking; they provide an avenue for issue

comparison and selection by consolidating dispersed knowledge from across the organisation; and they work alongside human actors to do the work of persuading various audiences.

The findings therefore demonstrate that agency is distributed (Chapman et al., 2015) between both the human actors that use tools and the tools themselves. In particular, it presents a view of tool use, which takes into consideration the mutual adaption (Chesley and Wenger, 1999) that takes place between strategists and the tools that they use. This is in contrast to the current view of strategy tools, which tends to mainly portray the use of tools in practice as a unidirectional interaction in which the strategists or managers that utilise these tools adapt them to be used for varying purposes, with very few studies (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Vaara et al., 2011) highlighting how these tools shape what people do in a performative way. The research therefore also contributes to the nascent literature on the performativity of strategy which has mainly taken a discursive approach, by studying the agency of texts within strategic plans (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Vaara, Sorsa and Palli, 2011) and has also argued that strategy is performative (Carter et al., 2010; Ottosson and Galis, 2011) without necessarily delving into the micro-dynamics of how strategy theory is enacted in reality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011). In addition, while studies on rational decision-making have identified that tools play a key role in turning theory into social reality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011), the process through which strategy tools perform such a role is quite ambiguous. The findings thus, address these concerns within the literature and specifically addresses Carter et al.'s (2010) call to study how strategy tools are performative and in so doing it also shows how strategy theory is enacted in practice.

Secondly, the findings show that when strategy tools are utilised in practice their theoretical underpinnings may have an effect on the actions of actors, as aforementioned, and therefore the occurrence of a process of dissociation (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006) is one in several outcomes that may be observed when tools are utilised. This research argues that when strategy

tools are used there is a possibility for the tool to be: performative in a Barnesian sense (where the theoretical underpinnings of the tool is enacted in practice rather than separated from the tool), counterperformative (this is similar to the argument of dissociation posited by Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006)), effective performativity (in this case the tool has an effect on what people do. This outcome of the use of tools is exemplified by Chesley and Wenger's (1999) study of the BSC) or generic performativity (in this case the effects of the tool are not observable). This research contributes to our current understanding of tools by highlighting that when tools are used in practice the *effects* of their use may differ from one context to another.

Thirdly, the findings also contribute to the recent materiality turn in strategy by addressing the gap highlighted by Dameron et al. (2015). They mention that there is a 'lack of systematic studies of strategy tools and how their features impact strategizing' (ibid, pages, S2 – S3). In this thesis, the findings show how the affordances of the strategy tool enabled it to act performatively and therefore influence not simply the analysis and its outcomes, but also the actions of the strategists to align with a particular model of strategy making identified by Grant (2003) as planned emergence. Some of the aspects of strategizing, which the materiality of the tool was found to impact on include participation in strategy making, the achievement of buy-in and political activity. The study also contributes to the literature on what members of a dedicated strategy function – that is, strategy teams – within organisations do (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007) and how strategy tools impact on their practices. Strategy teams have been shown to engage in executing practices (these are daily routine activities such as the writing of reports or strategy documents), reflecting practices (this refers to strategy teams reflecting on their existing ways of strategizing, which may lead to adaptations in the strategy process) and initiating practices (these practices involve activities related to the development of new strategic initiatives) (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007). In their study, Paroutis and Pettigrew

(2007) identify that strategy tools are associated with the work of preparing documents and reports (i.e. executing practices). In this thesis, the findings reveal that strategy tools also contribute to both reflecting and initiating practices. These tools therefore permeate the work of strategizing.

In addition to the above, the study has implications for practice in terms of participation or inclusion in strategy making (Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). The modular affordance of the tool studied in this thesis was found to have enabled participation and the achievement of buy-in, as aforementioned. This may have implications for practitioners and management scholars that design and develop strategy tools. This study shows that tools with a modular format enable collaborative efforts in strategy making because such tools necessarily require inputs from across the organisation. The development and use of such types of tools may mitigate the isolation of those outside of the top management level and enable their inclusion in strategic conversations (Westley, 1990).

1.5 Outline of the thesis structure

This thesis is comprised of seven chapters (see Figure 1.5.1). *Chapter two* is a review of the extant literature on strategy tools. It begins with an overview of the two dominant approaches to strategy making and a section on strategy making and strategy tools. The rest of the chapter is divided into two main sections: mainstream strategy studies on tools, which is referred to in this chapter as ‘tools-in-principle’ and strategy as practice studies on tools, referred to as ‘tools-in-practice’. The chapter begins with a critical examination of the mainstream literature on strategy tools. This is followed by an explication of the tensions and limitations of this literature. The chapter further transitions into the strategy as practice perspective to the study of tools as an alternative approach to the functionalist perspective of mainstream studies on

tools. Here, the different ways in which strategy tools have been conceptualised and the approaches drawn on to examine their use in practice are considered. This practice section is divided into two parts: the first part focuses on normative strategy as practice studies that examine how tools are utilised in practice. The second part is based on the recent materiality turn which moves beyond the human-centred view of the previous studies on tools and instead seeks to understand how the materiality of objects, artefacts and technologies, which also constitute the practice of strategy, impact on strategy work. The review concludes by highlighting the gap within the literature, which may be thought of as the need to consider both tools-in-principle and tools-in-practice together and not separately, as many studies have done.

Chapter three presents the analytical lens used for the study of strategy tools and what they do. Using the notion of affordances as a means to study strategy tools in practice, as advocated by the materiality turn in strategy, has been beneficial. However, if strategy tools are knowledge artefacts that are strategy theory in a different form, the notion of affordances is argued to not be sufficient to adequately understand the role of strategy tools in practice. I therefore combine the notion of performativity with that of affordances as a means to reconceptualise the role of strategy tools during the strategy making process. The chapter is thus structured into two main parts. The first part is focused on performativity and begins with an introduction to the notion of performativity, highlighting the different foundational conceptualisations of performativity commonly utilised within management and organisation studies. This is followed by a presentation of the conceptualisation of performativity drawn on and utilised within this thesis, which is that proposed by Michel Callon (1998) and which approaches the use of strategy tools based on a relational ontology. The different levels of performativity proposed by MacKenzie (2006b, 2007) are also presented in this chapter. The second part of the chapter is focused on the notion of affordances, which originated from ecological psychology, specifically from the

work of Gibson (1979). In this thesis, I draw on the notion of affordances from the sociology of technology and utilise the conceptualisation of the notion as presented by Hutchby (2001). In seeking to avoid issues associated with technological determinism and the human-centred views that overlook the role of objects in practice, Hutchby (2001) offers a view of affordances that complements the relational ontology of Callon's performativity program. The analytical lens developed is thus a synthesis of theoretical concepts drawn from science and technology studies, economic sociology and the sociology of technology. The concepts utilised for the analysis of this study are also described within this chapter.

In *Chapter four*, the research design and methodology used to address the research questions are discussed in detail and the rationale, which underpins each choice made, is highlighted within each section. The chapter begins with the philosophical foundations of the study and is followed by a discussion of the qualitative approach utilised. An inductive research strategy was adopted for the execution of the study. Such an approach is characteristic of strategy as practice studies and is also beneficial when the research purpose is an exploratory one. The use of a single case study is presented and this is followed by the different data sources used for the data collection. The inductive approach used for the analysis is discussed as well as details of how the data was coded and interpreted to lead to the key themes presented in the findings chapter. This chapter concludes with a section on the criteria for evaluating quality and ethical considerations taken into account during the study.

Chapter five is a presentation of the empirical findings for which the research is based on. The chapter begins with a brief case summary of the case study company. Within this chapter the findings are presented as a narrative that guides the reader through the strategy process, which

is an annual cycle. The details of the process are organised under the four interconnected roles performed by the strategy tool that were identified from the analysis. As the process progressed, the tool was also progressively transformed and concomitantly, the role of the tool changed as well. In addition to discovering these four roles, interestingly the analysis also revealed that while the tool performed these roles, it contributed to the performance of a specific strategy-making model described by Grant (2003) as planned emergence. The findings therefore showed that the tool was performative in the Barnesian sense, which MacKenzie (2006b) describes and also shows that when tools are used in practice, a process of dissociation, as argued by Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006), does not always occur. The concept of an Activation device emanated from the data as a concept that can be used to describe strategy tools that are performative in such a strong sense. This concept is discussed further in the discussion chapter.

Chapter Six is a discussion of the findings laid out in Chapter five. Here, a synthesis of the findings and the literature are presented. In this chapter the concept of an Activation device is presented as a tool, which performs the four interconnected roles identified in the previous chapter. Through these roles, such devices contribute to the realisation of the theory within them. These four main roles are depicted within the theoretical model developed from the study. The chapter also includes a discussion of the performance of the strategy-making model identified within the case, for which the strategy tool contributed to its enactment in reality. The findings are further juxtaposed with the extant literature and a categorisation of types of strategy tools, based on the different levels of performativity provided by MacKenzie (2006b, 2007), is also presented. This further addresses the tension related to the argument of a process of dissociation occurring during the use of tools in practice.

Chapter seven is the concluding chapter and encompasses a summary of the findings from the study in terms of the theoretical contributions made to the extant literature on strategy tools. This is followed by the implications of these findings, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research.

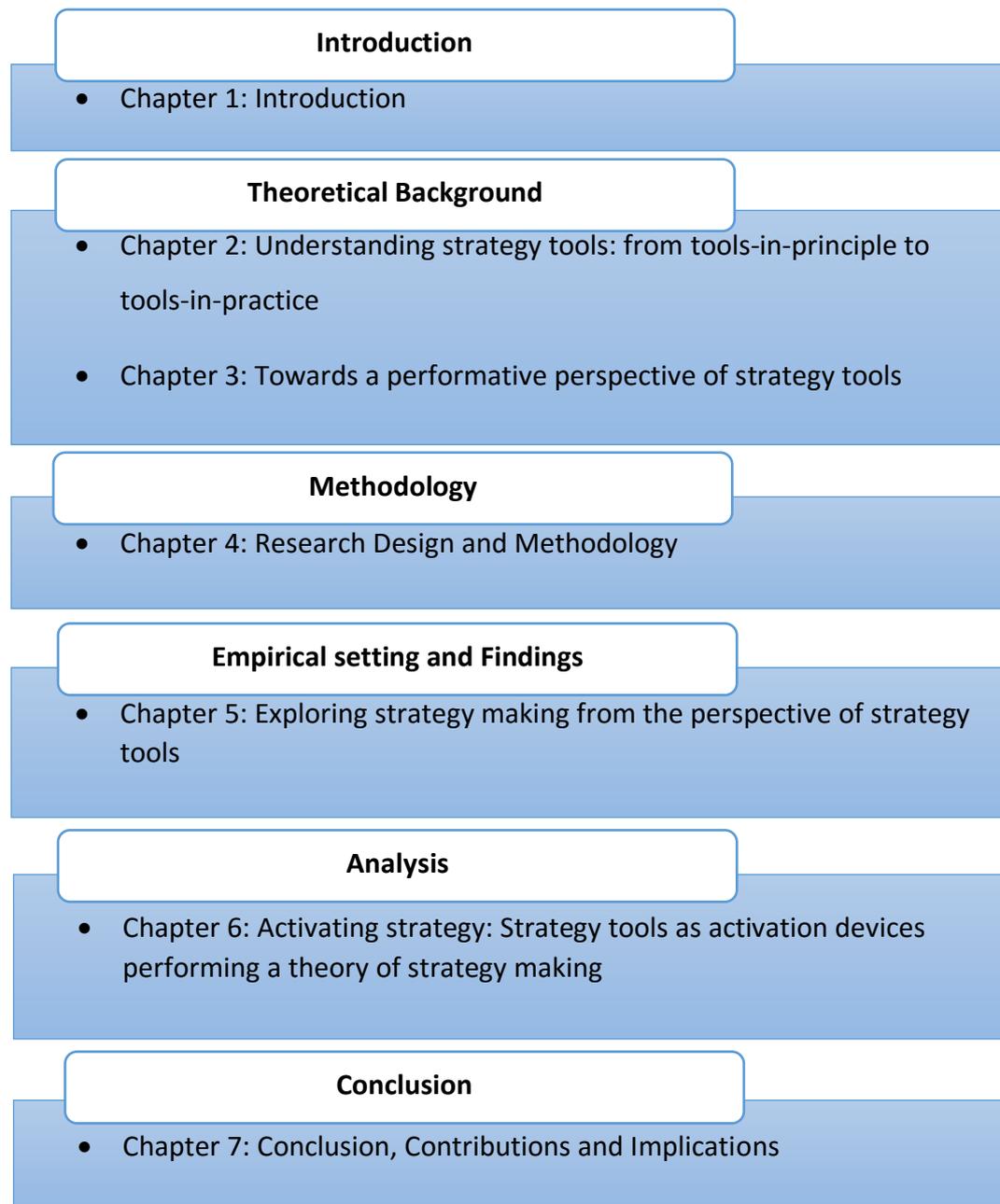


Figure 1.5.1: Outline of the thesis structure

Chapter 2

Understanding strategy tools: from tools-in-principle to tools-in-practice

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a review of the literature on strategy tools, one that compares the views of mainstream strategy studies on tools with that of studies based on the strategy as practice approach. The chapter begins with an overview of strategy making, it considers the two dominant approaches to strategy making and the use of strategy tools within these two models. The chapter continues with two main parts. Firstly, I consider mainstream strategy studies and how strategy tools have been conceptualised by such studies. This section is referred to as the tools-in-principle section and the review considers what mainstream strategy studies argue in relation to the selection, functions and applications of strategy tools. The main theme identified within this literature relates to the usefulness or lack thereof of strategy tools and both sides of the debate are considered. The focus on the usefulness of strategy tools within this chapter, provides an avenue to also gain insights on how tools are mostly 'presumed' to be used. This first part concludes with the limitations of these studies, which sets the scene for the second part of the chapter. The mainstream approach to strategy tools are seen as presuppositions, in the sense that majority of the studies within this stream focus on the text-book purposes for the use of strategy tools and how they are used and less emphasis is placed on how these tools are actually used in practice. The chapter is organised in such a way that it transitions from the traditional view of strategy to the strategy as practice approach, which views strategy not as what an organisation has but as what people do (Whittington, 2006). The strategy as practice scholars criticise the mainstream studies and set

out to address some of the unresolved tensions identified within the mainstream literature, particularly the debate on the usefulness of strategy tools. This second half of the chapter is referred to as the tools-in-practice section and begins with an overview of the strategy as practice approach to studying strategy. This is followed by a review of the literature on strategy tools based on this approach. The next section introduces the recent turn to materiality in strategy, where the approach to studying strategy tools is different from those aforementioned. This is followed by a review of recent studies on strategy tools based on the materiality approach. This second part of the chapter is concluded with a section on the limitations of these studies. Based on these limitations the research questions for this PhD thesis are formed. The chapter ends with a summary of the review of the literature, the research questions and a brief introduction of the analytical lens used to address the research questions.

2.2 Strategy making: Planning approach versus emergent approach

Approaches to strategy making have been categorised under ten models by Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) and they include: Design, Planning, Positioning, Entrepreneurial, Cognitive, Learning/emergent, Power, Culture, Environmental and Configuration. Of these ten models are two dominant and competing models of strategy making, these are the rational planning approach and the incremental emergent model. The planning approach to strategy remained popular in the 1970s and was propagated by scholars such as Ansoff (1965). The planning approach is characterized by deliberateness and it is a more formal and systematic approach to strategy making (Grant, 2003). The emergent approach on the other hand, is characterized by incremental learning and has been conceptualised by Burgelman (1988) as a social learning process. This learning approach to strategy emanated from works on logical incrementalism by Quinn (1980) and was propagated by scholars such as Burgelman (1983) and most notably Mintzberg (1978; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel, 2005; Mintzberg and Waters, 1985).

One of the reasons why both models of strategy making are more dominant than the other eight models identified by Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) is to do with Mintzberg's (1981, 1990, 1991, 1994) critic of planning and the ensuing debate between the planning school of strategy making and the emergent school, with scholars such as Ansoff (1991) in defense of the validity of the planning approach. Mintzberg on the other hand, advocated for an emergent approach and argued that strategy is a pattern in a stream of actions (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985). The issue of intentionality lies at the middle of Mintzberg's distinction between deliberate strategy and emergent strategy (See Figure 2.2). According to Mintzberg and Waters (1985, page, 257), deliberate strategies are the intended strategies that are realized while emergent strategies are 'patterns or consistencies realized despite, or in the absence of intentions'.

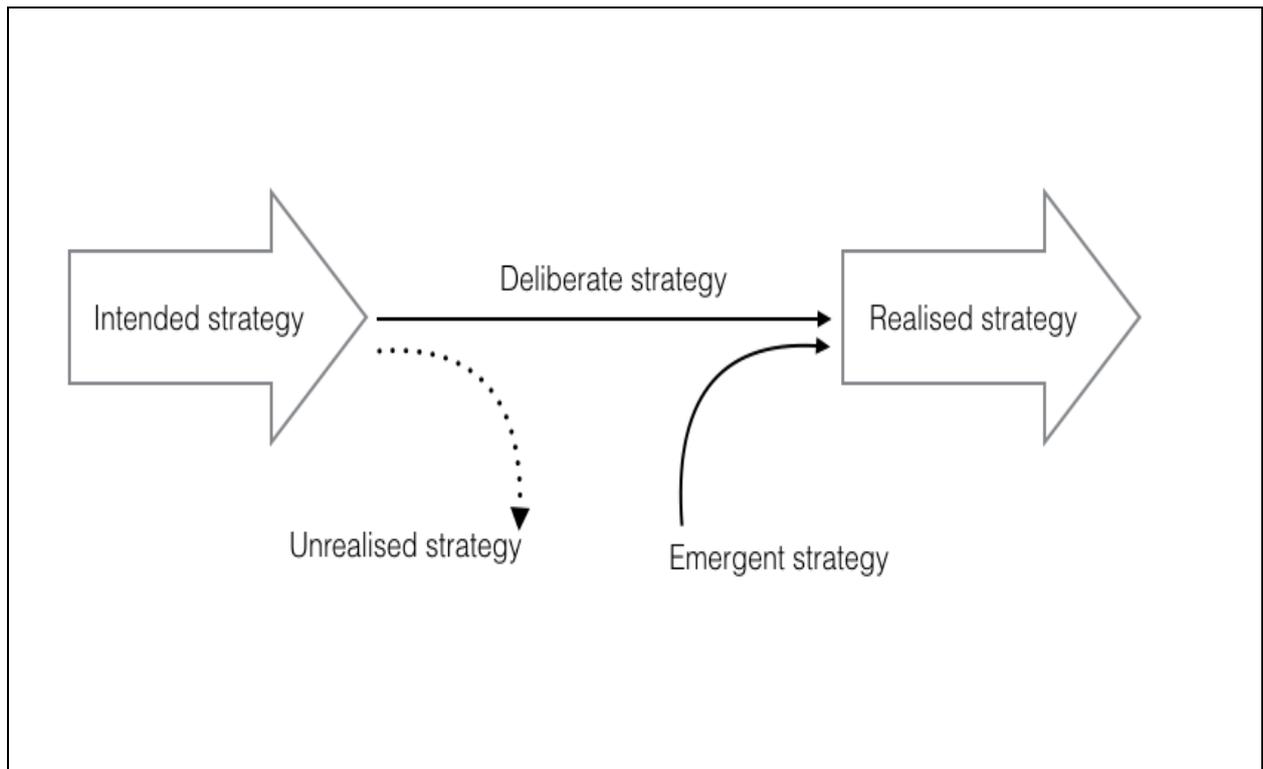


Figure 2.2.1: *Types of strategies (Source: Mintzberg and Waters, 1985)*

The tensions within the strategy literature and Mintzberg's (1994, 1994a) bold declarations about the rise and fall of planning and its fallacies, sparked several studies that sought to show the relevance of strategic planning through its persistent adoption by managers within a number of organisations (Giraudeau, 2008; Grant, 2003). One of such studies on strategic planning is Grant's (2003) study of strategic planning in eight major oil companies. In his study, Grant (2003) discovered an approach to strategy making that was not purely a planning approach, rather he found that the approaches to strategy making within these large companies that operated within a turbulent context, were a combination of both planning and emergence – what he refers to as planned emergence. This hybrid approach to strategy making is described by Grant (2003, page, 513) as 'systems of both incremental learning and deliberate planning'.

2.2.1 Strategy making models and strategy tools

Jarratt and Stiles (2010) highlight that studies on strategy tools show that differing strategy models are associated with specific strategy tools (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006) and therefore determine which tools will be used and how they will be used. The more rational planning model has been said to be mainly associated with the use of tools that structure analysis or underpin rational processes (Pickton and Wright, 1998; Gunn and Williams, 2007; Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Wolf and Floyd, 2013) while tools that engender sensemaking and reflection are more characteristic of the emergent model (Dyson, 2004; Gray, 2007; Jarratt and Stiles, 2010). For example, Webster et al. (1989) attribute certain tools – such as situational analysis, PIMS analysis and Value Chain analysis – to strategic planning. Wolf and Floyd (2013, page, 25) also highlight this distinction by stating that in a situation where ‘rationality is the ideal, the goal of strategic planning tools might be defined as engaging rational processing and controlling the tendency to use heuristics and suffer cognitive bias’. On the other hand, studies such as Dyson’s (2004) examination of the use of the SWOT analysis for strategy development at the University of Warwick showed the tool to be associated with more emergent approaches. Dyson (2004) argued that the SWOT was applied in a manner closely related to the learning school, affirming that the use of the tool was iterative and enabled collective learning during the strategy process.

2.3 Strategy tools-in-principle: A mainstream perspective

Strategy tools are pervasive entities that span a variety of industries and organisations, so much so that they are considered as institutional practices (Suddaby, Seidl, & Lê, 2013) that constitute other institutionalised strategy practices (Belmondo & Sargis-Roussel, 2015). They are disseminated through various channels such as business schools, management consultancies, journals and professional associations (Mazza and Alvarez, 2002; Haspeslagh, 1982; Clark, 1997; Rigby and Bilodeau, 2011, 2015; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013a). The widespread use of strategy tools makes them an important focus for both strategists and management scholars. A widely-used definition of strategy tools for which a number of studies are based on is provided by Clark (1997, page, 417), who defines strategy tools as ‘techniques ... methods, models, frameworks, approaches and methodologies which are available to support decision making within strategic management’. They are described as methods that enable managers simplify and represent complex situations (Gunn and Williams, 2007; Varadarajan, 1999; Grandy and Mills, 2004; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006). Examples include well known tools such as Porter’s five forces, SWOT analysis, Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Matrix, McKinsey 7S Framework, Balanced Scorecard (BSC), and internally developed tools (those developed within organisations by practitioners).

Despite the proliferation of tools, the literature on strategy tools is quite sparse, only recently have studies from a strategy as practice perspective added to the extant literature. The sparseness of the literature, at the time, is suggested by Clark (1997) to have been due to the fact that tools play a secondary role in strategy making. In other words, tools were considered, to an extent, to be of less significance in comparison to other aspects of strategy making. Contrary to this, recent studies highlight that without these ‘less important’ aspects of strategy making such as tools there would be no strategists and the work of strategy making would be

impossible (Rasche and Chia, 2009; Whittington, 2007). In addition to being considered as secondary, tools have also been viewed as passive (Clark, 1997; Frost, 2003). Clark asserts that a ‘tool is subservient as it generally contributes to only part of the task, rather than addressing all aspects of the strategic decision’ (1997, page 418) and they are considered as a means to an end (Eilon, 1980, cited in Clark, 1997).

Mainstream strategy studies, particularly earlier studies on strategy tools, therefore concentrated mainly on providing managers with lists of tools available to assist them in their strategic work (Prescott and Grant, 1988; Webster et al., 1989; Hussey, 1997). For example, Hussey (1997) provides a glossary of management techniques, both classifying and providing brief descriptions of the purposes of these tools. Other scholars such as Webster et al. (1989), concentrate specifically on evaluating strategic planning tools and techniques for developing strategy. They present a profile of thirty strategy tools used for strategic planning, similar to Clark (1997) and Hussey (1997), they suggest what tasks during the strategic planning process specific tools may be utilized for.

2.3.1 Selection of strategy tools

Scholars such as Morecroft (1992), argue that the selection of strategy tools is dependent on whether practitioners perceive a fit between their thinking and the model and if the model enables collective thinking rather than restricts it. More recent studies of strategy tools investigate this linkage (for example, Wright, Paroutis and Blettner, 2013). From a practice perspective (which is discussed in a later section) Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) add that the selection of quantitative tools, such as those in Morecroft’s (1992) study, are most often based on the fact that they portray rationality. In such instances, according to Langley (1989), the

motivation for the use of such tools are more symbolic and to legitimise than for any other purpose.

The literature further focuses on which strategy tools were used by managers and to what extent. In Clark's (1997) comparative study of the use of tools, several strategy tools are identified and linked to specific strategic tasks. For example, tools such as McKinsey 7S and core competencies are linked to organisational analysis tasks. These tools are said to more adequately support these tasks (ibid). In addition to this Clark (1997) also shows the extent to which tools are utilised both in the UK and New Zealand, thereby underpinning arguments about the institutional characteristics of strategy tools. Similarly, studies such as the annual surveys conducted by Bain and Company on management tools and trends since 1993 (Rigby, 2001; Rigby and Bilodeau, 2013) show the different types of tools used by managers in practice, the extent to which managers used these tools, how satisfied they were with using the tools, and whether or not, the use of these tools enabled the achievement of competitive advantage – a view related to the Resource Based View (Barney, 1991; Lippman and Rumelt, 1982; Wenerfelt, 1984). Such studies show that strategy tools are still widely utilised despite being criticised as being ineffective (Hill and Westbrook, 1997). One explanation for the continuous use of strategy tools, despite the criticisms aimed at them, may be as a result of a search for rationality and objectivity (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Frost, 2003; Langley, 1989; Kaplan and Jarzabkowski, 2006) since tools are widely viewed as sources of rationality (Cabantous, Gond, Johnson-Cramer, 2010; Grant, 2008; Lozeau et al., 2002).

2.3.2 Functions and uses of strategy tools

Based on Clark's (1997) widely used definition of strategy tools (see section 2.3) and consequently the dominant view that they are sources of rationality, strategy tools have thus

been presumed to be used mainly for instrumental purposes such as problem solving (March, 2006) as demonstrated by most studies aforementioned. Most mainstream studies highlight such instrumental purposes with very few studies examining other roles that tools play beyond instrumental purposes (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009). Tools are shown (and taught during management education) to be used mainly for analytical purposes such as, to provide a structure for analysis and serve as a means through which strategists may analyse their internal and external environment. For example, Orndoff (2002) highlights that tools are primarily used to support decision-making, improve planning and change the daily behaviours within the organisation. Langley (1989) finds that tools are used for four main purposes: information, communication, direction and control and for symbolic purposes. She argues that these purposes are inextricably linked to social interactions that take place around decision-making. She further suggests that the structural configurations within the organisation could determine the motivations for which tools are used and the ways in which they will be used. For example, when the use of a tool is instigated and executed by line managers the purpose for the use of the tool is mainly for communication (Langley, 1989).

While instrumental purposes have been the prevalent view of the use of tools, few studies have shown that they may be utilised for other purposes such as to focus stakeholders' attention on specific issues in order to gain their commitment (Quinn, 1980). Just as strategy tools are used to focus attention, they have also been argued to be used to divert attention from issues and to portray an impression of action (Brewer, 1981; Meltsner, 1976). Tools are also argued to be a means of achieving organisational legitimacy, particularly for public sector organisations (Lozeau et al., 2002). Some scholars elaborate on how legitimacy is achieved by arguing that tools are used ritualistically and therefore play a symbolic role in portraying rationality which results in the legitimization of organisational actions (Feldman and March, 1981; Langley, 1989; Meyer and Rowan, 1977). Strategy tools have also been shown to be used to justify

decisions made rather than to develop outcomes to use for decision-making (Bower, 1970; Kerr 1983). The literature also shows that they are sometimes used for adversarial debate (Langley, 1989).

Other functions of tools highlighted by the literature include engendering strategic conversations. For example, in Chesley and Wenger's (1999) longitudinal study they show how the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) was implemented for 'strategic management and performance measurement' purposes within the National Reconnaissance Office (NRO). In this case the BSC was not only used for performance measurement but it was used to foster strategic conversations within the top management team. Strategy tools are thus seen as mechanisms that engender strategic dialogue (Williams and Lewis, 2008). However, a majority of scholars and practitioners are predisposed to consider strategy tools as useful or valuable only when they improve results, as Rigby (1993) argues, such views may lead to scholars and users focused solely on the outputs of tools rather than the process involved in the development or use of the tool.

2.3.3 How strategy tools are used

Few traditional strategy studies focus on the process of the development and use of tools. An example is Chesley and Wenger's (1999) study. They show that strategy tools are adapted during use and add that not only was the tool adapted, but the organisation was also adapted during the process. This finding stands out from the mainstream studies. They argue that for tools to be successfully adapted there must be a 'co-evolution between the organization and the specific model' (ibid, page, 54) – a mode of interaction with strategy tools, which Lozeau et al. (2002) refer to as 'customization'. This view of a mutual adaptation is countered by Rigby and Bilodeau (2013), they suggest that companies adapt tools to suit their organisations rather

than adapt the organisation to the tool. In Chesley and Wenger (1999), the adaptation of tools was found to engender social interactions. For instance, one of the top managers involved in the development of the BSC mentioned that the NRO was not about making profit as a federal agency, rather it was about meeting budgets. This led to the change of the ‘financial perspective’ label of the BSC to ‘Financial Management’. Chesley and Wenger (1999) further argue that these changes to the BSC led to the achievement of buy-in. Chesley and Wenger (1999) also highlight that the changes made to the labels of the BSC enabled the executives to legitimize their roles as executives.

Contrary to mainstream studies, they show that although the BSC had been adopted for its textbook purposes, it was also adopted for other non-instrumental purposes, which was to engender conversation within the senior team. The BSC enabled this only after changes had been made to its labels, according to Chesley and Wenger (1999) the new labels ‘gave the executives something new to talk about’ (Chesley and Wenger, 1999, page, 65). This is underpinned by Hodgkinson et al.’s (2006) study of the use of tools by top managers in strategy workshops. They find that strategy tools were utilised for ‘introducing or guiding the discussion of strategic issues than for analytical purposes’ (ibid, 2006, page, 490).

2.3.4 The usefulness (or lack thereof) of strategy tools

The literature also considers the use of strategy tools and predominantly focuses on the usefulness or ineffectiveness of tools, which is inextricably linked to the anticipated outcomes of their use. Some studies further attribute the usefulness, or lack of, to several factors that mainly pertain to the characteristics of the tool. Strategy tools have received a substantial amount of criticism and the tension within the literature is expressed by Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (2009, page, 82): ‘[m]anagement tools are credited by their advocates with saving

corporations – almost as loudly as they are blamed by their critics for destroying them’. Challenges associated with strategy formation have often been attributed to the failure of tools to provide an ‘approved solution’ or a solution that yields a favourable outcome (Chelsey and Wenger, 1999; Porter, 1996). Some tools are reported to be difficult to utilize and often times the benefits of their use are not realised or experienced, particularly in relation to the organisation’s financial performance (Rigby, 2001; Porter, 1996).

The mismatch between the expected use of tools for instrumental purposes and what they are actually used for in practice also contributes to the tensions generated within the literature where some scholars have concluded that strategy tools are ineffective based on the fact that they were not utilised for instrumental purposes. For example, Hill and Westbrook (1997) examined the use of SWOT analysis and found that the outcomes of the analysis had not been incorporated into subsequent stages of the strategy process. They suggest that such tools be recalled, arguing that they are ineffective as a means of analysis, too descriptive, lack any relevance, provide very little insights and add no value to the development of strategy (Hill and Westbrook, 1997). They further mention that such tools were developed during periods of stable environments and therefore have underlying assumptions that contribute to their weaknesses, rendering them unsuitable for current market situations (Jacobides, 2010). Although Hill and Westbrook’s (1997) findings portray such tools as the SWOT, as lacking efficacy, it can be inferred from their study that the tool was not utilised for analytical or problem solving purposes but rather to enable social interactions (Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009).

Some studies argue that a number of tools are outdated (Jacobides, 2010) and also advocate for a recall of tools such as the SWOT (Hill and Westbrook, 1997; Varadarajan, 1999), while others argue otherwise, asserting that strategy tools are not outdated but are useful within contemporary strategic management (Gunn and Williams, 2007). Similar to Hill and

Westbrook (1997), Jacobides (2010) also mentions the issue of a fit between tools and the environment. He lays emphasis on the mode of representation of tools (Worren, Moore and Elliott, 2002) and advocates for a change in the tools used for strategy development. He further argues for the use of narrative tools (Carriger, 2011) rather than numbers and visual representations, stating that '[w]ords are more powerful and flexible than value curves' (Jacobides, 2010, page, 78). According to Jacobides (2010), strategy tools produce categories and visual representations that are static and only useful during times of stability, but are less reliable during periods of rapid changes. Similarly, Gray (2007) advocates for a storytelling approach, arguing that such approaches engender reflection. Such tools that enable reflection during the strategy process encourage strategists to step back from their everyday activities and all that is happening around them, in order to examine their thinking and assumptions (Gray, 2007).

Such arguments for the use of narrative tools seem plausible, however the issue with the argument is advocating for the sole use of narratives. This may hinder managers rather than benefit them. Studies on the power of visual representations such as strategy maps show how these tools enable strategists during the process of developing strategy, learning and organisational transformation (Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets, 2013; Kaplan, 2011; Eppler and Platts, 2009; Whyte and Cardellino, 2010; Paroutis, Franco and Papadopoulos, 2015). For example, Pollock and Campagnolo (2015) examine the use of a two by two matrix by managers for decision-making. They take into consideration the temporal aspects of decision-making and argue that top managers have limited amounts of time and such visual representations that present information in a quick and easy way are appreciated more than lengthy documents, especially during episodes (Hendry and Seidl, 2003) such as meetings and workshops that are temporally bound (ibid). Pollock and Campagnolo (2015) argue that 'specific forms of action and processes of decision-making have become possible ... through the production and use of

simple graphs' (page, 103). Other studies such as Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009) show that tools such as business models are both narrative and calculative devices and both of these aspects enable the business model to contribute to the formation of new innovations.

Still on the debate of usefulness, some scholars suggest that tools are context specific and when adopted and applied within a context they were not originally developed for, they could fail or be ineffective (Lozeau et al., 2002; Narayanan and Fahey, 2005). Contrary to this, others argue that rather than declare strategy tools as outdated, these tools may serve a better purpose when used within a different context. For example, Dyson (2004) suggests that the SWOT could be used effectively in situations of resource-based planning. The SWOT has been lauded for its simplicity and practicality (Dyson, 2004; Pickton and Wright, 1998), which are the same features of the tool for which critics (Hill and Westbrook, 1997) attribute their view of its ineffectiveness to. Although Hill and Westbrook (1997) criticise the SWOT, studies still show that these tools are widely used and are among the top tools utilised by managers (Gunn and Williams, 2007; Wright et al., 2013). In this case, this may be as a result of the very thing that Hill and Westbrook (1997) highlight as a weakness of the tool – the tool's ease of use or simplicity (Worren et al., 2002; Stenfors et al., 2004), which Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) argue to be an appeal for strategists. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015, page, 540) state that the 'selection of tools may be influenced by the degree to which they are simple and offer clear visual representations, where simpler tools are easier to remember and use'. Others such as Worren et al. (2002), suggest that such widely used tools are highly adopted most likely because they are also adaptable.

Scholars have also examined the use of tools within public sector settings such as Hospitals (Lozeau et al. 2002) and in public sector projects (Williams and Lewis, 2008). These studies raise the issue of context in relation to the usefulness of tools. Lozeau et al. (2002, page, 544) examine the application of tools, which they argue are 'rationalistic ... [and] designed for

market-dominated environments', within contexts such as public sector organisations and suggest that they are incompatible within such a setting. They assert that many strategy tools are contextually bound and are developed more for private sector settings than public sectors. Lozeau et al. (2002), criticise the tools utilised in their case studies, arguing that when tools such as the Value chain are forced upon public sector organisations, the way the organisations apply the tools could lead to instances where the tools fail. In this case the lack of usefulness of the tool is as a result of the incompatibility of the underlying assumptions of the tool and the type of organisation (Moisander and Stenfors, 2009) rather than its design or format (Hill and Westbrook, 1997; Jacobides, 2010).

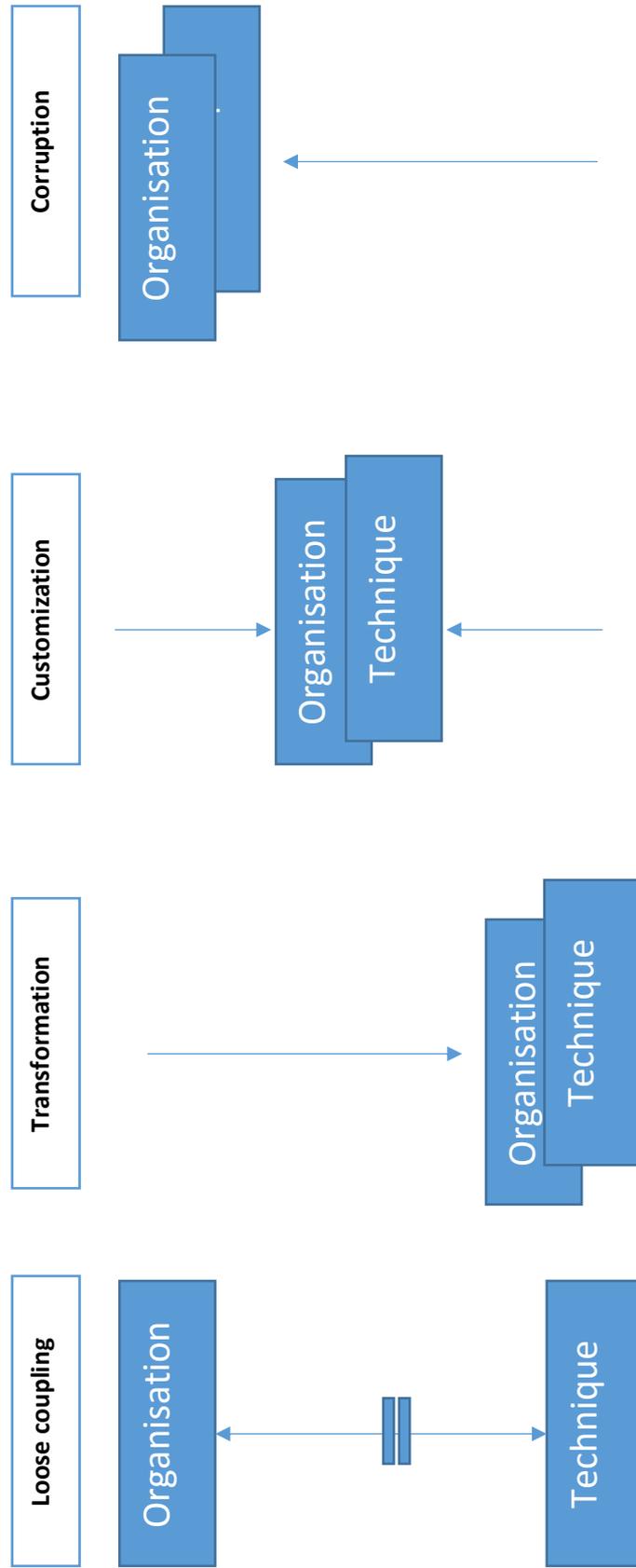
Lozeau et al.'s (2002) argument is based on the premise that strategy tools have underlying assumptions that are concerned with patterns of roles and power distribution. For example, strategic planning is said to be based on the assumption that the top management team have the power to determine the strategic direction of the organisation (Mintzberg, 1994). They compare the theoretical patterns of tools with the existing pattern of roles and power distribution in their case studies. They suggest that where there is a misalignment between the underlying assumptions of the tool and that of the organisation, there is a compatibility gap. Lozeau et al. (2002) suggest four ways in which organisations will address this gap: loose coupling, transformation, customisation and corruption (see Figure 2.2.1). According to Lozeau et al. (2002), the compatibility gap is most often addressed through the corruption of the tool. In this case during the application of the tool, there is no change or adaptation of the organisation, rather the strategy tool is significantly adapted and used to reproduce the existing organisational dynamics.

In concert with Lozeau et al. (2002), Narayanan and Fahey (2005) also argue that the usefulness of tools may be limited to the contexts for which they were developed, in this case an institutional context. Using an epistemological tool called Toulmin analysis, they examine the

underlying foundations of Porter's five forces and examine the usefulness of the tool within the context of an emerging economy (ibid). Narayanan and Fahey (2005, page, 207) determined that the tool's assumptions concerning 'transaction cost, capital flows and the laws governing rivalry' were not compatible (Lozeau et al., 2002) with organisations in emerging economies. The view that tools are context dependent assumes that these tools are restricted by boundaries – such as organisational or institutional boundaries – and if they cross these boundaries they may be ineffective or even lead to negative consequences (Armstrong and Brodie, 1994; Varadarajan, 1999) when applied within a context for which they were not developed. Others such as Grant (2008), argue that some strategy tools are not useful because they are atheoretical and provide only descriptions.

The dissemination of strategy tools and how they enable or constrain creativity in strategy making has also been raised within the literature (Clark, 1997) with some scholars arguing that they may hinder creativity (Dunbar et al., 1996; Sheth and Sisodia, 1999) required in situations of great uncertainty. For example, Sheth and Sisodia (1999, page, 72) also suggest that tools have a shelf life and can outlive their usefulness, when this occurs such tools impede rather than 'illuminate reality in a meaningful and useful way'. Similarly, Worren et al. (2002) argue that tools may establish a frame of reality within users that may hinder them from thinking outside of the frame. An opposing argument is provided by Hutzschenreuter and Kleindienst (2006), who point out that strategists are predisposed to cognitive biases – such as 'framing bias, illusion of control, or reasoning by analogy' during decision making and strategy tools

Figure 2.3.1: Different scenarios of how tools are used in organisations. (Source: Lozeau et al., 2002)



provide an avenue through which these biases can be avoided or mitigated during decision-making (ibid, page, 707). Tools are thus seen as a means to improve cognitive limitations when faced with circumstances of uncertainty and complexity (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006).

Varadarajan (1999) further argues that tools such as the BCG matrix have restrictive underlying assumptions and have long since outlived their usefulness. Matrix approaches have been suggested to have no theoretical basis and may lead strategists to focus on the wrong strategic issues or choices (Armstrong and Brodie, 1994). On the contrary, Pollock and Campagnolo (2015) assert that such tools as the BCG matrix are important valuation devices that afford managers insights at a glance and therefore enable them to make quick decisions. Such portfolio planning tools are argued to be useful (Haspeslagh, 1982). Grandy and Mills (2004) further criticise strategy tools by asserting that they are incomplete representations. For example, the BSC has been argued within the accounting literature to be an incomplete representation of reality (see Busco and Quattrone, 2014) and therefore distort the thing or entity that they are thought to represent. Grandy and Mills (2004, page, 1162) maintain that the ‘endless claims to understanding a firm’s resources through the application of a “value chain” (Porter, 1985) are empty, limited at the very least, as examination of all factors is an impossibility’.

2.3.5 Limitations of mainstream literature

The traditional studies on strategy tools have enriched our understanding by identifying for example, what tools are available to managers, illustrating the widespread use of tools and showing the link between strategy making models and tools. These studies also suggest factors that may impact on the usefulness of tools such as contextual factors. Some studies suggest that the adaptation of tools during their use may contribute to the usefulness of the tool (Williams

and Lewis, 2008). Other studies illustrate what some scholars within the strategy as practice approach (which is discussed further in section 2.4) have highlighted, which is that these traditional strategy studies focus (albeit seemingly inadvertently) on tools being utilised for instrumental purposes. This may be due to the prevalent emphasis on performance in the mainstream strategy literature which has consequently shaped the perception of strategy tools. A few studies have touched lightly on the fact that strategy tools can and have been used for purposes other than analytical purposes. A prominent finding within these studies is the role of strategy tools in engendering social interactions. There is also a general sense of a resource-based view within the literature where these tools are seen as a resource that could enable the achievement of competitive advantage.

However, these traditional studies are caught within a debate on the usefulness or lack thereof, of strategy tools, as shown above. Interestingly, despite the criticisms against tools, they are still widely utilised. The persistence of the debate on usefulness may be linked to the existing conceptualisation of tools within the literature; one that limits the progression of further understanding strategy tools and their roles in the strategy formation process. These studies portray tools as passive entities (with the exception of Armstrong and Brodie, 1994) that are secondary and exist for the purpose of supporting decision-making. The tensions in the literature are also most likely a consequence of the functionalist perspective within the literature that defines ex-ante functions of these tools and further evaluates them based on these functions (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009). Many of these studies are based on the textbook purposes of tools (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009) and studies such as Hussey (1997) and Webster et al. (1989) underpin this view by portraying tools as being used strictly for a particular purpose. Where anticipated outcomes are achieved, the tool is deemed useful while outcomes that do not align with the preconceptions of the purpose of the tool, reduce the tool to being deemed ineffective or outdated.

These studies, particularly those that critique the usefulness of tools, also tend to isolate the tools and assign blame concerning the outcomes to the tools, when the use of tools involves both the users and the tools. The fact that the same tool is viewed as useful in one organisation and less useful in another organisation shows that the issue of usefulness may not entirely lie with the tool, rather outcomes are relative and also depend on the ways in which the tools were utilised and for what purposes (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). This attests to the fact that to conceptualise strategy tools through a functionalist perspective leads to an analytical focus on the use of tools that separates the tool from the users, which further generates an incomplete picture of the process. Worren et al.'s (2002) study on the pragmatic validity of strategy knowledge produced, which is concerned with whether the tool enabled the actor to achieve their purpose, alludes to and therefore underpins the argument for studies to consider tools from a relative perspective rather than a functionalist view.

In light of the limitations highlighted within mainstream studies of strategy tools, the next section considers studies based on a strategy as practice approach, which challenges some of the arguments presented within mainstream studies. These studies examine strategy tools from a practice perspective and shed further light on them using different theoretical lenses.

2.4 Strategy tools-in-practice: A strategy as practice approach

2.4.1 Strategy-as-practice

This approach draws on a practice perspective for the study of 'strategic management, organisational decision making and managerial work' (Golsorkhi et al., 2010, page, 1). According to Orlikowski (2015) most management studies based on a practice perspective have considered practice in three different ways: as a phenomenon, as a theoretical perspective and

as a philosophy. Majority of the strategy as practice studies fall under the first category, which considers practice as a phenomenon. Taking an ontological stance of practice as a phenomenon, involves the study of what happens in practice (ibid). In comparison to the mainstream literature, strategy as practice endeavours to shift the attention away from a performance-driven focus on strategy to exploring and examining comprehensively what happens during the formation of strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2015; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). Due to the fact that the practice approach is premised on the supposition that strategy is not simply something that an organisation has but rather it is what people do (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008; Whittington, 2006), strategy is therefore argued to be a socially situated practice that is produced in praxis (Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets, 2013).

Research within the strategy as practice stream focuses on the ‘micro-level social activities, processes and practices that characterise organisational strategy and strategizing’ (Golsorkhi et al., 2015, page, 1), where strategizing or strategy making depends on the practices which shape both the processes and outcomes of the strategy developed (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). As a consequence of this reconceptualization, scholars within the stream call for researchers to adopt a sociological lens to examine the actual doings of strategy (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008; Whittington, 2007). While Clark (1997) suggested that the sparseness of the literature on tools was due to tools being secondary and inconsequential, Whittington (2007) remarks that viewing strategy with a sociological eye involves highlighting the significance in that which has been neglected such as strategy tools. These tools are seen as the ‘stuff of strategy’, without which strategists would be unable to do their work (Whittington, 2007).

This practice approach to strategy complements process studies of strategy (Whittington, 2007). From Mintzberg and Waters’ (1985) seminal work on deliberate and emergent strategies, strategy is conceptualised as a pattern in a stream of actions – actions taken by the

organisation. The focus for such process studies has been the organisation and changes that take place overtime (Whittington, 2007). The practice perspective complements such studies by focusing on the actions and interactions of people that actually make up the processes that traditional studies tend to emphasise. This practice approach to strategy extends the mainstream literature ‘by bringing to light practices that have largely passed unnoticed, and discovering in them effects that previously were hardly imagined’ (Vaara and Whittington, 2012, page, 14).

Research within this practice approach draw on social theory (such as Giddens, 1979; Bourdieu, 1977, 1990; Foucault, 1977; de Certeau, 1984; Schatzki, 2001, 2002, 2005) which offers an opportunity to zoom in and out (Nicolini, 2012) and gain further understanding of management practices. According to Feldman and Orlikowski (2011), adopting a practice perspective involves taking into consideration the core logic of how practices come to be, how they are reinforced, how they are adapted and the associated intended and unintended consequences. Scholars also draw on insights from fields such as anthropology and psychology to address issues within the strategy field. For example, Johnson et al. (2010) adopt ritual and ritualization theories from anthropology to examine the ritualistic nature of strategy workshops and how these impact on behavioural dynamics and consequently the outcomes of workshops. The strategy as practice perspective has been instrumental in advancing and providing an in-depth understanding of strategy such as how taken for granted practices like meetings unfold and how the practices within such strategic episodes (Hendry and Seidl, 2003; Seidl and Guerard, 2015) shape stability and change within organisations (Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008) and also enable and shape strategic discourse (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011).

There is an explicit ‘distinction between what “actually happens” and what researchers claim is happening through their representations, frameworks, narratives, models, propositions and theories’ (Orlikowski, 2010, page, 24). A gap is thus highlighted between knowledge and reality (ibid) and in order to bridge this gap, strategy as practice scholars engage closely with

what happens empirically (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). This is exemplified by the methodological approaches adopted within the stream. Many SAP studies are qualitative in nature (Whittington, 2007) and adopt such methodological approaches as ethnography and more recently video-ethnography (see Jarzabkowski, Burke and Spee, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015) in order to get as close as possible to the actual activities of practitioners (Orlikowski, 2010; Kaplan, 2011).

According to Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl, (2007), traditional strategy research has mainly been economics-based and has over the years gradually shifted focus away from the people that actually participate in the formation of strategy (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009). The practice perspective thus came about as a ‘response to the curious absence of actors and their activities in most academic articles on strategy’ (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008, page, 282); it therefore seeks to ‘humanize management and organization research’ (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, page, 6) by bringing the focus back to people, the tools and techniques that they interact with and through and their work of strategizing and organizing (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008). Strategy as practice therefore, offers a framework of praxis, practice and practitioners, as a means to achieve this (Whittington, 2006).

The framework serves as a guide for researchers and alludes to the fact that these three aspects are inextricably interrelated. Praxis here is the ‘work that comprises strategy: the flow of activities such as meeting, talking, calculating, form filling, and presenting in which strategy is constituted’ (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008, page, 282) or simply what people do; practitioners are the individuals that perform the work of strategy and are not limited to top and middle managers but also include external actors such as consultants and analysts (Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009); and practices refer to ‘the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done’ (Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008a, page, 282) such

as SWOT analysis and other strategy tools, technologies such as PowerPoint (Kaplan, 2011), graphs and spreadsheets through which people strategize (Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets, 2013). A focus on such objects in strategy has recently been represented by the recent material turn in strategy (discussed further in this chapter).

2.4.2 The use of strategy tools in practice

A paucity in the literature on strategy tools is evident and only recently have studies within the strategy as practice stream presented further research – both conceptual and empirical, qualitative and quantitative – on strategy tools (for example, Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel, 2015; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009; Wright et al., 2013). The ubiquity of strategy tools and the critique of management education (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013, Wright et al., 2013), strategy tools in particular (Jarratt and Stiles, 2010), could be seen as an impetus for the recent focus on tools by scholars. These criticisms focus on the usefulness of strategy tools in practice – a debate that has been ongoing in earlier studies on tools (as previously discussed). Kaplan and Jarzabkowski (2006) suggest that most of the arguments concerned with the usefulness of strategy tools were made in the absence of an understanding of how tools are actually utilised in practice and for what purposes. As such, scholars such as Whittington (2003), among others, advocate for studies on how tools are utilised in practice rather than rely on the former studies which focused mainly on the ‘intended “textbook” purposes of strategy tools’ (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009, page, 223). As a result, how strategy tools are used, the purposes for which they are used and their usefulness are the main focus of studies on tools (Jarratt and Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Wright et al., 2013).

Strategy as practice scholars argue that prior mainstream studies on strategy tools are limited by their view of tools as serving only instrumental purposes (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009)

and thus advocate for the use of a sociological lens for the study of tools. According to Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015, page, 537), using a sociological lens encourages researchers to pay ‘close attention to tools as they are used in context, the motivations of actors in using them, the purposes to which tools are put, and their potential to lead to an array of sometimes unanticipated outcomes’. Based on this strategy tools have been conceptualised in different ways and their use in practice has been examined through different theoretical lenses (see Table 2.4.1). For example, as Worren et al.’s (2002) study suggest that the pragmatic validity of tools may be determined by obtaining the opinions of users concerning tools, Wright et al. (2013) examine the internal logics of managers in comparison to the logics of tools using Personal Construct Theory and repertory grids.

Rather than focusing on the outcomes of the use of strategy tools, Wright et al. (2013) take a cognitive approach towards understanding how and in what ways strategy tools are useful. They argue that by focusing on the internal logics of managers, better insights may be gained into the qualities of tools that managers consider useful, subsequently these insights may be used for the development of tools that may be of more use to managers. Wright et al. (2013) shift from what tools are and what their proponents say they do, to what tools are and what managers require them to do. Their findings reveal a compatibility gap (Lozeau et al., 2002) between the managers and the tools they utilize. This gap may be as a result of a difference in the epistemic cultures of the management scholars that produce the tools and the practitioners that make use of the tools (Moisander and Stenfors, 2009).

Similar to Wright et al.’s (2013) study is Moisander and Stenfors’ (2009) work on the production and use of tools, however the latter take a cultural approach to the study of tools and draw insights from the sociology of technology. Moisander and Stenfors (2009) therefore conceptualised strategy tools as ‘cultural artefacts and technologies of organizational knowledge production’ (ibid, page, 229). They argue that management scholars and

practitioners have different epistemic cultures and therefore when management scholars develop tools they do so based on a logic that is inherently different from that of practitioners. The tools are thus found to be less useful in practice. They demonstrate this by focusing on 'Post-Bureaucratic Knowledge Organisations' (PBOs). Moisander and Stenfors (2009) suggest that such contemporary organisations require strategy tools that enable learning, collective knowledge production, and engender dialogue and trust. Rather than operations research tools which are based on 'ontological presumptions characteristic of the operations research discipline, [where] corporate knowledge workers are represented by "a decision-maker", who pursues predefined values and interests ... [and] individual "knowers" [are viewed as] detached and objective decision-makers' (Moisander and Stenfors, 2009, page, 234).

Both Wright et al. (2013) and Moisander and Stenfors (2009) examine the issue of the usefulness of tools by focusing on the underlying assumptions behind the tools in comparison to the users of the tools. Based on these studies strategy tools may be considered to be context specific and may not be compatible within certain organisations as argued by some earlier research on tools (Lozeau et al., 2002; Narayanan and Fahey, 2005). The usefulness of tools is thus impacted by the context in which they are utilised. Furthermore, the practice studies illustrate how the strategy as practice approach complements mainstream studies. While Lozeau et al. (2002) do a comparison between the tools and the organisation, and Narayanan and Fahey (2005) compare the tool and the institutional context of emerging economies, these practice studies zoom in and focus on the managers and their internal logics. These practice studies also supplement Worren et al.'s (2002) arguments in which they highlight a similar reason for why some tools are argued to not be useful. Worren et al. (2002) assert that outputs of academic research (in the form of tools) do not always align with how practitioners actually process information and this makes it challenging for practitioners to apply these tools when faced with pressures such as uncertainty and complexity.

Table 2.4.1: Different conceptualisations and approaches used to study strategy tools from a strategy as practice perspective

Conceptualisation of strategy tools	Exemplars	Theoretical approach	Focus	Findings
Strategy tools as: Knowledge artefacts	Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006)	Practice Perspective	How strategy theory in the form of strategy tools are utilised in practice	The use of strategy tools in practice involves a process of dissociation between the underlying strategy theory and the strategy tool
Strategy tools as: Cultural artefacts	Moisander and Stenfors (2009)	Sociology of Technology	Strategy tools, their development and use	A difference in the epistemic cultures of both developers and users of strategy tools impacts on the usefulness of tools
Strategy tools as: artefacts	Girardeau (2008)	Actor Network Theory/ Affordances	The use of strategic plans	The visual and textual materiality of strategic plans afford uses that transcend beyond their normative uses
Strategy tools as: Boundary objects	Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009)	Boundary objects	The role of strategy tools as boundary objects	Conceptualised as boundary objects, strategy tools enable collaborations across organisational boundaries
Strategy tools as: Tools-in-use	Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015); Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel (2015); Paroutis et al. (2015)	Affordances	Situated use of tools in practice. The interactions between the agency of actors and the affordances of strategy tools	Tools utilised for a variety of purposes and in multiple ways leading to unintended outcomes

Some strategy as practice studies move beyond the issue of usefulness and focus on how tools are used in practice. For example, Jarratt and Stiles (2010) draw on activity theory as a means to understand how strategy tools are used by senior managers when developing competitive strategy within different environmental context. Their findings reveal that tools are adapted according to the organisation's environmental context (ibid). Jarratt and Stiles (2010) argue that the use of tools is shaped by the types of strategizing practices used within organisations and these practices are in turn shaped by the organisation's operating environment. They identify three types of practices related to the use of tools: routinized, reflective and imposed. Jarratt and Stiles' (2010) findings challenge the arguments of mainstream studies such as Hill and Westbrook (1997) and Jacobides (2010), who argue that some tools are outdated and ineffective when used in environments that are less stable. Jarratt and Stiles (2010) show that in complex dynamic environments, strategy tools are used in a reflective way. Their argument is supported by Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015), the vignette used in latter's work showed that the strategists did indeed adapt the tool based on the economic crisis at hand at the time.

Thus far, this chapter has presented studies on strategy tools from a mainstream perspective, identifying the limitations of these studies. Subsequently, I look at strategy tools from the strategy as practice perspective, which is concerned mainly with the use of tools in practice. The next section – section 2.5 – considers the recent materiality turn in strategy. In this section strategy as practice studies that have adopted a materiality perspective to strategy, in particular strategy tools, are discussed.

2.5 Materiality in strategy

Practices are ‘always bound with materiality’ (Orlikowski, 2007, page, 1436) [emphasis in original] and are said to be materially mediated activities (Schatzki, 2001). The turn to materiality in strategy is therefore somewhat expected. There have been previous calls for an examination of the role of materiality in strategy work (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). Although the notion of materiality has only recently begun to receive recognition within the strategy as practice literature, materiality has long been acknowledged within other disciplines such as anthropology, communication studies and Science and Technology Studies (STS). From STS, materiality is the idea that ‘social existence involves not only actors and social relations but also objects’ (Pinch and Swedberg, 2008, page, 1). Within strategy as practice, Le and Spee (2015) offer two descriptions of the notion of materiality. For them materiality can refer to physicality – the physical properties of a thing – and it can also refer to the significance ascribed to a thing (Le and Spee, 2015). In the former materiality involves something that is physical and separate from the mind while the latter relates to the mind.

Dameron, Le and LeBaron (2015) advocate for this shift within strategy research towards the materiality of artefacts and objects, particularly the roles that they play during strategizing and the implications of these roles. Studies therefore focus on material objects used for strategy work such as strategy tools, technologies, physical objects and artefacts, in order to gain an understanding of how, for example, the materiality of strategy tools impact on the work of strategizing (Dameron, Le and LeBaron, 2015), since they are not neutral (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). This turn is timely and seeks to respond to criticisms concerning the human-centred focus of strategy studies (Chapman et al., 2015). Le and Spee (2015, page, 591) highlight that although these ‘material aspects are fundamental to accomplishing any organisational activity and process, [they] have largely been neglected or treated as mere

background in theoretical accounts that explain phenomena such as strategic change'. Dameron, Le and LeBaron (2015) further identify five types of materials used within the work of strategizing. These include strategy tools; objects and artefacts; technologies; built spaces and human bodies. They reiterate Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets (2013), by mentioning that these materials have had little attention within the strategy literature. Golsorkhi et al. (2015) further highlight the nascent stage of materiality in strategy literature and the need for studies that adopt a materiality approach to the study of strategy work.

There are a few prior studies that have considered the use of material objects for developing strategy. For example, in Heracleous and Jacobs' (2008) work on the crafting of strategy, they demonstrate how mundane physical objects are translated into embodied metaphors and used to enable sensemaking and assist managers with debates about strategic issues. Through the use of these mundane objects, Heracleous and Jacobs (2008) report that managers were drawn 'into passionate strategic conversations' (2008, page, 317). Similarly, scholars such as Whittington et al. (2006) show how a physical artefact – a seven-sided cube which embodied the new strategy – was used as a means to communicate change. Other management studies such as Macpherson et al. (2010), show how artefacts mediate learning in organisations. They highlight that artefacts such as strategy tools provide managers with opportunities for reflection and may also engender knowledge exploration activities which are necessary for change (ibid).

More recently, Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets (2013) determine that material objects such as pictures, maps and spreadsheets are important constituent parts of the practices of underwriters in a reinsurance company. They show how underwriters use these mundane objects to carry out the task of appraising reinsurance deals. They further identify a typology of practices carried out by these underwriters in relation to the different material objects. An example of these practices is what, they refer to as 'physicalizing' practices. These are practices that involve the use of pictures for appraising reinsurance deals (ibid). What these studies

demonstrate is that practices are as Schatzki (2010, page, 123) describes: social practices consist of ‘nexuses of human practices and material arrangements’, meaning that an understanding of the practice of strategy based only on the social is a partial understanding of the phenomenon. These examples also demonstrate the importance of material objects and artefacts for the work of strategizing and highlight the need to understand the implications of the role of these objects for the strategy process.

2.5.1 Materiality approach to understanding strategy tools in practice

The turn towards materiality emphasises the importance of the materiality of strategy tools for practice. Dameron, Le and LeBaron (2015) point out that the proliferation of these strategy artefacts heightens the need for an understanding of how their materiality may either enable or constrain strategic practices. For example, the materiality of strategy tools such as physical aspects like the labels of tools, are said to influence the outputs of analysis and consequently the decisions made based on these outputs (ibid). For example, Armstrong and Brodie (1994) demonstrate through an experiment that the specific labels of matrix tools such as the BCG matrix shape the outcomes of analysis and decisions made, they conclude that such tools may ‘mislead’ users (March, 2006). Strategy tools are also said to direct the attention of actors towards specific issues and not others (Armstrong and Brodie, 1994; Brandenburger and Nalebuff, 1996; Le and Spee, 2015) such as the SWOT which is focused specifically on four categories (Dameron, Le and LeBaron, 2015). Similarly, Werle and Seidl (2015) show how material objects steer/direct the exploration of strategic topics.

The recent literature on tools based on materiality, approaches the term ‘use’ (as in the use of tools) differently from prior studies discussed above. Here, the use of tools does not refer to a general acknowledgement that tools were adopted and utilised in practice as for example Rigby

and Bilodeau (2013) report that tools are used by different organisations or that a certain tool was utilised for the purpose of situational analysis. Rather, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) conceptualise tools in terms of their situated use and refer to them as tools-in-use. Other recent studies on strategy tools also draw on this, and examine tools as they are used (Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015).

In addition to the shift in how tools are studied and the materiality turn, Dameron, Le and LeBaron (2015) further propose the use of the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1977) as a means to examine the materiality of strategy tools. As such the recent studies on strategy tools draw on the notion of affordances (Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel, 2015; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015). For example, drawing on the notion of affordances, boundary objects (Star and Griesemer, 1989), activity objects (Engestrom, 1995) and epistemic objects (Knorr Cetina, 1997, 1999; Rheinberger, 1997, 2005), Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel (2015) extend Jarratt and Stiles' (2010) argument relating to tools being adapted to the organisation's local context. In doing so, they also explain why some strategy tools are not considered to be useful.

Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel (2015) focus on how a group of managers from different functional backgrounds collectively make use of a strategy tool. These managers each develop their own versions of the tool and then come together to consolidate their disparate findings (ibid). Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel (2015) argue that strategy tools have three aspects: language, meaning and intention. They further propose that the process of adapting tools involves the adaptation of the affordances of the tools and these adaptations occur through interconnected processes of negotiations. These negotiations relate to the three aspects of the strategy tool and are mediated by what they refer to as strategy objects – these are 'material devices that are part of everyday strategy work ... and that represent strategic knowledge', such as drafts of strategic plans (Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel, 2015, page, 91). The negotiations

involve the managers working to achieve an alignment or consensus between their languages, meanings and intentions, in relation to the tool. For example, Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel (2015) argue that when managers from different functions use a tool, they are faced with language problems and therefore engage in a negotiation of language, the strategy object involved in this process acts as a boundary object which mediates the negotiations and enables the managers to achieve an agreement. These processes of negotiation are not only mediated by strategy objects but also by technologies such as PowerPoint, whose affordances enable ‘the difficult task of collaborating to negotiate meaning’ (Kaplan, 2011, p. 321).

Similarly, others such as Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009) argue that strategy tools are boundary objects (Star and Griesemer, 1989) that enable social interactions, particularly collaborations across organisational boundaries (see for example Bechky, 2003). Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) also argue that strategy tools provide a common language for managers from different functional boundaries, hierarchical levels and geographical locations. According to Star and Griesemer (1989), who developed the concept of boundary objects, these objects enable collaborations across boundaries in the absence of consensus. Although boundary objects do provide a shared language, Nicolini, Mengis and Swan (2012) note that many studies have drawn on the concept as ‘a one-size-fits-all explanation that is mobilised any time collaboration across boundaries is discussed’ (Nicolini, Mengis and Swan, 2012, page, 614) (see also Star, 2010).

Using a practice lens Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) propose a framework of tools-in-use. They examine how the interrelationship between the affordances of strategy tools and the agency of actors, influence the selection, application and outcomes of tool use (ibid). They highlight that tools are both conceptual and material devices ‘through which actors pursue multiple ends, such as negotiating about the content of PowerPoint slides’ (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015, page, 539) [emphasis added]. In addition, the affordances of strategy tools are

said to shape their use (ibid). In their framework the application of strategy tools is presented based on the affordances of tools and the agency of actors. In relation to the affordances of tools, they present three main points that highlight how strategy tools enable the work of strategizing while they are used.

Firstly, tools provide a common language for strategic conversations as aforementioned. Secondly, since tools are said to channel the attention of users particularly through their labels (as aforementioned), based on this Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) argue that when tools are used they also channel how they are adapted by users. However, this point seems to contradict their earlier point concerning tools having ‘interpretive flexibility [and] users can adapt them according to their interpretations and interests’ (ibid, page, 544). This may be taken to mean that whatever interpretations or interests a user may have they are able to adapt the tool according to their interpretations without any constraints. In other words, the former point shows that users are constrained while the latter shows users to not be constrained. This contradiction may be due to the combination of theoretical lenses used. While boundary objects involve flexibility, affordances are concerned with constraints. Where the two assertions may be aligned is if we explicitly accept that interpretations are constrained by the affordances of material objects.

Thirdly, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) argue that tools provide a place within which social interactions and participation may take place that concerns the strategy process. Those who participate or are involved in the strategy process (Collier, Fishwick and Floyd, 2004; Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Westley, 1980; Whittington, Caillaet and Yakis-Douglas, 2011) are said to be determined by top managers and members of planning departments (Grant, 2003; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011). According to Laine and Vaara (2015), most studies have focused on how the social practices of actors have enabled participation or constrained it. From a materiality perspective, material objects are seen to also play a role in enabling and constraining

participation (Jarzabkowski, Burke and Spee, 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets, 2013; Kaplan, 2011), where for instance, actors may sometimes use technology as a means to determine who participates in the process and who is excluded (Kaplan, 2011). For example, Kaplan (2011) examines the use of PowerPoint in the production of knowledge during strategy making. Due to its modular affordance PowerPoint was found to have been utilised by certain actors as a means to include and exclude both ideas and actors from the process (ibid).

According to Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) strategy tools may be used by actors as a means for sensemaking and sensegiving (Balogun and Johnson, 2004; Gioia and Chittipedi, 1991); strategy tools are also used by actors to legitimize their point of view; actors may also use tools as a means to achieve personal objectives. While traditional studies presume that tools are used for the purposes identified by their proponents and that they are used for instrumental purposes such as problem solving, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015, page, 551) conclude that '[a]ctors use tools for many reasons, in many ways, and in accomplishing a wide variety of outcomes'. Based on their argument that tools may be used for a variety of purposes, the usefulness of tools may then be relative to the user and whether or not the tool enabled the achievement of their goal as Worren et al. (2002) argued. Others such as Paroutis et al. (2015), also consider the interactions between managers and strategy tools. They examine the patterns of visual interactions that take place when strategy tools are used during strategy episodes such as workshops. They further link these interactions to the affordances of the tool identified to have enabled the interactions (Paroutis et al., 2015).

2.6 Limitations of Strategy as Practice studies

These studies have contributed to our understanding of strategy tools in different ways. They have approached tools using various conceptualisations and theoretical perspectives which have led to useful insights. The recent studies insightfully shift the focus towards considering the situated use of tools, which provides a better understanding of how tools are used in practice. Strategy tools have been shown to be used for other purposes besides instrumental purposes, such as enabling social interactions (Hodgkinson et al., 2006; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). The literature has also addressed issues related to their usefulness and alignment with the users and the types of organisations within which they are used (for example, Moisander and Stenfors, 2009; Wright et al., 2013).

The more recent materiality studies have provided insights on how tools may enable and constrain strategizing practices, how the interactions between strategy tools and users may impact on the process of knowledge production and how they are used as a means to achieve a variety of purposes which lead to a variety of outcomes (Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets, 2013; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011; Paroutis et al., 2015). Material objects such as tools and strategic plans are said to be associated with power relations and issues related to participation in strategy (Balogun et al., 2014; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2014; Kaplan, 2011; Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2011; Vaara, Sorsa and Palli, 2010).

While the extant literature has contributed to our understanding of strategy tools there are still some questions that arise and tensions within the literature for which this research seeks to address. More specifically there are two main areas identified for which the extant literature does not consider. The first relates to the mode of interaction between strategists and strategy

tools in which a mutual adaptation occurs (Chesley and Wenger, 1999; Lozeau et al., 2002).

The second relates to the disconnect between tools-in-principle and tools-in-practice.

Firstly, the strategy as practice literature examines the use of tools in practice and some studies show that strategy tools are adapted during use in practice and they are adapted according to the organisation's operating environment (Jarratt and Stiles, 2010) and the process of adaptation may be conceived as a process of negotiation (Belmondo and Sargis- Roussel, 2015). Scholars such as Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) examine the interactions between the affordances of strategy tools and the agency of managers; they argue that strategy tools are 'applied improvisationally by organisational actors, both to interpret the strategic context and pursue preferences and interests' (page, 540). While these studies show how strategy tools are adapted in practice and the purposes for which they are used that extend beyond analytical purposes, very few studies (Chesley and Wenger, 1999; Lozeau et al., 2002) consider how the actions of the managers are also influenced by the tool in return. For example, Paroutis et al. (2015) demonstrate how strategy tools may shape the pattern of interactions of managers as they utilise tools during strategy workshops. The practice studies, just as in technology studies (Leonardi, 2013), mainly provide an 'overly socialized' view of strategy tools. Leonardi's (2013) explanation of the critic of several practice studies on technology, encapsulates the limitations that are also found within the practice studies of strategy tools. Leonardi (2013, page, 64) states that:

'the practice lens has been criticized for offering an overly socialized view of technology. This critique comes from the fact that the realm of action consists of people choosing to use a technology in a certain way. Here, the technologies themselves are only peripheral players that are subject to the whims of their users'. [emphasis added]

Based on this, while the strategy as practice studies show that strategy tools are not utilised for instrumental purposes, some studies inadvertently portray tools as being used instrumentally to achieve a variety of purposes. That is, they show that strategy tools may be used for purposes that go beyond that which mainstream studies purport. However, the practice studies provide one view for considering the role of objects and this view appears to mainly portray tools as a means to an end (Eilon, 1980) and as such we do not have an understanding of how tools actively partake in the strategy making process. For example, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) describe tools as being utilised ‘improvisationally’ and assert that strategy tools are devices through which actors seek to achieve a variety of purposes. Others such as Kaplan (2011) show how PowerPoint was used as a device through which actors could intentionally manipulate participation for their benefits.

Therefore, little is still known about how strategy tools alter the actions of actors, particularly during the strategy process. This PhD research therefore seeks to explore the ways in which tools actively constitute the formation of strategy by influencing the actions of strategists as they go about the work of strategizing. We may consider for example, the question: do strategy tools contribute to issues of participation beyond being used as instruments to include and exclude? The dominant focus on what tools are used for rather than what tools do, is also illustrated by Worren et al.’s (2002) notion of pragmatic validity (mentioned above in section 2.3.5). Worren et al. (2002) argue that products of strategy research such as tools may be evaluated based on their pragmatic validity – that is, tools may be considered to be useful if they enable actors to achieve their intended purposes.

From a materiality perspective, a consideration of the definition of an object as presented by Star (2010) reveals the possibility of considering the role of tools from a different perspective than has mainly been portrayed within the literature. Star (2010, page, 603) states that ‘an object is something people ... act toward and with. Its materiality derives from action, not from a

sense of prefabricated stuff or “thing”-ness. So, a theory may be a powerful object’ [emphasis added]. This definition shows that when considering the role of objects, they may be considered not only as entities that are acted towards, but the definition suggests that these objects may also act in response to human actions (see Pickering, 1993; 1995). In order to further our understanding of the active roles strategy tools may play, I draw on insights from fields such as economic sociology, the sociology of financial markets and science and technology studies, to clearly highlight the limitations of the strategy as practice studies on strategy tools, as well as address these limitations. It is useful to draw insights from other fields such as those aforementioned mainly because studies on strategy tools are limited (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015) and studies from these fields are more established in relation to the role of the materiality of such objects as tools and the roles they play in the formation of social reality.

A good number of these studies express this difference between considering tools as artefacts that are used in an instrumental sense and considering them as artefacts that intervene and alter the actions of actors (Callon and Law, 1997) and therefore actively contribute to the formation of reality. For example, Muniesa (2008) differentiates between these two perspectives by highlighting that to argue that an object plays a role is quite ambiguous and could be taken to mean that objects ‘play a role in a purely instrumental sense, i.e., as an aid to an otherwise fully purposeful, plainly human action’ (Muniesa, 2008, page, 291) [emphasis added]. This difference in conceptualising the role of tools may be illustrated by juxtaposing some of the studies aforementioned with Giraudeau’s (2008) study of the role of drafts of strategic plans. According to Giraudeau (2008) the role of strategic plans transcends being utilised as a means for communication and control as earlier studies have shown, but these plans contribute to the emergence of strategy by stirring the imaginations of the actors through their affordances. Callon and Law (1997) also provide an explanation for why tools appear to be passive and suggest that they do more than enable the work of strategizing. According to Callon and Law

(1997, page, 178) '[n]on-humans are not simply resources or constraints. Though they sometimes act passively this doesn't have to do with their inner nature, but because they have been made passive ... [N]on-humans intervene actively to push action in unexpected directions' [emphasis added]. The idea of material objects acting or being considered to have agency has been demonstrated by a few studies that utilise the notion of performativity. For example, Vaara, Sorsa and Palli (2010) show how strategic plans perform certain actions and further generate performative effects. They conclude that 'the strategy document became a textual agent, an actor that had the capacity to produce action from a distance' (Vaara, Sorsa and Palli, 2010, page, 691).

Similarly, scholars such as Chapman, Chua and Mahama (2015) also underpin the argument that studies have portrayed tools in a passive way. This recent work by Chapman et al. (2015) highlights three main criticisms of the strategy as practice literature, one of which is that the extant literature mainly ignores the role of material objects and considers agency to be solely related to humans. They further argue that the recent literature 'associates strategy with the agency of people. Limiting agency to only intentional human actors limits what we can understand about strategy as practice ... [There is therefore a] call for research to "dissociate the notion of strategy from well-articulated, prior intentions", as "intentions follow actions or are articulated retrospectively after actions are taken". Dissociating strategy from intentionality will allow for the agency of material objects to be accounted for in strategy practices, leading to the study of how, in the performing of strategy, agency is distributed between humans and material objects' (Chapman et al., 2015, page, 266). This is underpinned by Orlikowski (2010, page, 136), by considering both humans and technologies, argues that 'rather than attributing agency either to individual actors ... or particular technologies ... capacities for action would be studied as relational, distributed and enacted'.

This first limitation relates to the second limitation identified. Most studies do not consider the role of strategy tools as both knowledge artefacts (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006) and devices used during strategy making. Instead the focus has mainly been on the latter, particularly the physical material aspects of tools (Dameron, Le and LeBaron, 2015). In other words, there is a disconnect between tools-in-principle and tools-in-practice and the role of the underlying theory within the strategy tool has received very few attention within the literature, while recent studies have mainly focused on the physical features of tools. This may be due to the arguments by prior studies on how tools are used in practice, such as Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) who conceptualise strategy tools as knowledge artefacts – carriers of strategy theory. In response to the criticism of strategy theory not being ‘actionable’ in practice, Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) also address how strategy tools are utilised in practice. They argue that strategy theory is not utilised directly in practice but goes through a process of dissociation in which it is transformed ‘into “knowledge artefacts”, such as tools, techniques, and frameworks’ (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006, page, 349). Here strategy tools are viewed as materials that are intrinsically interwoven with theoretical assumptions. This is because, as Moisander and Stenfors (2009) point out, tools are often conceived from academic research, and as such, they provide a vehicle for practitioners to enact management theories. Using a practice perspective, Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) argue otherwise. They assert that the way strategy tools are used in practice is in a form of bricolage, in which they define bricolage as ‘the practical use of theoretical artefacts in creative and adaptive ways that have little to do with their theoretical origins’ (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006, page, 350). Similarly, Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) also argue that the principles behind the tools or their intended use, may hinder the use of tools improvisationally and therefore ‘managers remove the “theoretical mask” of their intended use’ (page, 544).

Furthermore, during this practical use of tools which is in a manner of bricolage, they argue that a subsequent process of dissociation (see Figure 2.6.1) takes place in which ‘practitioners use knowledge artefacts (tools and frameworks) without reference to the theories from which they originated’ (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006, page, 350). In other words, similar to Jarratt and Stiles’ (2010) argument, they also highlight that strategy tools are adapted when utilised in practice, however, as managers utilise these tools they do so in ways that do not relate to the theoretical assumptions of the tool. Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) argue against what they refer to as a ‘representational epistemology’ of the use of tools, represented by the bold arrow A in Figure 2.5.1. This representational epistemology is said to be the impetus driving the criticisms against the usefulness of strategy tools (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006). This view is in contrast to the ‘practice epistemology’ which they argue for and is represented by arrow B (ibid).

However, in Chesley and Wenger’s (1999) study of the BSC, they explicitly point out that although the physical labels of the tool was adapted in order to fit the organisation’s context, the underlying theory had not been changed. They argue contrary to Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) that when tools are used in practice, in addition to being adapted ‘the general process and theme of the model are relatively constant across applications, but the specific vocabulary, focus, and priorities vary from organisation to organisation’ (Chesley and Wenger, 1999, page, 63). The use of the BSC in Chesley and Wenger (1999) is an example of what Lozeau et al. (2002, page, 539) refer to as customisation, which is where the tool is ‘adapted to make it more compatible with the organisation without destroying its aims ... [customisation involves] adapting the [tool] and adjusting the organisation’ [emphasis in original].

Other management and organisation studies scholars such as Cabantous and Gond (2011) also consider tools as carriers of theory. They argue that as carriers of theory when tools are utilised in practice, they contribute to the realisation of the theory in reality. They provide a framework

that shows an interrelationship between actors, tools and theory (in this case rational choice theory). Tools embodied with rational choice theory enabled the enactment of the theory in practice (Cabantous, Gond and Johnson-Cramer, 2010) and consequently the production of rationality within organisations. Similarly, Carter, Clegg and Kornberger (2010, 582) posit that strategy tools are inscribed with strategy theory and when utilised, they ‘create a world in their own image’. These studies indicate that strategy tools are performative (Callon, 1998, 2007; Carter et al., 2010; MacKenzie, 2006a, 2007) and therefore highlight that the principles behind tools also play a role in the strategy making process.

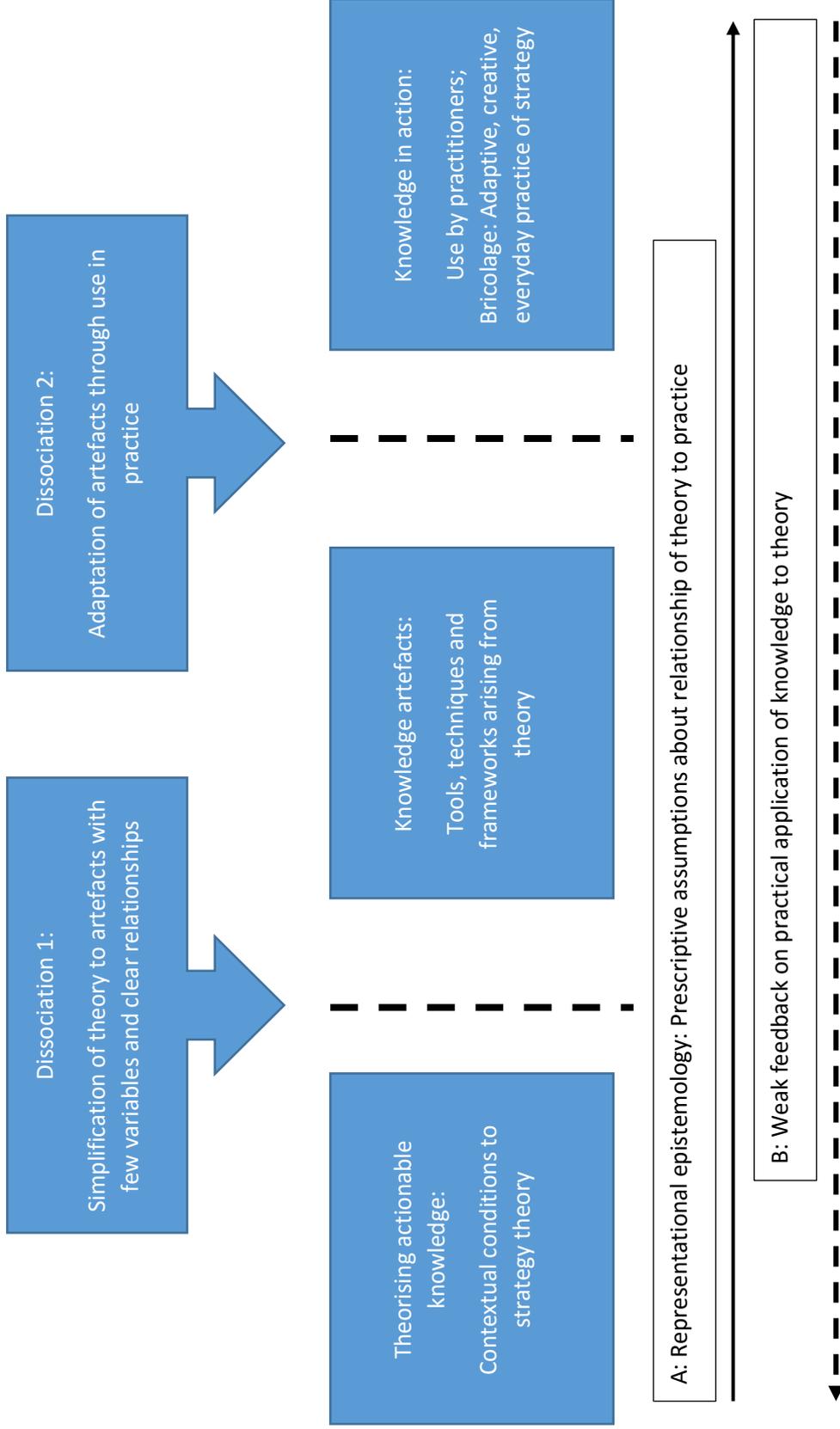


Figure 2.6.1: Process of dissociation of strategy theory in practice. Demonstration of how strategy tools as knowledge artefacts are utilised. (Source: Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006)

The arguments that tools enable the realisation of the theory within them contradicts Jarzabkowski and Wilson's (2006) argument about a process of dissociation taking place when these knowledge artefacts are used in practice. This highlights a tension within the literature. Based on this tension within the literature that highlights a disconnect between the tools-in-principle and tools-in-practice and the lack of studies that consider how tools adapt the actions of actors during use, this thesis therefore seeks to contribute to the extant literature on strategy tools by exploring the ways in which tools actively constitute the formation of strategy by influencing the actions of strategists through both their affordances and the underlying principles of the tool. I do so by examining the micro-dynamics of the interaction between the strategists and the strategy tools utilized during the process of strategy making.

2.7 Summary

In this chapter, the literature review identified the weaknesses of mainstream strategy studies which have underpinned the debates within the literature in relation to the usefulness of strategy tools. Studies from a strategy as practice perspective are seen to address these weaknesses by examining the use of strategy tools in practice, using varying conceptualisations of strategy tools and the use of different theoretical lenses. The chapter further reveals limitations and tensions within the strategy as practice literature in relation to the role of strategy tools during strategizing. Within the literature, we also find a separation between tools-in-principle, which are the mainstream studies and tools-in-practice, which are the strategy as practice studies. The limitations and tensions identified led to the need for a move towards a performative view of strategy which encompasses both tools-in-principle and tools-in-practice. Furthermore, the review led to the formation of the research questions of this PhD thesis, which asks:

‘How do strategy tools actively contribute to the formation of strategy and what are the implications of this for the work of strategy making?’

In this research, rather than consider strategy tools as the recent literature views them – as instruments used by actors to achieve purposes that range from analytical to socio-political, or as representations, they are viewed as both knowledge artefacts and devices that actively contribute to the formation of strategy. In order to address the research questions identified, this research draws on concepts from economic sociology, the sociology of financial markets, science and technology studies and the sociology of technology, in order to develop an analytical lens based on the notions of performativity and affordances. The analytical lens is discussed in the following chapter and utilised to examine the micro-dynamics of the interactions between the strategists and strategy tool produced and used during a strategy process in a UK financial institution.

Chapter 3

Towards a performative perspective of strategy tools

3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the literature on strategy tools particularly the recent strategy-as-practice literature on tools and the recent materiality turn in strategy was reviewed. A good number of these studies focus on how tools are used in practice and they draw on concepts such as affordances, boundary objects, epistemic objects and activity objects. These approaches to understanding more about the materiality of strategy tools offer several insights on these tools and how they are utilised. However, strategy tools have mainly been conceptualised in an instrumental view – they are used by managers as conduits to achieve their personal agenda. Tools are therefore mainly portrayed, inadvertently, as being passive. The materiality turn does seek to show that tools are not neutral; the main focus has been on highlighting that the physical features of tools influence analytical outcomes and the corresponding decisions made based on those outcomes. Studies from other fields such as sociology, particularly science and technology studies, reveal that objects, artefacts and devices actively contribute to the formation of reality in different ways. To conceptualize strategy tools as active participants that contribute to the formation of strategy, I draw on the notion of performativity from economic sociology and the sociology of financial markets (Callon, 1998, 2007; MacKenzie, 2006a, 2006b) and combine this with the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1979). In particular, I also draw on concepts associated with performativity. This move allowed for the development of an analytical lens that serves as the basis for addressing the research questions. By using these theoretical lenses, I am able to move beyond the realm of a human-centred view of strategy

tools to one that takes into consideration the role of strategy tools as devices that actively do things. This is, as Orlikowski and Scott (2014) articulate it, '[r]eframing conceptual concerns away from human-centred approaches' (page, 2). Tools are thus conceptualised not as a conduit that strategists use instrumentally but as actors in their own right – as devices that are carriers of strategy theory and are performative.

This chapter begins with a genealogy of the notion of performativity, which provides the foundational conceptualisations that have been adopted by management and organisation studies scholars. Studies within the strategy literature that have drawn on these different perspectives are outlined in a table in section 3.4. I pay specific attention to Michel Callon's perspective of the concept as this is the view applied within this research. I further introduce key concepts that provide some insights into what it means for a theory to be performative and for a tool as a carrier of theory to be performative. Very few studies within the strategy literature make use of this concept, these studies are also presented along with the specific conceptualisation of performativity they utilised in their respective studies. Next, I discuss the notion of affordances as a theoretical basis for the research and show how it complements my use of a performativity lens.

3.2 Performativity

The use of the notion of performativity in management and organisation studies has increased over the years and we find its application, as a theoretical lens, to vary within different fields. This is in part due to its foundational background which begins with Austin (1962), who coined the term 'performative', and continues with other scholars from philosophy (Searle, 1969; Lyotard 1979/1984; Derrida, 1979), sociology (Latour, 1986, 1987; Pickering, 1993, 1995; Callon, 1998, 1999; Mackenzie and Millo, 2003) and gender studies (Butler, 1988, 1990, 1993, 1997; Barad, 2003), conceptualising it in new and creative ways thereby producing other

dimensions of the concept. More recently the notion has been increasingly drawn on by scholars in such fields as Organisational routines (Feldman and Pentland, 2003; D’Adderio, 2008), Accounting (Skærbæk and Tryggestad, 2010), Marketing (Cochoy, 1998; Kjellberg and Helgesson, 2006, 2007, 2010), Information Systems (Pollock and D’Adderio, 2012; Pollock and Williams, 2015), Network studies (Healy, 2015), Economic Sociology (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Doganova and Muniesa, 2015; Pinch and Swedberg, 2008), Sociology of Finance (Mackenzie, 2006, 2007; Muniesa, Millo and Callon, 2007; Preda, 2006, 2007, 2008), Organisational Studies (D’Adderio and Pollock, 2014), Rational decision making (Cabantous and Gond, 2011), Communication studies (Cooren, 2004) and Strategy (Giraudeau, 2008; Guerard et al., 2013; Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Vaara et al., 2010). These studies and many others demonstrate the potential benefits of the notion of performativity as a lens for understanding and conceptualising phenomenon within the sphere of strategy. The next section provides an overview of the genealogy of the concept of performativity, beginning with the work of J. L. Austin in linguistics.

3.3 Background: one concept, five main perspectives

The origin of the notion of performativity is linked to linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin (Austin, 1962). Austin identified that certain sentences or utterances are performatives and saw these utterances not as constatives or descriptions but as having ‘the potential to create (new) reality’ (Diedrich et al., 2013). Performative utterances, according to Austin, do not simply state a fact or describe a setting, rather the utterance of a performative sentence ‘is the performing of an action’ (Austin, 1962: 6). Austin asserts that these performative utterances must satisfy the following conditions:

- A. they do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and

- B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as ‘just’, saying something. (Austin, 1975: 5)
[emphasis in original]

For example, by saying ‘I do’ during a marriage ceremony is not a descriptive statement but a performative one in which the actor becomes a married person. The spoken words perform an action. We therefore find a distinction between statements that describe an ‘already-existing state of affairs’ (Mackenzie, 2006b: 16) and ones that bring about the existence of what they describe.

3.3.1 Performativity of knowledge

Austin’s idea of performative utterances has since translated beyond language theory. Lyotard (1979/1984) applies the concept to the study of knowledge within the context of a postmodern society. Lyotard proposed that as societies and cultures transitioned into what he referred to as a ‘postindustrial’ and postmodern age, respectively, the technological advances associated with this new age would impact on knowledge. Thus, leading to a ‘transformation in the nature of knowledge’, how it is generated, disseminated and used (Lyotard, 1979/1984, page 6). Lyotard asserts that the ‘nature of knowledge cannot survive unchanged within this context of general transformation’ (ibid, page, 4) and draws particular attention to this transformation of knowledge and the corresponding effects it has on, for example, ‘public power and civil institutions’ (ibid, page, 7). For Lyotard performativity is the optimization of efficiency/performance – the efficiency of a system. He states that ‘The term *performative* has taken on a precise meaning in language theory since Austin. Later in this book, the concept will reappear in association with the term *performativity* (in particular, of a system) in the new current sense of efficiency measured according to an input/output ratio. The two meanings are not far apart. Austin’s performative realizes the optimal performance’ (Lyotard, 1979/1984, page 88) [emphasis in original]. Lyotard problematizes this performativity – that is, a logic of

optimization (Muniesa, 2014). He argues that in order to legitimate or validate scientific statements one requires efficiency, in order to achieve optimal efficiency (i.e. performativity), one requires technology and in order to utilise technology one requires funds for the technology. Lyotard summarises this by stating '[n]o money, no proof – and that means no verification of statements and no truth' and we therefore find that it is those that are the wealthiest that are able to establish truth in society (ibid, page 45). Furthermore, Lyotard expresses concerns that in this postmodern condition the production of proof is not actually geared towards the achievement of truth but rather the goal is 'performativity – that is, the best possible input/output equation' (ibid, page, 46) and this propensity of a performativity criterion (an optimal efficiency criterion) also has effects on the dissemination of knowledge. What Lyotard shows in this work is that the knowledge of a postmodern world is performative.

3.3.2 Gender as being repeatedly performed rather than a metaphysical substance

In challenging the existing paradigms of gender, Judith Butler draws on Jaques Derrida's views on performativity as well as insights from Foucault. Butler applies the concept of performativity within gender studies. In 'Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity', for which Butler is well known for, Butler (1990) argues against the commonly held (and lived) paradigm of what gender is – an attribute or essence of an individual, in which individuals each have one fixed gender identity that is inherent and falls under the categories of either woman or man. Butler in presenting a performative view of gender, argues for an ontological shift towards understanding gender as 'something that one becomes ... [and is therefore] a kind of becoming or activity [which is] an incessant and repeated action of some sort' rather than a noun (Butler, 1990, page, 112). Butler thus asserts that 'gender proves to be

performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be’ (ibid, page, 25), it is not a stable identity or ‘metaphysical substance that precedes its expression’ (Butler, 2010, page, 147). In ‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’, Goffman argues that individuals perform roles rather than their true selves when in a social setting. Using dramaturgical analogy, Goffman argues that there exist a front stage and a backstage of every individual. The former being the role played by the individual (who is in this case an actor on stage) at the time and the latter being the individual’s true self which they keep judiciously hidden. In other words people perform roles when in the presence of others. While Goffman distinguishes between the performance given and the real self behind the performance, Butler argues that there isn’t a ‘doer’ behind performances. For Butler ‘[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler, 1990, 25).

3.3.3 A Posthumanist Performativity – sociomateriality

Feminist theorist Karen Barad presents a conceptualisation of performativity that is inspired by her background in Theoretical Physics, and other scholars such as Butler, Michel Foucault and Science and Technology Studies scholars such as Latour. Similar to Pickering (1995), who differentiates between a representationalist idiom and a performative idiom, Barad expresses problems related to a representationalist view of the world in which there exist ‘representations on the one hand and ontologically separate entities awaiting representation on the other’ (Barad, 2003, page, 807). In order to avoid representationalism, Barad advocates instead for a posthumanist conceptualisation of performativity, which provides an avenue to move away from linguistic representations. This view focuses instead on discursive practices and materiality as being performative. Here matter is considered as actively contributing to the world’s becoming (Barad, 2003) and both materiality and discourse are inextricably entangled

– they are ‘ontologically inseparable’ (Orlikowski and Scott, 2014). This posthumanist performativity is ‘one that incorporates important material and discursive, social and scientific, human and nonhuman, and natural and cultural factors. A posthumanist account calls into question the givenness of the differential categories of “human” and “nonhuman,” examining the practices through which these differential boundaries are stabilized and destabilized’ (Barad, 2003, page, 808).

3.3.4 Performative versus Ostensive

Performativity is a central notion within Science and Technology Studies (STS), for which scholars such as Bruno Latour and Michel Callon are affiliated. In ‘the power of association’, Latour (1986) asserts that power is not something that an individual has but rather is a consequence of what people do. Latour presents this paradox as follows: ‘when an actor simply *has* power nothing happens and s/he is powerless; when, on the other hand, an actor *exerts* power it is others who perform the action. It appears that power is not something one can possess – indeed it must be treated as a consequence rather than as a cause of action’ (Latour, 1986, page, 264) [emphasis in original]. Latour distinguishes between a model of diffusion and a model of translation. The former is the normative way in which power has most often been conceived. In this diffusion model, we assume that it is the power that a manager has within an organisation, for example, that causes the order she/he has given to be executed by the one hundred people that report to him/her. We tend to attribute the force that caused the one hundred people to execute the order to the manager. In this model of diffusion, the command from the manager is seen as the ‘initial force that triggers the movements and which constitutes its only energy’ (Latour, 1986, page, 266). In other words, the manager’s power is the impetus that drives the order given, it is the cause of people’s actions. On the other hand, is the model of translation, in which the order given by a manager is not driven by the manager’s ‘power’

and executed by a passive medium – that is the one hundred. Rather what you find is that the manager’s order is executed by ‘active members shaping and changing the [order] as it is moved’ (ibid, page, 268). A transformation takes place at each point or person that the order gets to.

Latour maintains that people such as the one hundred, obey orders given because they seek to achieve their own interests and in doing so they modify the order. According to Latour ‘[p]ower is always the illusion people get when they are obeyed; thinking in terms of the diffusion model, they imagine that others behave because of the masters’ clout without ever suspecting the many different reasons others have for obeying and doing something else ...’ (1986, page, 268). Based on a performative view, constructs such as power are therefore seen as a consequence rather than a cause. Following this line of thought, Latour argues that ‘if society is made before our eyes then it cannot *explain* our behaviour but is rather shaped by our collective action. It is no more the cause of the latter than power itself’ (ibid, page, 272) [emphasis in original]. Latour therefore advocates for a shift from an ostensive definition of society which is society in principle, to a performative definition of society, which is society in practice. Butler’s argument in some sense is similar to Latour’s view of society, in that they both argue that gender and society respectively should not be seen as the cause but as the consequence of actions.

This genealogy (see Figure 3.3.1) of the concept of performativity also includes the work by Callon (1998), who developed Latour’s (1996) idea of understanding how scientific statements or theories or models were performative (Gond et al., 2015). This research is based on Callon and Mackenzie’s conceptualisation of performativity and is therefore discussed more comprehensively in the next section. These scholars form the foundational background of performativity that has mainly guided management and organisation studies that draw on the concept. Although there are several conceptualisations of the concept, there is still a thread of

commonality that weaves through them all and that is the becoming or bringing about of a thing or reality (see Table 3.3.1).

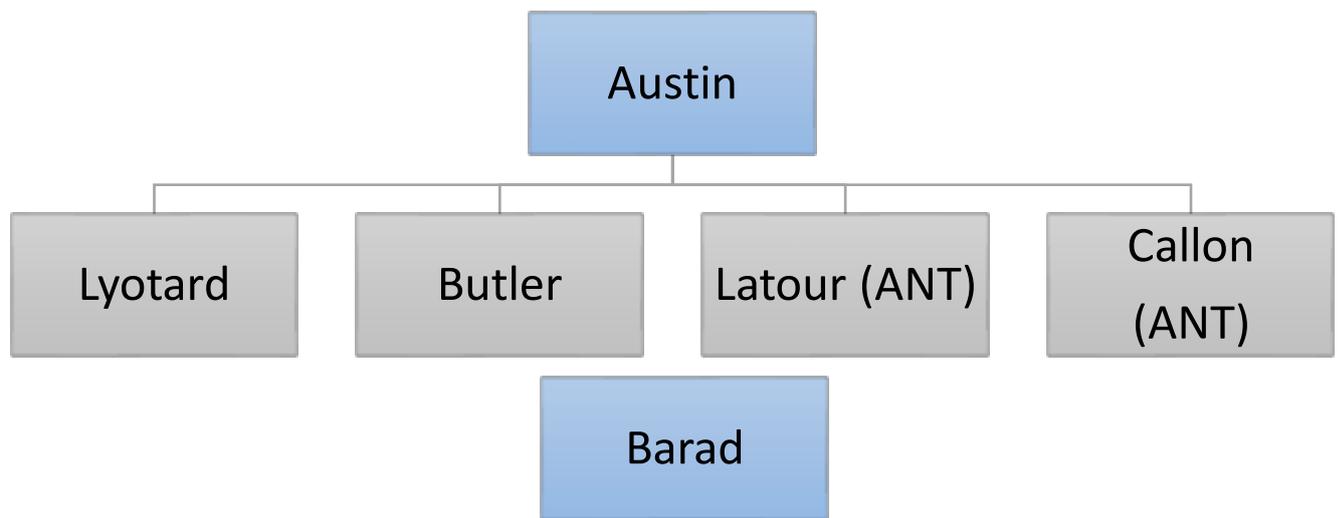


Figure 3.3.1: Foundational Conceptualizations of Performativity (Source: Gond et al., 2015)

3.3.5 Performativity as theories being realised

Callon applies the notion of performativity within the field of economic sociology. He argues that a theory or a model or a statement is performative when it ‘actively engage[s] in the constitution of the reality that it describes’ (Callon, 2007: 318). In the case of economics, Callon (1998) argues that it does not simply describe an economic setting or reality but in actuality it plays an active part in bringing about the setting that it is said to describe: ‘economics, in the broad sense of the term, performs, shapes and formats the economy, rather than observing how it functions’ (Callon, 1998: 2). MacKenzie provides an empirical illustration of Callon’s perspective of performativity with his work on option pricing theory (see MacKenzie and Millo, 2003; MacKenzie, 2006a). What Callon and others such as MacKenzie show, is that there is a formative relationship that exist between economic theory

Foundational perspectives	Foundational author(s), research roots	Main question(s)	Key concepts or thesis	What is performed?	Outcomes of performativity
Performativity as doing things with words	Austin (1962) Searle (1969) <i>Philosophy and linguistics</i>	How to do things with words?	Processes whereby an utterance does what it says; speech acts; typology of speech acts	Utterance, discourse	Realization of actions described by the performed utterance
Performativity as efficiency	Lyotard (1984/1979) <i>Philosophy and postmodernism</i>	What characterizes knowledge production in post-modern societies?	Alignment of truth, knowledge and the search for efficiency in postmodern societies	Knowledge	Rationalization of education systems through the search for performance
Performativity as actors' constituting the self	Derrida (1979) <i>Philosophy</i> Butler (1990, 1993, 1997) <i>Gender studies</i>	How do actors create their own selves?	Key role of citation in the constitution of actors through texts	Identity, gender, social roles	Gendering Enforcement of political projects by voicing/silencing
Performativity as bringing theory into being	Barnes (1983) Pickering (1995) <i>Social studies of sciences</i> Callon (1998); Mackenzie and Millo (2003) <i>Economic sociology</i>	How do theories shape realities?	The 'performativity of economics thesis'; influence of expert bodies of knowledge	Expert bodies of knowledge, science, actor networks	Scientific disciplines Embodiment of influential theories within social reality
Performativity as socio-materiality mattering	Barad (2003, 2007) <i>Gender studies and post-humanism</i> Latour (1986, 2005) <i>Actor-Network Theory</i>	How do things constitute reality through actors' practices?	Vocabulary to analyse the constitution of boundaries between social and material entities (intra-objects, intra-action, agential realism, agential cuts)	Gender, Socio-material entities	Constitutions of actors, meanings and roles through socio-material practices

Table 3.3.1: Foundational conceptualisations of performativity in management and organisation studies (Source: Gond et al., 2015)

and the market (Pollock and Williams, 2015). Callon's thesis is not restricted to economic theory alone but to other aspects such as ideas, techniques and *tools* (Diedrich et al., 2013) such as strategy tools.

Levels/Degrees of performativity

Mackenzie (2006b) furthers Callon's work by showing the nuances of performativity. Mackenzie (2006b) argues that there are at least three levels of performativity: generic performativity, effective performativity and Barnesian and counterperformativity. Using economics, Mackenzie suggests that economics influences the economy in varying magnitudes, where the effect ranges from a weak generic performativity to a strong Barnesian performativity.

Generic performativity

Economics, whether in the form of a theory, model, concept, procedure or dataset, exhibits generic performativity simply by being utilised in economic processes (Mackenzie, 2006b). Mackenzie refers to this level of performativity as the weakest and explains that we can empirically identify this form of performativity by observing the work of policy makers or market participants, for example, to see whether or not economic theories have been drawn on and used during economic processes. This weaker form of performativity has little or no effect (that is readily observable) (D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014). Mackenzie cautions that observers not only refer to 'what participants say and write but also at whether the processes in question involve procedures and *material devices* that incorporate economics' (2006b: 18) [emphasis added].

Effective performativity

This level of performativity is as its name denotes, unlike the generic level, it has an effect that is more evident than the previous form. By using an aspect of economics, this theory of

economics (such as option pricing theory) may have an effect on the economic processes within which it is used. MacKenzie argues that ‘for the use of a theory, a model, a concept, a procedure, a data set, or some other aspect of economics to count as effective performativity, the use must *make a difference*’ (2006b: 18) [emphasis in original]. For example, the theory might impact on the behaviour or practices of the actors involved in the process (Preda, 2006). Beyond this level of performativity is a much stronger version which may take one of two forms: Barnesian or counterperformativity.

Barnesian performativity and Counterperformativity

For Mackenzie an aspect of economics that not only has an effect on economic processes, but the use of the theory actually alters or transforms the setting in such a way that the setting or process resembles the theory, is the much stronger version of performativity known as Barnesian performativity. This is illustrated by Marie-France Garcia’s (1986) study of the transformation of the table strawberry market as recounted by Callon (1998) in ‘The Laws of the Market’. In Garcia’s study we find that the process through which the strawberry table market operated was in line with neo-classical theory (Callon, 1998). Garcia highlights that the table strawberry market case is a ‘concrete realization of the pure model of perfect competition, a model that occupies pride of place in economic theory’ (Garcia-Parpet, 2007: 20). Conversely, the use of an aspect of economics during an economic process may alter the process in such a way that the process or its outcomes look completely different from the aspect of economics used. In other words the use of the theory produces an effect that causes the process to be nothing like the theory. This is type of performativity is what Mackenzie refers to as counterperformativity. It can be thought of as the mirror image of Barnesian performativity (it is the reverse of Barnesian performativity). MacKenzie’s case of the Black-Scholes formula exemplified this type of performativity, where the formula *induced* behaviours that opposed the formula itself. MacKenzie’s concept of counterperformativity is similar to

Callon's concept of overflowing. They both refer to circumstances in which the theory or tool generates effects that are counter to the world within the theory. Callon describes it this way:

‘MacKenzie proposes the notion of counter-performativity to denote these failures, because in this case the formula produces behaviors that eventually undermine it. This analysis applies equally to the natural sciences and to human and social sciences. What Popper called refutation is another name for counter-performativity or what I have called overflowing. The fact of imposing devices designed to realize a statement causes other worlds to proliferate in reaction to that performance. Any act, even of language, produces effects that might strike back. The history of science is nothing but the long and interminable series of untimely overflowings, of socio-technical *agencements* that have been caught out, unable to discipline and frame the entities that they assemble. Just as, through their very actions, a badly calculated boat, an ill-adjusted missile or a wrongly formulated theorem reveal unsuspected worlds, the Black and Scholes formula sets in motion events that without it would not have happened and that, once taken into account, lead to new socio-technical *agencements*. What is at stake is the success or failure of the performance, what is at stake is the realization of the socio-technical *agencement* inscribed in the statement.’ (Callon, 2007, page, 323-324) [emphasis in original]

Scholars such as Kjellberg and Helgesson (2006) highlight that most studies on performativity have mainly focused on financial markets and auctions. They apply the concept within the context of mundane markets – retail – and argue that there could be a multiplicity of theories that shape a market rather than just one. A similar line of thought is also expressed by D’Adderio and Pollock (2014). They assert that for a theory to be performative there must be the existence of a competing theory and theories that complement the dominant theory within a setting (ibid). Callon’s conceptualisation of performativity is beneficial to this study because

it ‘emphasizes the agential role of ... technologies’ (Preda, 2007, page 40) such as theories, tools and techniques.

3.4 What does it mean for a model or a tool to be performative?

Mackenzie (2006a) specifically clarifies that the term performative, generally, is not restricted to economics; it has ‘a general theoretical stance: the postulates that “phenomena only exist in the doing of them” and “they have to be continuously performed to exist at all”’ (Callon, 2004)’ (MacKenzie, 2006a, page, 34). These underlying assumptions highlighted by Callon reiterates Latour’s idea of the concept as aforementioned. That is, it is in the doing that things are brought into existence and this *doing* or the actions of the actors that lead to the production of the phenomenon does not only include what people do but it encompasses both humans and non-humans (MacKenzie, 2006a; see also Latour, 1987) such as objects, artefacts, models, techniques and devices. In other words, material things contribute to the realisation of theory in reality.

What it means for a model or a tool in general to be performative is given by Callon (2007), although he refers to science, it also applies to other fields as has been demonstrated by studies on economics, financial markets and other fields such as social network studies:

‘Scientific theories, models and statements are not constative; they are performative, that is, *actively* engaged in the constitution of the reality that it describes’ (Callon, 2007, page, 318) [emphasis added].

This is illustrated by the table strawberry market case by Garcia in Callon (1998). In the table strawberry market example, we find the characteristics of a model of perfect competition. Transactions between buyers and sellers that had previously been done on an interpersonal level had now been moved to a designated warehouse. Catalogues that contained information

about the strawberries which were packed in batches had been given to the buyers. The auction rooms were designed in such a way that the buyers and sellers could not see each other. Everyone had access to the same information. The buyers could easily compare the quality and quantity of the strawberries by looking at the displays and consulting their catalogues. Prices were displayed on an electronic board for everyone to see. The auction process occurred in a degressive manner. Callon (1998) explains that it was all the different elements and devices within the case study that framed the transactions that took place within this market. In other words, the different material elements present played a key role in shaping the actions of the agents (D'Adderio, 2008). Callon highlights the important role that these material elements play which lead to the theory being performed. He states that 'the crucial point is not that of the intrinsic competencies of the agent but that of the equipment and devices (material: the warehouse, the batches [of strawberries] displayed side by side; metrological: the meter; and procedural: degressive bidding) which give his or her actions a shape' (1998: 21). Indeed, in the study of the table strawberry market, we see the characteristics of a perfectly competitive market. Garcia-Parpet concludes that in this case we find that 'the four conditions for a perfect market are fulfilled' (2007: 27).

The example of the table strawberry market calls to mind the concept of a socio-technical *agencement*. *Agencement*, according to Callon (2007), is a French word with no proper English translation, the closest meanings are assemblage or arrangement. The concept of an *agencement* takes into consideration the role of materiality in the performance of a theory. An *agencement* 'has the same root as agency: *agencements* are arrangements endowed with the capacity of acting in different ways depending on their configuration' (Callon, 2007: 320). This socio-technical *agencement* can be considered as the world within a theory or a tool, it is 'a heterogeneous configuration of actors and materials that supports' the assumptions of the theory (D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014, page 1816). Agency is seen as a product of the

agencement (Muniesa, 2008). Callon uses MacKenzie's (2003) study of the Black and Scholes formula as an illustration of this concept, explaining that what Mackenzie describes is an example of how the world within the formula was gradually brought into being: 'a formula that progressively discovers its world and a world that is put into motion by the formula describing it' (Callon, 2007, page, 320). According to Muniesa et al. (2007) an agencement is able to render things, behaviours and processes to be more like it. Using economics as an example of this Mackenzie (2006a) puts it this way, using an aspect of economics produces an effect in which the aspect of economics used actually makes economic processes more like the aspect of economics.

By suggesting that strategy tools are performative I mean, as MacKenzie (2006a) argues, that they do things; they exert certain performative effects. Such devices are able to induce certain types of behaviour or trigger a collaboration or cooperation. They may also act as a cognitive prosthesis for users – that is, they enable actors to overcome cognitive limitations (MacKenzie, 2006b). The tool can be seen as performative when its assumptions are supported by a heterogeneous arrangement of materials and actors that is – a socio-technical agencement (D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014). In other words, Callon's argument is that a theory is performative when it is able to create a socio-technical agencement that corresponds to it (Pollock and William, 2015). Beyond option pricing theory other studies within the fields of economic sociology, management and organisation, demonstrate how entities such as ranking devices (Pollock and D'Adderio, 2012), technical analysis (Preda, 2007), business models (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Doganova and Muniesa, 2015), rational choice theory (Cabantous and Gond, 2011), modularity theory (D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014), texts (Cooren, 2004) and strategic plans (Giraudeau, 2008; Vaara et al., 2010; Kornberger and Clegg, 2011) are performative.

Other studies such as those based on financial markets highlight the role of market devices – these are objects, tools, instruments, techniques such as calculating tools that enable market activities (Muniesa, 2008), they are ‘material and discursive assemblages that intervene in the construction of markets’ (Muniesa et al., 2007, page, 2) – and provide us with an understanding of the importance of the material aspects of the construction of markets (Muniesa et al., 2007). These devices are said to provoke economic behaviours (ibid). For example, studies have shown how devices such as the stock ticker altered the practices of stockbrokers (Preda, 2006), how an object such as the telephone shapes what people do and thereby contributes to the way that financial markets operate (Muniesa, 2008). Others such as Miller and O’Leary (2007) whose study is at the intersection of accounting, science studies and economic sociology analyse the role of two ‘mediating instruments’ – Moore’s law and technology maps – employed within the microprocessor industry and how these devices linked heterogeneous actors and domains, coordinated their actions and consequently contributed to the formation of the market. In accounting studies, Whittle and Mueller (2010) show how management accounting systems (MAS) are not simply for measuring performance, rather the MAS was found to be a ‘macro actor’ at the centre of political activity that took place during strategy formulation. The MAS was found to have acted as an “obligatory point of passage” – which is said to be ‘the only path through which the actors can further their interests’ – and therefore played a key role in highlighting specific ideas as being strategic (ibid, pages, 629, 631).

Preda (2007) provides a sociological study of the history of financial analysis, in particular, the formation and legitimation of technical analysis also referred to as financial chartism (a form of expert knowledge/theory of the market), which is a method or approach used to analyse financial securities. Expert knowledge such as Chartism or even strategy theory can take on different forms, as theories they can be represented in for example, visual forms and material forms such as charts (in the case of chartism) and strategy tools (in the case of strategy). These

devices can also be thought of as knowledge artefacts (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006) or carriers of theory as seen in Cabantous and Gond (2011), who show that some tools are carriers of rational choice theory. This expert knowledge whichever form it takes, is argued by Preda (2007) to be performative. Preda (2007) showed that technical analysis was not only a theoretical view or description of how the market works but it was materialised as texts, financial charts and statistics and used in the formation of a new market – a market that had its own terminologies, professional certifications, education, conferences etc. Such devices are useful for shaping the actions of actors (Callon, 1998). These devices not only shape practices but they can indeed lead to the formation of a reality that could be beneficial or detrimental. MacKenzie demonstrates the latter by showing that the use of the Black and Scholes formula eventually led to a crisis situation.

In other fields such as information systems (IS), we see how a magic quadrant – a 2 X 2 matrix – contributed to the reconfiguration of how IT systems are selected and procured (Pollock and D’Adderio, 2012; Pollock and Williams, 2015). Similar to Miller and O’Leary’s (2007) technology roadmaps which embodied Moore’s law, in Cabantous and Gond’s (2011) study of rational decision making praxis as being performative, they argue that tools mediate between theory and reality. This they argue, explains part of the persistence of rational choice theory within organisations because the tools applied by managers embody principles of rational choice theory; ‘[t]hese devices turn rational choice theory into a social reality that is accessible, available, and potentially useful’ (Cabantous and Gond, 2011, page 580).

The performativity of tools, theories or models, which embody expert knowledge (such as strategy theory), is determined by several factors. One of these factors according to Preda (2007) is the interests of actors, which leads them to adopt and utilize the tools and they do so in order to achieve their agenda. Similar to Preda’s (2007) argument, Callon (2007) explains that the formation or existence of the socio-technical agencement (or the world within the tool

or theory) is dependent not only on the tool/theory but also on other forces – the interests of the actors. This is exemplified by the case of the Black-Scholes formula (MacKenzie, 2003; MacKenzie and Millo, 2003). The formula was ‘adopted by traders on the Chicago Board of Trade because it served their particular interests in the competition with the New York Stock Exchange ...’ (Preda, 2007, page, 44). However, the performativity approach and its inclusion of the role of the material in the formation or emergence or configuration of a reality, allows us to see that these tools are not conduits because they have, as the studies aforementioned have shown, the capacity to intervene and alter actions. This means that even when managers have specific interests and agendas they wish to accomplish through tools, these tools are not passive in that they completely align with the plans of the actors. The tools may not always work as planned and the managers have to alter their actions (Callon and Law, 1997). These studies are not simply accounts of devices being passive or being used instrumentally ‘as an aid to an otherwise fully purposeful, plainly human action’ (Muniesa, 2008, page, 291). Rather they point to an agencement, to the agential role of such devices as strategy tools.

In their study of business models used by entrepreneurs to establish a new venture, Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009) suggest that objects may be performative in different ways. Doganova and Muniesa (2015) show how the business model was performative in three specific ways: as a performance, as a scale model and as a role model. As a performance ‘the business model is not only a statement, but an act – an act of exhibiting something, presenting it to an audience, putting it on stage’ (ibid, 113). For example the presentation of the business model on a PowerPoint slide to potential investors. They further assert that based on this role of the business model they are narratives that *convince*; they contribute to the work of convincing their audience(s). The second performative role that the business model performs is that of a scale model, in which it acts as a miniature representation of the future venture. As a scale model the business model can be ‘played’ with or experimented with and can therefore

be used to change organisations or they can be used for the formation of a new business. According to Doganova and Muniesa, the business model's performative role as a scale model is most evident when it is being used to build a new business. This is so because the business model 'describes [the] future enterprise – states what its activities will be, what customers it will serve and what alliances it will establish, etc. – and, in so doing, it helps bring this future enterprise into existence, because it helps *enrol* necessary partners, such as investors' (ibid, page, 114) [emphasis added]. That is, the business model not only describes the relationships needed for the formation of the venture but it moves about or circulates enrolling the necessary actors – building the network of relationships it described and thereby contributes to the formation of the new venture (ibid). The third performative role of the business model is that of a role model. As a role model it is emulated or replicated by others, particularly in cases where the venture formed was successful and maintained its success with time. For example, Doganova and Muniesa show how Google's AdWords and 'the sponsored search/pay per click business model' was drawn on and emulated by new entrants into the internet market because the model had proved to be economically viable (Doganova and Muniesa, 2015, page, 117).

In addition to the three performative roles highlighted, the same way that strategy tools are said to be carriers of theory or knowledge artefacts (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006; Cabantous and Gond, 2011), Doganova and Muniesa (2015) further address the question of what it is that the business model performs. That is what theory is it a carrier of and therefore performs? Using Google and Genentech, Doganova and Muniesa demonstrate that business models are valuation devices, specifically capitalization devices that are carriers of a theory of valuation and by using such tools the world or theory of valuation within the business model is performed. Doganova and Muniesa (2015) argue that the business model is a device that 'performs a singular mode of valuation', it does so by transforming that which is seen as non-economic – such as the genetic engineering technology in the Genentech case – 'into "assets"'

that have the power to generate streams of future revenues' (ibid, page 119). The theory of valuation within the BM is thus, one that views value creation not as viewing things as objects that can be bought and sold but value in this case is found in the 'earning power' of the thing (ibid).

In addition to the studies from economic sociology, studies of the sociology of financial markets, information systems and others, there are a few studies within the Strategy field that have also drawn on the notion of performativity (see Table 3.4.2 for examples), even fewer make use of Callon's conceptualisation of the concept. These studies within the strategy field show how strategy discourse, strategic plans to be exact, are performative in an Austinian sense, which is the dominant approach used within the strategy literature. For instance, Vaara et al. (2010) focus on strategic plans, they show how the strategic plan of a city was performative and exerted power effects in order to legitimise actions. They show that strategic plans are not simply mere documents, but actually have textual agency (Cooren, 2004). Similarly, Kornberger and Clegg (2011) look at the strategic plan of another city and show that they legitimised the outcomes and just as in Kaplan's (2011) work, they show how these plans highlighted the interests of some while excluding or silencing others. A consideration of how strategy tools are performative, would at first present one with the idea of viewing them as performative in an Austinian sense. In this research, I show how these tools are also performative in a Callonian sense, which highlights some of the performative roles that strategy tools play that have not necessarily been clearly articulated within the recent literature on strategy tools. Other studies such as Giraudeau (2008), draw on Actor Network Theory, and also examine strategic plans. Giraudeau (2008) shows how strategic plans do more than enable communication and control, they contribute to the emergence of new strategies by stirring the imagination of managers and promoting creativity. The notion of performativity is important for a more sophisticated understanding of the role that strategy tools play in strategy-making

processes because it helps to identify how they may play an active part in shaping the process and its outcomes.

Table 3.4.2: Perspectives of performativity used in Strategy (Source: Guerard et al., 2013)

Perspective of performativity	Examples	Application of performativity perspective	Findings
Austinian Perspective	Kornberger and Clegg, 2011	Performative role played by the discourse of strategy	The strategy discourse of the city of Sidney discursively created a particular conception of the city and a sense of community
	Sorsa, Vaara and Langley, 2010	Performative role played by the discourse of strategy	Strategic plans produce what they describe
	Vaara, Sorsa and Palli, 2010	Performative role played by the discourse of strategy	Strategic plans are influential texts that exert power effects
Butlerian Perspective	Rouleau, 2005	Strategy as repetitive enactment of strategic discourse	Strategy is repetitively enacted in everyday activities
	Mantere and Vaara, 2008	Strategy as repetitive enactment of strategic discourse	Different strategy discourses produce different subject positions and different opportunities for participating in the strategy
Callonian perspective	Carter, Clegg and Kornberger, 2010	Enactment of theoretical models of strategy producing corresponding strategies	Porter's model of competitive strategy creates corresponding strategic activities
	Cabantous and Gond, 2011	Enactment of theoretical models of strategy producing corresponding strategies	By using decision-making tools that are based on rational choice theory, actors produce behaviour in line with rational choice theory
Lyotardian perspective	Denis, Langley and Rouleau, 2006	The predominance of performance criterion in the practice of strategy	The dynamics of a preoccupation with technical performance and measurement in relation to a strategy
	Whittington, Basak-Yakis and Cailluet, 2011	The predominance of performance criterion in the practice of strategy	Pressure on strategists to perform in order to avoid being replaced

In Cabantous and Gond (2011), they adopt a performativity lens as well as a practice perspective and present the concept of a performative praxis, which is the ‘sets of activities that enable theories to become social reality’ (Gond et al., 2015, page, 13). They provide a framework that suggests how theories are realised in practice, using rational choice theory. They posit that rationality is produced in organisations through the interrelationship between theory, actors and tools (See Figure 3.4.2) and this linkage is driven and maintained by three mechanisms: rationality commodification, rationality engineering and rationality conventionalization.

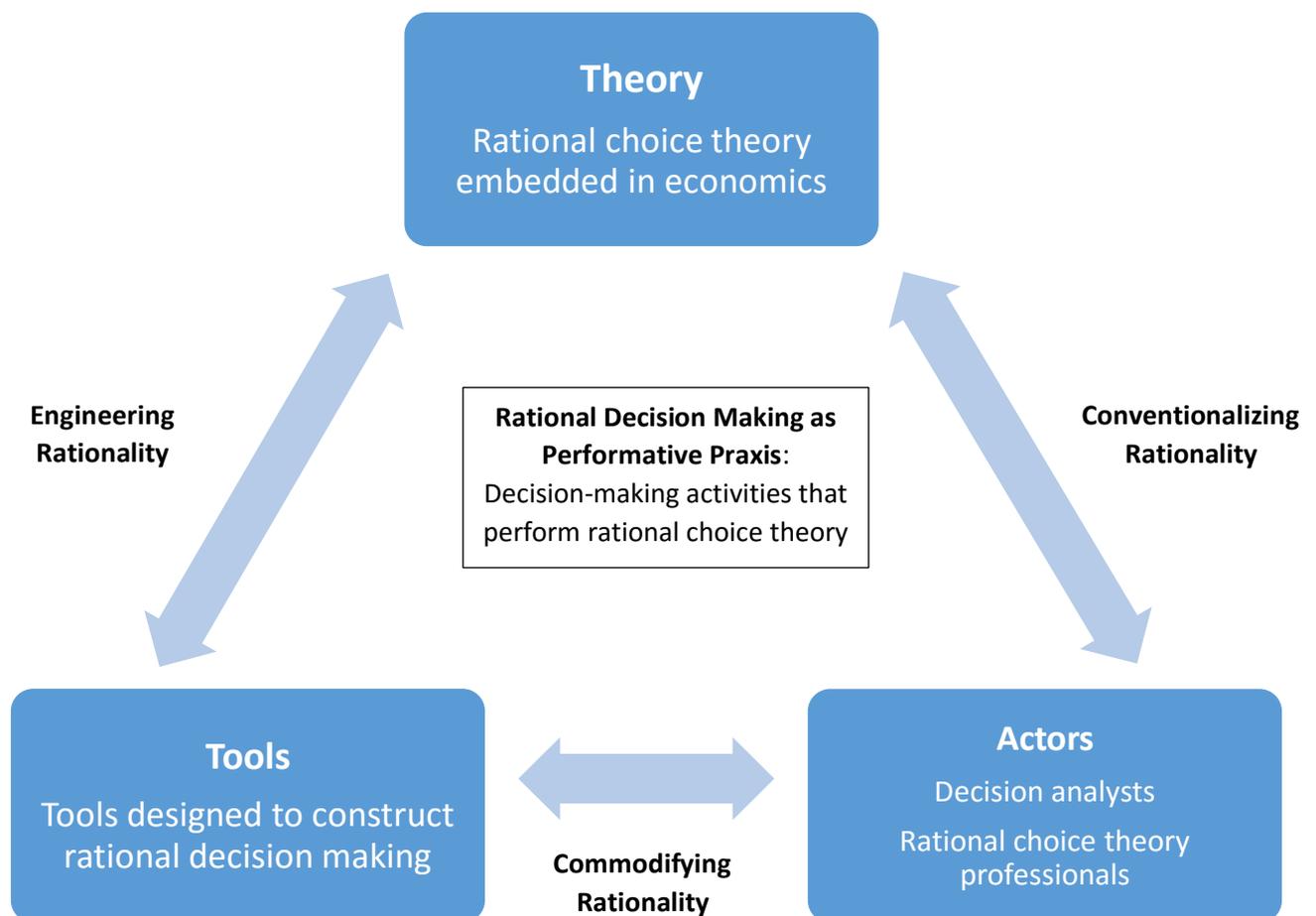


Figure 3.4.2: Framework of Rational decision-making as a performative praxis (Source: Cabantous and Gond, 2011)

These mechanisms represent the theory being present cognitively in the minds of the actors as a social norm or convention that has been passed on to actors through their education or some other means (conventionalization), the theory being made available to the actors in the form of tools or practices purveyed and recommended by consultants or academics (commodification) and these tools, which are carriers of the theory, are present within the organisation as a frame (engineering). Cabantous and Gond (2011) argue that these three mechanisms explain why rational decision-making praxis occurs within organisations. An example of their thesis, particularly the aspect of conventionalization, can be seen in the study by Lozeau et al. (2002) on the contextual use of strategy tools. Lozeau et al. (2002) argue that some tools are meant specifically for the private sector and when utilized within a public sector setting, there will be a compatibility gap between the assumptions of the tool and the existing assumptions within the public sector organisations. They suggest that one of the ways in which this gap will be dealt with is a ‘transformation’, here they state that ‘the technique [or tool] may transform the organization so that its functioning fits the theory behind the technique’ (Lozeau et al., 2002, page, 539). In other words, they make the same argument as Cabantous and Gond (2011), which is that tools are capable of turning theory into reality. However, based on their empirical findings their work lies within the sphere of conventionalization – that is, as Cabantous and Gond (2011) explain, the theory is in the mind of the actors – and Lozeau et al. (2002) do not actually tell us *how* a tool does this work of transformation. Furthermore, they do not – as many earlier studies on tools – consider the material elements of the process of adopting and utilizing these tools.

What is of concern in this thesis is the role of the tools in this process. The mechanism of engineering highlights the material aspect of the framework. For rational decision theory to be realised it requires ‘materials that incorporate rational choice theory’s assumptions’ – decision-making tools such as decision trees or decision support systems (Cabantous and Gond, 2011,

page, 580). These tools provide an environment that enables and sustains rational decision-making praxis. This aligns with Muniesa et al.'s (2007) views of market devices, they argue that the market is constituted of devices that actually render things more economic and thereby lead to the enactment of specific perspectives of economics. Cabantous and Gond further state that 'these devices turn rational choice theory into a social reality' (ibid, page, 580). This suggests that strategy tools may perform active roles during their use in practice.

From the studies above, we know that theory can be represented in the form of a tool or model or framework. This suggests that strategy tools are knowledge artefacts and also devices that have affordances. They can therefore be thought of both as a theory and a device. In order to understand what these theory-devices do, this study combines the notion of performativity with that of affordances. While performativity helps us to understand how the tool actively participates in the strategy process, the affordances perspective allows us to see the role of the affordances of the tool in performing actively and also enables us to see how the tool generates certain effects during the strategy process. Utilising the concepts of performativity and affordances also highlights the fact that tools have a certain degree of agency, and can therefore be considered as actors during the strategy process. In an explanation of the obvious lack of acknowledgement of the roles that objects, artefacts and technologies play in social life, Latour (2005, page, 71) provides a description of an agent:

'The main reason why objects had no chance to play any role before was not only due to the definition of the social used by sociologists, but also to the very definition of actors and agencies most often chosen. If action is limited a priori to what "intentional", "meaningful" humans do, it is hard to see how a hammer, a basket, a door closer, a cat, a rug, a mug, a list, or a tag could act. They might exist in the domain of "material" "causal" relations, but not in the "reflexive" "symbolic" domain of social relations. By contrast, if we stick to our decision to start from the controversies about actors and

agencies, then anything that does modify a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor ... Thus, the question to ask about any agent are simply the following: Does it make a difference in the course of some other agent's action or not? Is there some trial that allows someone to detect this difference?'

According to Pollock and D'Adderio (2012) the agency of an object or entity such as a tool or some other artefact can be identified by considering the affordances and constraints that the object offers. Pollock and Williams (2015), for example, show how ranking devices shape IT markets through their affordances and constraints. The following section therefore focuses on the notion of affordances.

3.5 Affordances

Tools and other artefacts do not act in isolation from human actors (Callon & Muniesa, 2005); rather, both humans and artefacts perform collective action. Such collective actions are important because they help to explain how strategy tools participate actively in the strategy process through their affordances (Gibson, 1979; Hutchby, 2001). A focus on the materiality of objects, artefacts or devices offers an avenue to see the agential capabilities of these objects in relation to the actors that mobilise them. D'Adderio (2011) explains that these objects and artefacts are able to produce varying degrees of influence. This level of influence ranges from the mediating instruments seen in Miller and O'Leary's case and Doganova and Muniesa's business model for example to even the most simple and mundane technology of all within an organisation – a piece of paper. Based on the studies mentioned in this chapter we know that these devices which have mostly been overshadowed and ignored can actually play significant roles within the work of strategizing. As aforementioned these objects do not act in isolation from human actors rather both humans and objects are interrelated and therefore perform

collective action (i.e. the socio-technical agencement). Orlikowski (2007, page, 1437) expresses this interrelationship this way: ‘the social and the material are considered to be inextricably related – there is no social that is not also material, and no material that is not also social’. In order to gain a better understanding of how these objects are able to actively participate in the work of strategy making, I also adopt the concept of affordances.

This notion of affordances originates from the field of Psychology, specifically from the work of Gibson (1979). Gibson’s interests laid in the study of visual perception from an ecological point of view. One of the main concerns of the field of ecological psychology was explaining how ‘animals and humans perceive an environment as deeply connected to their needs for *action*’ (Fayard and Weeks, 2014, page, 238) [emphasis added]. For Gibson both action and perception are linked and this linkage is achieved through material objects that offer possibilities for action to animals and humans (Albrechtsen et al., 2001). In his seminal work, ‘The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception’, Gibson describes affordances in terms of the relationship between an animal and its environment. According to Gibson, living things (for example humans, animals and other species) ‘orient to objects in their world (rocks, trees, rivers, etc.) in terms of what he called their affordances: the possibilities that they offer for action’ (Hutchby, 2001, page, 447). For Gibson when we look at an object, what we perceive are not the qualities of the object, rather what we see are the affordances of the object. A useful addendum to Gibson’s argument would be that when we have a goal in mind or action that we wish to execute, it is at such a time that what we perceive when we see an object are its affordances.

Although Gibson’s conceptualisation was within the context of an ecological approach to the study of visual perception in psychology, the notion of affordances has since been adopted and adapted within a variety of fields such as in Human Computer Interaction (HCI) and Design (Norman, 1988), the Sociology of Technology and in Science and Technology Studies

(Hutchby, 2001a; David and Pinch, 2008) and more recently in strategy (Le and Spee, 2015; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Demir, 2015; Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel, 2015). In his book *The Psychology of Everyday Things*, Norman (1988) sought to understand how humans managed within a world constituted of many objects; in order to do this Norman adapted Gibson's view of affordances. He defined affordances as 'the perceived and actual properties of the thing, primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how the thing could possibly be used' (Norman, 1988, page, 9). This definition, although Norman later made clarifications to it due to its ambiguity, proliferated within the field of Human-Computer Interaction and design and was interpreted and applied in a manner which Norman later mentioned was not his intended portrayal of the concept (Norman, 1999). The definition of affordances offered by Norman was critiqued by other scholars. For example, David and Pinch (2008), other than the obvious deterministic element of the definition, also highlighted the essentialist view of the definition.

In the sociology of technology, Hutchby (2001) proposed a view of affordances with an intention to bridge the gap between the two main contrasting views of constructivism and realism. On the one hand is realism, which is the 'view that worldly objects have inherent properties that act as constraints on observational accounts' and on the other hand is constructionism, which is the view that 'the very "reality" of objects is itself an outcome of discursive practices in relation to the object' (Hutchby, 2001, page, 443). Hutchby argued for a re-examination of this dichotomous separation. He states that 'sociologists need to see that social processes and the "properties" of technological artefacts are interrelated and intertwined, and need to analyse the ways in which they are' (ibid, page, 442). In order to address this divide, Hutchby proposes an approach that takes into consideration both the social and the technical as both actively contributing to the sociomaterial construction of reality, a view in which he sought to circumvent the issue of technological determinism. Affordances are thus

described by Hutchby as ‘functional and relational aspects which frame, while not determining, the possibilities for agentic action in relation to an object’ (Hutchby, 2001, page, 444).

What Hutchby expresses here is that affordances are both functional and relational. The functional aspects of affordances means that the materiality of the objects or artefacts do not determine the social, rather they afford and at the same time constrain the social to a range of possible actions (David and Pinch, 2008). In other words, while objects may be used in several different ways, there is a limited to what it is they can be used for (Hutchby, 2001). The relational aspect of affordances indicates that the affordances of an object may differ for different users. An illustration of this is that an animal such as a hippo, *interacts* with a body of water such as a stream or river differently from the way that a pond skater (a water-based insect) is able to interact with this same body of water. The body of water affords or allows the hippo to be able to drink from it and swim in it, while this same body of water allows the pond-skater to do what the hippo is unable to do – which is to walk on the surface of the water. This example demonstrates both the relational and functional aspects of affordances. While the hippo can drink and swim in the river, it is unable to actually walk on the surface of the river. It is constrained to a few activities in relation to the river. This illustrates that while the relational aspect of affordances highlights that different people can relate with the same object in different ways (in different context), the functional aspect shows that the number of ways in which the object can be used is constrained. This differs from the idea of a boundary object (Star and Griesemer, 1989) which speaks of flexibility and diverse interpretations without constraint.

The concept of affordances suggests a linkage between the materiality of objects and the situated actions performed by actors. The opportunities for action that arise are thus dependent on the materiality of the object, the situational requirement or context and the goals of the user seeking to interact with or through the object (Fayard & Weeks, 2014). Gibson articulates this

point by stating that an affordance is ‘equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour. It is both physical and psychical, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and to the observer’ (1979, page, 129). When considering the materiality of the object, Hutchby extends Gibson’s views by arguing that we need not be restricted to its physical characteristics (Hutchby, 2001; Le and Spee, 2015). Hutchby gives an illustration of this using the telephone. He highlights how the telephone has a materiality that impacts on ‘interactional space’ enabling intimacy from a distance. Similarly, David and Pinch (2008) highlight the ‘social’ affordances of online book reviews and how while the physical aspects afford reviewers the luxury of writing as many words as they wish, social constraints exist which require that the reviewers abide by the rules of how many pages they are allowed to write. Dameron, Le and LeBaron (2015) suggest that materiality may also be considered as a performance and not just substance.

In order to address the issues or the tensions that arose in the earlier literature on strategy tools, which were based on a functionalist view of strategy tools and argued that these tools were ineffective and not useful; these studies evaluated tools based on whether or not they actually enabled the work of analysis or problem solving, the SAP literature focused on how tools are used in practice. While some of the recent SAP studies on strategy tools adopt the notion of affordances, what they mainly show are not the roles that strategy tools play, in an active sense, rather what they show is that tools can be interpreted in different ways and can therefore be used to achieve different outcomes (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Leonardi, 2011). They therefore portray strategy tools as being used instrumentally to achieve diverse purposes. They remain wedded to the notion that strategy tools are largely passive artefacts and eschew the possibility that they can themselves exhibit agency (e.g. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). These studies do not actually show how tools shape what people do during the mutually constitutive movements that take place between the people that use the tools and the tools

themselves, regardless of the fact that the people adopted the tools to achieve some personal agenda. Based on the insights from economic sociology and science and technology studies, during these interactions between strategists and the strategy tools, anyone of the two entities may refute, or act in otherwise unexpected ways. Times when the tool refutes are some of the instances when we see them in action, such objects ‘articulate actions; they act or they make others act’ (Muniesa, Millo and Callon, 2007, page, 2) or they intervene to redirect action (Callon and Law, 1997). These instances and their implications for strategizing are still quite ambiguous within the literature.

By adopting a performativity lens, it enables one to identify these instances and what they entail. Callon (2007, page, 323) explains it this way: ‘performativity goes beyond human minds and deploys all the materialities comprising the socio-technical agencements that constitute the world in which these agents are plunged: performativity leaves open the possibility of events that might refute, or even happen independently of, what humans believe or think’. When anyone of the actors (whether the strategists or the tools) refute, this is what Callon refers to as overflowing or what Pickering (1995) refers to as resistance and Mackenzie refers to as counterperformativity (Callon, 2007). This concept of overflowing highlights the fact that when people interact with objects, the encounter may not always go as they planned and there is a possibility for either the people or the tool to transgress the frame that was established. According to Callon (1998, page, 251) ‘framing is either impossible to achieve or is deliberately transgressed by the actors: this produces overflows which cause the barriers to become permeable’. Based on this perspective, when tools are being used, they will either act like an agent and resist and therefore modify the actions of the people or they will conform to the plans of the people and thus be rendered passive (Callon and Law, 1997). Both performativity and affordances emphasise ‘the relations between people and the instruments

that they use as well as on the interactions between human agents as mediated by the material entities that they put into circulation' (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009, page, 1561).

In my research, strategy tools are not conceptualised as artefacts that can be interpreted in diverse ways (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015), as representations or in terms of their essential technical properties (Hutchby, 2001) as proposed by their designers/developers. Instead they are viewed based on their affordances – that is, the possibilities for action they allow. This *affords* one the opportunity to get an understanding of how these 'artefacts become important elements in the patterns of ordinary human conduct ... [and to understand] the nature of the relationship between ... [these] artefacts and human practices' (Hutchby, 2001, page, 444) in this case – strategizing. Based on this view, we can consider the specific affordances that strategy tools offer when in use that lead to the performativity of the theory within the strategy tools. Rather than conceptualise strategy tools as the current strategy literature views them – as instruments used by actors to achieve purposes that range from analytical to socio-political, or as representations (Grandy and Mills, 2004), they are viewed as carriers of strategy theory which are able to contribute to the formation of a new entity or social reality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009). Just as in Whittle and Mueller (2010), where they examined the political activity of actors and focused specifically on the role of accounting tools as macro actors in the process, my research examines the practices of a strategy team during the strategy process, focusing on the activities that take place during the production and use of a strategy tool.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter, an overview of the five main conceptualisations of the concept of performativity utilised within organisation and management studies, is presented. The few studies on performativity within the strategy field have mainly drawn on an Austinian view and scholars such as Carter et al. (2010) have called for studies to examine strategy, particularly strategy tools, using Callon's (1998) conceptualisation of performativity. In this research, I draw on Callon's (1998) view of performativity and the notion of affordances in order to understand how knowledge artefacts such as strategy tools actively contribute to the formation of strategy by adapting the actions of managers. I view strategy tools as being active to mean that they are performative. This is based on Callon's (2007:, page, 318) argument that a model, theory or statement is performative if it 'actively engage[s] in the constitution of the reality that it describes'. Applying the notion of effective and Barnesian performativity, the concept of an agencement and affordances (Callon, 2007; Gibson, 1979; Hutchby, 2001; MacKenzie, 2006; Muniesa et al., 2007) in this research, enables this research to explain how the use of a strategy tool during a process may have an effect on the process by rendering behaviours or actions to be more like the underlying principle of the tool. Furthermore, from the notion of affordances, strategy tools do not render the behaviours of managers in a deterministic way, rather the affordances of tools provide managers with certain possibilities for action. In this study, strategy tools are considered to be performative in different dimensions (Doganova and Muniesa, 2015) that extend beyond tools prescribing procedural steps (Carter et al., 2010; Dameron et al., 2015) and the affordances of tools are considered to be the mechanisms through which they are able to accomplish differing performative roles (Pollock and D'Adderio, 2012).

Chapter 4

Research Design and Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In chapter two the research questions for this study were outlined and they form the basis for which the research design was developed. In this chapter, the various aspects of the research design and methodological approaches utilised are presented and discussed. The chapter begins with an identification of the ontological and epistemological foundations of the research. In this section I discuss the two main opposing views of positivism and interpretivism and use these as well as the ontological views of objectivism and constructionism as a means to introduce and discuss the philosophical foundations of this research. This is followed by a delineation of two variants of constructionism: social constructionism and constructivism, for which this study is based on the latter. The philosophical stance of constructivism transcends the interpretations of actors and allows one to also acknowledge the role of the material in the *becoming* of reality. The next section introduces the discussion of the research strategy deployed to address the research questions. This is followed by a section on the use of case studies, the choice of using a single case study and the selection of the case study company. The next two sections consist of a presentation of the data collection methods utilised for the study and a discussion of the data analysis. The chapter concludes with a section on quality and ethical considerations.

4.2 Research Philosophy

A paradigm forms the fundamental philosophical assumptions of any researcher and is described by Guba and Lincoln (1994, page, 107) as ‘a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles’ [emphasis in original]. These philosophical foundations expectedly shape the research questions and the methodological approaches through which the research study will be conducted (Bryman, 2012). This is demonstrated within this chapter by the different choices made concerning the research design. Research paradigms have both ontological and epistemological aspects to them. An ontology or ontological stance is concerned with an individual’s beliefs about the nature of existence – that is, what one considers to be the nature of social reality (Blaikie, 2010; Crotty, 1998). Here, the question that is asked is: what is the nature of reality? Epistemology on the hand deals with knowledge, specifically what can be considered or accepted as knowledge (Bryman, 2012).

Within the social sciences are two main and opposing ontological views: objectivism and constructionism. Objectivism is described as ‘an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors’ (Bryman, 2012, page, 33). This foundational belief is just as the name implies, there is a world that exist objectively outside of social actors. This ontological stance is the basis for what is known as positivism. The second main ontological foundation within social sciences is known as constructionism. This is the belief ‘that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors’ (Bryman, 2012, page, 33). It is worth noting that within these philosophical stances are more nuanced perspectives that differ from one another in some ways but share certain commonalities. For example, constructionism is not a unified philosophical stance, rather it has different variants (Hacking, 1999). These variants, however, share a common belief that reality is constructed rather than some external objective entity. Grand et al. (2015) identify some of these more nuanced versions of constructionism

such as social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1967) and what is referred to as constructivism (Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Knorr Cetina, 1981).

By establishing one's beliefs of the nature of social reality, concomitantly an epistemological stance has also been adopted. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) point out, ontological foundations, epistemological foundations and methodological approaches are interconnected in such a way that a choice made in relation to any one of the three, constrains the choices that will be made in relation to the other two. Two main epistemological views associated with the ontological views of objectivism and constructionism respectively, are positivism and interpretivism. Positivism is based on an ontology of objectivism and therefore argues that the social world is indeed external to social actors and should be studied based on the principles of natural sciences (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The French philosopher Auguste Comte (1853) is identified as one of the early proponents of this philosophy. According to Comte, 'all good intellects have repeated, since Bacon's time, that there can be no real knowledge but that which is based on observed facts' (Comte, cited in Blumberg et al., 2011, page, 16). Positivism is said to have originated in response to the metaphysical views that existed (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991) and is based on three basic principles: 'the social world exists externally and is viewed objectively; research is value-free and the researcher is independent, taking the role of an objective analyst' (Blumberg et al., 2011, page, 16). Methodologically, the researcher would adopt methods such as surveys which are useful for the study of large samples (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Blumberg et al., 2011).

In contrast to this is positivist philosophy is what is known as interpretivism. This view rejects the idea of objectivism and the argument for the use of natural science principles for the study of the social world. Interpretivists believe that the social world cannot be compared to the natural world and the subjective meanings of different actors needs to be taken into account when considering how to study the social world (Bryman, 2012). Interpretivism is thus based

on three basic principles, which include: ‘the social world is constructed and is given meaning subjectively by people; the researcher is part of what is observed and research is driven by interests’ (Blumberg et al., 2011, page, 17).

4.2.1 Ontological and Epistemological foundations: Constructivism versus Social constructionism

Constructivism and social constructionism are both variants of constructionism and therefore share some commonalities but differ in several ways. Both views align in their ontological beliefs that there is no objective reality that exist independent of social actors, rather it is constructed. They both share an anti-positivist epistemology in which knowledge is conceived not as being generated objectively but as subjective (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Here, knowledge is generated from the interactions that occur between the researcher and the participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) and therefore takes into consideration the interpretations of both.

Social constructionism on one hand, is linked to the anti-positivist view of phenomenology (Schutz, 1932), which relates to how actors make sense of the world (Bryman, 2012; Grand et al., 2015), and considers reality as ‘social constructions’ and, consequently, knowledge as a product of these constructions (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Grand et al., 2015). Knowledge, scientific knowledge in particular, is conceived as resulting from ‘the generation of second-order knowledge, the construction of scientific “knowledge” on the social construction of “knowledge” (Schutz, 1967)’ (Grand et al., 2015, page, 80). Grand et al. (2015) point out that social constructionism is based on the assumptions that an understanding of both reality and knowledge are collectively shared and are also common – that is, both reality and knowledge are considered to be intersubjective (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

This philosophical stance has however been criticised for overlooking the role of material elements in the construction of reality and focusing solely on the social (Latour, 1992). Constructivism on the other hand shifts the focus from a human-centred perspective and argues for a view of reality that is a product of both the social and material-discursive elements which they interact with (Callon and Law, 1997; Latour, 1992; Law, 2008). According to Law (2008, page, 141) such a view ‘treat[s] everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. It assumes that nothing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations’. This variation of constructionism differs from others in that it is based on a relational ontology (Gond et al., 2015; Hassard and Cox, 2013; Law, 2004, 2008; Orlikowski, 2010). Such an ontological stance concerns the belief that ‘entities cannot be assumed to pre-exist, but are brought into being through discursive-material practices’ (Gond et al., 2015, page, 18). From a practice perspective knowledge is seen as embedded within the practices of actors (Langley and Abdallah, 2011) and these practices are considered to be constituted of both actors and material objects in relation (Orlikowski, 2010). Constructivism is thus, according to Hassard and Cox (2013), based on a ‘relationist’ epistemology which goes beyond the interpretations of social actors, as in social constructionism, and encompasses the role of the material. Based on this, agency or ‘the capacities for action would be studied as relational, distributed and enacted’ (Orlikowski, 2010, page, 136).

The choice of Constructivism

The aim of this research is to reconceptualise the role of strategy tools. It is not simply concerned with the interpretations of the actors as they use the tools, it is also concerned with the interactions/relations between the actors and the strategy tools that they utilise during strategizing (Hassard and Cox, 2013; Orlikowski, 2010). In other words, the research is concerned with the relations between the social and the material, since practices are intertwined

with material objects such as tools (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). In this research, the view of the world is one that is becoming rather than given (Diedrich et al., 2013; Law, 2008; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Accordingly, strategy or the strategy making process are not considered as given as traditional strategy literature show (Grand et al., 2015); strategy is instead not fixed but enacted, in a state of becoming (Thomas, Sargent and Hardy, 2011; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). In general, ‘phenomena only exist in the doing of them and they have to be continuously performed to exist at all’ (Callon, 2004, cited in MacKenzie, 2006a, page, 34). As a result, the philosophical foundations of this research are that of a constructivism ontology which is evidently post-structuralist and based on a relational ontology and relationist epistemology (Gond et al., 2015; Hassard and Cox, 2013; Law, 2008).

4.3 Research Strategy

The previous section highlights the philosophical underpinnings of this study and as Guba and Lincoln (1994) point out, the choice of an ontological or epistemological stance inevitably shapes the methodological approach that will be selected. The three are interrelated. In what follows I present the research strategy which is underpinned by the philosophical foundations outlined above and also guided by the literature. The following sections present the approaches used to address the research questions.

4.3.1 A Qualitative approach

While researchers have the choice of using either qualitative or quantitative approaches or both (mixed methods approach), the research questions, the purpose(s) of the research and the philosophical foundations insinuate (quite explicitly in a number of cases) which approach is most suited to addressing the research questions and achieve the objectives or purposes sought by the researcher. Qualitative research is concerned with words, meanings and interpretations in contrast to quantitative research which emphasises quantification and measurement (Blaikie,

2010). Both research approaches are mainly conceptualised in relation to research methods: the approach to data collection, the type of data collected, the approach to analysis and at a fundamental level, the research philosophy that underpins the process (ibid).

There are several key distinctions between qualitative and quantitative approaches and these are highlighted in Table 4.3.1. These distinctions highlighted in Table 4.3.1 depict qualitative research as being mainly characterised by an ontological foundation of constructionism, an epistemological stance of interpretivism and researchers that adopt this approach are predisposed towards inductive research strategies that enable the generation of theory (Bryman, 2012). This is in sharp contrast to quantitative approaches that are mainly based on an objectivist ontology, positivism and deductive approaches that enable theory testing (ibid). Although both approaches are portrayed as opposites and researchers may view one approach as being better than the other (Bryman, 2012), they may be thought of differently. Rather than consider both qualitative and quantitative research as two separate distinctive features of research, they may be considered as two ends of a continuum where different research projects fall within different points of the continuum. In other words, the distinctions highlighted in Table 4.3.1 are not restrictive. For example, some qualitative studies tend to have some elements of the features highlighted under quantitative approaches. They may for example be qualitative in terms of the research methods utilised but may adopt a deductive research strategy for addressing the research question.

For this research, I adopt a qualitative approach, which according to Pratt (2009) is useful for answering ‘how’ research questions and also enables the researcher to gain an understanding of how the participants being studied perceive and understand organisational events (Langley and Abdallah). This is underpinned by the use of qualitative research methods, which are defined by Van Maanen (1983, cited in Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991, page, 71) as ‘an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate and otherwise

come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world'. Qualitative research involves the use of data collection methods such as ethnographic approaches (for example, participant observations), in-depth interviews, the use of focus groups and documentary analysis (carried out in a qualitative manner which involves 'identifying phenomena among which connections are established' (Blaikie, 2010, page, 207)).

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Research strategy and role of theory in relation to research	Deductive Testing of theory	Inductive Generation of theory
Epistemological foundations	Positivism	Interpretivism
Ontological foundations	Objectivism	Constructionism

Table 4.3.1: *Fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative approaches*
(Source: Bryman, 2012)

The choice of a qualitative approach also aligns with the practice perspective used in this research (Feldman and Orlikowski, 2011; Orlikowski, 2015). The research is concerned with the study of strategy as a practice, which is a focus on what people do, rather than what an organisation has (Whittington, 2006). Qualitative approaches are typical of strategy as practice studies (Balogun et al., 2003; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2007). By adopting a practice approach where strategy is in the doing, Johnson et al. (2007, page, 52) argue that such an approach requires the researcher to “go out and look”, to see for oneself what transpires in

practice in order to get first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon. Johnson et al. argue that ‘in-depth and largely qualitative data are a central requirement for developing’ a practice perspective of strategy (ibid, page, 52). Similarly, Kaplan and Orlikowski (2013, page, 967) point out that the ‘[e]veryday activity becomes the object of analysis. Such a focus requires deep engagement in the field, observing and interacting with practitioners in action’. The selection of a qualitative approach was guided by the need for an approach which allows one to get as ‘close to the daily practices of strategy making by examining what actors [do]’ (Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013, page, 971).

In addition, the research methods adopted for this research are those that would enable the researcher to capture not only the strategists’ interpretations (Gioia and Chittipedi, 1991) but also observe actions and interactions that may not be articulated by the participants such as their behaviours and responses to others (Miller and Friesen, 1982). As such the means of data collection utilised include direct observations, in-depth interviews and documentary data. These data collection approaches are discussed further in the chapter. Adopting a qualitative approach for a research study such as this is particularly advantageous because it affords the researcher research methods that provide the opportunity to obtain ‘intricate details about phenomena... that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods’ (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, page, 11). Qualitative data also offers ‘insights into complex social processes that quantitative data cannot easily reveal’ (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007, page, 26). As Grant (2003) mentions, using quantitative methods such as surveys or questionnaires for the study of a process such as strategic planning may generate data that is ‘overly thin’ and may not necessarily be consistent.

4.3.2 Inductive research Strategy

Blaikie (2010) notes that the type of research strategy chosen during the formulation of the research design for any study may be determined not only by the philosophical foundations but more specifically by the type of research question and the purpose of the research (see Table 4.3.2). In this study, the research questions seek to understand what the active roles of strategy tools are during strategy making. It is essentially asking ‘what do strategy tools do’ when considered as devices that may influence the behaviours of actors and what are the implications of this *doing*? The purpose of the study is exploratory and is concerned with, as Rasche and Chia (2009, page, 723) put it, the need ‘to *make* [the] *object* [...] *talk*’ [emphasis in original]. Based on the research question and the purpose of the research, an inductive research strategy was identified as being more suited to addressing the research question. According to Blaikie (2010) an inductive approach is useful for exploratory studies which enable the researcher to gain insights when little is known about a phenomenon.

Whilst a number of qualitative studies on organisations tend to adopt a deductive logic to theorising which is a top-down approach that involves the development of a theoretical framework from the literature and this framework shapes and guides the data collection and the analysis and involves the testing of the framework in order to refine an existing theory (Shepherd and Sutcliffe, 2011; Bryman, 2012), strategy as practice studies largely draw on inductive approaches (Kaplan, 2011; Jarzabkowski et al., 2015). An inductive research strategy, contrary to the deductive logic, involves an approach in which you ‘start to collect data and then explore them to see which themes or issues to follow up and concentrate on’ (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, page, 490). My decision to follow such an approach was also guided by existing practice studies (in particular studies that adopt a materiality lens such as Kaplan’s (2011) study of PowerPoint and Werle and Seidl (2015)) and the exploratory nature of the study, therefore during the planning of the research design an inductive research

strategy was considered as being more useful for the purposes of this study. Blaikie (2010) highlights this rationale of using established approaches within one’s field, as a valid rationale for the selection of a research strategy.

Type of Research Question	Research Purpose	Research strategy
‘What’ questions	Describe	Inductive
‘How’ questions	Explore Predict Evaluate Assess impacts	Abductive
‘Why’ questions	Understand Explain	Abductive Deductive Retroductive
‘How’ questions	Intervention (Change)	Abductive Retroductive

Table 4.3.2: Research questions, purposes and corresponding strategies (Source: Blaikie, 2010)

During the research, it was discovered that the formulation of the research design was not separate from the actual execution of the design in ‘practice’, as other studies on strategy making show. Both planning and implementation were interlinked in that the research design was refined along the way, particularly with regards to the research strategy. Similar to Kaplan (2011), the research strategy adopted was an open-ended inductive approach that was based on the researcher’s interest in how the strategists used strategy tools as they went about the work

of strategizing. This approach did not mean that the researcher had gone into the field oblivious to any theoretical stances, instead it was an approach that would not constrain the researcher to any one particular theoretical lens but allow the researcher to watch the different actions and interactions that took place and also allow participants to reveal their interpretations, motives and rationales for why they acted in the ways that they did (Blaikie, 2010).

The inductive approach selected supports a bottom-up approach, which the researcher sought to draw inferences from the data observed and allows one to also draw from the existing literature (Werle and Seidl, 2015). By selecting such an approach, the researcher did as Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) advised and what Kaplan (2011) did, this was to analyse the data collected during the early periods of the field work and to further develop an analytical lens (discussed in chapter three) to guide further data collection and the analysis of the data.

4.3.3 Case study approach

A consideration of other means of conducting this research include the use of experimental research methods as seen in Armstrong and Brodie's (1994) study of the BCG matrix. However, such an approach involves holding certain conditions constant, such as behavioural events (Yin, 2009), which may be a necessary and constituent part of the process. In addition, Wensley's (1994) critique of Armstrong and Brodie's study demonstrates the possibility of shaping the experiment in such a way that the outcomes produced align with one's initial hypothesis. For this study, such an approach seemed unrealistic to address the research questions and the purpose of the study. Bearing in mind that strategy making is a *process*, for some organisations this is an annual cycle (Grant, 2003), to replicate a setting that entails all the intricacies and contingencies of a process seems highly unlikely. Another approach highlighted by Yin (1994), which may have been used as an alternative to the use of a case

study approach, is the use of archival analysis. This was found to not be suitable as a standalone approach for this study mainly because the study is concerned with the actual doing of strategy and therefore requires real-time data collection where the praxis or activities of the strategists can be observed.

The choice of a case study approach for this study was underpinned by the fact that case studies are said to be appropriate for exploratory studies and are also viewed as an appropriate option to be utilised for the purpose of gaining deeper insights into real-life phenomenon (Yin, 2009). The use of case studies also ‘allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events such as individual life cycles, small group behaviour, organizational and managerial processes’ (Yin, 2009, page, 4). In addition, Eisenhardt (1989) asserts that case studies are a suitable approach for any research seeking to develop a theory. The use of case studies for exploratory studies enable the development of theoretical outcomes such as a framework or model, which may later be tested in future studies (de Vaus, 2001). The use of case studies is also said to be a suitable way to illustrate the phenomenon one seeks to explicate and an advantage of this approach is that it provides the researcher with an avenue for ‘getting closer to constructs and being able to illustrate causal relationships more directly’ (Siggelkow, 2007, page, 22). According to Siggelkow, being close to constructs is particularly useful when the research is longitudinal, as is the case in this research.

A Single Case Study

In this research a single case study is utilised as the empirical site for data collection. The use of a single case study was pertinent because of the need to examine the everyday activities of the members of the strategy department (Kaplan, 2011). The choice of a single case study also appeared appropriate for the research design because it allows the use of ethnographic methods

for the study of strategy making over a period of time (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Johnson et al., 2007) and it meant that the researcher could be present and observe ‘the becoming’ (Dietrich et al., 2013) of the strategy process and consequently the adapted strategy. A feat that would have been difficult to undertake, had the researcher endeavoured to take on multiple cases. Although, Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) advocate for the use of multiple cases because they enable generalisability and Eisenhardt (1989) argues for a multi-case design that would allow for comparisons, Langley (1999) points out that both multiple case studies and the use of a single case study have different objectives and thus make different theoretical contributions (Langley and Abdallah, 2011). Accordingly, an argument concerning the use of multiple cases versus a single case is superfluous in some ways because both are of value for the enhancement of the literature. A single case study has its strengths in that it ‘can be a very powerful example’ (Siggelkow, 2007, page, 20). Yin (2009) underpins this by mentioning that single case studies may be utilised for theory building and also contribute significantly to extant knowledge. Single case studies afford researchers an opportunity to provide a rich description of the phenomenon of focus (Siggelkow, 2007). Kaplan (2011, page, 324) underpins this by stating that ‘[a] focus on a single organisation is appropriate where the interest is in examining day-to-day activities in depth’. Such practice focused studies are more inclined to use a single case study (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). In addition, Yin (2009) indicates that a rationale for the choice of a single case study is if the study is longitudinal.

Case study selection

The empirical bases for the theorising of this study is an in-depth longitudinal case study (Yin, 2009) of strategy making within a leading UK financial institution – an insurance company called META-Life (pseudonym). Just as the company name has been replaced with a pseudonym, so have the names of the actors involved in the study. The period of study was after the financial crisis – a three-year period from 2012 to 2015. The selection of the research

site was driven largely by the financial crisis and the researcher's curiosity concerning how the crisis had impacted on the strategizing practices of financial institutions particularly during strategy making. In META-Life one of the changes that were made, was the introduction of the strategy tool which is the focus of this study. The tool had been adopted by the strategy team a year after the crisis. As the strategy director explained when asked about why he had introduced the tool, one of the reasons he gave was so that the company would be able to identify any 'elephant[s] in the long grass'. He further explained that these were events that could happen rather unexpectedly and cause severe damage to the company. In addition, based on the focus on materiality in this study, a financial institution was identified as an appropriate site for the study because, according to Jarzabkowski et al. (2013, page, 44) whose study is based on a reinsurance company, 'financial service sectors, such as reinsurance, have been highlighted as particularly pertinent contexts in which to study materiality'. The selection of META-Life as the research site was also to do with the fact that they had a dedicated strategy function, whose duties included working with the CEO and executive committee members in order to formulate the strategy for the company. This allowed the researcher the chance to spend time with the team and focus on their daily strategy work (Vaara and Whittington, 2012) particularly in relation to the strategy process.

Research site, Access and Restrictions

The case study company selected for the research – META-Life, is a large insurance company based in the United Kingdom, with offices in different geographical locations. The company is a business unit of a much larger company called STAR Group (pseudonym). In META-Life (more specifically the strategy department) there is a strong focus on the customer (Lozeau et al., 2002) and the need to do the right thing for the customer. This was part of the company's culture and strategy – 'to be customer centric' (Company vision and mission document). I believe I heard these words from every participant that was interviewed. This focus on the

customer, shapes what the company does and at a micro-level what the strategists do. For example, the findings from the use of the strategy tool focused on in this case study were presented in a document in such a way that was organised under two headings all through the document – implications of findings for the customer and implications of findings for the company.

Gaining access to conduct research on strategy may at times be a challenge due to the fact that strategy is considered to be confidential and thus sensitive (Johnson et al., 2007). Achieving the kind of access required for a study that is concerned with what people do, is as Van Maanen and Kolb (1985, page, 11) describe: ‘gaining access to most organisations is not a matter to be taken lightly but one that involves some combination of *strategic planning*, hard work and dumb luck’ [emphasis added]. Their words ring true for this research. During the first year of my study, I approached the Royal Bank of Scotland through a contact within the University. At first, it seemed promising and the manager I had been connected with and I had liaised with over the phone, seemed to not have a problem with my coming to spend time with the company. However, after a few subsequent conversations with the manager, the bank declined my request for access. The next financial institution I had my sights on, which is the case study company used within this study, I also turned to a contact within the University again. I was introduced to the Strategy Director of META-Life in 2012 and he immediately agreed to my request to follow the strategy process within the company. I received an email from him the following day, alerting me to the specific month the process would begin and also putting me in touch with a manager in the strategy team. Gaining access to META-Life through the Strategy Director was as Bryman (2012) advised, which was to make use of contacts such as colleagues and academics.

On the researcher’s first day at META-Life a meeting was held with the Head of Corporate Strategy. This introductory meeting was to discuss what I was interested in studying, my aims

and data collection methods and the boundaries of my studying the company (the latter was a subject of discussion from the manager). I was given four specific restrictions during the period of field work at META-Life, this is as Bryman (2012) predicted – the unlikelihood of gaining *carte blanche* access to the company. Firstly, after I explained that I would be recording interviews conducted with the different participants, the manager responded that it was acceptable to do so as long as I made people aware that I would be recording the conversations held with them. Secondly, the senior manager pointed out that although I was allowed to attend meetings and workshops, I would not be allowed to record in such settings, due to the sensitivity of the discussions. The third boundary was that I was not permitted to take documents used during meetings, workshops or presentations, out of the company. At the time, this seemed to be a great challenge. However, the manager added that I would be given a desk space among the strategists and I was allowed to come in with my laptop and work from their office while I used the documents I needed. This turn around worked to my advantage, because this gave me access to not only be a ‘fly on the wall’ during meetings and workshops but to also observe the strategists as they went about their daily activities. The final boundary/restriction was highlighted on a later visit to the company, by the Strategy Director as I sat across from him in his enclosed office, which was next to the open plan setting where the members of the strategy department sat. The Strategy Director, after answering some of my questions during the interview, paused and mentioned that some of the information he had given me was quite sensitive and it would be better if I did not mention the company’s name in any of my publications. I agreed to all four conditions and apart from the four restrictions, I was given considerable access to the company.

4.5 Data collection

The data collection was, as other elements of the research design, shaped mainly by the research questions and purposes of the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Qualitative data collection methods were utilised as aforementioned. This aspect of the research involved the use of a multi-method approach to data collection, which enables the triangulation and complementarity of data (Yin, 1994; Bryman, 2006). Where triangulation is described as the use of multiple data sources in order to corroborate the data (Bryman, 2012). This multi-method approach is also highlighted by Yin (1994) as an important principle for data collection when using case studies. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2007) affirm the importance of strategy as practice studies drawing on multiple data sources. The data collection involved the use of ethnographic methods (Agar, 1980; Van Maanen, 1988), as suggested by Rasche and Chia (2009), since the researcher's intent was to get as close to the activities and practices of the members of the strategy team.

Data collection was done inductively without any 'prior specification of a theory ... [which could lead to] the possibility of introducing a premature closure on the issues to be investigated, as well as the possibility of the theoretical constructs departing excessively from the views of participants in a social setting' (Bryman, 1988, page, 81). Although I focused on following the strategy process within META-Life, the main unit of analysis was the use of a particular strategy tool referred to as the Horizon Scan (the tool is discussed further in the next chapter). Similar to studies on devices such as ranking devices, market devices and accounting devices (Pollock and Williams, 2015; Skærbæk and Tryggestad, 2010; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Doganova and Muniesa, 2015), I followed the interactions between the managers and the strategy tool (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015). In order to refine the case-based approach used, I drew on the idea of a biography of an object (Kopytoff, 1986; Appadurai, 1986), which involves tracking the life-cycle of the object and the

practices around it (D’Adderio and Pollock, 2014). Similar to Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009), I too consider the strategy tool ‘in action’ (Latour, 1987) and therefore followed it along its trajectory during the strategy process and after the process.

4.5.1 Data sources

The primary sources of data collection were 42 semi-structured interviews and 20 direct observations of meetings and workshops. The combination of direct observations and interviews are notably characteristic of qualitative case studies (Silverman, 2000), in particular strategy as practice studies (Balogun et al., 2003). Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015), for example, suggest that interviews be used as a means to supplement observations. According to Johnson et al. (2007, page, 56), the use of both observations and in-depth interviews enable researchers to gain ‘depth, detail and nuance’. In addition to these methods, I followed document trails (Latour, 1987, Skærbæk and Tryggestad, 2010) through the documentary data that was also utilised. Data was collected in the form of meeting documents, drafts of the Horizon scan, PowerPoint slides used for presentations, documents used for workshops and internal archives. The use of these different sources of data not only allowed for the triangulation of data, it also enhanced the dependability (i.e. reliability) of the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Type of Data	Amount
Interviews	42
Observations	20
Documentary data	200 pages

Table 4.5.1: Summary of data collection

Observations

A practice perspective favours ethnographic approaches (Balogun et al., 2003; Whittington, 2007; Johnson et al., 2007; Rasche and Chia, 2009; Vaara and Whittington, 2012) such as participant observation that allow the researcher to take part and get the first-hand view which Johnson et al. (2007) describe. This proclivity for ethnographic methods is mainly to do with the conceptualisation of strategy as what people do, and the best ways to theorise about what people do is to actually observe what they do in practice. Blaikie (2010) points out that participant observation ranges from the researcher participating fully to the researcher simply observing the actors. In this study, I mainly did the latter, except for two occasions where I was invited during a meeting and an informal conversation to contribute to the discussion. Besides those two outliers, I was like a fly on the wall observing the strategists and other individuals and groups from within META-Life during meetings and workshops. As aforementioned, I was given a desk space within the strategy department and worked from there on different occasions, I was therefore also able to watch the strategists as they did their work and interacted with each other. The daily strategic practices of the strategists were found to be very similar to those identified by Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007) in their study of strategy teams. The use of observations is advantageous to this research because, as Yin (2009) highlights, episodes or events are captured in real time and according to Tobbell et al. (2010, page, 268), observational data enables the researcher to ““experience” the ... environments and to access practice that might not be articulated by’ the practitioners.

Most of the meetings attended were meetings that concerned the Horizon scan, how it should be structured in the documents that would go to the executives. Meetings also concerned a review of the Chairman’s letter where the findings from the tool would be documented comprehensively and a review of the Strategy Director’s slides for his presentation. There were also talks that revolved around whether or not the company wanted to be innovators

(prospectors) or fast followers (analysers) (Miles and Snow (1978) typology of organisations), this decision had implications for how they would respond to some of the findings from the tool. All of the workshops I attended were based on business agility and this was one of the themes that came from the Horizon scan. Pre-workshop meetings were held by the strategists to determine the definition of agility. The strategist in charge of the workshops had drawn on a visual tool called the Target Operating Model (TOM) as a means to guide the facilitation of the workshops with the different product and channel distribution heads. The TOM had been designed by the Business Architecture team and so pre-workshop meetings were also held with members of the Business Architecture team concerning agility and how the workshops would be organised and conducted.

Some meetings concerned outputs from the workshops that had been conducted and were presented to the Strategy Director and two other senior executives. The conversations ended with the identification of next steps to be taken. One meeting, which was one of the Monday morning strategy team meetings, was a conference meeting with individuals from the Marketing department and concerned discussions about the company's brand. On that particular day, I had come in to interview one of the strategy members and was asked if I wanted to listen in on the conference meeting with the Marketing team.

During the meetings and workshops audio recording did not take place, as agreed with the Head of Corporate Strategy at the start of the data collection. As a result, extensive field notes were made. Informal discussions took place before and after each meeting with the strategists that had chaired the meeting or facilitated the workshops (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). This was to determine the purpose of the meeting, to clarify comments made by certain actors, to discuss the key points of the discussions and to determine the identification and role of each participant (this was only when meetings and workshops were held with individuals or groups from other teams or departments). I documented generally the interactions that took

place, for example, the conversations, the gestures of individuals as they spoke and listened and responded to other individual's comments (Johnson et al., 2010). Notes taken during the observations were typed up within a twenty-four hour period.

Interviews

The data collection began with an informal meeting with the Head of Corporate Strategy. I describe it as informal because it was on a Friday and most individuals I encountered including the strategy manager were all dressed business casual. The interview also took place downstairs at the company's large cafeteria as opposed to subsequent interviews which were held upstairs at participants' desk or in the CEO's office (whenever he was away) or in a meeting room downstairs. The subsequent interviews I conducted were formal and took place after the first meeting concerning the Horizon scan. The interview with the strategy manager on that Friday and the next introductory interviews I had with the members of the strategy team were to an extent unstructured. The questions asked were broad questions (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991) such as inquiring about the company, the hierarchical structure of META-Life and that of the strategy department, personal background information and historical information about META-Life and that linked META-Life to its parent company STAR Group, and an overview of the functions of the strategy department. The use of unstructured interviews at the early stages of the data collection was mainly to establish trust (Bryman, 2012), introduce myself to each participant and explain the purpose of my research. This was useful because during meetings with actors from other functions, any of the strategy team members present at the meeting would introduce me to the other attendees and explain the purpose of my being at the meeting. This in a way made some of the other attendees more at ease with my being present at the meetings. The unstructured interviews were also useful because I wanted to develop an understanding of what was happening (especially after the first few meetings I attended) – to

get into their world and to understand the languages and abbreviations that were common to the strategists but unfamiliar to me. These interviews opened up to some key insights which were pursued with follow-up questions. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009), unstructured interviews are useful for exploratory studies. They are said to be particularly useful when a researcher seeks to ‘find out what is happening [and] to seek new insights’ (Robson, 2002, cited in Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, page, 322).

The use of in-depth interviews can according to Blaikie (2009, page, 207) ‘get close to the social actors’ meanings and interpretations, to their accounts of the social interaction in which they have been involved’. This method was particularly useful in exploring the strategy process, to elicit the descriptions of the activities involved in the process. The method is also useful in getting the richness and complexity (Grant, 2003) of the phenomenon being studied. Prominent factors identified from the interviews were investigated further using more focused semi-structured interviews (Yin, 1994).

Subsequently, I moved to the use of semi-structured interviews as themes emerged from previous interviews. These interviews were concerned with the strategy process and the strategy tools used, with an emphasis on the Horizon scan. I made use of open-ended questions in order to allow the participants to also share their views and motives as they worked on the strategy tool (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991; Lozeau, Langley and Denis, 2002; Johnson et al., 2010). While these questions were more focused in comparison to the earlier interviews, there was certainly ‘an openness to changes of sequence and forms of [the] questions in order to follow up the answers given and the stories told’ by the participants (Kvale, 1996, page, 124). During the data collection, I followed in real-time the practices that constituted the formation of META-Life’s strategy. The interviews consisted of both real-time and retrospective interviews (Langley and Abdallah, 2011) and were held with all members of the strategy team (see Figure 5.3.2 in chapter 5) including the Strategy Director. In addition,

interviews were conducted either before or after meetings and workshop sessions. Telephone interviews were also held with members of the team based at other locations. Most of the interviews that took place at the workstation of the strategists involved them explaining their work using the Word or PowerPoint documents they were working on either on their laptops or desktops.

I recorded my observations of the day and my impressions after each interview and time spent with the strategy team. In particular, I recorded informal conversations that tended to take place more often than not as one of the strategists escorted me down to the reception to return my visitors card. Most times these short conversations between the seventh floor and the reception entailed useful insights which were recorded immediately I arrived at a place where I could type out the information. There were 42 audio-recorded interviews conducted and each interview lasted typically for an hour and sometimes more. Interviews were transcribed and uploaded into NVivo 10 software for coding and analysis.

Interviews have already been established as an important data source particularly because they enable researchers to capture the interpretations and feelings of participants (Johnson et al., 2007). They are also useful as an important means or gateway, according to Vaara et al. (2010), into gaining an understanding of strategy from the experiences of the strategists. However, where interviews fall short in terms of 'capturing the micro-behaviours and interactions that are the stuff of strategy practice', observations complement them (Johnson et al., 2007, page, 68). The data from the interviews were supplemented with the data from the documentary analysis, which is discussed further in the next section.

Documentary and archival data

The use of artefacts such as documents used in meetings, memos, articles and annual reports are said to be useful information that can be utilised to underpin data collected from other sources (Yin, 2009). Similarly, Marshall and Rossman (1995, page, 84) describe the use of documents as a supplement to other methods; they are ‘useful in developing an understanding of the setting or group studied’. Grant (2003) also highlights the usefulness of documentary data during his study of strategic planning processes, he mentions that his use of documents such as company reports were useful towards obtaining valuable historical data.

I collected presentation slides used by the Strategy Director for executive committee meetings. These documents used during meetings, workshops and away days, were saved in a dedicated folder for the researcher in a cupboard close to the team’s workspace. I also drew on archival data which were available on STAR Group’s website. Images of organisational structure and grade levels were printed out from META-Life’s intranet for the study. Copies of the Business Agility documents used during the workshops and images of the Target Operating Model, were also gathered. A copy of the Strategy Calendar, Strategy Process Update for Executive Committee, drafts of the Horizon scan document and a copy of the Chairman’s letter sent to the CEO and executives were also collected. These were useful for tracking the themes/findings from the tool, they were especially useful for corroborating the information the strategists had given during interviews and for supplementary information.

4.6 Data Analysis

The approach adopted for the analysis of the data was based on principles of induction and also included the use of existing theory (Kaplan, 2011; Werle and Seidl, 2015). This approach is similar to what is described as ‘iterative-theory’ building (Orton, 1997) or what O’Reilly (2012) describes as an ‘iterative-inductive’ approach (commonly used for ethnographic studies), which involved a back and forth movement between the data and theory (Johnson et al., 2010; Paroutis et al., 2015). The process entailed several rounds of coding and movements between the data, emerging themes and the literature. The analysis began during the data collection (O’Reilly, 2012; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). My introductory visits to the company revealed a focus on the strategy tools and the use of these tools as part of the practices of the strategy team during the strategy process was quite prominent. The analysis involved multiple levels: the strategy tool, the practices of the strategists and the strategy process. This was necessary in order to address the research question.

A case summary of the strategy process was developed (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1994; Miles and Hubberman, 1994; Langley, 1999) and this enabled the development of a thick description (Geertz, 1973; Lincoln and Guba, 1985) of the strategy process. It also enabled the tracking of the trajectory of the strategy tool. I traced the path of the strategy tool as it was developed and used, following its outcomes throughout the process up until the actual implementation of the strategic initiatives that were developed. Based on the research questions, the focus of the analysis was on the actions and interactions that occurred (Dietrich et al, 2013), where action is not considered simply as what the strategists did, but what they did in relation with the strategy tool. Callon (2005) provides an expression of ‘action’ that reflects that which was utilised in this research. ‘Action, including its reflexive dimension that produces meaning, takes place in hybrid collectives comprising human beings as well as material and technical devices’ (Callon, 2005, page, 4). Performativity is further argued by Callon (2005) to involve the

assumption of distributed agency, where both ‘people and the tools that they use ... perform[...] collective action’ (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009, page, 1561). To highlight the performative roles of the strategy tool, the analysis also involved looking out for instances when the strategists were passive and the tool was active (Callon and Law, 1997; Pickering, 1995). In addition to this, because the tool is conceptualised as both theory (as in a knowledge artefact) and device, I also considered instances when the tool was prescriptive and the strategists accepted the suggestions prescribed by the tool (Callon, 1998; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Callon, 2007) and aspects of what the strategists did that interrelated with the affordances of the tool.

The first round of coding was done using an open coding approach, which was a bottom-up process in which a myriad of conceptual codes were generated (Gioia et al., 2013). During this round of analysis, some concepts from the literature stood out on their own (O’Reilly, 2012). The analysis of the strategy process revealed issues related to participation, buy-in and political activity from the periphery (i.e. influencing the strategic direction). This phase was useful for identifying themes which may not have been evident through the use of a top-down approach. This also allowed for the identification of themes to pursue further in subsequent data collection and gaps in the data that required further explanations (in this instance an informant had left the company and the city, their mobile number was sourced from one of the other managers and used to conduct a follow-up interview via telephone). This round of coding revealed codes that related mainly to the strategists and other actors involved in the strategy process. A second round of coding took place in which the analytical lens discussed in chapter three was utilised. Scholars such as Chapman, Chua and Mahama (2015), in a bid to advance the recent materiality turn in strategy, suggest that analytically strategy as practice studies should conceive of strategy as a practice that is both social and material. In other words, they argue for a shift beyond the human-centred focus in most strategy as practice studies towards a sociomaterial focus. They

highlight that analytically this means that there is a need to examine the interactions that take place between humans and non-human actors because both shape the practices that we observe – both humans and tools ‘combine to generate specific effects’ (Chapman, Chua and Mahama, 2015, page, 268), which tend to be portrayed as the actions of humans rather than both humans and the objects or artefacts they interact with. As such, the next phase of the analysis involved the use of an analytical lens which enabled the examination of the practices of the strategists as a sociomaterial one (Cabantous et al., 2010). The lens is a combination of several theoretical concepts based on the idea of market devices and the notions of performativity and affordances. This was used to code the data in order to identify the performative roles of the tool, which was based on what these perspectives considered as being a performative role of a device. This enabled the generation of codes that highlighted what the strategy tool did in relation to the different actors. From the literature devices are said to enrol actors (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Doganova and Munies, 2015), they are also said to act as persuasion devices (Preda, 2007; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Doganova and Munies, 2015), they also induce behaviour or alter practices (Preda, 2006). During the analysis I also found informants described the tool in ways that hinted towards the role of the tool such as an activation device, a vehicle, a consolidation device. Some of these informant terms were retained and used as categories (Gioia et al., 2013).

After the open coding phase, I exported the multitude of codes from NVivo 10 to Microsoft Excel, there I could carry on sorting the data by categorising the conceptual codes. I switched to Excel mainly for the grouping of the codes. I moved back and forth between both technologies during this process. Through constant comparison (Strauss and Corbin, 1990) the conceptual codes that were developed from the coding were further categorised. This involved comparing and contrasting the data in order to group concepts that were similar under the same category. For example, instances within the data when the strategists referred to who had been

engaged with during the work of the scan, why they had been included and how they were involved in the work, were coded as engagement, involvement or participation. These were later categorised under inclusion. A further analysis where concepts from the literature were used as a higher level of abstraction, the categories labelled distributed thinking, buy-in, inclusion, exclusion and influencing were grouped under the label enlist. This concept was used because the categories all related to participation and the modular affordance of the tool. From the analytical lens, one of the performative roles a device may perform is to enlist participants and thereby contribute to the emergence of a new entity such as a new venture as seen in Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009) or a strategy.

The analysis also involved the creation of a new concept that encapsulated a group of conceptual labels (O'Reilly, 2012). Concepts that related to the future and looking to the future were grouped under the label – 'Reorient temporally'. This label was developed in order to describe the 'future-looking' characteristic of the tool that emerged from the data. Codes that also related to the tool pointing or channelling attention at specific issues were categorised under this label as well. This general theme of bringing the future to the present was not easy to describe, therefore the analogy of a telescope was used (ibid). This role of the tool can be thought of metaphorically like the use of the accounting tool – Net Present Value (NPV). In utilising the NPV, one of the procedures involved in its use entails the future value of an amount of cash being translated to a present value, which is further utilised in order that a decision concerning capital budgeting may be made. This specific category relates to the bringing of the future to the present (this is illustrated and discussed further in chapters five and six respectively). Figure 4.6.1 shows the Coding structure based on the analysis.

In summary, four main categories were identified as roles played by the strategy tool during the strategy process: 1) Enlist, 2) Reorient temporally, 3) Consolidate and 4) Persuade. From the analysis visual displays were also created as a useful means to examine the interrelationship

between the categories developed (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The patterns identified across the data and the relationships between the key themes developed, form the basis for the subsequent chapters – the findings and discussion.

Figure 4.6.1: Coding Structure

1st ORDER	2ND ORDER	AGGREGATE DIMENSION
Statements that express collaboration among all members of the Strategy function in the development of the tool.	Inclusion of other actors, enabling the achievement of collaboration, distributed thinking and buy-in	Enlist
Statements about the process of developing the tool being bottom-up as opposed to being 'the hobby of an executive member'		
Statements related to the involvement of different hierarchical actors in the process of developing the tool, including the CEO and senior management team		
Statements that relate to achieving buy-in by including or involving individuals and groups in the process	Buy-in	
Statements that express the inclusion of non-members of the strategy team, from within the organisation, whose functional expertise correspond to the labels of each lens of the strategy tool	Modular affordance	
Statements that express the socialisation of thinking (distributed thinking) involved in the process		
Statements that express that the tool prescribes a focus on the future. Statements that describe the tool as 'future-looking', statements about what the future will be and statements that refer to thinking about the future	Future-looking	Reorient temporally
Statements that refer to thinking retrospectively - reflecting on existing ways of doing.	Learning	
Statements that express a change in mental models. Statements that express a cognitive reframing as a result of going through the experience of developing the tool. Statements about the tool 'forcing logical thinking'. Statements about a redefinition of concepts.		
Statements related to testing their existing strategy against the outputs of the tool. Statements related to adapting strategic choices.		
Statements that express that the tool prescribes actions and points the attention of the strategists towards specific issue.	Prescription	
Statements related to the 'consolidation' of dispersed knowledge from across the organisation.	Convergence	Consolidate
Statements related to the comparison of themes and a process of distillation to determine the most prominent issues.	Evaluation, comparison and ranking	
Expressions of the outcomes of the strategy tool as a 'big picture' or representation of the environment.	Representation	
Statements related to 'influencing' the senior management. Statements expressing the intentional foregrounding of specific issues. Statements about	Influence	Persuasion

'pointing' and 'sieving-in' issues into the output of the strategy tool.		
Statements that express a view of the tool as a 'vehicle for change' and an avenue for ideas/agenda to be brought before the senior management.		
Statements related to justifying choices made		

4.7 Quality and Ethics

This section is concerned with the quality of the research and issues related to ethics which were taken into consideration during the study. Given the nature of the research design, for which the philosophical foundations, research questions and purposes shaped the approach to data collection, the data collection methods applied were such that allowed for a significant degree of close interaction with the participants. Based on this, guidelines for ethical conduct were followed and in relation to quality I was guided by Johnson et al.'s (2007) suggestions on how to enhance the quality of the data and by criteria offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

4.7.1 Criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research

The quality of social research has tended to focus on two main criteria – validity and reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Silverman, 2000; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009; Yin, 1994; Yin, 2013). Validity is described by Silverman (2000) as being synonymous to truth. He further presents a definition of validity provided by Hammersley (1990). Validity – that is truth, is defined by Hammersley as ‘the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers’ (Hammersley, 1990, cited in Silverman, 2000, page, 175). Validity may be an important criterion for quality research, however, no account given by a researcher can be a pure and accurate representation due to the researcher’s own interpretations and predispositions that inevitably shape the events being observed (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). In addition, Guba and Lincoln (1994) are also critical of this view of the existence of an

absolute truth as illustrated by Hammersley's definition above. As a result, they present specific quality criteria that are based on differing philosophical foundations, including identifying criteria that relate to studies based on a constructivism philosophy. These criteria provide more suitable alternatives to those more commonly utilised. Guba and Lincoln (1994) identify trustworthiness as a primary criterion for evaluating the quality of qualitative research. Trustworthiness encompasses four criteria: credibility (which corresponds to internal validity), transferability (which corresponds to external validity), dependability (which corresponds to reliability), and confirmability (which corresponds to objectivity).

It is worth noting that while the evaluation criteria: internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity are commonly used to ensure the robustness of a research study, I found these measures, just as Lincoln and Guba, to be too positivist and not in alignment with my philosophical stance. This is the reason for the use of trustworthiness offered by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

Credibility Criterion

This criterion is concerned with the researcher being able to reconstruct the different interpretations of social reality presented by the participants in such a way that when the account of the findings is presented back to the participants, it is found to be credible (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). It is through this attainment of credibility that Lincoln and Guba argue the quality of the research can be evaluated on. In order to enhance the credibility of this study I made use of multiple methods of data collection as discussed above, in order to triangulate the data collected (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Johnson et al., 2007; Bryman, 2012). In addition, I drew on the technique of respondent validation as another means to enhance the credibility of the study (Bryman, 2012). Respondent validation is described by Bryman (2012, page, 391) as

an approach through which the researcher may achieve credibility by ‘provid[ing] the people on whom he or she has conducted research with an account of his or her findings’. This technique is said to be common among qualitative research and enables the researcher to corroborate their findings (ibid). Using this approach, I submitted a paper written from the data collected to the managers for their comments and feedback. Investing time at the company (the longitudinal nature of the study) learning about the participants and also building trust along the way (Johnson et al., 2007), were some of the ‘activities [that] increase[ed] the probability that credible findings will be produced’ (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, page, 301).

Transferability Criterion

As opposed to external validity which is concerned with generalisation (Yin, 1994), the transferability criterion takes into consideration the empirical context. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the focus when one seeks to test the generalisability of a finding is first and foremost to compare the settings before one begins to test a theory or hypothesis. As a result, they argue that the issue is not firstly one of generalisation rather the issue is about the transferability of findings from one context to another. As a result, for a finding to be valid in another setting is an empirical issue (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In other words, the application of one’s findings in another setting depends very much on the similarity between the original setting where the findings were developed from and the new setting where the findings will be applied (ibid). Based on this, in order to enhance transferability, I provided a thick description of the case study as prescribed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). This is one of the advantages of a single case study, the researcher is able to capture and present rich accounts of what was observed during the data collection (Bryman, 2012).

Dependability Criterion

Dependability corresponds to reliability, which relates to the replicability of a study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2002). In order to achieve reliability, the replication of a study through the use of similar methods, within a similar setting will yield similar results, which leads to the reliability test being fulfilled (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The underlying assumption here is that there is an external world that is fixed and unchanging, and can be used by subsequent researchers as a benchmark (ibid). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that any differences found when a study is being replicated cannot be solely attributed to an issue with the research procedure, rather the differences exist because of both what is being studied and the research procedure. In other words, the focus of the research is not a fixed thing that remains the same but is in flux and these changes also impact on subsequent studies of the ‘same’ phenomenon. They cite an old philosophical saying to express their argument, which is that one cannot step into the same stream twice. This line of argument resonates with the ontological assumptions that underpin the strategy as practice agenda. Golsorkhi et al. (2010, page, 7), as aforementioned, describe the shift in the conceptualisation of strategy as one in which ‘strategy is no longer taken to be something stable that can be observed, but constitutes a reality in flux’. Since the focus of the study is in flux, then an alternative criterion is indeed required. Thus the alternative to reliability offered is the dependability criterion. To meet this trustworthiness criterion, the measures taken to enhance the credibility criterion – the respondent validation technique and triangulation – also addresses this issue of dependability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Confirmability Criterion

The conventional use of objectivity or how it is evaluated is usually based on ‘intersubjective agreement’ (Scriven (1971) cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Here objectivity is determined as ‘[w]hat a number of individuals experience’ while subjectivity is determined as the

experience of a single individual (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, page, 300). Scriven attributes this view of objectivity and subjectivity to quantitative studies and provides an alternative view for qualitative studies. Based on Scriven's work, Lincoln and Guba argue that for qualitative studies the focus is not on the researcher in terms of whether they performed the study as a single individual, rather the focus is on the data and whether or not it is confirmable – that is, has it been confirmed? Objectivity in a conventional sense is thus replaced by Lincoln and Guba with the confirmability criterion. To meet this criterion, a type of audit (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Johnson et al., 2007; Bryman, 2012) – peer reviewed to be exact, was done. Firstly, the data and findings were reviewed by a peer, who scrutinised the work (Bryman, 2012). Secondly, a paper was developed from this research and was submitted to a three-star journal for publication and has been anonymously reviewed and received a revise and resubmit. The responses from the reviewers have been incorporated into this PhD thesis.

4.7.2 Ethical considerations

From the nature of the research design in relation to the choice of a qualitative approach which entails the use of ethnographic techniques for data collection, the issue of ethical conduct is logically of relevance and contributed to the planning of the research design. Research ethics is concerned with 'the appropriateness of your behaviour in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of your work, or are affected by it' (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009, pages, 183 – 184). There are common ethical principles that are discussed by several scholars and resonate with the ethical guidelines provided by the University. This study was guided by the principles stated within the literature as well as by the UK Research Integrity Office Code of Practice for Research (UKRIO), which the University utilises. Four main ethical principles are presented by de Vaus (2001) for which studies such as the present one must adhere to. These include: voluntary participation, informed consent, no harm to participants and

anonymity and confidentiality (ibid). These principles are necessary guidelines that ensure that individuals that give their consent to be a part of a research project are adequately protected. Research ethics are also said to impact on the integrity of a research study (Bryman, 2012).

In relation to the ethical principles highlighted above, careful steps were taken to ensure these principles were adhered to. As Johnson et al. (2007) highlight, strategy as practice studies and strategy studies in general tend to involve the use of confidential documents and information from participants, as such their identity as well as the details of the interviews conducted with them should be protected. As mentioned above, I took precautions to ensure that the identity of both the company and the participants involved in this research were kept anonymous. No participants were coerced into participating in the study, rather their consent was obtained before any interviews or observations were undertaken. In the early stages of the data collection, all participants were made aware of the purpose of the research study and confidentiality agreements were established. The restrictions set out by the Head of Corporate Strategy and the Strategy Director were also adhered to throughout the research.

During the first rounds of interviews I had with the strategists, I ensured that I asked for consent to record the interviews. All participants agreed to the use of an audio recorder. Also at the early stages of the data collection, prior to my first meeting with the Head of Corporate Strategy, I had been included in the email list of the strategy team (this was a transient occurrence that ended after a few email exchanges). Along with the emails sent were documents that concerned the strategy process, the Horizon scan and a few other documents. I had initially thought to include images of these documents that would help illustrate several points made in the findings but I refrained from doing this because at the top of each PowerPoint and Word documents were the words 'CONFIDENTIAL' in addition the company's logo grazed every single page and would have given away the identity of the

company. In general, information that would divulge the identity of the company has not been utilised in any publications in order to ensure anonymity.

4.8 Summary and Limitations

In this chapter I have described the research design used for this study. This entailed the identification of my philosophical stance, the research questions and purposes of the research. This was followed by a discussion on the use of a case study approach and the choice of using a single case study. I further presented the multiple methods utilised for the collection of data and present the approach used to analyse the data collected. The concluding sections of the chapter is focused on a discussion of how I ensured that the research was of quality standards through the use of evaluation criteria that is argued to be more suitable for qualitative studies in comparison to conventional standards that aligned more with quantitative approaches. The final section of the chapter is an overview of the research ethics taken into consideration within this study.

There are also limitations that must be acknowledged within this research. The main limitation being the use of a single case study. Arguments concerning generalisation inevitable arise when a researcher adopts the use of a single case study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) substitute generalisation or external validity with the criterion of transferability and this was utilised as a guide to enhance the quality of the work and thus address this issue of generalisation. Further studies may draw on the ‘working’ thesis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) presented in the findings section as a means to study the use of tools in multiple case studies and conduct a comparative study. In relation to the data collection, such a study would have benefited from the audio recording of meetings and the use of more contemporary methods, such as video recording had permission been granted.

Chapter 5

Findings: Exploring strategy making from the perspective of strategy tools

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the empirical basis for the research which is an in-depth longitudinal case study of strategy making in a leading UK financial institution – an insurance company called META-Life (Pseudonyms are used to preserve the identity of the company and that of the strategists). The period of study was from 2012 to 2015. I am cognizant of the fact that a number of changes have taken place since then, particularly policy changes and regulatory demands that have an inevitable impact on financial institutions. The chapter begins with an overview of the insurance industry, a description of the case study company and the strategy process. This is followed by a more comprehensive presentation of the process with an emphasis on the active roles played by the strategy tool referred to as Horizon scan. The findings are presented in a chronological manner in order to demonstrate the changing roles of the strategy tool as the strategy process progressed. Finally I introduce the concept of an activation device, a term which originated from the informants. I describe how the tool, based on its roles identified during the process, acted as an activation device that eventually triggered/initiated a change in what the strategists do and consequently a change in the strategic direction of the organisation.

5.2 The Insurance Industry: from incremental to radical changes

The insurance industry in the UK contributes significantly to the overall economy, ‘employing over 300,000 people across the country, attracting global capital, serving the needs of consumers, and generating UK exports’ (HM Treasury, 2013). The sector contributes approximately 1.6% to the UK’s GDP and is a key part of the financial services industry (ibid). According to the Association of British Insurers (ABI), the UK’s insurance industry is the largest in Europe and the third largest in the world (ABI Key Facts, 2014). In relation to the nature of the insurance market, the industry is not only a highly regulated sector but is also crowded and competitive with about three hundred and eighty seven life insurance companies in the United Kingdom alone (ABI Key Facts, 2014).

About a decade ago – a few years prior to the recent financial crisis – the rate and degree of change within the industry in comparison to recent times could be described as both shallow and incremental. Prior to the crisis, attempts had been made to change the insurance industry but ‘none of them worked particularly well. That is, they didn’t fundamentally change the industry, they did some stuff that was either useful and some stuff that wasn’t terribly useful for anyone’ (Senior Manager). The environment companies find themselves in today is far from what had previously been described and is one that is characterised by radical changes, in which increased transformational changes are driven mainly by the presence of more active and demanding customers and ‘a much more demanding regulatory and political environment’ (ibid). These changes are expected to continue for a period of time due to the need for ‘a lot of catching up’ to be done by the industry, for example the insurance industry is general perceived as ‘extreme digital laggards and there are also areas that are both complex and opaque from the customer’s perspective and a regulatory perspective’ (ibid).

An example of more recent changes brought on by the government that have had significant impacts on the industry are the retirement freedom changes introduced in the budget in 2014 by the Chancellor. In 2013 almost three hundred and fifty thousand annuity products were sold within the insurance industry, with the introduction of the budget in 2014, which had a significant impact on the policy related to retirement, the insurance industry saw an end to the requirements to take out an annuity (ABI Key Facts, 2014). Such changes 'are radically overhauling how people convert pension assets into retirement income' as a result the annuity market is currently about one third the size that it was prior to the budget (Senior Manager). A 38% drop in sales of annuities was seen between the first and second quarter of 2014 (ABI Key Facts, 2014). According to one senior manager 'such change is unprecedented and there are a number of other events that are happening that are actually much much more significant than they've ever been in the industry'. Such changes lead to increased costs, complexity and price competitions especially within the annuity market. With a number of external pressures affecting profits coupled with the pace of digital adoption and the increase in demand, there is a focus on the need for strategizing practices and processes that would enable an organisation such as META-Life to respond better to such radical changes and also differentiate itself in order to remain competitive. Companies such as META-Life have to deal with issues of regulation, increasing competition, changes in the way products are distributed and technological changes amongst others, as a result there is also an understanding within the company for the need to validate their strategy continuously, particularly within these recent times of radical change, in which the insurance industry is faced with the challenge of dealing with the trends that are on the horizon. Based on this both the senior management team and the members of the strategy department work at ensuring the robustness of the company's strategy through their annual strategy process.

5.3 Case study: META-Life

META-Life is one of the leading insurance companies within the UK. It is a division of a much larger organisation – STAR Group – and is an establishment that has been in existence for over a century with offices spread across the UK. The company has more than six million customers, over two thousand employees (Company website), and offers products that range from life insurance to non-life insurance products such as life cover, annuities, income protection, investment and savings, home and motor insurance. Sales of products and services are carried out either directly, through intermediaries such as Independent Financial Advisors (IFAs) or through other channels such as company agents. As a financial institution META-Life's operations are regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and must therefore comply with the stringent standards laid out by their regulators. Such standards include those related to capital or the pricing and transparency of products.

In the late 1990s, STAR Group acquired META-Life, which was at the time one of the largest life assurers in the country, the acquisition led to the formation of one of the UK's largest Life and Pensions business (BBC website). Almost a decade later and amidst the backdrop of the recent financial crisis the company became a part of STAR Group's insurance division. During this period META-Life went through a series of changes, most notably structural changes (both within the company and its parent company STAR Group), which included the appointment of a new Group Chief Executive in STAR Group and a new Insurance Chief Executive in META-Life. With the introduction of STAR group's new Chief Executive, who brought with her her own vision for the company and its divisions, the strategy at META-Life was changed in order to align with STAR Group's new strategy. In addition to this, a consolidation of all of the insurance businesses within STAR Group took place – that is, STAR's Life, Pensions and Investment business and the General Insurance business became one business rather than two separate entities. Along with the merger of META-Life's insurance businesses, came the

amalgamation of the strategy departments within both businesses. One manager mentioned how META-Life's strategy department was the largest within the whole Group, and that there are more members in META-Life's strategy department than there are in STAR and its divisions' respective strategy departments.

As a division, META-Life is given strategic directives from its parent company within which it operates.

They [i.e. STAR Group] approve the strategy but they don't actually dictate or set down the strategy. They will give us a remit ... so for example 'best insurance company for customers or best insurance company for shareholders'. How you actually demonstrate that in your strategy or how you pull that out is up to you (Senior Strategy Manager – Stephen).

The dynamics of strategy formation between the parent company STAR and META-Life is much like Mintzberg and Waters' (1983) umbrella strategy, where META-Life operates within the boundaries set up by the Group strategy team. The strategy at META-Life is formed through a process in which its strategy team work in collaboration with the CEO and executive committee members, made of several functional directors (See Figure 5.3.1). For this research, emphasis was placed on the company's strategy department which is headed by the strategy director (who is also a member of the executive committee).

The Strategy Process

META-Life's strategy department consists of three groups, of which members are distributed across the UK. These three groups are: Strategy, Strategic Planning and Market Insight (See Figure 5.3.2). Due to the amalgamation of the Life, Pensions and Investment business and the General Insurance businesses, the Strategy department has two senior managers – the Head of Strategic Propositions and the Head of Corporate Strategy – that manage the daily operations

of the group and both report directly to the Strategy Director. Every year the strategists in the strategy department carry out a formal strategy process which, according to the Head of Strategic Propositions – Austin (pseudonym), is to ‘ensure that the existing strategy is still fit for purpose’. Due to the aftermath of the financial crisis, STAR Group’s CEO focused the company’s strategy on getting the company ‘back on track in terms of capital, customer and trust’:

Financial services has endured a torrid 6 years since the start of the banking crisis in 2007. Consumer confidence and trust has been rocked, fuelling political and regulatory pressure for change e.g. low annuity rates, calls for a charge cap on pensions (Strategic Horizon Scan document, 2014)

More recently META-Life’s parent company’s existing strategy is said to have ‘matured’ and is now much more about ‘how to grow the company and position it for the future’ (Senior Strategy Manager).

As a result of this, at the start of the data collection in 2012, METALife’s strategy was a focused participation strategy aimed at sustaining their existing position in the pensions and home insurance market and growing in two other markets. The strategy members draw on several tools during the process, these include the Horizon scan (a tool used to assess external risks and identify opportunities); Economic profit pools analysis (a tool that involves the quantification of the insurance market profit pools in order to assist the strategists with participation decisions); Scenario analysis (or Strategic Risk Assessment) (a tool used by the company to create scenarios and to further ensure the robust management of strategic risks under Solvency II¹ and to identify early warning indicators) and PESTER analysis (which stands for: Political, Economic, Social, Technology, Environment and Regulation). The

¹ Solvency II is an EU Directive that governs the insurance industry

outputs of the process leads to the development of new key strategic initiatives and the confirmation of existing initiatives (Strategy Process Update document, 2012). In addition to this the strategists also engage in a half and full year competitor analysis in which they seek to understand differences in their performance in relation to their competitors.

For example the competitor analysis once showed that in the corporate pensions market META-Life's margins were higher compared to their competitors, the strategists sought to understand the causes for this and other outcomes. These and the findings from the aforementioned tools inform the development of the strategic direction for the company.

The focus of this research is the process of the development and use of the Horizon scan by members of the strategy team. The Horizon scan is the 'initial phase of the annual strategic cycle and forms the basis for developing industry scenarios to test the robustness of [the company's] current strategy' (Strategic Horizon Scan document, 2014). The tool involves the acquisition of information and is a systematic approach to examining this information in order to identify prospective opportunities or risks that may impact significantly on an organisation. It is commonly used within the insurance industry, and is also used by government agencies and within other industries.

The scan was introduced to the division's strategy department by the strategy director, who had used it while working as a Senior Strategic Planner in the past within a major oil company. The scan work is a sort of pattern recognition and prediction activity that is characterised by dynamics that is both iterative and collaborative.

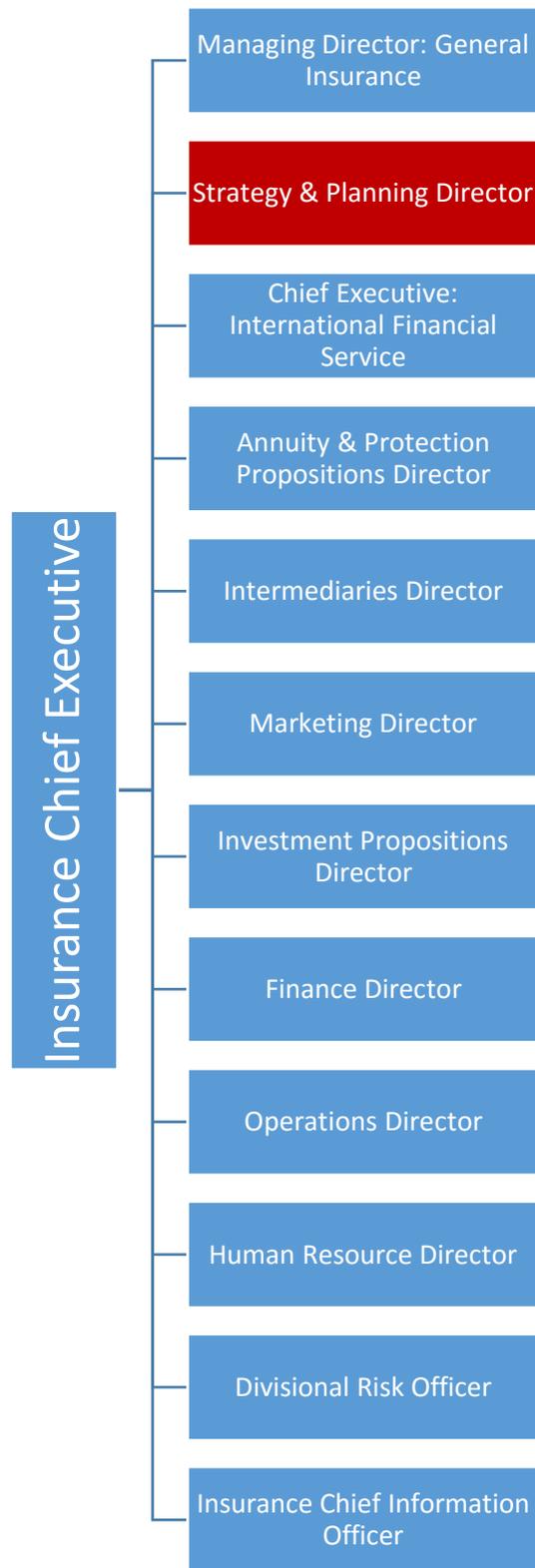


Figure 5.3.3: Organisational structure for Executive Committee Members (Top Management Team for META-Life)

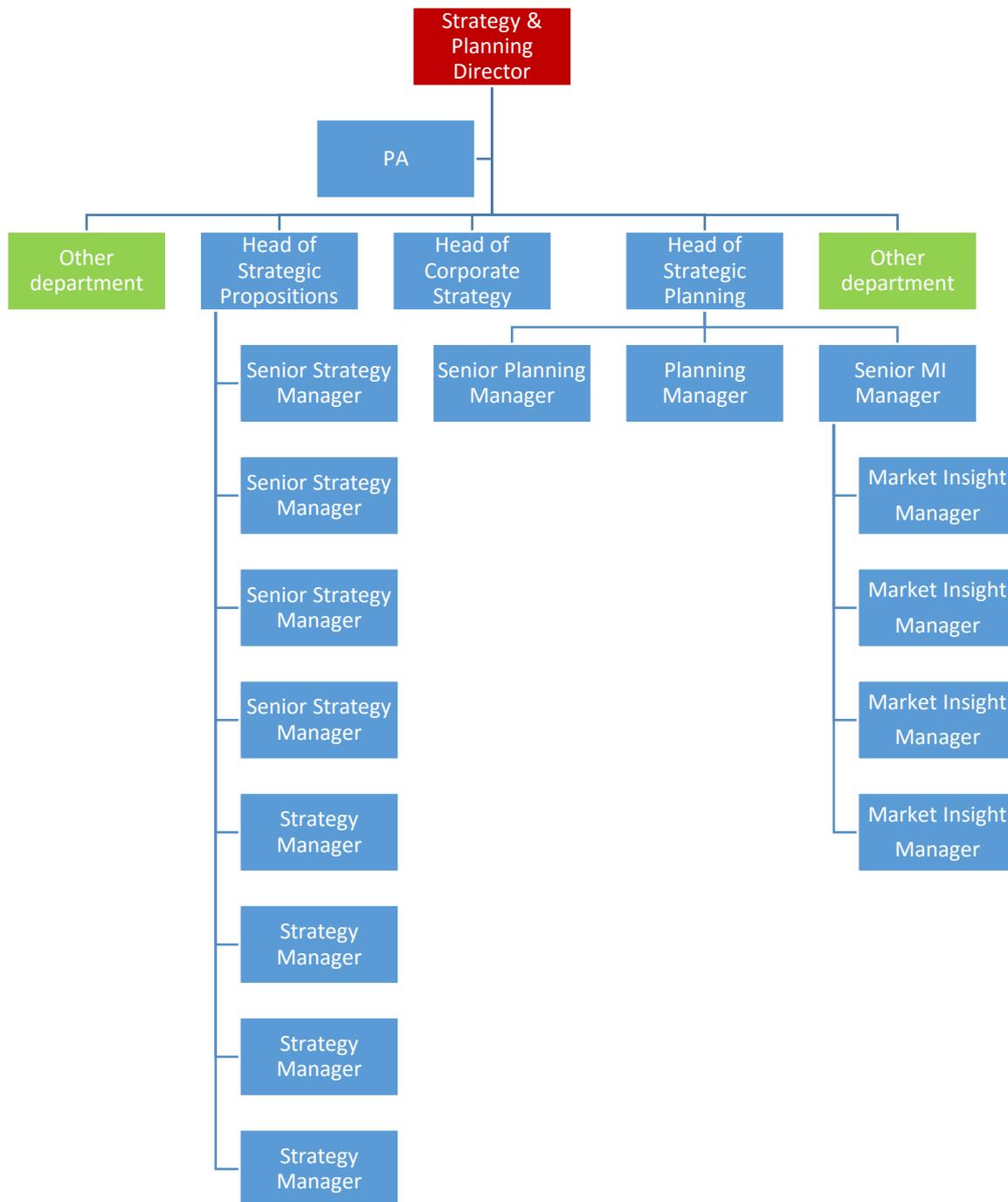


Figure 5.3.4: Organisational structure for META-Life's Strategy Department

The data generated from the exercise is gradually distilled and transformed into a set of strategic options, which are recommended to the CEO and executive committee members. The strategic choices made go through the iterative processes of prioritization, pre-mobilization and mobilization and eventually leads to the adaptation of the strategy. The strategy process is summarised in Figure 5.3.3.

In order to develop STAR's strategy for the next three to five years, the group's Strategy Director and her team carry out a Group Strategic Review (GSR), for which the findings from the Horizon scan forms part of the strategic context for the GSR. As a result the outputs of the scan work had two main purposes – one of which was to feed into the GSR and the second was more division focused – was to serve in the development of META-Life's strategic direction.



Figure 5.3.5: Summary of strategy process

5.4 Four interconnected roles performed by the Strategy tool (Horizon Scan)

The findings reveal that as the strategists engaged in the development of the strategy tool during the strategy process, the strategy tool was found to have performed four interconnected roles that influenced the actions of the strategists and through these roles shaped their actions in line with a particular theory of strategy making. These four roles include: Enlist participants; Reorient temporally; Consolidate and Persuade (see Table 5.4.1 for exemplar quotes that illustrate these themes). The data also shows that the mechanisms that underpinned these four roles were two main affordances of the tool – modular and temporal affordances.

The Horizon Scan

A metaphor that may be used to envisage the horizon scan is that of a telescope. A telescope can be defined as ‘an optical instrument designed to make distant objects appear nearer, containing an arrangement of lenses ... by which rays of light are collected and focused and the resulting image magnified’ (Oxford dictionaries, 2015). Much like the telescope, the format of the scan is a framework constituted of ‘twelve lenses’ and it brings things that are at a distance closer:

So what we’ve done [is] we’ve looked at the whole insurance landscape through twelve different lenses – so customer lens, behavioural economics, intermediaries, economic environment, government & regulation, technology, operating models, competitors, distribution, taxation, capital risk management and people’ (Senior Strategy Manager – Stephen).

Table 5.4.1: Key themes and illustrative quotes

KEY THEME	SUB-THEME	EXEMPLAR QUOTES
Enlist	Inclusion	‘So there’s a small team [i.e. the economics team] and there’s about four or five people and they basically come up with many statistics. They are the group central team, we don’t actually talk to them very much. Some teams might do, like the team down there [pointing to another department in the large open plan office space] they talk to them and use their assumptions a bit more. So for example, all this information [pointing at his screen], I got from them [i.e. the economics team]. So what I did was use their analyses rather than government estimates.’ (<i>Strategy manager</i>)
	Buy-in	‘So we [i.e. the strategy team] talk to them [Senior executives] at various stages during the process so we’ll talk them through where we think the big trends are and we’ll then come back to them how we think this falls out in terms of scenarios and then we’ll come back to them again in terms of what the implications of these are. So you know they are bought into the process they understand the steps of the process and they are agreeable with each of the steps so it’s then a course correction rather than any great rejection or disagreement.’ (<i>Strategy Director</i>)
Reorient temporally	Future-looking	‘You’ve got the rise of female bread winners in households – there’s now around two million women in the UK who are the major bread winners in their families. [This is] more of a sort of societal structure change that is going to happen and has implications of how we actually market our products and who are we actually going to appeal to in future.’ (<i>Senior Strategy Manager</i>)
	Learning	‘So it’s asking what does this mean? Are we actually reaching the right people? Our propositions, do they fit the

		needs of our customer base? Are we representative of our customer base? So it's just about challenging whether or not we need to think about different niche segments emerging rather than actually thinking of you know just the traditional insurance customers.' (<i>Senior Strategy Manager</i>)
	Prescription	'Then the final trend [from the scan], which as an accountant I find quite interesting, is the increasing pressure on the insurance value chains and that will affect (doesn't finish sentence) ... it's effectively [saying] that profits are going to be squeezed and operating models are going to be challenged and insurers need to adapt.' (<i>Strategy Manager</i>)
Consolidate	Convergence	'The scan is a consolidation device' (<i>Strategy manager</i>)
	Evaluation, comparison and ranking	'So, you'd have all the submissions and everybody is asked to submit what are the key trends or themes and what are the implications? You have two or three pages for everybody so it's quite a big document so we try and read across all those and try and identify all the big themes, and I used to call them MEGA trends' (<i>Senior Strategy Manager</i>)
	Physical representation of the industry	'Now in terms of next steps, this will then form a key part of the environmental context piece that goes to Group in early February that basically sets out this is insurance this is the landscape these are the key trends in the market this is what it means for the customers, value chains etc.' (<i>Senior Strategy Manager</i>)
Persuasion	Influence	In the document, we will make very clear sets of recommendations that represent the decision we want. This forces a decision from the executives. (<i>formal conversation with a Senior Strategy Manager</i>)

Although the scan may be thought of as a representation of the insurance industry, as the manager insinuates, it does more than represent. These lenses, as the team members refer to them, while not physical lenses as in an actual telescope, are specific themes peculiar to the insurance industry that are considered as factors that may impact on the organisation. The lenses include: customer; taxation; government and regulation; economics; behavioural economics; technology; people (colleague); intermediaries; operating models; competitors; distribution; and capital and risk management (Strategic Horizon Scan document, 2014). They were distributed among the members of the strategy team to be used to view the insurance industry. For example, a strategist working on the economics lens means that this individual gathers data from a variety of sources (both primary and secondary), such as the Office of National Statistics (ONS), and this information is specifically focused on the economy to identify trends or changes within the economy that could have a significant impact on the insurance industry.

One manager describes the different sources used to develop one of the lenses of the scan:

The colleague section will be predominantly online and using papers and consultancies that I found. The other source is working with the HR director – so Fred is looking at those themes and helping to develop those ... So I'm using internal expertise, lots of secondary research as well as things like statistics from the ONS, you know those sorts of things.

5.4.1 Enlist participants: Build-a-network

The work of developing the scan was a collaborative process that involved a network of different actors being enlisted to do the work. The data shows that during the strategy process, the first role performed by the scan was to enlist specific participants from across the organisation into the process. The inclusion of participants was shaped by several features of

the scan. For example, the extensiveness of the process of developing the scan required that all members of the strategy team be involved in the work. Austin – the Head of Strategic Propositions, describes the extensive nature of the work:

... So quite a long process and a good kind of team building process and challenging and I think just because of the breadth of the concept being covered, it would be unrealistic to think that one or two people could write it, it would just be too narrow and it wouldn't be well enough thought through.

Rather than assign the process to a few select members of the strategy team, the laborious activities, such as the intensive search and acquisition of knowledge from both primary and secondary sources required for the development of the tool, called for a team-wide collaboration.

VIGNETTE 1: Team-wide collaboration to develop the scan

At the start of the process, the selection of the lenses took place during a typical weekly Monday morning team meeting. The members of the strategy department are seated at their individual desks with their headsets adorned and their computer screens depicting the same image. All members are dialled into the conference call (including those based in other parts of the country). I was also dialled in and seated at a desk with a computer screen depicting the same PowerPoint slides that the members of the strategy team have on their screens. The meeting is initiated by Stephen, who was tasked with the job of coordinating the Horizon scan work. The early parts of the meeting involve a discussion about the upcoming group strategic review for which the scan work would also feed into and other matters related to the department were also discussed. The meeting finally reaches the agenda of the Horizon

scan and at that point a member of the team – Ralph (a strategy manager) – suggests an additional lens be added to the scan: the behavioural economics lens.

Prior to his suggestion, in the past the scan was made of ten lenses (Strategic Horizon Scan document, 2012). After proposing an additional lens, Ralph explains the importance and benefits of the new lens and justifies his argument for the inclusion of the lens by stating that the regulators were now focused on behavioural economics, the new Group Strategy Director had discussed it in a previous meeting and it was a theme that had been discussed at a prominent insurance industry conference. Stephen and the two heads of the team – Austin and Roy (Head of Corporate Strategy) – deliberated amongst themselves and agreed to include the new lens. At this point the scan now had eleven lenses.

After the adaptation of the scan, Stephen announces that the members can now select a lens to work on and jokingly threatens to assign the least wanted lenses to the members if they did not voluntarily select a lens within an appropriate time period. Immediately after his announcement a member of the team based in a different location voices his choice of the customer lens. The selection process continues as Stephen makes a note of the names of the people who would work on each lens either individually or in pairs. The meeting ends and I overhear Austin and Roy express their concerns about some of the selections.

As the strategists worked on developing their different aspects of the scan, it was once again adapted. This time around a new lens is drawn out of an existing lens. The definition of customer used for the customer lens was argued by another Senior Strategy manager – Helen – to be narrow

I thought the definition of customer was very narrow. We looked really at just retail and individual customers last year. We sort of ignored the fact that there are 4 million businesses in the UK which are customers of ours, we ignored intermediaries which are also customers of our product and I felt we were very narrow last year so I said

to [Nigel] that I'd quite like to look at some of the aspects that we didn't pick up last year which were more around the non-standard customer i.e. the person that sits between us and the end customer. You know if you think about auto enrolment although the end customer is the individual employee, actually you're having to meet the needs of a small business who is offering the pension to their employees. So I very much thought that we need to widen the definition of customer ... If you think about the next ten years [about] some of the trends that might influence our business, you're ignoring all of the four million businesses in the UK [and that] doesn't feel right.

This realisation led to the customer lens being split into two – traditional customers and intermediaries. With the addition of the intermediaries lens the scan became a device with twelve lenses used to examine the future of the insurance industry.

Including diverse actors for collaboration, distributed thinking and buy-in

Another feature of the tool that shaped its development relates to the need for a diversity of knowledge. In addition to all members of the team being involved in the scan work, the scan also enlists actors from different knowledge groups, known as Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), from across META-Life and STAR Group. These SMEs range from the IT department within META-Life to STAR Group's economics team. Although the strategists within the strategy team are knowledgeable and possess a good deal of expertise and experience, the scan is one tool that calls for expertise that goes beyond that of the strategy team. In other words, each lens required a specific SME to be part of the work of developing it. The particular SMEs from across the organisation included in the process were identified based on the labels of each lens of the scan. The format of the scan – its modular form which consists of twelve lenses – prescribed which specific expertise the members of the strategy team needed to draw on for

assistance from within the organisation. That is, each SME group corresponded with the specific labels of each lens of the scan. For example, one of the lenses of the scan is the taxation lens; to develop this lens the strategist that worked on it had to work in collaboration with the members of the Tax team in order to identify changes within this domain and to deduce the implications of these changes for the organisation and the customers.

The manager who developed the people lens (also referred to as colleague) gives an example of collaborating with a group of Senior managers from the human resources team to develop her aspect of the scan. The people lens deals with individuals that work for the organisation and future talent. Some of the trends found by the manager involved issues such as diversity and agile working.

We used the senior management team really to get their views on big trends around things like agile working and diversity and all sorts of interesting challenges that from a colleague perspective, the business is gonna face. So they help come up with those really (Helen).

The data shows that the SMEs that participated in the strategy process were not selected based on the subjective cognitive biases (selecting individuals believed to be best suited to include in the process) of the Head of the Strategy function or the strategy team. Rather in this case study, the identification and inclusion of participants in the strategy process was dependent on each lens of the scan. This meant that groups of SMEs from ten² different departments across the organisation were directly involved in the strategy process and subsequently the shaping of the strategic direction of the organisation.

² The reason why there are ten corresponding departments and not twelve – since the scan has twelve lenses – is because there were originally ten lenses and the two additional lenses were drawn out of two of the existing lenses. That is, the first lens added, behavioural economics is a subset of economics and the second lens added – intermediary – is a subset of customer.

Another example is the economics team, they were included in the process because their expertise were required for the development of the economics lens, the Human Resources team was involved because of the people lens and so on. The task of developing each lens involved extensive research in which the strategists were expected to have done their own research on their respective lenses and then test their findings on the SMEs. One member of the team describes how he engaged with the SME group related to his aspect of the horizon scan:

We provided them [i.e. the SMEs] with last year's document and also the themes that I initially shaped up – [i.e.] where I thought we needed to focus on. The primary objective was to test themes and whether or not there was anything that was missing based on their [i.e. the SMEs] own understanding (Nigel, Market Insight Manager).

The scan work also involved engaging with external consultants – McKinsey, these external actors were used as a sounding board for the findings from the process. Significantly, the process also involved including META-Life's CEO and his executive committee members. The interactions with the CEO and executives were in a collaborative manner, rather than the typical top-down fashion. The Strategy Director explains that the process is not a top-down process as would have been expected for such an organisation:

... it's [i.e. the strategy process] not so hierarchical as that ... there's no one sort of good ideas as to where we should be going and it generally emerges during the conversations we have both within the team and around the [executive] table ... (Kenneth, Strategy Director)

Rather than top-down, the strategists describe the process as bottom-up, one that to an extent mitigates political activity from the top:

And I think the other thing is that because it's [i.e. the scan] a very bottom up approach, what it does is it avoids being the hobby of perhaps one of the executive group. So

sometimes you might have an executive member that thinks: “this is the biggest opportunity for the business over the year, we should all get behind it”. Well this is a process that is very bottom up, looking at all the trends across a range of flavours and then highlighting the big trends and opportunities for our business to our executives. So it’s great that it’s such a bottom up process and it ensures that as a business we are wide ranging in our thinking of the future. As opposed to perhaps just getting behind one big idea that somebody had without really thinking about – what are all the trends in our market in the future (Helen).

As a result of the inclusion of different actors from across the company, in the scan work, we find a network of actors has been formed around the twelve lenses of the scan that ranged from the CEO to teams within STAR Group.

Inclusion: Modular format of scan enables the socialisation of thinking for idea generation

In addition to gathering information, developing and testing the findings from the different lenses, the strategists were also tasked with the work of identifying implications for their findings. That is, how would the main trends identified within each lens impact, firstly on the customer and secondly on the company. The identification of trends and their implications was the first half of the process, the latter part of the scan work was to develop ideas as to how the organisation would respond to the findings. These ideas came not only from the members of the strategy team but also from the SMEs that had been enlisted into the process of developing each lens of the scan. A member of the strategy team explains how the SMEs he collaborated with provided key insights in an area he was not particularly knowledgeable of:

I think they [i.e. the SMEs] reinforced a lot of the areas that I'd already highlighted but it was things like retirement area where I perhaps didn't have an awful lot of understanding on they were able to provide more detail around, also they suggested areas around kinda demographics that we weren't gonna look at such as immigration changes to sort of insurance need based on that [i.e. based on immigration] (Nigel, Market Insight Manager).

Similarly, another member of the strategy team mentions ways in which the SMEs she engaged with contributed to the generation of new ideas in relation to the lens she had worked on

They [i.e. the SMEs] were able to add a few ideas that we possibly had not thought of and they were able to give us a bit more data to support some of those ideas as well (Nancy, Strategy Manager).

The comments by the managers reveal the importance of collaborating with other groups from across the organisation during the strategy process. These peripheral actors may not have been included in the process, had there not have been a lens in the scan that corresponded to their department. While seated next to Ralph at his workdesk, he explains how he developed his lens of the scan. He mentions his interaction with the economics team and highlights that the strategy team rarely engages with them:

So there's a small team [i.e. the economics team] and there's about four or five people and they basically come up with many statistics. They are the group central team, we don't actually talk to them very much. Some teams might do, like the team down there [pointing to another department in the large open plan office space] they talk to them and use their assumptions a bit more. So for example, all this information [pointing at his screen], I got from them [i.e. the economics team]. So what I did was use their analyses rather than government estimates.

The Strategy director also highlights the benefits of inclusion and furthermore the role that the scan plays in enabling the socialisation of thinking and thereby the generation of ideas from a wider source, through its contribution to the formation of a network of knowledge experts.

The [scan] process involves making sure that we properly socialise all the thinking, in other words ... I don't see it as my job to come up with all the good ideas, I see it as my job to help the good ideas come to the surface and help them get implemented ... So making sure that we have the right people involved and engaged so that we spread our thinking as widely as possible and gather the great ideas in, from as widely as possible (Kenneth).

Another manager further comments on the wide reaching characteristics of the scan:

Everyone is involved in the horizon scan. Someone coordinates the pulling together of the paper, so just somebody in strategy so a senior manager in strategy – somebody at my grade. What they tend to do is distribute a list of themes or topics ... each person will pick up a theme and pull together a sort of 1000 word summary of the key things that are going on in the industry at the moment and where we should be looking to focus attention. Those will be very well syndicated with experts [i.e. the SMEs] in the business (Joachim, Senior Strategy Manager).

By enlisting participants from diverse knowledge groups, the scan enabled the kind of cross-boundary collaboration needed for the generation of new ideas.

Inclusion: scan perceived as a vehicle for change

During the development of the scan's lenses, some of the individuals and groups that were involved in the scan work, (with an exception of the CEO and the executive committee members. This exception is due to the fact that I did not get a chance to interview any of the

executives other than the strategy director), sought to utilize the scan as a medium through which they could influence the strategic direction of the organisation. Based on their understanding that the outcomes from the tool would inform the strategic decisions made by the executives, for these individuals the scan work was an opportunity to be a part of the strategic conversations that shape the company's strategy. In developing the different lenses, the strategists gather information concerning their respective lenses using both primary and secondary sources. However, the information acquired is distilled down to key themes, which means that not every interest incorporated into each lens will eventually be put forward to the executives.

It's very much a gathering of lots and lots of data and then highlighting or summing up what are the two or three key areas of consideration for our business (Helen).

The key themes presented within each lens were areas which each strategist, based on their analyses, the insights from the SMEs and personal views considered to be of great significance and therefore believed that the company needed to take into consideration.

'... It's a bit subjective Onya if I'm honest. You know it's not a science. I think Horizon scanning is very much an art' (Helen)

The outputs from each lens were submitted to Stephen – the manager who coordinated the scan work – and all the findings were collated and further distillations took place. In a meeting with some of the senior members of the strategy team (Austin, Roy, Emma and Agaba), Stephen discusses the findings of the scan work. He highlights a list of nine themes which had been pulled out from the twelve lenses. During the discussion the strategists deliberated on which of the nine themes were more paramount for the company. Three themes stood out very quickly as 'mega trends' and two other themes were later identified from the list as being more significant than the remaining themes. Any theme categorised as a mega trend gets more

visibility or attention from not only the strategists but also from the executives. The meeting concluded with an agreement to put forward the five themes selected to the senior executives and these themes would further feed into STAR Group's strategy process through the Group Strategic Review.

Whilst some actors involved in the development of the different lenses of the scan were cognizant of the fact that the findings from the scan work would inform the senior executives' decisions a few were oblivious of how the outputs of the scan would be used. A manager explains, using an example, how the findings from the scan shapes the company's strategy:

It [i.e. the scan] will influence hopefully what we actually do – as in our strategy. For example if we identify, which we've done many times, that there will be so many more retired people in ten years, our strategy that we are looking at now is that we have to do a lot more for retirement. We see this [finding], as a group, as a massive opportunity for us. So that's the kind of insight that we'll pick up from the horizon scan rather than numbers (Ralph).

The strategy director reiterates this by stating that the results of the scan work and the other tools will 'drive the strategy'.

While working on her lens, a manager comments on how the scan is a tool that enables them to channel people's attention towards specific issues.

So I'm probably picking up on existing themes but actually if we sieve them into this process we can make sure that insurers can start thinking about them and what we do about them (Helen).

This 'sieving' of specific themes into the lenses of the scan was also carried out by other members of the team as well, in order to point the executives in a specific direction. A comment by Helen illustrates the desire of the actors to contribute in some way to the strategy formation.

It's an opportunity to feed into our strategy what maybe I think are the key themes and implications for our business around different areas. To have an opportunity to feed into overall strategy because going forward this paper will inform the strategic risk for our business and the strategic investment opportunities this year or the year after perhaps. So it is an opportunity to influence I guess the long term business strategy of our business (Helen).

This is also expressed by the strategy director in an informal conversation. He explains that in the final document that will be sent to the CEO and executives, 'they will make very clear sets of recommendations' which essentially represents implicitly that 'this is the decision that we [i.e. the strategy team] want'.

The interests of some of the members were evident right from the start. After the team meeting, described above, where the members of the strategy team selected the lenses they each wanted to work on, I asked Ralph why he had suggested the inclusion of the behavioural economics lens. He explained that he believed it was a practice that STAR Group and its different business units needed to adopt. This new lens was distinctively different from the other lenses. He admitted that it was not particularly related to the scan because behavioural economics on the one hand focuses on the past while the Horizon scan looks to the future. Ralph's suggestion to include the new lens stemmed from his personal interest in behavioural economics and his educational background in economics:

I was doing a bit of thinking about behavioural economics in general – how we can apply them in [STAR Group] a bit more. I would say it's not strictly speaking a horizon scan work but I just got my personal interest in that and I want to dig into it a bit more cause I think [STAR Group] can do a lot more on this and I think this is my chance in

say influencing the company in that direction ... So I'm personally interested in economics and I studied it in university.

For Helen one of the main issues she was particularly passionate about was the issue of diversity within META-Life. Prior to the development of the people lens, Helen expresses both her frustrations concerning the sparse number of female executives and senior managers and her elation with regards to the appointment of a new Group strategy director, who is a woman.

I mean I'm all for the right person having the right job I don't believe in positive discrimination but I have to say on a personal level it is inspiring to see women at the top, absolutely love it ... it is absolutely inspiring as a female leader in the business to see senior women who have had fabulous careers doing really well. I'm a big fan of diversity and I think as a business we are sort of unconsciously biased towards white males getting the job and I do understand it cause we're a big organisation but I think we don't always get the right talent and I think we're certainly not future-proofing ourselves. I think people – good talented women are leaving the business Onya and it's because they don't see female role models at the top so they just can't see where they could go. So on a personal level I think it's fabulous and I haven't worked for any women for a long time which is really sad. It's great. I think it's really important cause if you think about it over half of our customers are women. I can send you some facts and papers about it but women control spending in the UK. And there are more graduates that are women than men and yet as a business less than fifteen percent of our top (and when I say top I mean my grade and above) are women, I mean it's ridiculous [and] at the top table hardly any. So it can't be right, you know it can't be right.

On examining the Horizon scan document submitted to the executive committee members, we find diversity as a key theme highlighted under the people lens Helen developed. She links this issue of diversity to META-Life's customers and provides corresponding implications of the theme:

... The ability to retain and attract talent from diverse segments will be key to ensure companies can reflect the views and needs of their customer groups within the organisation (Horizon scan document 2014).

Implication of the theme:

Need to drive through change across Insurance to focus on improving our levels of diversity (Horizon scan document 2014)

Others such as Nigel, who developed the customer lens, not only consulted the customer SMEs (known as the RA team) for insights but also included them in the actual work of developing the customer lens. In this case we find both Nigel and members of the RA team using the customer lens as a vehicle to propagate their ideas. Nigel comments on the reactions of the members of the RA team included in the scan work:

You know I think ultimately quite happy to be involved, particularly to use the Horizon scan as a piece of work we've got as a vehicle to get across some of the key messages that perhaps they don't find an audience for throughout the year.

This work of sieving specific themes that the strategists were passionate about into the scan document was enabled by the modular feature of the scan. The format of the scan is such that individuals are able to develop their respective lenses on their own. However, they are required to 'sensecheck' their findings with the SMEs and in the process any insights not previously identified by the strategists are highlighted by the SMEs. The autonomy the modular format of the scan afforded, provided the actors with the opportunity to propagate their ideas/interests

through the lenses of the scan. Although these issues and ideas were of personal interest to the different strategists, they were issues that were genuinely relevant to the company and would have some sort of impact on it, such as the argument for the adoption of behavioural economic practices proposed by Ralph, rather than issues that were aimed at promoting the self-interests of the actors. Stephen, for example, while collating the findings from the lenses draws a link between the company and the point made by Helen concerning women. He mentions that this has implications for how the company will market its products.

The scan work was thus an opportunity for the actors, particularly those who are not a part of the strategy team, to in some way also be a part of the strategic conversations taking place. These interests translated into ideas seemed at first as though the strategists and the other groups were being political but upon further analysis, the ideas suggested were not for personal interests as would be the case in political activities. Rather these ideas were brought forth implicitly through the scan's lenses as emergent ideas for what the company could do better. This desire to influence is linked to ideas emerging from the periphery of the organisation for what the organisation should consider as important themes that might impact the insurance industry.

The inclusion of the different groups and individuals from across the organisation through the lenses of the scan, was not only helpful for the work of idea generation, but was also an avenue through which the strategists were able to achieve buy-in, both of which are important aspects of strategy making.

Inclusion: scan enables the achievement of buy-in

As the strategy process progressed the inclusion of the different stakeholders in the scan work was useful for the achievement of buy-in:

The purpose of this process is to build consensus towards the direction of travel [i.e. the strategy] (Kenneth)

This same view is also expressed by Helen. She highlights the importance of engaging with the different parts of the organisation particularly the executives:

... At the end of the day the executive members and their senior team are essential stakeholders in the process. You need to make sure that whatever you are presenting in terms of findings or in terms of next steps that they've engaged with that along the way. I think that making sure that in particular the executives and their senior team are comfortable with what our findings are and our rationale, is really important because otherwise they're not going to buy-in to the findings for them to be taken forward into the business.

Through this participatory approach to strategy making underpinned by the scan, the strategy team were able to achieve consensus/buy-in for the strategic direction that would be recommended to the CEO and the executives. The outputs from the scan which feeds into the strategy, would later be used to justify the strategy when communicated across the organisation and was therefore a means to achieve wider consensus.

The other side of inclusion

Although the development of the network enabled the socialisation of thinking as the strategy director mentioned and also enabled buy-in, the inclusion of groups and individuals in the scan work inevitably meant that others were to some extent excluded from the work.

Inclusion – Exclusion Dialectic

Prior to the merger of STAR Group's insurance businesses – Life, Pensions and Insurance (LPI) and General Insurance (GI) – some members of the strategy team were formerly a part of a function called RA Insight. Members of this function dealt mainly with customer and market insight, providing the company with knowledge related to areas such as customer behaviour and competitor intelligence. The RA team itself consisted of three functions – the Market insight team, the Data analytics team and the Research team. After the merger of insurance the members of the Market insight team became a part of the strategy function.

During the scan work, the RA function served as one of the SMEs the strategy team consulted in order to develop the customer lens of the scan. As the process progressed, issues of exclusion arose that involved members of the RA team. While Austin mentioned that the scan work engendered team building within the strategy function, I observed from interviews with other actors involved in the work that some members and teams, who had been engaged with as SMEs during the scan work in the past, felt excluded from the process and expected to have been directly involved in the process rather than consulted with from time to time. A manager from the strategy team highlights this issue of exclusion:

The horizon scan in previous years has really been done by the people within the strategy team without an awful lot of engagement with some of the other key areas ...

There are stakeholders engaged but I think one of the main ones that was excluded to a large extent in previous years was the RA team.

The issue of exclusion occurred in different degrees and for several reasons. As aforementioned, the format of the strategy tool is such that the lenses of the tool specify which function within the organisation will be engaged with in order to develop the tool. Simultaneously and inevitably, the scan excludes others, for example the teams that constitute

the different product departments. The theme of each lens does not correspond directly to such departments. Had there been a lens with a theme that was focused on, for example, any one specific product such as annuities or protection, then the annuities or protection departments would have been SMEs involved in the development of the scan. However, this is not to say that such departments are never involved in the process. Functions or departments not explicitly linked to the scan are sometimes consulted by the strategy members but this only occurs if any of the findings from the lenses directly links to a specific product or function. For example, prior to developing the economics lens, Ralph mentions that if during his research, he identifies trends that may impact on any of META-Life's products, he will 'speak to that particular product'.

We also find that the approach taken towards developing the scan contributed to the issue of exclusion. While developing his lens, Ralph begins by doing some ground research on his lens using online sources and internal written reports developed by SMEs within META-Life. The results of the research are later discussed with the SMEs to confirm his findings and identify areas he might have overlooked. The outcomes from the discussion with the SMEs are further fed back to the strategy team. Ralph's approach towards developing his lens is one that is common to the way in which most of the other strategists also developed their lenses. This approach is one that is mainly deductive, where the process of data gathering and analysis begins with the strategists and the findings are tested on the SMEs. This approach according to a manager who was a part of the RA team but is now a part of the strategy team further exacerbates the issue of exclusion:

It always felt, I think, in previous years we'd go back to them [the RA team] with our [the strategy team] view having worked it up without their sort of involvement and then gone back to sort of the head of the function just to say: "oh do you agree with these things?" Where actually you should be starting with the team. Starting with the work

that they've done throughout the year and then try and you know sign post those sort of key messages within the document (Nigel, Market Insight Manager).

The manager distinguishes between the deductive approach used by the strategy team in developing the lenses and what he describes as a more inductive approach. This deductive approach according to the manager promotes further exclusion of other teams and prevents them from being actively involved in the process:

I suppose it's about more engagement with the wider business. Now it does happen, not that it's none existent or had been in the past but I think one of the missing elements was starting with the RA team's conclusions and analysis and working from that point through to what the customer piece should be rather than just pulling it together from our [i.e. the strategy team] own sort of tacit understanding. And what we see is little engagement on that front.

Rather than taking a deductive approach, Nigel took an inductive approach in which he began the work of developing his own lens by beginning his inquiries and data gathering from the RA team and then working forward from the knowledge acquired from them. He mentions how using this approach to develop his lens led to key insights being highlighted by the members of the RA team that had not previously been considered by the strategy team in previous years.

Further investigation of this issue of exclusion involved a discussion of the matter with the Head of Corporate Strategy – Roy, to determine why certain teams were not directly involved in the process of the scan work but had only been engaged with. Roy commented that I had to 'differentiate between owning a process and taking part in it'.

Strategy owns the Horizon scan process but we use an approach that involves engaging with other parts of the business [emphasis added]

This explained why only members of the strategy team worked directly on the different lenses of the scan, while other actors were treated as subject matter experts that contribute to the work by confirming or challenging the assumptions and conclusions of the strategy members, a process the strategy members refer to as sensechecking. Having ownership and authority over the tool meant that in addition to the tool including and excluding actors, the strategists could determine the level or degree of inclusion they desired from other functions and teams in the process.

5.4.2 Reorient temporally: Build-a-telescope

As aforementioned, one of the roles of the scan is that it acts like a telescope and it brings things that are at a distance closer. After an iterative process of gathering, distilling, testing and further distilling, what the contents of the lenses show are pictures of a possible future. The scan, as Helen describes it, is ‘future looking and future proofing’. It is a future-oriented tool that channels the mental focus of the strategists towards the future:

In the Horizon scan we ask: ‘what’s gonna happen in the next 10 years and how is that gonna impact us?’ ... The Horizon scan is basically the only time in a year where you get to just sit down and think about things more broader – to think maybe 10 to 15 years ahead. You know cause it’s very easy as a business to respond to the challenges of today without thinking about what are the challenges or opportunities of the future (Ralph).

Similarly, Nigel in explaining the process of developing his lens, he also alludes to the future-focus of the scan:

Secondly by looking at last year’s document and asking what is it that we’re missing this year. Cause I mean the one thing that I do think about the horizon scan, we are

talking about generally trends that are emerging and happening over a much longer period (Nigel, Market Insight Manager)

The focus during the development of the lenses is on looking at the trends that are happening within the insurance industry and identifying opportunities and risks and in a number of instances extrapolating from the data, what the future might be:

We [i.e. the strategy team] really sort of look out into the future and see things coming and work with the business to understand how they might go about responding to these things (Joachim)

At certain times, the strategists also engage in the creation of imaginations of what they envision the future will be:

We imagine what could happen in the future. So we're talking about retirement incomes being low. So you can imagine many people who are over 65 they will be working in retirement (Ralph).

The work of the scan is one that involves developing a picture of what the future might be, although it is a picture that is incomplete due to uncertainties, but nonetheless they have to some extent an idea of what this picture looks like in the present moment. The Strategy director also reiterates this future looking attribute of the scan.

The [process] goes from a sort of setting out what we think the future might look like through to securing the funding to do stuff...

So, within the scan we look for the long term emerging trends and how they might impact the business and from that we get a very large number of areas of uncertainty. So we might pick out a dozen or more different things where we don't know what's going to happen and the next stage then is to understand how they are related to one

another, so which one of these are likely to emerge ... And then try and craft that into a series of stories, in other words the scenarios as to how the world might emerge
(Kenneth)

It is based on these stories or pictures of how the strategists believe the world will emerge that the strategists develop responses to the opportunities and risks identified in the stories. An example of one of the findings from the scan is the trend of ‘significant demographic and diversity changes within UK households’ (Strategic Horizon Scan document, 2014). This is said to be ‘a sort of societal structure change that is going to happen’ (Stephen) in the future and will have significant implications for how the company will market its products and who they will appeal to in the future. What the strategists have is not simply a tool that provides a representation of the industry but a tool that in a way reifies the ‘probable’ future in the present. Further down the strategy process, the outputs of the tool (supplemented with the outputs of other tools) will be translated into strategic initiatives and subsequently alter the organisation’s activities and operations. Based on the scan, the future is no longer a distant occurrence waiting to be, but it has been made real and present. Knowing with precision what the future will be is unattainable and so to deal with, to some extent, the uncertainties associated with their picture of the future the strategists engage in a strategic risk scenario assessment. The risks identified during the scan work are assessed and possible scenarios of how these risks would unfold would be developed. The importance of looking into the future for these risks is described by the strategy director through a metaphor and is reiterated by the scan coordinator – Stephen.

The Horizon scan was really something adopted from my days in [STOW Oil – a major oil company] and ... it’s about looking for the elephant in the long grass, which was really those things that would come at you rather unexpectedly and could do some serious damage. So I thought it sensible to make sure that we always had our eye on

what was going on in the overall environment so we didn't get derailed by any of them (Kenneth).

I think it's good to, if you're a strategy function you really need to know what's going on in your business and if you don't have an eye on the future you could get surprised (Stephen).

The scan is perceived as an important tool that ensures that the business is able to draw insights both from the present and the probable future. It gets the strategists thinking and therefore acting according to the future perspective they presently have. This future perspective is drawn from the contents of the scan. For example, managers from the team describe findings from the customer and intermediary lenses that relates to how and where customers will seek advice concerning insurance products in the future. Certain types of insurance products are quite complex and associated with a greater level of risk than other products, these types of products are not usually sold without the customer being given sufficient advice about the product. According to the ABI, '[i]n 2013, 70% of customers who purchased a pension, protection or long-term insurance product had some form of advice' (ABI Key Facts, 2014). Historically, customers were able to get advice on products such as protection products by walking into a bank and speaking to an adviser. However this has now changed and the strategists highlight within the scan document that these changes brought on by the Retail Distribution Review 'has left an advice vacuum for millions of customers' (Strategic Horizon scan document, 2014).

The future perspective or picture of the future, in this case, was developed based on the findings. The strategists juxtapose what is happening in the present with what the data is insinuating and determine that there will be a change in the way people get advice, how they get the advice and where they get the advice from:

... what happened was that there was a mega trend happening but actually you could see more and more that where people get advice [now] and where they get it from in the future is gonna change and we need to think about that as a business. And that didn't come from one section, it was a recurring theme that came through everything. Like a perfect storm you know it was all pointing towards – 'we need to look at how advice within this market is in the future'. (Helen)

Helen's comment illustrates that the scan channels the attention of the strategists towards specific issues but in addition to doing so it highlights what the probable future would be.

The insights identified within the scan inevitably pose questions to the strategists:

You know for example the theme around advice ... we said well what are the new channels that people might want to go to in the future? We looked at direct channels, we looked at worksite, [and asked] 'would people want advice from the work place going forward'? (Helen)

In trying to answer such questions they develop a picture of what the future could be. Using this future perspective the company may then decide on whether to respond to it and also determine how they will respond to the finding. For this particular finding the strategists conclude that customers will, in the future, seek advice from within their workplaces.

So one of the conclusions we came up with was that where, how and when people access advice is changing. So we've seen the retail distribution review that came in 2013, as a result we've started to see a contraction in advice on banks ... basically we've seen people [i.e. financial institutions] stop providing advice for the mass market – for the person who walks into the high street. So all of the major banks, bar Trustwide Bank (pseudonym), have withdrawn. So where are people going to go for advice now? And

that would be someone like myself, I would call myself a mass market customer, where am I gonna go? Well potentially in the future you'd go to your employer. (Austin)

In addition to this finding under the customer and intermediary lenses, a recurrent and noticeable theme within the scan document is digital. While getting advice from the work place is a more formal means for customers, the strategists also conclude that one of the implications of the change in the way customers receive advice is that ‘for millions of mass market customers, the game has changed and the future will be DIGITAL’ (Strategic Horizon scan document, 2014). This means that customers, according to the strategists’ interpretations of the findings, are not only going to turn to their employers for advice but they are turning towards multiple online channels such as comparison sites and social media to obtain information in order to make informed decisions. So there is a shift from going into a branch of a bank to get advice towards getting advice from the workplace and online.

The growth in online research and comparison sites is accelerating and driving rapid change in product comparability and transparency. Consumers are increasingly focusing on price and only want to pay for the cover/product features that they need. This is driving channel shift away from traditional channels towards aggregators/online direct and creating margin compression for incumbent providers. (Strategic Horizon Scan document, 2014)

In response to the conclusions on digital, META-Life uses the findings to develop initiatives that relate to their focused participation strategy. By considering the digital theme, the initiatives developed are specific to some of the four markets META-Life participates in.

Learning: Transforming the way we think

In addition to reorienting the cognitive focus of the strategists towards focusing on the future, the scan also provides an avenue whereby the strategists reflect on their current practices and further juxtapose the present with the future. This leads to learning and subsequently changes in their activities and in what the organisation does.

I observed from the data that both the findings from the scan and the process of doing the scan work contributed to a shift in the mental models of the strategists. The scan instigates thinking from a future perspective (as discussed above). As one manager described, the scan is a period in which they pause and reflect on what they do vis-a-vis the future and consider adapting their activities and operations based on the future perspective.

The Horizon scan is basically the only time in a year where you get to just sit down and think about things more broader – to think maybe 10 to 15 years ahead ... I think [it] is a dangerous thing in strategy if you just focus from presentation to presentation. So I think it's a really valuable time for strategy just to sit down and think actually strategically what it means for us. So what we'll be looking to do and what I'll be looking to do is try to get some more strategic longer term insights. The Horizon scan is a time to sit down and see how the business might evolve. (Ralph)

An example of the content of the scan impacting on the way the strategists viewed the world is that the findings from the scan prompted a reflection and challenged their existing ways of thinking, this led to a redefinition of who their target customers were and consequently a redefinition of their propositions and whether or not there was a fit between their existing products and their target customers. Based on this finding from the scan the strategists asked themselves:

So it's asking what does this mean? Are we actually reaching the right people? Our propositions, do they fit the needs of our customer base? Are we representative of our customer base? So it's just about challenging whether or not we need to think about different niche segments emerging rather than actually thinking of you know just the traditional insurance customers (Stephen).

Here we see a shift from viewing customers as one homogeneous group who require insurance products to understanding that there are different niches of customers and each niche requires a slightly different product from the traditional one-size-fits-all products offered by the company. We find that the future perspective generated by the scan plays a role in triggering this change in the way that the strategists view the world and consequently respond to it.

In relation to the process, in addition to engaging with SMEs and other stakeholders, the act of developing the document and the PowerPoint slides was an event in which both the scan and the strategists were transformed. The meticulous back and forth development of the documents served not only to convince when the documents got in front of the executives but it also did a work of refining the thinking of the strategists. An illustration of this is when the strategists had an idea of what the document should be and they shaped the document in that form but whenever they presented the work to the strategy director and it was made evident during the meetings that the contents of the document needed to be adapted, they went back and made the changes. The numerous iterations that took place in making the changes to the document allowed for their thinking to also be adapted. This was made evident by the strategy director:

I think the long document was really to force clarity of thinking ... If you have to tell a story a very logical story as to why trends we see at the moment leads to implications that we're asserting, then I believe, particularly, a long form document is a very good way of forcing that logical thinking.

Almost everything in strategy is about process because it is the process that refines your thinking and I would say the same for most of the business modelling work which is done as well. So the process is at least as important as the output.

The strategy director further asserts that the actual experience of developing the long document led to a shift in the way that the strategists saw the world:

... It was about the process we went through in developing the document and how that developed our thinking about how the economy, well everything was evolving. I mean it would be dead easy to go through a process of – well let's dust down last year's document, give it a quick read cross a few bits out write a few new bits and bobs your uncle! There it is, just fire it off to the exec and we're done and that takes uh hours and is hours wasted. We spend days on it [the document], but they're days well spent and the output may not look that different you know – 40 sides of word document – but it's what's changed in your thinking, it's what's changed in your mental model of the world that matters.

Later on in the process while the findings from the scan were being developed into another document to be sent to STAR Group's strategy team, the manager in charge of coordinating the scan work explains that during the process of transforming the document into something more suitable for the central strategy team, the strategists were asked to compress their sections of the scan from several pages to about five sentences. This exercise reiterates what the strategy director had said about the scan work altering their thinking:

So what we asked everybody to do, which was quite a useful exercise cause it framed their minds more, was to come up with a snappy summary of what's going on. We've asked them to do a five sentence summary of their topics.

So it's [i.e. the scan] fundamental to our planning process and helps shape our thoughts about where we should be going. And is also a test as well, to make sure your current strategy is still valid or if you need to change something.

On another occasion while being escorted down to the reception by one of the managers, in order to return my visitor's pass, this same point of refining their thinking through the scan work was once again mentioned by the manager. This highlighted aspects of the process that related to learning.

5.4.3 Consolidate: Build-a-consolidation device

After the members of the strategy team submit their findings from their respective lenses to the scan coordinator, he goes through a process of consolidating the findings. The tool is now seen as a 'consolidation device' according to one member of the team (Agaba, Senior Strategy Manager), 'that pulls everything together into one place' (Nancy). Another manager uses a metaphor to describe this work of the scan:

It [i.e. the scan] really does go off into the corner and sweeps out all the interesting things that need to be thought about (Joachim, Senior Strategy Manager).

This work of consolidation brings together knowledge that had prior to the work, been distributed across the organisation. Another manager alludes to how the tool takes into consideration all the themes that they believe relate to the insurance industry. His comment also touches on the issue of inclusion.

... it'll be everybody in strategy team that works on it [the scan]. It's one of those really interesting pieces of the strategic cycle everybody wants to be involved in and it's one

of those key learning parts for everybody in the team and you know it kinda considers everything and so everybody should be involved (Austin).

The consolidated document is used by the strategists to identify patterns across the twelve lenses, determine the implications of the findings and distill the findings down to the most important themes.

Well you're looking for connections across the different lenses. A lot of it comes from the customer piece. What is it the customers need and how is that changing? What pressures are they under and how can insurance actually fill that? So we look across all the content to make connections and come up with themes and the implications of those.

The scan coordinator explains that nine themes were identified from this process. However, the nine themes were later distilled to five themes. He also explains that from the consolidated findings they were able to identify for example that one of the five themes was a consequence of three other themes.

5.4.4 Persuade: Build-a-compelling argument to persuade

The coordinator of the scan sends out a copy of the consolidated document to the other members of the team. All the strategists come together again for a team meeting. This takes place prior to another meeting where the senior members of the team worked collectively to select what they consider to be the key trends, from within the nine trends identified. The general team meeting is held to discuss each of the findings:

I do a form of editing, make sure that everything is written in a consistent style, make sure that the content is appropriate [that] it's actually covering the things we want it

to cover. So we've done a sense check on that and then we did feed that back out to the team and had a little team session ... I mean it's quite high level, we go through every single point. There was an exec summary where pieces of the big submission were summarised into a few paragraphs, the key trends and three or four bullet points about implication. So we tried to do that as well. So we sort of tested out with people the key trends that were coming out. There were a few: 'oh yeah we definitely agree with that ... I think that's more important'. You know you get a bit of comment around.

The five key trends that were eventually drawn from the scan and their implications for the company are presented in a document titled the Chairman's letter and will be presented to the CEO and the other executives by the strategy director. Prior to this particular meeting where the five trends will be presented, the involvement of the executives in the scan work and other analysis meant that at this point of the strategy process they were familiar with the findings from the scan work and would have requested for more information concerning a theme if they needed to get a better understanding of what the themes meant and implied. Prior presentations of the scan work by the strategy director to the executives would have been to update the executives on some of the opportunities and risks identified.

The team do update sensechecks with the executives at different stages of the strategy process keeping them engaged in the process. (Kenneth)

At this point in the process, the document is in the draft stage and the senior members of the strategy team and the strategy director work on developing it into the Chairman's letter. This document was produced along with an accompanying set of PowerPoint slides. The Chairman's letter is sent via email to the members of the executive team prior to their meeting, while the slides will be presented by the strategy director to the CEO and the other executives on the day of the meeting. The production of the long document could be described as both iterative and

intensive. This was evident based on the multiple meetings that were held that involved a back and forth movement between the strategists, the documents and the strategy director concerning the way in which the content of the documents (both the Chairman's letter and the PowerPoint slides) should be framed before the final document was developed and sent off to the executives.

I mean there's a lot of iteration between the submissions and the storyboard that gets to the executives. But the execs receive high-level slides of the big trends that we need to consider (Helen)

VIGNETTE 2: Crafting a persuasive device

Sitting across from the strategy director in a meeting held in his office to discuss the Chairman's letter, I observed as the senior members of the strategy department (with one member dialled in from a different location) collaboratively shape the long document that was due to be sent off to the executives in a few weeks. The strategy director asks the strategist who had coordinated the scan work to talk them through the document explaining the rationale for some of the wordings and formats used within the document. The other senior managers who had worked with the coordinator also offered explanations for their decisions and how the document had been framed and took notes as they all exchanged ideas on how to improve the document. Discussions also revolved around the presentation slides that the strategy director would use. Issues that involved the lengthiness of the slides were pointed out and were one of the changes that had to be made. Two hours after this meeting another meeting was held in a meeting room on the ground floor of the grandiose building with two senior members of the strategy team, the scan work coordinator and I, to discuss the points that had been made during the previous meeting and to decide on the changes that would be made to the slides and the long document. During the week other meetings

followed that involved a presentation of the updated slides and long document to the strategy director. This back and forth movement of framing and reframing the document during and after meetings with the strategy director continued. One of the managers narrates the process of developing the document and mentions what version of the document they were on:

... We would then go and have a debate with Kenneth [strategy director] and say here's our findings, here's our recommendations and then we'd have a debate with him about whether he thought those were the right areas as well. And each time that we do a first draft of each particular area, we'd send it to Kenneth. He would review it and come back with his comments as well. So multiple reviews, I think we're on version 30 or something of the draft ... given all the SMEs and internal reviews that we had. So quite a long process ... (Austin)

Sitting with Stephen at his desk as he talks me through the finished document, he interrupts his explanation of the key themes and explains that they also included at the back of the document, case studies. These case studies he explains are to 'bring some of the themes to life'. Using four groups of case studies, the strategists hope to underpin both their arguments on why some of the themes highlighted are important and their recommendations of what the strategic direction should be. Case study 1 was titled 'Digital Evolution' and was to help illustrate the importance of the digital theme highlighted within the scan and the effects digital evolution has had on other companies in other industries. When the strategists refer to digital within this context, they do not restrict it to 'Big data' (although they also refer to this), rather digital touches on different aspects of their business. For example, digital in relation to their products could refer to providing the necessary digital infrastructure needed for customers to access and

purchase products online rather than through face to face means. Roy comments on the recent shift to digital within the insurance industry and the company's response to the changes:

The other major change is the shift to digital – [which is concerned with] how people engage with organisations and how they make decisions and that's quite fundamentally different from how people used to make decisions about the types of products we would have, historically. And that's where investments in home, or digital protection or actually within that retirement stuff [which are] much more intuitive easy to engage with information and processes that are online, [come in]. So those are the 2 kinda major ones. Linked to that is increasing personalisation of stuff – so people want things that are much more tailored to them, and data and technology allow you to do much more tailoring than we used to be able to do. Em that needs to become a feature of how we engage with customers online

For customers to be able to do this there also has to be a means through which they can access supporting advice online in order to make the right choices of products. All of this requires investment in the building of infrastructure that will allow for this to happen. Within the document, after they present the case study on digital evolution, the strategists highlight that 'The insurance industry has been slow to embrace the move to digital'. For the insurance industry digital has not always been an imperative. This is because traditionally customers were able to purchase insurance products in person through face-to-face interactions, but now technological advancements allow customers to not only purchase products online within seconds but they are also able to compare prices of products and determine which deals are more suitable for them.

Other case studies within the document related to operating models, digital advice and Big data. I noticed how meticulously the strategists worked on shaping the document and decided

to follow this line of enquiry. This led to the observation that the document was very necessary for the work of convincing the executives and pointing them in a certain direction.

Scan moving around: to convince for agreement

The completed document and the PowerPoint slides highlight the main themes, the implications of the themes and clear sets of recommendations, both documents were now ready for the strategy director's presentation to the executives.

So we are taking pieces of work forward with recommendations about where we should invest strategically off the back of the horizon scan and all of the risks (Austin)

Both the slides and the strategy director make a case for why the company should take the specific strategic directions being recommended. The purpose of this particular meeting was for the executives to deliberate on the work presented, particularly the implications of the findings and the strategic options and make a decision as to whether they agree with the recommendations and thereby grant what one manager called an 'identification agreement', which is their consent for the strategy team to progress to the next stage of the strategy process, which is applying for funding from STAR Group to invest in the strategic choices made. Or the executives may choose to go in a different direction from what has been proposed. Depending on the response from the executives, the recommendations made could either be agreed upon, and can then be put through to the investment process, or further information may be requested for by the executives. They might argue that the finding or opportunity is 'great but it's five years out and we don't need to respond to it now. Let's watch what competitors are doing, monitor it and revisit it in 12 months' time' (Helen). The decisions taken by the executives also depend on the strategy of the company in terms of how the company wants to respond to the opportunity. That is, whether or not you are an innovator or fast follower.

So they [i.e. the executives] effectively now have a choice. If they agree with them [i.e. the recommendations] then let's press ahead and develop those options. Otherwise, should we be going somewhere else? So it's [i.e. the horizon scan] really a document that is designed to inform and encourage debate ... It's really a document to say 'this is what we think is happening, these are the implications for our customers and for the company and here's how we think we could respond' (Austin)

Since I was not allowed to attend the executive committee meetings due to the sensitivity of the discussions, I therefore relied on getting insights from the strategy director as to the outcomes of the meeting:

Generally speaking there's a good engagement at [the meetings] ... What we would tend to do through the strategic work is take people [i.e. the CEO and executives] through the scenarios. We wouldn't take them through the long document although ... that would be available to them. What's really interesting for them is not really the analysis that underpins it, it's not even to a certain extent the scenarios that came out of it although that is significant, it's what the implications of what those are for our strategy is what matters and so that is what we [i.e. the strategy team] tried to draw out in the conclusions. So it will imply are we in the right markets should we be moving our investment from one market to another market etc. those are the kind of implications that we drew out from the strategic analysis.

Based on the outcomes from the scan work in conjunction with other tools, the strategists are able to identify whether or not there is a need to adapt the existing strategy. As the strategy director pointed out, the findings will either validate their existing focused participation strategy or it will imply that they need to adapt what it is that they are doing. In addition, he explains that the findings elicit some degree of debate from the executives but they are

generally open to the recommendations and findings. This is mainly because they had been involved, as aforementioned, in the process of developing the scan and the other tools utilized and they are therefore familiar with what has been presented to them:

You get a fair bit of challenge [from the executives] but generally people are both welcoming and accepting of the findings because they know there's a robust process behind it and to be honest we take them through that process. So we talk to them at various stages during the process so we'll talk them through where we think the big trends are and we'll then come back to them how we think this falls out in terms of scenarios and then we'll come back to them again in terms of what the implications of this are. So you know they are bought into the process they understand the steps of the process and they are agreeable with each of the steps so it's then a course correction rather than any great rejection or disagreement.

By involving the executives, the strategists set the scene for the achievement of buy-in. We find that the process of convincing the executives is one that is achieved not solely by the strategy director, but by himself and the documents the strategy team have worked meticulously to prepare for the presentation. The strategy director explained that the recommendations presented 'forces a decision' to be made by the executives. According to the strategy director, without the recommendations the information presented to the senior team will simply be viewed as interesting insights from the analysis but by including the recommendations in the PowerPoint slides, the executives are in a way being signposted towards making a choice that is actually the decision that the strategists desire. The strategy director further reveals that the recommendations were accepted by the CEO and the other executives and they would be moving forward towards applying for funds.

Scan moving around: to convince for funding

Once the executives give their consent to the recommendations proposed, the next stage of the process is to develop an investment proposal based on the analysis and highlight the strategic choices made within the proposal.

We've identified 5 strategic options that we want to progress, so we are working up a business case to support those options. So at the moment we're moving to the cost-benefit stage just to put some numbers around that and it'll get submitted to Group and consolidated into an insurance view (Stephen)

The structure of STAR Group is such that funding for investments are coordinated by STAR. Although META-Life has its own strategy, it is still constrained by the resources available within the entire Group. In order to obtain funding for strategic investments, all of STAR Group's divisions had to go through a bidding process during the year. They all had to make a strong case for why their projects deserved a portion of the limited resources managed by the central team.

The insurance business doesn't have any money per say. All the money is held centrally as far as strategic investment spend is concerned and consequently we make bids for that money. The strategy team works with the CEO and the executives to coordinate the bidding of the money, coordinate the spending of the money, coordinate the measuring of the benefits. (Roy)

So insurance owns its own strategy but has to work within the constraints of the investment funding available. So anything we want to do, we have to pitch for investment funding. And actually put a business case together to say this is why this is a good thing to do. And that will be compared against other parts of the Group. (Stephen)

A prioritization process takes place within Group in order to determine which projects will be granted funding.

... Group has to prioritize its resources across all of its component parts or all of its divisions and functions. So there's a significant prioritization exercise for Group that narrows it down to a series of moves that the Group wants to make of which, insurance, if it's done its job well and if we've sold the message and the investment story well, then we get a reasonable share of the Group's prioritization (Roy)

To obtain the funding, META-Life puts through a 'high-level' business case that is convincing enough to 'sell the message' as Roy mentioned and to secure the necessary funds needed for the strategic initiatives. Without the funding the initiatives proposed are unlikely to be realised. It is therefore paramount that the business case submitted is able to do the job of convincing when it appears before its audience. The insights from the scan in the form of the strategic options translated into initiatives are used for the development of the business case. Once again we find the scan moving beyond META-Life to STAR to do a working of convincing.

The strategy director comments on this work of convincing needed to ensure that their proposals are accepted by Group:

You would have to make the most compelling business case you can, subject to making sure that you're gonna deliver the damn thing afterwards and be held accountable for delivering it. So it can be quite a long process and if at first you don't succeed then go away and try and make the business case better.

The strategy process culminates with a confirmation of the existing strategy, as well as a refinement of the strategy. While the process confirms that META-Life is currently operating within the 'right' markets, it also highlights that they need to adapt some of their activities and operations within these markets and the opportunity to enter into two new markets within two

of their existing markets. What had not been taken into consideration and therefore had not been included in the existing strategy had now been included, thereby adapting the existing strategy.

So the strategy ... has been refreshed and we've had to make some choices about markets and priorities as a result of this exercise ... We've actually ended up with more funding as a result of this exercise than we had in the last round (Roy).

The company's strategy was still a focused participation strategy but aspects of the four main markets that had been highlighted within their strategy had been adapted.

An example of one of the initiatives that came from the scan work and consequently led to a change in the company's activities is the finding on digital that was previously mentioned. Based on the fact that digital evolution is becoming more and more critical for organisations such as META-Life, we see how this theme was translated into a strategic option and subsequently into an initiative. The strategists determined that because digital was on the rise, within their ABC (pseudonym) insurance business they would 'invest[] in a new flexible, more agile platform to allow [them] to deliver the right proposition into digital channels' (Roy). In order to launch new digital products (which is where the market was headed) within their ABC market they need a platform to support that.

The platform, Roy explains, is called SATURN and was already ongoing and at its first phase as at the time I was speaking to Roy (first quarter of 2015). Project SATURN has an executive sponsor who is the director of General Insurance (see Figure 5.3.1), a member of the executive committee. The project also has a business sponsor who has a project team that consists of SMEs from within META-Life and change programme specialists. These individuals and groups are the main actors involved in the building of the SATURN platform. This project is a particularly large programme and involved an investment of over twenty-five million pounds.

The Project SATURN example illustrates how the findings from the scan work altered the way the organisation does business by being translated into actual initiatives. (Figure 5.4.1 provides a summary of the process).

It is worth pointing out that in META-Life once the funding for strategic initiatives (such as the SATURN project) has been received it is at that point that ‘it leaves strategy [as in the strategy function]’ and implementation begins:

So get the money into the business really, then the business then runs the project and delivers the initiatives with the money. And we [strategy team] tend to not be involved at that point and then we start with the next round [i.e. strategy process]. Quite a good process actually. (Joachim)

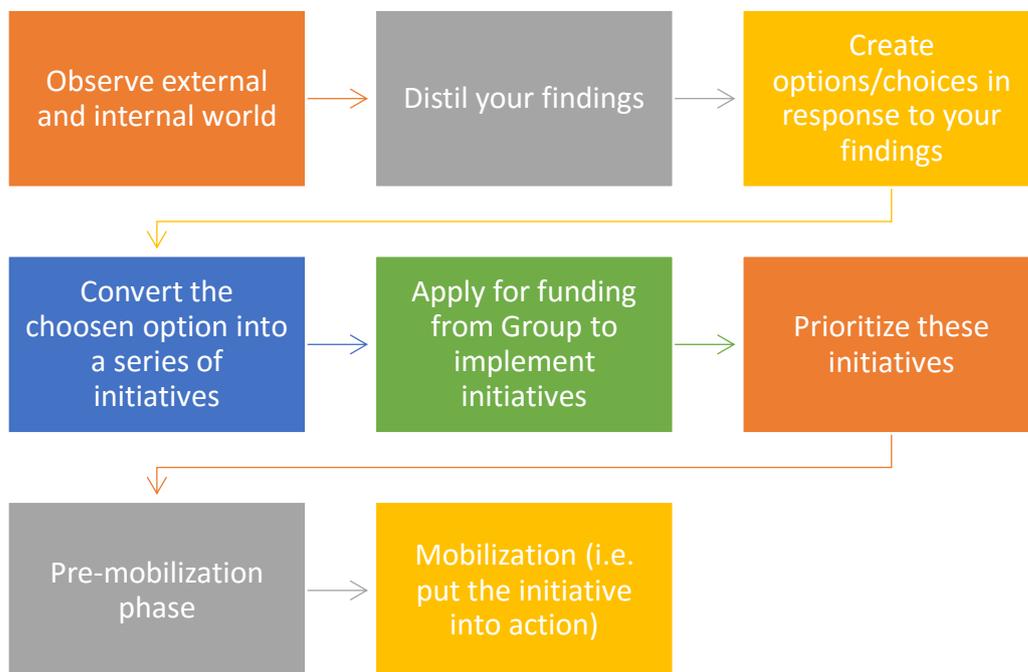


Figure 5.4.1: A summary of the translation of the outcomes of the Horizon scan into strategic initiatives

Scan moving around: to justify

In order to continue to trace the scan's outputs, I visited META-Life during the implementation of the strategic choices, to find out what had happened to the five themes. I found that beyond being translated into strategic options, beyond working alongside the strategy director to persuade the senior team and beyond it being a part of the business proposal sent to Group, the key themes highlighted were being mobilised for other tasks. This time they worked not necessarily to convince, but more to justify the decisions that had been made concerning the strategic direction the organisation was going in. The five themes had also been compressed into four themes and were used whenever the strategists communicated the strategy. One of the senior members of the strategy team explains how the themes from the scan work persevered and were used:

The themes kinda persisted all the way through ... So the themes and kinda key trends, the major influences from the external world and internal world on insurance – the ones we set out at the start of the year, the five which were condensed into four... persisted all the way through. So whenever we did any articulation of the insurance strategy, why we should follow that path, we would replay the themes as context material so to give people the context. We did that for the insurance board in May, we did it to STAR's board in June and September and there would have been a reference to it but in an appendix when we went back to them in November, so they [the themes] persisted all the way through (Roy).

What is found here is that rather than being retired to some cabinet in an office or a folder on a computer desktop, as many of such documents do, the themes from the scan work continued to be utilized by the strategists.

5.5 Scan as an activation device: triggering change

This section of the findings highlights the main role played by the tool in this case study – which is that of an activation device, a term that originated from one of the strategists. The tool was found to have shaped the strategy process in such a way that it resembles a planned emergence model of strategy making. Both the concept of an activation device and the performance of a planned emergence approach to strategy making are explicated in the discussion chapter. Discussions, both formal and informal, with members of the strategy team revealed that the scan acted as a sort of activation device that triggers or initiates or sets in motion a process of change within the company. This involves a transformation of how the actors think and consequently an adaptation of what the organisation does – strategy.

Keeping the process ticking

The scan, in triggering change, points or channels the attention of the strategists and senior team towards specific issues. It consolidates all that they believe they need to take into consideration.

The scan is a document that starts to set out areas we need to be looking at strategically ... (Ralph).

This work of the tool channelling attention towards specific issues is prominent within the data.

Stephen comments on this role of the scan as a pointer:

It was to kick-off some thinking around the exec table on what we should be focusing on over the coming year ... it points the execs towards where we think they should be focusing. And we've called out the strategic options to address the trends that we're seeing.

In addition to directing attention towards certain issues and not others, we find that the tool acts as a trigger which sets things in motion.

It [the scan] starts the process of identifying the big options for the business ... it needs to be played back to the executives as a trigger point for areas to think about. And the final horizon scan document was really good, [it] was really pictorial and had good examples of digital ...

The scan does force the issue a little bit. (Agaba, Senior Strategy Manager)

As an activation device it triggers the start of an event or change by first channelling the attention of the strategists towards specific issues and then it sets things in motion by also prescribing what should be done and as the strategist asserts, it forces the issue. He reiterates this work of forcing the issue:

The scan sort of forces the hand to – say for example – ‘look other markets such as digital [are] becoming progressively more important and so we need to do something’.

It is an activation device that keeps things ticking ... (Agaba).

The strategist uses the term activation device as a metaphor to describe the scan as a tool that triggers or sets things in motion and keeps the process going. He also shows by using the phrase ‘forces the hand’ – that the scan is not simply pointing at an issue but it is also prompting the strategists to act, and by responding to the prompts, the scan can therefore be seen to have initiated the start of the adaptation of the organisation’s strategy. The actual strategic options developed show the organisation’s responses to the prescriptions of the scan. However as aforementioned there have been instances in the past where the senior executives chose not to respond to a particular theme found but decided that the strategy team monitor the finding and revisit it after a specific period of time.

5.6 Summary

In summary, the data analysis revealed that as the strategists interacted with the strategy tool known as the Horizon scan, the tool was found to have performed four interconnected roles during the strategic cycle: enlists participants into the strategy process; reorient temporally the cognitive focus of the strategists towards being more future-oriented; it acted as a consolidation device that brought together diverse knowledge from across the organisation; and finally the tool performed the role of a persuasive device. The findings also show that these four roles were underpinned by two main affordances of the tool: modular affordance and temporal affordance.

Interestingly, a fifth role emerged unexpectedly from the data – the pattern in the actions of the strategists as they developed the tool during the strategy process, resembled what is referred to as a planned emergence. In other words, in using the tool, the actions of the strategists were shaped in such a way that was both planned and emergent – that is, a planned emergence model of strategy making. These findings are discussed further in the following chapter, using insights from the literature.

Chapter 6

Activating strategy: Strategy tools as activation devices performing a theory of strategy making

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I expand on the empirical findings presented in the previous chapter, through engaging with a theoretical framework that draws from studies in economic sociology, science and technology studies, the sociology of technology and insights from the nascent literature on performativity in strategy. More specifically, I utilise Callon's (1998, 2007) conceptualisation of performativity, which is, simply put, the thesis that theory such as economic theory, does not simply describe but performs, shapes and formats the setting it is concerned with, in the case of economics the setting is the economy. While the recent strategy as practice studies on tools draw on affordances for the study of strategy tools and the studies on performativity in strategy mainly approach tools from a discursive perspective, this study combines Callon's (1998, 2007) performative programme and the notion of affordances in order to provide several contributions to the extant literature on strategy tools. Considering the following in relation to strategy tools: the materiality of tools (Dameron et al., 2015; Le and Spee, 2015), the idea that they are non-human actors (Latour, 1987; Moisander and Stenfors, 2009), carriers of strategy theory (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006; Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Carter et al., 2010) and that they are performative (Callon, 1998, 2007; Carter et al., 2010), this research focused on addressing the questions of 'how do strategy tools actively contribute to the formation of strategy and what are the implications of this for the work of strategy making?'

There are two main contributions to the literature on strategy tools and the recent turn to materiality that this research makes. Firstly, this study shows that strategy tools shape the way managers practice strategy, as the literature indicates. The findings from this study, however, advances this argument by revealing that strategy tools do not simply shape actions, but they do so in a patterned way such that the actions of the managers reflect the theory within the tool. That is, the tool was performative in a Barnesian sense (MacKenzie, 2006, 2007) and I refer to such tools that are performative in such a strong sense as ‘Activation devices’. The analysis further addresses the implications of strategy tools being performative in a ‘Barnesian sense’ for the work of strategizing and addresses to an extent, what Carter et al. (2010) identify as ‘[a]n important agenda for understanding strategy [which] is to try and understand the effects that strategic tools and concepts have on making the world which they describe’ (ibid, page, 582). Secondly, while the first contribution addresses the question of ‘What’, the second contribution speaks to the question of ‘How’. The findings also revealed that strategy tools shape actions in a Barnesian performative way through performing four main roles: enlisting participants and therefore creating a network of actors; reorienting temporally the thinking of the actors; consolidating dispersed knowledge and persuading different audiences for different purposes. The findings also showed that these four roles were underpinned by two main affordances of the tool: modular affordance and temporal affordance. Based on the findings, the study both counters and at the same time complements the extant debates concerning the use of strategy tools in practice.

In this chapter a delineation is made between acting *through* tools and acting *towards* tools. The former on the one hand, is the perspective mainly presented in the literature on strategy tools and is, in my opinion, to an extent quite passive. The latter on the other hand, is an account of the interactions between strategists and strategy tools that highlights a mutual shaping/adaptation and thus the instances when tools are active. This is not to say that the

former view is erroneous, on the contrary the recent studies have provided rich insights on strategy devices such as strategy tools and technologies and as Callon and Law (1997), Pickering (1993, 1995) and others show, there are instances when these devices will be passive and there are instances when they will be active. This research is driven by the latter and is a reason for the selection of Callon's conceptualisation of performativity as a means to address the research questions. It is as D'Adderio and Pollock (2014, page, 1817) state, *'[p]erformativity therefore provides opportunities to theorise the sociomaterial mechanisms that underpin the coevolution of organisational theories and the organisation'*, in this case it is the co-evolution of strategy theory and strategy.

This chapter has two main sections. The first section begins with the introduction of the concept of an 'activation device' and a model that depicts how strategy tools as activation devices are performative – that is how they may turn strategy theory into a social reality by influencing the actions of the strategists. The model also depicts that what the tool is changes progressively through the strategy process. These transformations were accompanied by changes in the role of the tool (Busco and Quattrone, 2014) as demonstrated by the four interconnected roles that shape the practice and process of strategy making. This is followed by a discussion of these four interconnected roles performed by the device. In the second part of this chapter (section 6.4) I discuss how these different but interconnected roles contributed to the enactment of a particular model of strategy making – Planned emergence – within the case study.

6.2 Activation devices: activating strategy theory

In order to accentuate the active role of strategy tools during strategy making, they may be considered as what I refer to as 'Activation devices' (a term that originated from one of the strategists in the case study). The analysis reveals that such devices exhibit several dimensions

of performativity (Muniesa, 2014; Doganova and Muniesa, 2015) – that is, they have several performative roles that they play. But first what does it mean to activate? According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word activate is a verb that means ‘to initiate (a process)’ (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016), it could also mean to instigate or to trigger. The term activation device builds on the ideas explicated in chapter three.

Activation devices, I argue, instigate or activate certain forms of action which eventually result in the enactment of the underlying theory within these tools. The findings reveal that while strategy tools may shape what people do in a patterned way, as shown in the literature (Paroutis et al., 2015) they do so in a way that the actions and interactions of the strategists resembles the underlying theory of the tool. In this research, the term activation device is utilised to describe strategy tools as carriers of strategy theory and are performative in the sense that they render the setting to be more like the theory within the tool. Based on the findings the activation device contributed to the formation of a reality that closely resembles the theory within the tool through performing the four main interconnected roles identified from the analysis. These include enlist participants, reorient temporally, consolidate and persuade (See Figure 6.2.1). The changes in the roles of the tool, which show that the tool was progressively transformed along the process, are explained by the concept of a socio-technical agencement. According to Callon (2007, page, 320) ‘agencements are arrangements endowed with the capacity of acting in different ways depending on their configuration’.

In order to appreciate the difference between this study and the extant strategy literature on tools, it is important to highlight once again that one must be cognizant of the difference between enabling action and being performative. Indeed, the perspective(s) taken vis-à-vis a theoretical lens, will inevitably and expectedly shape the arguments that scholars make. The recent turn to materiality in strategy as practice (Dameron et al., 2015; Le and Spee, 2015) mainly adopts the notion of affordances and this is underpinned by the conceptualisation of

strategy tools as ‘materials used in strategy work’ (Dameron et al., 2015, page, S2) that have both material and conceptual affordances (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). Based on this, what we find in the literature is a focus on what tools enable the users to do – that is how tools enable purposeful action. For example, in Kaplan (2011), PowerPoint was shown to have been used to enable certain actors to highlight only information that was beneficial to their interests and gain approval for their cause. Through the choice of slides, these actors were able to use PowerPoint slides as a means to include specific actors and exclude others (ibid). Here we find that PowerPoint was utilised by the actor to enable them to achieve that which they set out to do which was to legitimise their views through including and excluding actors and information. This view of objects used as aids for intentional action is also demonstrated in Jarzabkowski et al. (2013). They identify practices of underwriters in a re-insurance company, such as ‘physicalising’ practices and ‘analysing’ practices, which they carry out using different objects such as photos and spreadsheets.

This research on the other hand, conceptualises strategy tools not only as devices with material and conceptual affordances but it also acknowledges that strategy tools are knowledge artefacts that are carriers of strategy theory. Based on this conceptualisation I draw not only on the notion of affordances but also on Callon’s performativity thesis as a means to gain a deeper understanding of how strategy tools impact on the work of strategy making and therefore contribute to the current conversations on strategy tools. A performative lens does not negate or rule out the idea of tools having affordances that enable and constrain, on the contrary these affordances are actually the mechanisms that enable the device to act performatively (Pollock and Williams, 2015). Performativity takes into consideration the affordances of devices such as strategy tools. Where I view a delineation between having a performative view and conceptualising tools as aids that enable action, as the extant literature seems to have done, is that a performative view highlights, as Mackenzie (2006a) argues – that theories or entities

such as strategy tools do things and the evidence of their doing is seen in the effects that these tools have on the actions of their users. In other words, the actions of the users are a consequence of the interactions between the users and the tool, rather than a result of the intent of the actor after using the tool as a conduit or means to achieve their intent (Mintzberg and Water's (1985) argument of deliberate and emergent strategies may be seen as an analogy of what I seek to express as the distinction between a performative view of strategy tools and what the recent literature argues). When we view tools in this light it is no longer a case of purposeful action by the actors – that is, what they set out to do intentionally, rather it is about the product of the socio-technical agencement. An illustration of this idea of tools as being performative is the study of ranking devices (Pollock and D'Adderio, 2012; Pollock and Williams, 2015). For example, Pollock and D'Adderio (2012) show how the actions or behaviours of vendors of IT products were *constituted* by the ranking device. In using the ranking device, the vendors adjusted what they did, vis-à-vis their products, according to the evaluative criteria given by the ranking device. In this illustration, the actions of the vendors were a product or consequence of the interactions between the vendors and the device. The effects of the device on the vendors is that they altered their product to fit the criteria highlighted by the ranking device. Based on this argument, I see the aspects of the role of strategy tools in the interactions between the actors and tools as still being quite ambiguous.

The previous chapter presented empirical findings that illustrates the performative roles that strategy tools play. Using the notions of performativity and affordances, this study reconceptualises the role of strategy tools in strategy practice – specifically the work of strategy making – focusing on the performative effects of tools when they are adopted and utilised during the process. The findings from this research aligns with and supports some of the extant literature, however it also reveals that when we consider the materiality of tools and its ability

to be performative (not only in an Austinian way), we see that they do much more than had previously been purported by the extant literature.

6.3 Interconnected roles of strategy tools as Activation Devices

The findings depict how the work of strategy making is characterised not by what the strategists did but by the collective actions of both the strategists and the strategy tools. The strategy formed is thus a product of the socio-technical agencement (Callon, 2007). The tool triggers or initiates a process which culminates with the adaptation of the company's strategy. Based on the model (see Figure 6.3.1) it first of all triggers the formation of a network of relationships and in doing so it generates certain effects. Then it moves on to generate a future perspective that leads to people acting based on that perspective (i.e. people are developing ideas for initiatives based on this future perspective). It then becomes a consolidation device that brings everything together from all twelve lenses of the tool. It then becomes a persuasive device (Preda, 2007) that moves around convincing people for different purposes. These findings show that the use of strategy tools goes beyond what has been provided within the literature on strategy tools. The four main roles performed by the tool are discussed below.

Enlist participants: Formation of a network for the development of strategy

The process of strategy making is one that requires a collaboration of actors from across the organisation (Hart, 1992; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). The first role of the strategy tool that emerged from the analysis of the strategy process was that of enlisting participants (Callon, 1999). The findings reveal that the strategy tool contributed to the formation of a network of

actors (Law, 1992; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009) by enlisting participants from across the organisation and it did so by means of its modular affordance (Kaplan, 2011). This work of enlisting was identified to have occurred twice during the strategy cycle. At the start and towards the end as seen in Figure 6.3.1. This section focuses on the first occurrence observed, which is the enlisting of actors at the start of the process the second will be discussed later in the section titled ‘Persuading’. The formation of the network of actors (which included the tools as well) was necessary for strategy to be formed, inclusion or involvement has been highlighted within the strategy literature as ‘a core element in the strategy-making process’ (Collier, Fishwick and Floyd, 2004, page, 67). The enlisting of actors from across the organisation was a necessary action that was required for the production of the tool. The development of the different lenses of the tool required the expertise of not only the members of the strategy team but that of a variety of individuals and groups. This was because the work of developing each lens required extensive research which involved the use of both primary and secondary data sources. The network formed constituted of actors that ranged from the CEO and his executive team to subject matter experts from different functions within and beyond the company.

This finding contributes to the literature, particularly Langley’s (1989) research on the use of formal analysis. Langley (1989) focuses on why certain actors are involved in the process and therefore argues that CEOs and other top management members as well as peers and subordinates, are included in the process of formal analysis for the purpose of achieving buy-in. From the analysis of the data from my case study, the findings support Langley’s (1989) argument for why CEOs and top managers are included in the process. However, while Langley (1989) provides an explanation for why certain actors are included in the use of strategy tools, my findings add to this by providing an argument for *how* certain actors were included in the process. In this research, the findings reveal that the inclusion of other peripheral actors – the

SMEs – was linked to the materiality of the tool: its modular affordance, the labels of each lens and its need for knowledge from a diverse range of functions across the organisation. Consequently, while top managers were included in the process for the purpose of achieving buy-in, other actors such as the SMEs were not included in the process primarily for buy-in because their knowledge and expertise was a prerequisite for developing the tool. Therefore, how and why actors are included in the strategy process may also be as a result of the materiality of strategy tools rather than the intentional actions of the strategists (Chapman et al., 2015).

Enlisting participants from across the organisation also brought together actors that were necessary for the adaptation of the company's strategy, such as the Corporate centre's finance team that coordinate the allocation of investment funds (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009). This network-building activity of the tool aligns with Doganova and Eyquem-Renault's (2009) research on the business model. However, while Doganova and Eyquem-Renault attribute this to the business model having a calculative and narrative make-up, in this study the role of the tool in the formation of the network was found to be associated with both the label of each lens and the modular format of the strategy tool.

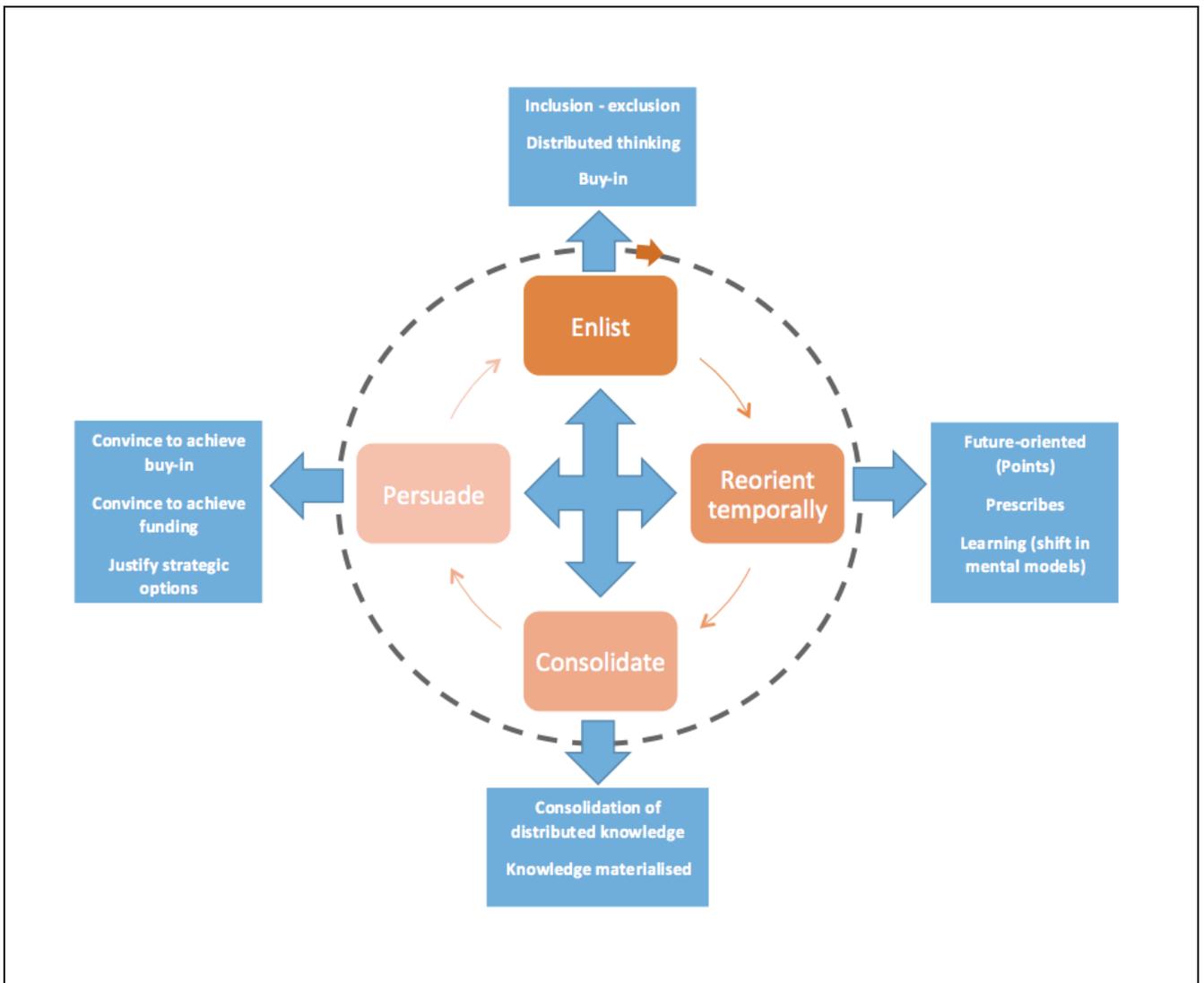


Figure 6.3.1: Four interconnected roles performed by strategy tools during the strategy process

The horizon scan is constituted of twelve lenses (these are themes or topics) through which the strategists use to examine the insurance industry. The format of the tool is such that each lens ‘is a separate entity that’ (Kaplan, 2011, page, 327) can be developed by one or two members of the strategy team autonomously – that is, it is made up of discrete lenses, but like a jigsaw when the individual pieces are brought together they reveal a more holistic picture.

Kaplan (2011) identifies two discursive practices – collaboration and cartography – of knowledge production during the strategy process, for which PowerPoint constitutes. In the

latter – cartography – Kaplan argues that the modular affordance of PowerPoint enabled the actors that owned slide decks ‘to choose whose slides and which slides to include’ (2011, page 328). In other words, the inclusion of other participants in the process was done by the actors, using PowerPoint as a means to achieve this. While Kaplan’s argument concerning ownership of the object does afford one the authority to determine who will be included and conversely, who will be excluded, in this study the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion were slightly different.

Firstly, tools play a less instrumental role (Muniesa, 2008) in the inclusion of others in the work of strategizing. What the findings show is that the tool contributed to the formation of the network because each of its twelve lenses corresponded to specific functions within the organisation – that is, the lenses already highlighted which group of subject matter experts would be included in the process. Owing to its modular format a process of framing (Callon, 1998) took place in which the tool drew a line between the actors (in this case groups/functions) that would be taken into account (for example the regulatory team who correspond to the Government and Regulation lens and the economics team that correspond to the economics lens) and those who would not (for example actors within the different proposition teams) be a part of the frame. In doing so, the tool initially frames (Callon, 1998) the process. It suggests, through the twelve lenses, which subject matter experts to include and the strategists accept this suggestion of including other groups from across the organisation (Callon and Muniesa, 2005). The SMEs included in the process and their knowledge expertise were the sources of primary data utilized by the strategists.

The strategists make a corresponding move by identifying the specific actors within these groups highlighted by the tool that would be included. This argument is underpinned by the notion of affordances (Gibson, 1979; Hutchby, 2001) discussed in chapter three; the affordances of objects frame the possibilities for action. However, since no frame is ever

complete (Callon, 1998) or perfect and there will always be overflows where anyone of the actors (either the strategists or tools) can transgress the frame. In this case, an example of overflowing (which is all that was not originally considered within the frame) (Callon, 1998) occurs, in which other groups of actors were included besides those suggested by the tool. These other actors include the CEO and executive members and external consultants – McKinsey. These interactions which led to the inclusion and exclusion of actors is evidently quite different from that described in Kaplan's (2011) study. While Kaplan's (2011) work highlights the intentionality of managers in including and excluding other actors, this case study showed that participation in the strategy process was instigated by the modular affordance of the tool, which required a collaboration that transcended beyond the strategy team. Secondly, the findings reveal that the ownership of the knowledge artefact was the basis for which the strategists could then intentionally determine who, within the different SME groups identified by the tool, would be included and the degree of their involvement (Miller, Hickson and Wilson, 2008).

This work of enlisting performed by the strategy tool created an avenue for others beyond the strategy team and the senior executives to participate (Collier et al., 2004; Mantere and Vaara, 2008; Whittington et al., 2011) in the strategic conversations (Westley, 1990; Chesley and Wenger, 1999) that shape the strategic direction or 'continued evolution of an organisation's strategy' (Whittington et al., 2011, page 536). We therefore find a linkage between the affordances of the tool and inclusion. This work of enlisting actors is thus beneficial to the strategy process since it is a work of inclusion (Collier et al., 2004). This finding illustrates the difference between conceptualising tools as a means and conceptualising tools as actual non-human actors. It also demonstrates how the materiality of strategy tools impact on the work of strategy making, a gap which Dameron et al. (2015) highlight.

The analysis revealed further aspects of this work of enlisting participants and forming a network of actors. We find that through this work of enlisting participants – that is, the inclusion of other actors outside of the strategy team, the tool enabled the work of strategizing in two ways: it enabled distributed thinking for idea generation (Whittington et al., 2011) and the achievement of buy-in (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990). In addition to this the findings also suggest that this role of the tool generated two effects: it generated contradictions – inclusion and exclusion – and it induced political activity in which the actors sought to highlight their personal interests in relation to what they felt the strategic direction should be.

In relation to the strategic work the tool enabled, the first of the two identified – distributed thinking – was enabled through the availability of a network of actors. This is as the strategy director explained, by including a variety of actors in the process, the strategists were able to socialise the idea generation process. This meant that the development and exchange of ideas would be a process that was distributed and ideas could be generated not only from the senior team and strategists but from different peripheral parts of the company (Regner, 2003). The finding is also supported by Collier et al. (2004) who examine the linkage between involvement and strategy formation. They assert that the inclusion of other actors in the strategy process ‘creates more emergence because it facilitates the development of a broader range of responses to a dynamic set of circumstances. Thus, strategy development becomes less of a planning exercise and more of a social learning process’ (ibid, 2004, page, 69) as Burgelman (1988) argues. The ideas that flow in from the periphery are argued to be beneficial for knowledge creation and ‘these ideas help adapt organisational strategies to changing environments’ (Mantere and Vaara, 2008, page, 342). These studies underpin the argument of the tool enabling the generation of ideas through its affordances and also its role in shaping the process of strategy making into that of a planned emergence model. The findings illustrate Whittington et al.’s (2011) argument about the relationship between inclusion and idea generation. In this

case, I add that strategy tools are ‘mediating instruments’ (Miller and O’Leary, 2007) that enable inclusion for idea generation, through their affordances.

In addition to enabling idea generation, by including other individuals and groups from across the organisation, the work of enlisting participants laid the foundation for the achievement of buy-in towards a shared vision or direction of travel (Ketokivi and Castaner, 2004; Collier et al., 2004). In relation to the link between the network formed and the achievement of buy-in, this finding is also supported by other studies that have demonstrated the linkage between inclusion, strategic conversations and the achievement of buy-in (Wooldridge and Floyd, 1990). In Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015), they argue that strategy tools serve as boundary objects (Star and Griesemer, 1989) that enable cross-boundary collaborations by providing actors with a common language for strategic conversations, which eventually lead to the generation of buy-in. Having a common language may not always lead to buy-in as is demonstrated by Busco and Quattrone (2014). This study contributes to the debate by arguing that strategy tools do not only enable the achievement of buy-in through providing a common language, they may also do so through a modular affordance which enables inclusion in strategic conversations (Westley, 1990). This finding contributes to the need for studies that further our understanding of how inclusion can be promoted within organisations (Vaara and Whittington, 2012).

As much as the tool was found to participate in the inclusion of actors in the process, it was also found to have generated a contradiction – that is, while some actors were included inevitably others were excluded (Vaara et al., 2010; Kaplan, 2011). It is here that we find the issue of ownership argued by Kaplan (2011) at play (this point of ownership/authority has also been discussed in Bechky (2003)). I argue here that the tool generated a contradiction, I dare say a paradox, because even while some actors were included, they had still been excluded to some extent. This issue of exclusion was salient with the subject matter experts in the RA team.

These actors illustrate what Westley (1990) and Mantere (2005) argue, which is that actors in non-senior levels desire to be a part of the strategy work. From the data, we find that members of this team wanted not only to be consulted but to also be a part of developing the lens of the scan that corresponded to their team. When I observed this issue of exclusion, I began to explore it further. What was found was that ownership of the tool impacted on the degree of participation/inclusion (Miller et al., 2008). This was illustrated by the comments made by META-Life's Head of Corporate strategy, who mentioned that the strategy team *owned* the horizon scan and they engage with other teams to develop it. Their ownership determined how they would engage with other actors. On the contrary, from the RA team's perspective, the level of inclusion or engagement was to a large extent insignificant.

The second instance of ownership impacting on the degree of inclusion was identified in the ownership of each lens. While strategy owned the scan, each member that worked on the lenses in a sense owned their respective lenses. Since the scan had a modular format that allowed for people to work autonomously on different parts of the scan, it meant that these people could also determine how they would go about developing their lenses (even though there were established expectations of how they were to go about the scan work). Based on this, in response to the issue of exclusion in relation to the RA team, the manager in charge of the lens that corresponded to the RA team approached the development of his lenses differently from the way others approached theirs. Rather than simply consult the RA team, he included them in the actual work of researching, gathering and interpreting the data that was eventually presented in the lens.

The findings thus reveal that both the strategists and the tool actively involve other actors, rather than the tool constantly playing some subordinate role in which it is simply a conduit. We also find that in addition to enabling inclusion and exclusion, the ownership of the tool also impacts on the degree of inclusion (and inversely exclusion).

The second effect generated by the tool which the analysis revealed was that of political activity. This is not particularly surprising since strategy has been shown to be an inherently political process and in getting a better understanding of it, observers are inevitably bound to encounter issues of power and politics (Clegg et al., 2004). However, since the focus of this study is on how tools are performative the findings presented here show how the tool was implicated in the political activity (Whittle and Mueller, 2010) that took place during the development of the tool. These devices seem to be at the centre of political activity (Whittle and Mueller, 2010; Kaplan, 2011; Vaara et al., 2010, Kornberger and Clegg, 2011). The previous chapter presented quotes from managers that illustrate how they sought to influence the strategic direction of the company by incorporating their personal interests into the lenses they developed. This finding in a way illustrates Latour's (1986) argument mentioned in chapter three, of a model of translation of power as opposed to a model of diffusion. Where phenomena such as power are advocated to be seen through a performative lens rather than an ostensive one.

At this point it is worth noting that while in Callon (1986), he describes the formation of social relationships or networks as a four stage process in which enrolment (in this case enlisting) is the third stage and is preceded by what Callon refers to as 'interessment' – simply put: is persuading or convincing others to align their interests with yours in order to enrol them in a network. For Callon, in order for enrolment to take place, the work of 'interessment' must occur, however actors may or may not be enrolled. What Callon describes and is found in a number of studies on devices and artefacts (for example Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Whittle and Mueller, 2010) is found later on in META-Life's strategy process, during what I refer to as the role of persuasion performed by the scan. However, this was not the case during this phase of enlisting participants in the development of the tool. At this developmental phase of the tool, what the findings show is that enlisting took place prior to convincing the actors.

Why this happened in META-Life is, in addition to the tool requiring a collective of actors to develop it, as Preda (2007) explains – the actors required the tool in order to further their interests. There is, as Carter et al. (2010, page, 589) succinctly state, ‘a struggle to put issues on the agenda’. The tool needs them; they need the tool. Preda (2007) cites MacKenzie and Millo’s (2003) study of the Black-Scholes formula as an illustration of his argument. The Black-Scholes formula, which was used to determine the price of financial derivatives was ‘adopted by traders on the Chicago Board of Trade because it served their particular interests in the competition with the New York Stock Exchange’ (Preda, 2007, page, 44). The tool constitutes the strategic conversations that shape the company’s strategy and was therefore, just like the accounting device in Whittle and Mueller (2010), an obligatory point of passage through which ideas coming from the periphery concerning the strategic direction of the company could be presented before the senior executives. According to Whittle and Mueller, ‘[w]hat counts as a “strategic” idea or function is thus an outcome of power struggles between organisational groups vying to control the agenda’ (2010, page, 627). The actors needed the tool in order to exert influence (D’Adderio, 2008).

Therefore, knowledge artefacts such as tools, which embody theory (Cabantous and Gond, 2011) may be performative when they are mobilized by actors in order to achieve a particular agenda, because these devices are perceived (Gibson, 1979; Hutchby, 2001) by the actors to have the capability to enable them achieve their desired agenda (Preda, 2007). What this means, according to Callon (2007), is that the interests of the users are a contributing factor that enables the tool to go about the work of setting up a socio-technical agencement and according to Preda, there are some circumstances where what the users seek is actually in alignment with the world within the tool and what is achieved is the performativity of the theory within. In addition, although there are other competing theories (D’Adderio and Pollock, 2014; Ottosson and Galis, 2011) at play – performative struggles – the theory within the tool will have a more dominant

role because it is seen as a means to achieve their agenda (Preda, 2007). Studies such as Lozeau et al. (2002) underpin this argument by providing a reverse scenario. They also allude to the performativity of tools but their case studies reveal that the tools were unable to have any significant transformative effects on the organisations. Although Lozeau et al. (2002) do not offer explicit explanations for why this happened (which is understandable as this was not the focus of their study), it can be inferred from their findings that one of the factors that affected the organisations where the tool failed to be performative were cases where the actors did not view the use of the tool to be in their interests.

In this case study, the actors perceived the tool as an avenue to propagate their ideas and interests and this was a contributing factor that enabled the formation of the socio-technical agencement. It is worth highlighting that although the scan at this stage could accommodate the different interests of the actors and they viewed the tool as a conduit to achieve their purposes, the findings support Kornberger and Clegg's (2011) findings. The process of developing the tool may have involved a consolidation of all findings or outcomes from each lens and the actors may have incorporated their different interests into the lenses, however, the process of developing the tool also involves several stages of distillations after the consolidation process. The members of the strategy team come together to discuss the findings from the scan and a debate takes place where other members might agree with the findings from a particular lens or argue for adjustments to be made to the findings. The latter would occur mainly because there may be aspects of the lens that have been neglected or there may be aspects that may not be as impactful as the author of the lens has portrayed it to be. And so there is a process of negotiation that takes place and is followed by stages of distillation. This meant that not all findings or interests would be highlighted as what the strategists referred to as MEGA trends. These MEGA trends are the key themes that get translated into strategic initiatives along the process. The findings support Kornberger and Clegg (2011) because

through the stages of distillation that occurred some interests were prioritized while others were marginalised. What is found is that not all interests make it into the strategy director's slides which are presented to the senior executives and therefore the tool does not accomplish the work of being a vehicle or conduit for all interests.

Reorient temporally

The next role that the tool was found to have performed is like that of a telescope bringing objects that are at a distance closer. Here the data shows that a future perspective was generated based on the fact that the tool is a 'future-looking' tool. The tool was found to have reoriented the focus of the strategists towards thinking about the future. The result of this was a picture of how the strategists believed the world would emerge. By generating this future perspective, it reifies the probable future and therefore 'transform[s] the uncertain into the more certain' (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015, page 541). The future perspective generated – for example the shift in where and how customers would get advice on insurance products in the future, from financial institutions such as banks to customers prospectively getting advice from their employers in the workplace – was found to have pointed or channelled the attention of the strategists towards specific issues. This finding supports early studies such as Pickton and Wright (1998, page, 102) who assert that strategy tools 'focus[...] attention on key issues' and more recent studies such as Werle and Seidl (2015) and Cloutier, LeBaron and Whittington (2015) who also identify this role of tools as pointers. What this finding demonstrates is that tools have revealing and concealing effects that have been attributed to their affordances (Dameron et al., 2015).

However, in addition to pointing or channelling the attention of the strategists and senior executives, this study adds that strategy tools also prescribe that the organisations act in

response to the future perspective generated. This work of the scan that prescribes and provokes (Muniesa, 2014) is a form of performance. According to Callon, '[p]rescription is simply a particular case of performance ... It is frequently mobilized to describe the mechanisms through which a conformity between ... theory and ... reality is achieved' (Callon, 2007, pages 326, 324). In other words, the tool prescribing actions for the organisation to take, and the actors responding to this prescription by accepting it depicts the formation of the world within the tool. For example, one of the big themes found was the rise of digital that had been identified in the scan work. One of the ways the strategists translated this finding into a strategic initiative, was in relation to their home insurance market (this is one of the markets aforementioned in their strategy). By November 2015 this initiative, referred to within META-Life as project 'SATURN', was already underway and was in its second phase with an executive sponsor (a member of the executive committee), change managers, project managers and other actors involved in its implementation. By accepting the prescriptions of the tool, not only during this phase but also during the previous phase – the enlisting of actors during the development of the tool – the work of framing occurred (Callon, 1998). What is found, is as D'Adderio and Pollock (2014) state: the theory begins to shape reality. If on the other hand the strategists or more specifically the CEO and executive committee had opted not to act in response to the tool's suggestions, then we would have had a scenario of an overflow – where 'differences emerge between reality and the theory' (D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014, page, 1815).

Worren et al. (2002) argue that the use of tools may reinforce already established mental models. The findings of this study reveal otherwise. Based on the findings during the process of developing the future perspective there was a shift in the mental models of the strategists. The finding suggests that tools do not only trigger a change in the activities of the organisation as seen above with the project SATURN illustration but they also trigger a shift in the mental

models of actors. This is illustrated by the fact that the process involved learning and reflecting, it is also demonstrated by the comments made by the strategists that related to their thinking patterns changing. As the strategists contemplate the future in light of their present activities, they develop new knowledge. For example, who they appeal to in the future and how they will appeal to them changed and this was based on a change in their conceptualisation of who their customers were. They found, for example, that their customers could be divided into different niche segments rather than categorise them under one definition of customer. The future perspective generated by the temporal affordance of the tool, challenged their current ways of thinking and triggered a shift in their mental models.

Consolidate

At the start of the process of developing the tool we find a divergence took place where the strategists met and the different lenses were distributed among the members of the strategy team during the team meeting. The strategists go away and work on their respective lenses, this is what happened during the first phase of enlisting participants at the start of the process. Here – consolidation – we find a convergence, where all the dispersed knowledge is, in the words of the strategists, pulled together in one place. After the twelve lenses were completed the strategists sent their findings to the strategists that coordinated the process and a consolidation process takes place. The tool is thus seen to do a work of consolidation. It is worth noting that the term consolidation device came from the strategists as they described the horizon scan to me based on what it did at that period of time. As a consolidation device the tool pulls together knowledge that was, prior to the process distributed across the organisation and beyond, and consolidates it into one place in the form of the scan. In doing this, it also makes that which was tacit explicit, where prior to the scan work the knowledge had been in the minds of the actors (I use the term tacit knowledge in the broadest sense, mainly to describe knowledge such

as that acquired from subject matter experts based on their expertise). The tool is thus seen as a material embodiment of the tacit knowledge. The tool was also found to have enabled knowledge exchange and learning. The findings suggest that by bringing together all the knowledge acquired in a material form (Kaplan, 2011), as a consolidation device the tool enabled the strategists to identify patterns and connections across the lenses and therefore contributed to the creation of new knowledge (Giraudeau, 2008) by acting as a ‘cognitive prostheses’ (Callon, 1998; 2005; 2007; 2008; Callon and Muniesa, 2005; Mackenzie, 2006b; Cabantous and Gond, 2011). Mackenzie (2006b) describes prostheses as devices that enable human actors to achieve that which exceeds their cognitive grasp. This collaborative action that encompasses both the strategists and the tool illustrates a socio-technical agencement, an agency that is constituted not only of humans but also of these prostheses as Callon (2005) explains. This role of the tool enabled the strategists to overcome their limited cognitive capacities as Cabantous and Gond (2011) argue in their explanation of the process of engineering that tools perform. This finding is similar to the illustration of the botanist and the small cards Giraudeau (2008) describes, where the botanist writes out descriptions of different plants on small paper cards and then he lays them out on his desk. Giraudeau states that ‘[t]his operation, which is both material and cognitive, will help him recombine the different types of plants into new categories, and eventually develop an innovative theory of their relations’ (2008, page, 294). This finding aligns with Giraudeau’s observation of other roles strategic plans play other than communication and control. Giraudeau (2008) showed how one of the roles that plans perform through their visual and textual affordances is to stir the imagination of actors and enable the creation of new strategies.

The tool acting as a consolidation device that serves as a cognitive prosthesis is also underpinned by Pickering’s (1995) illustration of a performative idiom, which he shows using the interactions between the Physicists – Donald Glaser – and the bubble chamber. In

Pickering's work the bubble chamber is viewed as a 'locus of nonhuman agency' (1993, page, 568). Pickering argues that both the bubble chamber and the emergent scientific knowledge were produced through the back and forth interactions between Glaser and the bubble chamber which he describes as a 'dialectic of resistance and accommodation' (ibid) or what he refers to as 'the mangle'. These studies and this present study specifically demonstrate that tools are not simply conduits that enable the achievement of a variety of purposes but they do things and one of these roles is that they act as consolidation devices that make tacit knowledge concrete, enable comparison and further contribute to the creation of new knowledge. They are, as Doganova and Eyquem-Renault (2009, page, 1561) express, '[l]ike the instruments of scientists without which new phenomena could not be seen, ... [these] tools ... reveal opportunities that isolated human agents could not have discovered alone'. The new knowledge created encompasses for example, the identification of the five key themes by the strategists, the relationships between these themes, particularly the identification of the fourth theme being a consequence of three other key themes. The tool also shaped the strategic options developed because they are a response to the findings from the tool (Skærbæk and Tryggestad, 2010).

Persuade

Within the strategy literature tools are said to be used to justify decisions made (Langley, 1989) or legitimate viewpoints (Kaplan, 2011; Vaara et al., 2010; Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). In this study the findings support this, however, tools were also found to engage in the work of convincing different actors at different points in time for different reasons in order to further enlist them in the network (Callon, 1998; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009) required for the formation of strategy. This time actors are enlisted by the tool as a persuasive device for the purpose of realising the strategy developed. As the audience changed and the rationale for use changed, the scan also took on different forms

(Busco and Quattrone, 2014). The next role identified from the analysis is that of persuasion. The findings reveal that the tool played the role of a persuasion device (Preda, 2007; Macpherson et al., 2010) at three main points in the process. It is also at this point of the process that we encounter interestment (Callon, 1986) or the work of convincing as a precursor for enlisting as in the model (Figure 6.3.1). The three main points during which this role as a persuasive device was evident are when the findings were presented by the strategy director to the CEO and the executives, when the findings were translated into strategic initiatives and made into a business plan with cost-benefit analysis and numbers and presented to STAR's central finance team and when the findings were 'played back' to different audiences whenever the strategy was communicated. This role of convincing is important especially within a context where the organisation is a business unit dependent on a corporate centre for investment funds which they have to compete against other business units to obtain (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009). However, this work of convincing may not always be successful or go as planned and in such instances of overflowing, the strategists have to consider a modification of their actions (Callon and Law, 1997).

The findings suggest that tools are able to perform duties assigned to them, such as convincing an audience (Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009; Doganova and Muniesa, 2015), almost in the same way that Winner (1980) showed that mundane objects such as the bridges in Long Island, New York were assigned and performed the duty of being political, by the master builder, through the way the bridges were built. From the data, after the findings were consolidated and the key themes referred to as MEGA trends had been highlighted, we find the strategists developing the Chairman's letter and the corresponding PowerPoint slides that would be presented by the strategy director. What seemed unusual to me was the amount of time spent on developing the documents and how the strategists worked meticulously and iteratively on the documents. These efforts suggest the development of a persuasion device that

is not simply a representation (Grandy and Mills, 2004) of the insurance industry but ‘narratives that convince’ in order to enlist its audience (Doganova and Muniesa, 2015, page, 113).

During the presentation of the strategic options and recommendations to the CEO and executives, the tool was found to perform a role of convincing this particular audience in order to achieve approval and acceptance of the particular strategic options that the strategy team preferred. The debates that occurred within the senior team, in response to the presentation, were found to be favourable and this is suggested by the findings to have been underpinned by the first phase of enlisting participants that occurred in which the senior team were included in the process in order to achieve their buy-in at this point of the process. On gaining this approval and enlisting the senior management team, the tool moves further to do another work of convincing, this time it was in the form of a business plan and its audience was the central finance team within STAR Group. The business plan was submitted to STAR in order to bid for funds to be used to develop the strategic initiatives identified. At this point the scan engaged in the work of competing against other business plans from the other business units owned by STAR and convincing the corporate centre of the value of investing in the strategic options proposed. A ‘strong case’ had to be made for why what META-Life was proposing would be more beneficial to STAR than other projects proposed by other business units. In the third instance of convincing, the findings from the tool were mobilised whenever the strategy (which had now been adapted) was articulated. Here the tool was used to justify the decisions that had been made (Vaara et al., 2010; Ottosson and Galis, 2010).

The model presented shows that these four roles are interconnected. The arrows that point at both enlist and consolidate indicate that they are linked in terms of the modular affordance of the tool. This particular affordance enabled both roles. Also the enlisting phase began with a divergence, where the strategists went off to work on their respective lenses, while consolidate involved a convergence. The arrows that link reorienting temporally and persuade indicate a

linkage between both roles that highlights that the future perspective generated not only points and prescribes but may be utilised as a means to legitimate the decisions made concerning the strategic direction of the organisation.

These progressive transformations in the role of the tool are, as Callon and Law (1997) argue, because the pieces or different heterogeneous elements of the network formed are not fixed entities, rather they are relational effects. What this means is that the identity of the entities within the network are not fixed ‘[r]ather their identity emerges – and changes – in the course of interaction’ (ibid, page, 171). The findings also reveal that as the tool performed these four main roles, it simultaneously shaped the strategy process to resemble that of the theory within the tool in a Barnesian performative sense (Callon, 1998; MacKenzie, 2006b). This is discussed further in the next section. This argument is based on Callon (2007) thesis concerning theories or models. He asserts that they are not constative but that they are performative when they actively contribute to the constitution of a reality. A key word here is ‘active’. What Callon is referring to here are tools or models that are drawn on and their inclusion in a process induces certain behaviours or causes the alteration of a state of affairs or practice (Preda, 2006, 2007). Pickering (1995) provides an elucidation of this active participation of nonhuman actors which I seek to express. In his mangle of practice argument, he distinguishes between a representational idiom and a performative idiom and uses the interactions between Glaser and the bubble chamber as a means to illustrate what he alludes as a performative idiom or expression. In his portrayal of the back and forth movements between Glaser and the bubble chamber, Pickering states that

‘interspersed between these bursts of human activity were periods of human passivity, which can be seen symmetrically as *periods of material activity*’ (Pickering, 1995, page, 51) [emphasis added]

This statement, in my opinion, describes more vividly what Callon means by the theory or model actively contributing. This is not a case of using a tool instrumentally in order to achieve some purpose, this performativity programme points to a socio-technical agencement in which both humans and objects or tools do things. Therefore, even as the tool is shaped by the network of actors, the tool also shapes the network (Callon and Law, 1997). In relation to Pickering's statement above – for which Callon and Law provide a similar argument that nonhuman actors may 'resist, and modify the actions of others ... or ... on the contrary, ... simply conform with the projects of others, and so be rendered passive' (1997, page 172) – most studies on tools tend to capture the instances when the tools are less active and more passive. This research shows the other aspect of the interactions between strategists and tools, aspects where the tools are more active. By including this piece of a bigger jigsaw puzzle, this study complements other studies in order to enrich our understanding of strategy making both as a practice and process. In the following section I discuss the enactment of a strategy making model of planned emergence.

6.4 Performing a planned emergence model of strategy making

The study of META-Life's strategy process demonstrates how strategy tools do more than aid decision making or enable social interactions as the earlier literature on tools show. It also shows that tools are not simply representations as Grandy and Mills (2004) argue. The study reveals that strategy tools not only shape the practices of strategists (or practitioners in general) by passively enabling them to perform a variety of purposes, but tools are able to actively contribute to the formation of a social reality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009) that corresponds to the theory which they carry within as knowledge artefacts (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006; Cabantous and Gond, 2011). This study highlights that there are times during the interactions between actors and tools when they are passive, in that they afford actors the possibility to perform purposeful action such as in Kaplan (2011), where actors deliberately utilize the technology in order to include and exclude both actors and ideas. However, there are other times, such as instances that have been highlighted within this case study, when tools actively intervene (Callon and Law, 1997) and frame or provoke actions in a particular direction. This in a way reveals a delineation between acting through objects and acting towards objects. Where the extant literature on strategy tools have mainly given accounts of the former. For example, Kaplan (2011) in arguing for a shift from viewing tools and technologies as cultural artifacts, advocates for a study of technologies like PowerPoint to be done by focusing on how people act with the technology.

The findings in this thesis contributes to our understanding of other possible roles strategy tools may play, by showing that they are able to shape the actions of the strategists – that is, tools shape what they do (strategy-as-practice) – in a patterned way that resembles the underlying theory the tool carries. They are, in other words able to contribute to the enactment of theory (Carter et al., 2010). Whereas Cabantous and Gond (2011) argue that tools may contribute to

the formation of reality through engineering processes and commodification processes, *which occur prior to the use of the tool*, I find from the analysis that strategy tools are able to influence actions through performing several active interconnected roles in which the tool is successively transformed through the process. More specifically the findings reveal that the tool in this case study, contributed to the formation of a Planned emergence approach to strategy making (see Figure 6.4.1), which according to Grant (2003, page, 513) is a combination of ‘incremental learning and deliberate planning’. The findings suggest that the tool materializes (Cabantous and Gond, 2011) the principles of a planned emergence perspective of strategy making. The four roles performed by the tool engendered actions that characterise a planned emergence approach to strategy making. The tool was able to accomplish this performative role of shaping the way strategy making was done in this organisation through both its affordances and its underlying theory.

While analysing the data and considering the way in which the strategy process was enacted and finding that the approach to strategy within the organisation was one of planned emergence, it was at first quite surprising. On taking a retrospective look at where the tool came from in the first place, I found that it had been introduced by the Strategy Director who had mentioned that the tool came from his days working in a major oil company. This particular oil company is in fact one of the eight oil companies studied by Grant (2003) in his study of strategic planning in oil majors. In Mintzberg and Lampel (1999), they identify ten models of strategy making, with two main rival approaches – planning and emergent (learning). What Grant found in his study of the oil majors was an evolution of the planning approach to an approach that was an amalgamation of planning and learning. Grant concludes that ‘the strategic planning systems of the international [oil] majors could be described as processes of “planned emergence”’ (Grant, 2003 page, 513).

Why the approach to strategy making in META-Life came to resemble what Grant (2003) found in the oil majors may be explained using the concept of performativity. Callon's (1998, 2007) notion of performativity takes into consideration the agency of non-human entities such as strategy tools and allows us to utilize the concept of a socio-technical agencement to get a better understanding of how the strategy tool was able to shape the strategy process within the organisation. Callon (2007) describes how a theory has within it a world – a socio-technical agencement – and this world is progressively brought into being and the theory or tool gradually discovers its own world. We find that the world within the tool was that of a planned emergence approach to strategy. According to Muniesa et al. (2007) an agencement is able to render things, behaviours and processes to be more like it. Using economics as an example of this Mackenzie (2006a) puts it this way: *using* an aspect of economics produces an effect in which the aspect of economics used actually makes economic processes more like the aspect of economics. MacKenzie (2006b) does not restrict this notion to just theories but also includes models, tools, concepts and procedures in the description. The tool within this case study mediated between the theory within it and the setting – the actions of the actors – (Cabantous and Gond, 2011) and by using the tool it rendered the setting more like the theory within it by framing the actions of the actors (Callon, 1998). This explains why we found the strategy process at META-Life resembling that of a planned emergence, it was in using the tool that the process became more like the world within the scan. The four interconnected roles discussed above, which the tool was found to have performed, sheds light on the micro-dynamics of this process of framing or circumscribing the actions of the actors.

The link between the process, the tool and the strategy director resonates with Cabantous and Gond's (2011) proposed framework of how rational choice theory is enacted as a social reality through the mechanisms of conventionalisation, commodification and engineering which enable the interrelationship between theory, tools and actors. The linkage found between the

strategy tool, strategy director and the process in this case study illustrates particularly their argument concerning conventionalisation. The strategy director had been ‘educated’ through his experience in the oil major and this had made planned emergence a convention or according to Cabantous and Gond (2011, page, 579), ‘a social norm guiding actions and decisions’. This finding is also quite similar to Garcia’s case of the table strawberry market, where a counsellor of the Regional Chamber of Agriculture was found to have played a central role in the construction of the market (Callon, 1998). Callon reports that the counsellor’s actions were inspired by his educational background in economics, particularly ‘his knowledge of neo-classical theory’ (Callon, 1998, page, 22). Garcia adds that it was not coincidental to have observed that the economic practices in the case of the table strawberry market corresponded to neo-classical theory, because the ‘economic theory served as a frame of reference to institute each element of the market’ (ibid, page, 22). Just as in Garcia’s case, we find the strategy director in META-Life to have introduced a tool, which materialised the model of planned emergence (Carter et al., 2010; Cabantous and Gond, 2011), which framed the actions of the strategists during the strategy process and consequently led to the adaptation of strategy.

What is found in this case study is an approach to strategy making that is characterised by a combination of both planning and learning elements. The strategy process at META-Life at first glance seems like a planned approach but on zooming in, we find attributes of an emergence approach, in which the process involved a continuous (symbolised by the cyclical frame of the model in Figure 6.2.1) incremental refinement of strategy as new insights are revealed (Jarratt and Stiles, 2010) through the use of such strategy tools as the Horizon scan. In the company, we find a process that is characterised by being bottom-up (Grant, 2003) – as opposed to a completely top-down process where the strategic direction is determined solely by the top management – just as a manager described the work of developing the tool to be. Having this bottom-up characteristic to it, enabled the tool to set the scene for emergence – its

modular affordance enabled the framing of the actions of those that were involved in the process, it gave their actions a shape (Callon, 1999). The ownership of the tool by the strategy team gave them the opportunity to also influence the strategy and the format of the tool with its discrete lenses which corresponded to actors from across the organisation and therefore enabled their inclusion in the strategic conversation, set the stage up for participation and distributed thinking for idea generation and exchange to take place. According to Collier et al. (2004, page, 69) inclusion 'creates more emergence because it facilitates the development of a broader range of responses to a dynamic set of circumstances'. These ideas emanate from the periphery who adopt more explorative approaches which engender emergence, than the senior team would, who are more inclined to utilize more exploitative approaches (Regner, 2003).

The process was also characterised by learning, knowledge sharing and creation and a consolidation/integration of knowledge from across the organisation as Grant (2003) describes in his work. The tool mediated the actions of the members of the strategy team in such a way that they now had a period when they could step out of their everyday practices (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007) and reflect on their existing activities and operations while also considering the future.

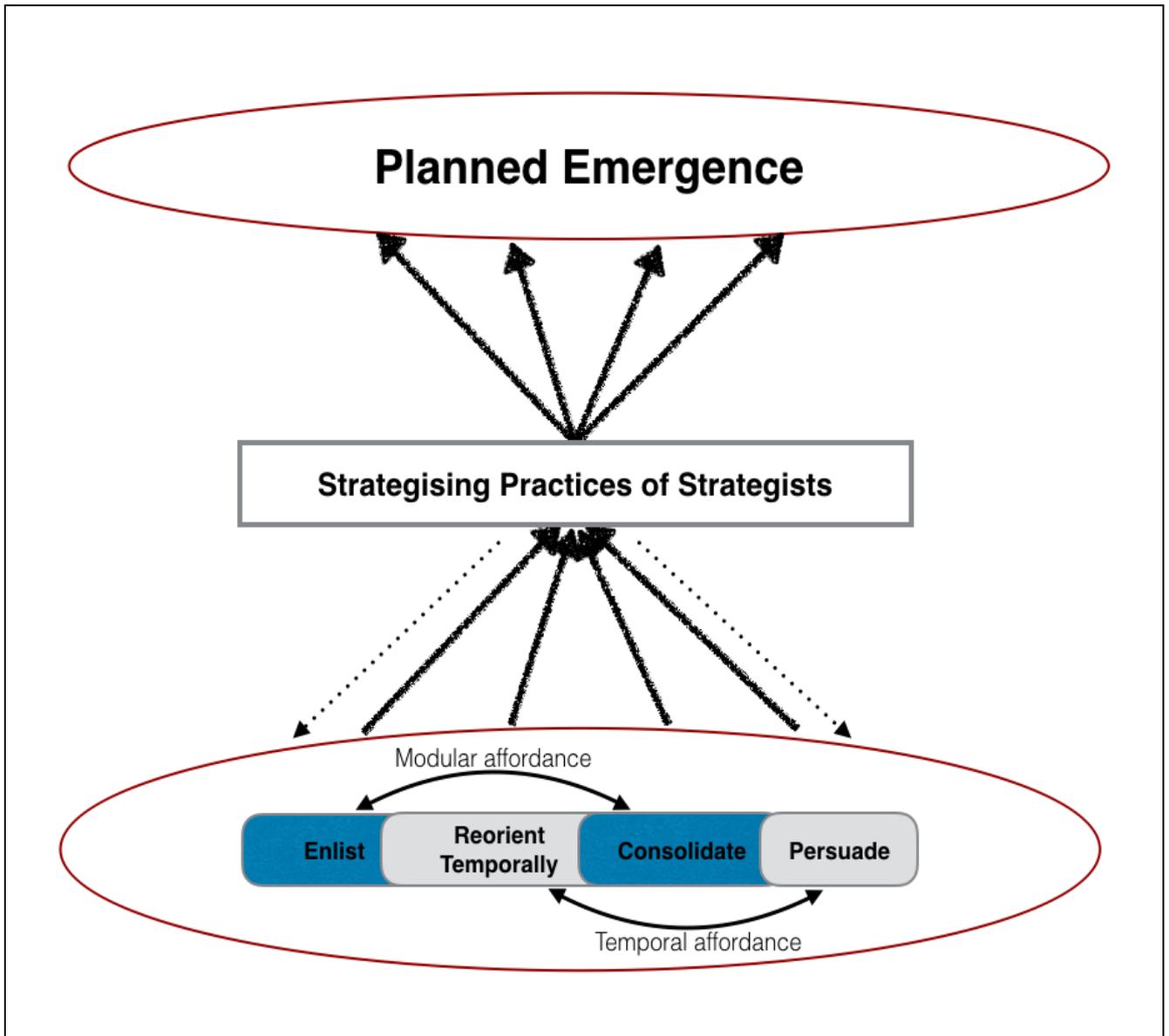


Figure 6.4.1: Strategy tools influencing the actions of strategists in a pattern that resembles a Planned Emergence model of strategy making.

**The dotted arrows represent the influence of the strategists on the tool. Both dotted and bold arrows represent the mutual adaptation that occurs when strategy tools are utilised in practice*

Artefacts are said to ‘create space and time for reflection and learning’ (Macpherson et al., 2010, page, 303). The tool framing the actions of the strategy team members in such a way that they were inclined to draw on the expertise of subject matter experts (Grant, 2003), enabled ‘social interaction[s] with new groups of people bring[ing] forward new ideas that challenge

existing practices' (Macpherson et al., 2010, page, 307). The use of the tool was also an avenue through which shared understanding was accomplished through negotiations that took place when the strategy team members converged to discuss each of their lenses as a team. The changes in mental models reported by the strategists are linked to this and to the process, particularly the very iterative process they underwent to prepare the documents that would be presented to the senior team.

The findings reveal another characteristic of the strategy process in META-Life that reflects that of a planned emergence as described by Grant (2003). In META-Life strategy formulation was as Grant reported: 'strategic decisions were made in response to the opportunities and threats that appeared, and were subsequently incorporated into strategic plans' (Grant, 2003, page, 510). In the previous chapter I highlighted that the tool – the Horizon scan – was actually utilised to identify opportunities and risks and based on the findings, future perspectives are generated and responses to these future perspectives are recommended to the CEO and executives. This also underpins the fact that the tool was an obligatory passage point to gain access to being a part of the strategic conversations that shaped the strategy. In addition to this, planned emergence being materialised as a tool utilised by the strategy team as they worked with the top management to develop strategy, enabled the theory to dominate other competing theories (Ottosson and Galis, 2010; D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014) and frame the setting. This is underpinned by Preda (2007), who argues that expert knowledge, for example strategy theory, is usually embodied in artefacts such as visual tools like charts, statistics or text and through these artefacts we may be able to identify how the theory is performative. In other words, theory takes on other forms – which according to Cabantous and Gond (2011) takes place through a process of engineering – such as tools and are then adopted by users and through this the theory may be able to become reality.

Identifying the link between what the strategy process looked like and where the strategy tool had originated from, I realised that the tool had not simply been performative in either a generic way or an effective way but it had been performative in what MacKenzie (2006b) describes as Barnesian performativity. In management and organisation studies scholars such as D'Adderio (2008) have shown how routines may be performative in such a strong sense. In this study, I contribute to our understanding of the role of strategy tools in organisations by addressing and illustrating what Carter et al. (2010) highlighted as a research agenda. That is, that the practical use of strategy tools, within which strategy theory is inscribed, increased 'the extent to which strategic processes [and] their outcomes resembled [the] depiction by the theory' (ibid, page, 581). This finding counters – and in the process complements – the extant literature on the use of strategy tools in practice. Firstly, this study agrees with Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) that strategy tools are carriers of strategy theory. Where we part ways is that Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006, page, 349) argue that the 'relationship between theory and practice involves a process of dissociation' in which the theoretical bases of strategy tools are disregarded by managers when used in practice (see also Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). The complementary aspect of the findings in this study is that this study in relation to Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006), among others, demonstrates Callon's concepts of framing and overflowing, more explicitly, they demonstrate MacKenzie's concepts of Barnesian performativity and counterperformativity. The extant literature which argues that a process of dissociation takes place in practice illustrates what MacKenzie argued, which is that the 'strong, Barnesian sense of "performativity," in which the use of a model ... makes it "more true," raises the possibility of its converse [counterperformativity]: that the effect of the practical use of a theory or model may be to alter ... processes so that they conform less well to the theory or model' (MacKenzie, 2006b, page, 19). What the extant literature argues is one view of how tools as knowledge artefacts are used in practice. This study provides the alternative.

From the findings in this study, I argue that when strategy tools are utilised in practice, the outcomes of the way they are used (in terms of the actions of the strategists) could be viewed using the four levels of performativity provided by MacKenzie (2006b) (see Table 6.4.1). Some tools are activation devices (they impact on a setting or on what strategists do in such a way that they are performative in a Barnesian sense, as shown in this research), some other outcomes of the use of the tool on the actions of the strategists are effective, in that they affect strategizing in some ways such as shaping the outcomes of analysis, or produce unintended effects (for example Chesley and Wenger, 1999), some tools are generic, in that their use does not reveal any observable effects (for example Hill and Westbrook, 1997), while others are counterperformative in that they lead to the production of something different from the theory which they carry within (for example Lozeau et al., 2002). It should be noted that the factors that affect what level of performativity a strategy tool will exhibit does not depend solely on the tool. For a tool to influence strategizing practices in a Barnesian performative way, it must be *viewed* by the users as a means through which they may be able to achieve their interests (Preda, 2007). In addition, determining whether the strategy tool will be performative in a specific way cannot be discerned prior to its use (Callon and Law, 1997).

The findings in this study shows that the process of mutual adaptation that occurs during the use of strategy tools is not only constituted by learning, as demonstrated by Chesley and Wenger (1999), but the mutual adaptation may result in a process that reflects the underlying theory of the strategy tool. The literature on strategy tools also suggests that the approach to strategy observed within an organisation – whether it be a rational planning approach or an emergent approach to strategy – determines how tools will be used. It is also argued that these models of strategy making are associated with specific types of tools (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006; Moisander and Stenfors, 2009). Based on insights from this case study, I argue that there are occasions where it may be the other way around, where the model of strategy

making that we identify or observe within organisations are actually an effect of the strategy tools utilized. In other words, the formation of a planned emergence approach was actually a consequence of the actions of both the strategists and the strategy tools rather than the approach being a practice that was already in place and therefore determines the actions of the strategists and the tools, as the existing literature suggests.

Level of performativity	Exemplar studies of strategy tools
Barnesian performativity	Activation devices (strategy theory is enacted): These devices do not only have an effect but they transform the setting within which they are adopted
Counter performativity	These tools have an effect that leads to the opposite of the assumptions within the tool. Here we find the tool was unable to bring about the world within it – that is, the socio-technical agencement. For example: Lozeau et al. (2002)
Effective performativity	These tools have an observable effect on the setting. For example: Chesley and Wenger (1999)
Generic performativity	These tools are used by managers but do not reveal any observable effects. For example: Hill and Westbrook (1997)

Table 6.4.1: Performative levels of strategy tools (Source: The Author)

This study was not a focus on the usefulness of tools as the earlier literature on strategy tools emphasised on but it was about what tools do (Giraudeau, 2008; Doganova and Eyquem-Renault, 2009) during the strategy process. While studies such as Lozeau et al. (2002), Carter

et al. (2010) and Cabantous and Gond (2011) assert that tools are able to transform a setting to be more like the theory within them, it has still been quite ambiguous as to what the micro-dynamics of this process looks like. In this work I show the micro-dynamics of how tools contribute to the realisation of theory. This demonstrates Lozeau et al.'s (2002) proposition concerning the use of tools, which is echoed by others aforementioned. Lozeau et al. (2002, page, 540) argue that 'the technique [or tool] may transform the organization so that its functioning fits the theory behind the technique', this study provides an illustration of the argument by showing how the tools may bring about this transformation. This research also contributes to the recent strategy as practice literature on tools by showing that in addition to enabling the work of strategizing as studies (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011) show, I argue that strategy tools frame the actions of actors through a process of enlisting participants, reorienting temporally, consolidating and persuading and thereby set-up a scene in which the strategy theory within them is performed. These roles performed by the tool are underpinned by the affordances of the tool. The study shows how the materiality of tools impacts on the work of strategy making. In relation to such tools that are able to be performative in a strong sense (D'Adderio, 2008), I refer to them as activation devices, they are not simply performative in that they had an effect on the process but they are performative in a Barnesian sense – that is the theory within the tool was enacted. These devices work as mechanisms that both trigger and keep the process of the refinement of strategy 'ticking' and thereby enable the incremental transformation of what it is that the organisation does. The study also supports Callon's (1998) argument, the strategy process at META-Life was indeed a continuous cycle of framing, overflowing and reframing, where we find strategy to be a consequence of such interactions as those between users of tools and the tools themselves.

Chapter 7

Contributions, implications and limitations

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter serves the purpose of presenting the main theoretical contributions that this research makes to strategy theory. The research contributes specifically to the literature on strategy tools, studies on the performativity of strategy, the literature on strategy making and the turn to materiality within the strategy as practice literature. A summary of the findings and the theoretical model developed in chapter six are discussed.

In conclusion, the findings show that strategy tools do perform other roles that go beyond their portrayal within the extant literature. By using the analytical lens discussed in Chapter 3, the analysis revealed that strategy tools actively contribute to the formation of strategy through shaping the strategising practices of the strategists in a pattern that reflects the underlying theory of the tool. The findings show that strategy tools may be performative in this way through performing the four interconnected roles identified: enlisting participants, reorienting temporally, consolidating and persuading. Furthermore, the analysis identified that the mechanisms that underpinned these roles were the modular and temporal affordances of the tool. In light of the extant literature, the results of the research also revealed that when strategy tools are used in practice, the effect of their use on strategising practices may be categorised by the four degrees/levels of performativity identified by MacKenzie (2006a). At one end of the spectrum some tools will generate no observable effect on the practices of strategists and at the other end, some tools will render the practices of the strategists to be more like the underlying theory of the tool.

This thesis also argues that strategy tools may be conceived of as mechanisms of transformation that trigger the adaptation of strategy and maintain a continuous process of the incremental refinement of the strategy. In the process of doing this, they are progressively transformed, thereby revealing a process of co-evolution between the strategy theory within the tool and strategy. This research advances the extant literature on strategy tools by showing the micro-dynamics of this co-evolution, and also showing that this co-evolution does not only result in changes to the organisation but changes that reflect the theory within the strategy tool.

The chapter is structured as follows: in the first section the chapter begins with a presentation of the main contributions to theory, structured under five headings. In this section, how the findings contribute to the extant literature is discussed. The following section presents the implications of the findings for practice. The final section of the chapter is a presentation of the limitations of this research, suggestions for future studies and a personal reflection of the PhD journey.

7.2 Contributions to knowledge

The objective of this research was to explore and identify the more active roles of strategy tools during strategy making, using an analytical lens which enables one to understand what tools do as non-human actors. I classified the literature on strategy tools into two – mainstream studies and strategy as practice studies. The mainstream literature on strategy tools was found to mainly focus on tools-in-principle – that is, the studies laid emphasis on the theoretical aspects of strategy tools and what they were developed to do rather than how they actually perform in practice. Scholars found that these tools did not perform as anticipated and as a result, a number of criticisms exists within the literature in relation to the usefulness of tools. The debates surrounding the usefulness of tools may be attributed to the fact that these studies

were largely based on a functionalist perspective that viewed tools as being used for specific instrumental functions such as analytical purposes or for problem solving. In addition, scholars within strategy as practice further criticise the mainstream studies on strategy tools, highlighting that these studies do not actually consider how tools are used in practice, rather they rely on the text-book purposes of tools (Spee and Jarzabkowski, 2009). This led to the focus on the use of strategy tools in practice (tools-in-practice). These practice studies found that tools are used in different ways and for different purposes (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015). However, the strategy as practice approach to strategy tools portrays them as being used instrumentally for other purposes besides instrumental functions. In other words, mainstream studies viewed tools as being utilised for instrumental means, while the practice literature in response to the views of the main stream literature show that strategy tools are utilised for other purposes besides instrumental purposes, however they inadvertently portray tools as being used instrumentally for a variety of other purposes. In particular, a number of studies have mainly conceived tools as a resource or constraint – that is they are considered to mainly enable or constrain action. While such studies have enriched our understanding of how strategy tools may enable the work of strategizing (as well as constrain it), I argue that tools perform more active roles (Callon and Law, 1997) during strategy making which is still quite ambiguous within the extant strategy literature.

Therefore, rather than focus on strategy tools in isolation as the mainstream studies do or on the purpose for which tools are used for, this research focuses on the interactions between the strategists and strategy tools during the development and use of tools. This is based on a relational ontology which views action as a product of a sociotechnical agencement, which is an assemblage of heterogeneous actors – both humans and non-humans (Callon, 1998, 2007; Callon and Law, 1997). This perspective opens up the practice of strategy making and allows one to also take into consideration the agential roles of strategy tools and how these roles may

impact the strategy process. In doing so, it circumvents both the functionalist perspective of mainstream studies and the top-down ideology of strategy as practice studies. Where the latter portrays tools as aids for purposeful human actions and are therefore rendered passive (Callon and Law, 1997; Muniesa, 2008).

In addition, a tension within the literature pertaining to how strategy tools are used in practice also exists. Strategy tools are conceptualised as knowledge artefacts (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Carter et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006) – that is, they are carriers of strategy theory. While some scholars argue that when they are utilised in practice a process of dissociation occurs, in which the theory is separated from the tool (Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006), others argue that the tool contributes to the realisation of the theory in reality (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Carter et al., 2010; Ottosson and Galis, 2011). The latter argument indicates that strategy tools are performative (Callon, 1998, 2007; MacKenzie, 2006a, 2006b) and therefore perform more active roles than had previously been portrayed in the literature.

The research questions for this study were formulated based on the limitations of the literature and the tensions within it.

This research was guided by the following research questions:

‘How do strategy tools actively contribute to the formation of strategy and what are the implications of this for the work of strategy making?’

The recent strategy as practice studies on strategy tools, in particular the materiality turn within strategy research (Belmondo and Sargis-Roussel; Dameron, Le and LeBaron, 2015; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011; Le and Spee, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015; Werle and Seidl, 2015), focus on the affordances of strategy tools and how they enable the work of strategizing. This PhD thesis focuses on the affordances of strategy tools and how it enabled the performative roles of the strategy tools. In other words, the extant literature emphasises

what managers do with material objects such as strategy tools, while this research is concerned with what tools do in relation to managers. The difference between most of the recent strategy as practice studies on strategy tools and this thesis is aptly illustrated by the foundational paradigms that underpin the extant literature and this thesis. Most strategy as practice views on strategy tools are based on a ‘neo-interpretive’ perspective, while this thesis is based on a ‘neo-structuralist’ foundation (Rasche and Chia, 2009). Where the former lay emphasis on the strategists and how they ‘use objects according to the frames [or knowledge schemes] they possess; the focus, here, is more towards the individual’ (Rasche and Chia, 2009, page, 723). While the latter, emphasises the object and aims ‘at finding out how the handling of objects shapes and is shaped by ... knowledge schemes’ (ibid, page, 723).

7.2.1 Impact of the materiality of strategy tools on strategizing practices

The first contribution which this research makes is that it contributes a materiality dimension to understanding how strategy is formed and therefore addresses the call by Dameron et al. (2015) for systematic studies of how strategy tools may impact on the work of strategizing through their affordances. The study advances our understanding of how the materiality of strategy tools shape strategizing practices that occur during the development of strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2013; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Paroutis et al., 2015). The findings show that during the use of strategy tools, these tools do not simply shape strategizing practices but they do so in a patterned way that resembles the underlying theory of the strategy tool. The research shows that strategy tools perform this role of shaping practices through performing the four interconnected roles of *enlisting participants*, *reorienting temporally*, *consolidating and persuading*, and the mechanisms that underpinned these roles were two main affordances of the tool – modular and temporal affordances. Strategy tools shape practices by instigating

different actions through both the underlying theory within the tool and the affordances of the tool.

In this study, the modular affordance of the tool was found to impact mainly on participation (Mantere and Vaara, 2008), strategy tools with modular affordances may enable the inclusion of actors from across the organisation and consequently distributed thinking and buy-in – both important aspects of strategy making. At the same time, as the tool included some actors, some others were excluded. Strategy tools may then be considered to generate contradictions of inclusion and exclusion. In addition, such tools also generate political activity, by reason of being an obligatory passage point (Whittle and Mueller, 2010) through which actors at the periphery (Regner, 2003) may engage in strategic conversations (Wesley, 1990). The temporal affordance of the tool on the other hand, reoriented the cognitive focus of the strategists towards focusing on the future and at the same time, the tool engendered a reflection on the current strategic practices. This led to new insights which consequently led to a change in what the organisation does.

7.2.2 Performativity of strategy tools

This research contributes to the nascent literature on performativity in strategy (Carter et al., 2010; Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Vaara et al., 2010), which has mainly taken a discursive approach to the study of the performative effects of strategic plans. This research contributes to this literature by reconceptualising the role of strategy tools in practice and showing the performative effects which they generate. It illustrates empirically how strategy tools may be performative in a strong Barnesian sense, in which the theory within the tool is enacted in practice (MacKenzie, 2006b). In this research, the findings revealed that the roles performed by the tool instigated or triggered actions and interactions of the strategists that corresponded

with the characteristics of the approach to strategy making referred to as planned emergence (Grant, 2003).

While the approach to strategy making within the case study seemed at first to be more of a planned approach (Ansoff, 1965), zooming in on the practices, what is found is that elements of the process were actually emergent and incremental (Mintzberg and Waters, 1985; Quinn, 1978). On discovering the strategy process in META-Life was as Grant (2003) described in his study of strategic planning in eight major oil companies, further interviews revealed that the strategy tool focused on in this study had been introduced by the Strategy Director who mentioned that it was a tool he had utilised while previously working in one of the eight oil companies in Grant's (2003) work. This finding suggests that the tool therefore materialised the principles of planned emergence. The research therefore addresses calls to study how strategy tools are performative (Carter et al., 2010).

The research contributes to the literature on performativity in strategy, by demonstrating how performativity, as conceptualised by Callon (1998, 2007), may transpire within a setting other than a financial market. The findings illustrate that performativity within such organisational settings is a process of mutual adaptation in which both the knowledge artefact and the actions of the actors are progressively shaped.

It also contributes to the debate surrounding the dissociation of strategy theory from the strategy tool, when tools are utilised in practice (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Carter et al., 2010; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006), by demonstrating that this process of dissociation may not always occur. The findings both counter and complement Jarzabkowski and Wilson's (2006) argument. In Table 6.4.1, the findings (in relation to the extant literature) show that when tools are used in practice (in different settings) they may be performative in the different ways that MacKenzie (2006b) provides rather than solely in a generic sense which correlates with

Jarzabkowski and Wilson's (2006) dissociation argument. Based on MacKenzie's (2006b) different levels of performativity, some tools may simply be performative in a generic sense, in which case the underlying theory has no observable effects. In other cases, the underlying theory within the tool may have an observable effect and can therefore be considered to have been performative in an effective way. The tool may also lead to effects that are the opposite of the theoretical underpinnings of the tool (Lozeau et al., 2002), in this case the tool can be said to be counterperformative. Finally, the tool may be performative in a Barnesian sense, in which the underlying theory is realised or enacted in reality. The findings also advance Chesley and Wenger's (1999) study and Lozeau et al.'s (2002) concepts of 'transformation and customisation' by showing the micro-dynamics of *how* strategy theory and strategizing practices co-evolve within an organisation.

7.2.3 Strategy tools as Activation Devices that trigger the adaptation of strategy

This study introduces the concept of an *Activation device*. A term that encapsulates and alludes to the more active roles performed by strategy tools during strategy making. The research reconceptualises strategy tools as activation devices that activate strategy – that is, they trigger the enactment of strategy theory (as aforementioned), they also trigger the start of the adaptation of strategy and contribute to maintaining the adaptation process. Based on the analysis, such an activation device performs the work of triggering and maintaining the adaptation of strategy through the four interconnected roles it performs during the strategy process. In Chapter 6 a theoretical model which depicts these successive roles performed at different stages of an annual strategy process cycle is discussed.

The findings contribute to the recent strategy as practice literature on strategy tools by arguing that tools be conceptualised, not simply as having affordances that provide managers with a means to achieving various outcomes (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015) – that is, they are not simply conduits, but rather as non-human actors that actually do things (Callon and Law, 1997; Giraudeau, 2008). The results of this research address the recent calls to separate strategy from intentionality, to view agency as being distributed between humans and non-humans and to therefore examine how objects such as tools *participate* in strategizing practices (Chapman et al., 2015; Rasche and Chia, 2009).

7.2.4 The amalgamation of tools-in-principle and tools-in-practice

The fourth contribution made to the literature on strategy tools was to close the divide within the literature by bringing together both tools-in-principle and tools-in-practice in order to enrich our understanding of strategy tools. The study reveals other roles that strategy tools may perform that transcend those already portrayed within the literature (Clark, 1997; Frost, 2003; Hussey, 1997; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Langley, 1989; Wright et al., 2013). Moreover, this thesis provides an account of how the use of tools in practice is a process characterised not only by the interaction of the affordances of the tools and the agency of the strategists (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015) but an interaction that also involves the underlying theory of the tool. Viewing the use of tools in this way allowed for the recognition of tools as active non-human actors (Moisander and Stenfors, 2009) rather than passive artifacts that enable the purposeful intentions of the strategists (Jarzabkowski and Kaplan, 2015; Kaplan, 2011). The findings also contribute to the extant literature on the process of mutual adaptation, which focuses mainly on the mutual adaptation that takes place between strategy tools and

organisations (Chesley and Wenger, 1999; Lozeau et al., 2002). This research shows the process of mutual adaptation as it occurs at the micro-level.

7.2.5 Strategy making practices of strategy teams

The study shows how the members of a strategy function work with the top management team in order to formulate strategy. It shows how strategy teams go about the work of developing strategy and links the actions and interactions that occur to the strategy formed. The study therefore contributes to Paroutis and Pettigrew's (2007) work by showing other practices of strategy teams. While the data revealed that members of a strategy function do perform the daily practices identified by Paroutis and Pettigrew (2007), the study also reveals that they play a significant role in the shaping of the strategic direction of the organisation (Grant, 2003) and they do so through the strategy tools they utilise. For example, they may channel the attention of top managers towards specific strategic options through the use of these strategy tools. However, their efforts may not always go as planned. This research also shows that strategy tools not only enable the executing practices of strategy teams (Paroutis and Pettigrew, 2007) but strategy tools also contribute to initiating and reflecting practices through performing, respectively, the roles of enlisting participants and thereby enabling distributed thinking for the development of new ideas and reorienting the strategists thinking temporally.

7.3 Implications for Practitioners

Studies argue that strategy making models, such as the two main competing models – the planning model and the emergent approach – are associated with specific strategy tools (Gunn and Williams, 2007; Jarratt and Stiles, 2010; Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 2006; Moisander and Stenfors, 2009). For example, Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) show how the positioning

school (Mintzberg and Lampel, 1999) involves the use of certain tools such as Porter's five forces. These studies argue that these models of strategy making not only determine which tools will be utilised but they also determine how the tools will be utilised (Jarratt and Stiles, 2010). Based on the findings, this research argues that since strategy tools are able to be performative in a Barnesian sense (MacKenzie, 2006a, 2007) the implications of this is that the strategy making models observed are not a given (Law, 2008). Rather they are brought into being through the interactions that occur between strategists and the types of strategy tools that they draw on during strategy making. Furthermore, the findings imply that strategy is not simply a product of people 'doing things' with material artefacts or objects, rather it is also a product of the subtle ways in which strategy tools shape the actions of strategists through both their underlying theory and affordances.

The findings also imply that tools may be considered as mechanisms of transformation that instigate or trigger the adaptation of strategy, hence the term 'Activation device'. In addition to this, strategy tools may also maintain the continuous incremental refinement of strategy, particularly when mobilised at the start of the strategy process cycle. Strategy tools as mechanisms of transformation also has implications for strategic change. In Balogun et al. (2014), they highlight that strategic change requires a 'shift in the shared interpretive schemes that govern the way the members of an organisation conceive of their organisation and their environment' (ibid, page, 187). The findings suggest that strategy tools may act as such a mechanism through which this shift in interpretive schemes may occur.

Finally, the study has implications for the development of tools by researchers and the selection and use of tools by practitioners. Strategy tools with a modular affordance, which requires a variety of actors to participate in its development, enables the work of collaboration/network building which in turn allows for the socialisation of thinking for idea generation. Where, both collaboration and idea generation are known to be important aspects of strategy formation.

7.4 Limitations and future research avenues

This research, much like every other research project, is inevitably prone to limitations. By identifying these limitations, some avenues for further studies were made evident and are presented after the overview of the limitations.

Limitations of the research

Firstly, I should highlight that this research has concentrated on the use of a strategy tool in a single case study setting and therefore the generalisation of the findings may not be feasible. The use of multiple case studies would certainly have enabled the generalisation of findings from the research. The choice of a single case study was so that an in-depth study of the development and use of a major strategy tool would be conducted, in which the practices and activities of the strategists could be captured through direct observations. The use of ethnographic techniques such as direct observations of the day to day practices of strategists may not have been achieved had multiple case studies been used. Furthermore, the use of a single case study is typical of strategy as practice studies which favour the use of single case studies which allow researchers to get as close as possible to the practices and activities of strategists (Balogun et al., 2003; Kaplan, 2011; Kaplan and Orlikowski, 2013; Jarzabkowski, Burke and Spee, 2015; Jarzabkowski, Spee and Smets, 2013; Johnson et al., 2007)

Secondly, due to the sensitive and confidential nature of strategy (Johnson et al., 2007), conversations that took place during the direct observations of meetings and workshops were not audio-recorded. This was a restriction that had been set out by the Head of Corporate Strategy at the start of the data collection, despite the existence of a confidentiality agreement. The audio-recording of these strategy episodes would have been beneficial, in terms of capturing the precise conversations that took place. Consequently, the lack of audio-recordings during these strategy episodes, meant that it is possible that I may have missed some points

made by the attendants during the meetings and workshops. However, this issue was mitigated by note-taking during the episodes. Notes were made of key points and were typed-up within a twenty-four-hour period. In addition, the interviews that were conducted after the meetings and workshops were based on the discussions that had taken place, thereby allowing some aspects of the conversations to also be audio-recorded. The notes made supplemented and were also supplemented by the audio-recordings of the post-meeting interviews. Indeed, the use of multiple methods of data collection served other useful purposes beyond triangulation.

Thirdly, there is the possibility that specific information pertaining to the company's strategy, may have been withheld during interviews. However, the documents collected from meetings, workshops and presentations served as a means to triangulate the interview data generated.

The fourth limitation of this research relates to the discursive aspect of the tool. While this was considered, the use of the documents such as the Chairman's letter and drafts of the Horizon scan document, were mainly to supplement and triangulate other data sources. There is the possibility that the content of the scan may have had other performative effects within the case study that was not identified through the analysis. Other studies that have drawn on a discursive approach to strategy documents such as strategic plans have identified performative effects generated by strategic plans (Kornberger and Clegg, 2011; Vaara et al., 2010).

A fifth limitation is concerned with the affordances of the strategy tool in this case study. The specific findings from this research, particularly the roles of the strategy tool that were enabled by its modular affordance, may not pertain to other strategy tools that do not have such an affordance. For example, there were other strategy tools used by the strategists during the strategy process but some of these tools required only a single member of the strategy team to work on them. These tools had no apparent social aspect to them during their development. There was no need for a collective of managers to participate in their development and therefore

no instances of inclusion or exclusion or identifiable political struggles, when such tools were developed. In comparison to the Horizon scan, which required all members of the strategy team, subject matter experts and external consultants. For this reason, the findings may not pertain to all forms of tools.

Finally, a limitation that pertains to the focus on one strategy tool is presented. While some studies show that managers utilise multiple tools during the strategy making process (Jarratt and Stiles, 2010), in this research I focus on the development and use of one tool. One reason for this is that some tools were used simultaneously and the possibility of tracking the path of more than one tool through observations and interviews seemed implausible particularly when the member of the strategy team working on the tool was based in a different geographic location. The limitation seen in this case is that there may have been performative struggles (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Callon, 2007; D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014) between these different strategy tools that may have also impacted on the strategy process. A consideration of the interplay between the theoretical underpinnings of these different tools may have enriched the study.

Future research avenues

This research has several limitations, as outlined above and can be enriched by further examination of the development and use of strategy tools within annual strategy making cycles. Some of the limitations of this research may be addressed through future studies. The research highlights five possible areas which future research may consider. Firstly, future studies may consider the discursive aspects of strategy tools, other than strategic plans, which have been considered by Kornberger and Clegg (2011) and Vaara et al. (2010), and how they impact on the strategic practices of strategists and also the strategy process. They may also want to

consider the effects of the changes made to the material forms of tools during different aspects of the strategy process, may have on the process. For example, in this study the tool went from a documentary form to being translated into bullet points on PowerPoint slide decks, which were presented to the CEO and senior executives. Perhaps taking on the form of slide decks may have had several effects on the decisions made for example.

Secondly, this research focuses on a single strategy tool, future studies may enrich this study by considering the interplay between the different strategy tools used during strategy making, as well as other artefacts and how they impact on strategizing practices and perhaps examine the possibility of performative struggles (Cabantous and Gond, 2011; Callon, 2007; D'Adderio and Pollock, 2014) that may occur between the different tools and the effects of these struggles on strategizing practices.

Thirdly, from Table 6.4.1 in Chapter 6, I categorise strategy tools according to MacKenzie's (2006b) levels of performativity: generic, effective, Barnesian and counterperformativity. By comparing the findings in this study with the extant literature, Table 6.4.1 suggests that when strategy tools are utilised in practice, the performative effects they generate may differ. Future studies may therefore seek to examine why some strategy tools fall under the category of generic performativity and in what context does this occur. In other words, why are some tools performative and others are not. Future studies may also want to identify what other factors, besides the affordances of the tool and the interests of the actors that adopt the tool (Callon, 2007; Preda, 2007), may impact on strategy tools being performative in a strong Barnesian sense.

Finally, in relation to methodology, future research may choose to consider the use of video-ethnographic (Jarzabkowski, Burke and Spee, 2015; Paroutis, Franco and Papadopoulos, 2015) methods as a means of data collection and analysis, particularly within strategy episodes such

as meetings and workshops. In this research, while interviews were audio-recorded, meetings and workshops were not. The use of video-ethnographic methods for would enrich our understanding of how strategy tools are developed and used. For example, having both visual and audio insights on how the negotiations concerning the outcomes of tools unfold, will provide deeper insights into how strategy tools are shaped and how they shape strategizing practices. Such an approach would enable researchers to analyse the role of strategy tools further by providing insights into the spatial and temporal aspects (Dameron, Le and LeBaron, 2015) of developing and using strategy tools.

In addition, future studies may also want to consider the use of multiple case studies, although this may require more than one researcher if data is to be collected through direct observations or even participant observations. At the moment the theoretical model developed from the analysis may be viewed as a working hypothesis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Bryman, 2012) which future studies may consider as a starting point when investigating active roles of strategy tools. Furthermore, the use of multiple case studies on the active roles of strategy tools during strategy making would enable researchers to test the theoretical model proposed in Chapter 6 and also compare the roles that tools perform across different settings. The researchers may also identify the level of performativity (MacKenzie, 2006b) in each setting. Findings from such endeavours may enable researchers to identify factors that impact on strategy tools being performative in a strong Barnesian sense. These studies could also compare the roles of strategy tools that have a modular affordance and therefore require the expertise of different actors and groups with strategy tools that do not have such an affordance. Do the latter category of tools impact on participation in strategy making through their specific affordances and not through the ownership of the tool?

7.5 Reflecting on the research journey

On reflecting on the research journey, a number of experiences have impacted on my thinking and I have learnt a great deal over the years (I am still learning). Several experiences stand out from others and have certainly shaped my beliefs and frame of reference. These experiences stand out because of the frustrations I experienced and the subsequent changes that occurred. One of such experiences pertains to the process of unlearning and learning. My educational background is Applied Physics and I was accustomed to thinking more ‘quantitatively’ than ‘qualitatively’. Moving on to do a Master’s degree in Management was useful in transitioning from the former to the latter but the one-year programme was not enough. The first year of the PhD involved a process that could be described as unlearning and learning. Coming from the physical sciences meant that I began with a sort of objectivist paradigm, however as I engaged in the Research Design and Data Collection courses, which are mandatory in the first year, I began to learn that there exist multiple realities which are a consequence of the different interpretations and meanings people have in relation to world. These insights came from engaging with other PhD colleagues, attending seminars and reading. I had shifted, rather painfully, from my ‘quantitative’ thinking to a more ‘qualitative’ mind set, which accepts that there really are ‘many truths’, as Wendy Smith phrased it during her presentation on her paper titled ‘Toward a theory of paradox: A dynamic equilibrium model of organising’ (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Even the notion of strategy formation has ‘many truths’, which Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) illustrate using the metaphor of the elephant and the blind people, who grab on to different parts of the elephant and define the beast based on the parts they are attached to. Each blind person asserts that their definition of the beast is the right definition when, as Mintzberg and Lampel (1999) point out, they have never seen the entire beast.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Sample Transcripts

Transcript 1

R: Researcher

I: Interviewee (Head of Strategic Propositions)

R: Please give me some background information about you

I: Yeah so background, I've been here five years. I am an accountant qualified. So, started life in PWC. Qualified as a chartered accountant and then moved into industry outside of practice of finance. I did a number of roles in telecoms and General Electric, in kind of commercial and strategic roles before moving here. So, I have been doing this role for three years.

R: Ok. Tell me about the horizon scan.

I: So, the horizon scan is an opportunity for us to look at what are some of the emerging trends in the UK industry and particularly what are the implications for insurers and for [Star group] and therefore what do we need to do about it? What are some of the risks, what are some of the challenges, what are some of the opportunities that we need to address?

R: Ok. Who worked on it?

I: It's quite wide ranging. So, we would kick the process off in Strategy [i.e. the team], we would then speak to relevant experts in the area. So we think about what are the key themes that we see going on in the industry and we test them out with some [incomplete sentence]. We effectively go and have conversations with the SMEs in the different areas after having done our own research, and we do our own research really by kinda trawling the internet, reading reports, occasionally going on courses. We'll really need experts in. So tax will be the classic example, I'm not sure if anyone in the strategy team has got a natural affinity for tax so we'd have to go and leverage some of the Group's tax advisors in insurance and their expertise about what's particularly happening, what's affecting the insurance business.

R: Within the strategy team, who worked on the horizon scan?

I: Pretty much everybody. So everybody in the strategy team is responsible for a particular section. Each person in the strategy team gets a topic, goes away and finds out as much as they can about it, they'll speak to SMEs. They'd have initial conversations, a lot of the time they'd buddy up with Roy and I. We then think about what the key trends are based on those conversations. We start to write those up, then discuss what we think the implications are for us in conjunction with those SMEs and start to get a draft in circulation and then we start to refine it over the period, but it'll be everybody in the strategy team that works on it. It's one of those really interesting pieces of the strategic cycle, everybody wants to be involved and it's one of those key learning parts for everybody in the team and you know it kinda considers everything and so everybody should be involved.

R: How did you develop your lens after each person in the team had selected a lens?

I: It's research. I'll give you an example – I went to the ABI's future of insurance industry in 2020 a couple of months ago. So there were some of the leading politicians and insurance directors standing up talking about what are some of the big challenges faced in the insurance industry and what do we think the industry will look like in 2020. So those would be some of the forums which we'd get an idea of what's the industry debating at the moment and how do we think some of those should affect us and are they important or not? And my other thing would be talking to other people as I said before who are experts in those particular areas so speaking to the guys in public affairs who have regular debates with the pensions minister and other ministers around public policy. What are the assumptions we're factoring into our five-year plan? So, I guess it's networks and it's research and it's the occasional conference that's particularly relevant to horizon scanning and longer term, they are the main sources.

R: Do you think the horizon scan is an effective tool?

I: I do think it's effective because there's been a number of pieces that we've done off the back of it. So, one of them that springs to mind and a piece I'm currently working on is worksite. So, one of the conclusions we came up with was that where, how and when people access advice is changing. So, we've seen the retail distribution review that came in 2013, as a result we've started to see a contraction in advice on banks – I don't want to get too much into content – but basically, we've seen people stop providing advice for the mass market – for the person who walks into the high street. So all of the major banks, bar [Name of bank], have withdrawn. So where are people going to go for advice now? Em and that would be someone like myself, I would call myself a mass market customer, where am I gonna go? Well potentially in the future you'd go to your employer. So, you get your pension through your employer, what about other simple products like a savings product that may be longer term like an ISA or what about protecting your family then? The work place is a convenient place and somewhere where you might trust your employer to go and get some of that advice or guidance and access to those products so we've done a piece of work and we're in the midst of doing that piece of work that says: 'how do we get into that market and how do we

leverage some of the advantages we already have in that space and what's the amount of products and what are the needs of those consumers? And so em that piece of work we've already been working on with the main directors for the insurance business. And we look to take that to the insurance executives and recommendations about where we invest.

Transcript 2

A portion of the discussion with the Strategy director after being informed by two members of the strategy team that the strategy tool had been introduced by him when he became the Strategy director.

R: Researcher

I: Interviewee (Strategy Director)

R: You introduced the scan to the team when you came in as strategy director, why? Where did it come from?

I: it was really something adopted from my days in [Name of oil company] ... We used to talk about in [Name of oil company], about looking for the elephant in the long grass, which was really those things that would come at you rather unexpectedly and could do some serious damage. So, I thought it sensible to make sure that we always had our eye on what was going on in the overall environment so we didn't get derailed by any of them.

R: what department were you in [Name of oil company]?

I: I was in [Name of oil company] many years ago, when [Name of oil company] was developing the whole scenario planning approach

R: why do you think it is [i.e. the scan] important and do you think it's effective?

I: why is it important – I think it's quite easy for businesses to see themselves just slowly disappear or indeed quickly disappear and I think there were certain banking businesses not a million miles from here which did quite rapidly disappear so I think you have to think the unthinkable and how you respond to that is a different matter but you know we've got tonnes of examples from not that long ago such as the likes of [Name of organisation 1], the likes of [Name of organisation 2], the likes of to a lesser extent [Name of organisation 3] cause I don't think it was so much a flawed business model in the case of [Name of organisation 3], I think it was flawed decision making but certainly in the case of [Name of organisation 1] and the case of [Name of organisation 2] it was a fundamentally flawed business model. It was an

entirely foreseeable scenario that caused them both to fall over. It may not have been a likely scenario but it obviously turned out to be a reality.

I: How effective is it? I think that's more challenging because foreseeing something going wrong is one thing, taking what appears to be a sub-optimal decision in response to that [is another thing] (and by sub-optimal I mean – if I think the most likely outcome is scenario A and then don't optimize my business for scenario A because under scenario B, optimizing my business is catastrophic whereas doing something sub-optimal under scenario A is also robust under scenario B that's quite a tough call). So, you do have to be confident enough to be able to take that sub-optimal decision in order to make your strategy robust for the future. I think some of the decisions will be relatively easy, I think a good example of very robust decision making was the decision in [Star Group] to focus a lot of the strategy on cost reduction. It was extremely painful at the time but it turned out to be an incredibly robust decision when the recession proved to be much longer than, at the time, anyone was particularly anticipating. So, having the courage to take that robust decision is the key element to making it effective.

R: What is the link between the strategy and the scan?

I: We start with the scan and then move on to the strategy. So, within the scan we look for the long term emerging trends and how they might impact the business and from that we get a very large number of areas of uncertainty. So we might pick out a dozen or more different things where we don't know what's going to happen and the next stage then is to understand how they are related to one another, so which one of these are likely to emerge i.e. which ones are correlated to one another? And then try and craft that into a series of stories in other words the scenarios as to how the world might emerge and what you typically might end up with is something like two sets of these uncertainties are quite closely correlated with one another. So you might have five or six things where you say well they will all go one way or they will all go another way and then you might have another set of five or six things which the same is true and then there might be one or two where actually they're completely uncorrelated with the two groups, but that at least enables you to sort of understand well we've got a matrix here plus a couple of outliers so we can build our scenarios around those. So, you build your scenarios so that you're testing the likely emerging uncertainties and then you need to test the strategy against those scenarios. So, one of the things we always do is run the numbers on our strategy against the potential scenarios to make sure that we're not coming up against anything catastrophic from that perspective and typically it's capital that is likely to be a constraining factor rather than actually going bust or anything like that for an insurance company.

R: So, it's testing the strategy to see if it's robust?

I: What is the answer to our strategy in the different scenarios and is there a better strategy which does better under those different scenarios. I mean likelihood is that we will adjust the strategy but the analysis of the market [and] the scenarios will drive the strategy

R: Why was it important to structure or frame the long document in the way that you wanted it to be structured?

I: I think the long document was really to force clarity of thinking. So, the actual output itself was less important than the process of developing it. If you have to tell a story a very logical story as to why trends we see at the moment leads to implications that we're asserting, then I believe, particularly, a long form document is a very good way of forcing that logical thinking. So, as I say it's the process more important than the actual output.

R: Why do you say that?

I: Almost everything in strategy is about process because it is the process that refines your thinking and I would say the same for most of the business modelling work which is done as well. So the process is at least as important as the output.

Appendix 2: Sample Field notes

<p>Date: March 28th, 2013 Time: 10:00am Location: Meeting room on the ground floor of META-Life's building Description: This is a meeting two members of the strategy team (Joachim and Austin) are having with four Subject Matter Experts from the IT department</p>	<p>Researcher's comments</p>
<p>On this day, I am shadowing Joachim. I walk with him and Austin to the elevator to go down from the 10th floor, where the Strategy team is based, to the ground floor where a number of meeting rooms are located. We scan our id cards and walk through the security barriers that stand guard between the elevators and the very large open space where the receptionists are located at the center.</p> <p>The meeting begins with Joachim giving an introduction, which involves explaining the purpose of the meeting. He kicks off with an introduction of himself and everyone else follows¹. I am introduced as a researcher shadowing Joachim for the day. (See seating arrangement below)</p> <p>Joachim has done some prior research on the issue of agility and technology and would like to test out his findings on the members of the IT department and get insights from them. He begins by mentioning that the objective of the meeting is to come to an agreement on whether his initial findings were the</p>	<p>¹For a company this size, it is not surprising that they do not know each other. The guys from Strategy introduce themselves to the IT department and vice versa. Joachim seems to know one member of the IT department – Dan – and seems to have done some prior work with</p>

right areas to consider. During the discussion, one of the members of the IT department – Patrick – points out areas that Joachim had not considered. Joachim scribbles this down on a notepad, while Austin sits quietly listening to the discussion². Joachim raises a point about customers and asks Patrick what his views were concerning the issue. Others within the IT team also contribute to this (except Alice). Austin finally speaks and has a look of confusion on his face as he asks Patrick a question based on the information on the slides that we each had. Patrick provides him with an explanation.

Joachim speaks up again and tries to get confirmation from the members of the IT team about one of his findings. The different members of the IT team make several comments about the point Joachim raised.

Anna, a senior member of the IT team, introduces an idea^{3, 4} (in the form of a question). Austin asks for clarification in order to understand what Anna meant. The conversation carries on in a sort of brainstorming fashion⁵. Anna makes some more points which others agree on.

Austin points out some problems or challenges with agility and technology. Anna tells him what the real problems are and why they occur.

During the entire conversation, Joachim continues to make notes in his notepad.

Towards the end of the meeting, Joachim mentions next steps and Anna asks how pressed for time the Strategy team are.

Patrick's phone rings while Dan starts to pack up his things, everyone else starts to do the same – indicating the end of the meeting. Joachim thanks everyone for their time and the others respond. Dan does a last-minute check to see if anyone has any questions or thoughts. Alice doesn't speak throughout the meeting (I later find out from Joachim that she is new junior member of the IT team and is still learning).

While we leave the room, Austin and Anna continue to discuss several issues.

him in relation to the topic of the discussion.

²It appears that Austin's presence in this meeting may be more to support Joachim, since he is a more senior member of the Strategy team. It may also be that he is here to get some insights about the matter but since Joachim is the lead on this job, Austin allows him to steer the conversation.

³Some ideas actually come from the people the Strategy team engage with.

⁴It is evident that Anna is the most senior person in this group of IT experts. Her body language, the tone of her voice and the mannerism with which she speaks points to this. She is also very knowledgeable.

⁵More of what I see as sensegiving, takes place between Anna and Austin.

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