

# Interdiscursive struggles: Managing the co-existence of the conventional and open strategy discourse

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## Abstract

**Research Summary:** “Open strategy” is a new macro discourse on strategy that differs fundamentally from the conventional strategy discourse. In this paper, we examine how actors deal with the co-existence of the two discourses, given their conflicting nature. For this purpose, we draw on a longitudinal, in-depth case study of an international finance firm that introduced open strategy alongside the conventional strategy discourse that had shaped their strategy work in the past. We find that strategy actors deal with interdiscursive tensions by enacting meta-discursive practices that regulate the mobilization of the two strategy discourses. Furthermore, we identify power as an important driver and necessary resource in enacting these practices. With these findings, we contribute to the open strategy literature and the literature on organization and strategy discourse.

**Managerial Summary:** There is a recent trend for opening up the strategy process to actors outside the upper echelons, which is referred to as “open strategy.” This new approach is based on a fundamentally different logic than the conventional approach to strategy

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making; while the latter highlights exclusivity and secrecy, the former stresses inclusivity and transparency. This empirical study examines how managers deal with tensions that arise from the co-existence of these approaches. We find that managers try to resolve these tensions by regulating where and when each approach can be applied. We also show that the switch from one way of regulating the application of approaches to another depends on the power and interests of the participants.

#### KEYWORDS

discourse, discursive struggles, open strategy, power, strategy as practice

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

As various scholars have argued (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Ezzamel & Willmott, 2008; Mantere & Whittington, 2021), strategic management is a particular macro discourse, “a set of ideas and practices which condition our ways of relating to, and acting upon, particular phenomena” (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 253). In their historical analysis, Knights and Morgan (1990, 1991) have shown that the macro discourse of strategy, as it was commonly known at the time and with its different variations, could be traced back to the military and was associated with a top-down logic of interaction and corresponding “subject positions,” that is, the distribution of roles and rights inherent in a particular discourse (Laine & Vaara, 2007). Two decades after Knights and Morgan’s analysis, an entirely new macro discourse on strategy emerged under the label of “open strategy” (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007). Although the degree of openness varies across initiatives (Hautz et al., 2019), this new macro discourse differs fundamentally from the conventional strategy discourse, both in terms of the actors’ subject positions and of the implied principles of strategy work (Heracleous, 2019; Seidl et al., 2019; Splitter et al., 2023). As Whittington et al. (2011) observed, the conventional strategy discourse highlights exclusiveness and secrecy as important principles of strategy work while the open strategy discourse highlights inclusiveness and transparency. In contrast to the conventional strategy discourse, according to which only strategy professionals with their distinctive strategy know-how are in a position to develop the strategy (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Vaara et al., 2019; Whittington, 2019), the open strategy discourse considers an expanded range of actors as potential strategists, highlighting the value of having diverse inputs into the strategy process (Dobusch et al., 2019; Stieger et al., 2012).

The open strategy discourse has been adopted by an increasing number of organizations (Splitter et al., forthcoming; Stadler et al., 2021; Whittington, 2019). But the introduction of this new discourse does not imply that organizations simply switch from one strategy discourse to another. As most existing organizations followed the conventional strategy discourse before they introduced the open strategy discourse, they often maintain the conventional strategy discourse alongside the newly-introduced open strategy discourse (Hautz et al., 2019; Stjerne et al., 2022). In such cases, strategy actors are confronted with two competing strategy



discourses with conflicting premises that, in combination, might impair strategy work (Hautz et al., 2017; Heracleous et al., 2018; Luedicke et al., 2017). As we know from the wider discourse literature, actors in such situations opportunistically mobilize the discourse that best serves their interests (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Tavella, 2021), leading to inter-discursive tensions in the interactions with other actors mobilizing a different discourse (Fairclough, 1992). To the extent that these interdiscursive tensions concern the content of strategic decisions, actors have been shown to mobilize rhetorical practices that frame decisions in such a way that they appear in line with the different discourses (Sorsa & Vaara, 2020). Yet, we lack an understanding of how actors deal with interdiscursive tensions relating to the strategy process and, thus, the interactions they engage in to get to such decisions. Knowing more about this is important as it helps evaluate the challenges and pitfalls of managing the introduction of open strategy into an organization. We thus pose the following exploratory research question: *How do strategy actors deal with the co-existence of the conventional strategy discourse and the open strategy discourse over the course of the strategy process?*

To answer our research question, we draw on data collected from a longitudinal, in-depth case study of an international finance firm that introduced the open strategy discourse alongside the conventional strategy discourse that had underpinned their strategy work in the past. In an effort to open up the strategy process, the CEO invited frontline employees to participate in strategy development, together with “traditional” strategy actors, such as the top management team (TMT) and external strategy consultants. Adopting a discourse perspective (Fairclough, 1992; Vaara & Fritsch, 2022), we analyzed how the different groups of actors engaged with the two discourses and how, in turn, the engagement with the two discourses affected their strategy work and subject positions.

Our study yields two main insights. First, we find that actors deal with interdiscursive tensions by enacting so-called meta-discursive practices that actively regulate when the different discourses can be mobilized. We refer to these practices as “meta-discursive” because they are not part of the two discourses but regulate the mobilization of the two discourses. Thus, by regulating when the different discourses can be mobilized, they also (indirectly) regulate the enactment of the practices implied by the respective discourses. At our case company, actors employed three different meta-discursive practices to regulate the mobilization of the conventional and the open strategy discourse, which we termed “collocating discourses,” “segregating discourses,” and “selectively linking discourses.” These different meta-discursive practices allow for the resolution of some interdiscursive tensions but might, at the same time, create others. Second, we find that power serves as an important driver and necessary resource for initiating meta-discursive practices. In particular, we find that strategy actors change a meta-discursive practice when they see an opportunity for strengthening or protecting their subject position, but we also show that they can only do so if they possess the requisite power to influence others to act in accordance with that practice. Overall, our study shows that the introduction of open strategy into a context that has been dominated by the conventional strategy discourse requires active management of the discourses, and that power plays an important role in that management process.

## 2 | THE CONVENTIONAL AND OPEN STRATEGY DISCOURSE

In their seminal papers, Knights and Morgan (1990, 1991) characterized strategic management as a historically-shaped macro discourse. Although there are various strands of strategic

thinking, the authors argued that all strands of strategic management (up to the point of their writing) were part of the same macro discourse and thus conformed to the same root metaphors, basic principles, subject positions, and corresponding power sources. Since these papers were written, an entirely new macro discourse on strategy has emerged under the label of “open strategy,” centering on the notion of “openness” (Seidl et al., 2019; Stadler et al., 2021; Whittington, 2019). While the enactment of the conventional strategy discourse may involve some elements of openness too (Laine & Vaara, 2015), open strategy as a discourse implies an entirely different logic of strategic management (Heracleous, 2019; Whittington et al., 2011). Thus, while we may see a continuum of more or less openness in the doing of strategy empirically (Hautz et al., 2017), the two strategy discourses underlying the doing of strategy are distinct, and not just the respective ends of a continuum. Analogously to the conventional strategy discourse, there are different strands of open strategy, ranging from more extreme to more moderate forms (Vaara et al., 2019), but all of these different strands share particular root metaphors, guiding principles, subject positions, and power resources, which are distinct from those of the conventional discourse. This implies that not all elements of “openness” in a strategy process are necessarily part of the open strategy discourse, such as when a traditional strategy process includes some elements of participation or when the CEO decides to be transparent about some aspects of the strategy, without adopting the open strategy discourse as such (Laine & Vaara, 2015). Hence, although the enactment of the conventional strategy discourse can involve some elements of openness, and the degree of openness within the open strategy discourse can vary, the discourses as such remain distinct because they rely on fundamentally different root metaphors, guiding principles, subject positions, and power resources. In the following, we compare the two macro discourses along these categories (see Table 1 for a more detailed explanation and empirical variations).

Emerging from military practice (Kornberger & Engberg-Pedersen, 2021), the conventional strategy discourse is based on the root metaphors of *military* and *top-down* (Knights & Morgan, 1991); as such, the strategy practices of the conventional discourse are oriented to the imagery of the military and top-down, even though there is a great degree of variation in how literally and extremely this is enacted. In contrast, the main root metaphors of the open strategy discourse are *wisdom of the crowd* and *democratization*, which have been linked to its roots in Open Innovation (Dobusch & Kapeller, 2018; Malhotra et al., 2017; Stieger et al., 2012). In line with this imagery, the discourse prompts greater openness toward wider actor groups, even though there is a wide variation in how this is enacted in different organizations—for example, it varies according to what extent democratization is interpreted as involving new strategy actors in decision-making or in just providing input.

The two macro discourses also set out different guiding principles that provide actors with some orientation in their strategy work (Knights & Morgan, 1991; Samra-Fredericks, 2005), even though those principles might be enacted in a range of different ways and degrees. The main guiding principles of the conventional strategy discourse are *exclusivity*, *professionalism*, and *secrecy* (Makadok & Barney, 2001; Mantere & Whittington, 2021). In contrast, open strategy is based on the main guiding principles of *transparency* and *inclusion*. Again, the degree of transparency, in terms of strategic information being shared, and the degree of inclusion, in terms of the type and number of actors included as well as their depth of inclusion, can vary from case to case (Hautz et al., 2017; Seidl et al., 2019; Whittington et al., 2011).

The two macro discourses also specify different types of subject positions, which describe the roles and rights of the different actors involved in the discourse (Foucault, 1982; Laine & Vaara, 2007). The conventional strategy discourse ideal typically differentiates three types of

TABLE 1 Description of the conventional and open strategy discourses.

	Conventional strategy discourse	Open strategy discourse
Root metaphors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Military</i>: Strategy making is likened to the way that higher-ranking officers devise the strategic plan that soldiers implement in the battlefield (Knights &amp; Morgan, 1990; Kornberger &amp; Engberg-Pedersen, 2021)</li> <li>• <i>Top-down</i>: Strategy making is likened to the movement of something that is happening at a higher and thus more important level to something that is happening at a lower and thus less important level (Knights &amp; Morgan, 1991)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Democratization</i>: Strategy making is likened to a democratic process where potentially everybody can bring in his or her interests and perspectives—either with or without involvement in the final decision making (Appleyard &amp; Chesbrough, 2017; Stieger et al., 2012; Whittington, 2019)</li> <li>• <i>Wisdom of the crowd</i>: Strategy making is likened to the attempt to leverage the knowledge of the crowd (Chesbrough &amp; Appleyard, 2007; von Krogh &amp; Geilinger, 2019)</li> </ul>
Guiding principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Exclusivity</i>: Strategy formulation is seen as the responsibility of an elite professional group from which non-professional strategists are excluded. The degree of exclusivity might vary across companies (Whittington, 2019; Whittington et al., 2017)</li> <li>• <i>Professionalism</i>: Strategic management is treated as a professional domain in which only strategy professionals possess the necessary know-how, capabilities, tools, and techniques (Mantere &amp; Whittington, 2021).</li> <li>• <i>Secrecy</i>: Strategy work is considered confidential. Leaking strategic information is regarded as a threat to competitive advantages. Strategic information should only be shared among the respective strategists (Makadok &amp; Barney, 2001; Whittington et al., 2011)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Inclusion</i>: Strategy making should involve a diversity of actors beyond the top and middle management—potentially across hierarchical levels and across organizational boundaries. The degree of inclusion might vary—in terms of type and number of actors included as well as their depth of inclusion (Mount et al., 2020; Seidl et al., 2019; Vaara et al., 2019)</li> <li>• <i>Transparency</i>: Information about strategy making and its outcomes should be shared widely. Sharing such information is not seen as a threat but as an opportunity. The degree to which strategic information is shared and with whom it is shared varies (Heimstädt &amp; Dobusch, 2018; Reischauer &amp; Ringel, 2022; Ringel, 2019; Yakis-Douglas et al., 2017)</li> </ul>
Subject positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Professional strategists</i> (i.e., senior management; strategy-department staff) who are in charge of formulating strategy and directing its implementation (Barry &amp; Elmes, 1997; Hardy &amp; Thomas, 2014; Paroutis &amp; Heracleous, 2013)</li> <li>• <i>Strategy intermediaries</i> (i.e., middle managers) liaise between strategy professionals and non-strategists (Balogun &amp; Johnson, 2005; Floyd &amp; Lane, 2000; Rouleau &amp; Balogun, 2011)</li> <li>• <i>Non-strategists</i> (i.e., frontline employees, customers, other organizations, the general public) “read” and implement the formulated strategy (Gioia &amp; Chittipeddi, 1991; Jarzabkowski &amp; Sillince, 2007; McCabe, 2010)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Strategists</i>: All involved actors are potential strategists. Yet, how the subject position of strategist is enacted by different actors can vary (Belmondo &amp; Sargis-Roussel, 2023; Brielmaier &amp; Friesl, 2021; Whittington, 2019)</li> </ul>

TABLE 1 (Continued)

	Conventional strategy discourse	Open strategy discourse
Power resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Formal power</i>: Power based on a relatively higher position in the hierarchy (McCabe, 2010)</li> <li>• <i>Critical resources</i>: Power based on the access to strategy-related information and know-how, which are only accessible to professional strategists (Whittington et al., 2011)</li> <li>• <i>Network links</i>: Power based on links to other strategy professionals during strategy formulation and to strategy intermediaries/non-strategists during strategy implementation. Relevant network links only possessed by strategy professionals (McCabe, 2010)</li> <li>• <i>Discursive legitimacy</i>: Power based on the fact that others consider legitimate what one is saying because of being part of the strategy profession (Jalonen et al., 2018; Mantere &amp; Whittington, 2021; Whittington, 1996, 2011)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Formal power</i>: Power based on particular competences associated with a position. Formal power does not rest on the relative height of one's position in the hierarchy (Seidl &amp; Werle, 2018; Splitter et al., 2021)</li> <li>• <i>Critical resources</i>: Power based on the distinctiveness of knowledge one has access to. Any kind of know-how, including operational and technical expertise, can potentially be a critical resource (Luedicke et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017; von Krogh &amp; Geilinger, 2019)</li> <li>• <i>Network links</i>: Power based on the diversity of network links that allow actors to win wider consent for the strategy outcome. Relevant network links are widely held (Hautz et al., 2019; Seidl &amp; Werle, 2018)</li> <li>• <i>Discursive legitimacy</i>: Power based on the fact that others consider legitimate what one is saying due to one's conformance with the principles of transparency and inclusion (Whittington, 2011)</li> </ul>

subject position: *professional strategists* (Barry & Elmes, 1997; Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Paroutis & Heracleous, 2013); *strategy intermediaries* (Balogun & Johnson, 2005; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011); and *non-strategists* (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Jarzabkowski & Sillince, 2007; McCabe, 2010). In contrast, the open strategy discourse no longer strictly differentiates between these three categories of subject positions but highlights that all actors might potentially be considered *strategists*. In line with the root metaphors of the wisdom of the crowd and democratization, there is a much wider range of different actors who could contribute to strategy making, and who might thus all be considered strategists in one way or another. Still, the manner in which the subject position of strategist is ultimately enacted by the different actors varies between initiatives (Appleyard & Chesbrough, 2017; Hautz et al., 2017).

In both strategy discourses, there are four different types of power resources that provide actors with the power to shape strategy making in line with their interests (Hardy & Leiba-O'Sullivan, 1998; Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Maitlis & Lawrence, 2003). The types of power resource are the same in both discourses, but they materialize differently. The power resource of *formal power* refers to the power resulting from a formal position which allows participation and warrants a voice in decision-making (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). In the conventional strategy discourse, formal power is based on the position an actor occupies in the organization's hierarchy (McCabe, 2010). In contrast, in open strategy the formal power is based on the competences within a position (Splitter et al., 2021). The power resource of *critical resources* refers to the resources considered important in getting strategy work done (Whittington et al., 2011). Thus,

whoever controls critical resources has (some level of) power over the strategy process. In the conventional strategy discourse, the critical resources are strategic information and expertise, while in open strategy critical resources are based on the distinctiveness of knowledge (Luedicke et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2017). The power resource of *network links* refers to the social relationships that may help actors gain support for their ideas from other relevant actors (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). In the conventional strategy discourse, network links are primarily relationships with other strategy professionals during strategy formulation and with strategy intermediaries/non-strategists during strategy implementation (McCabe, 2010). In open strategy, the range and diversity of potentially relevant network links is greatly extended, as more actors are included in strategy making (Hautz et al., 2019; Seidl & Werle, 2018). The power resource of *discursive legitimacy* refers to strategy actors' right to speak "for issues and organizations" (Hardy & Phillips, 2004, p. 307). Accordingly, actors with this power source have the power to speak legitimately about aspects of the organization's strategy (Phillips & Brown, 1993). In the conventional strategy discourse, the discursive legitimacy of an individual rests primarily on their relation to the strategy profession (Whittington, 1996, 2011; Whittington et al., 2017). Conversely, in open strategy, discursive legitimacy rests primarily on the extent to which actors act in line with the principles of transparency and inclusion (Whittington, 2011).

All power resources stand in a recursive relation to the actors' subject positions (Hardy & Phillips, 2004). Strategy actors need to possess certain power resources in order to occupy a particular subject position. However, their subject positions are also associated with certain power resources which define the extent to which strategy actors are able to impose their strategic ideas on others (Mumby & Stohl, 1991). Moreover, even though a subject position is associated with specific power resources, the level of these power resources is not fixed. Accordingly, power resources of strategy actors can be extended—thereby strengthening the subject position—or reduced—thereby weakening the subject position (Hardy & Phillips, 2004).

Our characterization of the two strategy discourses reveals some important differences, which is the reason why the two discourses are often described as being in "tension" or even "conflicting" (e.g., Baptista et al., 2017; Belmondo & Sargis-Roussel, 2023; Heracleous, 2019). Thus, when managers introduce the open strategy discourse into an organization that has been dominated by the conventional discourse, we would expect to see some interdiscursive tensions as some actors mobilize the new discourse while others continue to mobilize the old one. The strength of these tensions, in turn, might vary according to the particular strand of the two discourses enacted. In any case, such tensions have the potential to create significant disruptions in the strategy work (Heracleous, 2019; Luedicke et al., 2017).

From the wider literature on organizational discourse, we know that actors confronted with multiple discourses purposefully mobilize the discourse that best suits their interests and allows them to pursue and justify their preferred actions (Hardy et al., 2000; Hardy & Thomas, 2014; Vaara et al., 2004). For example, in the context of an M&A process, Vaara and Tienari (2002) showed that managers confronted with multiple M&A discourses mobilized the M&A discourse that allowed them to justify their preferred deals and legitimize their actions. In line with these studies, but focusing on conflicting strategy discourses in particular, Laine and Vaara (2007) and Mantere and Vaara (2008) found that different groups of actors often mobilize different strands of the conventional strategy discourse to serve their interests and purposes. Specifically, they found that senior managers mobilized a strand of the conventional strategy discourse that secured their control over the organization, while middle managers and operational staff mobilized a different strand of the conventional strategy discourse that allowed them to counteract senior managers' dominance and to carve out some space for their own influence on the

strategy process. Tavella (2021) built on these studies and identified different discursive practices which managers applied to legitimize a particular strand of the conventional strategy discourse to ultimately protect their subject position. The existing literature points out that interdiscursive tensions are likely to erupt as different actors mobilize different discourses in their interactions with each other (Fairclough, 1992). However, the literature says very little about how those actors deal with such interdiscursive tensions that potentially disrupt their strategy work. The only study to explicitly address this issue is a paper by Sorsa and Vaara (2020). In this study of strategizing in a pluralistic organization, the authors examined how actors confronted with different discourses handled interdiscursive tensions related to the content of a strategic change. They showed how the actors used rhetorical practices to frame the decided strategic change in such a way that it seemed in line with the different discourses, thereby allowing actors to proceed with their actions. This is an important finding, but it remains unclear how actors deal with interdiscursive tensions that concern not only the content of their strategic decisions but also the process leading to such decisions. After all, the introduction of the open strategy discourse, and potential interdiscursive tensions with the conventional strategy discourse, affects the process of strategy making rather than its content. Knowing more about the strategists' attempts at mitigating interdiscursive tensions arising from their interactions in the strategy process is important, as it helps us to evaluate the challenges and potential pitfalls of introducing open strategy into an organization. We thus pose the following exploratory research question: *How do strategy actors deal with the co-existence of the conventional strategy discourse and the open strategy discourse over the course of the strategy process?*

### 3 | METHODS

We undertook a longitudinal single-case study (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003) of a strategy-making process within a large international finance firm (with approximately 15,000 employees). At the start of the study, we were generally interested in how open strategy processes unfold over time. For that reason, we had purposefully sampled for an organization that was about to introduce an open strategy approach to develop a new strategy. Having negotiated access to the process as non-participant observers, we tracked the actions and interactions of all participants from the initiation of the strategy process to the communication of the strategic initiatives that the participants developed in the course of this process.

#### 3.1 | Case context

The CEO had already decided to adopt an open strategy approach when we started collecting data. Up until then, the company had followed a conventional, top-down approach to developing strategy, structured around the professional strategists. External strategy consultants helped the previous CEO to develop strategic plans which were then signed off by the Board and the executive managers of each business area. Before the introduction of open strategy, the front-line employees of the firm were solely involved in implementing the strategic plans and were thus not considered strategists.

Having been exposed to the ideas of open strategy in his previous role at another company, and being familiar with the literature on open strategy, the CEO decided to introduce and communicate about open strategy as a new approach to strategy making at this company. On



various occasions, he introduced the employees to the new strategy discourse familiarizing them with the guiding principles of inclusion and transparency. In line with the root metaphor of “wisdom of the crowd,” the CEO expressed his hope that this new approach would allow him to access the employees’ distinct, frontline knowledge, sampling unconventional but potentially useful ideas. He thus invited all employees to apply to become part of the strategy development process and, in line with the guiding principle of “democracy,” he stressed that this would allow the employees to have a say on the company’s strategy. However, in order to allow for direct interactions between all participants, he did not involve all 196 applicants but selected 20 employees who were supposed to be representatives of different business units, geographical locations, work experience, and gender. The CEO emphasized that the selected employees were to contribute their own and, as representatives, their colleagues’ ideas and make sure that they discussed the progress of the strategy development process with their colleagues. In this way, he tried to ensure that the other employees’ perspectives would be included, at least indirectly. Such a restriction on the number of participants who are expected to “represent” different parts of the workforce is not uncommon in open strategy and has also been observed in other studies on open strategy (e.g., Splitter et al., 2021; Splitter, et al., forthcoming).

The strategy process was scheduled to last for 13 months, the first 10 months of which were dedicated to the development of a strategic plan, with the remaining 3 months dedicated to the communication of the plan. Inspired by other open strategy processes that he had witnessed, the CEO expected the employee group to meet fortnightly for 1–2 days at the corporate headquarters to work on the strategic plan. After these “on-site events,” the employees were to return to their normal work. However, the initial design of this process did not specify how the employee group was supposed to work on the strategic plan, how they would interact with other members of the organization—in particular, the traditional strategy actors—and how the output of the employees’ work on the strategic plan would feed back into the organization at large. This was meant to be worked out as part of the strategy process.

While introducing open strategy and including employees in the strategy development process, the CEO did not want to replace the conventional strategy approach entirely. Instead, he also adhered to the conventional strategy approach by relying on the expertise of traditional strategy actors, as he had done in the past. He hired external strategy consultants because he thought that their expertise on the external market would be needed, and he set up a strategy department charged with coordinating the overall strategy process. He also kept in place the previous convention of having the executive managers and the Board sign off on the final strategy document. The fact that the CEO introduced open strategy in his company but also adhered explicitly to aspects of the conventional strategy approach made this company an ideal setting for examining our research question of how strategy actors deal with the co-existence of the conventional strategy discourse and the open strategy discourse over the course of the strategy process.

### 3.2 | Data collection

Our fieldwork covered the entire strategy process and relied on multiple types of data, including non-participant observations, interviews with the participants, and various kinds of documents (see Table 2). Using multiple sources of material allowed us to triangulate our data (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003) and increased the validity of our data and analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1985). The data was collected in an English-speaking country and thus most

TABLE 2 Data sources.

Observations	<b>90 workshops and meetings</b>
Employee-group workshops and meetings	15
Traditional strategists' workshops and meetings	31
Project management meetings	44
Interviews	<b>121</b>
CEO	8
Senior managers	14
Strategy-department staff	41
Members of the employee group	38
External consultants	11
Other staff	9
Documents	<b>~2200 pages</b>
Slides, process diagrams, TMT memos, emails, and videos communicating the strategy outcomes	

data sources were in English, except for some interviews that had to be translated from German.

As a non-participant observer, the first author spent between 6 and 9 hours a day over a total of 55 days within the organization, following closely the strategy actors' day-to-day interactions. Over the course of the entire strategy process, the field researcher observed 90 strategy meetings and workshops, including all on-site events involving the employees. All workshops and meetings were audio recorded and detailed field notes were taken. The field researcher complemented the observational data with her own reflections, both individually and together with her co-authors.

In addition to non-participant observations, the field researcher conducted 121 semi-structured ethnographic interviews before, during, and after the strategy process. The purpose of those interviews was to capture different perspectives and to trace how these evolved throughout the strategy process. For that reason, these data consist of eight interviews with the CEO, 14 interviews with senior managers, 41 interviews with the strategy department, 38 interviews with the employees, 11 interviews with external consultants, and nine interviews with other operational staff.

Documents provided an additional and important source of data; these included both publicly available material, such as press releases and publicly available strategy documents, as well as internal confidential material, such as PowerPoint slides presented during the strategy workshops, process diagrams, e-mails, and TMT memos. All these documents helped us trace the official internal and external communication around the strategy process, and to uncover how perceptions of the strategy evolved among the different actor groups. To get a better understanding of the wider context and background of the strategy process, the field researcher also collected 123 videos that employees had recorded in their applications to participate in the strategy process, 365 photographs that documented the settings of the strategy meetings and workshops, and 88 posts from the CEO's blog and other social media channels.

### 3.3 | Data analysis

We followed an “abductive” approach in analyzing the data, circling back and forth between our empirical data and the theory (e.g., Mantere & Vaara, 2008). On that basis, our analysis proceeded in four iterative steps. First, we ordered our data and wrote a detailed chronological case narrative (Eisenhardt, 1989) of the entire strategy process; this enabled us to identify key actors and key events in the strategy process. This process revealed that the strategy actors referred to their strategy work as open strategy, describing their activities as “inclusive,” and “transparent,” in line with the core principles of open strategy as described in the literature (Seidl et al., 2019). At the same time, the strategy actors variously also referred to parts of their work as “secretive” and “exclusive” in line with core principles of the conventional understanding of strategy (Whittington et al., 2011). Our case narrative also revealed that the co-existence of these two different understandings of strategy gave rise to various behavioral tensions. For example, the CEO spoke of “opening up the process as much as possible” to give the employees the opportunity to be included in strategy work. In contrast, his TMT and the external consultants highlighted the importance of keeping strategy work confidential and exclusive, and involving only the traditional strategy actors in the core activities. Following our abductive approach and going back and forth between our case narrative and the literature, we realized that what we were observing here could be described as tensions between two different macro discourses of strategy; that is, between two different ways of “relating to, and acting upon, particular phenomena” (Knights & Morgan, 1991, p. 253).

In a second step, we focused our analysis on validating whether these two approaches could be considered as different strategy discourses. For that purpose, we closely analyzed the transcripts of meetings and interviews, as well as other complementary documents, and applied deductive codes which we derived from existing discourse studies (e.g., Laine & Vaara, 2007; Vaara & Tienari, 2002). Thereby, we coded all references to subject positions, power sources, and guiding principles; that is, references to the various roles and resources that enabled strategy actors to shape the strategy process in favor of their respective interests and according to the rules that guided the strategy actors’ activities, respectively. With regard to the guiding principles of the open strategy discourse, we applied the code “inclusion” to verbal references such as “across all levels” or “every employee.” Similarly, we applied the code “transparency” to expressions such as “open and transparent two-way dialogue.” With regard to the subject position within the open strategy discourse, we applied the code “strategist” to statements where the role of new strategy actors in the strategy process was described using expressions such as “provide a different perspective” or “challenge the business.” We also applied deductive codes to references to the different power resources. For example, we used the code “network links” for a statement about extending the range of strategy actors to “a broader spectrum of voices.” In the case of the conventional strategy discourse, we applied the code “secrecy” to terms such as “sensitive information” or the code “exclusivity” to terms such as “managerial decision-making.” We also identified several instances where strategy actors talked about conventional subject positions by, for example, describing the consultants’ role with expressions such as “providing an external view about the market.” With regard to power resources within the conventional discourse, we, for example, applied the code “formal power” to statements such as “I [CEO] will take decisions on my own.” We present an overview of our deductive codes with exemplary empirical evidence in Online Appendix A. In sum, we found various instances where strategy actors were drawing on the core concepts of both discourses, which confirmed that what we observed at the case company could be described as the co-existence of two strategy

discourses. Having analyzed the statements of all groups of actors across the data, this step in the analysis also helped in identifying the discourses mobilized by different groups of actors.

In the third step of our analysis, we tracked how the actors dealt with the co-existence of the two discourses over time. For that purpose, we started with temporal bracketing (Langley, 1999). We initially distinguished two separate phases in the strategy process according to the activities that people were engaged in, which we labeled “planning-focused activities” and “communication-focused activities.” We drew this distinction based on the actors’ own differentiation between different phases in their strategy work but also on the basis of observed changes in activities. We then inductively coded all strategists’ activities in response to conflicting discursive principles and subject positions of the conventional and open strategy discourses. For example, we developed the code “creating different domains of strategy work” based on instances where strategy actors were “dividing work” between traditional and new strategy actors and “setting up different meetings” for these two groups. We then aggregated the codes relating to actors’ activities thematically into three “meta-discursive practices,” where the prefix “meta” is meant to indicate that rather than being part of the two strategy discourses these practices regulate when actors can mobilize those discourses. By regulating the mobilization of the two discourses, the meta-discursive practices also regulate indirectly the strategy practices implied by the two discourses. We labeled the meta-discursive practice of allowing both discourses to be mobilized within the same domain of strategy work as *collocating discourses*; we labeled the meta-discursive practice of restricting the mobilization of the discourses to different domains of strategy work as *segregating discourses*; and we labeled the meta-discursive practice of restricting the mobilization of discourses to different domains of strategy work while creating controlled touchpoints for exchanges between the domains as *selectively linking discourses* (see Online Appendix B for an overview of the inductive codes with exemplary empirical evidence).

Our analysis also revealed that during the initially identified phase of planning-focused activities the actors successively enacted all three meta-discursive practices, while during the phase of communication-focused activities they enacted only the meta-discursive practice of collocation discourses. In view of the significance of the meta-discursive practices, we split the initial first phase into three different phases, resulting in four phases in total, with each phase corresponding to the initiation of a new meta-discursive practice.

In the fourth and final step of our analysis, we examined the behavioral dynamics and motivations for enacting a new meta-discursive practice. For that purpose, we examined the data preceding a switch from one meta-discursive practice to another. In line with our abductive approach, we went back and forth between our empirical data and the literature, which already described that strategy work (Heracleous et al., 2018), actors’ subject position, and their related power (Hardy et al., 2000; Laine & Vaara, 2007) play an important role in the context of co-existing discourses. Drawing on this literature, we coded the data in terms of how each meta-discursive practice facilitated or impaired strategy work and how each practice was related to actors’ subject positions. We applied the code “strategy work impaired” and “strategy work facilitated” for the consequences of the enactment of the different meta-discursive practices and then developed more detailed codes which reflect the different reasons for strategy work being impaired or facilitated, such as “conflicting behavioral expectations” or “compatible behavioral expectations.” With regard to how the meta-discursive practices affected the actors’ subject positions, we coded the outcomes as subject positions being “threatened,” “protected,” or “strengthened.” Based on our previous analysis of subject positions and power sources (step 2 of data analysis), we also analyzed how actors’ power affected their ability to initiate a change in meta-



discursive practice. This step in the analysis led to the identification of strategy work and power as the central mechanisms underlying the succession of the meta-discursive practices (see Online Appendix C for exemplary empirical evidence on both mechanisms). On the basis of these main steps in the analysis, we developed a process model of the dynamics of the meta-discursive practices that actors performed to deal with the co-existence of the two macro discourses on strategy.

In line with Splitter et al. (2021), we applied several measures to ensure the robustness of our analysis. We kept a detailed log of the data we collected (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 2003). To that end, we entered our data into coding software (NVivo) that enabled us to index, search, code, and recode them. We carefully documented the progress of our analysis in regular team sessions, during which we tested the codes we were developing, justified our ideas and choices, took notes of what we were discussing, and used these to derive the themes (Gioia et al., 2013). Throughout the entire research process, we engaged closely with our participants sharing our insights to make sure that they matched their own experiences.

## 4 | FINDINGS

In this section, we describe how the strategy actors at the case company dealt with the co-existence of the two strategy discourses. To facilitate the understanding of our findings, we first present an empirical process model that summarizes our observations across four phases of the strategy process (see Figure 1). The model is structured around the succession of different meta-discursive practices through which the actors at our case company tried to regulate how the two strategy discourses were mobilized in the strategy work. The figure shows, for each of the four phases, which meta-discursive practice was initiated (depicted as boxes A) and how it affected, on the one hand, strategy work (depicted as boxes B), and, on the other hand, strategy actors' subject positions (depicted as boxes C). In the following, we describe our findings throughout the different phases, as illustrated in our empirical process model.

### 4.1 | Phase 1: CEO introduces open strategy into planning-focused activities (Figure 1, first arrow)

At the beginning of the strategy process, the strategy actors aimed at developing a new strategic plan for the company. Hence, they started with planning-focused activities. The CEO launched the strategic planning process by communicating that he intended to adopt an open strategy approach that would differ from the conventional strategy approach that the company had adopted in the past. His subject position within the conventional strategy discourse provided him with the formal power to decide how to run the strategy process. As a member of the strategy department described:

[The CEO said] “This is what I want to do. I want to include people. I want people to come on the journey with me and the leadership.” ... Ultimately, in terms of power structures, [the CEO] is [the organizational members'] manager ... Ultimately, they need to do [what the CEO decides].

(Interview with member of strategy department)

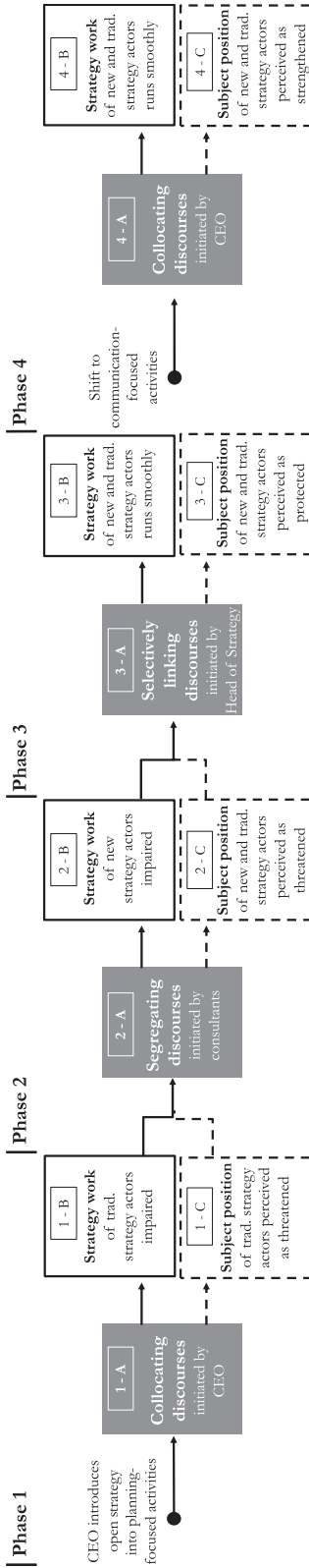


FIGURE 1 Empirical process model of managing the co-existence of the conventional and open strategy discourses.

The CEO introduced the new approach because he felt that the way in which strategy had been developed in the past had not been welcomed by employees and that the new approach would not only produce more novel ideas but also create greater commitment from employees. He explained his decision in a kick-off meeting with the strategy department and consultants:

Let's just go back in history, so the last big reviews, strategic ones, were done by [a strategy consultant firm] and [the former CEO]. They were both done top-down. So basically, [the former CEO] took [the strategy consultants], went in the room, after a month or two he came out with 500 pages. He was done ... But people ... say they hated it. Because it was done to them, nobody was involved ... I want it to be different ... I could just do it myself but that is not the point. The outcome has to be owned by the employees ... So I need everybody to be with me throughout the journey.

In this quote, the CEO describes previous strategic planning as a “top-down” approach, in which “nobody was involved,” which reflects the root metaphor and principles of the conventional strategy discourse. Because people “hated” the traditional approach, the CEO wants the approach “to be different”; “everybody” should be involved “throughout the journey,” which corresponds with the root metaphors and principles of the open strategy discourse.

The CEO used various formal and informal channels to announce his decision to introduce the new open strategy discourse. For example, he posted the following announcement on the company's intranet:

I need people to work with me on the strategy from across all levels and roles within the business ... I'm inviting you to get involved with the project; not to sit on the sidelines and comment or wait to see what we come up with, but to work on it with me and the team. With this in mind, we are looking for a diverse group of 20 people from across the business to think about the future and work on our next strategy. You don't need any experience in strategy to get involved ... It really is important to me that this is an inclusive process ... I am opening this process up as widely as possible, giving you all the opportunity to be a part of this unique experience.

## 4.2 | Collocating discourses initiated by the CEO (Figure 1, box 1-A)

By introducing the open strategy discourse, the CEO did not want to replace the conventional strategy discourse entirely. Instead, both discourses were to be maintained in tandem. We refer to this meta-discursive practice of allowing both discourses to be mobilized alongside each other as *collocating discourses*. The following interview quote in which the CEO describes the envisioned interaction between the employees and the traditional strategy actors illustrates the practice of collocating discourses:

My main interaction during the strategy process will be with the [employee group] and the [TMT]. My idea is that we involve [the employee group] at the beginning of the process to build options and ideas, especially when we need to look at things outside our comfort zone ... The consultants will provide technical input when we need market insights ... The strategy department will help me run the inclusive

process ... I will take decisions on my own, but I want to have [the other] people on board. I will justify my decisions so they can all help explain to the wider organization why we took certain decisions.

(Interview with CEO)

This quote shows how the CEO legitimizes both strategy discourses alongside each other. On the one hand, he legitimizes the open strategy discourse by assigning the employees a subject position as strategist and thereby the right to contribute to the “building of options and ideas.” On the other hand, he also legitimizes the conventional strategy discourse by assigning the strategy professionals a subject position as strategists, maintaining their privileged rights in “providing input,” “running the process,” and “taking decisions.”

By legitimizing the mobilization of the open strategy discourse alongside the conventional strategy discourse, the CEO expected to gain additional power resources and thus to strengthen his subject position as traditional strategist through the input and involvement of the employees, as explained by a member of the strategy department:

[The CEO] wanted to ... make sure that a broad spectrum of voices is feeding in. If you're involving [frontline employees], people feel like the employee voice is being heard ... I think having the [employee] group as part of the process was quite powerful to different audiences ... When you're presenting a strategy that's effectively democratized, it is more powerful in getting the message across to those people. We've had a wide cast of employee input into this ... It help[s] to sell the message.

(Interview with member of strategy department)

As we see in this quote, collocating the discourses was supposed to allow the CEO to leverage additional power sources. By integrating and listening to “a broad spectrum of voices,” he intended to increase his network links which was meant to grant him wider consent for the strategy outcome. Moreover, the member of the strategy department mentions that the involvement of employees was supposed to allow him to speak of the final strategy outcome not only on behalf of the top management but also on behalf of a “wide cast of employees,” which increased his discursive legitimacy toward “different audiences” within the organization. Thus, by collocating discourses, the CEO intended to leverage power resources from the open strategy discourse in addition to the power resources that he could leverage from the conventional strategy discourse.

### 4.3 | Collocating discourses impaired strategy work of traditional strategy actors (Figure 1, box 1-B)

Through the practice of collocating discourses, the employees were expecting to take on a subject position as strategists in line with the open strategy discourse. In particular, they expected that their new subject position would be associated with particular rights, such as the right to contribute ideas to the development of the new strategic plan, as one of the employees explains:

I would like to see [our employee group] as a sparring partner to the [TMT]. I would like to see some good challenges go in and not necessarily just be [part of] a group where things are wafted past us just to kind of “give a view.” I would really





like [our employee group] to be able to be seen as challengers, and, personally, I want to make sure that whatever the strategy [is], it's something that I can relate to and I can see working for me and my colleagues.

(Interview with member of employee group)

However, the traditional strategy actors struggled to acknowledge the employees' subject position as strategists, as this would provide the employees not only with the right to contribute to the strategy but also with the right to access strategic information. A consultant described his struggle as follows.

It's been difficult. So, during the first discussion we had with [the CEO] before we won the project, I had understood the [employee group] to be ... sort of the deputies, the future heads of the business, rather than a wider group. I think with this sort of cross-section of the group we found it a little bit hard to know ... how much can we share with them. How much can they really get involved ... We can't divulge everything or have them make the decisions around the strategy because that's not their role.

(Interview with consultant)

This quote shows how the collocation of the conventional strategy discourse and the open strategy discourse leads to conflicting behavioral expectations. While the employees expected to enact a subject position as strategists in line with the open strategy discourse, and thus get access to strategic information, the consultants mobilized the conventional strategy discourse, which meant that they would not “divulge everything” but conceal strategic information. The consultant further indicates that granting the employees the right to “make the decisions around the strategy” would clash with their view on the employees' subject position as non-strategists (in line with the conventional strategy discourse)—“that's not their role.”

A member of the TMT group further explains how fulfilling the employees' expectation of participation in strategy meetings (in line with their subject position in the open strategy discourse) led to tensions with regard to the secrecy of those meetings, which the traditional strategy actors would expect in line with conventional strategy discourse:

If you're in a business strategy meeting and one of the options you [are] talking about is “should we sell the business?” [it is] pretty difficult to have a relatively junior member of staff in the room, listening to that conversation, because the risk is, they go out of the room and tell all of their colleagues we are about to be sold.

(Interview with TMT member)

Importantly, we observed how traditional strategy actors were struggling to plan and set up strategy meetings in light of these conflicting behavioral expectations which inhibited the progress of strategy work. During a meeting with the consultants, the Head of Strategy highlighted the need to clarify expectations of how to engage with the employee group in the future:

We [the Head of Strategy, the CEO, the strategy department and the consultants] were starting to scope out ... how we're going to use [the employee group], how we're going to engage with them, communicate with them, what we want from them. I think the different actors involved are all in slightly different places on how this is going to work. [Thus], I think it's worth us just really spending some time to

talk that through ... in order to set up the timeline, thinking about the events that we want to run and how we actually get the ball rolling with them.

Here, the Head of Strategy refers to the conflicting behavioral expectations by saying that the “different [traditional strategy] actors are all in slightly different places” on how “to use” the employee group. Because of this, the strategic planning process seems not to progress appropriately. There is, therefore, a need to “get the ball rolling” and to “really spend time” talking through how to create some alignment around everybody’s understanding of the process. Thus, due to collocating discourses the traditional strategy actors’ strategy work was impaired.

#### **4.4 | Collocating discourses was perceived as a threat to the subject position of traditional strategy actors (Figure 1, box 1-C)**

Aside from impairing strategy work, the collocation of the two discourses also led the traditional strategy actors to perceive a threat to their subject positions. As open strategy was supposed to grant the employees a subject position as strategist, the TMT members were concerned that they could be challenged by the employees in front of their peers. They felt that this could undermine their credentials and expertise that constituted the basis for their discursive legitimacy as per the conventional strategy discourse. Thus, the collocation of discourses, and particularly the strengthening of the employees’ subject position as per the open strategy discourse, posed a perceived threat to traditional strategy actors’ discursive legitimacy, thereby potentially weakening their subject position vis-à-vis the employees as well as their peers. One member of the strategy department explained:

The way that we selected people might have created some resistance with the [TMT] ... If you go and ask the [TMT] member, “Who do you think should be involved in this process?” ... They could choose people they trust and feel like they know well enough to be aligned with their thinking ... which is exactly what [the CEO] didn’t want to happen ... I think [the CEO] wanted genuine challenge ... he was very secure in his role. I don’t think everyone in the [TMT] felt as secure in their roles to be able to openly embrace that sort of challenge ... Being asked to accept challenge in front of their peers from people within their business. So that’s quite a difficult thing.

(Interview with member of strategy department)

Because the traditional strategy actors felt that collocating discourses not only threatened their subject position but also impaired the strategy work, they tried to regulate the mobilization of the two discourses differently, which resulted in the enactment of a new meta-discursive practice and, thus, the transition into a new phase of the process.

#### **4.5 | Phase 2: Segregating discourses initiated by the consultants (Figure 1, box 2-A)**

As the consultants were tasked by the CEO and the strategy department to design the strategy process, they could draw on their traditional subject position as professional strategists to introduce a new meta-discursive practice.

[The responsibility to design the strategy process] was in their brief .... So, we were relying on [the consultants] to follow what they were asked to do ... They were the experts in running the process.

(Interview with member of strategy department)

Thus, based on the power granted by their subject position within the traditional strategy discourse, the consultants introduced the meta-discursive practice of *segregating discourses*. The practice of segregating discourses refers to creating separate domains of strategy work for each of the two discourses, so that the different discourses can only be mobilized in different domains and never within the same domain. The consultants referred to these different domains as different “tracks” of the strategy process, each dedicated to one of the two discourses. Track 1 consisted of strategy workshops involving the traditional strategy actors, which were supposed to be conducted in line with the conventional strategy discourse. Track 2 consisted of separate on-site sessions for the employee group, which were supposed to rely on the open strategy discourse.

We start to have the [Track 1] workshops ... The attendees would be the Managing Director and the CEO plus members from the executive committee ... This is more sort of the group of individuals that would ordinarily be involved ... For the [Track 1] workshop we'll have ... discussions around strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats ... The conclusions will be the key questions we want to be addressing through the rest of the work ... [The employees] are not participating in those [Track 1] workshops because it changes the dynamic of the discussion, and some of the information that's being discussed and shared is sensitive in nature ... That's all the information which you don't really want disseminated through the wider organization ... We plan to use the [employee] group in their [Track 2] workshops at various points ... We could use them for the ideation, to start with that sort of opening up the range of [strategic] options ... or [to have] that sort of “how do we narrow this [strategic options] down to the ones that are the most feasible, the most practical?”

(Interview with consultant)

Segregating the discourses set clear guidelines for strategy actors' behaviors in each domain and thus resolved the tensions between the conflicting behavioral expectations associated with collocating discourses. In particular, segregating discourses allowed the traditional strategy actors to do their strategy work in line with the conventional strategy discourse, while allowing the employees to do their strategy work in line with the open strategy discourse. Moreover, by excluding the employees from the Track 1 discussions, traditional strategy actors were prevented from being “challenged in front of their peers,” thereby overcoming the perceived threat to their subject position. Thus, segregating discourses allowed for the resolution of the tensions caused by collocating discourses. However, confining the two discourses to two domains of strategy work created new tensions.

#### **4.6 | Segregating discourses impaired strategy work of new strategy actors (Figure 1, box 2-B)**

The practice of segregating discourses resolved the problem of impaired strategy work for the traditional strategy actors, who could now get on with their strategy work in Track 1. In line

with the conventional strategy discourse, the traditional strategy actors analyzed the current business situation and started to derive strategic options for the strategic plan. However, the work in Track 2 involving the new strategy actors did not progress well. As a member of the TMT explained:

The part of the process that I think worked particularly well has been the [Track 1] workshops ... The work of the [employee group]—so, I probably put that in both the hit and the slight miss category. So, I think it was a great idea. But I felt initially there was a bit of a lack of clarity around how that group was going to work and how that would interact with the business strategy work streams [in Track 1]. I had a few weeks where I'm thinking, "I'm not sure what people are working on." And I think some of the [employees] were unsure of what we [the traditional strategy actors] were doing in terms of a strategy process.

(Interview with TMT member)

Similarly, the members of the employee group felt that their strategy work within Track 2 was impaired due to the practice of segregating discourses. In particular, they felt that they could not proceed with their strategy work because the separated strategy work of the traditional strategy actors within Track 1 was not transparently shared with them. As a result, they did not understand to what and how their work would contribute.

[The members of the employee group] are not able to concentrate on the workshops without that sort of, "Where is this going? What's the ultimate output?" And I think that's making certain people feel insecure about what they're doing, and they're not comfortable with that. And I think when you're not comfortable, then, some of them are kind of more questioning, or they're not engaging with [the strategy work].

(Interview with member of employee group)

As the quote indicates, the practice of segregating discourses impaired the strategy work of new strategy actors.

#### **4.7 | Segregating discourses was perceived as a threat to the subject positions of new and traditional strategy actors (Figure 1, box 2-C)**

Initially, the introduction of the meta-discursive practice of segregating discourses was supposed to protect the subject position of the traditional strategists by preventing them from getting challenged by employees as fellow strategists. At the same time, it weakened the subject position of the employees, who felt that they were no longer able to have any real influence on strategy making, given that their work in Track 2 was disconnected from that of the traditional strategists happening in Track 1.

I felt a sense of frustration [because] people [wanted] to be able to really add value but didn't know how to do that ... It wasn't clear what would happen with our input. My question is, 'who's "we"?' 'Who's considering [our input]?' I think that, in order for people to stop feeling frustrated, they might need to see where [their input] is going.

(Interview with member of employee group)

Having heard about the employees' frustration, the traditional strategists felt that their subject position was under threat, too. Yet, in contrast to the first phase, the perceived threat resulted not from the intended elevation of the employees to the subject position of fellow strategists but from the employees' enactment of their distinctive power resource of network links within the conventional strategy discourse. In particular, traditional strategy actors feared that the employees would mobilize their fellow employees to resist the implementation of the strategy claiming that their participation in the strategic planning activities was a "farce," which could undermine the traditional strategy actors' credibility and discursive legitimacy not only vis-à-vis the participating group of employees but vis-à-vis the organization as a whole.

The feedback that we got from the [employee group] was really strong ... They thought that they were going to have that direct connection with the senior team and they wanted to make sure that we were making good use of their time. [However] there was a risk of not only not getting the output that [the CEO] wanted [from the employees], but getting a negative outcome where they would all go back to their teams and say, "It's just a farce," or, "It's a pretense at inclusion rather than us actually being involved." ... There was potential for it to backfire quite dramatically if we didn't change the way we were [involving the employees]. The employees would not just resist [the strategy process], but go back saying that all the talk of transparency was just a pretense. And being actively derogatory about the process and about the strategy and about the intentions behind it as well.

(Interview with member of strategy department)

Thus, the meta-discursive practice of segregating discourses inadvertently created new tensions by impairing the employees' strategy work, undermining their subject position, and threatening to weaken the traditional strategy actors' subject position. Thus, both the traditional and the new strategy actors became concerned about the segregation of discourses, pushing for a new meta-discursive practice, which the traditional strategy actors still had the power to initiate.

#### **4.8 | Phase 3: Selectively linking discourses initiated by the Head of Strategy (Figure 1, box 3-A)**

The Head of Strategy initiated a new meta-discursive practice by relying on her subject position and the respective formal power within the conventional strategy discourse. This meta-discursive practice aimed at resolving the tensions associated with segregating discourses.

[The Head of Strategy] gave [the consultants] very clear instructions about needing to involve [the employee group] much more in the process ... Because she was appointed as Head of Strategy, [the strategy process] was her project. She was accountable very directly. And as she was signing off the budget for the work that [the consultants] were doing, at the end of the day they needed to follow her decision.

(Interview with member of strategy department)

We refer to the new meta-discursive practice introduced by the Head of Strategy as *selectively linking discourses*. This practice involves the creation of selective and controlled touchpoints between the two separate domains of strategy work. In these touchpoints, the open strategy discourse could be mobilized so that the results from the two domains of strategy work could be exchanged. The following vignette of a meeting between the Head of Strategy and the consultants describes the discussions that led to the introduction of the practice of selectively linking discourses.

Having discussed the employees' frustration about being excluded from the work of the traditional strategy actors, the Head of Strategy looks concerned and stresses that "we need to share with [the employees] some of ... the outputs from the work they are not involved in [i.e. Track 1] in terms of what are the strategic options being considered for the business ... In their on-site session [Track 2], [we let them] discuss the range of options and come to their own views on what they think is most important ...." One of the consultants agrees by stating that he sees an "opportunity to open up and for [the employees] to express themselves while linking it to the work that we're doing." Yet, he also emphasizes that their contribution needs to be controlled: "If we go completely open, I think there's a risk that they [will] contribute a lot, but it won't get used, and that'll just frustrate them differently. I think that if we are genuinely sharing with them the output of the work that's being done [by us], it will be easier for their contributions to have an effect. So, I think we can make enough space and link it to what we're doing." The Head of Strategy thinks about this suggestion for a moment, then she adds that the employee group should be invited "into a [joint strategy workshop]" where they can "present [their ideas] to the [TMT] and feel like they've got a point of view that matters."

As this meeting extract shows, the participants discuss setting up "joint strategy workshops" in order to respond to the tensions resulting from the separation of their strategy work from the strategy work of the employee group. These workshops should enable touchpoints to "link [the employees'] work to what [the traditional strategy actors] are doing." By stating that the traditional strategy actors should be "sharing [with the employees] the output of the work that's being done [by the traditional strategy actors]," the consultant refers to transparency in line with the open strategy discourse that could be mobilized within the touchpoints. The Head of Strategy further refers to the legitimacy of the open strategy discourse within these touchpoints by stating that the employees should "feel like they have got a point of view that matters," and thus the ability to enact their position as strategists. However, the consultant also stresses that these touchpoints need to be controlled because "there's a risk that they [will] contribute a lot, but it won't get used, and that'll just frustrate them differently."

#### **4.9 | Selectively linking discourses facilitated strategy work (Figure 1, box 3-B)**

Because the practice of selectively linking discourses provided the members of the employee group with transparency regarding the strategy work of the traditional strategy actors, the



employees were now able to understand how their work would fit in. As a result, they re-engaged in their strategy work, as explained by one of the employees:

We [the employee group] were being asked to consider these [strategic options] that the [traditional strategy actors] had thought of. And then, [our work] started to fall into place ... We started talking about [our own ideas and our work] started becoming really relevant. ... Then, everyone forgot about, “What are we doing here? Why are we spending all this time doing this?” ... Everyone in my group just started writing things down ... And then it just all just seemed to go from there.

(Interview with member of employee group)

The practice of selectively linking discourses thus resolved the inhibition of the employees' strategy work observed in the previous phase.

#### **4.10 | Selectively linking discourses was perceived as protecting the subject positions of new and traditional strategy actors (Figure 1, box 3-C)**

While the employees had previously been concerned about their limited opportunities to enact their subject position as strategists, they were now excited that they could take on this subject position because their strategy work had been linked through selective touchpoints.

What we're presenting [to the TMT] is ... just amazing. [Our work] has started becoming really relevant ... I'm like, “Gosh. We are so valuable in terms of if you want information about what's happening on the front line, we know better than anybody.” I actually feel like I make a difference ... when the Management Committee are considering everything, when they feel it necessary to consult with us ... We've got a really good group that has come up with some really good ideas that could be utilized.

(Interview with member of employee group)

By contributing “information about what's happening at the front line” that the employees know “better than anybody,” this employee refers to their power resource of providing distinct knowledge. As the employees could interact with the traditional strategy actors as strategists within the selective touchpoints, the employees were able to draw on this power source “to make a difference” and to make the TMT “feel it necessary to consult with us,” thereby enacting their subject position as strategists.

The practice of selectively linking discourses also allowed the traditional strategists to protect their subject position as strategists. Previously, the traditional strategy actors had been concerned that the employees' frustrations about their role in the strategy process would threaten their own subject position. Hence, the Head of Strategy was pleased that the practice of selectively linking discourses enabled the employees to take on an active role as strategists:

[The employees] do seem kind of high about the process ... which is really good to hear. And it does feel like they feel this is genuinely a good opportunity. They're

nervous about presenting to the Management Committee, which is a good thing because it shows that they see it as an important thing and it shows that they value the opportunity ... I'm glad that I kind of made a big fuss about getting [the employees' involvement] right ... We need them to stay involved in the process all the way through so that they are willing to be agents and communicate.

(Interview with Head of Strategy)

Here, the Head of Strategy expresses her relief about the fact that the employees were happy with their role in the strategy process, which meant that there was no longer a risk of them resisting the subsequent communication and implementation of the strategy, thereby undermining the power of the traditional strategy actors. Accordingly, selectively linking discourses not only allowed the employees to enact their subject position in line with the open strategy discourse but also to protect the subject position of the traditional strategy actors.

With previous tensions being resolved, and in the absence of new tensions, the strategy actors maintained the practice of selectively linking discourses during the remainder of their planning-focused activities.

#### 4.11 | Phase 4: Collocating discourses initiated by the CEO (Figure 1, box 4-A)

When the development of the strategic plan was completed, the CEO started preparing the process for communicating the new plan. For this, he wanted to change the set-up of the strategy process. He was able to do so due to his subject position within the conventional strategy discourse, which gave him the right to decide on the strategy process, as he described in an interview:

I think there is no uncertainty that I am the boss ... When we prepared the strategy launch event, everyone was looking at me and waiting for me to give directions [regarding how to set up the communication of the strategic plan].

(Interview with CEO)

In order to facilitate a joint communication of the strategy to the wider organization, the CEO wanted to dissolve the (partial) separation between the work of the new and traditional strategy actors that had been established by the practices of *segregating* and *selectively linking discourses*. Thus, he wanted to change the way the mobilization of the two discourses was regulated. In this vein, the CEO re-introduced the practice of *collocating discourses*. Analogously to the very beginning of the strategy process, collocating discourses meant that both discourses could be mobilized within the same domain of strategy work, allowing the traditional and new strategy actors to work alongside each other mobilizing both discourses and the related subject positions.

[The CEO] has his big [strategy launch] conference. The top 150, the top 1% [who are attending the event] have a role and responsibility to cascade the strategy ... [The employees'] job is helping us to roll and cascade the strategy out ... First, [the employee group] joins our weekly event committee [which is responsible for planning the communication of the strategy]. [The employees] have an active role to play,



so they're on that call, hearing and watching the agenda take shape. And they have a real responsibility to make sure that it's a success. [During the actual event] on day one [of the strategy launch event], the [employee] group will support [the CEO] by reading [parts of the strategy]. On day two, ... the [employee] group are being used [by the respective TMT member] to talk through some of the business unit strategy.

(Interview with member of strategy department)

This quote indicates that both discourses could again be mobilized within the same domain of strategy work, such as in the “weekly event committee” or the “big strategy launch conference.” By stating, for example, that “the top 1% have a role and responsibility to cascade the strategy,” the member of the strategy department refers to the “top down” root metaphor and the subject positions of the conventional discourse. Yet, he also draws on the principles and subject positions of the open strategy discourse by referring to the “active role” of the employees who have a “real responsibility” in ensuring the success of communicating the strategy to the remaining organization.

By re-engaging in the practice of collocating the two discourses, the CEO—similar to the beginning of the strategy process—intended to increase his discursive legitimacy, which was ultimately supposed to strengthen his subject position, as evident in the following quote:

The [CEO] is paid to stand on stage and say, “Things are going to be okay. We'll deliver our numbers.” ... If someone that you know and trust from your team [such as the participating employees] supports and knows [the strategy], and has inside information on it, ... you trust them slightly more ... One thing that's still hugely important is people knowing that [the CEO] isn't just sitting in his office with me, [the Head of Strategy], and some consultants, and coming up with this plan [but] having [the employees] saying, ‘I saw it. I was part of it.’

(Interview with Head of Strategy)

#### 4.12 | Collocating discourses facilitated strategy work (Figure 1, box 4-B)

During planning-focused activities, the practice of collocating discourses had led to conflicting behavioral expectations impairing the strategy work. However, now, during communication-focused activities, the behavioral expectations associated with the different subject positions and principles of the two discourses became compatible and so the strategy work proceeded smoothly, as illustrated by the following quote:

So, I think at that point, [the employees'] role became much more familiar and the benefit that [the TMT] could get from that group was much more obvious to [them] ... Typically, I think that's the way a lot of [the members of the TMT] would have worked anyway. You design the strategy, and then you have to go and convince a group of people who you know are very influential within the business about what the strategy is ... And then you ask them to be your champions to help you turn it into action ... [The champions] wouldn't have had any opportunity to input into changing anything ... I think for the [TMT] to get to that launch meeting with the top 150 and to be able to stand on stage with their members [of the employee group] felt much more comfortable. So, getting to that

meeting with that group [that was] already formed and already engaged and already informed about the process has taken a lot of work off the [TMT's] shoulders in the rollout.

(Interview with member of strategy department)

If they had followed the conventional strategy discourse, the TMT would have selected a group of employees during communication activities to become “champions” and “turn it into action.” However, in this instance, rather than appointing a conventional group of champions, the employee group was “already formed, engaged and informed about the process,” in line with their subject position within the open strategy discourse. Thus, the TMT was “much more familiar” with their role and “the benefit they could get from that group” during the communication activities. The member of the strategy department states that the TMT felt “much more comfortable” communicating the strategy alongside the employee group, indicating that the behavioral expectations of open strategy seemed compatible with those associated with the conventional strategy discourse. One member of the employee group confirmed this:

I feel that my responsibility will be to help [the traditional strategy actors] deliver the strategy locally but in a way that all staff, no matter what job they do, will understand it. We have lots of different jobs in this office, so I think it's trying to make it relevant for all of those people in their different day-to-day roles. So ... my role in this is to roll [the strategy] out, make sure people are engaged with it, excited about it, they understand it.

(Interview with member of employee group)

This member of the employee group indicates that not only does she consider herself as a strategy reader but as enacting a position as a strategist in line with the open strategy discourse. Thus, due to collocating discourses, the employees were now able to mobilize the open strategy discourse and proceed smoothly with the joint communication of the strategy. In contrast to the beginning of the strategy process, collocating discourses did not lead to tensions because the behavioral expectations associated with the two different discourses during communication-focused activities seemed compatible.

#### **4.13 | Collocating discourses was perceived as strengthening the subject positions of traditional and new strategy actors (Figure 1, box 4-C)**

Collocating discourses was seen as strengthening the subject positions of both traditional and new strategy actors, as this quote from an interview with an employee who wasn't included in the employee group shows:

[The members of the employee group] translate the strategy for the people that they work alongside ... That enables us to understand how we should start [implementing the strategy], ... to be able to translate something complex into something that becomes quite easy to digest ... They have a very critical role in enabling this strategy to succeed, and that's what [the TMT] needed from them. By

telling ... what this particular strategy means for them ... it allows people to take real ownership.

(Employee interview)

In this quote, the employee describes the subject position of the members of the employee group as “critical” by saying that they “enabl[ed] this strategy to succeed,” thereby referring to the strengthened subject position of the employee group. He also implicitly talks about two power resources of traditional strategy actors which were enlarged through the involvement of the employee group, thereby strengthening the traditional actors’ subject position. First, he refers to how the employees’ colloquial language allowed them to “translate the strategy,” providing a critical resource for the traditional actors in facilitating the communication of the strategy outcome and in explaining to other employees “what this particular strategy means for them.” Second, he describes how the employees’ network links to other employees, “allow [s] people to take real ownership,” which helped the traditional strategy actors in obtaining wider consent for the strategy outcome.

## 5 | THEORETICAL MODEL: DYNAMICS IN DEALING WITH CO-EXISTING STRATEGY DISCOURSES

We derived a theoretical model from our findings that describes how actors deal with the co-existence of multiple strategy discourses. Essentially, the model is based on our main finding that actors employ different meta-discursive practices to regulate where and when the different strategy discourses can be mobilized. Thus, at the center of our model is the initiation of meta-discursive practices (box C), which is preceded by two types of drivers (boxes A1 and A2), and an enabler (box B). The model also specifies two types of outcomes of the initiation of meta-discursive practices (boxes D1 and D2), which in turn might become drivers for the initiation of another meta-discursive practice. In the following, we describe each of these elements of the model in detail (Figure 2).

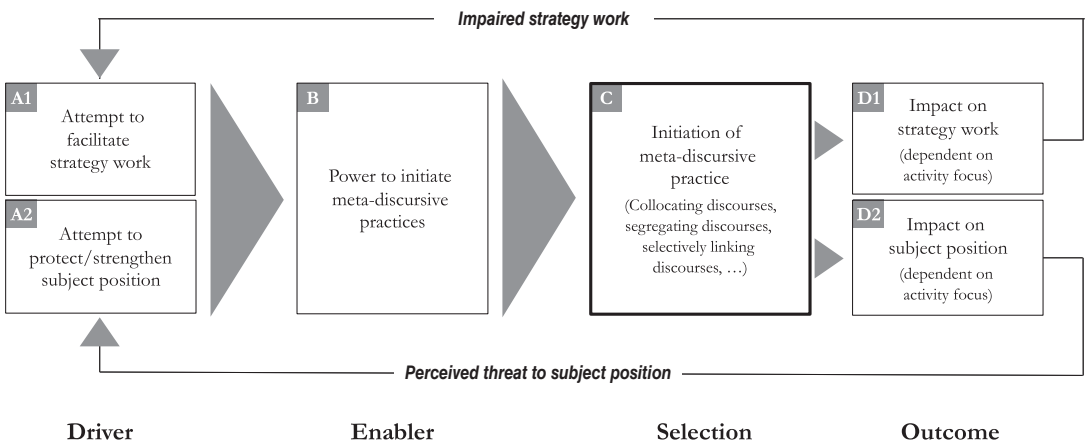


FIGURE 2 Dynamics in dealing with co-existing strategy discourses.

Starting on the left-hand side, the model specifies the *attempt to facilitate strategy work* (box A1) and the *attempt to protect or strengthen subject positions* (box A2) as the two drivers for initiating a particular meta-discursive practice. For example, in the second phase of our findings, the facilitation of their strategy work and the protection of their subject position drove the consultants to initiate the meta-discursive practice of segregating discourses.

As indicated in the next box (B), strategy actors need to have the requisite *power to initiate meta-discursive practices*, which means that these actors possess the power to influence other actors to behave in accordance with the meta-discursive practice. In our case, only the traditional strategy actors were able to do this because they could mobilize the conventional strategy discourse allowing them to enact a particularly powerful subject position. For example, in Phases 1 and 4, the CEO could mobilize his powerful subject position within the conventional strategy discourse to decide to collocate the two strategy discourses. In contrast to the traditional strategy actors, the employees were limited in their ability to initiate a new meta-discursive practice because their subject position in the conventional strategy discourse was that of non-strategists; and even the power granted by their subject position in the open strategy discourse could, in principle, always be challenged by the traditional actors mobilizing the conventional discourse. Thus, we witnessed only the traditional actors initiating new meta-discursive practices.

The drivers and enablers together lead to the *initiation of a particular meta-discursive practice* (box C). In our study, we identified three meta-discursive practices, that is, collocating discourses, segregating discourses, and selectively linking discourses. In principle, there might also be other meta-discursive practices in other contexts, and their sequence might be different than what we observed at our case company.

The initiation of a meta-discursive practice yields two different sets of outcomes: the *impact on strategy work* (box D1) and the *impact on subject positions* of various strategy actors (box D2). In our case, the outcomes of the meta-discursive practice were dependent on the activity focus. For example, during planning-focused activities, the practice of collocating discourses resulted in impaired strategy work and threatened subject positions, while during communication-focused activities it allowed for the smooth progress of strategy work and strengthened subject positions. In turn, if either strategy work is impaired (upper arrow) or if strategy actors perceive a threat to their subject position (lower arrow), or both, they become drivers (boxes A1 and A2) for the initiation of a change in the meta-discursive practice.

## 6 | DISCUSSION

In this paper, we addressed the following research question: *How do strategy actors deal with the co-existence of the conventional strategy discourse and the open strategy discourse over the course of the strategy process?* Responding to this question, our findings yield two main insights that contribute both to the literature on open strategy and the literature on organizational discourse.

### 6.1 | Insight 1: Identification of meta-discursive practices

Our first insight concerns the identification of meta-discursive practices as a way of regulating the mobilization of the co-existing strategy discourses. By choosing a particular meta-discursive practice, strategy actors determine when and where they can mobilize a particular discourse. In this way, they try to handle interdiscursive tensions, such as different behavioral expectations

regarding strategy work. Yet, by resolving particular interdiscursive tensions, meta-discursive practices might lead to other interdiscursive tensions elsewhere, prompting a change in the meta-discursive practice.

In identifying meta-discursive practices, we contribute to the literature on organization and strategy discourse, and particularly on the co-existence of discourses (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Existing studies have shown that actors mobilize discourses selectively (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Mantere & Vaara, 2008; Vaara & Tienari, 2002). Our findings add to those studies by revealing that the selective mobilization of discourses depends on meta-discursive practices that determine where and when a particular discourse can be legitimately mobilized. In contrast to “regular” strategy practices, meta-discursive practices, as indicated by the prefix “meta,” are not part of the strategy discourses but regulate the mobilization of the strategy discourses. Consequently, depending on the meta-discursive practice employed, not all discourses might be equally available for mobilization. We also add to studies on interdiscursive tensions. Tavella (2021), in particular, has shown that interdiscursive struggles arise when the principles and subject positions of co-existing discourses are conflicting. Our findings qualify this insight by revealing that whether such interdiscursive tensions arise depends on how the mobilization of the co-existing discourses has been regulated. Sorsa and Vaara (2020), in turn, showed how strategy actors use rhetorical practices to mitigate interdiscursive tensions related to the *content* of particular strategic decisions. Our findings add to this insight by identifying meta-discursive practices as a means for mitigating interdiscursive tensions related to the *strategy process*, that is, to the interactions involved in making strategic decisions. Thus, as the strategy content is only worked out within the strategy process, the meta-discursive practices are even more fundamental than the rhetorical practices for mitigating interdiscursive tensions.

With this insight, we also contribute to the literature on open strategy and particularly on the reflexiveness needed to enact it. As Baptista et al. (2017) highlighted, the effective enactment of open strategy requires organizations to develop reflexiveness, that is, the ability to be reflective toward open practices and their interplay with other practices. This includes, for example, the reflective interrelating of “radically open” practices in line with the open strategy discourse and “counterbalancing” practices in line with the conventional strategy discourse (Luedicke et al., 2017). Our study extends those studies by identifying a higher-level reflexiveness, which does not regulate the different strategy practices as such but the different strategy discourses with which those practices are associated, by determining where and when it is legitimate to mobilize those discourses. Reflexiveness toward the regulation of the strategy discourses also means being aware of where and when to expect different kinds of interdiscursive tensions and problems, as well as different ways of handling them. For example, we saw that the meta-discursive practice of collocating discourses is associated with different tensions than those associated with segregating discourses. Hence, by showing that the interdiscursive tensions vary according to the particular meta-discursive practices employed, our findings also qualify earlier work that seemed to imply a general clash between open strategy and the conventional strategy discourse (Heracleous, 2019).

## 6.2 | Insight 2: The role of power in dealing with co-existing discourses

Our second insight concerns power both as a driver and a necessary resource for initiating a particular meta-discursive practice. We find that strategy actors switch meta-discursive practices

when they perceive an opportunity for strengthening or protecting their subject position; at the same time, we show that actors need the requisite power to instigate such a change. Thus, wanting to enhance one's power by initiating a particular meta-discursive practice is not enough; one also needs to possess the requisite power to get other actors to behave in line with that practice. We also show that a change in meta-discursive practice can impact strategy actors' subject position in unexpected ways, which, in turn, might prompt them to instigate another change of meta-discursive practice (to protect or strengthen their subject position). Thus, our study reveals power as a latent but important driver of the dynamics in dealing with co-existing discourses.

With this insight, we contribute to the organizational discourse literature that has already highlighted the role of power in the mobilization of discourses (Hardy et al., 2000; Hardy & Phillips, 2004; Samra-Fredericks, 2005). While these studies show that the opportunity to enhance their power motivates actors to mobilize particular discourses, our findings suggest that power also drives attempts at regulating the mobilization of discourses. Accordingly, strategy actors' power is not only strengthened by mobilizing a particular discourse (Laine & Vaara, 2007; Vaara & Tienari, 2002) but also by controlling what discourses are available for others to mobilize. However, the opportunity to strengthen one's power through the initiation of meta-discursive practices is only available to those actors who already possess powerful subject positions that allow them to get others to behave in line with that practice. In our case, only the traditional strategy actors could initiate new meta-discursive practices.

With our second insight, we also contribute to the open strategy literature, particularly on the dynamics of open strategy processes (Dobusch et al., 2019; Dobusch & Dobusch, 2019; Holstein & Rantakari, 2023) by adding power as an important source for such dynamics. In particular, these studies show that open strategy processes typically unfold through alternating phases of openness and closure. Based on our insight, these dynamics can be shaped by strategy actors' attempts to strengthen or protect their subject position. On the one hand, traditional strategy actors might want to retain "phases of closure" to maintain the conventional strategy discourse and thereby their traditional subject position. On the other hand, they might want to introduce "phases of openness," which allow them to draw on additional power resources from the open strategy discourse, thereby strengthening their subject position. The fact that actors need sufficient power to initiate a change in meta-discursive practices also speaks to the existing literature which has highlighted the dominance of traditional strategy actors, even in open strategy processes (Belmondo & Sargis-Roussel, 2023; Brielmaier & Friesl, 2021; Splitter et al., 2021). We can explain this dominance by the fact that traditional strategy actors can always rely on the conventional strategy discourse to provide them with a powerful subject position from which to enact a particular meta-discursive practice that secures their power.

### 6.3 | Practical implications

This study has several practical implications, two of which we would highlight in particular. First, by identifying different meta-discursive practices, we reveal different options for managers involved with open strategy to actively regulate the mobilization of different strategy discourses in their attempts at handling interdiscursive tensions. In this way, our study highlights the need for managers to reflect on how to regulate the mobilization of the strategy discourses. Second, our study also helps managers understand the different forces underlying the dynamics in regulating the open strategy and the conventional strategy discourses. People will push for a change

in meta-discursive practices if they feel that they can strengthen or protect their power, but the ability to do so depends on whether they have the requisite power to get other actors to behave in line with those practices. Understanding the underlying forces can help managers to identify the potential levers supporting or undermining these dynamics.

## 6.4 | Boundary conditions and future research directions

As is typical of single-case studies, there are several boundary conditions which also open up opportunities for future research. The first boundary condition relates to the limited experience of the traditional strategy actors in organizing and managing open strategy processes. Apart from the CEO, who was familiar with open strategy, neither the external consultants nor the strategy department had any prior experience in that regard. If the traditional strategists had been more familiar with open strategy, they might not have enacted the unsuccessful meta-discursive practice of segregating discourses but moved straight to selectively linking discourses, or they might have chosen entirely different meta-discursive practices altogether. Moreover, prior knowledge about open strategy constitutes a potential power resource that the traditional strategists might have mobilized in their attempts at switching between meta-discursive practices, making it easier for them to do so. Thus, future studies could examine how different degrees of familiarity with open strategy might influence the choice and ways of employing meta-discursive practices.

The second boundary condition concerns the particular strands of the conventional and open strategy discourses enacted at our case company. As highlighted in the theory section, there is variety in how the guiding principles of secrecy and exclusivity on the one hand and transparency and inclusivity on the other hand can be enacted. At our case company, we saw a fairly moderate form of open strategy. In particular, the openness in the open strategy discourse was limited to a subgroup of 20 employee representatives, and their inclusion did not extend to decision-making. In other cases, where we might find more extreme forms of open strategy, the observed interdiscursive tensions—and related to that the dynamics between different meta-discursive practices—might be much more pronounced. However, we would argue that the enactment of meta-discursive practices for handling co-existing discourses would still be relevant across different strands of the conventional and open strategy discourses, even though the choice and sequence of the particular meta-discursive practices might be different. Thus, future studies could examine how different strands of the conventional and open strategy discourses impact the sequence of meta-discursive practices and the dynamics of handling the co-existence of these strategy discourses.

The third boundary condition concerns two related cultural aspects of the case organization. First, in our case company, the conventional discourse had been deeply embedded in its organizational culture and was taken for granted by the organizational members. In other companies, and particularly in start-ups, where strategy actors might be less attached to the conventional strategy discourse (or might not even have done strategy before), the strategy actors may try to enact a different form of segregating discourses, where they restrict the internal strategy practices to the open strategy discourse entirely, only allowing the conventional strategy discourse to be mobilized outside the organization. Second, our case company was generally characterized by a bureaucratic culture, which amplified the tensions between the two discourses. In organizations embracing a more “open” culture, where psychological safety prevails and managers and executives cultivate a learning mindset, the interdiscursive tensions might play out

differently. For example, in contrast to our case, senior executives might not feel threatened in their subject position when challenged by employees acting as fellow strategists. Rather, being challenged by whomever might be considered a valuable learning opportunity. As a consequence, people might experience fewer interdiscursive tensions and, thus, enact different meta-discursive practices. Against this background, future studies could examine how different cultural contexts affect which and how meta-discursive practices are enacted.

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## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

As we are collecting highly confidential, sensitive, qualitative data on strategy work and are obliged to keep the data confidential (according to the non-disclosure agreement with our case company), we cannot publish our data.

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Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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