FINDING AN EMERGENT WAY THROUGH TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE – A NARRATIVE APPROACH TO STRATEGY

ABSTRACT

Current strategic media management has a tendency to draw on design or planning schools and focus primarily on competitive advantages, industry development and strategic positioning. However, the way in which strategies emerge from everyday practices is poorly understood. To this end, we build a theoretical lens from the narrative approach to strategy-as-practice and the concept of 'wayfinding', and study how organizational narratives can help both managers and employees to construct meaning around emergent strategy during ongoing transformational change. Through interview data of an empirical case study, we identify narratives on three fronts – about *(1) employees, (2) managers, and (3) the market* – and elaborate on how these narratives may give meaning, offer guidance and provide an actionable basis from which to find a way through ongoing transformational change. Our study contributes to the research on strategic media management by showing how narratives can help to make sense of emergent strategy and the way organizations find their way through ongoing change.

Keywords: strategic media management, narrative approach to strategy-as-practice, emergent strategies, organizational change

INTRODUCTION

Media management is increasingly witnessing a "strategic turn" in approaching and conceptualizing the challenges that traditional print-media focused organizations have. This entails a shift towards sophisticated concepts and approaches to understand a continuously changing environment and provide guidance for strategic activities (Achtenhagen & Raviola, 2009; Berman, Abraham, Battino, Shipnuck, & Neus, 2007; Chan-Olmsted, 2006; Järventie-Thesleff, Moisander, & Villi, 2014; Küng, 2008; Maijanen & Jantunen, 2014). The challenges are based on rising competition in the

media industry, an increasing multitude of new actors, startling technological innovations, and changes in media consumption, as well as cultural changes more broadly (Deuze, 2008; Hartmann, 2009; Mierzejewska & Shaver, 2014). Most of the research in media management draws on approaches to strategy that represent design or planning schools (Küng, 2008; Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 1998). Therefore, these studies tell us a great deal about the nature of competition, industry development and competitive advantages in the media industry (e.g. Chan-Olmsted, 2006; Maijanen & Jantunen, 2014; Vukanovic, 2009). However, studies that address the challenges from a practice-based perspective to strategy remain scarce (Horst & Moisander, 2015; Järventie-Thesleff et al., 2014), even through the strength of practice-based approaches lies in uncovering the tools and methods of strategy making (practices), elucidating how strategy work is conducted (praxis), and describing the role and identity of the actors involved (practitioners) (Vaara & Whittington, 2012, p. 1). In particular, there is a shortage of studies focusing on emergent strategies. We build both on the narrative approach to strategy-as-practice (Brown & Thompson, 2013; Fenton & Langley, 2011) and on the concept of 'wayfinding' (Chia & Holt, 2006, 2009) to contribute to a better understanding of the way in which organizational narratives can shed light on the emergence of strategy in the context of a media organization going through transformational change. We ask: How do diverse organizational actors construct meaning of transformational change? What do the narratives of change tell us about the process of wayfinding?

The narratological approach to strategy-as-practice is one possible approach drawing on practice theory and building on the linguistic turn in social theory with a focus on discursive practices (Brown & Thompson, 2013, p. 1143). Managers and frontline employees employ narrative descriptions of their activities and strategy practices to create understanding and to make sense of organizational change (Boje, 1991; Brown, Gabriel, & Gherardi, 2009). Strategy in this light, is not perceived as something that an organization owns, but instead is viewed as a practice of different groups of people that shapes actions which impact the future of the organization (see e.g. Whittington, 2006). Acting strategically is defined as acting purposively towards a future goal even though the goal may be open. In this way, while the picture of the future state may be unclear, it shapes the immediate action (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011, p. 138). When the future is ambiguous, strategy-*in*-practice is "not a process of locating positions using pre-

established reference points, but a dynamic, evolving and self-referential process of discovery and self-clarification that is never complete" (Chia & Holt, 2009, pp. 163-164).

Our empirical analysis is based on a case study (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Stake, 2003) of one of Europe's leading print-focused media organizations. Based on the analysis, we find that all staff in the media company struggles with this transformational change on three fronts. First, the employees find themselves in a process of changing their new identity. Second, managers struggle to find and offer direction. Third, the market narrative is about shifting patterns of consumption, increased competition, and emerging novelty. Through our analysis, we identify and unpack these three interconnected organizational narratives, described with open-ended questions to accentuate the continuous, transformational change:

1. Employee narrative: Who are we, and what are we becoming?
2. Management narrative: What is our map and where are we?
3. Market narrative: What is the terrain on which we work?

Our analysis suggests that narratives can constitute an invaluable approach in making sense of emergent changes and in finding a way through the challenges of a continuously changing organizational environment. The "narrative lens" helps to stabilize the ongoing process of organizational change by providing meaning and giving direction in times when accelerating technological change, emerging business models and changing patterns of media consumption make it difficult for management to see too far ahead.

Theoretically, we contribute to the field of media management by exploring a *narrative perspective* of strategy. We draw on insights and methods from theories of strategic change (Chia & Holt, 2009; Stacey, 2007b; Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999), and narrative approaches to organization studies (Boje, 1995; Brown & Thompson, 2013; Ford, 1999), and integrate them into a framework for working through strategic change in media organizations (Maijanen & Jantunen, 2014). The research thus connects several fields of research to shed new light on the process of strategizing through transformational change.

The article is structured as follows. First, we describe our theoretical approach, based on the concept of 'wayfinding' and the narrative approach to strategy-as-practice that we build in our study. Next, we outline the methods and procedures of our empirical analysis. We subsequently present our findings about the three organizational narratives, explicating the challenges and processes through which organizational actors strive and stumble. Concluding the paper, we discuss our contribution and the implications of finding direction through continuous emergent change with a narrative approach.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Wayfinding as means to act strategically

We build on a practice-based approach to strategy. Therefore, our argument is aligned with the field of strategy-as-practice (SAP) that sees strategy not as a property of organizations, but as an organizing practice that its members, such as managers, senior editors and frontline staff, engage in to shape the future state of the organization (Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Whittington, 2006). Chia and Holt (2006) compare this difference to the "building and dwelling world-view". In the traditional *building* mode, found in strategy research dominated by economic thinking and rational planning (e.g. Barney, 1991; Porter, 1980), the strategist constructs mental models of the world preceding any practical engagement – she deliberately plans, has a clear purpose, and the technological means to produce the "intended outcomes by the proper mobilization of available expertise and resources" (Chia & Holt, 2009, pp. 159-160). In contrast, the practice-focused *dwelling* mode consists of local adaptations and situated practical coping; the practitioner acts strategically on the immediate concerns, but follows habituated ways (practices or routines) that are consistent with her own sense of identity (as a strategist) (Chia & Holt, 2009, pp. 159-160). The difference lies in knowing *before* you go as compared to knowing *as* you go (Chia & Holt, 2009).

Acting strategically becomes particularly difficult in times of continuous transformational change (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002; Weick & Quinn, 1999). This type of change is characterized by *emergent* properties which arise from complex (human) interaction and which cannot be planned (Stacey, 2007b). Ongoing transformational change has become a normal condition for many organizations (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002),

particularly those in the media industry (e.g. Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Picard, 2009; Sylvie & Gade, 2009). As new players enter the market, old traditions are challenged, and the industry evolves in unpredictable directions (Mierzejewska & Shaver, 2014). In this emergent situation, sharing and experiencing change becomes important for organizational actors at all levels to understand and give meaning to newly forming realities (Stacey, 2007a).

As a concept, wayfinding captures the spirit of what it means to act strategically (Chia & Holt, 2009). In practice, managers are well aware that they cannot predict the future state of the organization and the industry. The potential for management control is reduced to local circumstances and actions (Stacey, 2007b). As strategists, managers are intimately immersed in their context/terrain, and their actions emerge from particular situations. They create an understanding of what is happening through interacting with various stakeholders, such as employees. On this basis, they make sense of future events "retroactively", using their past experiences as interpretations of the emergent future (Czarniawska, 2008, p. 33). Ultimately, strategy arises as a narrative in the organization (Brown & Thompson, 2013).

To build our theoretical lens we draw on foundational work of strategy emergence. Here, Mintzberg and Waters (1985, p. 258) see an emergent strategy as an order – consistency in action over time – in the absence of intention. Additionally, more recent studies show that emergence takes place in the interplay of the intentions and activities of people, as they interact with each other on the basis of their own prevailing understandings of the situation (e.g. Nayak & Chia, 2011; Richardson, 2004; Stacey, 2007b). Therefore, we build on a definition of *emergent strategy* as an organizational pattern that is the outcome of the interplay of local actions, practices and intentions of all staff contributing to strategy making in the organization.

A narrative approach to strategy-as-practice

The narrative approach enables scholars to show how the flow of actions produces emergent strategies and helps the company to find its way through ongoing transformational change. Sonenshein (2010, p. 478) argues: "By accounting for the construction of meanings by both managers and employees, scholars can understand a wider breadth of meanings during change, as well as how meanings change over time

and across organizational levels in ways that impact how strategic change gets implemented". Indeed, people narrate to better understand the complexities and dynamics of relationships, to define and shape self-conceptions, and to influence unfolding events as much as reflect on experiences (Tietze, Cohen, & Musson, 2003). People share experiences and knowledge through stories (Boje, Luhman, & Baack, 1999; Czarniawska, 2004) and this facilitates change in organizations (Boje, 1991; Ford, 1999; Humphreys & Brown, 2002). Local stories, actions and talks are the material out of which strategy narratives become told (Czarniawska, 2008; Fenton & Langley, 2011).

A *story* can be defined as a description of a sequence of actions, feeling states and events […], whereas a *narrative* is seen as a storyline linked by reflections, comments upon, and categorizations of the storyline (Stacey, 2007b; emphasis added). A narrative is more complex because it includes a story and an evaluation of it (Stacey, 2007b). It connects events through time (Bruner, 1991), e.g. past-present-future, thereby structuring the flow of events and providing order. In this sense, a narrative mode of knowing is a way to organize our thinking about complex settings and to create understanding which is grounded in personal experience (Tsoukas & Hatch, 2001).

While narrativists may adopt several different research orientations (Czarniawska, 2004), we build on Fisher's 'narrative paradigm' which is based on the notion that people make sense of their world and their lives through narrative understanding (Fisher, 1984, 1985, 1989). Following Fisher (1984), we adapt the narrative lens to examine how strategy emerges in the case organization. Consequently, we search for narratives in the accounts of employees of the media company about their work and of media consultants about their customer. These narratives reflect people's understandings of what the journalists and the managers are doing, who they are, and what the organization is or should become (Fenton & Langley, 2011).

As a theoretical approach, the narrative lens highlights the processual characteristics of organizations and renders the challenges, complexities and relationships of organizational change open for analysis (Rhodes & Brown, 2005, p. 177). From this angle, we analyze the descriptions of events, feeling states and actions, as well as reflections, comments and broader themes of the empirical material as texts, which receive their meaning within wider intertextual relations (Moisander & Eriksson, 2006).

The narrative(s) we construct remains one particular interpretation (Rhodes & Brown, 2005), but invites further reflection, (re)interpretation and development.

In this article, we contend that a narrative perspective to strategic media management may help to better understand the challenges for media managers, and provide orientation to employees. From this perspective, we explore the different organizational narratives in our case company and analyze how they provide a basis for finding a way through continuous, transformational change.

METHODOLOGY

Case

The empirical analysis is based on a qualitative case study (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Stake, 2003). Our focus is on a large European print-focused media organization that publishes a variety of print magazines for global markets, in particular special interest magazines, but also well known general interest brands, making it one of the biggest magazine publishers in Europe. Because of the sensitive nature of the changes that are taking place in the organization, we were required to maintain its anonymity.

The company is an excellent case for our study, because it is exemplary for print media companies in its ongoing strategic change and challenge to find strategic direction. The company has a long and proud history of producing high quality content magazines, owning some of the strongest brands in the market, and is seen as a flagship for creative journalism. With strong revenues, they supported early ventures into the digital market between 1997-2000. They owned search engines, online platforms, and were strong in online marketing. After the Internet bubble in 2000, they partly divested themselves from digital ventures, while continuing their focus on high quality print magazines. In the following years their involvement in digital ventures was low. Over the years, the company again became active in digital media, expanding through acquisitions and investments. However, in order to compensate for declining sales and to further their transformation into a publishing house of the future, the company decided to lower costs, increase efficiency and carry out layoffs. In this way, this can offer us an interesting example of a media organization whose management and employees struggle to find their way through ongoing and difficult challenges.

Data

The data collected for this case study includes 19 interviews and various documentary materials gathered over a period of approximately one year. We started with a few contacts and subsequently used a method of chain referral, by which the principal investigator asked for further interviewees at the end of each interview (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Noy, 2008). To extend the scope of the interviews, we conducted additional interviews in a media consulting company that has worked for the case company in the past. The interviews lasted on average about an hour, were audio recorded and later translated and transcribed (see Table 1). To supplement the dataset, we used publicly available documentary material, such as annual company reports, press releases, websites and news coverage.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Data analysis

When analyzing the data, we used basic methods and methodological procedures of reflexive qualitative research (Alasuutari, 1996; Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009). In the empirical analysis our research was data driven and theoretically informed. We built our coding scheme through an abductive process of interpretation (Dubois & Gadde, 2002; Thomas, 2010).

The theoretical lens ("narrative perspective") guided our understanding of the case and allowed us to draw attention to particular aspects in the data. Roughly, we went through three stages of analysis from raw data to theoretical interpretations – including the development of thick descriptions, identification of key themes and issues, and checking interpretations – to derive our data structure(s) (see Figures 1-3) and representative quotes (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013).

INSERT FIGURES 1-3 ABOUT HERE

When compiling an overview of our findings (Pratt, 2008), we informed our comparison of the narratives by the elements suggested by Labov – abstract, orientation, complication(s), evaluation, results or resolution, and coda – on which we build for describing the different dimensions of the story (Labov in Swann & Leap, 2000, p. 193). The interviewees' descriptions showed several trends and stories, focusing on

individual working conditions, personal histories and developments, as well as larger organizational issues, such as layoffs, team changes, communication and knowledge sharing. Additionally, the interviewees reflected on increases in competition, the behavior of management, and also the changes in the industry more generally. These seemingly fragmented activities, events and conversations of everyday organizing provided the material for the latter narratives (Czarniawska, 2008, p. 33). Our analysis reveals that, from an aggregated perspective, the interviewees discussed three narrative plots in particular. These form the basis of three organizational narratives, which we call (1) *Employee narrative: Who are we, and what are we becoming?,* (2) *Management narrative: What is our map and where are we?,* and (3) *Market narrative: What is the terrain on which we work?* (see Table 2). In the findings section below, we chose quotes from interviewees that describe most clearly distinct issues in regards to the issues and challenges that the actors struggle with and need to master.

FINDINGS

We identify three interlinked organizational narratives about *employees*, *managers* and the *market.* These narratives structure the flow of events over time, give meaning to organizational actors' experiences, and reveal the challenges of the actors (see Table 2).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

Employee narrative: Who are we, and what are we becoming?

The first narrative is about the employees experiencing a process of identity change. They have been socialized into a profession that shares strong traditions, values and practices, all of which perfected for traditional mass-media society. They face increasingly higher workloads and demands from diverse clients. The pressure and complexity of their work grows, which makes their everyday work significantly more challenging.

> *Previously it was just about writing a good story. Now, you have to know much more about working with a computer and with the programs they have. The demands have increased. I manage well, but don't like it. I am a "real journalist". I write. (Journalist)*

We find several other complications in the journalists' narrative about their changing identity. They now have to face a declining importance of their job, because people don't buy print magazines anymore. The meaning of being a journalist and an employee in the media company more generally, continues to change, as the following quotes exemplify:

> *The outlook for print journalist seems really dim, especially for people my age. (Journalist)*

> *We have many job descriptions now that many people that work for the company cannot even read and understand. (Manager)*

Closely related, they feel economic pressures directly influencing and sometimes determining their work. In the past they could easily make trips for conducting research and writing stories. Today they have to calculate and show the measurable benefits. The economic reality further becomes apparent in the increased competition. Employees are not only competing with their colleagues for fewer jobs in the company, but also with freelancers that offer working for less. Competition marks the rules of the game:

> *[I]f the print media has continuously declining sales, editorial offices will become smaller. Regular employees are fired […]. (Former editor-in-chief)*

> *[The journalists who are being let go] have been a long time working for the company, and actually are doing a great job. They are very skilled in what they do. It just happens that what they do does not matter anymore. How should they react to that? (Journalist)*

While the employees face financial pressures in their everyday work, they also perceive the change in identity as a change in terms of work practices. They need to learn about new technologies and ways of news production. On a small scale, it may mean to learn working with a new editorial system or handling changing applications, such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram. On a larger scale, it means adapting their work practices and changing their thinking. Overall, they feel the pressure to learn new practices and new ways of thinking in their everyday work:

> *Before you had to think only about the story. As a journalist today you also need to worry about the financing. […] Previously you are thinking only "analogue",*

in terms of printing. Nowadays you have to think "digitally". (Former editor-in-chief)

The resolution of the story is that the journalists find themselves encountering new challenges that forces them to re-author their identity and to construct new understandings of their role that would be coherent and positively valued (Alvesson, Ashcraft, & Thomas, 2008; Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009). As they develop skills and practices for a new era they expect the managers to provide guidance and clarity about the organizational strategy. However, when the managers fall short on these expectations, the employees become frustrated and fear for their future. While their future is uncertain, they experience their identity change slowly.

Management narrative: What is our map and where are we?

The second narrative is about managers struggling to find and communicating direction during continuous change. In the past, the managers were perceived to do no wrong and were seen "as the captain on a sundeck" (Manager). The company had well known, reliable brands, which created enormous profits. Advertising sales were rumored to be so high that people still talk about the need for having had enough paper in the fax machine, so that they could receive all the incoming requests for advertising placements in magazines. The revenues were so high that profitability was never a question, and "comparable to selling arms" (Manager). As the changes in the industry were only gradual at first, even with the beginning of the Internet in the 2000's and the Internet bubble shortly after, the managers still felt at ease:

The management was laid back and said, "it is not all that bad". (Editor-in-chief)

The storyline becomes more complicated, as the company made decisions to disinvest from digital business ventures. They had their own search engine, development teams, and generally a high affinity towards digitalization. When these decisions turned out to be wrong, the industry had already moved forward. Slowly, the management realized that they had lost ground. They were not sure, if they were still in the lead, and if the map they were using was in fact correct. Where were they? How could they (re)orient themselves and the company? A high-ranked journalist recognizes:

Answering the question is very difficult because, the middle management gets these financial targets, which they have to achieve, and at the same time they have to develop the means to do that. (Online journalist)

The challenges the managers encounter are plentiful. The industry has strong new actors, who are seen as media companies, shifting the meaning of media and information. Yet, while the case company is successful in developing niche products, of high quality and with high prices, it seems not enough to sustain growth or even ensure long-term survival.

What makes it [management] so difficult is that no media company knows how to react to those changes. (HR Manager)

The company needs more young people and more innovative ideas to create organic growth. However, tensions between departments and products may hinder organizational development:

There is the big rivalry between online and print media. The company is not sure how they want to manage both areas. (Media consultant)

The resolution of the narrative is that managers have to focus on the task at hand, make a step forward, and then look again. In practical terms, the managers are well advised to concentrate on the things they know while at the same time providing the conditions for developing new practices for the digital age. Their challenge is to enhance the local communication, collaboration and knowledge sharing across the organization, managing interest and mediating between departments, people and ideas. In so doing, the managers participate in creating the map, while working through the changes that are ongoing.

Market narrative: What is the terrain on which we work?

The third narrative is about the industry undergoing continuous, emergent change. A senior journalist remarks that the process is underway – it is 'in-being' (Online journalist). In the past, media organizations experienced tremendous growth. Their audience in the industrial mass-society was large and homogenous. Print media was a key channel to publish advertisements and reach consumers. However, with the growth of media technology and the Internet, the audience market began to change. Consumers

could henceforth choose from a wider variety of media products, and their consumption continuously shifted towards digital media. Information became freely available, which reduced their willingness to pay for content.

> *We are not a specialty case anymore [...]; we are now offering commodities [to the consumers]. (Manager)*

The market narrative complicates through new actors and products. With the shift of consumers' interests, more players entered the media market. Software giants provided information services, news and other media products to an audience, which is becoming more heterogeneous and fragmented, while consuming more selectively.

> *The new publishing houses are Google-type of companies. Media houses are in the best cases content houses or [...] platform solutions providers. (Manager)*

At the same time, pay-for-content providers like Netflix, Amazon, and Apple offer services for which consumers pay selectively or have subscriptions. The involvement of these actors redefines our understanding of media organizations and the industry.

> *Today you have people that are not educated as journalists performing that job. This created an entirely new competition for us. (HR Manager)*

> *For us as a publishing house, our business model is changing. (Internal IT consultant)*

While these changes may alter our understanding of and the willingness to pay for information, such as digital versions of previously printed media, it is impossible to foresee where the industry is going. As a consequence, managers need to change their practices and understanding of what it means to act strategically.

> *The entire thing is a very difficult process right now, because the media is continuing to differentiate itself. (Online journalist)*

> *They [the managers] have to give security for the process. They also don't know where the company is going or the industry is developing, or if they will still have their job tomorrow, but in the process in which jobs may be lost they have to give and provide [process-security for the employees]. (Media consultant 1)*

The industry is witnessing a rise in niche products and digital services. New special interest magazines are blossoming, catering to the changing needs and interests of evolving consumer groups. However, as society is becoming more user-focused, the way people consume media and expect to navigate through content is changing. Simply transferring content does not work, because consuming print is different than consuming digital/online media. Therefore, the change is towards greater connectivity between content, interactivity, and service.

The resolution of the narrative is that the market is under continuous, transformational change, where new business models emerge and new actors enter the market forcing the media companies to be agile, ready to change the course of action at any time. All actors in the media industry are participating in (re)constructing the terrain. All they know right now, is that the future is radically open, and it is up to them to map the terrain. This state of unfolding encourages creative endeavor and an active engagement with being in the present.

Based on the accounts that the employees of the company and the media consultants construct about the change and the activities in the media organization, we were able to identify the above narratives on three different fronts that capture the emergent nature of the strategy; how it evolves gradually while change occurs.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Implications for theory

In this paper, we set out to contribute to a better understanding of emergent strategizing in media organizations by applying a narrative approach to strategy-as-practice.

Conceptually, the narrative approach provides answers to what managers can do, when they don't have the perceived certainty of "knowing where they are" in reference to a map. Chia and Holt (2009) contend that practitioners will start describing, "how they got here". They will talk in relation to past experiences and the narratives acquired within the context, and how these have shaped their identity and aspirations (Chia & Holt, 2009, p. 165). This provides the basis for conducting strategy work attentively and *performatively* (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011), shaping the future in skillful ways. The

narrative approach, thus, sheds light on the future oriented ways in which strategies emerge.

Our contribution to the literature is twofold. First, we contribute to the literature of media management by advancing the practice-based approaches to strategy, emphasizing that instead of seeing strategy as a plan or property of the organization, strategy can be seen as something that its members do in the day-to-day of organizational activity. This research approach is particularly relevant when studying organizations that are going through transformational change. Thus, the practice-approach to strategy with its focus on micro-level activities can help in seeing strategy as an ongoing emergent process that unfolds over time through the diverse activities of everyday coping constructed by the people of the organization.

Second, we contribute to the research of media management by showing how especially the narrative approach to strategy-as-practice can be useful in both empirically exploring and theoretically elaborating on emergent strategies in media organizations. By exploring the practitioners' accounts of their everyday work and ongoing challenges in coping with unfolding situations, we were able to identify three different narratives that contributed to the emergent strategy and to the way the case organization was finding its way through the ongoing transformational change. Hence, our empirical study demonstrates that narratives provide a framework to structure meaning of the events, which members of the organization experience, and a surface for reflection on the current situation. The understanding of one's strategy is future-oriented, emergent and evolving over time, as the organization is successful in particular aspects and practices. The production of meaning and formation of a particular strategy happens "retroactively", i.e. that future events are interpreted or projected through past experiences Czarniawska (2008, p. 33). The approach further highlights the inter-relatedness between social processes of strategic change and draws attention to the storied nature of explanations of outcomes (Brown & Thompson, 2013, pp. 1149-1150). By analyzing the similarities and interdependencies between the narratives, it is possible to understand the needs of the individual actors or groups, thereby creating a basis for action. Strategizing in emergent situations thus becomes a process of wayfinding (Chia & Holt, 2009) that the narrative approach facilitates.

Implications for practice

Our insights are in line with the need of media managers for practical knowledge and conceptions to complement their experience (Küng, 2010). Our study offers at least three recommendations.

First, managers want to ensure that employees feel secure and can tolerate ambiguity. We find that the employees experience a process of identity change, in which they look to the managers for guidance and security. In our case, the journalists are facing higher workloads and expectations, and need to cope with the economic realities of their work. They need to adapt their skills (Huang et al., 2006) and change their thinking, into which they have been socialized (Lowrey, 2012). In particular, the journalists face coming to terms with other modes of news production (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2009; Ostertag & Tuchman, 2012), new actors that create competition (Nielsen, 2012), and forms of user-generated content (Jönsson & Örnebring, 2010). While Sylvie and Gade (2009) claim that the task for managers will less be about direction than alignment (of knowledge) and feedback, we contend that it is important for the employees to feel secure when undergoing such identity change (Ybema, 2010), because it may be more fragile than forging a new identity (Gioia, Price, Hamilton, & Thomas, 2010).

Second, managers may benefit from listening more closely to local opinions. We find that managers are struggling to find a way for the company. But as media organizations harbor experts from a large variety of fields, shifting the decision-making from a pure top-down notion towards a more inclusive form, may allow using the existing resources, skills, and knowledge for locally sustainable decisions. Previous studies have proposed that we will see moves towards new platform models (Berman et al., 2007) and higher integration (Vukanovic, 2009). Indeed, our managers face the question "What is our business model?" But since emergent strategies cannot be known beforehand, the managers are forced to concentrate on the task at hand, continuously clarifying and adapting to the situation (Chia & Holt, 2009). They have to work closely with their staff to improve communication and balance tensions (Achtenhagen & Raviola, 2009; van den Bulck & Tambuyzer, 2013). The direction managers then find, may be a return to traditional strategies (Tameling & Broersma, 2013) or new modes for collaboration and innovation (Sylvie & Schmitz Weiss, 2012). Therefore, harnessing creativity and allowing for local adaptations and playfulness is key.

Third, practitioners will benefit from knowing how to manage organizational paradoxes, in particular, as a way to manage emerging change. Change has become a normal process for organizations in general (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002) and the media industry in particular (Picard, 2009). As new players enter the market, old traditions are challenged, and the industry is evolving in unpredictable directions (Mierzejewska & Shaver, 2014). Based on our findings, media companies are subject to various internal dynamics, which facilitate or hinder change (Maijanen & Jantunen, 2014). Therefore, understanding how particular needs are constituted within organizational practices, and how they may be conflicting, could provide the basis for local resolutions and agreements. However, it may be necessary to acknowledge that these resolutions may only be short term, and have to be re-negotiated over time. Therefore, addressing paradoxes of change can also be a way to focus on the present and to support wayfinding in practice (Horst & Moisander, 2015).

Further research and outlook

Our analysis shows that strategy emerges continuously on the basis of organizational narratives, while the company is taking step-by-step into an unknown future. We need further studies to complement, question or substantiate these findings. Indeed, we need more in-depth explorations or "contextualist orientations" (Küng, 2008, p. 218) of how media companies strategize and cope with ongoing changes to describe and analyze their transformation. How do strategies emerge in other media companies? How do managers in other companies and at different levels understand and practice strategic management? Are there some media organizations that abandon strategic management altogether? How do people cope with uncertainty? How do leaders work with and co-construct the future as it emerges (Scharmer, 2009; Scharmer & Kaeufer, 2010)?

For academics, understanding strategic management in the media industry as a practice and focusing on the ways in which strategies emerge provides an important avenue for further research. It may shift the focus from prescriptive knowledge towards a richer description of the experiences of journalists and managers, encountering changes in their profession and industry (Dickinson, Matthews, & Saltzis, 2013). For practitioners, this conception provides a basis to work confidently with the future, and facilitate a narrative engagement with the potentialities of their organization.

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