Making Strategy Work

Ph.d. Serie 9.2013

Copenhagen
Business School
HANDELSHØJSKOLEN

Making Strategy Work
An Organizational Ethnography

Marie Mathiesen

Doctoral School in Organisation
and Management Studies

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1st edition 2013
PhD Series 9.2013

The Doctoral School of Organisation and Management Studies (OMS) is an interdisciplinary research environment at Copenhagen Business School for PhD students working on theoretical and empirical themes related to the organisation and management of private, public and voluntary organizations.

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MARIE MATHIESEN

"It's a mean picture. Everything is in the right place, but it's a nasty cartoon. Of course the artist thought it was science."

"I don't think anything is ever just science," I said.

He nodded. "That's the problem with seeing things. Nothing is clear. Feelings, ideas shape what is in front of you. Cézanne wanted the naked world, but the world is never naked. In my work I want to create doubt."

He stopped and smiled at me. "Because that's what we're sure of."

Siri Hustvedt, *What I Loved*

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Thank You

... Anne Reff Pedersen for always helping me find my own way. Your intuition for what the project, and I, needed at any given time has amazed me time and again.

... Chris Grey for unlimited supplies of wisdom, warmth, and acumen. Our monthly Skype lifeline kept me afloat in the writing phrase.

... Barbara Czarniawska and Kristian Kreiner for reading my text carefully at my second Work in Progress seminar. Your insistence on precision and demand for more and better questions propelled me towards completion.

... Kai Hockerts for launching me into a PhD. Your academic entrepreneurship skills are admirable, and you taught me how to navigate CBS.

... The real Bioforte and the people in the actual Stakeholder Engagement Department for being open-minded and engaged, and for allowing me to do fieldwork with you.

... PhD compatriots and other colleagues: Sanne Frandsen, Didde Humle, Christina Frydensbjerg, Janni Thursgaard Pedersen, Maja Rosenstock, Carina Skovmøller, Robert Strand, Dorte Boesby Dahl, Anne Vestergård, Anne Roepsdorff, Linda Harrison Jensen, Wencke Gwozdz, Andreas Rasche, Kathrine Hoffmann Pii, Kirstine Zink Pedersen, Trine Pallesen, Mette Mogensen, Rasmus Kjærgaard Rasmussen, Anja Svejgaard Pors, Shannon Hessel, Karin Strzeletz Ivertsen, Kari Jalonen, Carina Bayerdörffer, Mette Brehm Johansen, Anne Petersen, Anders Koed Madsen, Ib Tunby Guldbrandsen, Ursula Plesner, Lærke Højgaard Christiansen, Frans Bevort, Cecilie Glerup, Elisabeth Naima Mikkelsen, Jane Bjørn Vedel, and Karen Boll. Thank you to all of you for input, inspiration, and camaraderie.

... The IOA department at CBS for adopting me.

... The ICM department at CBS and cbsCSR for being excellent "birthparents."

... The Wise Mothers: Karen, Carla, Tea, and Ditte for your wisdom, friendship, and perspective.

... My own wise mother, Lone, and her Ib, for your all round solid parental backing and all the babysitting.

... Brian, Kai Lukas, and Luna Ellen for being love in my life every day.

I.1

An Introduction

This is a thesis about making strategy work in a biotech corporation. The present introduction outlines the rationale for studying strategy work now and the specific research question for the thesis. The work is positioned within the Organization Studies tradition and the anatomy of the thesis is outlined.

What Is This?

This PhD thesis is an Organizational Ethnography of strategy work in the Stakeholder Engagement Department at a biotechnology company that is, here, called Bioforte. The work describes and reflects on specific episodes and themes from the work involved in developing the department strategy. The strategy work on which this thesis is based took place over three months in the fall of 2010.

Why Strategy Now?

You only need to turn on the radio, open a newspaper, or peek into any executive's inbox to realize that we are in an Age of Strategy. Strategy is in the public sector, in education, in private companies, in government, and even in families; it is in all kinds of organizations and is often present at all levels in those organizations. In the last few decades, strategy has moved from being primarily a concern of executives to a concept that permeates all layers of organizing. Every department has a strategy, every project practically requires a strategy, and, indeed, every ambitious individual needs a career strategy. Strategy permeates organizational life from top to bottom.

The stakes are high with strategy: It has become an influential force in most organizations in contemporary Western society, and because we live our lives in

organizations, it is, by extension, an influential force in our lives. This thesis takes a close look at strategy with the purpose of further explicating this force that holds so much sway over the spaces in which our lives unfold. This study of strategy work is focused on unfolding how and what strategy becomes, which is then, by extension, also an exploration of what we as humans in organizations become.

Defining Strategy

Strategy in everyday language is not easily defined: If a person is strategic, it can mean that she is clever, smart, careful, goal-oriented (usually positive qualities), or perhaps manipulative and calculating (usually negative qualities). Likewise, when activities in organizations are labeled as strategic, it can mean that they are more important or valuable than other activities; that they are long-term; that they are planned; that they belong to a different plane or level; or that someone else, usually higher up in a hierarchy, has decided they must be done. In addition, strategic is also used to signify the stuff that is not fun—that which *has* to be done, or even that which comes after the everyday business is over—so, in that sense, that which can wait. Acting strategically can also mean that you are acting with an eye to the future while in possession of privileged knowledge, such that your actions do not make sense to others in the present because the actions are part of a larger scheme—which may or may not be revealed at a later point. The label strategic can function as an excuse—denoting that which is symbolic and necessary to satisfy outside interests. "What is your strategy?" has become synonymous with asking what the plan is, but it can also be a question about the methods a person will employ to achieve that which is set forth as the plan (the plan that can also be called strategy). In our everyday language, the concept of strategy is frequently and widely invoked, yet it is impossible to pin down.

It does not get any less ambiguous by turning to the academic discussions of strategy: As Chapter I.2 will unfold, management and organizational researchers working on strategy do not agree on what strategy is. Some argue it is a rational exercise organizations must possess; others that it is a process that is really only possible to comprehend retroactively; and still others maintain that strategy is everyday practices. It seems to be impossible to definitively define strategy, and perhaps it is also destructive (at least for strategy), to try to pin it down.

The question, What is strategy? does not have one right answer because the answers always depend on the context and on the person, or thing, giving the answers. Strategy can therefore be said to exist as many things simultaneously.

My position from the beginning of the research that forms the basis of this thesis has been to assume that *it is unknowable what strategy actually and truly is*. It is not only a futile quest to search for the definitive essence of strategy; it is also uninteresting. Instead, what is important and interesting is the practice of strategy: How strategy becomes different things in various contexts, how people use strategy, and not least, how it is made; in other words, the focus this thesis adopts is the exploration of what it takes to make strategy work.

It is important that this thesis does not examine strategy as such, but focuses on strategy work. For this thesis, I define strategy work as *that which people in organizations do when they say that they are doing strategy*. And because this is a study of a specific strategy process in the Stakeholder Engagement Department in an organization that I call Bioforte, I can specify further: *Strategy work is what Bioforte's Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group do when they say they are doing strategy*. In other words, strategy work is what it is *in practice*. If this definition feels slightly unsatisfactory, do not despair: At the end of this thesis, I will, based on the stories of strategy work at Bioforte, return to it and offer specification and qualification.

The approach to defining the object of study, strategy work, as that which occurs in the field under a given name naturally implicates me as well, because in this ethnographic study, I too am a person in the field. This then poses the question of whether I am right when I sit in a meeting thinking that what is going on is no longer strategy work but has drifted into something else. What if everyone else agrees that it is still strategy work? This quandary is perhaps exactly the point of the thesis—strategy is continuously defined and created through collective work, and part of the practice of collective work is disagreement and finding momentary agreement solid enough to allow work to happen before disagreement disrupts the process again. It is all about *making it work*.

The Title and The Research Question

Thus we come to the title of this thesis, *Making Strategy Work.* The text unfolds this phrase in two ways. One, as "*Making* strategy work" and two, as "making *Strategy* work." The former emphasizes the making and practices of strategy work as everyday activities. That is, the specific undertakings by a group of people who have the task of doing strategy. The latter reading of the title, "making *Strategy* work," tilts the focus to what it requires to make "Strategy" as a concept function, or work. The stories told in the ethnography section of the thesis are both about what people in a multinational biotech corporation do when they are doing strategy, and also about what it takes to make strategy as an organizational idea or concept work and be useful.

Not surprisingly, a quick Amazon.com search will reveal that *Making Strategy Work* is also the title of a few management books. These books, however, seem to be concerned with the "rolling out" of strategy in an organization. Within mainstream Strategic Management, some scholars distinguish between strategy formulation and implementation, and within that framework, the phrase *Making Strategy Work* connotes a "how to" for strategy implementation. This perhaps more traditional and straightforward understanding of the phrase exists as a shadow of, or footnote to, how this thesis understands and explores *Making Strategy Work.*

Extending from the title, the guiding research question for this thesis is: ***What does strategy work do?*** This kind of question has a set of assumptions and implications. First, for a question this broad, it is necessary to specify and contextualize, as it is impossible to study all strategy work everywhere. The choice for this thesis is to focus on what strategy work is in the middle of a corporation by examining strategy work in the Stakeholder Engagement Department at the multinational biotech corporation Bioforte. Second, the phrasing of the question has performative implications, as saying that strategy work can *do something* is not a matter of granting human agency to strategy work, but rather a matter of acknowledging that all things, human and non-human, have ramifications and produce effects in the world. These kinds of effects are considered from the perspective that we cannot know in advance what strategy work is going to do, or whether it is good or bad. Third, the research question of what strategy work does foregrounds the everyday making of strategy as both the starting point for analysis and as worthy of sustained academic attention.

Traditionally, studies interested in strategy have focused on two approaches: They have either mobilized an industrial economics tool kit to do research that posits organizational strategy as an independent variable with firm performance as a dependent variable (Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002); or they have taken a retroactive perspective to examine the unfolding of strategy in corporations much like a historian would (Mintzberg 2007). This thesis explicitly departs from both of those traditions to hone in on the real time action of creating strategy, that is, on strategy work.

While earlier studies of strategy have focused mainly on corporate strategy, this thesis, following the development of strategy into a wider organizational concept, studies strategy work in the middle of the organization at the departmental level. As an approach to studying strategy work as it happens, the thesis uses Organizational Ethnography. By Organizational Ethnography is meant extended engagement with the field where the researcher both *participates in and observes* work as it unfolds in the organization. Furthermore, Organizational Ethnography also designates the analytical text in Part II.

In the last few decades, a research tradition labeled Strategy as Practice has emerged which places emphasis on conceptualizing strategy as practice (Golsorkhi et al. 2010). In Chapter I.2, the thesis enters into conversation with this stream of strategy research to develop a space for contribution labeled Critical Strategy as Practice. Strategy as Practice studies primarily take a qualitative approach and use, for example, interviews and observations to study strategy. These kinds of approaches are related to the ethnographic tradition, however, there are surprisingly few ethnographies devoted to exploring strategy work (Vaara and Whittington 2012), and this thesis is oriented explicitly towards this lacuna.

Organizational Ethnographies can come from a variety of theoretical starting points; this thesis is theoretically anchored by a conceptual braid of practice, narrative and, performativity. Chapter I.3 unfolds each of the three strands and discusses them in relation to each other. The strand of practice develops the notion of a practice theoretical approach that conceives of individual practice as embedded in a social and shared practice. Thus understood, actions both create and reflect the social fabric. The strand of narrative discusses stories as an ordering mechanism and as a mediating mechanism negotiating between the

individual and social realm of practice. Furthermore, the chapter conveys the idea that an ethnographic study is triply narrative: It engages with stories in the field; it generates stories from the field; and it presents the results in a research narrative. The last strand of the braid, performativity, is unfolded to communicate an understanding of the social and the particular/individual as mutually constitutive. Taken together, these three strands demonstrate a worldview that: refutes a representational conceptualization of reality in favor of a performative model; is devoted to exploring the interplay between practice as individual action and practice as a normative social configuration; acknowledges both the aspect of generative possibility and of preexisting determination in human work.

Methodologically the thesis employs Organizational Ethnography, which in this case designates both the approach to studying strategy work in the field and the research product (especially Part II). Chapter I.4 outlines Ethnography as a work process consisting of three overlapping and mutually constitutive tasks: fieldwork, headwork and textwork (Van Maanen 2011). The Ethnography is anchored by the theoretical braid described above and discussed more in depth in Chapter I.3

Strategy Work Rather Than Strategizing

The object of study in question is framed as "strategy work" rather than as "strategizing," and this choice is not (solely) dictated by my desire to pun on the idiomatic expression "making it work" in the title. Given the, by now fairly established, move within the field of organization studies to consider organization both as a verb and a noun (Weick 1969), it might seem fitting to use the –ing form and use "strategizing." However, I have refrained from this for several reasons, and instead opted for the term "strategy work." Firstly, "strategizing" has a business-speak quality, which to my ears sounds very deliberate and rational, something that this thesis thoroughly questions. Secondly, I read it as a gerund, not as a present participle. Grammatically, the –ing ending can either designate a gerund or a present participle. A gerund behaves like a noun, as for example in "strategizing is important." A present participle designates a verb form or an adjective, and I believe that is how most scholars read the organizing form (Czarniawska 2008). In my touring of the strategy literatures, strategizing seems not to invoke a processual understanding of strategy making nor the doing of strategy broadly defined, but rather how organizations position themselves according to the

environment—in effect, a synonym for a traditional Strategic Management understanding of strategy[1]. Apart from the above reasons not to use strategizing as a key concept, the term "strategy work" has some virtues that I wish to embrace in this thesis: "Strategy work" connects to a broader tradition, and a recent revival trend, of taking "work" seriously in organization theory, which emphasizes not only what organizational actors are doing, but also *how* and *why* and *with what consequences* they do something (Phillips and Lawrence 2012). Additionally, the term "strategy work" designates *the work*, rather than a specific theory, hypothesis, or model, as the starting point for the analysis (Barley and Kunda 2001). In this case, the analytical focus is deliberately not put on Strategy as a product, but instead on the process of making strategy—that is, *on the work*.

Strategy Work in Organizational Studies

An underlying argument for this thesis is that strategy conditions organization in modern Western society. In organizations we live with strategy always already. There is no escaping strategy, but there is lots of doing, using, shaping, and making strategy. The concept of *conditioning* is evoked to describe this force because it entails multiple meanings: A condition is the underlying frame of things; a disease; the state of an object (in good condition); something that restricts, modifies, and shapes (conditioned by); a qualification; but sometimes also a prerequisite (with the condition that). Strategy is a powerful force shaping contemporary organizing, and is, in turn, shaped by contemporary organizing. In this reciprocal relation, strategy is something that is shaped and also something that shapes. It is something that is both done and does. The interest here is not to prove that this is the case, but rather to take this assumption as a starting point for exploring *how* this double movement happens.

The reason to pause (for three years in my case, probably much less in yours) on strategy is exactly that it conditions organizing—not simply in rational ways and

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[1] The strategizing term has been adopted by some key Strategy as Practice scholars (Whittington 2003; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007), and as Chapter I.2 will show, this thesis contributes to a specific stream of this tradition of strategy research. However, for the reasons outlined, I prioritize using the term "strategy work."

straightforward ways, but also in complicated and delicate ways that unfold in the everyday practice of making strategy work.

This thesis presupposes that organization and strategy are strongly connected, and that it is therefore necessary to consider strategy work if we want to understand contemporary organizing and organizations. Conceiving of strategy work as a crucial component of organizing then becomes a strong plea for a conceiving of strategy *within* the discipline of Organization Studies. This is not to say that strategy and organization are one and the same, or that strategy work and organizing are; in contrast to Richard Whittington et al., I am not eliding the two (Whittington et al. 2006). While I do maintain that strategy conditions organization, I do not argue that strategy fully determines organization. In this way, *strategy is seen as constitutive of organizations but not as fully constituting them.*

As mentioned earlier, I define strategy work as that which people do when they say they are doing strategy. Organizing, on the other hand, is here defined as the embedded, or contextual, actions that make up the organization. This definition is very similar to Melville Dalton's from half a century ago: "Organization is seen not as a chiseled entity, but as a shifting set of contained and ongoing counter phases of action" (Dalton 1959, 4). It is through organizing that the organization becomes, continuously. Hence, the task of Organization Studies is to always remember that organization is neither fully solid, nor purely liquid: "The apparent solidity of 'the organization' is an accomplishment of a process – organizing – which occurs in time and requires a day by day, indeed minute by minute, enactment: the organization of the organization, so to speak" (Grey 2012, 15). As a consequence of seeing organization as both product and process, the researcher's gaze needs to include how people in organizations are always, as the proverbial saying goes, making it work.

Anatomy of the Thesis

As mentioned, this thesis consists of three parts. **Part I** includes this introduction, a literature review, a theoretical chapter, and a method chapter. In **Chapter I.2**, the literature review provides a mapping of academic thinking around strategy with the purpose of demonstrating

how the thesis configures a space for contribution in the overlap between two established streams of strategy research. This overlap is characterized as Critical Strategy as Practice.

Following the literature review, the theoretical **Chapter I.3** weaves a conceptual "braid" of practice, narrative, and performativity. The goal with this chapter is to anchor the ethnographic approach theoretically by outlining a specific postmodern understanding of how the world works, and, consequently, how we might engage in the quest for understanding it. This chapter also provides conceptual discussions of some key tropes I draw upon in the ethnography such as distinction, metaphor, and multiplicity.

The theory chapter is followed by the method **Chapter I.4**. This section discusses Organizational Ethnography as method and product; it presents the case of Bioforte, and the story of how I came to study strategy work there. The chapter also outlines specifically how the study was conducted as a three-month ethnographic participant observation of strategy work in the Stakeholder Engagement Department during the fall of 2010. The influence of my pregnancy on the ethnographic engagement is also described. This chapter further outlines how I have drawn on writing as an analytical tool and explains the reasoning behind the stylistic choices in Part II. Lastly, it presents my biggest challenge as a participant observer in the field.

Part II is the analytical core of the thesis and is offered to the reader without explicit references to theory, although the theoretical braid developed in Chapter I.3 consistently guides the analysis. The ethnographic text opens with an overview of the characters in Bioforte and a prologue. Beyond the opening, Part II is divided into five chapters: **Chapter II.1** Organizing Us: Do We Make Strategy or Does Strategy Make Us?; **Chapter II.2** Organizing Work: Getting It To Work; **Chapter II. 3** Organizing Selves: Life in Work and Work in Life; **Chapter II.4** Out of the Ordinary: Strategy as an Organizing Device; and **Chapter II.5** So Simple and So Complex: Tensions of Strategy Work.

Each chapter in Part II offers an unfolding and simplification of one aspect of what strategy work does at Bioforte, and due to the thematic structure, the organization of the material in Part II does not follow a strict chronology. Taken together, the five chapters thus demonstrate how strategy work does many things; it has organizational effects and products beyond what mainstream strategy research is normally willing to consider as an effect or a product of strategy work.

And finally, **Part III** crystallizes the findings from the ethnographic text and discusses them in relation to the theoretical and methodological considerations in Part I so as to pinpoint the contributions of the thesis as a whole. Part III also outlines some limitations of this study as well as some directions for further research. A short conclusion closes the thesis.

I.2

Literature Review: Three Streams of Strategy Studies

The chapter contains a mapping of three streams in academic strategy research: Strategic Management, Critical Approaches to Strategy, and Strategy as Practice. This classification is demonstrated by a model (Figure 1) that forms the basis for a discussion of the relations between the streams and the nuances of each tradition. Based on the contours of the three different streams of strategy research, the contribution of this thesis is situated in the overlap between Critical Approaches to Strategy and Strategy as Practice.

When, Where, and How to Begin When Discussing Strategy?

The creation stories and birthplaces of strategy are many. Historical weight and significance are invoked by designating texts such as Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Carl von Clausewitz' *On War*, or even *the Old Testament* as points of origin (Bracker 1980; Carter, Clegg, and Kornberger 2009; Clegg et al. 2011). The etymological roots of strategy invoke the Greek word for office or command of a general and establish strategy as a primarily masculine concept with military roots and influences (Hoskin, Macve, and Stone 2006). Similar military roots can be found when looking up "campaign" and "mission"; concepts we also readily use in organizational life today. For the present purpose of analyzing strategy in a contemporary organizational context, these more ancient, religious, spiritual, mythical, and military points of origin take the role of backdrops while turning to strategy as an organizational term.

In terms of timing, strategy as an organizational concept emerged in post-World War II North America (Bracker 1980; Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002). Writers such as Alfred D. Chandler (1962) and Igor H. Ansoff (1965) were some of the early founding fathers for Strategic Management and they wrote specifically for business managers. Once strategy became a thing in business, it did not take long for the academic discipline of Strategic Management to emerge out of a North American interplay between universities, businesses, and consultants (Hambrick and Ming-Jer 2008). The business of management consulting rose

alongside Strategic Management with much of the consulting by management consultants concerned with making better strategy for corporate clients (Engwall and Kipping 2002).

The societal backdrop for Strategic Management was a North American world marked by the Cold War where questions of how to plan for an unpredictable future obviously did not apply solely to business. The idea that cunning analysis combined with solid planning was necessary to survive certainly pervaded the political sphere; with a strong attachment to analysis and planning, Strategic Management is entangled with this larger social current (Rasche 2008). In the post-World War II era, when Strategic Management emerged as a discipline, two recent World Wars had provided solid empirical evidence that the world could get out of control with disastrous consequences. If you have seen the world fall apart, it seems a sensible approach to attempt to map, flatten, and contain complexity in order to control impending disorder and chaos.

At the end of the twentieth century, once Strategic Management was a firmly established field, Critical Approaches to Strategy emerged critiquing the normative assumptions of the discipline. In the past decade, Strategy as Practice has gained ground as a third stream of strategy research drawing attention to the practice of strategy. The figure below maps these three streams (Figure 1). Even though the development of the strategy fields arrange in a loose chronology, it is important to note that Strategic Management has not been replaced, or even displaced, by Critical Approaches to Strategy or by Strategy as Practice. Even though Stephen Cummings, in his book *ReCreating Strategy*, depicts a broad move in strategy studies towards more postmodern approaches, this move is happening alongside a continuation of the traditional Strategic Management studies rather than as a revolution of a unified field (Cummings 2008). Strategic Management remains an immensely powerful discipline that continues to produce mountains of academic research, textbooks, and airport literature.

Strategic Management
-organizations have strategy

Planning   Process

- Industrial economic heritage
- Firm performance as dependent variable
- Formulation separate from Implementation

- Psychological and sociological heritage
- Formulation and implementation intertwined

Planning: E.g.: (Ansoff 1965; Chandler 1962; Porter 1980; Prahalad and Hamel 1997; Kim and Mauborgne 2005)
Process: E.g.: (Mintzberg 1994; Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002; Mintzberg 2007; Pettigrew 2007)

Practice as empirical interest

Strategy as Practice
-organizations do strategy

- Eclectic influences
- Discursive approaches prevalent
- Understandings of "practice" span from empirical to philosophical
- Wide ontological variance
- Ethnographic studies

E.g.: (Whittington 2003, 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010; Vaara and Whittington 2012)

Critical Approaches to Strategy
-strategy is socially constructed

Practice as philosophical approach (practices constitute reality)

- Critical philosophical tradition
- Discourse analysis a la Foucault
- Strategy as abstract concept primarily

E.g.: (Knights and Morgan 1991; Alvesson and Willmott 1995; Levy, Alvesson, and Willmott 2003; Ezzamel and Willmott 2004; Grandy and Mills 2004; Rasche 2008; Carter, Clegg, and Kornberger 2004, 2008, 2009, 2010)

Figure 1: Three Streams of Strategy Studies[2]

Beyond mapping the three streams of strategy research and their overlaps, the model above also identifies what I see as key assumptions about strategy underlying the various approaches: Strategic Management as a field believes that "organizations have strategy"; Critical Approaches question this through the argument that "strategy is socially constructed"; and Strategy as Practice, broadly speaking, assumes that "Organizations do strategy." Building

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[2] As I will discuss, Strategic Management has a fetish for models, and the irony of offering my own model of strategy studies is not lost on me. However, developing the model has served as a useful heuristic device in navigating the vast ocean of academic work on strategy, so I include it with the hope that it will also be useful for the reader.

from the assumptions of each stream, we can with slight exaggeration say that within Strategic Management, strategy emerges as good—it is necessary, it ensures survival, and it enables organizations to function. Within Critical Approaches to Strategy, again put rather crudely, strategy emerges as bad—it disciplines, it controls, and it oppresses. Within Strategy as Practice, approaches span from adhering to a traditional Strategic Management conception of strategy as a positive force to a more critical take on strategy as suppressive, and also includes positions between those two poles.

The scholarly focus of this thesis is found in the starred square in the overlap between Critical Approaches to Strategy and Strategy as Practice. This position, which I will develop more thoroughly at the end of the chapter, adopts a social constructivist, or more specifically a practice theoretical, view of reality from Critical Approaches and a focus on practices in context from the Strategy as Practice tradition. This implies a view of strategy as not already pigeonholed as either good or bad. Strategy takes and it gives. It is also from within this overlap of combining a critical lens and a practice-oriented approach that the research question for the thesis of "*What does strategy work do?*" becomes possible. The following section will discuss each of three strategy streams represented by the boxes in the figure and outline a space for contribution in the landscape of strategy studies.

Strategic Management: Planning Approach

The model identifies two approaches within Strategic Management: Planning and Process. The Planning Approach to Strategic Management , which is also sometimes called the Design School of Strategy, the Content, the Rational, or the Classical approach, is a rational and logical endeavor that defines strategy as a form of planning that adopts much of its theoretical apparatus from industrial economics, and almost always posits firm (i.e. financial) performance as the dependent variable (Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002). A core assumption of Strategic Management is that successful management depends upon strategy; strategy is seen as something necessary to create in order to succeed as an organization (Whittington 2001). In the broadest terms, the discipline is concerned with questions of how organizations should respond to the environment, with the environment defined as that outside of the organization such as competitors, government regulations, and industry trends. The founding fathers of this approach are Chandler (1962) and Ansoff

(1965). Michael Porter is a contemporary management guru who exemplifies this strategy tradition (Porter 1980).

The early scholars of the Planning Approach were concerned with providing practical tools for managers facing complex decisions. In the preface to his 1965 book, *Corporate Strategy*, Ansoff writes: "this book provides a practical method for strategic decision making within a business firm. It is addressed to working managers responsible for such decisions" (Ansoff 1965, ix). Forty years later, W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne echo that message, albeit in a more sassy tone, in the preface to a recent take on the Planning Approach to Strategic Management titled *Blue Ocean Strategy*: "We invite you to read this book to learn how you can be a driver of this expansion [Blue Ocean market creation] in the future" (Kim and Mauborgne 2005, xi). Providing useful advice and analytical tools to people who have to make decisions is a key raison d'être for Strategic Management.

The analytical tools that traditional Strategic Management offers often come in the shape of models that aim at simplifying complexity in order to facilitate decision-making. These models come in the shape of pyramids, two-by-two matrices, flow charts, tables, coordinate systems, and so fort. For a recent strategy model collection aimed at managers please see Krogerus and Tschäppeler (2011). The book has an accompanying website and app.

The obsession and preference for models in Strategic Management has a fetish-like quality. The wonderful thing about strategy models, and the reason they are immensely popular, is that they reduce complexity and explain messy problems in simple terms. Furthermore, a simple model is easy to remember and helpful as a communication tool. Conversely, the terrible thing about strategy models is of course that they flatten the world: they reduce complexity and explain messy problems in simple terms. Stephen Cummings and David Wilson, in their discussions of models, claim that as long as the models are seen as partial models, not as reality, and are used in combination, then they are more helpful than harmful to managers navigating the complexity of organizing (Cummings and Wilson 2003; Cummings 2002). Similarly, researchers report that managers perceive strategy models as helpful in combination and see the tools as complementing one another (Wright, Paroutis, and Blettner 2013). The use and interference of different models and tools is one area of strategy work that has recently seen a surge of scholarly interest (Kaplan 2011; Kaplan and Jarzabkowski 2006; Spee and Jarzabkowski 2009).

Strategy models are also emblematic of a specific "strategic" language often associated with Strategic Management. This is the slick language of management deploying terms such as "competitive advantage," "cost benefit analysis," "strategic objectives," "influencers," and "drivers." Chris Carter, Stuart Clegg, and Martin Kornberger cleverly call this kind of language "Managerial Esperanto" (2009), and tongue-in-cheek guides for how to gain fluency in "MBA speak" abound on the internet (Wong 2011). While it is easy to dismiss this kind of language as ridiculous, it must give us pause that it is so widespread. This ubiquity hint at the fact that many people in organizations find the language useful. Just as with the strategy models, strategy speak must be recognized for what it gives, namely, an adaptable *and* specific vocabulary. The language of traditional Strategic Management has a certain looseness that allows it to be translated into a variety of specific contexts yet at the same time remaining unmistakably strategy (Cummings 2002).

Strategic Management: Process Approach

The Planning Approach to Strategic Management is complemented by the Process Approach, which, broadly speaking, argues that conceiving of Strategy as the perfect plan is unrealistic and unhelpful because decisions in organizations actually happen in a messy and political manner that makes the division between formulation and implementation impossible and unrealistic (Mintzberg 1994). Henry Mintzberg has become a sort of godfather of the Process approach, and his definition of strategy as a pattern in a stream of actions may be the most well-known and influential definition of strategy from this approach (Mintzberg 2007).

The Process Approach is also called the Emergence Approach and draws on psychological and sociological theories to understand strategy. As a result, the Process Approach claims to humanize Strategic Management by opening "the black box of the firm bobbing helplessly around the economic bath tub" (Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002, 12). The argument implied by calling the firm a black box is that the economic theories favored by the Planning Approach are not able to adequately investigate the human dimensions of organization. Here the Process Approach claims that a theoretical repertoire stemming from psychology and sociology provides better tools.

The Process Approach argues for a take on strategy that focuses on how it actually unfolds (Pettigrew 2007). The implication is then that strategy emerges retroactively because

decisions and actions can only be classified as strategic after the fact. Some decisions and actions that seem inconsequential in the moment may turn out to have significant influence on the direction of an organization. The task of the strategy scholar then becomes identifying and explaining the strategic pattern, which requires longitudinal retroactive studies (Mintzberg 2007). Methodologically, strategy researchers must then look to the discipline of history.

The Process Approach to strategy foregrounds the messy and political aspects of strategy work in organizations (Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002; Mintzberg 1998). In Mintzberg's book-long elaboration of the argument against the Planning Approach to Strategic Management, *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning,* he accuses the Planning Approach to Strategic Management of "normative naïveté" because of the focus on how strategy *should be* rather than how it actually *is* (Mintzberg 1994, 226). Although Mintzberg and colleagues in places advocate for abandoning the Planning Approach entirely, their efforts have not been successful. In fact, the Planning and the Process Approaches are often presented side by side, for example, in textbooks on strategy and in MBA courses on strategy.

The two takes on Strategic Management, Planning and Process, feed each other to a certain extent, as they can ping pong back and forth in endless loops of argument over whether strategy is a matter of constructing a pure and ideal state of being that organizations should strive for, or whether it is a more messy political reality that organizations work through, and which therefore can only be fully perceived retroactively. The most famous example of juxtaposition is the so-called Ansoff-Mintzberg controversy, which played out in the Strategic Management Journal in 1990-91 (Mintzberg 1991; Ansoff 1991). In this public debate, iconic representatives of the two approaches to Strategic Management defend their positions and argue over whether scholars of strategy can conceptualize thinking and doing as separate entities.

Critique of Strategic Management from Within

Critique of Strategic Management can be classified into two groups: Critique from within the discipline and critique from outside the discipline; I will discuss the former in the present section and the latter in a subsequent and separate section. The critique from within displays

skepticism with the goal of improving the Strategic Management discipline, whereas the critique from outside Strategic Management is more directly critical. This displays a more radical position where the critique is not aimed at improving the discipline, but rather focused on exposing the assumptions of the Strategic Management field—a move that naturally undoes, or at least tries to unsettle, the discipline.

From within Strategic Management, the most salient points of critique are in line with the Process Approach's accusations that the traditional Planning Approach to Strategic Management is overly naïve about human nature and that the Industrial Economic theoretical apparatus severely limits the discipline. In 1986, Paul Shrivastava provided an early voice in critiquing the ideologically monolithic nature of Strategic Management and called for "less ideologically value-laden and more universal knowledge about strategic management of organizations" (Shrivastava 1986, 364). Some scholars in the Critical Approach to Strategy tradition have used his plea as a starting point, although they would take issue with the idea of "universal knowledge." but his article has been largely ignored by the Strategic Management community (Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002). Another noteworthy early point of critique of Strategic Management came from Linda Smircich and Charles Stubbart, who argued against the assumption that organizations and their environment are a priori separate (Smircich and Stubbart 1985). Instead they introduced the enactment model as a figure for how the distinction between organizations and their environment must be continually created or enacted. The consequence identified as a result of the application of this "enactment model" is that the task of strategic managers shifts to become "management of meaning" (Smircich and Stubbart 1985).

As mentioned, it is an explicit ambition in the Strategic Management field that the theoretical work should be applicable to practice. From the outset, the Strategic Management discipline developed in the interplay between business and academia: Academic scholars and business executives collaborated, discussed, taught one another, and sometimes they were even one and the same person. Professors at business schools would study what corporations did and then write strategy books for executives and teach strategy in business schools. At times, the same people who were taught strategy in business schools would go work with strategy in the field and then sometimes even return to teach strategy to a new set of students

in business schools (Ezzamel and Willmott 2004). This entanglement between theory and practice results in a circular flow of influence in which academic arguments have a very direct impact on how people in organizations behave and think, and where people in organizations have a very direct impact on how academics behave and think. This inbred nature of the strategy field has become a point of criticism. Perhaps more than any other topic in management studies, strategy exemplifies the double loop between practice and theory (Ghoshal 2005).

Additionally, Strategic Management has been characterized as a non-reflexive field. Pettigrew et al. attribute this "historical predisposition not to critically reflect" to the managerial orientation of the discipline and note that most managers have little patience for critical reflection (Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002, 11). The result of this non-reflexive nature of Strategic Management is that the discipline rarely asks questions about issues such as the shortcomings and unintended consequences of Strategic Management practice. However, for the past two decades, these kinds of questions have come from critical scholars outside the discipline.

Critical Approaches to Strategy from Outside Strategic Management

The critical voices talking back to Strategic Management are represented in Figure 1 by the box titled "Critical Approaches to Strategy"; this stream responds explicitly to Strategic Management, hence the triangular arrow between the two boxes in the figure. Critical Approaches to Strategy can be classified within Critical Management Studies (CMS) – a branch of organization studies focused on analysis of organizations from a postmodern philosophical perspective drawing on Critical Theory and privileging themes of power and emancipation (Alvesson and Willmott 2003; Fournier and Grey 2000; Alvesson 2008; Levy, Alvesson, and Willmott 2003). Turning to strategy, Critical Management Scholars point out that strategy has an "aura of top perspective, elitism and power" (Alvesson and Willmott 1995, 101) and have taken traditional Strategic Management to task for ignoring historical, cultural, and political conditions and consequences for strategy (Knights and Morgan 1991). Additionally, Critical Approaches to Strategy direct attention to how Strategic Management does not recognize the interrelation between strategy and identity (Alvesson and Willmott 1995). The critique points to the assumptions about agency in Strategic Management:

Managers have the power to know the sources of competitive advantage, to predict the external environment, and to deploy business resources to secure strategic objectives.

The Critical Approach to Strategy provides a clear contrast to Strategic Management, as well as to the voices of criticism within that discipline, by questioning the ideological foundation for strategy. Strategic Management process scholars such as Pettigrew and Mintzberg, while critical of the Planning Approach, do not examine the concept of strategy itself. Nor are they particularly interested in how specific, and most often oppressive, political and social conditions are reflected and reproduced in the practice of strategy. In that sense, the Process Approach is still very much "pro-strategy." Even though Mintzberg vigorously critiques the Planning Approach to Strategic Management, he is also dismissive of the idea that strategy "enacts" organizational reality (Mintzberg 1994, 245). In other words, Mintzberg is not interested in analyzing the performative nature of strategy—a key hallmark of Critical Approaches to Strategy. Likewise, Ezzamel and Willmott, from a critical position, argue that the Process Approach to strategy that Mintzberg represents pays no attention to, and possibly denies, the interrelationship between subjects and objects of knowledge (Ezzamel and Willmott 2004).

David Knights and Glen Morgan's 1991 article appropriates strategy for a critical management studies agenda and is often used as a starting point for Critical Approaches to Strategy (Knights and Morgan 1991). The work offers a critical examination of strategy and the interrelationship between strategy and identity: "Conflict over 'strategy' is therefore more than just a question of career politics and market competition. It touches on the very sense of what it means to be human as well as having effects that readily legitimize prevailing relations of inequality and privilege in contemporary organizations and institutions" (Knights and Morgan 1991 , 251). Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of genealogy, Knights and Morgan provide an analysis of the specific conditions that enabled Strategic Management to gain the tremendous influence that it did. Their work points out that the managerial discourse in pre-World War II United States provided the ground for strategy to emerge when three factors aligned: restructuring of ownership relations, market conditions, and developments within the structure of organizations. Knights and Morgan argue that the space for strategy discourse to emerge was created by the following: Owners becoming further

removed from the everyday business and therefore developing a need for overview information; markets becoming much more competitive due to international developments; and, finally, organizations responding to the above challenges by developing increasingly complex organizational structures.

While these factors are crucial in tracing strategy's emergence, the discussion by Knights and Morgan must be complemented by other factors: As I have already mentioned, I would add to this that the societal and political context in post-World War II North America, in which strategy emerged as a concept, was a world where the unpredictable had to be controlled and where level-minded preparedness was seen as necessary to avert disaster. In addition, the symbiotic relationship between consultants, business schools, and corporations fed strategy's growth spurt. Furthermore, the twentieth century brought about an increasing focus on work as a space for individuals to create a purposeful life; a factor that should also be considered when examining how strategy came to be.

Knights and Morgan's work is an example of how Critical Approaches to Strategy question the 'naturalness' of strategy by examining the underlying assumptions and conditions leading to accepting strategy as a given. From this critical vantage point, analysis of strategy must question the context that enables the very existence of strategy. In other words, strategy is always and already political. This position implies a critique of mainstream Strategic Management approaches to strategy that takes for granted the conditions under which top management makes decisions and creates action plans.

The larger emancipatory agenda of CMS involves probing the ideological underpinnings of management as a whole, and consequently, Critical Approaches to Strategy question the privileged position of the very concept strategy (Levy, Alvesson, and Willmott 2003). The consequences of adopting this specific take on strategy is that research must pay close attention to how strategy is constructed and to what it creates. In this way, Critical Approaches to Strategy consider strategy a performative practice and provides a key contribution to strategy scholarship with the introduction, and cementing, of the argument that strategy creates the problems it proposes to solve.

Given the tradition and critical theoretical apparatus of Critical Approaches to Strategy, the work has primarily discussed strategy in the abstract and general sense, rather than the specific. However, more recently, some critical studies that engage with specific empirical cases have begun to emerge (Kornberger and Clegg 2011; Phillips, Sewell, and Jaynes 2008). Consistent with Critical Management Studies as a whole, Critical Approaches to Strategy often look to Michel Foucault for theoretical inspiration (McKinlay et al. 2010; Knights and Morgan 1991; Ezzamel and Willmott 2004; Allard-Poesi 2010). The themes that emerge most clearly in these works are Foucauldian notions of discourse and power as well as his concept of genealogy. Other poststructuralist thinkers have also been brought to bear on strategy. Recent work includes Andres Rasche's use of Jacques Derrida to deconstruct what Rasche identifies as three fundamental paradoxes of Strategic Management: Environment/Organization; Formulation/Implementation; Rule and Resource/ Application (Rasche 2008). Gina Grandy and Albert Mills pick up the thread from Knights and Morgan and explore strategy as simulacra (Grandy and Mills 2004). Borrowing the concept of simulacra from Baudrillard, they argue that strategy has become the copy without original. Similar to Knights and Morgan, they resist the idea that strategy is a response to a problem, rather framing strategy as a discourse that creates both the problem and the solution it is concerned with: "Strategic management exists to make us believe that there are 'problems' to be solved in the 'real' world, that there is in fact a 'real' world, in which 'problems' exist" (Grandy and Mills 2004). This quote provides a succinct summary of the aforementioned important contribution of Critical Approaches to Strategy as a whole, which is the refusal to take the concept strategy for granted. Critical Approaches destabilize the naturalness of strategy and thereby posit Strategic Management as a field that creates the very problems it proposes to solve. As a whole, Critical Approach argue that strategy is a specific concept connected to a set of discourses that warrant analytical focus, exactly because it has become "naturalized."

Critique of Critical Approaches to Strategy: Coming Full Circle

Critical Approaches to Strategy exist alongside Strategic Management, and the critique of strategy has not caused much of a stir in the Strategic Management community. The reason for this is probably that Strategic Management and Critical Approaches to Strategy are based

on fundamentally different worldviews: Strategic Management, by and large, adopts positivist or realist positions, which assume that reality exists. Critical scholars, on the other hand, operate from a social constructivist point of departure, which assumes that reality is constructed by way of social processes. Broadly speaking, in the critical approaches, reality does not exist a priori; it is performed or enacted, which is exactly why strategy can be said to feed forward and create the very problems it purports to solve.

Given the irreconcilability of the worldviews of Strategic Management and Critical Approaches to Strategy, it is not surprising that a critique of the Critical Approaches leads us full circle back to the ontological assumptions of Strategic Management. For example, Strategic Management researchers Teppo Felin and Nicolai Juul Foss resist the idea that economic theories can be self-fulfilling prophecies (or as a critical scholar might say, performative) from an ontological position that claims true and false "specifications of reality" exist (Felin and Foss 2009, 655). The article by Felin and Foss offers a rebuttal to critical scholars arguing for the performativity of economic theories, but it is not difficult to imagine how the same argument could be sustained by substituting in "strategy" for "economic theories." A critical counter-rebuttal would claim that Felin and Foss have no basis of argument because *there is no true or false reality,* and in this manner the carousel of argument could go round and round; as Mikko Ketokivi and Saku Mantere put it in their article discussing paradigms in organizational reserach, the two sides can continue "taking turns talking past one another" (Ketokivi and Mantere 2010, 329).

In the context of this thesis, a poignant critique that can be leveraged against Critical Approaches to Strategy is that the positioning *against* Strategic Management runs the risk of merely flipping the tables on strategy. This point of critique also applies to Critical Management Studies more broadly where the position *against* mainstream management research fosters research which reproduces the divisions and distinctions that are the object of critique (Ekman 2012). Hence my flippant comment earlier that Strategic Management sees strategy as "good" and Critical Approaches to Strategy see strategy as "bad." As a consequence of the positioning *against*, the product of Critical Management Study approaches is most often an analysis which posits management (more often than actual individual managers) as powerful and employees as oppressed, and this shies away from seeing the nuances and the

possibilities for freedom *and* control as simultaneous in organizational life (Ekman 2012; Dalton 1959). In the case of strategy research, Critical Approaches most often put forth strategy as a managerial mechanism that determines and controls employees.

Connected to this move of the critical work assuming an antagonistic position is the charge that critical studies have a tendency towards cynicism (Spicer, Alvesson, and Karreman 2009). While Strategic Management has been accused of being naïve, Critical Approaches to Strategy run the risk of embodying a cynical stance, which becomes the flipside of positivistic management studies that glorify the leader, by producing critical analyses demonstrating the inescapable oppressiveness of strategy.

An additional point of critique that can rightly be leveraged against Critical Approaches to Strategy, thus far, is that the analyses tend to deal with strategy in the abstract, as a discourse in the sense of a broader societal trend, rather than attending to the specific actions and practices of strategy. The argument that critical scholars tend to focus on phenomena in the abstract, rather than the situated and particular, has also been held towards Critical Management Studies more broadly (Fournier and Grey 2000). It is possible that one reason for the scarcity of close empirical analysis is to be found in the assumptions of Critical Approaches to Strategy. Given the epistemological point of departure, Critical Approaches do not assume that strategy as the object of analysis exists independently of its analysis (Ezzamel and Willmott 2004). However, this belief makes empirical critical strategy research challenging because, in order to study something, it is necessary to (at least partially) pretend that the topic exists independently of the efforts to identify and analyze it. Critical strategy researchers need to live with, and find ways to work around, the paradox that they are studying something that (at least partially) exists because they are studying it. This conundrum parallels the postmodern contradiction concerning language: Meaning is always deferred; yet we must act as if we can communicate in language.

Strategy as Practice: A Panacea?

Critics dissatisfied with both Strategic Management's normative naïveté and with the aloofness of Critical Approaches point to practice as a possible "way out" and have done so for a while: Already in his 1986 article, Shrivastava calls for "strategy as praxis...as a possible way of reorienting the Strategic Management field" (Shrivastava 1986, 364). Similar

arguments for an increased attention to practice are found in recent texts that adopt a critical take on strategy (Clegg et al. 2011).

In the past decade, the strategy scholarship stream Strategy as Practice has emerged as an answer to these calls for increased attention to practice (Golsorkhi et al. 2010). In Figure 1, Strategy as Practice is represented by the third box on the right; this box has overlaps with both the Strategic Management box and the Critical Approaches to Strategy box. These overlaps represent the fact that the ontological and epistemological span of Strategy as Practice is so wide that some of the work under this label is quite similar to that of Process researchers of Strategic Management, and some of the work has close affinities with Critical Approaches.

Strategy as Practice was initiated as a distinctly European take on strategy and intended to provide a counterweight to the North American Strategic Management tradition (Jarzabkowski 2008; Whittington 2003; Jarzabkowski and Kaplan 2010). Methodologically, Strategy as Practice research primarily draws on qualitative approaches such as interviews, observations, and ethnographic fieldwork. Although Strategy as Practice is an emergent research approach, scholars in the community have been successful in building a strong academic brand that attracts a variety of scholars. See for example the website www.s-as-p.org. The Strategy as Practice label covers a wide range of approaches to strategy but is nevertheless united in a focus on the practice of strategy—that is, the everyday actions performed by strategists and the context those actions are part of. It is often repeated that Strategy as Practice scholarship is concerned with strategy as something organizations *do*, as opposed to more mainstream Strategic Management approaches where strategy is something organizations *have* (Whittington 2003).

The recent *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice* provides an illustration of the wide array of approaches and theoretical frames used in scholarship under the Strategy as Practice label. The collection mobilizes a host of theoretical apparatuses in relation to strategy with chapters on, for example: Heidegger, Giddens' structuration theory, activity-theory, Bourdieu, Wittgenstein, Foucault, narrative perspective, critical discourse analysis, and identity (Golsorkhi et al. 2010). A recent review by Vaara and Whittington similarly underscores how Strategy as Practice draws on a whole host of practice theories (Vaara and Whittington 2012).

This breadth of perspectives prevents the development of Strategy as Practice as a unified alternative to Strategic Management, but this same breadth conveys that there are alternatives. The Strategy as Practice field does not represent one coherent body of scholarship; as with anything else, it moves in different directions and draws upon a variety of inspirations and traditions.

As an early contribution to the Strategy as Practice tradition, Richard Whittington offered a framework separating out *Praxis*, *Practices*, and *Practitioners* (Whittington 2006; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007). He defines *Praxis* as the actual activity that people do, *Practices* as shared routines of behavior, and *Practitioners* as the human actors. The alliteration of the tripartite framework is meant to signify the mutual connection of the concepts.

As will become apparent in the next chapter, I am reluctant to separate practice into praxis (specific activities) and practices (that which guides activities) because I find that the dual meaning of the word "practice" conveys a theoretical point; not to mention the epistemological consequences of separating people (practitioners) from that which they do, but more on that later. Nevertheless, the framework has some purchase analytically because, even if researchers acknowledge the mutually constitutive nature of Praxis, Practice, and Practitioners, research will inevitably privilege one of the three for methodological reasons (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007). For example, as I mentioned earlier, the Critical Approaches are mainly concerned with discussing Practices or strategy Discourse. In this thesis, given the ethnographic approach, I do to some extent privilege "praxis," although the point of the study is to study actions *as done by specific people (practitioners) in a specific organizational context (practice).*

Within the Strategy as Practice stream, there is generally a heightened consciousness of the fact that strategy is often a communal endeavor. People do strategy work together and it often involves retreats or offsites (episodes) dedicated solely to strategy work (Hendry and Seidl 2003; Jarzabkowski and Seidl 2008). While in Critical Approaches to Strategy there is a tendency to discuss Strategy as an abstract phenomenon, Strategy as Practice mostly discusses strategy in the specific: Strategy is to be found in the everyday decisions and actions of people. Also, some Strategy as Practice scholars make the argument that actions need not be

perceived as strategic by actors in order to actually be strategic. Here, the definition of strategic that applies is "having importance for an organization." In that manner, strategic activity, in the sense of practices that shape the organization, is to be found in the day to day activities of people (Jarzabkowski 2003). Using this Mintzbergian definition of strategy widens the scope of strategy studies and moves the concept of strategy making closer to organizing, understood as the actions that make up the organization.

Another trend found in Strategy as Practice is an orientation towards middle managers (Wesley 1990; Balogun and Johnson 2004; Mantere 2008). Such analyses of the role of strategy, specifically for the middle management level in organizations, connect to a broader tradition of exploring the specific conditions of middle management in organizations (Rouleau 2005), and, at the same time, it is an explicit departure from Strategic Management's focus on strategy as a concept that belongs primarily to the top-level executives in an organization. While most Strategy as Practice work focused on middle management discuss middle managers' practices in light of overall corporate strategy, this thesis takes a different focus because the Bioforte case is not concerned with how the corporate strategy comes to be or how it influences the Stakeholder Engagement Department, but rather with how a departmental strategy is created. As will become apparent in Part II, this focus does have connections to corporate strategy, but the specific case investigated is of strategy work as it unfolds in the middle of the organization.

Before discussing the discursive concentration within the Strategy as Practice area, it is worth dwelling on a manner of unfolding "practice" offered by Wanda Orlikowski and Martha Feldman (Orlikowski 2010; Feldman and Orlikowski 2011). The argument is aimed at the wider management literature, but it is especially pertinent for Strategy as Practice, and the article with Orlikowski as the sole author is published in the 2010 *Cambridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice*. In unpacking the notion of practice, Orlikowski distinguishes between three ways of understanding practice: Practice as phenomenon, perspective, and philosophy. The first of the three is to see practice as a phenomenon: Practice is relevant and important and as scholars we should focus on it; essentially, *practices matter.* Within the Strategy as Practice field, this first practice as phenomenon approach designates a focus on how strategy is practiced and how strategy tools enter into practice. The second way of conceptualizing

practice is as a perspective: This manner is focused on practice just as the former conceptualization and further draws on practice-oriented theory to establish the point of departure that *practices shape reality.* In this second approach where practice is a perspective and practices shape reality, the Strategy as Practice perception is that in practice, strategy is shaped. Finally, the third conceptualization of practice is to see practice as a philosophy (ontology). In this view, *practice is constitutive of all social reality.* When applied to the Strategy as Practice realm, this most far-reaching conceptualization of practice permits studies where the strategy practices, strategizing, or strategy work both create and reflect organizational reality. Doing strategy work therefore becomes both a task we undertake and something that shapes us as humans in organizations. We make strategy therefore we are. Orlikowski points out that not many studies of strategy, and certainly not many empirical field studies, adhere to this third way of seeing practice as reality (Orlikowski 2010).

This third way of positioning practice as philosophy is closely related to the practice turn in social science, and it is also a theoretical position adopted by this thesis—the next chapter elaborates this stance. The Strategy as Practice work that adopts a practice theoretical vantage point perceives doing as constitutive: Practice in this sense becomes performative—a connection which the next chapter will also unfold—because practices have effects and create realities. Following the view that practices constitute reality shifts the object of study from strategy as a stable object to the construction, that is, the practices that make up strategy. This presents a whole host of challenges because rather than a "solid" object to study, there are practices, which are shifty, ephemeral, temporary, contradictory, individual, collective, contradictory, enigmatic, specific, and more. As researchers we are denied a stable external property that we can observe and analyze; rather, we study something that comes into being through doing. And then it disappears again. In other words, studying practices means that there is no stable external property to observe and analyze; rather, all we have is something that comes into being through doing. And that something then shapes and directs that same doing. Strategy is an on-going accomplishment that is likely to slip away at any moment.

The definition of *strategy* that I put forth in the introduction can be seen as a direct consequence of this practice theoretical, or practice philosophical, orientation because it posits strategy *as that which people in organizations do when they say that they are doing strategy.* This is a definition that acknowledges that knowledge is always situated.

Within the Strategy as Practice tradition, there is a stream of scholarly work that focuses on discursive practices (Vaara 2010). The practice perspective and the discursive (or linguistic or narrative) perspective are complementary approaches to studying strategy in organizations (Langley and Abdallah 2011) because organizational action often consists of talk (Boden 1994) and strategy work is replete with talk and text (Samra-Fredericks 2010). The intertwining of discourse and strategy takes several forms in academic studies: Some take a discursive perspective on strategy (Mantere and Vaara 2008) and others take a strategic perspective on discourse (Hardy, Palmer, and Phillips 2000). While there is often a focus on what people say about strategy, the discursive stream of Strategy as Practice also includes focus on strategy texts such as strategic plans in order to provide insights on strategy as a genre (Vaara, Sorsa, and Pälli 2010).

In the broader context of analyzing the talk and text of strategy work in organizations, discursive and narrative approaches are of the same ilk. Fifteen years ago, David Barry and Michael Elmes argued that strategy should be examined as a form of narrative and proposed that researchers employ a narrativist perspective on strategy (Barry and Elmes 1997). Their paper offers a useful starting point of the discussion of strategy as something said and told; they do not, however, complicate the notion of a story to explore the constitutive power of strategy practices/storytelling. More recently, arguments for bringing a literary analytical apparatus to studies of strategy have emerged (de La Ville and Mounoud 2010). Additionally, Christopher Fenton and Ann Langley have produced review of how Strategy as Practice can incorporate the narrative turn to develop a set of narratively inspired research agendas (Fenton and Langley 2011).

Discursive Strategy as Practice studies often take a sensemaking perspective; this seems to be especially true for those studies that analyze how middle management cope with corporate strategy or strategic change (Balogun and Johnson 2004, 2005; Mantere 2005; Mantere, Schildt, and Sillince 2012). Additionally, the interplay between strategy and identity has also been a topic of discursive investigation (Laine and Vaara 2007; Sillince and Simpson 2010).

With the development of discursive analyses of strategy in organizations, there has also been examinations of the slipperiness of language and how ambiguity enters into strategy: Managers have been found to intentionally create ambiguity (Vaara and Tienari 2011) and to exploit ambiguity in order to enable action in the context of strategy work (Sillince, Jarzabkowski, and Shaw 2012). Ambiguity found in strategic plans has also been analyzed as a double-edged sword with both enabling and inhibiting qualities (Abdallah and Langley Forthcoming).

David Seidl, in his systems theoretical take on strategy, contributes to the discursive take on strategy by discussing the field of strategy as an "ecology of strategy discourses" (Seidl 2007). Seidl argues that strategy should not be conceptualized as a unified field, but rather understood as a series of fragments. To Seidl these fragments are "autonomous" (Seidl 2007, 197). Strategy as a label exists in different contexts, but, in each setting, it is a different and context-dependent concept. As Part II will show, this argument resonates with my analysis where strategy as a concept is also fragmented. However, my analysis departs from Seidl's argument because I have found that strategy is different (multiple) *even within* a given context.

Critique of Strategy as Practice

Somewhat ironically, the concept of "practice" has been leveraged as a point of critique against the Strategy as Practice approach. While some studies under the Strategy as Practice label take practice as an empirical concept, others embrace it as a theoretical concept while still others see it as an empirical *and* a theoretical concept. Invariably, this breadth leads to some confusion and vagueness (Carter, Clegg, and Kornberger 2008). Add to this the plethora of theoretical inspirations scholars draw upon while using the label Strategy as Practice as evidenced, for example, by the Cambridge Handbook mentioned above, and it is hard to conceive of Strategy as Practice as a coherent academic school of thought—an attribute that might be construed both as its strength and as its weakness.

Chris Carter, Stewart Clegg, and Martin Kornberger have criticized Strategy as Practice as a whole for being unclear about the definition of practice, for being without historical awareness, and for being theoretically promiscuous as well as both sociologically and philosophically naïve (Carter, Clegg, and Kornberger 2009, 2008). Additionally, Strategy as Practice has been seen as merely offering a re-branding of the Process Approach to Strategic Management. Robert Chia and Brad McKay critique Strategy as Practice for putting too

much focus on individual agency without due recognition of the conditions that shape and enable action (Chia and MacKay 2007). Similarly, in a piece drawing on Heidegger, Robert Chia and Robin Holt argue that there is room for poststructuralist thinking in the Strategy as Practice approach, and that this would be a worthwhile avenue for researchers to pursue (Chia and Holt 2006).

Given the breadth of theoretical influences and approaches within Strategy as Practice, it is perhaps unfair to critique the stream as a coherent body of scholarship. However, what Strategy as Practice can be argued to offer as a community, despite the disparities, is an unwavering focus on practice in the sense of specific activities (words, actions, movements, silences, etc.) performed by people in organizations. By foregrounding practice, Strategy as Practice work, in general, demonstrates a tendency to cut the study of strategy down to size, which means that the work analyzes how and what strategy is, rather than what it should be. This provides a contrast to mainstream Strategic Management and to Critical Approaches to Strategy, both of which are concerned with what strategy should be, albeit in different ways; Strategic Management focuses on what strategy *ought to be*, whereas Critical Approaches examine how strategy *ought to be different*, and, as a contrast, the starting point for Strategy as Practice is to focus on how *it is done*. And herein also lies the danger: The concern for what strategists *do* can foreclose considerations of the conditions for doing and thereby shift into a literal and narrow-minded empiricism that glorifies individual agency. Similarly, Gerard Hodgkinson and Ian Clarke point out that if researchers are to understand the strategy practice of strategy workers, it is not enough to observe and interview those workers because practice is not equivalent to action (Hodgkinson and Clarke 2007).

A key takeaway from the critique of Strategy as Practice is that it is exceedingly difficult to do research that both recognizes the immediate *and* the embedded nature of practice. This realization is not an argument for not attempting it, but instead a sympathetic recognition of the challenge of doing research that is attuned to practice *and* its conditions. Perhaps it is in this realization we can find some of the reason that Critical Approaches to Strategy primarily treat strategy as abstract and that the Strategy as Practice stream is predominantly concerned with practice as concrete activities. Through the ethnographic approach, this thesis attempts

to face this challenge and offers one take on an analysis of strategy work that is both attuned to the immediate action aspect of practice and the shared social fabric aspect of practice.

Contributing to the Emerging "Critical Strategy as Practice" Tradition

It is the ambition of this thesis to contribute to the kind of strategy studies that are represented by the dashed square overlap in Figure 1 above. This overlap represents a combination of Critical Approaches to Strategy and Strategy as Practice. Both streams focus on practice: The Critical Approaches bring a poststructural understanding of the real as constituted by experience, and the Strategy as Practice approach contributes with a sensitivity towards the specific and experienced. From this starting point, I would argue that it *is* possible to do work that seeks to explore reality and how it becomes. Recognizing the contribution of Critical Approaches to Strategy, this thesis does not take strategy for granted; however, it also insists that merely seeing strategy in hegemonic terms is too simplistic and potentially as naïve as taking it for granted.

In the dashed overlap is a meeting between Critical Approaches to Strategy's claim that strategy is a construct with specific ideological underpinnings and effects (rather than a natural response to organizational reality) and Strategy as Practice's focus on strategy as action, that is, as practice. Strategy as Practice has been successful in redirecting scholarly focus to the everyday activities of strategy, but, as a research stream, Strategy as Practice has unrealized potential in terms of theorizing practice (Rasche and Chia 2009). From this assertion, it is possible to return to the phrase that strategy is something organizations *do* rather than something organizations *have*, and point out that what you do determines what you have and what you have shapes what you can do. Put crudely, combining the critical and the practice approach renders strategy both as something that is done to us, and, at the same time, something that we do. From this vantage point, this study explores how practices create strategy *and* how strategy shapes practices.

Luckily, this thesis does not sit in this space of *Critical Strategy as Practice* alone. There is a small body of strategy researchers who work from a praxiographic perspective and see strategy not as a solution to an extrinsic problem, but rather as a discourse that renders possible the very problems that it proposes to solve. Some of the scholars in this tradition identify with

the Strategy as Practice label while others distance themselves from the nomenclature. For example, Dalvir Samra-Fredericks labels her approach "a critical study of SasP" and uses conversation analysis as a means to explore the power effects of strategy (Samra-Fredericks 2005). Similarly, Darren McCabe explicitly aims to demonstrate the complex workings of power in strategy through a case study of a building society (McCabe 2009). Providing a slightly different take on the productive powers of strategy, Kornberger and Clegg analyze strategy as a performative practice in the context of a city strategy (Kornberger and Clegg 2011). Stephen Cummings is a strategy scholar who draws heavily on postmodern thinking in his discussions of strategy. His writings also attempt to bring a postmodern and critical understanding of strategy into the MBA classroom (Cummings 2002).

The argument for mobilizing a combination of Critical Approaches to Strategy and a Strategy as Practice stance is that it broadens the possibilities for analysis and insight. Given that Critical Approaches to Strategy have a tendency towards cynicism and Strategy as Practice has been accused of being uncritical, my ambition in combining them is to add an appropriate measure of compassion to the Critical Approaches and a dash of critique to the practice-oriented approach. While the typical question for Strategy as Practice is, What do strategists do? And a typical question for critical approaches to strategy could be, How does strategy control? The theoretical position from the overlap between these two positions enables posing the research question for this thesis: *What does strategy work do?* This question implies several theoretical points: First of all, strategy work *does* something, it has performative effects; second, we don't know in advance if it is powerful or weak, if it is good or bad (it is possibly both in specific ways); third, we cannot know *how* strategy does what it does without close attention to the specific strategy practices and their conditions.

Studies exploring the philosophical implications of practice in the context of strategy are also relevant to the emerging Critical Strategy as Practice tradition that this thesis contributes to. These arguments are not empirical in nature, but they do provide the philosophical groundwork on which a practice theoretical examination of strategy can stand. For example, focusing on strategic decisions, John Hendry develops the position that strategy is a social practice that "takes its meaning from the social context in which it evolves and is, at any time, whatever people make of it" (Hendry 2000, 970). Valérie-Inès de La Ville and Eléonore

Mounoud likewise conceptualize strategy as a practice and reach to Michel de Certeau for theoretical inspiration (de La Ville and Mounoud 2002). Often these meditations on practice draw on philosophical thinking; for example, in Robert Chia and Robin Holt's use of Heidegger to theorize the relation between agency, action, and practice (Chia and Holt 2006). Robert Chia and Brad MacKay also explicitly seek to develop the philosophical "post-processual" practice perspective as a means to develop the Strategy as Practice tradition. They point to some limiting assumptions of the Strategy as Practice stream and hold that "strategy-making must be construed as collective, culturally shaped accomplishment attained thorough historically and culturally transmitted social practices and involving dispositions, propensities and tendencies" (Chia and MacKay 2007, 236). This definition indeed describes the complexity of the object "strategy-making" that Critical Strategy as Practice researchers aim to study. However, these kinds of in-depth philosophical considerations of practice in relation to strategy usually stop short of empirical exploration of strategy work.

Critical research of the empirical variety that is concerned with strategy work has tended to do either fine-grained or retrospective analysis. The former fine-grained tradition includes work focusing on a small section of strategy conversation (Samra-Fredericks 2005, 2003), research on the "micro-practices" of middle managers' strategic sensemaking and sensegiving (Rouleau 2005), and work employing "micro-ethnography" to analyze connections between emotions and strategic topics (Liu and Maitlis 2012). The retrospective accounts of strategy processes are found both in discourse focused analyses (Laine and Vaara 2007; Mantere and Vaara 2008) and in ethnographic accounts (Watson 2003). In contrast, this thesis offers a study of a 3-month process as it unfolds. Following strategy work as it happens is obviously very different from studying how strategists make sense of strategy after the fact and will therefore illuminate different aspects of strategy work.

Ethnography provides a uniquely suitable approach to studying practice from a critical perspective because ethnographic fieldwork studies action in context as it unfolds. Additionally organizational ethnography is inherently critical as it examines "the *realities* of and the *truth* about how the organizational and managerial world "works," it continually tests intuitive understandings about social life, it continually challenges conventional wisdoms, and it continually questions taken-for-granted or ideologically-grounded assumptions about

the world" (Watson 2011, 215-216). I have looked eagerly, but to date, I have not been able to find an organizational ethnography explicitly about strategy work. Organizational ethnographies usually use the unit of an organization as a frame or locus for their research, but, given how precarious the distinction between organization and environment is, why not have ethnographies focused specifically on strategy work? It is of course always difficult to know why something is *not* so, but my speculations are threefold: Strategy is often considered sensitive and confidential in organizations; it often happens in the higher echelons of the organization where it is harder for ethnographers to negotiate access (Watson 2011); and, additionally, it is also only relatively recently that strategy has become the forceful and ubiquitous organizational concept that it is today.

All in all, I have argued that the time is right for what I have to offer; namely, an ethnographic study of strategy work from a critical practice theoretical position. The following chapter will present the theoretical anchoring of the study before discussing the ethnographic method in Chapter 4. Part II of the thesis contains the primary Organizational Ethnographic text.

I.3

Theoretical Anchoring: Braiding Practice, Narrative, and Performativity

The previous chapter outlines the fields of strategy studies and concludes by asserting that this thesis contributes to the intersection between Critical Approaches to Strategy and Strategy as Practice scholarship, and that given this overlap, the approach for the thesis is labeled "Critical Strategy as Practice." This starting point begets a set of theoretical assumptions that this chapter will unfold as a "conceptual braid" informed by practice-based, narrative, and performative approaches. The concept of a "braid" is invoked as I "twist together" the three theoretical "threads."

Studying Strategy Work after Some Twisting and Turning in Social Science

This chapter deals with the theoretical assumptions that underpin the ethnographic study; that is, the ideas about how the world works that make up the "canvas" on which the ethnography is "stitched." It is necessary to explicate the theoretical anchoring of this thesis because there are vastly different ways of doing, thinking, and writing ethnography. Each approach to ethnography, be they realist, constructivist, practice-based, or something else, presupposes a different ontology and epistemology. That is, they have different ideas about the status of reality and how we can know about it.

It is 2012, and I am writing at a time when a variety of "turns" have been taken in social science. A "turn" connotes a shift in paradigm, or a trend that has had major influence. For this project of examining strategy in organizations, I will consider three of these: the practice turn (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2000, 52), the narrative turn (Czarniawska 1999, 2004, 1998; Mitchell 1981), and the performative turn (Butler 2010, 2006).

There is a seemingly never-ending stream of turns in social science: You may encounter "the human turn" (CBS 2012) and actually also "the nonhuman turn" (Center-for-21st-Century-Studies 2012), which is closely related to "the posthuman turn" (Barad 2003).

You can find "the speculative turn" and "the reflexive turn" (Clifford and Marcus 1986). "The theological turn" (Sørensen et al. 2012) also exists and so does "the pictoral turn" (Curtis 2010); more well-known is perhaps "the linguistic turn" (Rorty 1992 (1967)), which then relates to "the discursive turn" and "the communication turn" (Morris 2001) and "the dialogic turn" (Phillips 2011), not to forget "the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn" (Barad 2003, 801) and "the material turn" (Bennett and Joyce 2010). And so it continues. This list is by no means exhaustive; more turns will surely keep piling on as social scientists continue their work—actually, it cannot be too long before we begin to encounter *re-turns*.

Acknowledging that there literally is a turn at every corner, I will pick up on three social science turns, which when taken together form an understanding of the social that is the basis for this organizational ethnography: (1) practice constitutes reality (the practice turn) (2) language structures social life, rather than being merely a medium through which to represent truth (the narrative turn, which is a twist on the linguistic turn), and finally (3) words and actions have effects, or, put another way, things do things (the performative turn). This project is therefore situated in an approach to studying the social, which not only privileges practice, stories, and performativity as sites of analysis, but actually takes those as bases for how the social unfolds.

Although helpful when trying to identify overarching trends or streams within social science, the turning metaphor gives rise to some curious associations of direction and focus: Is social science all twisted up and turned around? Does that mean that it has gone astray? Or that it is confused? The image of a turn can also connote focus. Are different themes "taking turns"—like children sharing a toy—in the social science spotlight before they fade away and a new fashion emerges? Should we understand a "turn" as a pivot in narratological terms, the moment when the story changes trajectory?

Instead of fighting the turning metaphor, I have embraced the image and chosen to represent my theoretical approach as a conceptual braid of *practice*, *narrative*, and *performativity*. The figure of a braid is appropriate here because a braid is a matter of turning strands in such a way that they work together to form something: Three (or more) strands turned together make a strong, sometimes even beautiful, and useful tool (see Figure 2

below). The braid image also serves to illustrate how the three concepts that make up the theoretical position are quite literally intertwined. I have chosen to combine three strands in a manner that I think works well in providing the theoretical anchoring of this thesis. This interrelation and connection is purposefully assembled as a temporary arrangement, just as a braid is a way to organize strands and hold them in place without fixing them permanently. After the last page of this thesis, when the braid has served its purpose, these strands can be woven together differently; they can be unraveled and combined with other strands, and so on. In the following, I will discuss the three strands and their interrelations in turn.
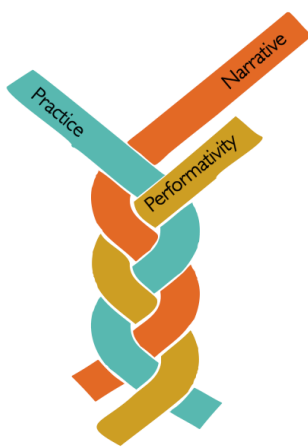

Figure 2: Conceptual Braid

Practice: Theorizing the Everyday

Due to the positioning of this thesis as Critical Strategy *as Practice*, the first strand I pick up is practice. Not surprisingly, practice is a central concept for Strategy as Practice, even though, as I hope the previous overview of that field demonstrates, Strategy as Practice scholars understand the concept of practice in a variety of, and at times contradictory, ways. There is not one clearly defined party program for practice theory. Instead, the term designates a group of loosely connected and overlapping practice-based approaches (Gherardi 2006). It is not the purpose of this chapter subsection to develop a genealogy of practice theory; instead, I hope to clarify some points of connection between different takes on practice with the aim of illustrating the consequences of placing practice as a strand in the conceptual braid that makes up the theoretical anchoring of this project. Following Theordore R. Schatzki, I

understand theory as a general and abstract account, rather than as a an explanation (theory as hypothesis), and I use the terms practice theory and practice-based approaches/theories interchangeably (Schatzki 2000).

The practice turn can be located in the last third of the twentieth century, and a broad spectrum of social theorists are named as members of the praxeological family: Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau, Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, Harold Garfinkel, and Bruno Latour (Simpson 2009; Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2000; Reckwitz 2002). Common across these diverse theorists is an interest in the everyday and in life-worlds, hence the methodological appropriateness of ethnography, which is precisely dedicated to studying everyday activities as they happen in a context. This is not to say that practice-oriented theorists always draw on ethnography. Foucault, for example, privileges tracing the social through historical documents. Within organization studies, practice-based approaches draw a heritage line back to ethnomethodology's focus on how individuals order their worlds (Garfinkel and Rawls 2002). One strand of practice-based approaches is concerned especially with organizational learning and knowledge, and here, the concept of Communities of Practice has become a central trope in analyses of the social aspect of learning (Lave and Wenger 1991; Orr 1996).

Defining practice as part of explicating a practice theoretical approach is tricky, as it is exactly the polysemy of "practice" that is the crux of practice theories: Practice at the most basic level can mean activity. It can also mean the carrying out of a given profession, as in "my teaching practice," which signifies more than simply the activities undertaken when teaching. Practice can also signify how a given abstract or theoretical concept is physically carried out and applied, as in I am "putting the ideas into practice" when I paint this room. There can also be a habitual aspect to the word practice, as in "my yoga practice," which implies something that I do at regular intervals and will continue doing in the future. It can also have a procedural ring to it: "The practice we follow here." "In practice" can mean something akin to "in real life" and opposed to "in theory." This variety of meanings of the word practice points to practice as a rich concept that is more than action and less than destiny.

Practice theorists do not agree on an authoritative definition of practice (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina, and Savigny 2000), and definitions of practice tend to be quite loose, for

example, Andreas Reckwitz rather poetically defines practice as "a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood" (Reckwitz 2002, 250). Apart form being lyrically appealing, this definition also has the benefit of emphasizing verbs rather than nouns. Practice is *the way in which* something happens. Consequently, practice is not static; it is always becoming and to study practice is to prioritize *how* something is done. For practice theory, knowing how something becomes is the way of knowing what that something *is*.

To illustrate the embeddedness of any practice, Silvia Gherardi uses the charmingly prosaic example of brushing one's teeth. The everyday activity of rubbing paste on our molars becomes an example of how activities that we undertake daily can involve specific objects (toothbrush and -paste), happen in a given time (morning and evening) in a given space (bathroom), and connect us to other individuals (the dentist, the hygienist, and the technician in China casting a bridge) as well as to societal institutions (healthcare programs, sanitation services, tax administrations), and so forth (Gherardi 2006).

In the case of this thesis, the practice under investigation is not the individual practice of brushing one's teeth, but rather the collective practice of "making strategy"—understood as a social accomplishment that consists of a set of activities with a given materiality, time, place, and specific connections to institutions. The word practice not only designates the specific activities, but also carries with it an understanding of the fabric that is constituted by specific actions and shapes actions. Even though it can be confusing and at times hard to know whether an author means practice as action or practice as program/structure, or perhaps a completely different meaning, it is fitting that the same word can signify both, for that is exactly the point of practice theory: action and structure are codeterminate of each other (Boden 1994).

In terms of social scientific heritage, practice theory builds on social constructivist theories, which propose that meaning is socially constructed. Social constructivist theories can be divided into a structuralist and an interpretative tradition; both locate the production of the social in the mind (Rasche and Chia 2009). The development of social constructivist theories into practice theory implies a shift away from a focus on the mind towards an increased focus on "material human doings" (Rasche and Chia 2009, 716). It is a way to move "out of the

head" and more into the body. Indeed, practice-based perspectives focus on time and space, which fosters analytical considerations of the material and the body (Corradi, Gherardi, and Verzelloni 2008).

Practice theory acknowledges the role of implicit and shared knowledge in organizing reality (Reckwitz 2002). This implicit and shared knowledge has many names: habitus, procedure, institution, discourse, structure, frame, program, the social, the symbolic, and so on. The intention here is not to equate all these theoretical concepts, but rather to point out that practice theorists have a preoccupation with the fabric of the social, which they develop using different vocabularies and analytical moves.

The query for practice theory can broadly speaking be articulated as: How is the fabric that holds the world together created and how do we use it? If the fabric did not exist, we would experience only meaningless fragmentation in life; and if our lives were determined by an unmalleable and deterministic structure, we would experience only endless repetition. Given that either extreme feels absurd, practice theory claims that understanding the social must necessarily focus on how humans manage the interplay between action and structure. The position for practice theory is that humans are neither solely agents of pure free will, nor pre-programmed entirely by norms. Another way of understanding the preoccupation of practice theories is to ask: How come the (social) whole is more than the sum of its parts (individual actions)?

It is a challenge to find an adequate language to represent the logic of practice theory because (especially written) language forces a linear order where one thing leads to another, and practice theory's assumption that action and structure are codeterminate questions and complicates this kind of binary cause and effect logic. So the conundrum for a communicating researcher is, How to write a sentence that unfolds the world differently? One textual strategy is to write tightly packed circular sentences. For example: "Structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures"; this sentence from Bourdieu offers such a fine example that it is cited both by Martha Feldman and Wanda Orlikowski (2011, 1249), and by Davide Nicolini, Sliva Gherardi, and Dvora Yanow (2003, 15). In the case of this project, the practice theoretical point of view leads to the similarly circular

assertion that *the organization makes strategy work and strategy work makes the organization*. Apart from sentences that end in their own beginnings, other textual strategies responding to the same challenge of representing codetermination are to actively engage with the ambiguity and slipperiness of language and to use the form of the text purposefully because, as Gherardi asserts, "it is not possible to talk unambiguously about ambiguity" (Gherardi 1995, 10). In Part II especially, I attempt to follow this dictum and let the play of language and the form of the story help deliver the arguments.

How Is the Notion of Practice Useful?

The claim for why a study of strategy work needs practice is this: The notion of practice enables a *situated social scientific analysis* of the way things are done. This kind of analysis asks what the status of daily life is; it pays attention to actions and to connections between individuals as well as the specific context and materiality of those connections. It is, quite simply, a way for a researcher to study *work* as both a verb and a noun. The consequence of a practice theoretical point of departure is that knowledge about organizing is explicitly accomplished by a specific researcher in a specific place at a specific time. This rejection of knowledge as "universal" owes much to the post-structuralist feminist critique of science (Gherardi 2006). The overlap between the agendas of practice theory and of feminism, as both a theoretical and a practical movement, emerges in the move to displace a univocal narrative of scientific knowledge.

Strategy Work as Practice: Poaching from de Certeau

In the context of an ethnographic study of strategy work, Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* offers an inspirational point of departure. The book is a loose and fabulating treatise dedicated to "the ordinary man." The main argument, grossly simplified, is that everyday practices such as reading, walking, and cooking are sites of production and should therefore be analyzed as such (de Certeau 1984). Social activity—culture and meaning—happens *in and through* everyday life, which is why a theory of practice is necessary. This move exemplifies the previously discussed practice theory shift of the analytical focus away from individuals, and also away from structures, to practices: de Certeau states that his goal is to enable a discussion of practices and that this goal will be achieved if, "everyday practices 'ways of operating' or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social

activity, and if a body of theoretical questions, methods, categories, and perspectives, by penetrating this obscurity, make it possible to articulate them" (1984, xi). De Certeau places his own approach as an extension of ethnomethodology and also points out that the anthropological studies he builds on have been conducted "away from home," while his explicit ambition is to study the everyday life that is around him.

De Certeau's work resists disciplinary classification and has been used in a variety of social studies traditions such as cultural studies, urban studies, and tourism studies. Within studies of strategy, de Certeau is used by Valérie-Inès de La Ville and Eléonore Mounoud as a theoretical position that can provide a nuanced perspective on agency in strategy, or as they put it, "in an attempt to escape the over-socialized and under-socialized views of strategy-making" (de La Ville and Mounoud 2002, 101). In a later paper, the authors continue their engagement with de Certeau (de La Ville and Mounoud 2010). De Certeau's ideas on consumption also make a brief appearance in a very recent paper on ambiguity in strategy (Abdallah and Langley Forthcoming). The purpose of drawing on de Certeau is not to review his influence or application in strategy studies or beyond, but rather to engage specifically with some helpful ideas and concepts as part of developing the strand of practice in the conceptual braid that is woven by the chapter.

De Certeau himself explicitly positions *The Practice of Everyday Life* in conversation with the writings of Foucault and Bourdieu. Foucault and Bourdieu serve as helpful starting points for de Certeau because they both insist on locating analytical focus in practices situated in time and space (Rasche and Chia 2009). De Certeau, however, is not fully satisfied: He reads the two side by side and claims that Foucault focuses on what practices produce (a disciplining discourse) while Bourdieu hones in on what produces practices (habitus) (Wild 2012). Implicit in this critique is the assertion that they both look in the wrong place and that instead they ought to turn to the everyday practice of the common man. With this shift, the purpose is to examine "antidiscipline"—that is, the tactical maneuvers of those subject to discipline. The tone of *The Practice of Everyday Life* has a hopeful and celebratory quality to it—the common man is not autonomous or powerful, but he is a hero exactly because of his ability to find a way. This is what de Certeau calls "making do."

When reading de Certeau in the context of a project on strategy, it is helpful to unfold his notions of tactics and strategy because he uses these two concepts extensively in his discussion of everyday practice. For de Certeau, **strategy** is:

> The calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as it *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. As in management, every "strategic" rationalization seeks first of all to distinguish its "own" place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an "environment." (de Certeau 1984, 36)

The main premise for strategy is that it has a locus. Strategy needs a defined place from where to manage, and therefore strategy begins with a division between the space of strategy and the environment. In addition, strategy in de Certeau's conception belongs to the powerful. Those who are not powerful must then turn to **tactics**:

> The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to *keep to itself*...It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep (de Certeau 1984, 37).

This pitting of strategy and tactics against one another veers off from the traditional militaristic understanding of tactics as the actions necessary to follow the strategy. Here the two are at odds: strategy determines, whereas tactics "make do." De Certeau is interested in the interplay—in how the ordinary man tactically maneuvers through a life subject to and determined by strategies over which he has no power. In this sense, everyday practices are tactical in character because they occur in a space inscribed and defined by strategy.

De Certeau's project is to investigate tactics rather than to examine how strategy comes to be strategy, as Foucault might. While I find a deep resonance with de Certeau's argument, I would still claim that his text puts too much faith in strategy. I doubt that the uncomplicated position of power he discusses as the locus for strategy can ever exist. My

quarrel with de Certeau can be pinpointed in the first sentence of the first block quote on strategy above: "…as soon as a subject with will and power…can be isolated." Isolating a subject is, in my view, impossible. By subject, de Certeau refers to institutions and organizations rather than individuals; however, that does not change the objection to his postulation that there is an isolated position of power from where it is possible to speak and create strategy. In my view, any and all positions are always intertwined; isolation is a social impossibility. Therefore, the division between strategy and tactics that de Certeau invokes is unrealistically pure. Likewise, in everyday English, the phrases "I'll be tactical about this" and "I'll be strategic about this" can be used interchangeably. This objection to the conceptualization of strategy and tactics does not, however, diminish the valuable theoretical inspiration poached from de Certeau's emphasis on, and admiration of, the practice of everyday life. In addition, de Certeau's unfolding of tactics has immense purchase on the strategy work studied in this thesis because the people making strategy work at Bioforte are tactical. They do not have the option of keeping to themselves and planning a grand strategy. Instead, they find themselves working to make do in a space defined, not by one Other powerful strategic force, but by many different forces. This may indeed always be the case.

De la Ville and Mounoud also refer to de Certeau's distinction between tactics and strategy and invoke tactics as unconscious and strategy as conscious and willed (de La Ville and Mounoud 2002). I find this problematic given that de Certeau's agenda is to move away from positions that focus on subjects or on social context to develop an analysis, specifically, of practices. I see de Certeau's project as exploring what practices do, which also implies a certain disregard for whether they were intended, conscious or unconscious.

De Certeau is fond of the notion of poaching, which I understand as a form of trespassing whereby you bring something back with you. I imagine slipping into a domain unnoticed and plucking a useful concept and then applying it "at home." So, what have I brought home to my text from de Certeau? I poach threefold: The first element is the insistence that daily life matters in a science of the social. The second element is an analytical focus on the ways in which individuals and groups "make it work." This focus implies a strong insistence that there is always "play," or "Spielraum," and how this unfolds becomes the central question. The idea that everyday practice has a certain slippage echoes that most post-modern of

concepts, Jacques Derrida's notion of différance (Derrida 2001 (1967)). Finally, the third element poached from de Certeau is a joyful, celebratory quality in the writing that inspires this thesis; not in terms of specific analytical tools or theoretical terms, but on the level of a mode of writing.

Narrative: Making Stories as a Human Predilection

The second strand in the conceptual braid that holds the thesis in place theoretically is *narrative*. The narrative turn comes on the heels of the linguistic turn, which is most often located in the late 1960's with the publication of Richard Rorty's *The Linguistic Turn* (Rorty 1992 (1967)). The linguistic turn marks a shift towards an understanding of language as constitutive, rather than as representative, of reality. This means the world is made through language and consequently there is nothing outside of language. If we cannot articulate something, it cannot enter into our reality: What we say about the world is therefore what makes the world. The route of the linguistic turn leads to a communicative paradox: We know that language does not represent a priori concepts in a one-to-one correspondence relationship, yet the very act of communicating is an act of pretending that representation is possible.

The narrative turn is an extension of the linguistic turn, but the emphasis is slightly narrower: Instead of focusing on all of language, the narrative turn directs the focus to the role of stories in human experience and knowledge. If we accept the conditions of the narrative turn, namely that meaning is narratively constructed, then the central role of narratives in social science, indeed in life, is so obvious that it almost feels silly to write about it. If all knowledge becomes meaningful through narrative, then the centrality of narrative is achingly obvious. However, this position has a set of implications for doing organizational research that are worth unfolding, which is what I will attempt to do in this section.

Discussions of narrative often turn to Roland Barthes' definition of narrative as present in an infinite variety of forms such as articulated language, pictures, gestures, etc. and as "present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there never has been anywhere, any people without narrative" (Barthes and Duisit 1975, 237). This thesis adopts a broad definition of narrative as, quite simply, an

account of some event(s). Following Donald Polkinghorne (1988), I do not distinguish between narrative and story, although organizational scholars of storytelling have maintained that there is a difference (Gabriel 2000; Boje 1995, 2008). Plot designates the connection and sequence of events in a narrative, but plot can be very minimalistic in a narrative. For example, in this narrative: I write. However, from the fact that narrative does not require much by way of plot in order to be a narrative does not follow that everything in textual or verbal form is a narrative. Most greetings, orders, lists, labels, slogans, schedules, and definitions are, for example, not narratives. Narratives are often constructed around such elements, but they are not in and of themselves narratives.

Stories are social performances; adhering to the narrative turn does not mean that we can fashion reality as we wish by telling any story that we like. Our stories always work in the interplay with other people's stories, and they can be accepted, elaborated, contradicted, and rejected. This thesis can work as an example of this dynamic: I cannot tell just any story I wish about strategy work at Bioforte; indeed, as the method chapter mentions, the employees of Bioforte read this thesis in draft form and objected to some of my stories. Subsequently, I adjusted the text. Because this text is a social science story, the text needs to have what the audience conceives as a convincing connection to reality. You must believe that I am telling you stories about what I experienced at Bioforte in the fall of 2010.

What Do Narratives Do?

Narratives fulfill two very important functions that make the world livable for us. First and foremost, they order. Secondly, they enable sharing of individual experience. On the first function, John Law has this to say:

> Stories are part of ordering, for we create them to make sense of our circumstances, to re-weave the human fabric. And as we create and recreate our stories we make and remake both the facts of which they tell, and ourselves. So it is that we seek to order, and to re-order, our surroundings. So it is that we formulate, we try to sum up. (Law 1994, 52)

Ordering in this way is a move to make the world graspable. In order to have order, you need differences; therefore a crucial function of the narrative is to create and sustain distinctions that enable such differences. In that way, distinctions enable us to make sense of the world;

they help us organize ourselves and that which surrounds us into recognizable categories that we can understand. With distinctions we are able to say, this is this, and that is that. Without distinctions, well, it is hard to even imagine what exists without distinctions (and even saying "without distinction" is another way of creating a distinction). Perhaps one could say that without distinction, we are condemned to aporia. Distinctions render the world understandable.

Distinctions do not exist a priori, nor are they permanent; they are created through practice and to be upheld, they require work and must continuously be performed and enacted. Consequently, distinctions also shift over time; they disappear, they change, they emerge, and they collapse. On the topic of distinction, it is also worth pointing out that an alternative meaning of the word distinction is "outstanding," which again recalls the idea of a divide or demarcation because being extraordinary, or outstanding, depends on something else being ordinary, or normal.

In everyday life, distinctions are everywhere and they are created by a plethora of devices, not only narratives. There are mundane examples all over: Business class travelers and economy class travelers; pregnant women with a high risk of developing pregnancy diabetes and those with a low risk; in Denmark, yellow license plates for vehicles designated for business use and white license plates for vehicles earmarked for private use, and so on. All of this obviously matters to us in daily life because to live together we need to understand and use these categories and classifications that function through different distinctions. Furthermore, different categories have different consequences.

Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star point out that it is human to classify. Indeed, it is impossible to imagine a world without classifications (Bowker and Star 2000). In their book, they use a range of examples to demonstrate that the act of classifying, or ordering, through distinctions has moral and ethical consequences because each distinction valorizes some elements while it silences others. Similarly, through the concept of "the Other," postcolonial theory also critiques how distinctions lead to inequality, as once a distinction is created between two categories, they cannot be equal (Said 1979). Part II will show how the strategy work at Bioforte is also classification work. In and through the strategy work, a set of distinctions is worked out. Attending to these distinctions, not as natural or given, but from a critical perspective of examining how the categories come to be and how they are sustained, is

very much in line with the critical theory heritage of the tradition of Critical Strategy as Practice that this thesis seeks to contribute to.

On the second function—that narratives enable sharing of experience—is an awareness of narratives as mediation between the social and the individual. Catherine Kohler Riessman offers a visually rich formulation: "Narrative is the proverbial ferry between the abstract and the concrete, between cognition and behavior, between the symbolic and the material" (Riessman 2007, 16). It is a hauntingly beautiful image: to see narratives ferrying a concrete material action or thing into the abstract realm of symbolic meaningfulness. In this way, narrative can be seen as a main enabler of *social* life, for it *makes* us hang together. It is a practice that transfers individual experience to others.

Individual experience is made collective through stories and vice versa, collective practice can become individual through stories. Strictly stylized, the former move from individual to collective is the effect of narrative on the listener, and the latter move from collective to individual is the effect of stories on the narrator. Similarly, Michel Callon, in his analysis of writing devices used by tour operators on the Seine river, argues that narratives connect individual and collective action (Callon 2002). Narratives mediate the position between individual and collective, and as such they are in-between and reveal both individual and collective actions. This is obvious to us when we read about a character in a novel as shaped by the novel and also as the force that moves the novel forward. In Callon's case, the object of analysis is a set of specific writing devices (manuals, menus of tour offerings, etc.) and he explores how these texts become organizing tools that shape the tour operators as well as their clients. He concludes that, "these texts do not describe an existing reality. Instead they format it. Just as we know since Austin that the statement "I declare the session open" is an act that opens the sessions, so too the charters, bibles, and other handbooks or customer cards *perform* the service they describe. They cannot be dissociated form the various relevant actions"(Callon 2002, 199). This argument is analogous to my analysis of strategy work as a practice that organizes and thus *creates* the us (working group and the department), the work (the strategy work and non-strategy work), the selves (of people working with strategy and the researcher as well). Making these kinds of conclusions about what strategy work does obviously hinges on adopting a performative view of strategy work whereby the work does not

reflect an already existing organization but rather makes and orders that same organization which it represents.

While I see the two main tasks of narratives *as ordering* and *mediating between social and individual*, those two aspects do not comprise the entirety of the functions of narrative in our lives. For example, stories may set the scene, create, shape, move, dismantle or disrupt.

In practice, narrative is a layered concept: stories exist inside other stories; stories make reference to other stories; and stories resist or reinforce other stories. Different versions of truth are not a surprise to the narrative researcher because truth is recognized as the individual's take on a collective reality. This interplay between common and individual is a fundamental feature of narratives[3]. Individual narratives can be said to relate to "grand narratives" analogously to how practices (or praxis, understood as individual behavior) relates to practice (understood as the shared fabric). This kind of relationship is again similar to how discourse on a local level can be said to relate to Discourse understood as a general normative tendency.

The Connection Between Practice and Narrative

A main assumption in the kind of narrative approach that I am outlining is that stories have effects. Reality is created and shaped by stories. In the language of practice theory: Narratives are constitutive rather than merely representative (Peterson and Langellier 2006). In this sense, a narrative approach intertwines with a practice theoretical approach. To reach back and pick up a strand from earlier, I turn again to de Certeau, who connects narrative and practice in his essay "Story Time" (1984). The problem he raises is that something keeps

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[3] There is a range of vocabulary related to the linguistic aspect of organizing and I have chosen to focus on narrative as a concept and to use story as a synonym for narrative. However, both *discourse* and *sensemaking* are related concepts that could have been applied to my approach. Discourse, in the Foucauldian sense of an overall normative tendency, is a concept often mobilized by critical scholars and precisely because the empirical interest of this project is with the specific practices and the making do, I have instead opted for the concept of narrative. Certainly, organizational narratives can express and reflect organizational discourses, but mobilizing the concept of narrative places the main focus at the level of individual stories, rather than on what they add up to. In terms of sensemaking, I have refrained from drawing on the concept mainly due to its roots in social psychology (Weick 1995). The tradition invoked by sensemaking implies a focus on the individual as an actor making sense of organizational processes. The commitment for this thesis is to examine what strategy work does—an agenda that begets a focus on the practice level rather than the mental level.

"slipping away" when he attempts to develop a theory of practice, which I read as the problem of how to represent practices, discuss them, and theorize about them (de Certeau 1984, 77). The trouble is that when we describe practices, we are performing another practice, not capturing the described—hence the "slipping away." One solution, according to de Certeau, is to embrace the fact that talking about practices is yet another practice, and therefore: "*A theory of narration is indissociable from a theory of practices, as its condition as well as its production*" (italics in original) (de Certeau 1984, 78). His implicit challenge is then that practice theory must always be aware of its own practice—which is necessarily a narrative practice.

The argument that stories are not merely accounts of a practice, but *make* practice as well, has two important implications for a research project: Firstly, that stories are not taken as more or less accurate reports of what really happened, but as events and actions in and of themselves; and secondly, that a researcher is also making stories. Consequently, the next chapter will discuss how traditional evaluation criteria of validity and reliability must thus shift as measures for judging the value of research.

Organization Studies and Narrative

Within Organization Studies, the role of narratives as constitutive of organizing has been widely recognized (Czarniawska 2008). Given that stories are a main mode of knowing and communicating in organizations, I find it challenging to even envision a *non*-narrative study of organizing, although the manner and degree to which a study is narrative will vary. Czarniawska outlines four ways that narrative enters organization studies: Studies written in story-like form; research that collects stories; organizational research that sees organizational life as narrative through and through; and lastly, critical literary reflection on organization studies as a discipline (Czarniawska 1998). In the case of this thesis, the first three certainly apply: One, the ethnography in the second part of this thesis is narrative in form; two, I did collect (and produce) stories; and three, the theoretical position of this thesis does posit organizations as thoroughly narrative. As for the fourth point, it is not the purpose of this thesis to provide critical literary reflection on the discipline more broadly; however, the literature review in the first chapter, as well as the braiding of concepts in this chapter, are, indeed, literary moves.

Deirdre Boden, who is a discourse analyst influenced by ethnomethodology, asserts that the majority of action in organizations is talk; it is through talk that "the everyday business of organizations is accomplished" (Boden 1994, 1). A consequence of this is that analysis of organizations must also happen through attending to "talk." Methodologically, this thesis is far from the Critical Discourse Analysis mobilized by Boden. However, Boden's argument about the centrality of talk in organizations also applies to an ethnographic approach. The position here is that organizations are story factories, and because organizing happens largely in narratives, it can, and even must, be studied through stories. Which, I should note, is not the same as saying that organizational narratives explain everything about organizing; for example, it would be possible, and perhaps even exciting, to do a study of an organization by looking only at schedules. Evidently, such research would construct a narrative based on these schedules, and in that sense, it would be narrative as well.

The beauty and utility of focusing on organizational narratives is also that stories can portray and give access to some of the intangible aspects of organizing: the jokes, the ironies, the double meanings, the laughter, and the feelings. Stories do not only tell what is, they also hint at absences. In this sense, listening to stories, as well as noticing what is *not* said and what is between the lines, are important tasks of organizational scholars.

In organizational contexts, narratives often appear in fragments; often people will not retell stories from beginning to end, but instead allude to elements of a story or make reference to a previous incident (Boje 2008). Additionally, organizations are full of contradictory narratives, which should not be a surprise, nor necessarily a cause for concern (Humphreys and Brown 2002). The task for organizational analysis is to tell the stories of how it hangs together and makes sense, *and* to also tell the stories of how it at times does not make sense; that is, how it is confused, fragmented, and strange.

A crucial role for narratives in organizations is to make sense of what has happened, but narratives do not only perform retroactive sense making, they also look forward. We use stories to describe what we would like to see happen, what we fear will happen, and so forth; in this way, narratives can transcend chronological time as stories bring the past and future into the present, or even create an alternate now in what Anne Reff Pedersen has termed "side-shadowing" (Pedersen 2009).

Once organizations are conceptualized as narrative universes, the implication becomes that to understand organizational stories better researchers can look to literary theory, which has a range of tools that may be helpful, for example: genre, narrator, protagonist, voice, style, etc. Even if organizational scholars do not focus on collecting or analyzing the stories of organizing, they will be, at a minimum, narratively oriented when they construct and communicate their own arguments.

As was also pointed out in Chapter I.2 in the literature review, an academic conceptualization of strategy as a storytelling practice has existed for at least fifteen years (Barry and Elmes 1997; de La Ville and Mounoud 2010). A specific connection between a traditional understanding of strategy and narrative can be located in the term *causality*. Plot is a sequence of events, and when there is more than one event, they usually relate causally: This (effect) is happening because of this (cause) (Polkinghorne 1988). In order for a story to work, it must establish a *believable causality*. Strategy can be understood to have a similar task in organizations. The traditional Strategic Management understanding of corporate strategy is concerned, if not obsessed, with establishing causality. The whole point of a strategy is to be able to proactively tell a story about causality: If we do this and this and this, then we will get these results. The task of a strategy is to connect outcomes to actions. Often the language sounds something like this: These are the *drivers* and *objectives* we need to work with in order to achieve a *mission* in line with the *vision*. This is causality, and it is also storytelling according to a now very well defined genre of strategy. So well defined, in fact, that the story strategies tell is rarely very surprising or interesting, which is one reason the finalized strategy is not a central concern for the analysis. Rather than focusing on the story of strategy as it emerges in a final strategy document, this thesis is concerned with the strategy work, which I define as the activities that are part of making a strategy; the research of this work, and the work itself, is narrative through and through.

Metaphor, Narrative, and Strategy

The concept of metaphor has a proud history in organization studies (Cornelissen et al. 2008; Cornelissen 2005). Especially since Gareth Morgan's influential book *Images of Organization* (1986), scholars of organization have consciously considered which metaphors to mobilize

when analyzing organizations. Chris Grey points out that perhaps organization itself is a metaphor: "Metaphors are also inescapable since organization is intangible and ungraspable directly: perhaps in this sense the very term 'organization' is a metaphor" (2012, 264). In that sense, organization becomes knowable through metaphors. Rich metaphors also abound both in scholarly works on strategy and when practitioners work with strategy, but academic work focusing on analyzing the relationship between metaphor and strategy is scarce. One example can be found in the book, *Crafting Strategy*, which discusses how "Embodied Metaphors" facilitate strategy making for practitioners (Heracleous and Jacobs 2011).

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, who argue that our conceptual system is metaphorically grounded, define metaphor as a mode of "substitution": "...metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5). In this manner, understanding is always partial; it is a contingent matter dependent on something else. Likewise, metaphor is not innocent: metaphor illuminates certain things and hides others. Additionally, metaphors enact realities, they are performative: "Metaphors create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophesies" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 156).

The narrative oriented researcher must be attentive to metaphors since they make up a large part of our linguistic world; however, they are different from narrative because a metaphor is an image, not a sequential account of plot. Czarniawska quotes Latour for asserting that story puts things together in an "and" relationship, while metaphor substitutes in an "or" relationship (Czarniawska 1999). As Yannis Gabriel, Daniel Geiger, and Hugo Letiche point out, stories and metaphor have rarely been theorized as being from the same domain because, traditionally, stories have been seen as within the poetic domain while metaphor has been placed in the rhetorical domain. This division has carried over as story and metaphor have become central concepts in organization studies (Gabriel, Geiger, and Letiche 2011). In this work, metaphors are taken as a part of narratives. They are images used in stories; at times these images can become emblematic of entire stories and function as a sort of "shortcut" by invoking a shared understanding of something.

As will become apparent in Part II of this thesis, the Strategy Working Group at Bioforte makes heavy (metaphor intended) use of metaphors. The metaphor usage posits many different and contradictory images of strategy without conflict ensuing. Looking to academic strategy literature, John Hendry picks up on a similar plethora of metaphorical definitions of strategy among scholars. Based on the observation that strategy can be an idea, an object, and a set of actions, he proposes regarding strategy as a "social practice" (Hendry 2000). The various activities and definitions of strategy are then not seen as defining strategy, but rather as a set of products of the social practice that is strategy. Hendry's elaboration of strategy as social practice resonates strongly with the aim of this thesis of studying strategy work from a practice theoretical position.

A cliché is an overused expression and some metaphors become clichés, as for example with the image of strategy as a journey for a department or an organization. Whether something becomes a cliché has to do with the frequency of its use—it is a social feature that depends on the context and on previous narratives. Often when people use a cliché, they are well aware that they are employing a hackneyed term and will signify this by couching the cliché with a small "warning," for example, "as the saying goes" or "even if it is a cliché;" non-verbal cues such as hand gestures and body language are also used to signal that a speaker is aware of using a cliché (Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson 1998). There is nothing inherent in a cliché to distinguish it from a metaphor; it is a matter of practice (action and context) that determines when a metaphor becomes a cliché. If you do not know a specific social context, you might not recognize a cliché as a cliché, but instead merely see it as a "regular" metaphorical image. A consequence of this is that the attribute of cliché-ness is socially negotiated—one person's metaphor might be another person's cliché and vice versa.

Performativity: Assumptions of a Performative Worldview

It is now time to pick up the third strand in the braid and turn to performativity, and the disclosure here is that I have actually been speaking about performativity all along. The very research question for this thesis assumes performativity by asking, *What does strategy work do?* In other words, the work does something; it has effects beyond those that were intended. Broadly defined, a discourse is performative if it contributes to the construction of the reality that it describes. Performativity is thus the acknowledgement that what we do (verbal

utterances, bodily gestures, etc.) contributes to shaping our reality. Extended to the notions of practice and narrative, performativity is to be found in the recognition that concrete practice and stories contribute to constituting, or shaping, the reality they are part of (practices) and describe (narrative). In this sense, the most basic assumption of practice theoretical approaches, namely, that concrete individual practices both make up and are shaped by social practice, *is* performative.

The concept of performativity is most often traced back to the linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin and his concept of speech acts (Silverman and Torode 2011 (1980)). Austin focused on developing a philosophy of ordinary language, and an important contribution of his work is the argument for conceptualizing utterances, or speech, as action; his most famous text is titled *How To Do Things With Words* (Austin 1962). By extension, the main premise of performativity is that words and their performance have effects. In the vocabulary of practice theory, we can say that words and actions (practices) are constitutive of reality. This notion is also sometimes described with the term enactment.

It was through Judith Butler's discussion of gender as performative that the notion really took off to a degree that it has become a sort of social science buzzword in the last few decades (Butler 2006, 2010). From a philosophical position, Butler argues that gender is, in practice, culturally constructed: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler 2006, 33). Andreas Reckwitz calls Judith Butler's performative gender studies praxeological–this is in the sense that Butler's preoccupation is with how doing gender performs a social practice and considers the possibility for altering the practice through the doing (Reckwitz 2002). By way of feminist and queer theorists, performativity has been taken up by economic theorists and rippled throughout other streams of social science (Callon 2006; Spicer, Alvesson, and Karreman 2009; MacKenzie 2006).

Traditional cause and effect relationships, as also discussed in the context of narrative and strategy above, are unsettled by performativity. Butler describes that in a variety of disciplines, performativity is put to use as an "alternative to causal frameworks"; implied here is an unsettling of realist or positivist ontology (Butler 2010, 147). One could say that performativity offers a different kind of causal relationship that is oriented towards both an effect→cause *and* a cause→effect mode of reasoning. For example, the position that strategy

is performatively constituted calls into question the possibility of strategy representing an already given entity. The point is that strategy as a concept only becomes through the doing of strategy. Therefore, strategy does not represent already existing organizational capabilities and so on. Similarly, Michel Callon argues that one of the main benefits of performativity is that it displaces the "representational idiom" (Callon 2006, 15); that is, the idea that science is supposed to represent reality. Callon also clarifies that the performativity of a statement is not solely found in the statement—in other words, language is not everything and the material matters (Callon 2006).

Performativity connotes how subjects are produced by their context, and yet each doing or iteration will be different, which means that each act, or word, contains the *inevitable possibility of difference*. It is in the repetition that possibilities (for resistance or affirmation) enter. This position is also present in de Certeau's work in which he conceptualizes practices as performative—or as he says, *sites of production*.

In terms of this thesis, the research question, *What does strategy work do?* is also an explicit construction that moves focus away from individual agency. The doing is done, not by a human subject, but by the strategy work. This is not to grant agency in the traditional sense to strategy work, but it does imply the theoretical and performative point that work (actions and talk) have constitutive effects.

Performativity Is Not Merely Self-fulfilling Prophecy

A point of criticism towards performativity is that it grants language too much power and ignores political struggle. Butler responds to this critique by reiterating that Austin distinguishes between illocutionary and perlocutionary performatives: "The first characterize speech acts that bring about certain realities, as when judgments are pronounced by a court or federal increase rate changes are announced by the Federal Reserve chair in the US. The second characterizes those utterances from which effects follow only when certain other kinds of conditions are in place" (Butler 2010, 147). The argument here is that actions are always situated in a specific time and place, and given the context, they may work or they may fail. Drawing a parallel back to practice theory, practices are not only producing reality, they are also produced by reality. Similarly, narratives also exist as actions that may work and be accepted or may fail and be rejected as false depending on the context.

Martha B. Calás and Linda Smircich argue that the crux of performativity is actually to examine context as enabling and restraining specific doings: "Performativity is *not* a social constructivist or ethnomethodological account of what gender is or may be. Butler's ultimate concern is not how gender is 'done' but examining the conditions of possibility for, and the consequences of such 'doings' within norms that delimit acceptable and unacceptable expressions of gender" (Calás and Smircich 2008, 360). This comment establishes the *conditions of possibility* and the *consequences* as the objects of importance in analysis. In this sense, performativity cannot be equated to self-fulfilling prophecy, as it is a matter of interplay between context/structure/social practice and individual action and practice.

Karen Barad also weighs in with a rebuttal to the tyranny of language criticism towards performativity (Barad 2003). She finds the criticism ironic because to understand discursive utterances as performative, is to dispense with the idea that words can represent reality: "The move towards performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions" (Barad 2003, 802). Therefore, a performativity lens serves as a tool to question and examine how reality is practiced, done, and made through how it is told and constituted. Furthermore, performativity does not assume individual human agency in the same manner that a self-fulfilling prophecy does; speech acts are not the only route to performativity: objects, gestures, absences, silences, and so forth are also performative.

Strategy and Performativity

As outlined in Chapter I.2 in the overview of academic strategy literatures, a key hallmark of the Critical Approaches to Strategy is the acknowledgement that strategy is performative—that strategy creates the very problems it purports to solve (Knights and Morgan 1991). This position stands in contrast to more traditional conceptions of strategy represented by Strategic Management, for example, by Henry Mintzberg who dismisses performativity (although he calls it enactment) (Mintzberg 1994). Rather than understanding performativity (or enactment) as a condition that conveys how our present reality is always both enabled and limited by a specific context, Mintzberg discusses it as the naïve idea that things will be as-I-say. This is a simplified reading of performativity that relegates the concept to mean a self-

fulfilling prophecy, and by adopting that view, Mintzberg joins the common and also, as I hope the previous section demonstrated, misguided critique of performativity.

The key question, however, is not so much whether Mintzberg has misunderstood enactment/perfomativity, but rather what happens if you do not care about investigating the conditions of possibility for, and consequences of, strategy. The answer to this becomes that the engagement with strategy is thus "un-critical" in that it is uninterested in examining the normative aspects of the concept. Contrary to that position, this thesis adopts a Critical Strategy as Practice position, which maintains that strategy work has a set of effects that are part of constituting a reality in which strategy is seen as a necessary object. Then as a starting point, the theoretical approach outlined here leads to the assumption that *strategy is what it is because it is being done in specific ways in specific contexts.*

More Than One: Multiplicity

Multiplicity connotes the idea that there is not one true reality, but instead there are truths and realities which each have their own discourses, logics, narratives, frames, styles, categories, etc. (Law and Mol 2002). In her analysis of how arthrosclerosis is enacted in various ways in a health care system of hospitals, doctors' practices, patients' lives, and laboratories, Mol points out that being more than one is not the same as being fragmented into many (Mol 2002) . From this ontological position, reality is not one, nor many. It is not whole, nor pure fragments. Instead, it is multiple. It takes different forms; it looks different; it *is* different. Consequently, social scientists cannot simplify to find the truth, but they can work in and with complexity to illuminate truths and tell stories about how and where these different truths overlap, meet, and contradict each other.

To explain, I turn to an ancient story often used by strategy researchers: the fable of the blind men and an elephant (see for example (Cummings 2002)). The story exists in many variations, but it is always about a group of blind people touching separate parts of an elephant. Each of them, from their own tactile experience, make out an idea of what an elephant is: The man who feels a leg claims an elephant is like a pillar; the one who feels the trunk claims an elephant to be like a tree branch; the one who feels the ear says the elephant is like a large fan; the one who feels the tail says the elephant is like a rope, and so forth. Typically, the moral of the tale has to do with our limited perception of reality as the blind

men are taken to represent human consciousness and the elephant to be symbolic of reality. However, if we adopt the position that reality is multiple, then the moral of this tale shifts to underscore that we really should not be concerned with whether there is one whole elephant that exists outside of the different descriptions that each of the blind men make. Instead, each blind man represents a truth, and it is the intersection and overlap of truths that ought to interest us: Why are they all talking about an elephant? And what happens when the guy feeling the ear collides with the guy feeling the trunk?

On a more general level, taking multiplicity seriously prompts social science to focus on the interplay between my description and yours. Important considerations become the conditions for and the consequences of my descriptions: Where do I stand and what are my tools? and, What does a given description make possible and what does it preclude?

The blind men in the fable about the elephant use metaphors to describe what the animal is like: a pillar, a tree branch, a fan, and a rope. In Part II, the Bioforte Strategy Working Group describes strategy in a similar fashion. They make liberal use of metaphors for strategy: a journey, a process of cognition, a locomotive, a helicopter, a place out at the end of the world, a common thread, etc. One explanation for how many metaphors for the same thing can exist side by side is that strategy is not one true thing; it is made through the metaphors. Thus, the metaphors are *making strategy work*. This argument hinges on the fact that there is no center or essence of strategy, which is then (partly) represented in a variety of metaphors and descriptions—strategy *becomes* through the metaphors. It is made, told, and performed by the team tasked with doing strategy. The question of how to define strategy is then answered by the practice of strategy. Strategy, in the analytical approach of this thesis, is performative. It is what it becomes in practice, or put another way, strategy is defined as that which strategists do when they say that they are doing strategy. From this vantage point, the topic of investigation also becomes the way strategy hangs together. The fact that strategy does not scatter or fragment into pieces is indeed a remarkable achievement.

The Three Strands Together: Onto-epistem-ology

The reason this chapter uses a braid as a metaphor for the theoretical anchoring of this thesis is evidently because the three turns—the practice, the narrative, and the performativity turn—are intertwined. The relationship is not one of the three concepts adding up to some whole

unified theory that can then be applied in the analysis; instead, the three concepts weave in and out of each other to create a conceptual braid that underpins the exploration of what strategy work does.

From practice theory, the thesis mobilizes a conceptualization of individual practice as both shaped by and shaping shared social practice. In addition, this strand of practice is used to weave in inspiration from de Certeau's approach to theorizing everyday practice. From the narrative strand, the chapter takes sensitivity towards organizational work, and especially strategy work, as a form of storytelling and awareness that organizational analysis is also a narrative product. Narrative is unfolded as a vehicle to move meaning between individual and social practices, and as a manner of organizing the world. In addition, the strand of narrative develops the concrete concepts of distinction and metaphor, which are central in the empirical material used in Part II. From the performativity strand, a sense emerges that performativity has been present all along in the research question, the Critical Approaches to Strategy which this thesis seeks to incorporate into a Critical Strategy as Practice approach, and in the two strands of practice and narrative. The concept of performativity is understood as the acknowledgement that reality is made in the interplay between conditions of possibilities and consequences. It is important that not only human subjects can exercise performative acts; all kinds of material assemblages, and absences, are also performative. Furthermore, the strand of performativity leads to a discussion of a multiple ontology, which is central to this thesis.

The chapter's three strands, practice, narrative and performativity, have three clear points of convergence: One, they reject a representational ontology; two, they share a concern with the interplay between the individual and the shared realm of the social; and three, they acknowledge the inevitable possibility of difference.

Cutting across all three turns I have used—the practice turn, the narrative turn, and the performative turn—is a complication of traditional dualism. This undoing of dualism is intertwined in the theoretical vocabulary the chapter develops: In terms of the practice turn, the central claim is that practices constitute, or enact reality; similarly, following the narrative turn, narratives create and reflect the world as we experience it rather than as it truly is; as for

the performative turn, the displacement of a representational idiom is also an undoing of dualism.

In this manner, the theoretical braid this chapter develops also connotes a complication of traditional social science distinctions such as micro/macro, structure/action, theory/practice, process/product, objective/subjective, individual/institutional, and mind/body. Ontologically, both sides of the dash are equal. The macro is not different than the micro a priori, even if the distinction makes sense analytically (Boden 1994; Miettinen, Samra-Fredericks, and Yanow 2009). The rejection of dualism extends (all the way) to the question of being and knowing. To philosophically ground the theoretical approach outlined here, I have borrowed the term "onto-epistem-ology" from Karen Barad, who writes:

> The separation of epistemology from ontology is a reverberation of a metaphysics that assumes an inherent difference between human and non-human, subject and object, mind and body, matter and discourse. Onto-epistemo-logy—the study of practices of knowing in being—is probably a better way to think about the kind of understandings that are needed to come to terms with how specific intra-actions matter (Barad 2003, 829).

The point is exactly that the creation of the world is a continuous process determined by the product created by that same process. Put another way, practice and reality are codeterminate of each other.

The consequence of this point of departure becomes that a study of *how* the world becomes is also, and at the same time, a study of what the world *is*. In the specific terms of this project, the onto-epistem-ological stance enables a study of how the, mostly narrative, practices of strategy work constitute strategy. However, because the world is continuously becoming, any study can only and always tell the stories of a place that is no longer. Or as Law and Mol put it: "When subjects and objects are made together, there is no external resting place for those engaged in knowing and in writing" (Law and Mol 2002, 20).

This chapter has outlined the theoretical anchoring of the thesis in order to clarify the assumptions about the nature of the reality that is under investigation in the Organizational Ethnography of strategy work. The ins and outs of how this ethnographic investigation was conducted are dealt with in the following chapter.

I.4

Method: Doing and Writing Ethnography

This chapter clarifies what it means to position the thesis as an Organizational Ethnography and describes the rationale for studying strategy work ethnographically. The nature of fieldwork and fieldwork as a bodily experience is discussed before presenting the case of Bioforte as well as the details of how the study was conducted. In terms of the analytical approach, the chapter unfolds close reading and writing as analysis. The stylistic form of the ethnographic text in Part II is explained. The chapter closes with a discussion of my greatest research challenge and of what a case can and should be expected to provide.

What is Organizational Ethnography?

The full title of this thesis is *Making Strategy Work –An Organizational Ethnography* where ethnography in this context designates the written product; it is, however, also the method. I define Organizational Ethnography as close analysis of everyday practices of organizing in context. This means that as an approach to studying organizing it is committed to doing so as the organizing happens. In addition, Organizational Ethnography focuses on the everyday activities of people in organizations *and* on what makes those activities hang together (Ybema et al. 2009). As an approach, Organizational Ethnography has an appreciation for the complexity of organizing and a concern with finding out "how things work" in organizations (Watson 2011). This stance renders Organizational Ethnography an inherently critical endeavor as examining how things work entails questioning assumptions and logics of the field. Additionally, Organizational Ethnography is not methodically singular but draws on a range of methods: observation, participation, document analysis, interviews (structured, un-structured, and in between), focus groups, diary studies, visual methods such as photography and video recordings, etc. (Neyland 2008; Watson 2011).

An ethnographic approach is closely intertwined with a narrative approach as ethnographers both gather and create stories. To exemplify this John Van Maanen writes about *Tales of the Field* (1988). The "of" in the title can be interpreted both as stories gathered

in the field and as stories made *from* experiences in the field. Story is both input and output. In this way, ethnography actually becomes triply-narrative: The empirical material consists of narratives recorded in the field *and* narratives created by the researcher from the field, *and* the ethnographic product offers (analytical and theoretical) narratives about these stories of practice.

A crucial hallmark of Organizational Ethnography is that the researcher spends extended time in the field in order to not just *observe* or *see*, but actually *experience* practice. Through experiencing practice, ethnographers gain knowledge of their field, which allows them to imagine the alternatives. Ethnographers must not only listen well and observe carefully, they must also immerse themselves in the field in order to hear what is silent, and see what is absent. In that way, the ethnographic approach is not only interested in what is present, but also what is absent. By knowing the field, ethnographers know the range of possibilities; they get to know "normal"—not to be confused with taking normal for granted.

Historically, an ethnographic approach is intertwined with Organization Studies because the discipline was established based on detailed qualitative studies of work (Barley and Kunda 2001). Around the middle of the last century, more quantitative-oriented methods and approaches gained ground as the preferred tools of Organization Studies (Czarniawska 2012). The tide turned again around the 1970s and 1980s when qualitative studies of organizations began to re-emerge. The current movement for ethnography in organizations extends from this methodological shift (Humphreys and Watson 2009).

As the phrase "Doing and Writing Ethnography" in the chapter title implies, Organizational Ethnography designates both the method and the product—both the way the fieldwork is done and the textual product. John Van Maanen discusses ethnography as composed of "three constitutive (and overlapping) tasks – fieldwork, headwork, and textwork" (Van Maanen 2011, 218). The tasks are constitutive and overlapping because ethnography works as an open approach. By open, I mean that the parameters and questions are not determined ahead of the study but evolve out of the work. In that way, questions and answers co-evolve as the fieldwork, the headwork and the textwork develop.

A few words on nomenclature: Although I have chosen to describe this study as Organizational Ethnography, with some methodological elaborations, it could conceivably be classified as, for example, business anthropology (Moeran and Garsten 2012), praxiography (Mol 2002), ergonography (Czarniawska 1999), ethnomethodology (Garfinkel 1999 (1967)), grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), qualitative analysis (Huberman and Miles 2002), or, simply, a case study (Yin 1994; Flyvbjerg 2006).

I have, however, chosen to throw my lot in with Organizational Ethnography for three main reasons: Firstly, I gravitate to Organizational Ethnography for the "organizational" part. As Chapter 2 and 3 clarifies, this thesis situates strategy work firmly as an organizational practice and argues that strategy deserves a central place in Organizational Studies. Within the scholarly tradition of Organizational Ethnography, I find a range of scholars who all have an ethnographic sensibility towards, specifically, human lives as they unfold in organizations. The purpose of devoting a thesis to studying strategy work is to become wiser about organizing, which in turn will lead us to become wiser about our world, because we live in an organizational world (Etzioni 1964).

Secondly, I cherish the attitude of the Organizational Ethnography tradition as a whole: Within Organizational Ethnography there is an embrace of the complex as well as an attractive and fruitful capacity for wonder—a willingness to explore what makes up both the wonderful and the not so wonderful elements of organizing. This attitude has also been called an "Organizational Ethnography sensibility" and it sets the approach apart from other takes on studying organizations (Ybema et al. 2009).

Thirdly, the Organizational Ethnography tradition maintains careful attention to language, both in the field as an object of study and in the written text as a mode of communication. This appreciation for carefully crafted language is, for me, exemplified in the poignant titles of Organizational Ethnographies. Here are some studies of organizing that both display this feature and have been inspirational for this thesis: *Men Who Manage* (Dalton 1959), *Crafting Selves* (Kondo 1990), *The Business of Talk* (Boden 1994), *Organizing Modernity* (Law 1994), *In Search of Management* (Watson 2001), *The Body Multiple* (Mol 2002), *Engineering Culture* (Kunda 2006), and *Flexible Firm* (Krause-Jensen 2010). The title of this thesis, *Making Strategy Work,* is also a nod to the tradition of employing a double entendre in ethnographic work. I see the ingenuity of these punning titles pointing to the ethnographic tradition's

embrace of complexities, focusing on the slipperiness of meaning, and displaying a fondness for imaginative interpretations of possibilities, as well as a playful love of language.

Lastly, let me point out that, as with most things, the strength of ethnography is also its weakness: The emphasis on the specific and contextual requires a large time investment and also precludes broader studies. Therefore ethnography is not always the answer. If a researcher has a question, for example, about the extent to which Northern European corporations work with strategic plans, then a different research approach will be more appropriate.

Studying Strategy Work Ethnographically

Given the fact that we are in an age of strategy and that every organization needs a strategy to be taken seriously, it is perhaps surprising that there are not many more in-depth field studies of strategy. Strategy is an important and rich area for Organizational Ethnography to engage with, but there are not many ethnographies of strategy (Watson 2003). What there is, on the other hand, are plenty of *calls* for more ethnographic studies of strategy[4] (Vaara and Whittington 2012; Watson 2011; Rasche and Chia 2009; Balogun, Huff, and Johnson 2003; Jarzabkowski, Balogun, and Seidl 2007; Jarzabkowski 2008). This thesis consciously responds to these calls and offers one take on what an ethnographic study of strategy work can look like.

There may be some good reasons for why strategy work has not been thoroughly explored by Organizational Ethnographers: Firstly, the ubiquity of strategy is a relatively new phenomenon, so perhaps the studies just have not been done yet. Secondly, strategy work has traditionally taken place at the upper echelons of organizational life while ethnography has a strong tradition for working at "the bottom" and studying the everyday lives of ordinary people. Thirdly, strategy work in organizations is often considered a sensitive and confidential affair which may pose a challenge for ethnographers seeking to gain access (Johnson, Balogun, and Beech 2010). That said, Organizational Ethnography is perfectly poised to study strategy

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[4] While Henry Mintzberg and colleagues have conducted voluminous empirical research of strategy, I would characterize this form of research as historical rather than ethnographic. Mintzberg's method is retroactive; rather than studying strategy as it happens, he relies heavily on interviews and document analysis (Mintzberg 2007).

work because of the focus on organizing *as it happens.* The "as it happens" part is crucial because it allows the ethnographer to experience and take part in events as they are woven into the fabric of reality. It is this process of weaving, that ethnography can tell stories about. Traditionally qualitative strategy research has relied on retrospective sense making produced through interviewing strategy makers about their decisions and choices (Hendry 2000). Needless to say, following strategy work in real time is a very different approach which allows the researcher access to not only the decisions that stick, but also to the overflow and the ignored—that which does not make sense in the end. As Phyl Johnson, Julia Balogun and Nic Beech put it, studying strategy requires "an approach that goes beyond talking to or observing strategists, to being with them. This implies a co-inhabitation of a set of meanings and explorations of intended and unintended, conscious and unconscious, actions and consequences" (Johnson, Balogun, and Beech 2010, 247).

Doing Organizational Ethnography in the Field

Organizational Ethnography is conventionally divided up into work in the field (fieldwork) and work at the desk (headwork and textwork). Working ethnographically usually begins with fieldwork, which quite simply means to go out into some part of the world for an extended period of time and to record your experiences in fieldnotes. Fieldwork can entail different activities depending on the topic of study, but it is crucial that the researchers establish relations and prolonged interaction with the people and the practices they seek to study. It is not about some pre-defined protocol to follow, rather the elements of fieldwork, such as listening closely to understand what is going on, learning how to maintain social relations, and figuring out how to fit in, are essentially what we do all the time as human beings (Watson 2001). Doing ethnography is more than just "being human" however, because as an ethnographer at work you will constantly question if you are doing the right thing, if you are in the right place, and if your research will ever come together in a product with a coherent argument. The fact that the framing of the research develops and evolves as you go along means that ethnography requires imagination and stamina beyond everyday life.

The very first issue for an ethnographer embarking on a study is access. Access is not only about physical access because it is not enough to simply be in the room if no one is willing to interact with you, explain things to you and include you. Furthermore access is not

a onetime affair; it needs to be continually renegotiated. Access hinges on *establishing*, *developing* and *maintaining* relations in the field (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2009).

Once initial access has been granted or arranged, the ethnographer in the field takes on the role of "participant observer." Participant observation, or fieldwork, is "a research practice in which the investigator joins the group, community, or organization being studied, as either a full or partial member, and both participates in and observes activities, asks questions, takes part in conversations, and reads relevant documents" (Watson 2011, 206). As participant observers, ethnographers work in the tension of being both an insider and an outsider. Observation is always already a form of participation and participation a form of observation. In order to participate you need to observe and vice versa. This is a form of entanglement, and it is from this position that "fieldwork can 'reconstruct' the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, scientist and native, Self and Other as mutually constituent, rather than see it as an 'unbridgeable opposition'" (Moeran 2009, 154). An occupational hazard of the participant observer role, is that the ethnographer ends up in the middle of things and that can be difficult: You might be told secrets and be expected to keep them; you might overhear, or otherwise come into possession of sensitive information and thus be obliged to treat such information sensibly. Navigating these kinds of situations successfully requires an ethical compass and a sound sense of judgment, just like life.

The most important tool for fieldworkers therefore becomes their social skills, intuition, and common sense. Susan Leigh Stars offers some helpful advice for what fieldworkers should do:

> I teach students in my fieldwork classes to listen and look for two things: first, for the special language used in a location, metaphors, *mot justes*, turns of phrase, private codes used by one group and not another. Second, for things that strikes them as strange, weird and anomalous. What is causing them doubt? How may it become inquiry? In this, the strength of fieldwork is its anthropological strangeness and nowhere is that more important than in the beginning stages of inquiry.
> Over the past several years, in studies of various groups of scientists, technicians, doctors and nurses and patients, I have often encountered that funny feeling of finding an anomaly, sometimes embedded in the distinct language of a workplace or health care venue. **It is a little irritating feeling, kind of a pre-sneeze sensation—and it is also exciting.** Learning to trust this message is the toughest lesson I have to teach my students—no less than myself (Star 2010, 605).

This description of how fieldwork is something you *feel* underscores that as a fieldworker you also bring your body with you—indeed it is your most important tool. Melville Dalton, whose book *Men Who Manage* from 1959 is often put forth as one of the earliest Organizational Ethnographies, similarly describes how he works with "hunches" rather than hypotheses (Dalton 1959, 1964). Hunches have the distinct quality that they develop along the way *and* can be dropped if necessary—they depend on and are reactions to your intuition.

Bringing Our Bodies With Us into the Field *and* into the Text

Fieldwork is a manifestly physical experience: For the ethnographer in the field, the body is the central tool, yet in the ethnographic product, the imprint of the body is rarely present. Although researcher reflexivity has become a necessary and unavoidable trope in ethnographies over the last twenty-five years, roughly since *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986), the ethnographies I have read are still often written as if the ethnographer is all brains, and maybe eyes, but rarely body. Law briefly discusses the absence of the body in ethnography (Law 1994) and I would speculate that this absence of the body might be more prevalent in Organizational Ethnographies because in contemporary Western discourse, it is rare that work in organizations is taken up as a bodily experience.

As outlined above, I aim to contribute to the Organizational Ethnographic tradition with this study of strategy work. In addition, it is my ambition to extend the awareness of bodily experience in Organizational Ethnography by writing a thesis that is "more bodily" through my awareness of the bodies (including my own) in the field, my own body as an analytical tool, and in the textual choices and style. I will elaborate my thoughts on the latter towards the end of this chapter. I do not aim to write an ethnography that is "all body," but merely to consciously make an effort to bring the body in.

The issue of bodily experience in this ethnographic project was exacerbated by the fact that when the fieldwork began, I was visibly pregnant. The fieldwork ended when I reached full term and went on maternity leave. This means that throughout the strategy work that I followed and participated in at Bioforte, my belly was growing. A pregnant body is vulnerable and intimate. But really, any body is, so this discussion of the condition of the pregnant fieldworker is presented as an "extreme" situation to reflect on something wholly ordinary: We all have bodies, all the time.

I organize my discussion of how my pregnant body impacted the fieldwork around the two axes of *space* and *time*.

S P A C E

Taking Up Physical Space: Within ethnographic approaches to studying organizing, there is enormous weight put on **being in the field**, on inserting your body into the field, but not very much reflection on what it means to actually and physically insert your body into the space that is the field. My pregnancy made me hyper aware of my body at Bioforte: It was not possible to forget that I had a body, and the fact that I occupied physical space. When a woman is pregnant her body intrudes: it takes up more space; it becomes more public; it bursts forth and inserts itself into social interactions; it refuses to be ignored or overlooked and suddenly people comment on the body. In this way, being pregnant forced the bodily issues for me: How do the people in the field respond to my physical presence? How does my body occupy space in the field? And what happens when it does?

Of course, as researchers, we are never ephemeral. We always have bodies. We just often forget that we do, and only very rarely do our research products contain reflections of how our bodies affect our research.

Where Am I Seeing From?: Being pregnant had bearing on how people saw me AND it shaped and directed my own gaze. The point is not that I would have otherwise been "neutral," but rather that because my body was in the temporally-limited and extreme condition that is pregnancy, it (and the body inside it) was noticeable in a way that our body and gaze are not normally. We tend to forget our bodies; and as a consequence, we may also forget to examine where our own gaze is coming from.

A Shared Space: During my time in the field, my belly grew larger and larger and the mother stepped out in front. Stories of childbirth and anecdotes of children popped up with increasing frequency. For those who are parents, my mere presence served as a mirror for them to experience their own past pregnancies, or their partner's pregnancies. At the lunch

table, the conversation around me often turned to life with babies and revolved around themes such as the lack of sleep and the agony over which car seat to choose.

Access: A field researcher needs to continually renegotiate her access. She needs to work to be included, not just in terms of getting initial access, but also to be included in the conversations, meetings, and so on. Given how my pregnancy was an evolving condition that created a shared conversation space, it also did some of the access negotiation for me.

Personal Space: The pregnancy both expanded and shrunk my personal space. I had more personal space because, through the pregnancy, I was marked as unavailable and as someone with another life outside of work. On the other hand, I had less personal space because conversations quickly got personal as people would ask me personal questions and also share their own experiences of having children. I had the sense that the people in Bioforte felt they knew me, because they knew the most obvious and at the same time incredibly intimate thing about me: I was about to have a baby. Furthermore, in settings where people normally do not touch each other, someone would occasionally even put a hand on my belly.

Two in the space for one: As a pregnant woman you are also bringing another body into the research context. You are literally carrying the fetus with you as you conduct research, and the unborn baby may interfere and shape the work in its own way. It may kick you, make you feel sick, cause you to run to the bathroom constantly, or to be really hungry. It may prompt you to daydream, exhaust you and in that sense pull you away.

T I M E

Identity Overlaps in Time: We all have different identities and we usually perform them **one at a time**. Pregnancy, however, is there **all the time**. In that way, pregnancy is a visual representation of multiple identities—a sort of instant intersectionality is granted by the visibly pregnant belly. As a researcher, I also became a mother to be. People looked at me and saw both a field worker and a pregnant woman.

To some at Bioforte, the idea of having an academic running around might have been a bit unsettling because they do not know what to do with one of those, much less what they do. But a soon-to-be-mother, on the other hand, is an immediately recognizable category that they had no problem engaging with. There is an immediate opening and point of relation, which not only fosters emotional connections, but also allows for a whole host of light conversation topics, from opinions on home-birthing to car seat positioning.

Visible Ends and New Beginnings: Being pregnant meant that my exit from the organization was guaranteed. My participation and presence would end because of the firm and non-negotiable deadline of my due date. The people at Bioforte could feel sure that I would not ask for more interviews or maneuver my way onto other projects. It was not possible that I would hang around forever and be difficult to get rid off.

In terms of my own fieldwork schedule, the pregnancy dictated when I would leave the field. This decision of when to get out can be difficult when doing fieldwork because there is always something more to follow, always more to know. Some researchers talk about saturation and claim that you should stop your fieldwork when you find that you are not discovering anything new. This it very impractical advice as it is likely that you can go on discovering new things infinitely in any setting.

Temporary: While the pregnancy signaled a definite end to my field engagement, it was also very much the temporariness of pregnancy that caused the condition to be so influential. I noticed the pregnancy and its impacts because I could easily remember when things were otherwise. I recalled a time when my body was not as cumbersome—when it was more easily ignored. It is like when you have a broken leg; suddenly you notice all the steps and stairs.

A Pause: The pregnancy also interfered with the project in the sense that it put the analytical process on pause while I was on maternity leave. It thereby inserted a larger than otherwise time gap between the ethnography in the field and the ethnography production at the desk. The disadvantages of such a pause are that, even with fieldnotes, recordings, photos and so on, it may be harder for me to remember details of what happened at Bioforte when writing about it a year later. The advantages of such a time-lag are that it removes my analysis from

the organizational present where it might be more threatening. The distance in time has a dulling effect on the nuisance of having someone watch you carefully and write about you. It is perhaps easier to agree, "oh yes, we used to be like that," than to accept a researchers rendition of something that is current. Furthermore, because of the pregnancy, I have had a long time to reflect on my Bioforte experiences. The analytical phase has been stretched out to a length that would seem frivolous were it not for the pregnancy and maternity leave. This elongated time between the ethnography in the field and the ethnography at the desk also makes it possible, and inevitable, to insert a sliver of separation between the writer of the thesis and the fieldworker. Now that I am no longer pregnant, I actually feel as if the Marie of back then was a different person. Additionally, the pause has meant that I have been able to check back in with Bioforte to find out what happened in the time after the strategy work.

A Note of Hesitation: Given the nature of the fieldwork—strategy work in a multinational corporation with comfortable offices fairly close to my home—it is hard to imagine that the pregnancy shaped my work as an ethnographer in prohibitive ways. But had my fieldwork been physically demanding or perhaps taken place in a different location, such as a laboratory working with radioactivity where pregnant women cannot work, then the pregnancy could have limited my fieldwork. Luckily, I think the main effect of being a pregnant ethnographer in this case was that it prompted a set of valuable reflections about my main research tool, my body.

The Case: Why and How Bioforte?

The fieldwork that forms the foundation of this Organizational Ethnography was conducted in a biotechnology company that I have given the cover name Bioforte. Part II Chapter 5 opens with a presentation of Bioforte, so here I will only outline some basic information before presenting how I came to study strategy work in Bioforte.

Bioforte is a Danish multinational company with more than 2000 employees in around 30 different countries the world. Bioforte's headquarters in Denmark house company offices as well as research and development facilities. The company has a male CEO and is structured, similarly to many of its competitors, into three major divisions.

Given that Bioforte and the people working there are anonymous in the thesis, the descriptions of the company are necessarily vague; identifying characteristics and details that might easily identify the real Bioforte have been left out or altered. The same goes for personal characteristics of the people involved in my fieldwork, except for myself. The goal for the writing is that the people from Bioforte will recognize themselves in the stories, while other outside readers should not be able to literally identify them and the company. Just like Bioforte is a made up name, all names of people in the company have been changed, and names of departments, programs, strategies, and the like have been purposefully re-named with sufficiently generic alternatives that are not so different, in essence, from the real names.

Bioforte reviewed a draft of this thesis and requested a set of changes. The requests for changes and deletions cluster into three categories: First, personal information not related to the strategy process about the people working at Bioforte; second, writing discussing confidential executive-level conversations; and third, elaborations about cooperation with Sarah Jones, an academic researcher who has previously been involved with Bioforte. Even though the case is anonymous, I have followed Bioforte's requests and changed the writing to reflect their concerns.

My engagement at Bioforte can be divided into three phases as per the table below (for a more detailed overview of my fieldwork activities, please see Appendix 1):

Period	Phase
Dec 2009 – July 2010	1) Pre Fieldwork Phase (Exploration and Pilot Study Phase)
Aug 2010 – Nov 2010	2) Primary Fieldwork Phase (Strategy Work Phase)
Dec 2010 – Present	3) Post Fieldwork Phase

Table 1: Fieldwork Phases at Bioforte.

I first came into contact with Bioforte when I was invited to join an "injection from academia" session in December 2009, where the company had asked for academic scholars to respond to their current Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) challenges. The session took place in Copenhagen, and I was there as part of the academic panel. The panel also consisted

of a colleague of mine from CBS and another academic scholar. At the afternoon meeting, the CSR manager, Monika, first presented the Bioforte CSR strategy and challenges, then the academic panel, including myself, responded with impressions and theoretical reflections. At the time of the meeting, I was exploring where to do fieldwork for my thesis, and Bioforte seemed to be a good fit for ethnographic work because of their openness towards academic researchers; indeed, they themselves had arranged for the "injection from academia" session. Furthermore, the headquarters was within reasonable travel distance from my home and from CBS, plus Bioforte is a multinational company, which I was explicitly looking for at the time due to my focus on CSR and innovation. I was searching for a company that was large enough to have a position on CSR as well as an in-house innovation practice. After the session, I exchanged business cards with the Vice President of Stakeholder Engagement, John, and the CSR manager, Monika, and received permission to contact them in the future.

Later in the spring of 2010, I called Monika, and we met to discuss my possible research involvement. At that time, my topic of CSR and innovation was also interesting for Bioforte, especially for Monika, in her role as responsible for CSR. Following our conversation, I did a month long pilot study consisting of a few days of observation and a handful of interviews. After the pilot phase, I gave a presentation of my findings at a Stakeholder Engagement Department meeting. At this point, John agreed to let me conduct more extensive ethnographic research at the company, and the focus of my fieldwork shifted, mainly because the Stakeholder Engagement Department was about to embark on a strategy process that I could follow and be part of. Participating in a defined process was attractive both to me and to Bioforte: I then knew more precisely "what" I had to study, the strategy process as it happened in a set of meetings and conversations, and for the Bioforte team, the addition of a researcher made sense in the context of the strategy work because they then knew how to involve me and could imagine how I might be useful. Thus, I became an academic member of the strategy team: I got an access card, a computer with a Bioforte email address and access to the company intranet. My quasi-employee status also granted me permission to buy lunch tickets to use at the lunch buffet. We signed a research contract and the work began.

Given the nature of ethnographic fieldwork, the ethnographer's previous experience plays a

role in how the ethnographer experiences the field. In my case, my background as a consultant in boutique consultancy focusing on "strategy execution" served as a kind of Phase 0, a pre-pre-study. From my professional experience, I brought to the fieldwork the advantage of knowing the language, tools, and conditions present in other instances of strategy work. Holding my fieldwork experiences at Bioforte up against my previous experience as a strategy consultant was immensely helpful, because either I experienced something I could recognize, which prompted me to think: "This is just like that time when... I wonder why?" Or the reverse would happen: "I have never seen this before, I wonder what is going on?" In that sense, I could use both *recognition* and *unfamiliarity* to prompt ethnographic headwork.

The fact that I have experience as a strategy consultant on my CV, was also a benefit in negotiating access; Bioforte saw my addition to the team as a benefit. Two years previously they had also had an academic researcher involved in their HR strategy process. I have given her the pseudonym Sarah Jones. Sarah worked as a consultant and had received pay for her work. She has since also used Bioforte as a case in her academic work. Several times I pointed out to John that I saw my role differently: I was not getting paid, rather I was a participant and an observer doing fieldwork, so they could expect me to be part of the strategy work, but not to take charge of the process. During the fieldwork I felt, and tried to manage, the tension between being an insider and an outsider. I sometimes got the sense that the team wished I would steer the process more or do more work for them. Even though it was hard to feel like I was letting them down, I deliberately hung back. My impulse was at times to step in and take over, for example, by structuring meetings, following up, producing documents, and so on because that had been my role in these kinds of processes in my previous job as a consultant. However, I decided that it was okay for the team to be a little disappointed in me, and that I was not at Bioforte to be a consultant, but as an academic researcher participating in *their* strategy process. That said, I did try to be helpful: I would summarize conclusions from meetings in writing; I conducted interviews internally in Bioforte; I prepared PowerPoint slides; and I would work with one of the team members to develop communication, structure the process, plan the meetings, and prepare meeting materials.

Phase 1, the exploration and pilot study phase, took place before the strategy focus for the fieldwork emerged, and therefore I was familiar with Bioforte by the time the strategy work

began—I had a feeling for the way people spoke, I knew a bit about the past and more recent history of the company, and I would not get lost trying to find the canteen on my own. And, perhaps more importantly, the people in the Stakeholder Engagement Department were familiar with me because I had been around and had given a presentation at a department meeting. I had already been introduced and I was not a stranger at Bioforte.

Phase 2, my primary fieldwork period of observing and participating in the strategy process, lasted from week 23 to 43 in 2010. During the primary fieldwork period, there were 60 working days. I was present at Bioforte 27 out of those days (a full overview is, as mentioned, in Appendix 1). A few were half days, and I also did some work on the strategy from my office at CBS and from home. So I estimate that my engagement with the strategy team was about 50% during the months of August, September, and October in 2010. Apart from the informal participation that comes from just "being at work," I participated in all Strategy Working Group meetings and email correspondence regarding the strategy work. Additionally, I conducted 15 interviews with internal Bioforte stakeholders as part of the strategy work. As part of generating ethnographic fieldmaterial, I also conducted narrative interviews (Czarniawska 2004) with the six other members of the Strategy Working Group towards the end of the process (please see Appendix 2 for details). Because the interviewees had worked with me for months prior to the interviews, the interviews were characterized by a free and open tone, an established level of trust, plus a common vocabulary and shared organizational context. The main disadvantage of our familiarity at the time of the interviews was that interviewees sometimes cut explanations short or left them out because they assumed I did not want to hear things (they thought) I already knew. This happened even though the interviews were framed by a calendar appointment, roles of interviewer and interviewee, a recorder on the table, my pen and notebook, and a closed door to a one-on-one meeting. All together these elements served to establish the interview situation as different from other everyday interactions with the group members. Due to the contextualization of the conversations as interviews, I felt free to ask for elaboration of points and to pose "stupid" questions.

The material that I mobilize in the Organizational Ethnography in Part II was collected and generated during the strategy process. It consists of fieldnotes, interviews, documents, photographs, and audio recordings.

Because I would end each day in the field by driving home, I would tape record myself during the car ride. I would recount the day's impressions and to try to capture the mood of the day as well as my thoughts about what had happened that day. These recordings form a set of spoken fieldnotes, which I later transcribed. For a strategy workshop that I could not attend due to my impending due date, the rest of the group taped the entire workshop for me, and one group member, Benjamin, took pictures of the workshop.

I also took pictures myself while doing fieldwork, but obviously cannot use my own shots or Benjamin's from the workshop in the thesis as they could potentially reveal the identity of the company. In Part II of the thesis, I do use a single picture to illustrate the materiality of strategy work, and that picture is composed in a way that does not give anything confidential away. Even though only one picture is included in the thesis, the pictures were useful for me in the analytical headwork and textwork phase because looking at a picture, combined with notes and recordings, jolts my visual memory and transports me back to the feeling of being at Bioforte.

My notebooks from my fieldwork at Bioforte are a reflection/illustration of the participant observer role I had in the field: The pages are full of observational notes and fieldnotes complete with time stamps, and on the same pages, in between and next to these kinds of notes, are to-dos pertaining to the strategy work, decisions from meetings, feedback on specific documents I had prepared, and other such work (participant) notes.

I should also note that the strategy product plays a very limited role in the ethnography. This is mainly because the study is a study of **strategy work**—that is, the work that goes into making strategy and all the effects this work brings about. The specific content of the official outcome—The Strategy—is considered close to irrelevant in following this line of investigation. If the goal had been to study the product very closely, ethnography might have had to yield to more document-oriented approaches such as discourse analysis. In addition to the reasons grounded in the research question and approach, and on a more practical note, I have also refrained from detailed descriptions of the strategy document because thorough description

and readings of the strategy could possibly reveal the actual company that here appears as Bioforte.

Writing Ethnography at the Desk

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the term "ethnography" is both the method and the product; it is through deskwork, which entails both headwork and textwork, that the fieldwork is transformed into "an ethnography" as a product. Usually ethnographers move physically out of the field when it is time to undertake the deskwork. That was also the case for me as I conducted this phase of work at my CBS desk. In my case, the headwork and the textwork intertwine because I use writing as an analytical process. My analytical approach can be explained through the tropes of close reading and writing as analysis.

Close Reading

Close reading is an approach to texts that pays particular attention to how meaning is constructed through literary devices such as syntax, word choice, repetition, themes, style, metaphors, tropes, rhythm, etc. Close reading has been around for as long as texts have been around, and probably before that too, when there were drawings on caves to "read," but it became fashionable as a distinct approach to texts in the early to middle twentieth century with New Criticism (Baldick 1990). New Criticism advocated a move away from biographically based interpretations of texts to readings focusing solely on the texts as self-contained entities. While New Criticism is now rather unfashionable and considered politically naïve, close reading remains a foundational tool for literary criticism.

The powerful questions that close reading poses are quite simply, *What does the text say? And how does it do it?* Adjusting these questions slightly and expanding them to the ethnographic context, my approach has been a close reading of practices: *What* does the Bioforte team do when they say they are doing strategy? And *how* do they do it? Asking these questions in the field fosters a sustained attention to the details of the action, the language, the shared social practices, the stuff (materiality), and the bodies involved in the strategy work.

Close reading of course also implies writing because recording the insights from the reading happens in writing. This therefore leads to the other aspect of my deskwork, writing as analysis.

Writing as Analysis

As the etymological roots of Ethnography, ethno = people and graphy = writing, imply, the ethnographic approach is very much about writing your way through (Humphreys and Watson 2009). In my case the knitting and kneading of the material to construct the argument began with visual mapping of ideas, and with memo writing to development themes and analytical strands (Clarke 2005). The writing is not merely the representation of material and arguments, but rather it is also the organizing and creating of both the material and the argument. It is all writing.

In this manner, ethnography is consciously and explicitly literary; a contention that has been widely acknowledged in the field at least since *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). The task of Organizational Ethnography is to create stories, narratives that both describe what happened and why it is important, or put another way, how we should understand it.

Given that ethnographies cannot hide from the fact that they are literary accomplishments, the question becomes what to do with that (self)consciousness? This question leads to debates of reflexivity: "Reflexivity...is conducted both in the field and in the text. It is increasingly acceptable, if not expected outright, that researches do not hide behind a 'third person,' omniscient exposition in their accounts – the so called 'view from nowhere' or 'God's-eye view' (Haraway 1998; Harding, 1993) – but, instead, weave their analyses of their positionality into their textual representations" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2009, 60). This weaving can be done in many ways. Traditionally a sort of "confessional tale" mode of inserting the "I" (eye) of the researcher into the text has been adopted, but there are many tools in the literary toolbox that can be used to deal with the conundrums of representation. Czarniawska suggests that social science texts move away from stubbornly ignoring form to borrow, or poach, from literary genres (Czarniawska 2010). She quotes Bruno Latour in her argument: "To the few wooden tongues developed in academic journals, we should add the many genres and styles of narration invented by novelists, journalists, artists, cartoonists,

scientists and philosophers. The reflexive character of our domain will be recognized in the future by the multiplicity of genres, not by the tedious presence of 'reflexive loops'" (Latour 1988).

In this thesis, I strive to avoid such a wooden tongue and as part of this quest I reach for form. Inspired by social scientists like Annemarie Mol (2002) and John Law (1994), Part II employs two different styles of writing and fonts, in order to illustrate reflexivity in texture and not merely in argument as reflexive loops. In this way, the combination of writing styles conveys an argument about the position of the researcher as participant observer and as storyteller.

On Style

The first half of the thesis, Part I, which is nearing its end with this chapter, contains a more traditionally academic text with references and a certain tone that I hope is both professional and personal. Part III is meant to match this tone and work with Part I to bookend the analysis. Part II of the thesis, on the other hand, aims for something different. It builds on the first part, but it is more playful in style. Part of the reason can be found in the conundrum of how to describe complexity—describing and explaining, even demonstrating, is simplifying, which is the *un*doing of complexity. Herein lies a researcher's challenge, and my response has been to reach for language, with all its possibilities of puns and slippages, double meanings, (mis)understandings, (mis)readings and (re)readings.

Part II of the thesis, the ethnographic section, braids two genres, or voices, of writing, and the two are distinguished visually through typography. The first genre, which I will call "descriptive" text, is rendered in the sans-serif font Gill Sans light and contains narratives from the field written in the present tense. While I do not believe there is such a thing as pure description, I still call this genre descriptive because it is stories of what happened at Bioforte as I experienced it. I have written these descriptions in the third person and the present tense, incorporating a character that is a PhD student fieldworker from CBS called Marie. The second genre of the ethnographic section, which I call "reflective" text, is rendered in the serif font Goudy Old Style; the same font used in the rest of the thesis. In this genre, you get an omniscient and more traditional academic voice-over narration of what the Bioforte stories are about. Occasionally, you will also read "I" in these sections. This I is a different character

than the Marie in the text because the I is the author of the thesis, whereas Marie in the descriptive sections is a fieldworker whose actions are also being studied and read by the I of the reflective text. Given that I was once Marie, I have a deeper access to Marie's thoughts and reasoning than to those of the other characters in the ethnography.

The Goudy Old Style sections are reflections on and readings of the Gill Sans light descriptions, which are in turn reflections on and readings of my experiences in the field. Therefore, it is not a case of pure descriptions of reality followed by analysis, instead I present layers or genres of narratives, which do not adhere to a strict chronological order. Cinematic language provides a helpful allegory to explain the relationship between the two genres of writing: The descriptive text is similar to scenes in a film, while the reflective sections provide the voice-over commentary. The former is more plot-driven, while the voice-over unfolds what I perceive as the point or the morals of the stories. The five chapters in Part II are composed by themes and the text does not follow a strict chronology. Just as the title of the entire thesis is pregnant with meaning in a way that is typical for ethnographies, the subtitles of the sections in the Organizational Ethnography are composed with the aim of pinpointing the analytical insight. When quotes appear throughout the ethnography, they are actual quotes recorded in the field.

The typography, fonts and spatial arrangement on the pages divides the text into two kinds of writing: Descriptive and Reflective. This division between descriptive parts in the present tense where I include myself as a character in the stories and reflective parts with a more omniscient narrator, is offered as an experimental literary solution to what Marilyn Strathern calls the problematic "elision between fieldworker, writer and author" in ethnography (Strathern 2004 (1991), 9). In the ethnography in Part II, I textually split myself into character and author. By having a character named Marie in the descriptive text, the fieldworker can be "read" as the other characters are read. The Marie character can be as stupid, ignorant, fumbling, clever, action-prone, etc. as the others. Weaving myself in also becomes a textual example of how I believe that ethnographers must put themselves at stake in the work in order to experience practice, not merely observe actions. With this literary and visual separation of the fieldworker and the author, I hope to produce the following benefits:

-The present tense choice ironically gives both a closeness and a distance: Closeness in the immediacy that the present affords (à la a crime novel) and distance through a signaling that this is a story, rather than the illusion that we can offer a precise and complete report of events in the field.

-The form of Part II expresses and demonstrates the entanglement of researcher and field when taking on the role of participant observer.

-The text reflects a level of self-consciousness and artifice that I find true to fieldwork.

-The form puts me as an ethnographer at stake because my character is treated at the same level as the other characters in the story, and becomes as vulnerable, if not more so.

-The form can place me inside the story; for example, when I write "they" about the Strategy Working Group, it also implies myself at the time.

-The fact that there is both a Marie as a character in the story and a Marie as the author of the thesis underscores how the ethnographer writing and the ethnographer in the field both are, and are not, the same person.

-The form demands imagination from the reader.

-The form is playful and allows the reader to experience an academic argument in a manner that is hopefully pleasurable.

Language Considerations: English and Danish and Translations Between

The fieldwork was conducted in a mixture of Danish and English as Bioforte uses Danish for informal communication such as verbal discussions and emails, but use English for more formal documents such as their strategy. In many large corporations in Denmark, the working language is English, which means that most documents are in English, and meetings will be conducted in English if international staff is present. Overall corporate communication, for example, communications from the CEO, is also often done in English, but in informal settings people speak Danish. This is common practice for large organizations in Denmark and it produces a sort of peculiar management language where English phrases are woven into Danish sentences. This layering of language is, unfortunately, lost in translation. For example, in one interview, John says:

John: ... og det der ligger i det her, det er også at vi vil være proaktive. Altså vi skal være sådan et energicenter hvor der kommer en masse god karma fra og gode koncepter og spændende ting der sikrer at vi er **committede** og professionelle og der er **drive** i forhold til at **execute**. Det er det vi gene vil.

John even takes the word "commit" and uses it like a Danish verb. Instead of the correct English "committed," he conjugates it in Danish and creates "committede," a word that is neither English nor Danish. At Bioforte I also heard uses like "driversne" instead of "the drivers." English words are creatively massaged to conform to the grammatical rules of the Danish language. In the English translation, this texture of the language mixing disappears and the feel necessarily shifts a little. Here is the translation of John's comment:

John: ... and in this is also something about being proactive. I mean, we need to be an energy center from where there is a lot of good karma, good concepts and exciting things emanating which will ensure that we are committed and professional and there is drive in relation to execution. That's what we'd like to do.

In the translation, it is still obvious that John uses "Strategy speak" because he uses the words "committed" and "drive in relation to execution" but the artifice is slightly reduced compared to the Danish version of his comment.

Knowing that I would eventually write a thesis in English, I wrote up my fieldnotes in English. With certain expressions, direct quotes, and interview transcriptions, I used Danish to preserve the particular mood and feel invoked by the language. Then in the writing phase, I have translated material on an ongoing basis. Translation and analysis intermingled in the process of writing this thesis because as I unfolded the experiences in the field, I had to move them into another language. When I translate, it is obviously not just about finding the equivalent English words. It is about writing an English language account of what happened and about giving the text a feel and energy that is true to the story from the field that I aim to tell.

The fact that I write in English while most of the work I observed and participated in was conducted in Danish gives a linguistic distance; a distance that I imagine is more helpful than harmful. My text is obviously translated, and therefore it cannot be a pure transcription. The burden of representation is somewhat lighter when pure transcription is so obviously

impossible. At the same time, the translator's task is crucial because in the part of the writing process that she is responsible for, she holds the representative power. I have tried to translate as faithfully and as honestly as I could.

The Research Exchange

It is appropriate to ask, What did the organization gain from having me conduct ethnographic research there? And what did I gain? Of course, it is difficult for me to know what, if anything, Bioforte got out of the exchange. I can only speculate about the more intangible benefits of having a researcher affiliated with a corporation. In Bioforte, I heard that having an academic around gave them "a breath of fresh air," because an outsider has a new perspective. My presence also signaled that Bioforte is a company worth studying, that they are interesting and do interesting work. For John, the fact that he brought me into the mix made him appear as a leader with connections to academic life, and that could possibly imply that he is a leader with access to cutting edge knowledge, at least for those who view the university as at the forefront of knowledge. I also hope I was nice to have around; that me being present at a meeting would at least not make it a worse meeting.

And then there is the more tangible stuff. The two presentations I gave to the Stakeholder Engagement Department, the 15 interviews I conducted as part of the strategy process, and the additional work I did as part of the strategy group. The employees of Bioforte will also be able to read this thesis and see themselves. I am fairly sure that the thesis will not be what they expected, but, nevertheless, there is a full piece of academic work devoted to them.

So what did I get? Well, I got the one thing without which this thesis could not exist: A company to conduct fieldwork in where there was great openness and a welcoming attitude towards me. Without access to Bioforte, and to a specific work process where my role as participant observer was accepted, there would not be any ethnographic study of strategy work.

My Greatest Fieldwork Challenge: Researcher and/or Consultant?

Fieldwork hits you hard. Or as Czarniawska puts it: during fieldwork "the identity of the researcher—that image of themselves that successfully functioning adults take for granted—is challenged" (Czarniawska 1998, 33). This threat to your identity happens because as a participant observer you go into a new context and you need to find a way to conduct research in that environment; it is highly likely that making it work entails taking on new roles and leaving behind your old ways and preconceived notions of who you are. Additionally, studying people around you will invariably lead you to also reflect on your own practice. And perhaps you won't like what you see.

In my case, the primary tension in the fieldwork was between being useful and using people. Qua my experience as a consultant, I had done a different kind of "fieldwork" in organizations; a kind where I was expected to give answers. When I embarked on the fieldwork in Bioforte, I was very conscious, and also explicit with my Bioforte contacts, that I was not a consultant but a researcher. The reason this distinction is important for me is that there are both overlaps and important differences between the two roles: Both the consultant and the researcher listen closely and try to understand the organization; however, while the consultant conducts an analysis to give action-oriented answers, a researcher (at least the kind of researcher I am) provides (merely) analysis. This felt insufficient and uncomfortable at times. I found myself holding back impulses to flip open my laptop and create the fancy PowerPoint graphic that I could see in my mind's eye and which I knew would please. I prevented myself from being prescriptive, from taking over the running of meetings, and from thinking that I have answers. This was a struggle for me because I had to forego the quite intoxicating affirmation consultants get from other people considering them smart and valuable. Even though I made efforts to clarify the researcher role, and to give back with integrity from the position of the researcher, and even though the Bioforte team never mentioned it, I still felt at times that John and the other participants in the Strategy Working Group did expect me to step into the consulting role and give them some kind of tool they could use.

As an illustration of what the people at Bioforte might say on this topic, here is the Vice President of Stakeholder Engagement John's answer when asked what his department got out of having the researcher Marie participate in the strategy process:

John:	We have to go get some food soon. I can answer like this. It was the second time we did it. I mean, we had Sarah earlier and I think that both times it has been fruitful because the danger with what I am saying here about how we get our ideas by looking at the ground is that we do not get the ideas you cannot get by looking at the ground, I mean. That there is someone from the outside who comes in. It gives some air under the wings. It causes you to pose some questions. It is not because you have told us what to do, but you have been part of the discussions and asked some questions. I mean, you have qualified the process with those contributions. And then you have been a big practical help, by keeping things on track. Where are we in the process and all of that, but that could every...that could anyo...that could also have be done by an internal person if you hadn't been here
Marie:	yes yes

Asking the question required me to muster some courage because of my misgivings of not living up to expectations, and I appreciate how John's reply captures many aspects of the situation: He thinks it is valuable to mix it up a bit; I did not tell them what to do; the fact that I was present shaped, or qualified, the process; I was a practical help; and any one of them could have done what I did.

In hindsight, I can connect the challenge of the former consultant coming to terms with the ethnographic researcher role to my struggle with finding the best answer to the question, What is a researcher good for? Throughout the PhD process, this question has remained with me, and the answer that I am now, at the end of the thesis process, ready to give as an answer to the question of "what is a researcher good for?" is both banal and universal, but nevertheless powerful: The researcher can tell a good story.

How Do You Know If The Story Is Good?

Once the task of the researcher has been defined as "telling a good story," the obvious next question becomes, "How do you know if a story is good?" A short answer: It is good if it works. In order for this thesis to do anything, it has to work, and while it is not up to me to decide if it works, I would like to propose the three concepts of **trustworthiness, beauty,** and **use** as preconditions for a story working. These concepts are thus also the evaluation criteria that I find appropriate for this thesis. The first, **trustworthiness**, I poach from a discussion of Organizational Ethnography by Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow (2009). The latter

two, **beauty** and **use**, are proposed by Czarniawska (2008, 1998) as more helpful than validity and reliability when it comes to evaluating social science.

In terms of the first criterion, **trustworthiness**, the key is that it is not about perfection, but rather about the research being taken seriously: "What is most notable about trustworthiness as a standard for assessment is that it places scientific research squarely in a social context, recognizing the interdependence of researcher and readers as contextually embedded, sense-making actors" (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2009, 63). This idea of the centrality of social context for research is in tune with describing research as a more or less believable story. In that sense, trust is the precondition for research even being accepted as research. In the Organizational Ethnography tradition, trustworthiness is usually achieved through the researcher providing a credible and detailed account of the circumstances of the study, as I have attempted to do above.

In terms of **beauty** as an assessment criterion, there is not much more to say than: It matters because form and function are interrelated and we humans are aesthetic creatures. Additionally, beauty is not singular; a study can be beautiful in many ways. Nor is beauty universal; it depends strongly on context and on the audience. In this sense, beauty and use are intertwined.

The third criterion of **use** for research is possibly the most reader-dependent of the three. Shifting from case to story in the question, What is a ~~case~~ story useful for? allows imagining better and more open answers. Good stories work in different ways for different people, and stories that tell you what they are good for are rarely any good. Similarly, Law and Mol argue that cases are not representative, but that they are "able to do all kinds of other work" (Law and Mol 2002, 15). In terms of other work, they suggest that a case can be useful by working to: Sensitize, seduce, suggest ways of thinking, condense or symbolize, act as an irritant, destabilize expectations, and work allegorically. To that list we can add other workings such as inspire, confuse, critique, remind etc. Which kind of work a given case can do depends on the reader's specific situatedness because when you read you interweave your experience, your needs, your inclinations, and your position in time and space in order to put the text to use. This is how reading becomes a site of production as de Certeau says (1984).

Part I of the thesis draws to a close here, and it is time to turn to my tales of the field in Part II. The task of Part I has been to equip you as a reader for the stories ahead by introducing the thesis' topic of strategy work and research question (Chapter I.1), by explaining the thesis' position within the academic strategy literature (Chapter I.2), by laying out the conceptual braid which anchors the stories theoretically (Chapter I.3) and by letting you know what I understand by Organizational Ethnography and how I came to study strategy work at Bioforte (Chapter I.4).

II

While Part I anchors the thesis in terms of its position towards academic strategy literature, theoretical approach, and method; Part II forms the analytical heart of the thesis. It is an ethnographic text that describes and reflects on the fieldwork experiences at Bioforte. The conceptual braid developed in Chapter I.3 is the implicit theoretical backdrop for the themes of practice, stories, and performativity that the text explores. The ethnography opens with a prologue that presents Bioforte and the strategy work context. Then it consists of five sections that together give an answer to the question of what strategy work does: Chapter II. 1 argues that strategy work organizes both the Strategy Working Group and the department; Chapter II.2 discusses how the strategy work is organized and how it organizes other work; Chapter II.3 describes how the selves of the strategists (including the researcher) are organized by strategy work; Chapter II. 4 demonstrates a set of distinctions performed by strategy work; and lastly, Chapter II.5 discusses tensions and contradictions of strategy work at Bioforte. Part II ends with an epilogue. The insights about strategy work that emerge from the ethnography are discussed in Part III, which concludes the thesis.

The Scene and The Cast of Characters

BIOFORTE A multinational biotech corporation headquartered in Denmark. The company is successful but fairly unknown to the general public. Although the company is global, Danes occupy all executive posts. Recently, there has been a shift in the ownership structure of the company, which has resulted in a feeling of being in the big leagues now and therefore needing to live up to the professional standards of a multinational corporation.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

A department comprised of the Human Resources (HR), Communication, Process Improvement, and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) units.

THE STRATEGY WORKING GROUP

John Executive Vice President of Stakeholder Engagement. The boss. Owns an old manor house in Sweden. John is a psychologist by education. He wears a suit to work, but usually without a tie. He is easy to like. He talks a lot and often quite frankly as he thinks out loud.

Susan One of three HR Managers. Often serves as a trusted advisor to John. Wears colorful tunics and slacks. Laughs easily. Generally trusts her intuition and prefers creative, sensible solutions that work.

Benjamin Process Improvement Manager. Has only been at Bioforte for little more than a year. Used to be a management consultant. Usually wears slacks and a button down shirt. Runs a meeting in a way that makes it seem like he is enjoying himself; decisions and actions are recorded on the whiteboard, with owners and deadlines assigned.

Elizabeth Communications Manager. Used to work in a public relations role before she was promoted to lead the Bioforte Communication Department. Normally wears slacks and a button down shirt. Her demeanor in meetings is often diplomatic yet determined.

Eric Elizabeth's baby. A calm and mostly content little fellow. Three months old when the strategy process kicks off.

Helen Project Manager in Stakeholder Engagement. Worked for Susan at another biotech company before she came to Bioforte. The most junior person in the Working Group. Has a casual business look. Manages Stakeholder Engagement projects and, at times, also John's calendar. Can be rather brusque in her manner, which she jokes about herself.

Monika CSR manager. Used to work in a more technically oriented department. Is passionate about CSR and about Bioforte developing a strong CSR profile. Usually wears a black suit and a blouse. Works long hours.

| Marie | CBS PhD student conducting ethnographic fieldwork at Bioforte. Has previously worked as a consultant. About the same age as Helen. Visibly pregnant. Wears slacks or maternity skirts and blouses. |

OTHER PEOPLE

David	Communications Specialist at Bioforte. Works for Elizabeth.
Tom	CEO of Bioforte. Strikes an informal, yet authoritative figure. Has been at the company for most of his career.
Sarah Jones	An Associate Professor at CBS who helped develop the previous round of Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.
Frank	Executive at Bioforte.
Bob	Executive at Bioforte.
Michelle	HR Manager, colleague to Susan and Nicole.
Nicole	HR Manager, colleague to Michelle and Susan.

KEY CONCEPTS

Growing Excellence = Bioforte corporate strategy.

Conductors of Science = Professional development program for Bioforte scientists.

| ELC | (Executive Leadership Committee) 5 men and 1 woman in charge of the different divisions of the company, includes John, Frank and Bob, and the CEO, Tom. |
| MBB | A reputable global management consulting firm. |

SUB WORKING GROUP TOPICS

Key Challenges
External Trends
Stakeholder Analysis

BIOFORTE COMPETITORS

Vivatek
Livzoom
Zyndo
Scantek
Plaxtek

Prologue: Welcome to Bioforte

This story takes place in the multinational biotech company Bioforte in the fall of 2010. At the time of this story, the company has around 2,500 employees working in Denmark and in locations across the globe. The Bioforte headquarters are in the outer suburbs of Copenhagen—in the borderland between city and countryside. Modern buildings, generous in their use of glass, divide up grassy areas in a campus styled arrangement. The buildings hold laboratory space and offices and you can walk between the buildings on tiled paths. Around the campus area, there are woods and, in the woods, other company campuses with parking lots around the edges.

Although there's a lonely bus stop at the entrance to the parking lot, and once in a while an employee on a bike with a backpack carrying office clothes rolls up, employees mostly drive to work. At the Bioforte parking lot, there are two kinds of cars: cars bought with sense and cars bought with desire. There's a lot of the former kind: sensible midsize cars from makers such as Skoda, Hyundai, and Toyota. And then at the front, in a few reserved parking spots for executives, you find some cars bought with desire: a handful of Audi and BMW SUVs.

To get to the lobby, you must pass through a revolving door. The lobby is a large two story open room and it's kept in white and steel. When a visitor arrives, the receptionist on duty behind the white curved desk with the white phalaenopsis orchid arrangement asks the visitor to sign in on a computer, prints a name tag, and then calls the Bioforte host to announce the visitor's arrival. Upstairs from the lobby, there are meeting rooms and a handful of executive offices. Connected to the lobby is the canteen, which is a large open split-level room furnished with Danish design classics. The lobby color scheme of white and steel continues here, but the huge glass walls let in a lot of green from the surrounding forest, depending on the time of year of course. Around noon every day, after passing the hand sanitizer stand and rubbing a dollop of disinfectant foam on their hands, employees walk up to a buffet spread out over three large rectangular tables. Each day there are many things to choose from: a fish dish, some lean meats, and lots of vegetables and salads. A couple of cutting boards next to the basket of freshly baked bread hold an exquisite selection of cheeses.

Right before this story begins, Bioforte underwent a major change in ownership, which will be referred to here as "the shift." For a prolonged period of perhaps 6-12 months, people at Bioforte felt insecure about would happen to the company, to their departments, to their jobs, to their colleagues, to their lives. Of course none of these things, company, departments, jobs, colleagues, and lives, are ever stable, but the impending shift foregrounded the usual uncertainty and added a layer of drama. One email from the CEO specifically told Bioforte employees that they couldn't discuss matters related to the shift, or anything concerning the future of Bioforte, with anybody, really. So they tried hard not to, but the shift was there, right under the surface of any conversation for a long time. There were silences, awkward moments, knowing smiles, and comments such as "depending on what things look like in the future" and "anything's on the table." Decisions and big projects were put off until after the shift. At the time of this story, the shift has occurred and the dust has settled a bit. The mood at Bioforte is a mixture of relief that the shift is over and eagerness to prove that the organization is worthy of this shift from the old—a mom and pop kind of shop—to a new more professional big-league kind of company.

Marie is a PhD student at Copenhagen Business School. She's coming to Bioforte for her first day of fieldwork at the company. John, who's the Bioforte executive in charge of Stakeholder Engagement, has agreed to let her hang around and involve her in the upcoming strategy work in the Stakeholder Engagement Department. After she's entered her name into the computer by the front desk, the receptionist asks Marie if she's there for a job interview. Marie is comforted that she looks the part. She then realizes that the question is probably also an indication that she overdressed, given that her goal with the carefully picked out outfit of black slacks and a blazer over a freshly ironed blouse is to look like a regular Bioforte employee.

  The receptionist hands Marie a visitors badge and asks her to wait in the lobby while she calls for her host, Monika, to pick her up. Marie sits down in the stylish black leather chair and waits for Monika to escort her through the revolving doors onto the path towards the Stakeholder Engagement Department in the next building.

The Stakeholder Engagement Department is located in a two-story building close to the canteen. The square building sits around a courtyard with a neglected picnic table and some wilted shrubbery. The long hallways have royal blue carpet, white walls with framed Bioforte

advertisements, and lots of doors leading to individual offices. The door handles are round white plastic that feel light to the touch when you open a door. Usually the offices have a desk near the window, a small table for meetings closer to the door, and a whiteboard on the wall. Apart from offices, each floor has a couple of little kitchen areas where you can make tea and coffee and prepare department breakfasts.

The Stakeholder Engagement Department occupies a corner section on the second floor of the building. Starting from a photocopier in the corner, the offices fan out in both directions. Some people have a small individual office and some share a larger space with colleagues. John has a large corner office where, apart from his desk, there's room for both a big conference table and a white couch. There's a large abstract oil painting on the wall next to the conference table and framed lithographs and watercolors above the couch. Behind the desk is a large whiteboard. Next door to John sit the three HR managers: Michelle, Nicole, and Susan. Each of them has a small private office. A couple of doors down, Helen, an HR project manager, also has a private office. Down the hall, straight across from the kitchen, is the CSR office where the four desks for the CSR team seem rather crammed and the walls are covered by bookcases brimming with binders and books. Monika's desk is the one by the window closest to the door. Across the hall from the CSR office and back in the direction of the photocopier, Benjamin shares an office with a colleague. There's an extra desk in there, which the two Process Improvement team members who work abroad can use when they are at the Bioforte headquarters. If you exit the Process Improvement office and walk left past the door leading to the bathrooms and make a right at the corner, the Communications office is the next door on the right. It's a large office shared by the entire Communications team. Elizabeth's desk is the first one in a row of workstations by the windows facing the courtyard. On the left side of the room, there's a meeting table and a large fern-like plant in a white pot.

The Stakeholder Engagement Department at Bioforte is only a couple of years old. The department was created when the Human Resources (HR) department was merged with Communications and the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) unit. Then a small Process Improvement team focused on implementing Lean principles throughout the organization was added. Additionally, the department includes a HR Service Center, which handles all matters of compensation, etc. The Facilities Operations, which consists of the kitchen staff running the lunch canteen as well as the groundskeepers and the mail staff, also formally belongs to Stakeholder Engagement, but the connection is almost invisible in the daily life of the

Stakeholder Engagement Department as none of the canteen, maintenance, or mail staff attends meetings or participates in other ways in the Stakeholder Engagement activities. The reorganization resulting in the creation of the Stakeholder Engagement Department coincided with the finalization of the last round of HR strategy work, which means that this time around is the first time that the Stakeholder Engagement Department is making strategy.

The backdrop for the Stakeholder Engagement Department strategy work consists of two important pivots: The first is the larger organizational shift, which ushers in a need for Bioforte to be more buttoned-up and business-like; the second is the departmental shift of creating the Stakeholder Engagement Department, which results in a need to re-make the department into an integrated whole rather than a collection of separate units. These two recent events both engender the need for a new Stakeholder Engagement strategy and they also influence the strategy work.

Organizing Us: Do We Make Strategy or Does Strategy Make Us?

Making a strategy demands that you are the kind of department that has a strategy—you must communicate a single purpose and what you do must coalesce around distinct objectives. In this way, strategy work feeds back on you and shapes you.

Strategy Here, There and Everywhere at Bioforte

Months before the strategy work in the Stakeholder Engagement Department started, and in the Pre Fieldwork Phase as part of exploring what fieldwork opportunities exist at Bioforte, Marie met with a manager in charge of innovation who described how Bioforte had recently developed a strategy for innovation—it has twenty-one steps and three enablers and is graphically represented on a colorful PowerPoint. As the innovation manager was explaining this slide to her, Marie understood that if you hope to have your agenda taken seriously at Bioforte, you must develop a strategy.

At the same time as the Stakeholder Engagement Department works on their departmental strategy, the Executive Leadership Committee is also working on a corporate strategy. This process is run by MBB, a prestigious management consulting firm; the same firm helped develop the twenty-one-step innovation strategy.

At lunch one day, Marie's eye catches a little colorful folder sitting in a clear Plexiglas holder next to the soda fountain. It says "Bioforte Nutritional Strategy" on the front above a smiling wholesome looking blonde woman.

A flash forward: When Marie goes back to Bioforte in March 2012, she gives a short talk at a Stakeholder Engagement Department quarterly meeting. Using PowerPoint, she presents how

her time with the department is transforming into a PhD thesis. On the agenda slide that opens the meeting, Marie's presentation is sandwiched between a presentation, given by an Executive Vice President, of how one of the Bioforte divisions is implementing the corporate Growing Excellence strategy and a presentation of the new diversity strategy that John and Monika have developed. There are three items on the agenda, plus some logistics regarding an upcoming "work camp" at John's house in Sweden, and all three of them are about strategy.

First the Executive Vice President presents the development in his division over the last few years. Then it's Marie's turn and after her presentation, John and Monika give an overview of their recent work with formulating a strategy for diversity. Their presentation is subtitled, "Making Diversity and Inclusion a Competitive Advantage." Before they dive into the slides, Monika mentions that a few top Bioforte guys went to South America on business and at one meeting with a big customer, they were received by only female executives who weren't afraid to put their stilettoed foot down[5]. This experience made them realize that Bioforte was probably behind the curve when it came to diversity. So they decided that Bioforte needed a diversity strategy.

At Bioforte, strategy truly is everywhere: it spreads like a web throughout the organization. There is corporate strategy and departmental strategy, and then employees develop individual career strategies. Projects have strategies; the same is true for processes. But strategy is not uniform or singular in all its appearances—it is many different things and it fulfills many purposes, purposes that can shift as the time and place of strategy shift.

The ubiquity of strategy is not an object of reflection for the employees, nor is there any question of whether strategy is a good thing and more strategy is an even better thing. Strategy truly is the way to get almost anything done in the organization. At Bioforte, strategy signals that there is a sense to it all; meaning and purpose has been found and declared. If

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[5] Unfortunately, there is no great English translation that fully captures the linguistic finesse at play here. The usual Danish expression Monika invokes is "fremme i skoene" which literally means "forward in the shoes" and connotes attentiveness, decisiveness and energy. This expression is often translated as "to be on one's toes," which is close in meaning but usually implies a certain frantic activity and that someone else, or something else, is keeping you on your toes. The expression Monika adapts, on the other hand, involves a strong sense of individual agency. Monika substitutes stiletto (stiletten) for shoes (skoene) and says "fremme i stiletten." This re-engineering of an idiomatic expression rather elegantly introduces gender and power into the diversity strategy presentation.

there is a strategy, it means that there is someone who has thought the relevant issue through, ready to assure you that it is all under control.

With strategy, a web spreads throughout Bioforte; it is both a web that the Strategy Working Group is caught in and one that they spin additional strands onto. They "work it," so to speak.

One of the key hubs in the web of strategy at Bioforte is the overall corporate strategy, which is not the focus for this story, but which is nevertheless important to the context of strategy work in Bioforte's Stakeholder Engagement Department.

A Corporate Strategy? You Buy That From a Consultant

Right before the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group finalizes their strategy, the Executive Leadership Committee distributes the corporate strategy—Growing Excellence— for Bioforte. The corporate Growing Excellence strategy is developed with help from MBB. MBB is one of those global management consulting firms that flood corporate hallways with young analytical lions in expensive dark suits. The development of the corporate strategy by MBB in collaboration with the Executive Leadership Committee happens simultaneously with, and separately from, the development of the Stakeholder Engagement strategy. Marie is told that MBB was chosen because someone on the Executive Leadership Committee has a personal contact there that they really like. Once both the corporate strategy and the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy are finalized, they become linked through the tag line Growing Excellence. The front page of the final PowerPoint representing the Strategy Working Group's efforts reads: "Stakeholder Engagement Strategy 2011-2016 Growing Excellence."

Growing Excellence, which John tells Marie has been chosen by MBB as the title for Bioforte's corporate strategy, is also the title of an immensely popular management book, and to Marie, seeing Growing Excellence on a PowerPoint slide in John's office immediately conjures up the critique of the book as a methodologically flawed book about a handful of companies who in reality were neither growing, nor excellent. Marie asks John if he knows of the book, and it's clear that he doesn't, nor is he terribly interested in knowing about it. To most Bioforte employees "Growing Excellence" is merely the title of the corporate strategy, not an explicit reference to a book. And if they recognize the title from the spine of one of the American

management books on their office shelf of books procured at workshops and management courses, chances are they didn't read the book, much less know about the subsequent critique of the book published in academic journals.

When organizations turn to management consultants for help with developing a corporate strategy, they get more than just a strategy. Hiring consultants to work on corporate strategy also makes a corporation into a business that is serious about strategy. External advisors help craft strategy that is true to the genre used by other multinationals and will therefore be familiar sounding and trustworthy to shareholders, press, and other stakeholders. However, at the end of their engagement with a management consultancy, corporations do not only get the legitimacy that a solid corporate strategy provides, they also get to signal, internally and externally, that the issue of strategy is high-priority. It is partly through the task of creating a corporate strategy and partly through engagement with consultants that the organization becomes the kind of company where strategy matters.

That is not all, however; the corporate strategy's tasks goes beyond establishing legitimacy with stakeholders and creating a strategic company to being useful for the people working at the company. Organizations, and especially multinationals like Bioforte, are complex entities where many people work on many different projects in many different ways. If a corporate strategy is to be relevant to all of them, it must be rather broad. If it is too specific, it will exclude people, tasks, perhaps even departments. A corporate strategy therefore needs to be sufficiently generic that a large variety of ongoing projects, activities, and strategy efforts can find resonance in it. Otherwise, the corporate strategy is a showstopper. In that sense, a corporate strategy needs to be specific enough to be meaningful and feel true to the organization, yet it must also be loose enough that a large variety of people can apply it to their own specific context. In that sense, a corporate strategy must both tell one good story *and* facilitate a lot of other good stories. This is not a simple task.

Strategy Work in the Middle of the Organization

The Stakeholder Engagement Department is in the middle of the corporation. They are a support function in the organization, and the people working on the strategy for the department are middle managers, except for John. In the traditional understanding of

strategy as the corporate plan of action, the department does not, strictly speaking, need one. They could just add a few action points to the corporate strategy. Yet they do need a strategy of their own. Not only because the Executive Leadership Committee has asked John to present the strategy for his department, but also because they feel that they need a strategy in order to know who they are as a department.

The Key Challenges Sub Working Group is having a meeting with Marie. Her job is to act as a representative for the Strategy Working Group and clarify any questions concerning the overall strategy model and the process, and to see if they'll be able to meet the deadline for presenting their input to the entire Stakeholder Engagement team. The meeting is in Helen's office because she isn't here today. Apart from Helen's desk, the room also has a small table that they huddle around. Michelle, who's been assigned as anchor for the group, looks at the strategy model in the PowerPoint deck that Marie and Helen have prepared and says that she's bothered by having to begin this process without being totally clear on what the corporate top-level strategy is. They discuss how this Stakeholder Engagement strategy process is only just beginning and that hopefully John will come back next week from his trip to Sweden with the Executive Leadership Committee with some more clarity. Marie says that she completely understands Michelle. What if, for example, the executive strategy turns out to be: Let's take on Asia. Michelle looks down at her paper, points to the end of the bulleted sentences, and remarks, "then we'll just add "in Asia" at the end of everything." They all laugh at the joke.

Two truths hold: The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group need to know what the corporate strategy will be after the shift in order to create a Stakeholder Engagement strategy, **and** they are fully capable of developing a Stakeholder Engagement strategy in the absence of a clear corporate strategy. This is the reality of creating strategy in the middle of an organization, where on the one hand, it is an impossible task as the corporate strategy is dictated from the top, yet it is also a necessity because the top expects that the department presents a strategy to them. Given that the board and the corporate leadership need to approve the department strategy and will not approve a strategy that is incongruent with the corporate strategy, the maneuverability of the department is actually quite limited. In addition, the department already has a bunch of initiatives running and is already working on

many different tasks. Yet the very concept of strategy runs on a fiction that the department strategy determines the actions and initiatives of the department. This strategic logic does not hold however, because if strategy determines activities, then the department activities would be determined by the corporate strategy, and then there would be no need for the departmental strategy.

This position of making strategy in the middle becomes less of a dilemma if the work of making strategy is seen as the work of making sense of it all by telling a good story about the department and the work that it does as useful and valuable. This shifts the attention to the other work that strategy work does by telling a good story that ultimately lends legitimacy and some autonomy to the department. The corporate leadership wants a good story about what the department is up to, one that justifies the department's existence and can serve as one of the chapters in the larger story that chronicles why the entire company is useful and valuable. Once they get the story and are convinced by it, they are more likely to leave the Stakeholder Engagement Department alone to make decisions and go about their business as they see fit. In this sense, the department strategy builds trust and creates space.

Making the Strategy Group Work

Back to the strategy work in the Stakeholder Engagement Department: In August 2010, the strategy process begins. Marie is at Bioforte and John stops by the office she's borrowing to say that he has time to see her now. They go to his office to discuss the practical aspects of organizing the strategy work and Marie's involvement. Together they frame Marie's presence as a team member who's also using the strategy process as the empirical basis for her PhD thesis. Last time the Stakeholder Engagement Department did strategy, they had Sarah Jones there as a consultant to engage with the process. Sarah is also an academic from CBS. This will be similar. Marie carefully tries to point out that her approach and role is very different from Sarah's. For one, Marie isn't getting paid to develop a strategy, and the scientific paradigm she works within is much different from Sarah's. John doesn't seem too concerned with these differences that Marie perceives to be crucial. Marie decides this isn't the time to launch into an in-depth discussion of the epistemological differences in academic strategy research. Instead she makes sure that John doesn't expect her to be in charge of the strategy process. She's happy to be on the team and will do her best to be useful; at the same time,

she's at Bioforte to gather and produce field material. Even though she used to be a consultant, she doesn't want to lead and steer the process.

John mentions that he was surprised how helpful it was to have Benjamin be a part of the discussions about strategy before the summer holiday. He really has a lot of good ideas. John thinks that perhaps there should be a working group for the strategy process, but that it's really important to think of issues of envy, so it won't work to make an official group. He'd like Benjamin and Susan to be working on this.

The phone rings and John answers, and after hearing who's on the line, he gestures to Marie that she can stay in the room. It's Elizabeth, head of Communications, calling to say that she'll be by tomorrow afternoon. She's at home on maternity leave. Her little boy, Eric, is three months old. John has asked if she wants to be involved in the strategy work even though she's on leave. Her point of view is important for the work, but he feels that the work cannot wait until she gets back, so on the phone they discuss how she can contribute while on leave.

John gets up to get Susan. It's the fourth time he leaves the office. He darts in and out to stick his head into other offices to ask questions such as "Is Benjamin here today?" "When is Helen back?" and "Who's got the documents from the last meeting?"

The next day is a Friday; Marie is working at her desk at home. At 11:40 am, she gets a call on her cell phone. It's John on a speakerphone; he's in his office with Benjamin, Susan, Elizabeth, and her baby, and he wants to establish that group, including Marie and Helen, as the Strategy Working Group. Marie says that this is of course fine with her and that she's coming to Bioforte next week.

The following week, Marie arrives at Bioforte a bit after 9 am on Monday. She checks in with the friendly receptionist, who by now recognizes her and remembers her name. John has arranged that there's an access card ready. It's a white plastic card in a plastic pocket with a clip. Marie fastens the card to her jacket as she's seen other Bioforte employees do. At this time of the morning, foreign visitors arrive. Usually they come in small groups and usually they are men in suits speaking a foreign language such as Polish, Arabic, or Spanish. A woman in a chef's jacket wheels fruit and water for a meeting through the lobby on a trolley.

Marie walks across the company campus to the Stakeholder Engagement Department. Right after she arrives, John comes to fetch her so she can join the meeting in his office. Helen, Elizabeth (including her baby in a large pram), Susan, Benjamin, and John are gathered.

They have copies of three hand drawn models in front of them. Benjamin created the models based on the strategy model John drew on the board behind his desk. John enters with Marie and picks up right where he left off before he went to fetch Marie.

As the group talks about the model and the strategy work, someone says that Monika should really be part of this group. Given that she's the CSR manager, she needs to be part of these discussions.

The fact that the composition of the group was a process of congealing rather than of a deliberate up-front declaration does not mean that the formation of the group is not important. It is very important. The Strategy Working Group has a special status because it is concerned with creating the departmental strategy. Being in the group means that you get to speak strategy. And speaking strategy is powerful and influential. Creating strategy signals that you are one of the people who get to decide the future. The composition of the Strategy Working Group emerges as the outcome of a complex set of events, opportunities, and restraints–some visible and some invisible. Invisible, but important, is a sense of what feels good to the members of the working group. Who is it nice to have in the room as part of the discussions? The composition of the group needs to allow the group to make strategy work. Without the experience of prior group formation at Bioforte or the clarity of hindsight, the process seems rather haphazard.

After the fact, the group will communicate it as perfectly reasonable and obvious that the Strategy Working Group needs to consist of John, Susan, Benjamin, Elizabeth, Helen, Monika, and Marie. However, before it is so, John articulates how there should be no official working group. At Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement, an official group is anxiety inducing because it means including some people and excluding others. Of course, it is inevitable that some will be in and some out, but openly declaring this demarcation is simply not the way it is done at Bioforte in the Stakeholder Engagement Department. Therefore, instead of the group being appointed and chosen, it congeals and the members of the group see to it that it makes sense.

In the context of Bioforte, strategy work is seen as important, meaningful, and powerful; additionally, the department values inclusion and congeniality, which leads to anxiety around the group composition. On the one hand, having some people participate in strategy work signals that they are more important than others, and on the other hand, the

department cherishes a culture where everybody is considered important. The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group needs to work around this tension in order for them to do strategy work, and they do.

How Do We Bring People Along?

The Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group is faced with a dilemma: Strategy is experienced and framed (also) as a process of cognition, which is a time demanding process that will transform the department.

John: Because the strategy process is a process of cognition and that's why it's important that you organize it in a way so that you take the discussions and you explore all areas.

This framing of strategy as a process of cognition poses some problems because cognitive processes are individual journeys and not everyone in the department is involved with the strategy work, thus not everyone goes through the process. The solution the Strategy Working Group reaches for is to try to communicate the process in concentrated form to the rest of the department. This proves to be a very difficult task because the people who have not been present at the strategy discussions obviously have not gone through the same process of cognition, and condensing such a process is a tall order.

The Strategy Working Group is preparing for a departmental strategy meeting where the rest of the Stakeholder Engagement department will be brought into the process. They'll be updated on the work the strategy working team has been doing and asked to provide input on the preliminary vision statement. The Group discusses what to say:

Elizabeth: I think it's important that we point out that this is an anarchistic process. Perhaps at the end on Friday. We're improvising, getting some input, and then perhaps asking for more.

While she talks, Elizabeth makes opening and closing gestures with her hands to illustrate the move of asking for input, working off that input, and then including other's input again.

Helen: It would be good if you [meaning John] said that at the end .

The Strategy Working Group returns often to the question of inclusion. Marie is a bit puzzled by the obsession with having everyone participate because it seems like both an unrealistic and an impractical ambition to her. John explains why he thinks they should strive for inclusion and how it's very difficult to make it work:

John   But the more you can get people to make the strategy, the more ownership they'll typically take, right. So therefore it's my personal opinion, I mean, I often try to make processes as broad as possible. But then there's a threshold of pain too, where things fall apart because it becomes too big and ungainly. But then you have to make some compromises and there it's important to include those who haven't been seated at the table. And get them involved…. that they won't just be presented with the final result but so that they also encounter some subtotals and have a possibility of commenting and so on, right. That's why we did this broad process and narrowed in, and broad and narrow, right. I mean, that at least was the intention.

The opening and broadening of the process happens through the department giving input on the draft mission statement at a quarterly Stakeholder Engagement meeting. Marie and Helen have prepared little white cards for the meeting participants to jot down their impressions of the mission statement and their ideas for possible improvements. After the meeting, Marie collects the cards and the Strategy Working Group discusses the responses at a meeting. Eventually the Group decides to leave the mission statement as it was.

Another opening of the strategy process happens in the form of a lunchtime road show, which Marie and Benjamin prepare. They order sandwiches and invite the department to tour three different rooms. In each room, there's a presenter from the Strategy Working Group to present a sub section of the strategy and a prepared poster with blank space for input. Marie stands at the back of one of the rooms, leaning on a windowsill wondering why the session feels so strange. The people present listen attentively but don't have many comments. There's no time for them to digest the information or to start a discussion before they have to move on to the next room.

In the strategy work process, there is a struggle between inclusion by openness and productivity by slimming down and narrowing in. The Strategy Working Group wants to include everybody, but that is impossible, so they compromise by designing a process that is

meant to give a shortcut to inclusion. By asking the department for input, they try to condense a process of cognition in order to hurry those not included in the strategy work along the same path that the Working Group has gone down. The hope is that the rest of the department feels the strategy in the same way that they have been feeling it. This is quite impossible, but something else happens in this move of opening the process to those not included in the Working Group.

By inviting the input from the entire department on drafts of the strategy and mission statement, the Strategy Working Group both signals where the work is headed and that they are the kind of Working Group that values input from the rest of the team. The problem is that it is very difficult to contribute to a process that you have not been a part of. This is maybe the reason why Marie felt a strange awkwardness in the room during the road show. People listening simply did not know what a contribution would look like because they were just seeing the information for the first time without the knowledge of what was discussed to reach the version they were being asked to comment on.

Even though the mission statement is not changed as a result of the input, and the comments from the road show are meager, the opening of the process is described as a necessity by the Working Group. It is possible that the department could reject the strategy if they felt that it was created in an exclusionary process, which did not allow them to contribute. I think it is more likely that the sessions including the rest of the department in the process ensure that the strategy work becomes shared by the whole department and not only the task of those involved in the Working Group. Thought of this way, the sessions become ceremonial: A session to give input on the mission statement and a road show constitute the entire department as the kind of department that does strategic work. Perhaps it is not that important whether the rest of the department experience the strategy work in the same way as the Working Group, as long as they get to have some part in it.

Supply and Demand

Two of the subunits in the Stakeholder Engagement Department are Communications and Process Improvement. Elizabeth took over the Communications Department just a few years ago and Benjamin took charge of the Process Improvement unit even more recently. One of the first things both of them did in their new leadership roles was to make strategy. These

strategies signified a shift from an old order to a new order in much the same way that the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy seals the consolidation of the various old Bioforte units (Communications, HR, CSR, etc.) into the new Stakeholder Engagement Department.

Given that making a communications strategy for Bioforte was one of the first things Elizabeth did a few years earlier when she was put in charge of Communications, Marie asks her what they got out of it:

Marie: What did it do to have the strategy? And how about the process?

Elizabeth: The process was fantastic because it abolished some perceptions of the Communications Department. We became more visible because you could say that we'd been used to it working in one way, and then that was taken for granted, and unless you had some large need, then we were just sort of there and like that. Then we went out in the organization, and we created it jointly also. We made the dot-diagrams together and the interviews too. That kind of thing everybody was part of doing and producing the deliverables. As a team that is, a new team. I'd been part of the team and then suddenly I was the leader of the team and then in our department to settle into our new roles, that was good. We had a person who'd just started and we came out of the process as a new team. Even if a lot of the faces were absolutely not new, out in the organization. **We found that what we wanted to offer the organization was actually also what the organization was asking for.** So that gave us a tremendous boost, I mean, motivation-wise and energy-wise, for all of us, and we've found that we're much more sought after than we were before. Probably with another type. I mean, with the previous strategy we worked with people further down in the organization. Now we're working more with the leadership-level in the organization. Not exclusively, but the distribution has shifted.

Benjamin likewise set out to define the strategy for Process Improvement when he was first hired to lead that unit. He conducted a process with interviews, and then presented to his steering group of important people a set of spectra of how his group could act at Bioforte. For example, they could be supportive of projects or drive initiatives, or somewhere in between. It was pretty lucky that his steering group decided that Process Improvement needed to be in the driver's seat rather than just facilitate projects, because that was also most motivating to him. Of course, he nudged them in the right direction.

Both Elizabeth and Benjamin create the demand they wish to fill. They are not blind to this fact, yet they still invoke the classic organizational and economic narrative of supply and demand as structured in a linear causal relationship. Making strategy work is also about

creating the demand that fits with what you want to, and can, supply. The organizational demand and need is constructed and shaped through the strategy work so that when the strategy is finalized there is a neat narrative about how Bioforte needs a given set of communication competencies, and therefore that is what the Communications Department will offer. In the case of Process Improvement, the story is likewise that Bioforte needs a process unit that can do these specific tasks, therefore the Process Improvement unit will have this specific strategy. It is not that these narratives are not true, both Elizabeth and Benjamin's revamped efforts *do* find resonance in the organization; it is the fact that it takes so much work to make them true that is remarkable.

The Work of Making a Department

The creation of what is now the Stakeholder Engagement Department coincided with the finalization of the last HR Strategy two years earlier, and in order to avoid having a strategy for a department that no longer existed, the HR Strategy was re-baptized into a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and updated with strategic goals for the newly merged sub-areas as well. Several times, the Strategy Working Group points to how the last strategy for the department was not really a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, but more like an HR strategy stapled together with strategies for the areas of Communications, CSR, and Process Improvement. Now, on the other hand, the strategy work has to result in a true integrated Stakeholder Engagement Strategy, not just a compilation of strategies for each sub-department.

During Strategy Working Group meetings, the team often talks about how they need to work more collaboratively among the different units. They want to rid themselves of the old ways of thinking only in terms of compartments—their "silo" thinking. Elizabeth describes this to Marie:

> We often end up in a place where we have some statements and we sit and have some discussions and then it often goes: but Benjamin, how do you see your area? and my area? and those kind of things. And in principle that should not be important at this level. I think we had a bit of a breakthrough yesterday, or the day before or when it was that we had a meeting, where we started to talk across areas We get out of the activities because it's also still very obvious that you can sit there and look at the boxes and some of the things we've created and say, but it says HR on this one, and communications on those. Look, oops now we don't have any from CSR, we need one from CSR—that's how it easily ends up. Then we think OK, we have some processes together where we chip in and sometimes communications chips in 80% to a process and 20% to something else. Other times we only chip in 5 % or something like

that, but we have some education that cuts across, and we've started to look more at the crosscutting aspects. I think that moved us forward.

The Working Group experiences a fight or a struggle to resist doing what they've done previously and thinking what they've been thinking previously. They want to work in a new way. Making the department work in this new way happens in and though strategy work.

Benjamin describes to Marie how Susan came back from a trip to Asia and told him about some difficulties one of the country managers was having. She had discussed the problem with him in her role as HR partner and had the thought that perhaps Process Improvement could help him. Benjamin is in charge of Process Improvement. Then Benjamin gave the guy a call and was able to design a process to help solve the problem. Benjamin isn't sure this would've happened if they hadn't been doing the strategy work. Susan probably wouldn't have thought about telling Benjamin because how would she have known what kinds of problems he and his team are able to solve.

Stakeholder Engagement Department unity and coherence is an important and valuable outcome of the strategy work. Monika puts it this way:

> I actually don't think that those focus areas will change much. Perhaps they'll be called something else a bit more cool, but I don't think they'll be any different in terms of content. I think that Elizabeth's articulation was pretty good, with the…, now I can't really remember what she wrote about the stakeholder thing, right. We all agreed to it. Perhaps they weren't the most obvious. **But actually I think the most important thing that'll happen as a result of the process, is the teambuilding aspect**. I mean that we'll use each other more in Stakeholder Engagement. We'll realize that we can use each other more. And then of course there'll be some concrete actions, right? And then you can say that we can all be accountable and understand them. That's also a clear benefit. **But also that this department emerges as a whole**, because I don't think people currently see it that way.

John sees the strategy as an argument for why the department makes sense. For why communication, HR, Process Improvement, and CSR fit together:

John: We think it made sense, and we think we got something out of it, but it was hard to say this is why we do it. And that I think we've got now. So we can say, this is our mission, it's to strengthen the ability to execute. Our vision is that we want to be an energy center for commitment, professionalism and drive. In the way we execute. I mean, we want to be that pebble in the water.

	Do you remember that I've used that image before? The pebble thrown in the water, which creates some ripples, some waves, which the organization surfs.
Marie:	Yes.
John:	And in this there's also something about being proactive. I mean, we need to be an energy center from where there's a lot of good karma, good concepts and exciting things emanating, which will ensure that we're committed and professional and that there's drive in relation to execution. That's what we'd like.

The strategy work is also work to bring the synergies between the departmental units into existence. The Strategy Working Group works very hard to make the department make sense. Creating a joint strategy is an occasion to discuss how the team should work together. In the meetings, they then become that team. They sit down to discuss how their strategy should look, and that is the very practice that defines them as a team. Thinking about and finding the overlaps and connections is also creating and making those overlaps and connections. It is not so much that the working meetings reveal some obvious overlap, tasks that run across units or assignments that the team can undertake together; rather, making a strategy together becomes the common task that then creates and shapes them as a department. In other words, the strategy work changes them into the department that they need to be in order to make the strategy. They need to cohere socially and work-wise. The revelation here is that strategy presents itself as a representation of a department, but in practice, strategy work is a way to bring about the department, which then can present a strategy as a representation of something that already was rather than something that was made through strategy work.

The prominence of the strategy concept is also about what can and cannot be said, and when something can be said. At Bioforte you cannot say: "Now we'll spend twelve meetings (seven people for several hours each time), two full days away at a conference center, do a road show for the department, and a bunch of PowerPoint slides over the next few months, because we need to reflect on who we are and who we'd like to be as a department, on our identity." At least, that is not possible at Bioforte. What is possible is to say that we will really extend ourselves and put a lot of energy into creating a solid strategy—and a bi-product of doing that very important strategic work is that we get a better sense of who we are. The framing is crucial: Making a strategy is legitimate work that will necessarily consume resources, whereas the identity work is a beneficial "bi-product."

Presenting the SE Department Is Making the SE Department

A month or so into the strategy process, the Group decides to dispatch Marie to do a set of internal Bioforte interviews regarding Stakeholder Engagement. A Sub Working Group on Top Management input, which was originally proposed together with three other Sub Working Groups, is replaced by interviews with key stakeholders in the organization. As an outsider, Marie is especially well positioned to conduct the interviews, plus she has lots of experience doing interviews.

Marie is relieved to be taking on this task of completing the Top Management input task. It feels good to be useful and to be able to complete a concrete task. Furthermore, she sees the interviews as peripheral and thus without a determining force on the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. As she begins the work and realizes the strong symbolic significance of the interviews, that notion increasingly seems naive.

Marie creates a PowerPoint slide and asks Susan, Michelle and Nicole as HR managers whom they think should be interviewed. She also gathers names from David, Monika and Benjamin. Her question is: "Who should I get input from for the strategy?" The criteria used by the people Marie asks are not based on who might say something that the strategy team can use to refine the strategy, but rather one of remembering to include everyone of importance. Again, Marie experiences an anxiety among Bioforte employees over leaving people out and also realizes that there's a certain prestige in being asked for your opinion so it's crucial that all the right people be interviewed. Forgetting someone could be interpreted as slighting him or her on purpose. The interview assignment also shifts to gathering input from Bioforte as a whole, rather than only the top management. Consequently, Marie's list swells to almost 50 names. In order to manage the scope of the assignment, she highlights 15 with a pink marker and asks John to OK her selections. There are only two women on the final list.

Marie drafts an email for interviewees in Danish and English and stops by Susan's office so Susan can edit it to make sure it sounds authentically Bioforte. Susan makes some minor edits to the language and then Marie emails it to John who pastes it into an email to the

interviewees. Marie is cc'ed so she can use the emails to follow up and schedule interview times.

A few of the interviews with people in Asia, the US and Southern Europe are done by phone; Marie takes one call in her car on her cell phone while parked in front of her son's daycare center. The rest of the interviews are with Bioforte stakeholders who work in the company headquarters. To meet them, Marie walks the blue-carpeted hallways of the buildings carrying a piece of paper with the drawing of an organizational chart. She's printed the diagram from the Bioforte intranet and is a bit puzzled to suddenly find herself walking around inside Bioforte as a representative of the Stakeholder Engagement Department, carrying a representation of that department in her hand. In the interviews, she first pushes the drawing across the table to an interviewee so they can look at the representation of the Stakeholder Engagement Department that she has to offer.
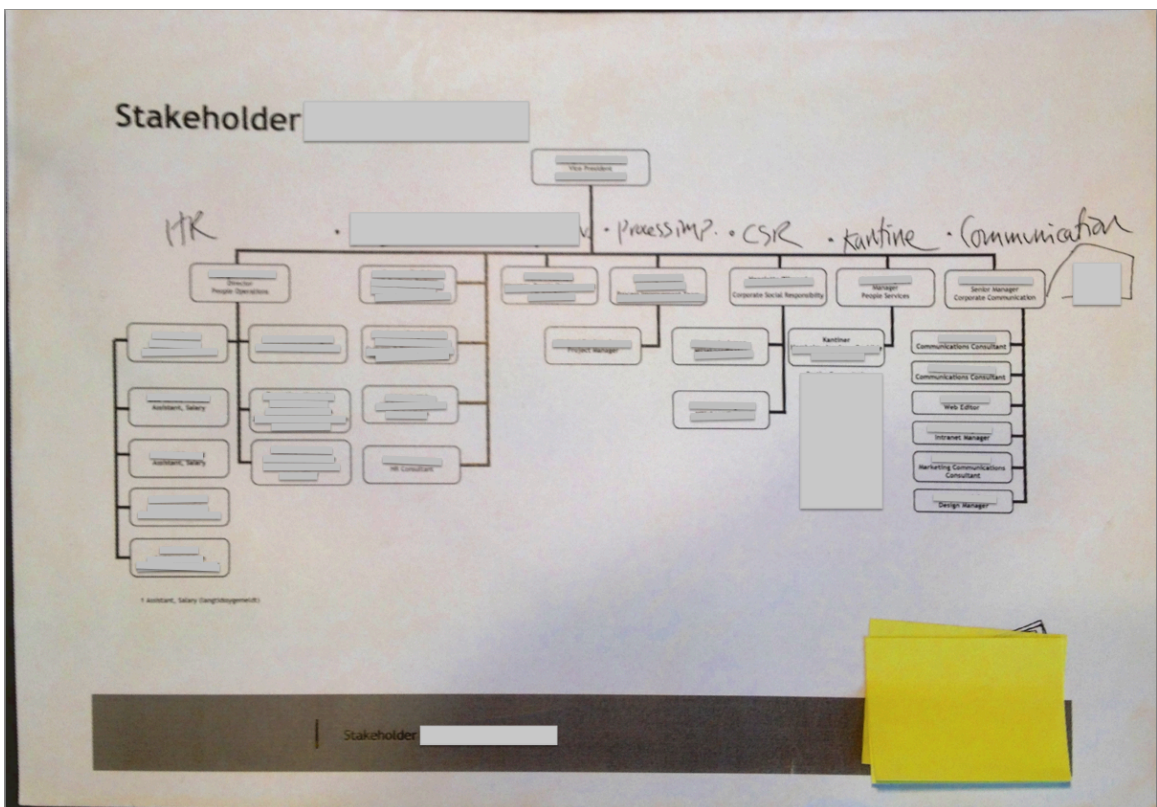
Most of the people Marie talks to are thankful to get this layout of the department; they tell her that they're still somewhat unsure what the Stakeholder Engagement Department actually

is. They know that it's changed from HR a few years before, but what exactly this means is fuzzy to them.

Another smaller piece of white paper is also pushed across the table as Marie hands over her CBS business card and explains her role in the Stakeholder Engagement Department.

Marie presents herself as a PhD scholar in organization studies at CBS who's participating in the strategy process at the Stakeholder Engagement Department as a team member, and also in order to gather "data" for her PhD thesis. This information seems to impress the interviewees slightly. Marie isn't sure if this is because of her CBS affiliation, her title or perhaps they're just being polite. To the interviewees Marie meets with in person, she also acknowledges that she's pregnant, which is fairly obvious at this point, and explains that her time at Bioforte will end when she goes on maternity leave.

The interviews follow a loosely structured interview guide Marie developed with John and Susan. The guide has six questions. Under the heading "Snapshot of the present", the questions are: How would you describe Stakeholder Engagement at Bioforte? How do you use Stakeholder Engagement? What do you think Stakeholder Engagement does well? And, What do you think Stakeholder Engagement does less well? Under the heading of "Future", there are two questions: What do you see as the greatest future challenges in your part of the business? And, What do you think Stakeholder Engagement should focus on in the future?

In her role as interviewer, Marie follows the guide loosely, and without exception, the interviewees are talkative and cooperative. They willingly and readily share their perspective. Marie is reminded of her old boss pointing out that one should never underestimate peoples desire to talk about themselves.

When the interviews are over, Marie develops a two-page report of the main insights. She includes some direct quotes to give a flavor of the comments but leaves out the names of the speakers. She presents this input to the strategy working team in a meeting. The team is not surprised by any of the insights. When Marie reviews her notes from the interviews and

develops the summary sheet, she also writes up a separate report in her notebook. This report contains some of the more outrageous or person-specific input. At the end of a meeting with John, she asks if he has a minute and summarizes this information to him.

The strategy work is making the department "inwardly" as the conversations and meetings of the strategy team talk the department as a unit into being; but it also happens "outwards" in the organization through the process of interviewing Bioforte stakeholders; "upwards" by presenting the strategy to the top leadership team; and ultimately, "externally" when John gives talks to networks of HR professionals in which he discusses the Stakeholder Engagement strategy.

The interviews that Marie undertakes matter for the strategy work and they are also PR work. The interviews make the Stakeholder Engagement Department visible and brand it to their internal Bioforte stakeholders. Most of these stakeholders still see the department as HR plus something new, and they are not entirely sure what this department is. The Strategy Working Group's work thus also becomes an effort at rebranding the department and replacing old perceptions of who they are with new ones. Additionally, by virtue of having Marie do the interviews, the Stakeholder Engagement Department becomes not only a department that does serious strategy work and that cares about the interviewee's perspective and needs, it also becomes a department that is affiliated with the business school and where PhD students care to study. At Bioforte, saying: "We want to update you on our strategy work and get your input," becomes a legitimate way to also say: "We have changed and would like to tell you about who we are now."

Strategy Makes Room to Maneuver

In a Strategy Working Group meeting, Benjamin, while Susan is standing by the board, says:

> Every time I meet our VP of sales, he says to me 'in the morning when I'm packing my kids' lunches, I also pack one for you, and I want something in return for that lunch.'

Susan: Oh, I'm met with that all the time: 'You are just an expense.'

Benjamin: But that's how it is, we are a support function.

Marie understands from this exchange that Stakeholder Engagement has something to prove. They need to work to gain some respect and they'll get this respect by demonstrating, through an impressive strategy, that they add value to the company.

The Executive Leadership Committee is meeting with a headhunting firm to find a new Executive Vice President for one of the Bioforte divisions, and John reports from the meeting that Tom portrayed the Stakeholder Engagement Department as business savvy to the headhunting team. John's take on Tom's comment is that if the Stakeholder Engagement Department succeeds in portraying themselves as business-oriented, it'll equal freedom for them. They can then do all kinds of things that they feel like; fun initiatives, and programs that they are inspired to create.

Conductors of Science is an example of a fun initiative. It's a professional development program for Bioforte scientists. The program was developed entirely in-house by the Stakeholder Engagement Department, by Susan and John, who also run the three days of instructions that the course involves. Conductors of Science is a "flagship" for the Stakeholder Engagement Department because it's a high profile initiative. The participants are Bioforte scientists and so far the two cohorts of about a dozen employees that have gone through the program have loved it. So people inside Bioforte talk about it, and outside too, because Elizabeth has arranged that some stories of the program have appeared in the press, and John proudly tells the story of the program when he's out of the house, giving one of his presentations to HR professionals.

John and Susan giddily show Marie the backpack that participants in Conductors of Science get. It's a small kid-size backpack filled with trinkets and toys that are used as props in the course. Susan unzips the backpack and pulls out some of the items: a special hat, some juggling balls, and sleeping masks to wear during a guided meditation exercise where the participants lie on the floor. The program has its own logo and everything.

Flagships like Conductors of Science make a good story. These projects have a lot of energy around them, and they give brand value to the department too. John's assertion is that the department needs more flagships and they want the mandate to launch those; a mandate that they can gain through being business-oriented—something that a credible strategy signals.

John tells Marie that the Leadership team is entirely on board and happy with the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and attributes this success to whether the strategy is able to tell a clear story.

John: The deciding factor for whether the strategy works, I mean, that it works in a way so that. And I have also tried to show this in different contexts right, because it's very, it's a completely clear structure, right. I mean, we have an overarching vision, mission, and we have some overarching goals, an objective which will be addressed in each of the separate departments.

Marie: You've presented this outside Bioforte?

John: In HR networks.

Marie: What happens then?

John: Can we have a meeting? Can we come out and visit you? They want it.

Marie laughs and asks:
       But what do they have themselves?

John: Well, they have something, but it's hard. I mean, HR people aren't so great at this kind of thing. This has a pretty clean and clear tone, I mean, it's connected to, it's grounded in the business.

The strategy is successful because it "speaks business clearly" but Marie has an inkling that perhaps the HR professionals calling John also want the other story. Because there's both a story about how Stakeholder Engagement is integral to the business, and then there's a story about how Stakeholder Engagement found themselves through the strategy work. This latter story is a good story when John tells it. It's a bildungsroman narrative that John skillfully serves up as a side order to the strategy PowerPoint. It's a story of how the team sat down together and found out who they were. They decided what the company needed from them and how to offer it, and then when they did, it had an impact. It added value. John knows this and can prove it because the different job satisfaction indicators measured by an outside consultancy went up.

John calls this "the good story," and after the new employee satisfaction measurement results come in he complains, not because he's terribly upset that the satisfaction has gone down a little, but because he can no longer tell the good story of how the strategy had a direct impact on employee satisfaction.

There are a lot of things to do when running a company, so it is not as if the Bioforte employees would just be sitting around if they were not formulating a strategy. They choose to spend time on this. Then questions arise: Why is it important? And, What do they get? There are many answers to these questions: It is important because to be a respectable business, it is necessary to have a strategy. Likewise, to be taken seriously as a department, you need one. It is also important because the leadership team asks the Stakeholder Engagement Department for a strategy. As for the question of what the Stakeholder Engagement Department gets from a strategy: they get a certain freedom and respect. One function of strategy is that it can buy organizational resources. It is a currency and a credential. If you have strategic proficiency, you can spend that and in return get some esteem and also some creative freedom in the organization. When you, through strategy, prove that you matter to the bottom line, it is so much easier to do all kinds of other things that also matter and provide value, but perhaps in less tangible ways, for example, the flagships, which they have so much fun developing.

In this kind of organizational economy, strategy becomes the currency that buys creative freedom for the department. A convincing and rational strategy buys them the leeway to pursue their passion and make a program like Conductors of Science. The strategy signals that the Stakeholder Engagement Department at Bioforte is a serious and business-oriented unit that is valuable. The strategy is an answer to the lunch pack comment made by the VP of sales. It is a way of showing him that the department is indeed packing their own lunch.

The strategy PowerPoint document distributes this argument—we are valuable—to board meetings, to employees, to the leadership team, to other departments, and John gives presentations to networks of HR professionals in more public settings where he tells the same story. This is the story that gives the department its existence and freedom. If the story is good and convincing, then they can go about their business as they please.

This section has demonstrated how strategy work contributes to the making of a working group and a department. It is in the everyday activities that make up the strategy work that the department comes to be the kind of department that can have a strategy. In that sense, strategy feeds forward; it creates its own premise to exist.

II.2

Organizing Work: Getting It To Work

Figuring out what strategy work entails and what strategy is becomes a large part of the Strategy Working Group's activities. Strategy work is not routine for them. They have to invent it as they go along and they have to make sure they agree on what they have invented. The process of doing strategy work also becomes a process of making up strategy.

Organizing the Strategy Work

Early on in the process, when John fetches Marie for a meeting', the team uses a set of drawings to visualize the strategy work components and phases. The drawings are quick sketches Benjamin created based on a drawing on the whiteboard behind John's desk. John drew the model in a conversation with Marie when explaining to her how he thinks about strategy. During the talking and drawing, he got so excited that he drew onto the wall of his office. Slightly mortified by the red lines on the white wall, he tried to rub it off. When that didn't succeed entirely, he hid the smudge behind the curtain.

The drawings show how the Mission Statement guides Fields of Action, which then dictates Drivers. Benjamin has put an exclamation point next to the note that Drivers need to be at Stakeholder Engagement level. He wants to underscore that the Drivers cannot be unit specific, i.e. only relevant for communication, for example. Page two communicates how Drivers will be evaluated and thus ordered into Critical Success Factors. Page three represents the process chronologically.

Panel 1:

MISSION STATEMENT	FIELD OF ACTION	DRIVERS	RELEVANCE & RESPONSIBILITY

MISSION

STAKEHOLDER MISSION

FIRST SHOT: visible
"I...
Field...

1. HUMAN CAPABILITY
  - video

2. WILL & MOTIVATION
  - motivation

3. ORGANISATIONAL CONDITIONS
  - struktur } mix
  - relations }

1.1
1.2
1.3

2.1
2.2

3.1

HR	Communications	CSR	PI	SSC
✓		✓		
	✓			
✓				

IMPORTANT THAT DRIVERS ARE IDENTIFIED AT STAKEHOLDER LEVEL

Panel 2:

DRIVERS	EVALUATION	CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

1.1
1.2
1.3

2.1
2.2

3.1

DRIVER #1   COMMENTS:

BUSINESS VALUE

QUALITY / EFFECTIVENESS
DRIVER #2

SHORTLIST OF MOST CRITICAL DRIVERS BASED ON EVALUATION

Based on Benjamin's drawings, the team discusses the structure of the process, how to gather information, and from whom. John mentions something called Delphi and finds an old binder of overheads that he leafs through to find information on what exactly the Delphi process is. After a minute or two of flipping through the binder, he gives up on finding the information and instead explains that the process is about gathering information about the future from different people and then extracting that information.

Elizabeth asks about whether each unit will have a strategy or just an action plan. She suggests that the strategy they are working on is the overall goal for Stakeholder Engagement and then each sub-department develops a plan. The others disagree. They think that there should also be a strategy for Communications, one for CSR, and so on. All departments need to have a strategy. It occurs to Marie that strategy is like an onion or a Russian babushka doll at Bioforte: there's a strategy within a strategy within a strategy within a strategy and so on—all the way down the ladder of the Bioforte organizational diagram.

In the beginning of the strategy process in Stakeholder Engagement, there's also lots of discussion around what should be included in the strategy. Monika doesn't believe that the everyday operational stuff should be in the strategy. John, on the other hand, expresses a view of strategy as somehow overarching and defining of the everyday. They argue and go back and forth, but don't resolve it.

To make sure the strategy process includes the department, the strategy team decides to establish some Sub Working Groups. That way the people in the department will also be involved and have ownership for the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy.

The Group decides to have Sub Working Groups on: Key Challenges, External Trends, Stakeholder Analysis, and Top Management Input.

Now the issue is how these groups should be composed. Quickly, the discussion moves towards concerns of how not to hurt people's feelings. Marie has made a piece of paper with 4 columns, one for each Sub Working Group. The others then start adding names that they think are a good fit for each particular group, but then they decide that some people will feel left out. The solution becomes to add everybody in the department to a group. Consequently the groups burgeon, and Marie looks at the four columns with some concern: "Are you sure this is a good idea? It's really difficult to get anything done in such a big group." Then they decide to go back to a smaller group size of a handful of people on each topic and to assign an anchorperson for each group. Selecting an anchor isn't difficult; clearly the two other HR managers, apart from Susan, need to have a special role and David is a good fit for the role of anchor of Stakeholder Analysis. So Michelle will be the anchor for the Key Challenges group, Nicole for the External Trends group, and David for the Stakeholder Analysis group. The Top Management Input group is put off for a while and Susan and John are assigned to it.

The Sub Working Groups should report in three weeks time, as the whole strategy process has to be done by week forty-two[6]. And since Marie can only be part of the process until mid October when she goes on maternity leave, that's the deadline. It's as good as any deadline. And also, Benjamin has paternity leave coming up in November. The team laughs at the idea that they'll be giving birth to a strategy just as Marie gives birth to a baby girl.

Marie, who wanted to refrain from being in charge of the process, is now in charge of the process in a different way: Her body, and the baby girl growing inside it, directly influence the deadline for the Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. Marie isn't sure what to think about this. It's convenient because it means she can be part of the entire process, but it's also uncomfortable.

Now that the groups are set and have a deadline for their reports, there's some talk about how to communicate to the people involved. John is going to send out an email

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[6] In Denmark week numbers are widely used to refer to specific time frames. For example: "Our product launches week seventeen" and "My vacation will be week thirty and thirty-one this summer."

updating the department on the strategy process, but it'll be clumsy to include the groups in the email if the people involved haven't been told. It's then decided that on Thursday and Friday, Susan and Helen will let people in the sub working groups know about their role, and then John can send the email regarding the strategy process on Friday before he goes to Sweden for the weekend to do more restoration work on his mansion and prepare for the Executive Leadership Committee, who will join him for an offsite there next week. Then the next week while he's gone, the groups will get started.

The first task of strategy work is to find out what strategy work looks like, so it becomes definitional work to figure out what strategy work consists of. What are the concepts that go into it? What does the process look like? Strategy needs to be made tangible, and a perception of what it is needs to be shared among the group members. The frame used is John's experience and preferred model reinterpreted by Benjamin using his experience from his consulting job. In this manner, Benjamin's hand written pages become the skeleton for the work. The Group talks up against those three pages and works to make them their own. They question and specify the model. In the images, one can see Marie's handwriting overlaid with Benjamin's as she has attempted to understand the model. With the help of the three pages, the group members come to understand strategy similarly enough for them to work on it. But the model is fragile. It can break down, get lost, or forgotten. And the model is not the only thing in charge; Marie's pregnancy and Benjamin's paternity leave influence the deadline and thereby the process. The right and accepted way to involve co-workers and constitute groups becomes another organizing force. The work of making strategy work entails coordinating these various forces—the model, the body, the families, and the co-workers—so that it all functions.

Strategy Shapes the Work; Work Shapes the Strategy?

The Strategy Working Group is in John's office for a strategy meeting. There are several yards of brown paper covering one wall. Elizabeth is standing by the list of objectives with a marker in her hand trying to map current activities onto specific objectives. The rest of the team is seated around the large table. People take turns mentioning the operational activities pertinent to their area and wondering aloud what objective they should be categorized under.

Suddenly, one objective has too many activities. Another objective has to be created. Once the major activities are written on the brown paper, they're done.

At once, it is not so clear what influences what: Does the strategy decide what the work looks like? Or is it rather that the work shapes the strategy? It is both. The work and the strategy are mutually constitutive and figuring out how to make it work on those premises is also part of the strategy work.

But What Is Strategy?

At one of the first meetings Marie has with John, he asks her midsentence, "There must be some official definition of strategy?" to which Marie laughs before weaseling out by saying, "There are hundreds." When Marie returns to Bioforte to present her work after her fieldwork period and maternity leave are over, John asks from the back of the room, "But what *is* strategy?" while Marie presents a slide outlining how different academic schools of thought think about strategy. Once again, Marie answers vaguely by pointing out that "that's exactly the question" and "it depends where you're coming from."

Part of Marie wishes she was prepared to just give John a reasonably useful definition of strategy. Sarah Jones did this; she's sure of it.

In meetings, Marie jots down the metaphors used to describe strategy in her notebook. Strategy is, among other things: a mountain to climb; a highway; a journey; the helicopter perspective; a common ground; a landscape; a development horizon; a map; a trip out past no-man's land; a process of cognition; chewing and spitting out; a process of clarification; a drawing; a picture; a painting; a tool; a common thread; an umbrella; a plan; a management tool; a set of platitudes; a conceptual framework; policies: a story: a strand of cadence.

After a few meetings, Marie stops being surprised by new metaphors or wondering how strategy can both be a landscape and a process of cognition because to the Working Group, strategy is truly like each metaphor. So the metaphors always make sense: Each metaphor makes strategy work in a particular way so that the speaker needs to make his or her point in a specific context.

Some of the metaphors are clichés—and the Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group use them as such. Benjamin might say, "the strategy process really is

a journey" leaning his head forward and tilting it slightly into a nod to indicate that he knows full well that saying that strategy is a journey is a hackneyed expression. His tone and mannerisms in the delivery request the others to accept his use of the cliché. A cliché mobilizes both a certain image, and a distance towards this same image. It's used self-consciously, but that doesn't mean that it's less effective or less valid.

Metaphors of strategy as a cognition process seem to Marie to appear more often than others. When discussing how the External Trends Sub Working Group could arrange to invite a speaker for inspiration, John mentions that he thinks the groups should avoid a bunch of processes around identifying the useful parts. It'll take root subconsciously. Marie makes a joke that John has great faith in the sub-conscious. He laughs and points out that he's a psychologist by training after all. His position is that there's a lot of value in the informal process when it comes to the strategy work: "We make structures and processes, but then we sit and talk and then someone gets a good idea. It's the fermentation in the sub-conscious. There has to be some anarchy in the process, there has to."

Even more metaphors pile up in Marie's notebook when she interviews each of the other members of the Strategy Working Group and starts with the question "What is strategy?"

Benjamin: I think that for me in the Working Group; we work a bit with mission and vision and so on. When I think strategy, and especially strategy process and strategy development process, then strategy is the umbrella which both encompasses and points toward where we'd like to go on a high level, vision and so on. It's also something about what's our justification and what do we have to offer the organization and what are we put into this world for, which you could call mission, and then it's also how we, on a practical level will fulfill this. All the way down to activity plans and how we'll measure it. KPI's [Key Performance Indicators] and that kind of thing. So if I…I mean you could say that the package strategy, it contains all that, and the strategy process contains all the exercises and hoops to jump through that it'll take to get to a place where you can answer all those questions.

Monika: First and foremost, I'd like to say that I've been working with it [strategy] for many years, also before I got to Bioforte and I've really always thought that it was a great work tool.

Susan: For our own little department, that is Stakeholder Engagement, I think that strategy is something which will give us direction, something that will help us describe all of these, a lot of it we already know, but what should we focus on. So it's definitely something about prioritization and especially here where we're really conscious about whether there's a connection between that which the business wants and that which is our job, or that which is our assignment in Stakeholder. Where's the link? Or where's really…And I think,

and this is a large compliment to John, because I think he's been really good at this. In that way, I see it a bit as the strategy process that's, as a locomotive where John fills up, or where we all, as leaders, where we fill up the coal carriage, and then this is what we have to do in this way because our role is this. And then there is a bunch of discussion where we go back and forth with the business and the department. And we talk to high and low. You do your interviews. We ask.

John: Well, a strategy is to have a clear intention with where you're going. If something is strategic depends on if it represents a step in the direction towards that intention.

The four answers to the question of "What strategy is?" are very different, but they do not exclude each other. They do not preclude the people answering from working together on strategy because strategy can be the umbrella, the package, the locomotive, the work tool, and the intention all at the same time. Strategy is made to work as a concept through metaphors that describe it partly. Through the metaphors, strategy is always understood and worked with in terms of something else. In the metaphors, strategy is made to work, but it is a fleeting sort of existence that is constantly complemented and replaced with other workings. In this way, strategy has an incredible flexibility—it stretches and bends and is different things, all without breaking apart or loosing influence. Each metaphor for strategy makes strategy in a specific way. Each metaphor defines some aspects of strategy and with a range of metaphors, the concept becomes both an enabler of collaboration, as it is open, and it becomes more than one, in the sense of multiplicity.

When metaphors become worn, they can often become clichés. A metaphor can in practice become a cliché but is not inherently a cliché. It is a matter of the social context that determines whether a concept has been overused. Therefore, the attribute of "clichéness" connects to previous uses of the concept and the shared experience of a group. What clichés do then is to point to past usages and a shared practice—in that sense, they galvanize the reference of meaning for a given working group. This means that a speaker will most often also know that a cliché is a cliché. At Bioforte, this is definitely the case. When one of the members of the Strategy Working Group invokes a cliché, they signal with cues, either by using body language or linguistic modifiers, that they know that the expression they are about to use is hackneyed. This is a way of asking for permission to use a cliché. The cues are designed to ask listeners to hear "past the cliché."

In the examples above, Susan uses spatial vocabulary to discuss how "back and forth" discussions are part of strategy work. She also says that "high and low" are brought into the process by the stakeholder interviews. Likewise, John uses the idea of "direction" and how strategy is a "step" in a given direction. Both of the comments draw on ideas about space, but in different ways. Susan's comments clarify strategy as something that creates a position among other positions. The image her metaphors bring forth is of strategy making a space for the department in the context of the leadership team and the employees. In John's comments, the spatial aspect is much more about movement towards a goal or a future. These two different ways to conceptualize space and use spatial metaphors when discussing strategy are not at odds or exclusive of one another. Rather, they can exist simultaneously.

When the Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group does strategy, they do not settle on one stable definition of strategy. Throughout the fieldwork, I never heard them argue about whether a metaphor was right or wrong. They would just add metaphors continuously. They do not say what strategy *is*; instead, they continuously describe what strategy *is like*. They mobilize metaphors to create working definitions. They make working definitions of strategy together, and individual members of the team each have their own working definitions. A working definition is a definition of strategy that is selected for a specific occasion and which functions so that you can continue collaborating. A working definition is aware that it is partial. It is good enough for now. It works. Conventionally, a working definition connotes a definition that is tentative and selected for a specific occasion. It may, however, be that all definitions are working definitions.

A variety of metaphors provide plasticity and strength to strategy; it is flexible, and also robust. And this resilience quality seems to enable collaboration. Metaphors allow difference because they explain one thing "in terms of" another. A key point is that metaphors are not exclusive: Metaphor is a way to conceptualize strategy by saying what it is like. This approach allows a concept to be like several things simultaneously because implicit in the use of metaphors is an understanding that it is a partial understanding. In this manner, the metaphors for strategy are not exclusive. This feature can foster collaboration precisely because it is not a problem if one team member conceptualizes strategy as a common thread

and another as a mountain that needs to be scaled. These two images or metaphors for strategy can co-exist and thus allow the people to collaborate.

Through the metaphors, strategy is extremely flexible as a concept, but it does not disintegrate, nor does it fossilize and solidify into a single definition or metaphor. Strategy becomes an abstract object that is loose enough to be defined in a range of ways, and its robustness derives from this adaptability.

If It Looks Like Strategy Work, Then It Must Be Strategy Work

The materials of strategy work at Bioforte are large sheets of brown paper, flip-overs, colored post-its, colored cardboard cards, pre-printed response cards, whiteboards with differently colored markers, and PowerPoint documents. The visual language of strategy has a form that is immediately recognizable, and as with the spoken and textual language, it is flexible enough that you can fill it out with pretty much anything, yet it is also distinctly strategy. There is a quality to the strategy work that is unmistakable yet interchangeable and flexible.

When the Strategy Working Group is moving colored post-its around on a backdrop of brown paper, they *feel* with their fingertips that they are doing strategy work. They are undertaking the ritual of strategy making. The aesthetic quality and expression matters because it is part of why and how strategy works. Although you (hopefully) cannot read the specific words on blue and yellow notes in the pictures, it is not hard to tell that it is a picture of strategy work.

At a department meeting, a projector shines a large colorful word cloud onto the screen. The words have been collected as descriptors of the department. The twenty or so people

present sit and look up at the visual graphic, digesting that this is what they said. Then they begin to correct the image: they argue that some words should be larger; that two or three terms actually mean the same thing; that something is missing; etc. The PowerPoint slide with the word cloud on it feels very strategy-like. In the meeting, the department uses the cloud as a "conversation piece" to start a discussion about who they are.

The specific materiality of strategy is immediately recognizable; strategy has (almost) the same look in many different organizations. It has become a discipline, and mobilizing the recognizable materiality of that discipline is a way for the people doing strategy to be part of something bigger. In Bioforte there is a sense that strategy is what serious multinationals do, and if they then do something that looks like strategy, then it must be strategy, and "having the strategy look" is then part of making them into a serious multinational corporation.

A Strategy Work Space

John's large corner office becomes the place of strategy. It's where the Strategy Working Group meets most often, both when John is in and when he isn't. It isn't so strange that the group ends up in there, as it's the only room in the department where seven people (and sometimes a pram) can fit, but given that John is the boss, his office lends the work the group is doing some seriousness and power. The strategy model drawn on the whiteboard and the brown paper and the post-its are left on the walls between meetings. It becomes the tamer corporate equivalent of a situation room in an action-filled war movie.

In November, the strategy work is drawing to a close and the Strategy Working Group, except Marie who's too pregnant to leave for overnight trips, goes away on a two-day strategy camp. It's important to get away from the daily tasks to be able to focus on the big picture. If they just hold a two-day meeting at Bioforte, their minds will still be on operations and it'll be hard to make strategy. Benjamin organizes most of the practical aspects of this offsite meeting. Marie helps him design a program for the two days. They design activities hour by hour and assign homework for the other members of the Strategy Working Group.

Strategy work has a specific language, specific materiality, and specific locations. John's office is a "strategic space," just as making strategy is done "away." Going offsite signals that the

work is prioritized. It needs a "room of its own." It is a prioritization and a signal that strategy is important. So important, in fact, that they spend money and time to go away and work on it. And at the same time, the two-day meeting becomes a reward for the people in the Strategy Working Group. They are pampered somewhat. They get to have a nice dinner together. The physical setting apart is also registered in the shared calendar system at Bioforte because the participants in the offsite strategy camp have the dates blocked in their calendars so that their colleagues can see that they are doing strategy work for those two days and are therefore unavailable for normal business.

In order for strategy work to be strategy work rather than just regular work, it is necessary to have these kinds of markers: the materiality in the posters, flipovers, etc., as well as the separate spaces. These markers create strategy as a work task that is out of the ordinary.

Hapsi Flapsi: Speaking Strategy

Over lunch one day in September, Monika describes to Marie how she used to feel that she didn't understand what the team was talking about. Monika used to work in a different department and when she moved to Stakeholder Engagement to take charge of CSR, it was all "hapsi flapsi" to her—she simply didn't understand what the others in the department were talking about most of the time. Now she's beginning to get it and feel more comfortable with the language. But it took a while.

John tells Marie several times how he learned to speak strategy. He was working at Zyndo and they wanted a Human Resource strategy. Nobody had that. He made calls to the twenty largest companies on the Danish stock exchange to ask them if they had one. None of them did. So then he hired some consultants from the US. They came with a model. And he has essentially used the same model since then because it's intuitive and it works. It needs to be simple. Today every single large company in Denmark has a strategy for their Human Resources or Stakeholder area.

One particularly prickly concept is that of Driver, which appeared in Benjamin's drawing in one of the earliest strategy meetings but continues to cause trouble—when exactly is something a Driver, and when it is an Action or a Task or a Topic to work on? Driver gets confused with Objective, Focus Area, or Key Success Factor. In a strategy team meeting,

Elizabeth pauses and points to the strategy model on the page in front of her: "I'm still not sure what a Driver is." This isn't the first time this has come up. Marie has to bite her tongue to keep herself from bursting out "but just last week you defined it as…" The recurrent confusion strikes her as tedious and a bit ridiculous, but somehow it also seems necessary. Together the team struggles to establish some stability around strategic concepts, but the meaning keeps slipping away from them again and again.

Over time, the strategy model changes such that the document that represents the final Stakeholder Engagement Strategy contains a vision, a mission, and seven strategic objectives each with between one and three corresponding initiatives. The word Driver has been abandoned along the way. One of the initiatives attached to the strategic objective of "proactive stakeholder engagement" is "professionalize dialogue with relevant stakeholders." This strategy speak has a looseness and a confidence to it that's both vapid and powerfully convincing.

Towards the end of a meeting, the strategy team begins discussing what the theme should be for the organizational review process this year. **Innovation** is too much of a buzz-word. **Reducing complexity** is good but used too often. Susan tells the story of how a manager in her division came up with "**youcountability**" and how it caught on to become a word that division used widely. Elizabeth says that she's missing the overall corporate strategy. John points out that given the shift has only just occurred, it isn't realistic to expect them to have the new corporate strategy already. Elizabeth dryly remarks that even before the shift, there was no clear corporate strategy. **Responsibility** is deemed relevant. Whatever they settle on, it can't be hapsi flapsi; it needs to be concrete. Matters of **attracting and retaining key people** will be appropriate for next year. This year it has to be something related to **productivity** and **energy**. Elizabeth talks about **execution** and **motivation** and then she has to step outside because Eric is crying. Marie suggests the words **performance** and **spirit**. Susan likes **agility**. **Translating potential to performance** is floated after someone mentions **capitalize opportunities**. The theme must be easy to explain and can't be too HR-focused. Helen says that whatever they choose must be immediately understandable. The situation for the company is that the low hanging fruit has already been picked. Now it's about choosing the fruit higher up. Elizabeth comes back and stands up with Eric draped across her forearms. She rocks back and forth while she suggests something to do with **benefit**. They need to remember what the point of it is. When **unleashing potential**

is mentioned, several people in the room seem to think it's a great theme. Marie is really puzzled as to why **unleashing potential** is clearer than any of the other ideas, and asks if that isn't also hapsi flapsi—it isn't.

It takes a lot of work to make sense of something together. Words need to be explained, weighted down with other words, put into contexts, unfolded into stories, and then sometimes it works and the meaning of something seems clear, at least for a little while until it unravels again. When it does, the Group goes to work reassembling or rebraiding a fragile thread of meaning, a thread that breaks and unravels very easily.

In the examples when meaning keeps slipping away from them, it is terribly postmodern—they need to do all of this work to stabilize meaning, yet it is impossible and it continues to slip away. They look this impossibility straight in the eye and know it is futile to try to figure out what something means, but they continue nevertheless. I am reminded of Sisyphus; but in fast-forward. The short time span strikes me; from one minute to the next, meaning slips.

Additionally, the looseness of the strategy language contributes to its *translatable* quality. Strategy must be overarching *and* specific so that it can take many different forms in order to be useful to different people who are embedded in different organizational contexts. Strategy must be able to span the entire organization, which is not uniform. It contains many different jobs, departments, and people. They should all be able to use the strategy for something.

Strategy has its own language with a specific aesthetic quality, a quality that has a certain vagueness to it. Vagueness can be inviting; it can include people. If you demand too much coherence or specificity, then you exclude. Here we find the constant dual threat for strategy: On the one hand, it can easily become so generic and fluffy that it is devoid of meaning, on the other hand, it also threatens to slip into a specificity that closes off and renders it irrelevant to adjacent situations.

At a department seminar I attended with CBS, during a strategy discussion, one of the administrative staffers coined the brilliant phrase "the horoscope-trap" as the feeling you get when you read something and it fits your situation, but when you stop and think about it, or read it with another person's eyes, you see that it could in fact fit anybody. It is this kind of

vague, yet oddly specific, quality that strategy must strive for in order to be applicable to many different organizational destinies.

For a long time, Marie waits for the Working Group to look at the old strategy. Several times the Working Group mentions how this time around it needs to be different from the old strategy process. Because last time, it was way too academic and they had too many meetings. But they never pull out that previous strategy. It's as if it doesn't exist, and at first Marie doesn't understand why it isn't relevant. Then she thinks that perhaps it's because strategy is about the future and it needs to ignore the past: When John first frames the strategy work, he says that it's time to clear the table and wipe the slate clean.

Monika also mentions to Marie that Bioforte already has defined values, policies, and positions around much of the stuff that the Strategy Working Group discusses. Marie is really confused while Monika is a lot less perplexed by the fact that a whole bunch of corporate level strategic guidance is being disregarded. Marie finds the materials on the intranet. It is fairly generic, but potentially helpful: presentations about values, policies, and positions. They seem reasonable and suited to Bioforte, and Marie wonders why the Strategy Working Group ignores them when it isn't a matter of ignorance.

A new beginning; that is what strategy promises. And in order to be a new beginning, old beginnings need to be ignored. A strategy needs a clean slate in order to be a strategy. A clean slate is of course a fiction because we never get a clean slate. Not even at birth.

The past as a precondition for the future cannot exist for strategy. Strategy does not work if it is not artificially ignorant of operational realities and pasts. Strategy needs to pretend that the future is not determined by the past because if that was the case, then what would be the point of strategy?

Throughout the strategy work process, the Working Group is continually defining strategy. A lot of work goes into organizing the work by figuring out definitions for strategy, for different models, and for concepts they need to use. They need to agree on a language to use, and they need to make sure they are otherwise on the same page in terms of strategy. The challenge is that this is an ongoing and demanding task because nothing remains static; they are

constantly re-assembling meanings. There are some things that pull strategy together and therefore do some of the assembling work: the distinctive look, the language, and the places of strategy hold a lot of force because they *organize the work as strategy work.*

II.3

Organizing Selves: Life in Work and Work in Life

In the modern Western society that Bioforte inhabits, work has become intimately related to personal identity. We demand meaning, purpose, and fulfillment from work. In this aspect of our work lives, strategy takes on a special role because strategy has not only permeated all layers of organizations; it has also become a privileged site of making meaning.

There is a sense that strategy provides spiritual nourishment in organizational life. With strategy we can talk about dreams and hopes. It is about mission and vision and about articulating how the work makes sense. This kind of articulation is invariably wound up with our personal sense of self and meaning. Strategy is a discussion about who we truly are and who we want to become. Strategy becomes the answer when we ask: How are we to find meaning in our organizational lives?

In this way, strategy work also organizes the selves of those working with strategy.

At Bioforte people know each other well. Personal life is discussed. After just a few weeks, Marie knows about an HR girl's husband's trouble with training their dog. The dog doesn't listen very well and it's supposed to be ready to accompany the husband on the job as a police dog soon. Marie knows what kind of TV programs John watches with his daughters because he's made a decision to watch whatever they're into. Marie knows about the argument one of the guys from communications had with his wife over values when they were buying a new car. Marie of course also knows that there are very many things that she doesn't know.

The private isn't separate from the professional. And Marie realizes that she feels "at home" in the Stakeholder Engagement Department. Which of course is a cliché: The company as a family. But it feels that way often. People are frank and forthright and they seem to genuinely care about each other. During Friday morning breakfasts in John's office, there's plenty of

banter and joint history. Marie also remembers that it gave her pause for thought when Tom, the CEO, referred to himself as "dad" both times Marie sat in on meetings with him.

Back in the office, Marie picks up her notebook and goes into the hallway. David holds Elizabeth's baby boy Eric outside the Communications office. Quite a few people gather around him and coo over the little boy. He peeks up over David's shoulder to look interested at everyone.

Elizabeth comes back from exchanging her phone to a blackberry (all employees will be equipped with those) and they walk together into John's office. Elizabeth rolls the pram down the hallway on the blue carpet and it barely fits through the doors.

Throughout the meeting, they can hear Eric making little grunting sounds from his pram. At one point, Elizabeth puts him on the floor on a blanket and dangles a soft monkey toy above him as she continues talking. At times he cries a bit and Elizabeth leaves the room twice. She comes back in with a calm baby every time. The last time she returns is right before the meeting is over and Elizabeth is standing in front of the others holding Eric in her arms. She rocks back and forth while she talks and Eric falls asleep. They're all drawn into the scene; transfixed by the motion, and they almost feel the little boy nodding off. John says "now he's sleeping" in a soft voice once the boy closes his eyes completely.

In another meeting with the Strategy Working Group baby Eric is sitting on Elizabeth's lap facing outward. He looks from person to person as if he's following the conversation, which causes John to interlude into musings about the value for kids of being part of a whole. He asks the others if they remember sitting under the table playing when the adults were talking and just being part of it all. It's a tribal, bonfire thing. Someone asks if there's anything else they need to discuss and the conversation moves on.

The private does not exist in a separate sphere. It is there, at the same plane as the professional. The people at Bioforte do not live a private life and then a professional life, they lead lives in which the private and the professional intertwine. This is also the case for the strategy work. The private strand of peoples' lives has a gently shaping role most of the time, but this changes now and then. It oscillates from almost invisible to abrupt and forceful:

Helen has some illness in her family and needs to take sick leave. Once it's clear that Helen will be out for a while, John asks Marie and Benjamin to take charge of the project

management part of the strategy process. Marie and Benjamin sit down in Helen's office which is now in effect Marie's office because she's using the meeting table in there as her table when she's at Bioforte. Marie and Benjamin take stock of the process and map out the remaining activities on the whiteboard. They plan a lunch meeting for Stakeholder Engagement as a whole to give input on the strategy and an offsite for the strategy team. When the meeting is over, Marie catches herself thinking that if she wasn't there, then it isn't unlikely that the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy would've been put off until Helen came back. Benjamin has a lot of other Process Improvement projects on his plate and everyone else seems busy too. Marie really isn't sure what to make of the fact that she's now possibly responsible for the strategy work process, which she's also studying, not going into hiatus.

The professional and the private are part of the same life. The same body and brain is at work and at home; sometimes simultaneously, thanks to laptops and Blackberries. Events concerning the health of the people at Bioforte, or the health of their families, interfere, influence, and shape the organizing of work at Bioforte. And the opposite is of course also true. Constructing public and private as separate takes work, and sometimes, no matter how hard we work to keep them separate, that divide does not work. And they flow together in interference.

When strategy emerges as a story about why work matters, it also becomes a vehicle to find personal fulfillment through work and in that sense, to connect the work to the private sphere. Strategy becomes important in the organization as influential and powerful, but it also becomes important to the identity of people in the organization.

Making Strategy Is to Be Where Things Happen

Marie asks Monika if it's important to be part of making strategy?

Monika laughs a bit and explains:

> There's a perception that it is. You notice that your colleagues look at you a bit, perhaps interested or with a tilt, I'm not sure what it is. They notice that you're part of some strategy work. That then means you're somehow at a certain level. Where things happen. Then you're part of deciding the future, right? I think that's how people think.

Marie: Yeah, and their future too.

Monika: Yes and then it creates a sense of insecurity also actually, and that's probably why one gets a second look. But what, are we doing something…[uuuUU sucks air in between her teeth] What about my competences? [uuuUU sucks air in between teeth] Are they sufficient in the new? And that kind of thing, right? I mean, those are the kind of things that play into it. And to that I would say that I've been lucky to often be involved in those processes and not because I especially have signed up for it, but probably because I've shown somehow that I think it would be really fun. Although I didn't do that in this case, because I've been so incredibly busy, but earlier, right.

Working on strategy is to be "where things happen" and Monika's first response to Marie's question is to laugh. In this laughter is a signal that there is something between the lines with this business of making strategy. There are some kinds of assumptions that are not easily made explicit. In this realm, it will not do to state reasons and facts; rather, Monika describes how people look at her and what this look might mean.

Monika's use of the words "lucky" and "fun" conveys a sense that strategy work is special. On the outside of strategy work, there can be insecurity about how what you have to offer will fit into the future that is created and shaped through the strategy work. In this sense, making strategy is also a way to work yourself, and what you have to offer, into the organization going forward; to make sure that what you bring will be valued and needed. There is no doubt that it is better to be making strategy than to be on the receiving end of a strategy that others have made.

We Make Strategy, Therefore I Am

The strategy work structures (organizes) the individual in the sense that making strategy turns you into a person who makes strategy. Doing strategy shapes and influences who you are.

To accommodate Elizabeth's life as a new mom, Marie drives from Bioforte to Elizabeth's house to interview her there. She lives in an affluent suburb of Copenhagen. There's a brand new SUV in the driveway. From the open kitchen, Marie hears the slight hum of a dishwasher. There's a large glass wall out to the secluded garden. Elizabeth and her husband bought the house from a couple of architects who thoughtfully renovated the place. Marie arranges herself and her belly in a comfortable position on Elizabeth's cream-colored couch. There's no

coffee table so Marie holds the tape recorder in her lap; she's a bit worried that it'll pick up the noise from the dishwasher. Eric is awake and lying on a blanket by the window.

Marie: Does it mean something to be someone who makes strategy? I mean, if John had not invited you to be part of it?

Elizabeth: I would've been really sad then.

Marie: Why?

Elizabeth: For several reasons, I mean because we have, both when we were put together under John in this Stakeholder Engagement Department and before, John and I have worked very closely together. Before, John and I and communication and HR, if you will, had some joint assignments. So I had discovered that it makes a lot of sense; so to not be included, I would think was 100 steps backwards. And from a professional standpoint as a communications person, I don't think that it would make sense to not include Communications. Personally, since I'm passionate about it and think it's important and I want to make it happen. It isn't because I can't operate according to strategies defined by others. We do that with the corporate strategy and that I'm not part of making, but it's definitely a piece of work that I like a lot, think is crucial and which I also think I can contribute to and at the same time learn from.
                That's also the reason I'm not just on maternity leave.

Marie: Well, yes.

Elizabeth: It's a very obvious sign that I'd like to be part of it. I could just have said, and I had the full freedom to say, I'll step in and see where you're in January after my leave.

Marie: Does it work? To roll the pram into the boss's office?

Elizabeth: It's pretty amazing. Pretty amazing. The openness and acceptance that's there. And maybe it wouldn't have been this way if we hadn't had good collaboration up until this point. I mean, first of all, John is very informal in this way, which I think is fantastic. I mean, he's pretty, without bringing the pram into the picture, he's pretty untraditional in his methods and approaches at times, which I appreciate a lot. I think it's nice when people aren't, I mean, when someone once in a while does things a little differently than is normally done. But also from my colleagues, it's amazing how they just accept the pram and me. I think that's great.

Marie: How do you get it to work?

Elizabeth: Well, I'm at work, if you want to call it that, to the extent that I feel like it, also here at home and in between, because I think about it. I reflect. I did that before too. I mean, it's perhaps the way I work. For example, now there's this new book "When the Business Communicates," which I showed you. As soon

as I see that in the newspaper, I think that I'd like to read that, because I know the author a bit and I know what he represents. So I read that because I want to while I'm at home on maternity leave. It isn't because anyone has said to me that I need to do this, or anything like that, but I just want to. I found some ideas and have taken some notes for when we go more operational on our strategy within Communications. I've taken notes for ideas, tips and tricks, some of it we can use and some of it we can't because we're past that stage, but I do it to the extent that I think it's fun and that I feel like it. I mean, it isn't something that I feel obliged to do. I mean, I feel that, and this is also thanks to my colleagues and John, that if I didn't feel like it and if I said, I just can't manage to participate because I didn't sleep all night or he's been screaming or something, well, then I'd feel that that was fully acceptable.

Marie: But you'd loose something else?

Elizabeth: I'd loose something else, right?! I mean, I do it because I think it's super interesting and I can feel that it gives me something. It also gives me more energy to be on maternity leave. I don't necessarily get more energy from, as people tell you, lying on the couch. I'm not very good at that. I can get more energy from, even if I can be tired because I've been running around with him on my arm a whole day at Bioforte, then mentally it's like an energy injection to be part of the work.

Marie: Did John ask you?

Elizabeth: We talked, I mean, we've talked about the strategy process and we've talked about how actually we should do it later when I'll be back, but then the opportunity came, among other things with you and you have a natural deadline too and on top of that it probably made sense to get started already now. So John said that we started now and then he asked me to think about what I thought. And then I said, well, I'd like to join, and then John said, "you should only do it if you feel like it. I mean, there are no requirements from this end and you have the full right to hold your maternity leave and I understand." For my part I feel that there's been full understanding for both things. John does know me well enough by now that he knows that I'm not that good at staying at home and being on leave, but the fact that there's an openness and acceptance towards the pram and bringing the baby to work and openness and acceptance towards if, I mean it hasn't been necessary yet, but if one day, I need to say, today he's so whiney, so I'm not coming today. Then I'm also sure that would be accepted fully.

Strategy work *allows* a narrative about personal fulfillment, growth, and meaning to be constructed around work. And at the same time, it *requires* this kind of narrative as well: Strategy demands that you find meaning in your work. As a consequence of this dually benevolent and demanding characteristic of strategy, it becomes framed as an essential task that only you can do. Elizabeth clearly does find personal fulfillment in the strategy work.

Probably also in other kinds of work, but it is not random that she chooses to go through the extra effort to be part of strategy work during her maternity leave. It is because it is more important than other kinds of work to her. Strategy gives people in organizations a way to inscribe themselves into the work. It is about shaping the mission and vision of the work, which connect to deeply personal beliefs of how and why things matter. Therefore, strategy is not just a task that you can let others handle because that would mean handing over the power over your own future to someone else. Strategy is about how it all makes sense and what story we tell about ourselves at work; letting someone else tell your story is not very appealing. Likewise, you cannot refuse to tell the story, as that merely means that some other story, over which you have no control, will be told.

Elizabeth also expresses that her colleagues and her boss at Bioforte accept her both as a coworker and as a new mother. They accept the premises that come with being the mother of an infant and still wanting to go to work sometimes: Elizabeth brings Eric and the pram with her; she needs to step out of meetings sometimes to comfort and feed her baby; she cannot make ironclad promises about when she will be there. The circumstances of her work and private life shape her as a specific kind of strategy maker: The ambitious working mom who balances her obligations and makes it all work.

Organizing the Researcher

All throughout the fieldwork, Sarah Jones's functions are sort of a mirror image for Marie because Sarah was at Bioforte last time the Stakeholder Engagement Department worked with strategy. The previous process is often described as academic. Marie is unsure what the others mean when they say "academic." It does however seem like she should know, given that she's the academic. So she doesn't ask directly, but after a while she decides that academic in this context must mean that the process used a lot of words and a lot of time.

On the one hand, Marie believes that she's very different from Sarah because Marie isn't taking charge of the strategy process; on the other hand, it occurs to Marie that she and Sarah aren't so different, really. They're both involved with the creation of strategy and they write about it in academic work. Marie and Sarah will write academic articles about strategy at Bioforte and submit them for publication in academic journals a ridiculously long time after the fact.

Early on in the strategy work process, John shows Marie a PowerPoint slide of the strategy model Sarah developed while at Bioforte. Late in the process, John shows Marie a PowerPoint deck unfolding the strategy story for the Stakeholder Engagement Department. This deck includes a slide Marie has made. Sure, Marie was just creating a slide from a hand drawn model Benjamin made based on one of John's drawings, but still, Marie has created a model on a slide that Bioforte uses, and so did Sarah.

In the spring of 2010 when Marie first hears about Sarah, she thinks that perhaps it would be a good idea to meet Sarah, so Marie emails her and they set up a lunch meeting.

They meet in the canteen at CBS. Marie is sure she'll recognize Sarah from her picture on the CBS website, but she doesn't. Sarah comes over and finds Marie. She looks younger than Marie expected. She's wearing a short skirt, blouse and leggings, all in black. As they talk, many people stop by to chat and Marie gets the feeling Sarah knows a lot of people at CBS. She's affable, laughs easily, and has a no nonsense manner about her.

They talk about Marie's fieldwork at Bioforte. Sarah surprises Marie, when they discuss that companies seem to have realized that having researchers around is good PR, and she says: "In the end we're all positivist; they know we're going to tell a good story." Marie isn't at all sure what to do with this comment. All she knows is that it makes her really uncomfortable. Does it mean that she must tell a good story, and what even *is* a good story for Bioforte? And whom is she supposed to tell it to? Marie feels like she's on a different social scientific planet than Sarah. Sarah summarizes the distinction between them in a much less dramatic way: Sarah primarily does quantitative work and Marie does qualitative. Sarah was trained to formulate a research question and then find data to back that up. Marie's ethnographic approach opens and opens and opens. Sarah shivers at the thought.

Participating in and studying strategy work also becomes identity work for Marie. Through her engagement at Bioforte, she has experiences that organize her own thoughts about what kind of academic researcher she is and wants to be. The figure of Sarah becomes important, as the Bioforte anecdotes about Sarah and Marie's interaction with her brings forth a set of differences and similarities between the two academic researchers. Through reflecting on what those differences and similarities are and what they are based on, Marie constructs a clearer image of herself as a researcher.

Marie comes to understand that she values how the ethnographic approach she has chosen opens and opens. This image from her conversation with Sarah stays with her and becomes emblematic of how she sees the world as continually unfolding in practice. While there are similarities between Sarah and Marie, Sarah also functions as an oppositional pole for Marie. All throughout the process, the Sarah figure becomes a space for reflection for Marie. From time to time, Marie asks herself how she is doing things differently from Sarah; she considers what Sarah might think and how Sarah might answer a given question.

Participating in the strategy work is as much an organization of the identity of the ethnographer as it is an organization of the Bioforte participants in the Strategy Working Group. In the case of Marie, the organization of the self very much happens through imaginations of Sarah.

Out of the Ordinary: Strategy As an Organizing Device

At Bioforte, people create differences that matter through strategy work. Strategy becomes the fabric on which a set of distinctions is drawn. The Working Group in their strategy work continuously forms distinctions—categories that enable them to say this is that and that is this. These distinctions are useful because they organize the messiness of organizational life and as such, work to keep chaos at bay; yet they are fragile constructions that constantly threaten to slip away. Much of the strategy work is continuously creating and maintaining distinctions such that they are kept in place.

By performing distinctions, strategy work becomes a **device** for organizing. A device is akin to a tool or an apparatus. An organizing device helps create a sense of order; it aids in the sorting of things. A distinction is a demarcation that enables classification. In that way, distinctions enable us to make sense of the world; we organize the mess that surrounds us into recognizable categories that we can understand. Distinctions are not permanent; they are created through practice and to be upheld, they require work and must be continuously performed and enacted. Consequently, distinctions also shift over time. They disappear, they change, they emerge, and they collapse.

The different distinctions that emerge in strategy work at Bioforte are related and intertwined, but it is not the case that the different distinctions are merely different names for similar categories. There is not *one* fault line where the different categories arrange around. Rather, the distinctions overlap, shift, contrast, and move. In other words, it is not a simple matter of a priori good or bad with strategic being equal to good and operations equal to bad, for example. The positive or negative charge that the categories on either side of a given distinction obtain is a shifting valuation that is continually reworked.

The distinction between strategy and operations is very often enacted during the strategy work. Activities are not inherently strategic or operational, but rather they become strategic or operational through work.

At the two-day strategy offsite, the Strategy Working Group goes through an exercise of mapping the most crucial issues for each of their areas. They have flip-overs hanging on the wall of the basement meeting room and are grouping issues into themes. The topic of "being strategic" comes up.

John: It's very obvious to me that it's an issue that it's extremely important that we develop a position on because as it is now, it's untenable…

Monika: Shouldn't it be on this list?

Benjamin points to a note on the flip over:

It is: "Group leaders in Stakeholder Engagement, more strategic, more big picture thinking."
I think it's connected with some of the initiatives over here too. The audit for example, I mean, it legitimizes that you get out there in a very time efficient manner and actually engage in a dialogue about what it is you do to improve something. At least for my area. You could say that if I should enter that dialogue in other ways, then it would almost require me to travel down and do a project and then earn the right to challenge whether they do the right things. Where with an audit, I think one puts on the role that you request, John.

Monika: But, I don't think that an audit is especially strategic, actually. In that case, I think it's all the way in the operational realm.

Benjamin: But those audits…

John: They could be.

Elizabeth: We could use those occasions.

Benjamin: It's totally strategic.

Elizabeth: I actually also see audits as very strategic.

Monika: Yes, yes, but all I'm saying is that they also contain elements of the operational, right.

John: That depends what we put into it, I mean.

Benjamin: But say if we go out twice per year to some regions and some other big organizations, or some factories or something, and are there that one time per year, then it's all about going through the plans in place for moving forward, and that could be both the organizational, I mean, Organizational Review, or Unit Review or something. And it could be about improvement and it could be about CSR. What are you doing here to make sure you don't have problems next year?

Monika: Here I just have to say that, and that's perhaps a way that I am different from the rest of you, right. I mean, I have a responsibility for health and safety here at Bioforte, and that means I have a responsibility for rolling out global procedures and processes ensuring that we aren't in the situation as we are right now in Lyon with people who almost get killed inside a machine, right. It's my responsibility and that means that when I'm out there on an audit then I also have to ask: Do you have a procedure to prevent this going forward? and that's not very strategic!

Benjamin: Nah.

John: But for all of you, I agree with you [meaning Monika], but for all of our areas, both parts belong to the work, and that's the nature of our job.

Monika: Agreed! And that was exactly my point too.

Benjamin: I do think that we see audits differently. You could say that my area isn't one where you legally require audits of anything, so when I think audit, then it's in a way just another word for a regular follow up on agreements to ask: How far have you gotten? And will that get us to the finish line or do we need to do something else too?

John: But if we don't get the 15% strategic time into our calendars then we risk seriously putting our feet into it because then you're sitting and fiddling with something in Lyon and miss seeing the big issues.

Monika: It isn't because I have a problem understanding what you're saying, I just think that I'm expressing a really big challenge. So let's keep it at that, right, I mean, to get to that point, I mean, that's all I am saying. I'm not saying that I disagree, because I don't.

John: And I'm not saying that it's easy, because it isn't and it isn't easy for several reasons, because we get push back from the organization. There's, we're just crazy busy *and* then there's the fact that our nature is operational. I mean, that's pretty much the fact for all of us, that's where we're coming from and that's what's easiest for us and so on. Me included, because I can see it in myself when I'm sitting in my office for two years and taking care of operations, and then the phone rings and then there is some issue and then

they [meaning the rest of the Executive Leadership Committee] are abroad or something, and me, who really should be the most strategic of all of us, I'm just fucking sitting in my office for two years, right. That just doesn't work. And in a way we pay the bill because we, rightly so, will be criticized for not doing what we're doing now for example and connecting, I mean undertaking the role we need to undertake. And then I don't have time to be at, to be part of deciding which executive we need for our enzyme division because I'm sitting there discussing HR data systems with Stan's group, right!

Monika: That's freaking ridiculous!

John: Yeah, and that's just one example of the issue.

Monika: Which makes it very obvious!

                Everyone laughs.

For the Working Group, the distinction between strategic and operational is important. But deciding whether an audit is operational or strategic is difficult. It takes work. And they do not agree, so they must work at it to figure it out amongst themselves. Strategy is higher status, more important than operations, but operations is not to be dismissed. Operations is also important. Everything seems to have the potential to be strategic and to be operational. It is a matter of framing "it" (concepts, ideas, activities, initiatives, etc.) correctly, but given that this framing is extremely fragile, it is also a matter of fighting for this framing and making it work.

The fact that this distinction between strategic and operational, or any distinction actually, does not exist a priori is also the reason that the Strategy Working Group in the beginning of the strategy work process cannot resolve the issue of whether the strategy should include operations or not. Because deciding what should be in the strategy *is* deciding if something is strategic or operational.

The Group works out what is **strategic,** and what is non-strategic, that is, **operational**. The example of the audit illustrates how an activity can be strategic to one team member and operational to another. Operations emerge as the opposite of strategy. Strategy is construed as more valuable and essential, yet it cannot exist without operations to define it. Not everything can be strategic, because then nothing is. Additionally, operations threaten strategy because

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operations take up so much time that it is difficult to find time to think strategically. The Group often discusses how it is a challenge for the strategy work that they are drowning in operations.

The strategy work is always about to loose its allotment of time in the present. Strategy is about the future. The present is full of operations. Strategy is not really important until tomorrow.

Helen has created a timeline of the strategy activities and she sits in front of her computer with the Bioforte calendaring software open. Marie is in their shared office, and looking over Helen's shoulder, she can see the Strategy Working Group members' calendars as Helen tries to find a slot in the calendar when everyone can meet. Helen clicks back and forth between days. It's impossible to find times when everyone is free. She sighs and goes ahead and picks a time anyway. Then people will have to move things around, and if they can't, too bad.

Strategy and operations do not have the same claim to the present. Operations is urgent and therefore eats up the present. Strategy is important, but not urgent, and therefore it risks loosing its space in the present. It may get squeezed out. The Strategy Working Group works to squeeze it back in, as Helen does when she overwrites the operational appointments in the calendar with a strategy meeting.

John discusses the recent employee satisfaction survey, part of which was an assessment of the Bioforte leaders by their immediate reports:

John: I have the worst rating in the ELC.

The others seem genuinely concerned for John's feelings and eager to show him that it isn't so bad:

John: I'm after Bob and Frank.

Elizabeth: So you're the third worst…

               Laughter.

Helen: One could also venture to say that you're in the middle….

John: I think it's because I can't be an operational leader and that's what people want. I'm a VP. I'm so busy. I don't have time for the everyday stuff. I'm getting more involved in these committees.

John waves at his desk:

Like this remuneration committee. It's with Rick....and Francisco and the woman from Germany. We're meeting on Thursday and there are seven agenda points and they all pertain to me. The question is, how do we ensure it [meaning the fact that John is becoming more involved higher up] doesn't become a problem?
I use 90% of my time on operations and not enough time on the strategic stuff.

Benjamin: Perhaps this strategy work can help this somewhat.

The Strategy Working Group works very hard to create and maintain a distinction and a connection between operations and strategy. At an end point in a meeting conversation, John declares that he thinks they need to "**be better at seeing the strategic contours of their operations**." Elizabeth proposes that the entire team gets some professional communications training.

Strategy is not ordinary everyday business. It is something else. It is extraordinary. And through its status as extraordinary, it makes the daily work bearable. It ascribes meaning to the everyday. Strategy work is also about creating a narrative that connects the ordinary and everyday business (the operations), to the special extraordinary (strategic) realm. The communications training comment underscores how it is crucial that Stakeholder Engagement is able to tell a good story, and a good story is the narrative about how operational activities fit into a larger strategic narrative. In this sense, strategy holds the promise of escape from ordinariness. Strategy lends a workspace, both in the linguistic sense of a vocabulary, and in the sense of a physical space of strategy meetings and workshops, in which to create these distinctions and work the connections between ordinary (operations) and extraordinary (strategy).

Another distinction that is performed in strategy work is that of work being meaningful rather than trivial. Doing strategy in the Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Department is also about making work meaningful. Strategy becomes the arena in which meaningfulness can play out. It gives room to tell a story of why and how the work matters.

Elizabeth: I mean, strategy means a lot to me. I feel really terrible about work in general if I don't have a feeling that there's some strategic significance to what we're doing, and that isn't only within my own narrow area, I mean, I don't need to have a strategy just to have a strategy, but I do think that communication, just as well as other disciplines in an organization, are part of supporting the business that it must, and we shouldn't just be there to be there. So it's important for my area that we have a strategy, which supports the overall corporate strategy. And if we don't have a pretty firm thought concerning, both in the helicopter perspective, what we're there for, what should drive us, then we end up at a concrete activity level.

So without strategy, you have no larger purpose. Is it really as simple as that? Ending up at a "concrete activity level" is something that Elizabeth positions as a place to be avoided. The notion is that somehow the everyday activities will take control and rule you if you do not make sure that you have a strategy. By having a strategy, you can feel better about your work because you know what the purpose and meaning of it is. Activities in and of themselves are trivial and therefore threaten the larger meaningful narrative that strategy is. Yet at the same time, these activities are the ingredient in this meaningful strategy narrative. It is all a matter of framing the trivial as meaningful.

Important // Unimportant

Elizabeth is explaining to Marie how having a strategy enables you to distinguish between that which is important and that which is unimportant:

I think that you can easily be overwhelmed by all kinds of things and all kinds of miscellaneous assignments, which maybe aren't so relevant. I mean, it's, strategy for me is also largely about prioritization and weighing, because we're all [baby Eric makes a gurgle sound] engaged employees and people so you want to do it all. But not everything is equally important. So it's also very much a process of classification.

Elizabeth articulates strategy as a prioritization tool that allows her to distinguish between that which is important and that which isn't important. In this sense, strategy work is the work of making some things important and others less so. It orders and organizes. Her comments also reflect the same image of strategy being under siege by operations that Helen fought when she tried to find time in the calendar for Strategy Working Group meetings.

Susan also tells Marie a story to show how strategy is useful to her as a tool to prioritize and gain the right to establish boundaries:

> When I was in Singapore this last weekend, then I met the boss of our subsidiary in India and he asked if I could come out and do something for him before Christmas in India, and then I could say to him that I really would like to help but it would have to wait until after Christmas because we had some, and I couldn't tell him what, but we have some things that I need to focus on until Christmas and I can't say what they are, I tell him they're in our strategy and it's something we need to look at. And that's fine and let's do it, he says. Where again, when I think a couple of years ahead, then that's a thing I need to prioritize and then I need to go out and massage the organization in that direction. I mean, if they say, we'd like this and this, then I can push it aside and say, unless it's something that's very critical for the business, then it isn't something I can look at before perhaps later because focus is such and such.

While strategy is used by Susan to prioritize her own work, it is also useful when she needs to push back on demands. In her interaction with the boss of the subsidiary, Susan mobilizes strategy as an argument. She cannot tell him exactly what she is doing. It is confidential, but if she says that it is strategic, he will understand and accept that it is important, more important than his problem. Strategy gives her the authority and power to say no. She can draw a boundary and create a space for herself with strategy. It is quite striking that Susan does not need to argue at the level of specific tasks and to clarify to her colleague why what she is doing is more important than what he needs help with. She can simply say that it is "strategic" and he will know that it ranks high on the scale of importance. "Strategic" is very hard for the colleague to question or resist because if it is strategic, then it must be important and it must be prioritized.

   If we see the organization as a big tangle of task or a deluge of things that need to be done, then strategy work becomes one way of sorting out this tangle and knowing where to start and what to give importance to. Strategy is a device for organizing and when you use it, the world is more manageable.

About twenty people sit around a large wooden conference table one morning in August 2010. There is coffee, water, and fruit for everyone. John opens the meeting. He remains seated as he talks about how the time is right for a new strategy for the department, a sharper strategy. He's been at Bioforte for a couple of years now. He's used his best ideas and the team has heard his best jokes by now. The work has become too operational. And with work being all operations, he might as well be moved into the retirement home already. But as it said above the lectern at his old school "forward and upwards." It has to be fun next year too! People around the table nod their heads and smile.

The implication of John's pitch for strategy is that strategy makes work fun. This fun has a twofold function: First, making strategy is fun; and second, with a strategy, all the work in the department is more fun because even the boring everyday things then have a larger purpose.

A few months later, Monika explains to Marie what's in it for her when she works on strategy:

Marie: And it's fun?

Monika: Yes, I think it's fun.

Marie: What's fun about it?

Monika: Well, I think it's cool. That part of throwing some balls in the air, trying to think a bit out of the box, giving yourself some space, that's the stuff I think is fun.

Marie: Yes.

Monika: And then actually to do that together with someone who does the same thing. So that together perhaps you'll achieve something…a bit higher level than what you walk around in on a daily basis, in the everyday humdrum of things. Suddenly you can see some potential that you didn't see before and that's what excites, at least for me, I mean, seeing some development opportunities that I didn't see and being part of making something of it. I mean, that I think is very rewarding for me.

Strategy work is rewarding. It is exciting and it pulls you out of the everyday humdrum of things. You see things differently, and better, through strategy work. The Danish word they use for fun is "sjovt," which in this context has a connotation of something challenging that

will give you pleasure. It is not a frivolous kind of fun. It is more a sense of delight in the work.

Left brain // Right brain

A distinction that keeps working its way into strategy discussions is that of left brain and right brain. This image, drawing on popular scientific reference, continuously pops up. As the metaphors of left and right brain are worked into the strategy work, they start to perform a certain, rather complex, distinction: Left brain is creative and fun and desire-driven, perhaps slightly unserious and light, while right brain is rigor and analytical and boring, but also important and powerful.

It's one of the early meetings of the Strategy Work Group. They're still trying to define the process for the work. There's talk of producing some two-by-two diagrams based on interviews in order to give a factual image of the organization's needs. These diagrams will be right brain. But in the end, it will be left brain. John declares that they go through all this work with their right brain, and then when it comes down to it, they decide with the left brain.

Benjamin tells Marie that he believes that John thinks he's mainly right brained, but he perceives himself as, at least somewhat, dominated by his left brain. The misperception is probably due to his past as a consultant where he learned how to speak the right brain language fluently.

Benjamin discusses left and right brain in relation to strategies with Marie:

Benjamin: I think you need to be careful about creating the pure right brain strategies. I come from a consulting firm, which has taken as its motto the idea of moving away from strategies that are never implemented, and I think that strategies that don't amount to anything, I mean, you have many more right brain strategies in the category that never amount to anything. And perhaps the quality is a bit lower, or what could you say, they aren't as well founded, those left brain ones, but on the other hand they probably more often actually amount to something because people actually feel like implementing them. So I agree very much that it's a balancing act and I think that, at least that's how I understood John based on the trip to Sweden with the ELC, they're trying with the left brain to set some, what do you want to call it, some boundaries for the strategy process which is about to start and then afterwards they ask some right brain people to buttress that which is actually that which they feel

like doing with this organization. This is what you need to figure out and of course it's possible that a couple of the things they felt like simply don't make sense based on some calculations or analysis. And then they need to discuss that.

Because the Group so often refers to the categories of left brain and right brain, the categories become quite refined and they start to work well. That is, they start to carry a lot of meaning for the members of the Group. Obviously, the image of left or right brain is not reserved only for strategy work. The Group also uses it in different contexts, but it becomes especially important in the strategy work as a marker between one realm and approach that is marked by emotion, intuition, and creativity; and one that is characterized by rationality, facts, and rigor. The Strategy Working Group does not prioritize right brain over left brain. The Group discusses how they as a whole probably have a proclivity for left brain work, but they continuously discuss the differences and the merits of both approaches. They make strategy work through mobilizing both realms and they are acutely aware of when they need to be "right brained" and when they can be "left brained." For example, when they need to present something to the Bioforte board, it must be right brain simply because that is the mode of communicating in the boardroom.

Us // Them

The Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group talks about Stakeholder Engagement as a special department at Bioforte. The feeling is that Stakeholder Engagement has a more human approach to business and that this way, while perhaps not duly recognized by the top leadership team, is a better way to view organizations.

Marie is trying to get a handle on how the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy Working Group sees the differences between the strategy work they do and that of other places in the organization:

John: I mean, of course I have experience doing strategy at the C-level both here and at Zyndo and so on….

Marie: And does that compare? Or is it different?

John: It's different!

Marie: How is it different? That was really clear. It's different!

John: Well, it's clearly different. It happens…I mean, here we've done it as a common, to the extent possible, we've run it as a common. I mean, it's like a journey that we've all participated in where we don't really know, I mean, we plan the journey beforehand and say, well now we would like to go to Galapagos but then we undertake this journey, and if we could just plan the journey and see some pictures then we didn't really have to go, but that isn't how it is because the journey in itself also has a goal, I mean, that's also what it's like during a strategy process, that you experience things during the process even if you can plan some things and a structure for the process and an overarching goal and can say that when we get to here, then we have to have this and this and this. Then the journey you're going on, the experiences you have underway, during the crossing, they qualify the goal you reach at the end. Actually, that's what the strategy is about.

John clearly values the inclusiveness of the strategy work process, even while he recognizes the impossibility of everyone undertaking the journey. The underlying argument of the Strategy Working Group as a whole when they speak about how they have a special approach to strategy becomes: *We are special because we do strategy like this, and because we do strategy like this, we are special.*

This distinction between "us" and "them" works both in relation to the department vis-à-vis the rest of Bioforte, and in relation to Bioforte vis-à-vis other organizations. The "us" can be constructed differently depending on the context of the discussion and the purpose for the speaker. What is important is that doing strategy work in an open and processual manner makes one special at the same time as this certain mode of doing strategy work is a consequence of how one is special.

The title of this chapter is Out of the Ordinary, because that is what the Strategy Working Group accomplishes through strategy. They make their working lives more meaningful and special. Specifically, they do this through establishing a set of distinctions that order their world. On the topic of distinction, it is also worth pointing out that an alternative meaning of the word distinction is "outstanding," which again recalls the idea of a divide or demarcation because being extraordinary, or outstanding, depends on something else being ordinary, or normal. The extraordinary creates the ordinary and they can only exist in conjunction since

the relationship between them is one of comparison. The ordinary is constantly dependent on something other to exist, something extraordinary, because otherwise it cannot be inscribed as ordinary. The reverse is also the case: The extraordinary can only be so by virtue of the existence of the ordinary. The distinction between them is therefore also the connection.

This chapter has outlined certain specific distinctions that emerge in the Strategy Working Group. The distinctions are not equal in power and importance. Some distinctions pop up briefly, play a big role, and then fall away again; some function as undercurrents to the work; and still others become more sustained through use, such as the case with the left brain and right brain metaphor. The point here has not been to make a categorization of distinctions, but instead to show how in practice the strategy work becomes a locus for performing various distinctions. Strategy work is also engagement in the messy business of getting a grip on the world. It is a way of organizing the organization.

II.5

So Simple and So Complex: Tensions of Strategy Work

In this section, the argument moves from discussing strategy as a device for organizing through drawing distinctions in an either/or mode to the both/and aspect of strategy at Bioforte. Contradictory truths about what strategy is co-exist and trying to understand both what strategy is and what it does at, and for, Bioforte is a process of coming to appreciate the nature of this complexity and these contradictions of strategy.

Throughout the Stakeholder Engagement strategy work process, Marie is trying to pin down what strategy actually is at Bioforte, and she vacillates between thinking that strategy is nothing but a bunch of vapid hooey, and seeing how strategy is a powerful concept that adds value to the Bioforte team, and back again to vapid hooey. The answer to the question "What is strategy at Bioforte?" isn't a singular answer. Marie comes to understand when trying to understand strategy work at Bioforte that it means to embrace the contradictions because it's in those tensions and contradictions that strategy is defined at Bioforte. It's both this and that. It's multiple.

Neither Too Specific Nor Too General

When explaining to Marie what a bad strategy is in her mind, Elizabeth says that a strategy is bad when:

Elizabeth: It's too big and polished and very theoretical and full of detailed descriptions or if it's so high level that it's, what we in the communications business, call bullshit bingo. If the goal is to "take it to the next level"—what does that even mean? I mean, a strategy also needs to be able to answer. You need to be able to ask why and how all the way to the root. So it can't be too fluffy, nor can it be too comprehensive.

Elizabeth's description of strategy is a contradiction in terms. Strategy must not be too general nor must it be too specific. This is not a matter of strategy needing to be somewhere in the middle in order to avoid being too high level or too detailed; it is rather a sense that strategy needs to *both* be specific and general. It is confusing to read Elizabeth's answer because she is articulating this paradox about strategy. In order for strategy to work, it must have an elasticity that enables it to be both detailed and big picture oriented.

This characterization of strategy as not too general and not too specific mirrors the way that "strategy speak" works through being simultaneously loose and tight. In order for strategy to work, it needs to be extraordinarily translatable—it has to be able to step into different situations with confidence and without seeming out of place and irrelevant.

Strategy Shows the Way; Reality Decides What We Do

After John has presented the final strategy PowerPoint document to Marie, he rolls back up the presentation screen he's recently had installed and unplugs his computer from the projector. It's fall 2011 and the strategy was finalized just under a year ago. The first slide in the presentation says: Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Strategy 2011-2016.

Marie: When are you going to work with strategy again John? And how?

John: I'm going to do that probably in fall next year. This one needs a bit of an adjustment at that time, right. Then it'll be time to evaluate where we are. Because some of the things we've launched now will prove not to be the right prioritization. Some other things will show up which we didn't think about. I mean, diversity is higher up on the list than it was when we did this. We're not going to do a thorough process like we did now. I mean, it isn't the strategy that decides what we do. **It's the reality that decides what we do.** Because this strategy reflects a reality that was here a while ago, but reality continually moves, right, and that means that we all the time make prioritizations, but the strategy is part of giving direction at a point in time so we decide that now we're going northwest. On the way north west, it turns out that, oh well, we need to walk a little bit more to the east, and then we walk more towards east. We don't keep walking northwest when reality shows that it's wiser to walk towards, that is change direction underway, right. But the strategy is part of ensuring that we do it on an informed basis. I mean, working on this strategy means that we've been into every freaking little, yes, you were part of it yourself, we've discussed endlessly and at times we felt that we didn't get anywhere and every time we sat down to discuss strategy then we started at the same beginning. Don't you remember?

Marie:	Yes yes, I'm fully aware of what you're talking about.
John:	And it was maddeningly frustrating.
Marie:	It was fascinating.
John:	Yes, it was also fascinating and it's very much in the way we work here.

The idea of strategy as determining action is dismissed by John at the same time as the strategy slides are projected on a screen portraying a story of how the strategy determines actions and outcomes: A vision leads to a mission which leads to strategic objectives which leads to initiatives and concrete actions in the organizations. That story of strategy as the determining force is important and powerful, but at the same time, strategy is also a powerless concept that will have to yield to "reality."

John says that it is the reality that decides what they do, not the strategy. With this comment, he acknowledges that strategy as the guide for decision-making is an impossibility, yet strategy *is* the illusion that we can plan for the future. The problem is that we never know the future in advance, and it is always different to what we imagined. Therefore, the illusion that a strategy can steer the organization only holds for a very short time, until "reality" happens.

John points to an insight that is absolutely fundamental in making strategy work: Strategy pretends to be representative of reality, but to treat it as such is harmful because then you will be making decisions that are "removed from reality." As a strategy maker, John knows that confusing strategy and reality is folly.

We Need to Spend the Time It Takes; This Can Be Done in a Jiffy

In one of the early Strategy Working Group meetings, after Helen has presented her first take on a timeline for the process, John declares that they could sit down for a week and more or less produce the final product. They already know the nature of the end product. Marie widens her eyes and looks at him. She isn't sure what this means: should they abandon the process and just write a strategy in a week or…? John continues to say that they need to follow Helen's plan because the process is also really important; they do get something out of talking and getting into all the corners and crinkles of the issues. That's actually the real work.

Strategy is a process of cognition and by sitting and talking and talking and talking and talking, someone will come up with a good idea.

This tension between leaving the process open and exploring ideas and discussing things on the one hand and on the other hand wanting a result is characteristic for the strategy work at Bioforte. Elizabeth gives her take on it when Marie asks her at the end of an interview if there's anything else about strategy that she would like to add:

Elizabeth: Yes, I mean, I think, I don't know if I would call it interesting or what, but there are two things that like, two feelings that fight in me when we sit in a process such as this. And it's exactly that thing about when it's a good thing to have a long time to sit and talk things through and be very process oriented and you talk and you talk and perhaps you end up in the same discussion many many times and then you see it again and then you just repeat the same things because it's as if you just can't move on, and when do you say, okay, now we're just not getting any further here, and this isn't where we'll get any breakthrough ideas so perhaps it's time that you go home and think these two questions over Marie, I think these over. We go home and think alone behind our screens, but of course based on what we had, and then we meet again. I mean, that togetherness, having everything open and everything free. I mean, when to do what? That's difficult to handle. Because I think that I can feel along the way in a process that works this way, then we aren't always in the same place, I mean some, half of us, can be in a place where we think okay, now we just need to talk a lot about it and then you can feel that the other half is impatiently sitting there and thinking, okay, let's get on with it. Let's make this more concrete and then it can be the other group that feels differently next time.

As Elizabeth expresses, strategy work involves working between an openness and a closure, between letting strategy emerge in discussions and also understanding that it is already predetermined and set. For the Strategy Working Group, both of these are true: Strategy is open and they need to sit down to discuss it before they can know what the strategy should be, *and* they already know the strategy and they can just write it up right now.

Making a strategy *requires* a closure, a simplification, a conclusion, and, at the same time, the strategy work *resists* that kind of closure, simplification, and conclusion. The Strategy Working Group more or less knows what the strategy document should say, yet they can talk and talk forever feeling that the closure, the "result" and the end point, continually slips away from them.

The Process Is What Actually Matters; The Product Is Very Important

The Working Group often talks about how it is the *process* that matters, not the final product. Yet for the process to matter, the final product must also matter because the product justifies the process. If the strategy document itself is irrelevant, it is impossible to justify spending time on the strategy process.

What is the relationship between the strategy document and the strategy process? It is impossible for the document to actually represent the process even if the strategy document is framed as the result of the process. Somehow there is a loose coupling that allows the product to be both really important **and** irrelevant. The strategy document is important as an organizational output, but it is also important as a catalyst because without the product, there would be no process. It is irrelevant in the sense that on its own, it does not add anything. Imagine the product without the process—it would be worthless. Likewise, if you imagine the process without the product—it would have no justification. In this way, product and process are both irrelevant and are both essential.

At Bioforte, the Strategy Working Group discusses this tension:

John: Plans are nothing, planning is everything. Now it's a piece of paper that lies there, but the actual value is in the fact that we went through the considerations. That I feel, and every single time we do these strategies, I remember we talked about it when we were doing this one. Every single time I'm left thinking that it turned into something other than I thought it would. Because when we embark on the process, I think I know what I think is the right thing, but every single time, then the strategy process causes me to end up much clearer. I thought this was the right thing, but actually, this is more right. Or some things pop up. And become important. I mean, the prioritization changes along the way. And that's of course because I qualify the prioritizations. I mean, that I've thought it through with my colleagues. I mean, that they're quality ensured because several brains have looked at it together. And that causes my prejudices and poorly thought through thoughts about one thing or the other to be differently challenged so that I also end up more clear on my own positions. The diversity issue is a good example. I mean, we're going to get started on this. I'm presenting to the board this March a strategy on diversity. I have some fluffy ideas about diversity. I'm not properly clear on it. I'm actually not sure what I think myself. The process we're going to go through will clarify us in relation to what we think. Why we think this. How it's connected to the business. All of that stuff. That's what the process is

> about. And that's why the quality of the product in March will be better than what I could produce if I just sat down to do it, or if I didn't do it.

The way John speaks constructs the strategy document and the strategy process as mutually constitutive. The process shapes the product and the need for a product prompts the process. The content of the product is not merely a representation of something that exists in the organization, rather the need to have a product is what produces the content of that product. As John says, he is not sure what he thinks about diversity, but through making a strategy about it, he will develop such a position.

Strategy work is not all process or all product; it is the interplay between the two. At Bioforte, once the process has been completed and the product is produced, the strategy document becomes totemic of the process. John uses the document as a prompt to unfold the story of the process. As he, for example, does with Marie early on in the strategy work phase or with presentations to external HR networks.

The Strategy Is Customized; Strategy Is Generic

Strategy at Bioforte also exists in the tension between being unique and being wholly ordinary. On the one hand, a strategy is supposed to express what is truly special about a department, or an organization, and on the other hand, a strategy cannot be so different that it is unrecognizable to other departments or other organizations and stakeholders. As chapter II.1 discussed, these are also the reasons that organizations buy strategy from consultants. Engaging consultants becomes one way of balancing that tension in practice because the consultants essentially ensure that the strategy is legible as a strategy. Consultants are masters in the genre of strategy.

In the Stakeholder Engagement Department at Bioforte, the tension between strategy as customized and strategy as generic becomes visible for Marie in an early meeting in the Strategy Working Group:

Susan, who's slouched back and sideways in her chair, says that she thinks it would be cool if the strategy was something simple. John agrees and says that it's a criterion for success that it's original. Susan says that perhaps they could make a film? Marie says that she was just thinking about whether there was a way to use images. And Susan agrees that a visual expression

would work great. The conversation moves on, and in the end, the strategy doesn't take the shape of a film, nor does it have any pictures or images in the final PowerPoint deck. The final document is remarkably true to the genre of corporate strategy. It looks very much like other strategies that Marie has seen in her role as a consultant: Bulleted lists, block arrows, and key points in colored boxes, all arranged in the Bioforte template for a clean and stylish look.

This episode contains a small clue to give an inkling of what strategy could perhaps have been but did not become. So, why is it that the strategy does not become a film? Possibly, the answer is to be found in the fact that in the shape of a film, the strategy cannot still be strategy at Bioforte. A film is too far removed from the genre of strategy. It would be too customized, and furthermore, it is not the right technology. A film cannot do the same kind of work that a PowerPoint presentation can. It cannot be emailed around, handed out at board meetings as printed slides, or be projected behind John as he makes a presentation to the Bioforte board. It cannot be compared to other strategies.

Perhaps it is useful to reach for yet another metaphor and think of strategy as a language. A language that has strict rules but that also allows expression of a wide variety of ideas. By making a film, the Stakeholder Engagement Department would no longer be speaking the right strategic language. They would perhaps be able to express themselves in a film, but it would no longer be strategy. Possibly, in another organization this could be different, but at Bioforte, it simply would not work to have a film as strategy.

The generic aspect of strategy makes strategy vulnerable to ridicule because it can be very hard to see how something general and non-specific contributes in a given context.

Marie and Helen sit down to talk about strategy. The discussion turns to strategy as a cliché, and Helen tells Marie a story of how she's experienced the exact same strategy video presented in two different biotechnology companies where she's worked:

Helen: I mean, in reality there are many companies who say the same thing and then it's the culture that differs. The vast majority of companies have a strategy about growth, and I mean, not many have anything other than that, right, but the crucial aspect is how you do it and there I think that the culture actually plays a larger and stronger role. If you have a strong culture which drives,

drives forward, then I think you're a motivated employee. I think that's much more important than…I mean, because you can also, I mean,…if you took the strategy from Scantek and dropped that here then it would probably fit just fine. And you can see that they all use McKinsey, Boston Consulting or one of the other big consultancies, and they say the same thing.

But I do think that it's, I mean, the executive team doesn't have anything else to grab onto. I mean, they, I've tried it too. I was working at Plaxtek and they had some kind of work on values going on and you came up and they showed you this video which was really good, that's not the issue. But then I start work at Vivatek and they also have something with strategy going on. I see the exact same video. I mean, I'm sitting there telling my friend: I've seen this before! I'm entirely certain! It's the exact same video! And it was. Then I went up and asked, Who has made this video? and I tell them that it's exactly the same as one I saw at Plaxtek, which is also a biotech company.

So I'm a bit, you know, yeah yeah. The overall strategy is of course important and it needs to set the frame, but it's further down in the organization where we actually do the stuff that sets us apart, and that's why I keep repeating that the strategy needs to be clear and concise because otherwise it doesn't work—then it doesn't matter.

Marie and Helen laugh at the story of how the consulting firm is able to sell the same video twice to different clients.

In Helen's story, there is more at stake than a consultancy trying to gain economies of scale on their product because her anecdote is a demonstration of how a corporate strategy can fit many different corporations. This is because a corporate strategy needs to be generic and open. It has to have an elasticity that enables it to fit an entire organization, which will mean many different divisions, many different departments, many different cultures, and many different nationalities. The requirements for robustness in a strategy and its ability to be customized to a company may be fulfilled by a certain generic quality that makes a strategy more true to the genre of strategy than to the organization it was developed for. Yet there is a persistent story told about how strategy is intensely customized; strategy expresses the organization's soul and defines the organization. That, of course, is also true.

Tensions define strategy in the Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Department. Strategy is, as the chapter title says, "so simple and so complex." These tensions can be seen as a direct consequence and expression of the multiplicity of strategy. Given that strategy is not a singular entity, tensions and contradictions will be present. These tensions cut across the organizing work that strategy does at Bioforte. In the first three chapters of Part II, this work

is described in terms of how it shapes three different organizational realms: us (the group and the department), the work (activities and tasks, including the strategy work), and selves (the identity of the Bioforte people working on strategy as well as the researcher). The crux of it all is that the Group does *make strategy work* in these various modes despite, and because, of the tensions in strategy.

Epilogue: Where Does Strategy Come From? And Where Does It Go

Marie is writing at her desk at CBS. She needs a reference for a section of the development of strategy as an academic field. A Google scholar search comes up with an article titled "Are You Sure You Have a Strategy?" from 2001 (Hambrick and Fredrickson 2001). Marie downloads it, exports the reference to Endnote, and skims the article on her screen. It's a typical strategy piece written for an executive audience and it contains some fancy models. Marie looks at the figures and thinks about the fetish for models within Strategic Management. Then she decides that her time is better spent reading something else, so she saves the pdf in the "scholarly articles" folder on her computer and moves on to another text. After lunch she plugs in her foot switch to continue transcribing an interview with Benjamin. On the tape, he discusses his own approach to making strategy, and Marie asks him where he got his idea of what strategy is. He replies that his old job as a management consultant was a big influence and from his student days, he particularly remembers an article called "Are You Sure You Have a Strategy?" On the recording is a seven-minute stretch where he summarizes the article for Marie and exemplifies the article's argument by relating to his own situation.

Here we have the academic studying the practitioner using a model, developed by another academic, and feeding that study into a piece of academic work which other academics will read. This circle of replication is one way that strategy can be said, as the Critical Approaches to Strategy do, to feed forward by creating the practice that it claims to describe. It is in this circular interplay between academic scholars and organizational practitioners that strategy is made to work. Strategy's starting point and end point overlap, and this loop of strategy has been criticized for a sort of inbred performativity: Managers look to academics for advice on how to do strategy while academics look to managers to describe how strategy is done. This loop is part of how it works, and as a strategy researcher, I too am caught in the loop. The circular mechanics can give the feeling of being caught in a house of mirrors. You look straight ahead, but all you see is a tunnel of your own reflection repeated endlessly.

III

Discussion

Part III forms the finale to this thesis. It provides a discussion of the thesis' findings across the different sections: the strategy literature streams, the conceptual braid of theory, the method explicated in Part I, and the ethnographic text about Bioforte in Part II. The contributions to the academic tradition of Critical Strategy as Practice and to people doing strategy work are outlined as well. The thesis limitations are explained, and three ideas for further strategy research extending from the thesis are described. Part III concludes with an ending to the entire thesis.

A Study in and of the Age of Strategy

This thesis responds to a zeitgeist of strategy here, there, and everywhere by studying the concept of strategy from a position that questions the general taken-for-granted attitude towards strategy. As the introduction stated, ours is an Age of Strategy, and strategy is no longer reserved for corporations, nor is it only for the executive level. It has spread and is now to be found in all kinds of organizations, at all levels. Following these developments, the thesis does not examine corporate strategy but rather offers a study of a specific strategy work process taking place in the middle of an organization at the departmental level.

A Patchwork: Simplifications as Complexity

The ethnographic text in Part II offers *a practice-theoretical, narrative, and performativity informed analysis* of making strategy work in the Bioforte Stakeholder Engagement Department. The text is based on stories of the field, understood both as narrative material gathered *in* the field and as narrative material generated *from* experiences in the field. To produce the ethnographic text, the stories of the field were untangled into categories and streams through visual mapping and memo writing. After which these categories and streams were rearranged according to themes and patterns. This process was akin to quilting, with each bit of text representing a square of fabric. The process of textual composition involved moving around

textual "fabric squares" to bring forth patterns while paying attention to issues of matching and contrasting.

Following the composition phase, the five chapters in Part II were stitched together to form themes of strategy work as organizing "us" (the working group and the department) (II.1), organizing work (II.2), organizing selves (II.3), creating distinctions (II.4), and replete with tensions and contradictions (II.5). Individually, these five themes, as well as each individual story or textual patchwork square, are all simplifications of strategy work, yet when they are presented in a composition, complexity emerges. The five chapters in Part II sit together in a constellation that argues for seeing strategy work as a complexity of performative activities that bring about a variety of effects in the organization.

Findings

The title of this thesis, *Making Strategy Work*, explicitly involves a double entendre: It both connotes the doing of strategy work and the notion that it takes work for strategy to function as a concept. In this sense, the title contains a performative point: doing strategy is also making, or assembling, "strategy." Through close empirical analysis, the thesis has explored how this double movement happens and thus makes a set of claims about strategy and strategy work:

∗ Strategy is all around us

This claim is less of a finding and more of a starting point for the thesis. The ubiquity of strategy exists in everyday language as well as in public and private organizations, from hospitals to schools to telecommunication providers. In corporations, strategy has assumed a central position in the last few decades. This is what is meant by the assertion that we are in the Age of Strategy.

∗ Strategy conditions the organization

Organizations are shaped by strategy in a variety of ways and they cannot ignore strategy. It is not possible to operate without, or outside, strategy. Strategy has become an organizational condition—it shapes, creates, sets parameters, and makes possible. This means that organizing happens on the condition of strategy. At Bioforte, the Stakeholder Engagement Working

Group works with/for/under/against/despite/beside strategy, but rejecting or resisting strategy entirely as a category is out of the question.

The stories in the five chapters in Part II conceptualize strategy work as crucial to organizing; however, it is not the claim of this thesis that strategy work is the sum total of organizing. There are many other concepts and forces that overlap and intermingle to make up organization, e.g. personal lives, tasks, history, culture, and so forth, but those are not the focus of this study.

∗ Strategy cannot be definitively defined

This claim is grounded in the onto-epistem-ological position of the thesis, which resists a representational worldview and therefore rejects the idea of one single true definition of a concept. Furthermore, it is a function of attending to the polyphony of strategy in everyday language, in the many contradictory strategy definitions in the academic literature, and in the multiplicity expressed in definitions and metaphors of strategy at Bioforte.

∗ Strategy's multiplicity gives the concept strength

In strategy work, strategy is continually remade and each remaking is a new enactment of strategy, which means in that instance, strategy *is* different. Thus strategy is multiple. Other research that has explored ambiguity in strategy maintain a representational ontology and thus see ambiguity as a partial or an equivocal rendering (Sillince, Jarzabkowski, and Shaw 2012; Abdallah and Langley Forthcoming). In contrast, this thesis explores different expressions of strategy, for example, in the Bioforte group's usage of metaphors for strategy; not as renderings of strategy, but as makings of strategy. In the makings of strategy lie great vitality and strength, since the concept of strategy is continually generated.

∗ Strategy's specific and recognizable materiality, places, and language contribute to strategy's coherence

Strategy work looks and feels a certain way. There is a certain generic quality to it that is immediately recognizable: It uses brown butcher paper posters, colorful post-it notes, and preprinted response cards. This look seems to apply across organizations. Strategy often also happens in specific places such as certain important meeting rooms and at conference centers

away from daily life. The specific language of strategy is also spoken across organizations. This specific look, feel, place, and language, which signal strategy so strongly, work to maintain the dominance of strategy as a concept. Furthermore, it works because the template (materiality, place, language) is open enough that it can be put to many different uses in different organizations.

∗ Strategy is a social practice

The term social practice is here taken to mean a sense of a shared fabric that is both translated into specific actions as well as upheld and sustained by those actions. Other scholars have proposed a similar view of strategy as a social practice (Hendry 2000; de La Ville and Mounoud 2002). Strategy work is the task of mobilizing the social practice of strategy into everyday life through specific language and bodily actions. Michel de Certeau's project is to theorize this everyday practice and develop a vocabulary for discussing everyday actions of the common man as sites of production (de Certeau 1984). In acknowledgment that everyday actions are always partially determined, de Certeau calls this "making do," and he sees generative potential in everyday practices, much in the same way that Derrida spoke of différance as both to differ and to defer (Derrida 2001 (1967)).

∗ Strategy work is replete with tensions and contradictions

The tensions and contradictions are perhaps a natural consequence of the fact that strategy cannot be definitely defined and that it is multiple. The tensions and contradictions do not, in the case of Bioforte, become an obstacle to collaboration and production of strategy. The Bioforte Strategy Working Group acknowledges the tensions and contradictions as part of making strategy work.

∗ Strategy promises a rational guide for action

Scholars of traditional Strategy Management maintain that rational analysis of the organization and the environment enables you to make good decisions. This is also, by and large, the popular and common perception of strategy. As Chapter I.2 describes, the Process Approach to Strategic Management, exemplified by Mintzberg and his colleagues, critiqued this assumption about strategy by arguing that planning is futile and that strategy is only

visible retroactively as a pattern in a stream of actions (Mintzberg 1994). However, it is crucial to take strategy and its promise of rationality seriously as this promise is absolutely central to strategy; without this rational promise, strategy is not strategy. This argument is analogous to Barbara Townley's assertion that reason makes a self that is capable of reason whereupon this construction is hidden away so that the fiction of the self as reasoning can emerge (Townley 2008). In terms of Bioforte, the rational promise of strategy is important because it holds enormous sway over the people doing strategy work at the same time as they know it to be a fiction.

∗ Strategy work is rational *and* emotional

At Bioforte, strategy work emerges as both a rational, calculative exercise and an emotional exercise. The metaphor they often use to express these two coexisting characteristics of strategy work is "right brain" and "left brain". Rather than determining whether strategy is truly rational or truly emotional, the ethnography shows how strategy work involves a continuous definition and interplay of these realms.

∗ Strategy work depends both on conceptualizing strategy as a product *and* seeing it as a process

Strategy is neither pure process nor is it pure product. The strategy product, usually the strategy document, serves as a prompt, a catalyst, and a guide for the process. The process exists because a given document has to be produced, yet that very product has very little value in and of itself. The process of developing the product is actually what affects the organization through the organizing work that it does.

∗ Strategy work can be identity work at the group level

The specific task of strategy work constitutes the Strategy Working Group. It is through the strategy work done by the group that it becomes a strategy working group. Each member of the Strategy Working Group represents a department unit and by working together on strategy, they also establish a set of overlaps and connections between these units, which enables the department to establish a sense of unity. The strategy work in this sense does

institutional-building work. It is by doing strategy work that the department becomes the kind of department that has a strategy.

∗ Strategy work can be identity work at the individual level

The personal identity of the strategists is constituted in part by the fact that they are doing strategy work; they actively use the task of strategy work to define who they are. Other scholars have related the theoretical concepts of strategy and identity (Sillince and Simpson 2010). However, these arguments separate out the process of strategy from that of identity, whereas Part II demonstrates that strategy work and identity work can be the same thing. The people working on strategy at Bioforte do identity work *in and through* the strategy work.

∗ Strategy work enables the creation of distinctions that organize the organization

It is in the strategy work that the team establishes a set of distinctions that orders the organization: Strategy/Operations, Meaningful/Trivial, Important/Unimportant, Fun/Boring, Left Brain/Right Brain, Us/Them. These distinctions are at play in the various aspects of strategy work as it organizes the "us", the work, and the selves. Through creating and maintaining the distinctions, the team is able to create categories that can order the mess that is the organization.

∗ Strategy does not represent an already existing order

Empirically, this is demonstrated through the Bioforte Strategy Working Group shaping the tasks in the Department such that they can be articulated as strategic. Philosophically, it is a matter of faith whether or not reality can be said to be or to be becoming. As the conceptual braid in Chapter I.3 unfolds, this thesis believes in the latter perspective. An extension of this claim of non-representativeness is the assertion that strategy feeds forward to create the very problems that it proposes to solve, which is put forth by Critical Approaches to Strategy (Knights and Morgan 1991).

The fourteen claims about strategy outlined above are presented in this thesis. Taken together, they make the overarching argument that strategy is complex. Strategy does not do one type of work in the organization; it does many different types of work and tasks.

Consequently, it also produces many different effects at different levels or realms of influence.

The argument that strategy work does a range of work in the organization resonates with how Ann Langley has argued that formal analysis acts as a form of organizational glue, fulfilling purposes different from the ones stated (Langley 1989). She identified four groups of purposes for formal analysis (rational evaluations of specific situations): information, communication, direction and control, and symbolic purposes. Even though the starting point for the analysis is similar to this thesis, Langley's question of what purposes are behind the uses of rational analysis differs from the position of this thesis, which rejects the notion of other purposes as being *behind* a primary rational purpose of strategy work. In this present analysis, strategy work does a whole range of work; some of it is explicitly stated as the purpose of strategy work and some of it is not but still exists *in concert* with explicitly stated purposes.

In the analytical quilt that Part II offers, the narrative mode moves from a rather traditional storytelling mode in the Welcome to Bioforte Prologue to a more fragmented mode (So Simple and So Complex: Tensions of Strategy Work). This movement towards tensions and fragmentation embodies an analytical point, as it is another way of conveying the idea that strategy work does not necessarily add up neatly. Part II starts with a coherent story about strategy work but the more it unfolds this story to tell fragmented stories, the more the classical compositional and narrative device of beginning-middle-end structure unravels as well.

The movement from a traditional narrative to a more fragmented form underscores how Part II makes no claim to completeness or wholeness. This is not an exposé of how strategy *really* works. Instead, I have put forth five movements or themes concerning strategy work that I encountered in my fieldwork and that seem important to me. Another researcher in another (or even in the same) context would surely have drawn different images of strategy work. The chapters are not arranged as different ways of talking *about the same thing*. Instead, my position is exactly that there is not one *same thing* to be revealed, and the different

chapters are all examples of *making strategy work*—which is how we can say that strategy is multiple.

An implication of the aforementioned fourteen claims about strategy and strategy work is that it becomes very hard to know if strategy is good. Given that strategy is so many things and does so much work, the criteria for when it is good become equally complex. Thus, the question of whether strategy is good seems like an impossible question to answer. Strategy can work in some ways and fail in others, depending on intentions and circumstances. It is probably inevitable that strategy will be both good and bad. It can be good if the process of creating it was good; for example, if it felt good because it created a sense of community, purpose, and teamwork. It can be good if it impresses others, or oneself. It can be good if it causes you to imagine new possibilities. It can be good if it does what the owners of the strategy hoped it would do. Thus the evaluation criteria when determining if a strategy is good centers on its usefulness. From the experience in Bioforte, I would stay that a strategy is good if you can use it to tell good stories, preferably a couple of good stories at the same time.

In the context of Bioforte, the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy can be said to be good, for it allows a telling of the Department as business oriented and savvy while it also allows stories of teamwork and identity.

The Promised Definition of Strategy Work

At this point, it is possible to deliver on the promise from the introduction to propose a more precise definition of strategy work based on the ethnographic fieldwork of what people at Bioforte do when they say that they are doing strategy: *Strategy work is a set of verbal and physical activities with a specific materiality, performed within the social context of making a strategy, which contribute to constituting the group, the work, and the selves of the people engaged in that same strategy work.* Furthermore, the strategy work is characterized by contradictions and tension; plus it works through ordering by enabling the creation of distinctions.

Given my conclusions about strategy work (that it organizes the organization), it is tempting to ask if that is not the case for any organizational work? What does it matter that work is explicitly strategy work? Could this not be a study of any random organizational work process? Here, I will maintain that it *does* matter that the stories in Part II are about strategy,

as strategy has a privileged position in organizations; it is considered to be special. For example, at Bioforte, Elizabeth chooses to work during her maternity leave, but only on strategy because that is more important than other kinds of work, to her and to Bioforte. Of course strategy work will have similarities with other kinds of organizational work, but it *is* special work, and it becomes special work through a concerted effort by the people making strategy.

Academic Contributions of the Thesis

In terms of academic strategy research, this thesis considers Organizational Studies as its home and Critical Strategy as Practice as its field. The thesis then contributes with a twofold development of the Critical Strategy as Practice perspective: The first aspect of the dual contribution lies in Chapter I.3's development of a specific theoretical braid that weaves practice, narrative, and performativity and thereby explicates this triad of theoretical traditions and assumptions as relevant to a practice theoretical exploration of strategy. The second aspect of the contribution to Critical Strategy as Practice is to provide an empirical analysis that puts this theoretical frame to use in an ethnographic study of strategy work.

The field of academic strategy literature is in the literature review in Chapter I.2 and is divided into three streams: Strategic Management, Critical Approaches to Strategy, and Strategy as Practice. The space for contribution is pinpointed in the overlap between Critical Approaches to Strategy and Strategy as Practice, and therefore designated as *Critical Strategy as Practice* (for a visual representation of the argument, see figure 1 on page 25). The "critical" part of this nomenclature refers to the thesis' affiliation with approaches to Critical Approaches to Strategy, which as a whole, can be said to offer a position towards strategy that questions the naturalness of strategy by examining the conditions for, as well as the consequences of, strategy (Knights and Morgan 1991). The "practice" part of the designation affiliates this thesis with Strategy as Practice and the strong turn within that tradition towards strategy as something that organizations do (Whittington 2003).

The move of bringing a critical approach to bear on empirical fieldwork is enabled through Organizational Ethnography—a methodological approach to studying organizing as it

happens with an inherently critical stance in that it questions underlying assumptions and logics of the field (Watson 2011).

Theoretically, the anchoring of the thesis braids the notions of practice, narrative, and performativity in order to develop some analytical concepts and also to explicate the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research. In terms of practice, the thesis reaches for practice theory and practice-based approaches to develop the conceptualization of practice as *the way in which something happens*. Inherent in this definition is an attention both towards practice as everyday activity and as shared social fabric. Michel de Certeau provides inspiration in terms of theorizing the everyday (de Certeau 1984). De Certeau emphasizes the generative power of what he calls everyday practice and locates it in activities such as reading, cooking, and walking the city. Furthermore, he has a great appreciation for how the common man "makes do" and finds a way in spaces that are already determined and planned.

The concept of narrative is woven into the theoretical discussion as a device that performs two central functions in social life: Ordering and mediation between the individual experience and the shared social realm. Narratives order through enabling the establishment of categories, distinctions, and other ordering moves. Furthermore, narratives are a way of translating shared experience into individual lives and vice versa, incorporating individual experiences into shared social meaning.

The last concept of the theoretical braid is performativity; a concept which also runs as an undercurrent throughout the thesis, beginning already with the title *Making Strategy Work* and the research question *What does strategy work do?* By performativity is meant the idea that words, actions, things, and absences are performative; that is, they have effects in the world. In discursive terms, the reality described is constituted (however, not fully) by that same description. Furthermore, engaging with performativity as a social science concept leads to an emphasis on the conditions of possibility for and the consequences of practice. This emphasis has affinities with practice theory's notions of individual practices as both enabled and constrained by a shared social practice.

The conceptual braid of practice, narrative, and performativity that anchors the thesis theoretically implies three assumptions: First, reality is performed and must therefore be said to be made, rather than to be represented, by practice (including the practice of social science). Second, the object of study is a becoming that happens in the interplay (or practice)

between the individual and the shared realm of the social. And third, this interplay introduces a generative slippage that causes things to always be different. It is the ways in which they are different that we must thus study.

Through applying a philosophical understanding of "practice" (Orlikowski 2010) to the Critical Strategy as Practice label, new opportunities for analysis open up. For through a practice theoretical understanding, practice is not simply understood as activities, but rather as both what we do *and* the social context of those actions. This thesis joins scholars discussing strategy from a practice theoretical perspective (de Certeau 1984; Hendry 2000; de La Ville and Mounoud 2002) and then complements these discussions by contributing an ethnographic strategy work study that conceptualizes strategy as a social practice.

Practice theory is especially appropriate when studying strategy because, traditionally, strategy has held a very simplistic notion of agency. The focus on exploring *strategy work* aligns this thesis with a larger turn to work in Organization and Management Theory. In relation to strategy, this turn to work is characterized by Nelson Phillips and Thomas Lawrence as consideration of work as a purposeful effort which adopts a "…conception of agency that is humbler and more nuanced than what is often seen in the strategy literature" as well as insisting on "…the role of actors in socially constructing elements of work and organizations previously taken for granted as beyond actors' control" (Phillips and Lawrence 2012, 226). This dynamic of how people navigate the possible in a given situation is exactly the interest of practice-oriented approaches, and an ability to investigate this interplay is the methodological strength of ethnography. Therefore, this thesis can also be seen as contributing to extending the turn to work to strategy research.

This thesis does not claim to be a sustained critique of Strategic Management, yet there are two aspects of the thesis that can be construed as a form of "talking back" or an indirect criticism of traditional Strategic Management. The first is the prioritization of strategy work, and of strategy process, over strategy as a product. This choice becomes an implicit critique of much of the existing body of strategy research, even beyond Strategic Management, because traditionally the strategy product is considered essential to understanding strategy. The second aspect is the emphasis on performativity and on understanding work as performative

of organizations. Mainstream strategy is primarily a non-reflexive field (Pettigrew, Thomas, and Whittington 2002) denying that the relation between strategy and organization can be of a mutually constitutive nature. Thus, one of the basic premises of this thesis can be seen as an argument against a core assumption of Strategic Management (Smircich and Stubbart 1985).

In addition to the fields that this thesis engages overtly with—such as the streams of strategy literature, practice theory, and the notions of narrative and performativity—this thesis also has a more covert engagement with feminist thinking, which can be characterized as an undercurrent. This is partly a function of the strong connections and affinities between feminist theory and practice theory (Gherardi 2006). In the thesis, the feminist undercurrent is visible (if you look) in the emphasis on the situatedness of knowledge, the importance of the body, the experimentation with form, the reflections around the author's position as producer of knowledge, and in the text. On a very concrete level, it is also visible in the purposeful prioritization of "feminine" production metaphors that are used throughout the thesis: braiding, canvas, fabric, threads, stitched, patchwork, quilt, etc. Obviously this thesis is not an overtly feminist critique of strategy, but I see now, here at the end, that woven into the thesis is also a feminist conversation about strategy in practice.

Contributions to People Doing Strategy Work

The point of it all is to think differently about strategy work. Thinking about strategy is important simply because strategy is a central force in our modern lives. It shapes the organizations that shape our lives, be they our workplace, our school, or the hospital where we were born. For people doing strategy, which, as the introduction also points out, is pretty much all of us, there is value in paying attention to both what strategy work *gives* and what it *takes*. And *how* it does that.

It is not the job of the Bioforte case, nor of the entire thesis, to be prescriptive or to improve strategy. Instead what the thesis, especially Part II, can offer strategy practitioners is stories about making strategy work that potentially resonate with these people's practice. The highest hopes I have for the stories from Bioforte, and the accompanying academic, theoretical, and methodological discussions, are: that they are *trustworthy* to readers; that they

are considered *beautiful* in some way by these same readers; and that they might be *useful*, for example, as spaces for reflection.

Limitations of the Thesis

Strengths and weaknesses can be conceptualized as opposing poles of the same characteristics. In terms of this thesis, there are especially four characteristics that, beyond the strengths that warrant their existence, also imply a potential limiting weakness.

The first of these characteristics is the situated nature of an ethnographic approach. The virtue of ethnography is that the researcher is a participant observer in the field, which means that the ethnographer both studies and is part of what is happening. The price of being a participant observer is that you cannot observe the process you are studying from the outside. As an ethnographer you simply cannot be in more than one place at one time. It would have been interesting and relevant, for example, to compare strategy work in different organizations, or in different departments at Bioforte; or to study how the people in Bioforte's Stakeholder Engagement Department, who were not involved with making the strategy, experienced the strategy work. I made some attempts over lunch to ask outsiders to the Strategy Working Group how they saw the strategy work and what they thought about it, but quickly realized that the vague and supportive answers I got reflected that, to the people in the department, I was part of the Strategy Working Group and therefore a representative of the strategy work.

The second characteristic of the thesis that embodies both strength and a set of limitations is the focus on studying strategy through *strategy work* rather than through a strategy product. While the position of this thesis is that the content of the strategy document is not terribly interesting in and of itself, it could still be of value to look at the performative nature of the strategy document. Such a study would have examined what kinds of work the Strategy document did, and does, at Bioforte. For example, by following the document when it is put to use in different situations such as in a board meeting presentation, in decisions about department prioritization and work, or when John uses the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy in external HR network presentations.

The third characteristic to unfold here is the use of a theoretical apparatus that poaches freely from a variety of disciplines: practice theory, literary theory, feminism,

poststructuralism, and so forth. In two senses, this is a thesis of overlaps rather than traditional extensions. First, it configures a space for contribution in the strategy literature in an overlap between two traditions, Strategy as Practice and Critical Approaches to Strategy, and then it proceeds to develop a theoretical approach embodied by a braid—a metaphor that also conveys overlapping movement. While these positions are developed consciously for what they offer in terms of combinatory virtues of rethinking and reformulating, they can also certainly be conceived of as a weakness in that such "promiscuity," to a certain extent, prohibits thorough and deep engagement with one particular scholarly or theoretical tradition with the aim of extending this tradition.

The fourth characteristic of this thesis that offers both a strengthening and a limiting quality is the commitment to experimenting with form. While the structure of the thesis as a whole with literature review, theoretical approach, method, analysis, and conclusion conforms to the traditional structure of a PhD thesis, the Organizational Ethnography section in Part II plays with the analytical form by using two genres of text, a descriptive and a reflective, and by conveying the difference visually through typography. This construction is an experiment, as also described in the method Chapter I.4, which is offered to the reader with the aim of stylistically conveying a methodological point about ethnography as both a participating and an observing approach. However, the very notion of an experiment implies that it may not work.

Also Doing Strategy

I would be amiss to not point out that I am perfectly aware that this project also does/enacts/performs strategy. In the vocabulary of my theoretical approach, you could say that this PhD project, through a set of practices, provides performative narratives of strategy. On the most immediate level, this thesis and its narratives about strategy have effects on me as a person and as a scholar. It has effects in the field among the Bioforte strategy practitioners I studied and worked with, and, hopefully, it also has some effects among the strategy scholars—effects that are otherwise known as theoretical and empirical contributions. It undoubtedly also has the potential to have other effects that I cannot imagine at this point.

This notion that we as scholars are wrapped up in what we study, an aspect that is also conveyed in the Epilogue to Part II, is not an aspect of academic work to bemoan; rather it is,

as John Law points out, merely a premise for social scientists: "*...we're caught up in the ordering too.* When we write about ordering there is no question of standing apart and observing from a distance. We're participating in ordering too" (Law 1994, 2). As I see it, there is no way around the fact that social inquiry is productive. A consequence of this feature is the problematic nature of the notion of representation, for if we become through action, then the action of talking and writing about strategy is yet another becoming, of strategy and of us.

Looking Forward

At this point, towards the end of this study, after I have pointed to the insights and made claims for what I think are the significant contributions of the thesis, it is customary as well as reasonable to discuss what else would be worth exploring now. Further research on strategy can, and will, of course go on in all kinds of directions, but here are three lines of inquiry that I would consider exciting and worthwhile in the quest for knowing more about what strategy does in organizations:

1) The Tools of the Strategy Trade

This line of inquiry could extend this thesis' considerations of strategy materiality, metaphors, and language to give a more sustained focus on the tools of strategy work: Strategy models, PowerPoint, and the use of images. It is widely recognized that models
(Kaplan and Jarzabkowski 2006; Wright, Paroutis, and Blettner 2013) and PowerPoint (Kaplan 2011) play an instrumental role in strategy in organizations and therefore a critical investigation exploring the effects and "agency" of the tools of the strategy trade would be illuminating. A preliminary research question for such a project could be, *How are strategy tools put to use by those working with them?* Methodologically, this kind of research could either take an ethnographic approach of following specific tools in practice, or it could zoom out in order to study a broader range of tools as they appear in popular management literature and possibly create a simulation of strategy tool use through focus groups in a studio setting.

2) Consultants and Clients Making Strategy Together.

This topic of exploring strategy as a process of co-creation involving consultants and clients would shift the focus from this thesis' preoccupation with how strategy is made inside an

organization to how strategy is made in collaboration with outsiders. Organizations often hire management consultants to help them create strategy, and in a sense, strategy is a curious topic for engaging outside help: It is usually put forth as highly customized and expressive of a core identity, which would make one think that it would require deep knowledge of the organization to get it right; yet outside management consultants are called in as specialists of strategy and corporate strategies are often surprisingly alike and generic. It would be exciting to research ethnographically how consultants and clients work together in and around the paradox of strategy as something that sets an organization apart *and* something that makes an organization similar to others.

Specifically, this research would pick up on the call for more exploration of the role of consultants in strategy (Vaara and Whittington 2012) and engage with previous work around consulting in action (Sturdy et al. 2009). A draft research question could be, *How do clients and consultants navigate the paradox of strategy as a customized **and** generic genre?* The interest in co-creation presents a challenge in terms of method, as it would be impossible for a researcher to be involved both with a client team and with a consulting team. One solution could be to study one collaboration process from three ethnographic vantage points: one ethnographer as a participant observer in the client team; one as a participant observer in the consulting team; and one as a participant observer of the collaboration without explicit attachment to either the client or the consultant wing. This methodological approach could also lead to the entirely fitting feature of co-creating research about co-creation.

3) Time in Strategy

This line of inquiry would be an exploration of strategy in relation to philosophical and theoretical conceptions of time. As mentioned in Part II, a traditional conceptualization of strategy depends on the fiction of clean slate thinking, which necessarily complicates the relation between time and strategy. Such research could explore questions of how people working with strategy mobilize time: How they engage past, present, and future as well as how they shape those temporal realms.

Recently, scholars have turned to time and strategy (Kaplan and Orlikowski 2012), which provides a good point of departure for discussing different organizational modes of time (Pedersen 2009) and the effects of time in and on strategy. Here, a preliminary research

question could be, *How do strategies use and perform time?* In terms of method, document studies of corporate strategies and their relationship to time could provide a rich approach to this inquiry.

Additionally, not as a separate line of inquiry, but as an overall aspiration for strategy research, I repeat the insight from the method Chapter I.4 that there are very few Organizational Ethnographies specifically on strategy. Given the increasing role of strategy in organizations, more in-depth, ethnographically oriented empirical explorations of strategy as it happens in organizations would enrich the strategy field and Organization Studies.

Strategy Is Not Going Away

This thesis has offered one take on what studying strategy from an Organizational Studies perspective can look like. Furthermore, it argues that organization scholars need to sustain focus on strategy as an influential organizational concept. I claimed in the introduction that the stakes are high when studying strategy work because of the central position of strategy as conditioning of modern organizations. We live our lives in organizations, and these organizations are increasingly doing strategy work, so to study this work is also to study the human condition. This also seems to be the case as we look ahead, for there are no signs that the influence of strategy is receding anytime soon. An anecdotal piece of evidence can be found in the fact that Bioforte has, since my fieldwork in the organization ended, created a new top-level executive position devoted to strategy. This position has been filled with an ex-consultant.

III.2

A Conclusion

So, What *Does* Strategy Work Do at Bioforte?

As exemplified in the title *Making Strategy Work*, this thesis' exploration of strategy is twofold: It unfolds a specific instance of an organization doing (making) strategy-work *and* also provides an analysis of what it takes to make strategy, as a concept, work. Following from this dual inquiry, the research question posed at the onset of this PhD thesis is, *What does strategy work do?* Throughout the ethnographic text, as well as the academic, theoretical, and methodological discussions, the thesis answers that strategy work constitutes ways of "doing" organizing by engaging in a range of group, identity, institutional, narrative, and ordering work. Here, we find the broadest answer to the guiding question of what strategy work does: It organizes the organization. This organization is achieved through the purposeful effort that is work.

The thesis places emphasis on paying close attention to how strategy work constitutes the organization. At Bioforte, different modes of organizational work coexist in the strategy work, and these modes interweave in complex constellations. In order to demonstrate the complexity and the inherent performative nature of strategy work, the thesis untangles the practice of strategy work at Bioforte and re-stitches it in a patchwork quilt arranged in five themes, which are exemplified by the chapters in Part II. This quilt is thus a composition of simplifications that is meant to convey complexity.

At Bioforte, making strategy work is a complex and communal endeavor that contributes to making specific social units (the working group and the Stakeholder Engagement Department), the work and the idea of strategy, and the selves of the strategists. Strategy work is also a locus for creating a set of distinctions that enable navigation of the organizational sphere. Making strategy is ordering work; and it is ordering work that is concerned with several organizational realms simultaneously. In addition, strategy work is fraught with

tension and contradiction; however, this causes no problems for the people working together on strategy. Taken all together, the thesis refuses to reduce strategy work to a single function or realm of organizational life.

The majority of strategy research talks about strategy as a rational endeavor whereby decisions lead to performance and outcomes, and whereby strategy becomes a representation of an organization that already exists. As I hope this thesis has demonstrated: *Strategy does not work in this way, but at the same time, this is the way it works.*

What is at stake here is not the revelation that strategy is ostensibly rational, while in actuality it is irrational; rather, it is the effort involved in making it work that is remarkable. The people in the Bioforte Strategy Working Group are heroes in the sense that Michel de Certeau invokes because they "make do." They make strategy work in their everyday practice. They work through, and in, the multiple nature of strategy, which includes paradoxical perceptions of strategy as a logical and linear representational product *and of* strategy as an emotional and symbolic process that brings about a strategic reality.

Strategy work is ordering work. It organizes the organization by performing a structuring and a stabilizing function. However, it is a fleeting stability that is momentarily achieved through the strategy work; as soon as it is assembled, it falls apart again. This is perhaps also why ongoing strategy work has become a permanent feature of modern organizations. Strategy work can never be finished. It *is* Sisyphus work; but instead of taking that as cause for despair, we ought to remember that Albert Camus (1991 (1942)) urged us to imagine Sisyphus as happy.

Appendix 1: Overview of Fieldwork Activities

Date	Activity
1) Pre Fieldwork Phase (Exploration and Pilot Study Phase)	
2 Dec 2009	Participate in "Injection from academia" session
10 Feb 2010	Interview with Monika at Bioforte HQ
8 April 2010	Interview with Bioforte Coordinator at Bioforte HQ Observation day shadowing Monika in Bioforte HQ
19 April 2010	Interview with Bioforte Project Manager at Bioforte HQ Observation day Bioforte HQ
20 April 2010	Interview on the phone with Bioforte Manager
22 April 2010	Observation day Bioforte HQ Interview with Bioforte Manager Observe 2 meetings where Monika gives a CSR presentation Attend meeting with Tom, Bioforte CEO
11 May 2010	Observation day planned (cancelled due to Bioforte illness)
27 May 2010	Observation day–Bioforte meeting at external location
15 June 2010	Observation day at Bioforte HQ (am only)
24 June 2010	Presentation at Stakeholder Engagement Meeting (am only)
2) Primary Fieldwork Phase (Strategy Work Phase)	
10 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
16 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
17 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
18 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
19 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
23 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
24 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
25 Aug 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.

31 Aug, 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
2 Sept, 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
3 Sept, 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
10 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
13 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
14 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
15 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
17 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
20 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
23 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
24 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
28 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
29 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
30 Sept 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
4 Oct 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
7 Oct 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
13 Oct 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
15 Oct 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
26 Oct 2010	Fieldwork day at Bioforte HQ. Strategy work.
(8 / 9 Nov 2010)	(Strategy offsite which I did not attend)
3) Post Fieldwork Phase	
8 Dec 2011	Meeting with John
1 March 2012	Presentation to Stakeholder Engagement Department

Appendix 2: Narrative Interviews with Strategy Working Group Members

Narrative Interviews were conducted with other members of the Bioforte Strategy Working Group in the period between September 24, 2012 and October 26, 2010.

Interviews were conducted with John, Susan, Monika, Elizabeth, Benjamin and Helen (pseudonyms).

The interviews all started with the question "What is strategy?" and then the interviewees' answers acted as a guide for how the rest of the interview unfolded.

Sample questions from me:

- How did you learn about strategy?
- Can you tell me of a time you worked on strategy?
- When have you worked with people on strategy who see it differently than you?
- How do you know if a strategy is good?
- If you have to describe good strategy versus bad strategy, what would you say?
- Who do you look up to in terms of strategy?
- What would happen if you did not do this strategy work now?

The interviews were taped and fully transcribed by me.

Appendix 3: Overview of Figures and Tables

MAKING STRATEGY WORK –AN ORGANIZATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

This PhD thesis is an ethnographic exploration of strategy work in practice. The academic contribution of the thesis is positioned in the overlap between Critical Approaches to Strategy and Strategy as Practice. This implies a critical position that does not take strategy for granted and which emphasizes a philosophical understanding of the practice concept. Other studies have adopted a similar Critical Strategy as Practice position, but very few ethnographic studies of strategy work have been conducted from this point of departure. Thus, the thesis aims to contribute two-fold to the existing Critical Strategy as Practice literature: One, to strengthen the tradition theoretically through the development and mobilization of a conceptual braid of practice, narrative, and performativity; and two, to provide an extensive empirical analysis of strategy work from this perspective.

The case for the thesis is strategy work in the Stakeholder Department of a multinational biotech corporation, which is here called Bioforte. The thesis explores the dual aspects of the title as "*making* strategy-work"–the specific doings of crafting strategy; and "making Strategy *work*"–finding ways for strategy, as a concept, to function in the context of an organization. Building on the double entendre of the title, the guiding research question for this exploration is quite simply: *What does strategy work do?*

The answer to this question is, however, not simple, because as the ethnographic exploration demonstrates, strategy work in the Stakeholder Engagement Department at Bioforte has a range of performative effects. Through narratives of everyday practice, the thesis demonstrates how strategy work contributes to organizing the organization by shaping The Strategy Working Group, the department, the work, and the selves of the people working with strategy. The organizing force of strategy work is partly achieved through the continual collective creation and maintenance of distinctions such as strategic/operational and left brain/right brain. In this sense, the thesis argues that the organizing forces of strategy is to be found in the performative nature of strategy work.

Resumé (Danish Abstract)

MAKING STRATEGY WORK –EN ORGANISATIONEL ETNOGRAFI

Denne PhD afhandling er en etnografisk udforskning af strategiarbejde i praksis. Afhandlingens akademiske bidrag er positioneret i overlappet mellem kritiske tilgange til strategi og strategi som praksis traditionerne. Heri lægges en forståelse af strategi, som ikke tager strategi for givet, og som lægger vægt på en filosofisk forståelse af praksisbegrebet. Tidligere forskning har taget en lignende "Kritisk Strategi som Praksis"-position, men kun få etnografiske studier af strategiarbejde har dette udgangspunkt. Således har afhandlingens bidrag to aspekter: For the første søger afhandlingen at styrke denne tradition teoretisk ved at udvikle og mobilisere en konceptuel fletning af praksis, narrativitet, og performativitet; for det andet, leverer afhandlingen en dybdegående empirisk analyse forankret i dette perspektiv.

Casen for afhandlingen er strategiarbejde på afdelingsniveau i en multinational biotek virksomhed, her kaldet Bioforte. Afhandlingen udforsker dobbeltheden i titlen både ved at fokusere på en forståelse af Making Strategy Work, som det arbejde, der ligger i at lave strategi og ved at studere det arbejde, der ligger i at få "strategi" som begreb til at fungere i en organisationel kontekst. Med afsæt i titlens tvetydighed, er det styrende forskningsspørgsmål for afhandlingen ganske enkelt: *Hvad gør strategiarbejde?*

Svaret på spørgsmålet er dog ikke enkelt, fordi, som den etnografiske udforskning viser, har strategiarbejde i Bioforte en række performative effekter. Gennem fortællinger om hverdagspraksisser demonstrerer afhandlingen, hvordan strategiarbejdet er med til at organisere organisationen ved at forme strategiarbejdsgruppen, afdelingen, arbejdet og strategiarbejdernes individuelle identitetsarbejde. Strategiarbejdets organiseringskræfter opnås delvist gennem den kontinuerlige kollektive skabelse og vedligeholdelse af distinktioner, så som strategisk/operationel og højre hjerne/venstre hjerne. På den måde argumenterer afhandlingen for, at strategi er organiserende i kraft af strategiarbejdets performative natur.

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