Learning how to Strategize Transformation: a Reflection-on-action Perspective

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Abstract:

By demonstrating that the way strategy is taught has evolved according to the history of strategy, this article explains that our dissatisfaction with current strategy teaching stems from a focus on strategy that has become irrelevant to the current turbulent environment. To move forward, we propose shifting the teaching of strategy to the teaching of *strategizing* by having students learn the process by which strategy actors deliberately transform their organization to realign it with its environment during transformational projects, because the ability to formulate and implement strategy in transformational contexts has become paramount in today's turbulent environments. To this end, we describe a learning process based on students' reflection on action in which they learn how to strategize organizational transformation. By developing the pedagogical outcomes of the learning process, we contribute to current debates about the teaching of strategy, on the skills that strategists need, and on the practical relevance of strategy research.

Keywords: learning program; reflexivity; strategy teaching; strategizing; organizational transformation.

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of strategy has been questioned since 1912, when the first strategy class was held at Harvard Business School (Bower, 2008; Bridgman et al., 2016). Called Business Policy, it involved teaching cases that focused on the actions of future general managers who attended the class, in accordance with the object of strategy, defined as the pattern of goals, purposes, or objectives and the major policies and plans for achieving those goals (Learned et al., 1969). The class was replaced in the 1970s by the class of Competitive Strategy led by Michael Porter, which focuses on how the firm performs its various activities compared to rivals (Porter, 1996). This led to a shift in focus from the general manager to the firm. Beginning in the 1980s, theory-based teaching materials developed as a byproduct of the academicization of the strategy field enriched existing teaching materials (Burke & Rau, 2010), with the goal of helping students understand the complexity of strategy (Grant, 2008).

Thus, current teaching of strategy varies along a continuum ranging from case-based business policy types of classes to theory-based competitive strategy types of classes, leading to debates and controversies about how to teach strategy along the continuum (Bell et al., 2018; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). We argue that such a perspective overlooks recent changes in the development of strategy in organizations. As strategic planning has evolved in the face of changing strategic environments (Mintzberg, 1994, 2000; Whittington et al., 2017), strategy is no longer about allocating resources through planning, but about transforming organizations through projects (Mitchell & Zmud, 1999; Zmud & Cox, 1979). Such a shift calls for the following research question regarding strategy teaching and education: *how to teach strategy in the current strategic environment?*

To answer this question, after describing how the teaching of strategy has evolved over the history of the discipline, we argue that the current strategic environment requires a shift from the teaching of strategy to the teaching of strategizing, which we define as *the process by which strategy actors deliberately transform their organization to realign it with its environment by formulating and implementing a strategy through meaning-making during transformation projects*. We then describe a learning process based on students' reflection-on-action and show that a focus on strategizing helps students face the current strategic environment as they learn the skills necessary to conduct transformational projects, reflect on the importance of interactionist skills, and develop a strategizing mindset.

In doing so, this article shifts the pedagogical debate on teaching strategy by offering a contingent perspective. It also reflects on the required skills of the strategist and, finally, contributes to the debate on the separation of teaching and research by showing how teaching can create knowledge for research purposes.

The rest of this article is organized as follows. After the first section describes how the teaching of strategy has evolved along with the development of the discipline of strategy, the second section shows the necessary shift from teaching strategy to teaching strategizing. To achieve this, the third section describes the learning process experimented over three years in a French business school, and the fourth section unravels its results. Finally, we offer implications of this learning process in the concluding section of the article.

THE EVOLUTIONS OF STRATEGY AND OF ITS TEACHING

WE DESCRIBE THE EVOLUTION OF THE TEACHING OF STRATEGY IN RELATION TO ITS STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT ACCORDING TO THREE PARADIGMS, FROM THE CASE METHOD TO A THEORY-BASED TEACHING, AND THE CURRENT QUESTIONING OF THESE TWO OPTIONS.

TEACHING STRATEGY WITHIN THE BUSINESS POLICY PARADIGM

The first business class of strategy was taught in 1912 at the Harvard Business School under a course of business policy (Bower, 2008). It was placed as a capstone at the end of the MBA curriculum to put students in their future role of general manager and was positioned at the intersection of all business subjects to integrate their diversity (Hambrick & Chen, 2008). Local business executives were coming to class presenting a problem to which students proposed solutions on paper. During the next class, the executives would discuss the suggestions offered by students (Bower, 2008). Over time, the method evolved. Beginning in the 1920s, inspired by law cases taught at the Harvard Law School, cases were promoted within the Harvard Business School, leading discussions to be replaced by cases and class visits by case discussions. It was the start of the case-based business policy classes (Bridgman et al., 2016; Shugan, 2006). One rationale for the case method, was, according to Khurana (2010), the scarcity of usable classroom material, due to the ongoing institutionalization of business schools in the USA.

To apply the law in different situations, the case method relied on Socratic dialog to teach legal reasoning. The aim was to teach the capacity to generalize from singular cases to other analogous legal applications (Shugan, 2006). Borrowing these principles, business policy cases aimed to adopt a holistic approach of strategy by describing the complexity of the general management role and putting the emphasis on the need for coordination among the different activities of the firm (Hafsi & Thomas, 2005). Such an approach was coherent with how strategy was perceived: the pattern of objectives, purposes, or goals and major policies and plans for achieving these goals (Learned et al., 1969). To better fulfill the evolution of the strategic environment, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the case method continued to evolve as students had to plan a course of action and propose an organization to implement the plan (Bower, 2008). From a focus on local businesses, cases also specialized to focus on areas of general management or on whole industries. Teaching was accomplished by senior faculty members who had spent their careers in the business field.

In 1963, Harvard Business School held a conference to transmit the class philosophy to faculty members of other schools. It led to the conceptualization of the SWOT analysis, showing that the cases *"provided an empirical base for the development of concepts of practice"*, and to the publication of a casebook to export the case method (Bower, 2008, p. 270). While the Gordon and Howell (1959) and Pierson (1959) reports led to metamorphosing management education into an academic field (McLaren, 2019), as the reports inscribed the business policy class as a capstone in management education, they enabled the hegemony of the business policy class (Bower, 1982). In this way, it is the Harvard teaching model that prevailed for the teaching of strategy, even though the Gordon and Howell (1959) and Pierson (1959) reports adopted the philosophy of the Graduate School of Industrial Administration at the Carnegie Mellon University for its reform of the management field (Mintzberg, 2005), the place where Igor Ansoff's (1965) rationalist and planning oriented view of strategy, which denotes with the business policy perspective, was born.

Research is mixed regarding the benefits of the case method for the teaching of strategy. It has first been criticized for its blind adoption of a teaching method that comes from the field of law and hardly fits the needs of business (Shugan, 2006). While law cases constitute precedents often guiding subsequent legal cases, it is not the case with strategy. The Enron case, which Gary Hamel largely taught and diffused before Enron's collapse, constitutes a striking illustration of this first issue. The material used to constitute law cases also differs from those used for business cases: law cases are publicly available, while business cases require scientific inquiries, involving biases, partial information, subjectivity, etc. Finally, solving a law case relies on evidence, while solving a strategy case relies on truth, with the objective of giving recommendations. As evidence does not always constitute truth, blindly searching for evidence in a case will not always lead to the right strategic recommendations.

Another set of critics relates to the strategy knowledge deliberately taught with cases. On the one hand, Bridgman et al. (2016) lamented the absence of values infused by the Harvard Business School case method, as it is supposed to remain neutral regarding any type of conclusion. On the other hand, Shugan (2006) criticized the absence of a standard body of knowledge coming from the case method. These two critics have been particularly powerful in the context of the 1970s when the field of strategic management came into being with the objective of constructing a body of knowledge inspired by the field of economics (Schendel & Hofer, 1979).

TEACHING STRATEGY WITHIN THE COMPETITIVE STRATEGY AND STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PARADIGMS

Slowly taking over the business policy field mostly devoted to teaching and pedagogy, a strategic management research agenda developed in the 1970s in the continuity of the academization of the whole management field (McLaren, 2019). It questioned the emphasis put on the general manager and on non-economic factors to focus on narrower questions through the adoption of a deductive approach anchored in economics (Bower, 1982, 2008; Camerer, 1985; Hambrick & Chen, 2008). This academic body of knowledge progressively infused strategy curricula, leading at the end of the 1970s to questioning the primacy of the business policy class at Harvard Business School to replace it with Michael Porter's class of competitive strategy. Grounded in industrial organization, Porter's class aimed to understand how the firm performs its different activities compared to those performed by rivals (Porter, 1981). The consulting industry also rapidly duplicated Porter's framework way of thinking strategy (e.g., growth-share matrix, 7S of McKinsey), also infusing the teaching of strategy (Kiechel, 2010).

However, while the course of competitive strategy was popular with students, as recalled by Bower (2008), *"neither teaching nor improving the course provided the basis for personal academic progress"* (p. 272). Indeed, at the end of the 1970s, Dan Schendel from Purdue University challenged both the Harvard Business School and consulting perspectives on strategy by setting the *Strategic Management Society* and the *Strategic Management Journal* that pushed for a more scholarly, analytical, positivist, and economics-based view of the field of strategy (Hafsi & Thomas, 2005; Pettigrew et al., 2001). Schendel and Hatten (1972), perceived strategic management as the *"process of determining (and maintaining) the relationship of the organization and its environment expressed through the use of selected* *objectives, and of attempting to achieve the desired states of relationship through resource allocations which allow efficient and effective action programs by the organization and its subparts"* (p. 9). As this initial definition of strategic management clearly explicates, the role of the general manager increasingly vanished. Furthermore, to maintain the unit of analysis on the firm, studies of strategy implementation and longitudinal studies became scarcer (Bower, 2008).

However, this new paradigm for teaching strategy has led to several shortcomings. First, as the field of strategic management developed for research rather than teaching purpose, it did not aim to produce findings of practical relevance, and led to a disconnect between research and teaching (Burke & Rau, 2010). This gap led to a separation between the faculty members devoted to research and those devoted to teaching, the latter sometimes ignoring that the theories they teach and were themselves taught have been discredited for decades (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007). Second, while the teaching of theories from the strategy field has irrigated practices (J. Jung & Shin, 2019), some of them have been found ethically questionable and even be found responsible for business scandals (Ghoshal, 2005). Third, as the field of strategy focused on a vast area of phenomena, the core underpinnings of strategy—i.e., previously the focus on the general manager—have disappeared, leading the field to lose its distinctiveness as its various elements become indistinguishable from adjacent fields (Hambrick, 2004). Consequently, and as confessed by Richard Whittington, most academics like him were unable to teach organizing and strategizing (Whittington, 2003).

THE CURRENT CHALLENGE TO THE TEACHING OF STRATEGY

The two opposed poles of practical and theoretical approaches to the teaching of strategy, as described in the two preceding sub-sections, constitute the grounding of the current way how strategy is taught in current universities and business schools (Augier & March, 2007; Bell et al., 2018; Wren et al., 2007). Even though it used to be some cultural differences among business schools around the world regarding the teaching of strategy, the reproductive patterns that have occurred on a global scale have now led to a relative homogenization of management education (Vaara & Faÿ, 2012). For instance, even France—known for its unique positioning in the international academic management scene (Engwall, 1998)—has followed the wave described above by first adopting the case method (Chessel, 2020) and then an academic emphasis on teaching (Carton et al., 2017; Harker et al., 2016).

At one pole of the teaching of strategy continuum, the underlying assumption of theory acquisition approaches is that *"applying a set of preestablished steps allows the student who* *know little about the topic to learn efficiently and economically"* (Bell et al., 2018, p. 233). For that purpose, the Michael Porter's and consultants' frameworks of the 1980s have increasingly been found too static and decontextualized. As theories can question students' prior assumptions and beliefs and broaden and develop their cognitive frameworks, using them leads students to make sense of strategy by learning how to ask the right questions, develop comprehension of and insight into business situations characterized by high levels of complexity, and develop an ability to cope with paradoxes and ambiguity (Grant, 2008).

Different suggestions have then been offered for improving theory-based teaching. For instance, to train students on how to react to strategic events, Starbuck (2018) suggested using theories for framing the future by learning how to scan information, experiment, and interpret these experiments. To improve decision-making, Buckley (2018) encouraged to cross-fertilize theories and cases and to improve strategy implementation and Lindsay et al. (2018) to broaden the studied theories to use the ones in capacity to explore the different aspects of strategy implementation. This is aligned with the willingness of strategy to understand *"the dynamics of the firm's relation with its environment for which the necessary actions are taken to achieve its goals and/or to increase performance by means of the rational use of resources"* (Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012, p. 182). Finally, to ensure that future managers make decisions based on the best scientific evidence, Rousseau and McCarthy (2007) suggested the application of Evidence-based Management to business teaching, a practice that ensures the explicit use of the current, best evidence in management and decision-making. However, despite these suggestions for improving the teaching of strategy, main critics from prior period remain, as the application of strategy theories remains of limited relevance for students (Knott, 2015), societal issues unaddressed, and subjects of inquiry narrow (Bell et al., 2018).

On the opposite pole, a p*ractice-based approach* to the teaching of strategy aims to develop the students' capacity for more innovative approaches to strategy formulation and implementation (Bell et al., 2018). As strategy is not a functional area, some researchers argue that its legitimacy should lie in its practical relevance (Hambrick & Chen, 2008). For that purpose, the focus of strategy could be put on action by enhancing the ability of students to make and execute each steps of the strategic decisions and thus develop their cognitive and affective competencies to do so (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2018).

In his pamphlet on management education, Mintzberg (2005) also argued that business education should lie in a practice, as management practice comprises tacit understanding gained in context. He thus argued that management can only be learned by practicing managers, not students without prior experience. Learning can rely on management theories to help managers make sense of their experience and on reflections on their experience in the light of conceptual ideas, both with professors and other participants. However, the main critics addressed to Mintzberg (2005) is the absence of alternative to the MBA (or equivalent masters' degree without experience), as his propositions overlook management teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Barnett, 2005; Feldman, 2005).

Overall, beyond offering strategies aimed at navigating throughout the continuum of a research-based and a practice-based approach to the teaching of strategy (Augier & March, 2007; Bell et al., 2018; Wren et al., 2007), or at seeking complementarities between the two approaches (Yoder, 2019), the learning and education literature does not provide a suitable response in the capacity to extinguish criticisms regarding the current teaching of strategy. We explain it by the ignorance of the evolution of the strategic environment, which encourages a move from the teaching of strategy to the teaching of *strategizing*, as suggested below.

AN EVOLUTION OF STRATEGY FROM RESOURCE ALLOCATION TO ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

While we indicated that, throughout time, strategy has involved the allocation of the organization's resources through planification (e.g., Learned et al., 1969; Porter, 1996; Schendel & Hatten, 1972), the increasing turbulences from the 1980s onwards morphed the strategic planning practices (Whittington et al., 2017), leading to a disjuncture between strategy planification and strategy making (Mintzberg, 1994). On the one hand, capital budgeting developed by involving short-term decision making, with a single commitment to action (rather than multiple alignments to constitute strategies across the organization), which forced incremental improvements (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 101; Quinn, 1980), and strategy planning evolved, leading to the development of analyzes and forecasting not to constitute strategy, but to support it (Ocasio & Joseph, 2008; Whittington et al., 2017). On the other hand, strategy "opened up" (Whittington, 2019), being embodied within transformational projects (Mitchell & Zmud, 1999), spanning throughout strategy formulation—including chartering, which involves the decision-making to fund the strategic project, and design, where critical choices are made—to strategy implementation, evaluation, and control, as the transformations of Imperial Chemical Industries in the 1980s and of Philips a decade later both illustrate (Freedman, 1996; Pettigrew, 1985).

Such projects develop during organizational transformations come in response to turbulences from the environment (Besson & Rowe, 2012; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). By redesigning organizational processes (Mitchell & Zmud, 1999), strategy actors reorient the organizations' resources toward changes in their fundamental properties (Gersick, 1991; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994), Because of organizational inertia, it leads to the path-dependency effect that renders difficult organizations' realignment with the environment (Sydow et al., 2009; Vergne & Durand, 2010). To handle it, strategy actors must undertake *strategizing* activities.

While we already highlighted that strategizing is embodied within transformation projects, research additionally shows that strategizing develops following a process characterized by succeeding strategic episodes (Hendry & Seidl, 2003), which eventually leads to organizational transformation. It is accomplished by the top management group (Hambrick, 1994), constituted of the top management team—including the CEO—, board of directors, and consultants, and by the middle managers and their consultants (Pettigrew, 1985; Su et al., 2022). While the top management group accomplishes the transformation through some sets or series of actions and interventions to create a momentum for change (Dutton & Duncan, 1987) and give sense to lower-level employees (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991), middle managers lead the transformational projects to implement the strategy (Balogun et al., 2015; Floyd & Lane, 2000).

As they are themselves embedded in the organizational transformation, strategy actors improvise (Orlikowski, 1996). For that purpose, they take action to foster organizational learning as a means of informing strategic choices (C. Jung et al., 2023) and rely on meaning making during their interactions with other middle managers or members of the top management group. As the difficulty to create meaning creates tensions (Huff et al., 1992), strategy actors must make their cognitive frames resonate with the other actors by mobilizing actions in their favor (S. Kaplan, 2008), leading to their gathering within coalitions that evolve as meaning is created (Denis et al., 2001; Ma & Seidl, 2018). The organizational transformation is accomplished when a coalition becomes in capacity to insufflate a change in the organization's structure and practices that re-aligns the organization with its environment (Gersick, 1991; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994).

Overall, we argue that the changes in the process of strategy have created an impetus for strategizing, which we define as *the process by which strategy actors deliberately transform their organization to realign it with its environment by formulating and implementing a strategy through meaning-making during transformation projects*. From a pedagogical perspective, it is thus necessary to develop ways to learn strategizing. For that purpose, by building on previous research showing that current strategy requires the development of new competencies (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2018), relies on a broader set of theories than the sole strategic management theories (Lindsay et al., 2018), should be informed by the best theoretical thinking (Rousseau & McCarthy, 2007), and can build on the reflection on practice of learners (Mintzberg, 2005), next section develops the learning process that develops the skills necessary to strategize transformation.

LEARNING HOW TO STRATEGIZE TRANSFORMATION

BUILDING ON THE REFLECTIONS-ON-ACTION DURING CONSULTING ASSIGNMENTS

To foster strategizing learning, we relied on practitioners' reflexivity (Argyris & Schön, 1974; Schön, 1983). By acknowledging that practitioners are knowledge producers, Schön (1983) argued that professionals, such as consultants, do not rely on a specific body of knowledge as claimed by the sociology of professions, but on tacit knowledge developed from their everyday actions, i.e., their knowing-in-action. To improve their professionality, Schön (1983) explained that they develop their reflexivity in two ways. First, they *reflect-in-action* during their practice and thus becoming researchers in their practice context. While such reflectivity can be fruitful, it can also be detrimental as it can halt them in their operations. In contrast, consultants can *reflect-on-action* after the fact, by rigorously analyzing what they have previously done. It aims not only to help them understand how they act but why they act the way they act and eventually change their practice by developing double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974).

Previous pedagogical programs have built on reflection-on-action. For example, we showed that Mintzberg (2005) was involved in a program where practicing managers could leverage their work-based experiences in the classroom with insightful theories to help them make sense of their own actions. Similarly, to reflect on practice in a learning environment, Cunliffe (2004) offered individual ways (e.g., writing a reflexive journal) and collective ways (e.g., class activity) to reflect on one's actions. To achieve both in regard to strategizing, we developed the field mission practice group as a learning process.

LEARNING PROCESS DESCRIPTION: THE FIELD MISSION PRACTICE GROUP

The pedagogical context.

Our learning process began in 2020 within an 18-month program of a French business school, operating at the graduate level and focused on strategy and consulting. Since 2020, the three cohorts have grown from 50 to 61 students. Students enter the program with diverse academic backgrounds (business, economics, engineering, law, social sciences, etc.) at the bachelor or master level and with at least 6 months of professional experience. Half of them come from Europe, the rest from Asia, Africa and the Americas. We have organized the program into four phases. The first phase is dedicated to strategy design,

the second to strategy implementation, the third is spent abroad and relates to strategy diversity, and the final phase consists of a 4-6 month experience during which they apply the knowledge they have acquired in a consulting firm (three quarters of the cohort), strategy departments, start-ups or NGOs. We designed the program with the pedagogical intention of offering experiential and practical courses with intensive work groups. In parallel, other courses offer academic knowledge to feed the experiential courses.

The field mission description.

Students learn how to strategize transformation by reflecting on consulting assignments, which we call *field missions*. They are conducted in groups of two to four students from different academic backgrounds, two days a week for four months. The 66 field missions over the past three years have occurred in industries as diverse as airlines, automobiles, charities, healthcare, insurance, and media. While 86% of the assignments took place in France, others took place in other European countries (Spain, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland), in Cambodia, in the Ivory Coast, and in the United States. When the missions were in France, the consultant-client relationships typically involved a mix of face-to-face and distance interactions, with interactions ranging from weekly or bi-weekly to less regular meetings (e.g., Mission 15, 2022). For the other missions that took place abroad, either the students traveled to the office abroad once or twice, or the client came to France once or more. For one mission, the relationships remained online (Mission 9, 2022).

The organizations ranged in size from small (SME) to medium (mid-size) to large (e.g., CAC40, SBF120) and were corporations or NGOs. The sponsors of the organizations were at the C-level (i.e. Chief Executive Officer, Chief Strategy Officer...), Senior Vice Presidents, Business Unit Heads, etc. The missions covered various topics, the most recurring in 2022 and 2023 being optimization and processes, business model development, corporate social responsibility implementation, and growth strategy development. To ensure that they included strategy development, we first evaluated each field mission based on a two-page document describing the mission that we discussed with the client prior to the mission. For example, in 2022, we discarded an entrepreneurial mission aimed at launching a new service for a company in the fast-moving consumer goods industry because it did not transform the organization, and in 2023, we discarded missions without a strategic focus because the scope of the mission was too broad or the organization was too young to have a path-dependency effect. In contrast, we typically retained missions that focused on changing organizational processes or addressing strategic choices of the firm (e.g., international strategy, growth strategy), regardless of whether they focused primarily on strategy formulation or implementation.

We offered the missions to clients for free. The rationale was to increase the number of potential clients by suppressing barriers to entry, and to put less pressure on students to succeed. The downside is that offering free consulting suppresses the price levers that consultants can use to access people and information and get their recommendations heard. In practice, the field assignments have provided students with an understanding of the strategy of organizational change, which fulfills our primary pedagogical objective. We also chose to have the students work with their clients without the supervision of a professional manager, because we wanted them to experience organizational change themselves, without the bias of experienced consultants whose corporate culture is strong (Rasiel, 1999). Again, this has drawbacks in terms of effectiveness, but it increased the students' learning of strategy.

The conduct of the field missions.

The field missions unfolded as follows. As soon as the students were assigned their mission, they had to contact their clients to organize an initial contact (phone, video conference, or face-to-face meeting). The purpose of this first exchange was to establish the client-consultant relationship, gain an understanding of the assignment, exchange useful documents, and prepare a preliminary calendar of expected deliverables for the assignment. During the next meeting, the preliminary calendar was then questioned, discussed, and revised, for example by adding unexpected deliverables (e.g., analysis of additional countries, Mission, 11, 2022), rearranging workflows, or making changes to make the calendar more realistic.

In parallel, students typically began collecting data to respond to their clients' needs if the transformation involved a reformulation of strategy. For example, this involved site visits with interviews (Mission 6, 2022), expert testimony (Mission 2, 2022), or secondary data collection (Mission 12, 2022). The next step involved the implementation of the project, usually in cooperation with the client's organization. For example, for a strategy implementation project that involved redesigning a process, it involved redesigning the process (Mission 3, 2022). For a strategy reformulation mission aimed at exploring new industries in which the company could grow, it involved building business cases to construct scenarios (Mission 12, 2012). The final step of the missions involved presenting the strategy formulation to customers (mission 13, 2022) or their board of directors (Mission 14, 2022), or implementing the strategy, such as creating an inbound marketing process (Mission 16, 2022).

At the end of the missions, we asked clients to grade the students and provide feedback on their work. For example, one student received the following comment: *"very good understanding of our company's problem"* (Mission 17, 2022), while another received *"the mission was a success [...] in several aspects: the technical quality of the deliverables and the regular meetings with the client, [...]"* (Mission 6, 2022). Overall, with the exception of one mission in 2022 that was prematurely resumed and therefore did not receive a grade or feedback from the client (Mission 11, 2022, see below), the clients were satisfied with the work performed. For example, in one mission (Mission 6, 2022), the client asked the students to submit a proposal for another mission after the mission was completed. In addition, a fourth of the 2023 missions were conducted with organizations for which the students had previously worked in 2022.

The field mission practice groups.

To gain an understanding of organizational transformation strategizing, the students reflected *on* their understanding of the mission during practice groups (Schön, 1983). For this purpose, during the missions, we gathered the students in groups of three to four missions according to their mission theme to organize project reviews with one of the authors of this article (for a comparable setting, see Schein, 1999). The goal was for the students to reflect on their actions to enhance their understanding of the ongoing organizational transformation. We asked them to present their ongoing mission, which was then discussed, questioned, and debated to generate a conversation with the professor and the other students who were facing similar situations in their own field missions (Baker et al., 2005).

The first presentations focused on the expectations of the mission and on how the students organize themselves to perform the mission. Then the focus was on the ongoing work and on the difficulties they face. Finally, the final presentations focused on their learning and understanding of the ongoing organizational transformation. Typically, discussions moved from issues related to data collection, software use, time management, etc. to issues related to the client-consultant relationship, issues related to the political impact of consultants' work, etc. In other words, we were moving from single-loop to a double-loop learning (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Our role as academics was to help the students develop and explain their own theory-in-use through maieutic and questioning (see a comparable example in Schein, 1999). In this way, the role of the academics during the practice group differed from a coaching role: given the academics' theoretical understanding of transformation strategizing, they could understand the ongoing transformations students were facing and help them reflect on their strategizing (see also Mintzberg, 2005).

At the end of the learning process, based on their iterative reflections on action, each group of students wrote a 2-page memo describing the context of their mission, what they accomplished, and what they learned about both consulting and organizational transformation. To ensure the quality of their work, students' grades were based on their ability to understand what they had accomplished during their consulting assignment. Overall, the work was of good quality and fulfilled well the learning objective we had in mind for this course, which consists of *"[...] demonstrating behavioral skills in diverse professional environments"* (internal document, 2023). For example, even the students whose mission was resumed were able to reflect on their situation from the perspective of organizational transformation (Mission 11, 2022, see below).

CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON STRATEGIZING BASED ON STUDENTS' REFLECTION-ON-ACTION.

Given the research interest in transformation strategizing, we also used students' reflection-on-action for research purpose, thus benefitting from the teaching-research loop (Christensen & Carlile, 2009; R. S. Kaplan, 1998). Throughout the research, we collected different data, including the students' 2-page memo where they express their own theories-in-use, but also all the documents they have produced throughout field mission practice group course (mission sheets, students' PowerPoint presentations), and took notes of all field mission practice groups. We analyzed them by relying on grounded theory methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It led to improving our understanding of strategizing based on a large array of strategy projects. It also led to improving the strategy learning outcomes of our learning process, as detailed in the next section.

OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS-ON-ACTION

We describe the pedagogical outcomes of the learning process of the field mission practice groups, based on four exhibits describing missions that occurred in 2022. They explain how the field mission practice groups generate students' single-loop and double-loop learning, which leads to the development of their strategizing mindset.

SINGLE LOOP LEARNING ON TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIZING: ILLUSTRATION WITH STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF STRATEGY EMBEDDEDNESS

By reflecting during practice groups on their strategizing practices, students could understand the skills necessary to conduct transformational projects. Exhibit 1 summarizes a field mission that aimed at seeking new market opportunities for the senior vice-president of an organization operating in the biotechnology industry (mission 2, 2022). It illustrates the strategizing skill of *discovering the unknown*.

When reflecting on their field mission, which aimed at seeking new market opportunities, the three students who were involved in it rapidly understood that *"the more [they] progressed, the more [they] understood that the company was not a major player in its market […]"* (final memo, mission 2, 2022). Thus, the students' mission aimed to *"find a new lever to avoid [the company] losing too much money"* (ibid.). For that purpose, they had to *"study other [potential] markets to find a solution to palliate the potential loss of the group"* (ibid.).

The students explain that the field mission unfolded as follows: *"[a]s we had zero knowledge about the pharmaceutical industry, we had to conduct a lot of interviews with different experts, which drove us out of our comfort zone. Indeed, we did 20+ interviews to better understand the mission, collecting qualitative elements that serve our analysis"* (ibid.). It involved preparing questions, adapting them as the interview unfolds, debriefing the interview in preparation to the following one, etc. (ibid.) Based on the interviews and on other analyzes they conducted, the students have been able to recommend the company not to penetrate the market that they have investigated.

Exhibit 1—Discovering the unknown for a go/no go decision

Exhibit 1 explains that in order to help the vice president of the organization formulate a strategy, i.e., enter a new market, the students had to help discover elements of the market that were previously unknown. To do this, they relied on interviews (as described in detail in Exhibit 1) and strategic analysis. However, it was not so much the interviews and the strategic reasoning that the students developed in their memo that were important to the success of the mission, but how they were used to formulate a strategy, in this case a no-go decision.

In contrast to earlier ways of learning strategy, as reviewed in the first part of this article, the reflection-on-action developed during the field mission practice groups helped students understand that their strategizing was inscribed within a strategy process. Thus, their consulting work did not consist of conducting interviews for the sake of interviews or developing strategic analyses for the sake of analyses, but of discovering the unknown in order to find new opportunities for the company. These are tools to help the organization transform itself. In other words, both the use of analyses and the pace at which they are used are inscribed in the transformation process of the organization. Similarly, students learned the importance of understanding the organizational situation, creating awareness, formalizing the strategy, etc., which contrasts with how strategy was previously taught.

DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING ON TRANSFORMATION STRATEGIZING: ILLUSTRATION WITH THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERACTIONIST SKILLS

While previous sub-section described how the field mission practice groups increased the understanding of students regarding what it means to strategize, this subsection concentrates on how students learned the importance of interactionist skills to strategize, at the expense of analytical, cognitive, and emotional ones (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2018). For the sake of illustration, Exhibit 2 describes a field mission that aimed to improve the cost structure of the training department of an energy distribution company (Mission 6, 2022).

In their memo, the three students who conducted the mission explained that *"[a]fter gathering the information, we realized that the purpose [of the mission] was to help [the department] optimize its finances and we created, for them, an excel software that models the saving that could be made" (final memo, mission 6, 2022).* In fact, the students explain later in the memo that *"[w]e also understood during our visits and our collection of information that we were our client's messengers among his collaborators within the company, we were not only there to collect information, make a diagnosis, and make some recommendations, but we were also there to raise awareness about the transformation that was occurring within the company. […] This made us realize that the client had a hidden agenda."* (ibid.) This discovery was made because students were struggling to get interviews with employees.

In fact, through their interactions with their clients, the students also *"noticed that not all people within [the department's] management [team] agree with the future project of 2035. Indeed, we were told that one of the managers did not hesitate to tell her opposition to the project. There is a need to create a guiding coalition for [the department] to make its 2035 strategic plan come true."* (ibid.) They were hired as messengers of the coalition: "*[i]n conclusion, we realized that besides making a diagnosis, analyzing, and making recommendations, consultants are tools for the client to achieve his agenda and conduct change within his organization and consultants can be part of political games without noticing it."* (ibid.)

Exhibit 2—Understanding the importance of interactions

In their own words, the students explain in this particular case that they not only provided analysis and recommendations to the company, but also communicated one of the coalition's strategies for transforming the department. In addition to demonstrating that the field assignment was part of a broader strategy process, this case also shows that success in strategizing involves success in interactions. At their own level, the students were able to build trust with the client to obtain hidden information, they participated in a coalition by communicating a vision to staff, etc., and they were aware of these roles.

TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIZING MINDSET: ILLUSTRATION WITH STUDENTS' INABILITY TO STRATEGIZE TRANSFORMATION

To indicate how the practice groups help students to understand what a strategizing mindset entails, we draw on two cases in which the students did not adopt this mindset but were able to detail the required mindset and reflect on their mistakes. Exhibit 3 first details a mission that was originally intended to export a firm's software abroad but was aborted by the client (Mission 11, 2022).

> The mission was conducted by two students and aimed to help the client export its products first in the Italian market for proximity reasons and then to Germany. For that purpose, the students had to conduct a market study of the countries. As the students explain, *"[w]e had to justify our choices by carrying out a PESTEL and a SWOT which are the basic tools for a country study"* (final memo, mission 11, 2022). As the students acknowledge, *"[t]his work was in fact a test to see what we could achieve."* (ibid.)
>
> Afterwards, the students *"carried out an online questionnaire to target companies that may or may not want to work with our client in order to narrow down the field of possibilities and thus have a first contact with possible clients"* (ibid.). At that stage, the consultant-client relationships became problematic, and the students raised the issue during practice groups: the client canceled meetings at the last minute or did not show up, he was disrespectful of their work, etc. The students were also questioning the relevance of their internationalization mission, as the operations in the national market did not seem to go well. After discussing the issue during the practice group, the students sent an e-mail to the professor to let him know that the situation was getting tense, leading the professor to write to the client to establish a call. However, the next day, during a meeting between the students and the client, the client decided to abort the mission and noticed the professor of its ending.
>
> In their final memo, the students interpreted this episode by the incapacity of the client to understand that the issue his company was facing was related to the fact that *"the company had no communication and marketing culture, which explained the fact that it could no longer find clients in France, and not because the market was saturated."* (ibid.)

Exhibit 3—The failure to construct trust with the client

Exhibit 3 expresses the failure of a client-consultant relationship during organizational transformation. Disappointed by the students, the client "slammed the door" on the students, while, according to the students, the new market perspectives the client was seeking were caused by his inability to communicate properly about the products in his home country. The students understood that this violent strategic episode was part of the transformation process and that they were only playing the role of scapegoats. According to them, the client cannot accept that going abroad is not the solution to the transformation his organization is facing, because internal processes need to be transformed.

At the end of the mission, the students understood that they had failed, not because the client decided to abort the mission, but because, despite their intuition, they could not go back to the client to help him reorient his strategy towards changing some of his processes and practices (related to communication and marketing). As a first learning step, they understood their failure.

Similarly, Exhibit 4 shows the case of the internationalization of a company operating in the certification industry, for which the students struggled to find their role towards the client (Mission 15, 2022).

> A group of three students have worked on a field mission that aimed to help an organization operating in the certification industry to internationalize by *"provid[ing] information so that [the company] can make [its] choice in terms of countries"* (final memo, mission 15, 2022). However, rapidly, as the students explain, "*[the client] has blocked us in a kind of expertise strategy. But we are not experts. He is. It is therefore very difficult to bring him new elements that he does not know. We, therefore, have difficulty showing him our added value, which also affects our motivation for the project. The information he asks us for is very difficult to obtain. Either we come across information that he already has, or it is impossible for us to get feedback from competitors."* (ibid.). As the students explained by concluding their memo, *"our problems in our relationship with the CEO also come from our difficulty in showing our legitimacy. Indeed, as we said, we are stuck in a kind of expert relationship."* (ibid.) Because of that, they have not told the client that *"internationalization was not the real issue"* he was facing. For them, *"[t]he real ones were a lack of marketing and external communication, the difficulty for the [certification] to find the right positioning and the fact that the competitors were gaining market shares in France and abroad."* (ibid.)

Exhibit 4—Stuck in the expertise model

Like Exhibit 3, while the students understood why they were not able to strategize, they struggled to adopt the right mindset. They explain that they were *"blocked in a kind of expertise strategy"*, i.e., providing information about countries, which limited their ability to express their opinion about the ongoing transformation.

Throughout the discussions in the practice groups, the students have understood the need to move out of an analytical stance to show that their role was to align the organization with its changing environment. While some students were able to do this, as the two exhibits illustrate, such a strategizing mindset is difficult for students to assimilate and remains easier for experienced students to learn (Mintzberg, 2005).

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

THE PREVIOUS SECTION RELIED ON FOUR EXHIBITS TO SHOW THAT THE PRACTICE GROUPS HELPED STUDENTS UNDERSTAND, LEARN, AND SOMETIMES APPLY THE STRATEGIZING SKILLS FROM A SINGLE LOOP TO A DOUBLE LOOP LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING WHAT CONSTITUTES A STRATEGIZING MINDSET. IN DOING SO, THIS ARTICLE CONTRIBUTES TO THE RESEARCH ON TEACHING STRATEGY, INFORMS THE COMPETENCIES OF STRATEGISTS, AND SHOWS HOW TEACHING CAN HELP BRIDGE THE RIGOR/RELEVANCE GAP.

REFORMING THE TEACHING OF STRATEGY

This article shifts the debates surrounding the teaching of strategy, by showing that the way strategy is taught is contingent on the strategy environment. We argue that such discussion has been overlooked by previous research. For instance, while we agree with Mintzberg's (2005) argument that managing is different from analyzing, or Grant and Baden-Fuller's (2018) argument that current teaching of strategy fails to develop specific skills, their arguments build on the idea that current pedagogy is misconceived.

In contrast, our argument in this article builds on the current decoupling between the teaching of strategy and strategy-making. While we observe that throughout the evolution of the discipline of strategy, teaching has been contingent on the definition of strategy (and the strategy environment), the current questioning of how to teach strategy stems from a misunderstanding of the evolution of the strategy. Thus, building on Mintzberg's seminal work (Mintzberg, 1994), we thus showed how strategy has changed, leading to a reform of the teaching of strategy. To this end, we offered the learning process of the field missions and their practice groups, which build on students' reflections-on-actions. Given the crisis that our discipline is currently facing (Bell et al., 2018; Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008), we argue that questioning how we teach strategy is timely and that recoupling the teaching and practice of strategy can also avoid many of the drawbacks of strategy education that we have examined in this article.

DEFINING THE STRATEGIZING NECESSARY SKILLS

This article also highlights the skills needed to strategize. While the case method taught future general managers how to adopt a holistic approach to strategy and the research-based approach taught the ability to analyze, recent research also calls for the development of cognitive and emotional skills (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2018), the ability to manage complexity (Lindsay et al., 2018), the ability to deal with power (Pfeffer, 1992), creativity, soft skills, etc., without always being included in the strategy curriculum.

By observing 66 projects over three years in which students reflected-on-their-action, we found that, first, the skills required for strategizing go beyond analysis, second, they include the ability to interact, and finally that they require stepping back from the transformation projects to guide the right transformations. We also recognized that these skills can be difficult to develop. Building on these observations and using Goffman's (1969) metaphor of the game, we therefore describe strategizing skills as the ability of strategists to understand that they are part of a strategic game, with its own rules, its own players and coalitions of players, its different rounds of game (i.e., strategic episodes), its own tactics and strategies, and that the strategists (whether they are members of the TMT, middle managers, or consultants), are players in this game. Considering these elements offers a profound change in the way strategists' skills have been conceived so far, by adopting a broader perspective than the sole focus on specific elements (e.g., analysis, emotions, power, etc.). Further research can be conducted to better delineate the strategizing skills and understand how they are used in transformational projects.

BRIDGING THE RIGOR-RELEVANCE GAP THROUGH TEACHING

Finally, this article addresses the debate surrounding the separation of teaching and research by suggesting that teaching can generate knowledge for research purposes (Burke & Rau, 2010). While previous research has indicated how teaching can foster the development of management concepts (Christensen & Carlile, 2009; R. S. Kaplan, 1998; R. S. Kaplan et al., 2018), for instance, by relying on the classroom setting to develop management theories (Carton & Dameron, 2017), or on executive education to inform theories (Tushman et al., 2007), this research describes an educational setting that can inform research on strategizing. By drawing on data collected during the practice groups where students regularly reflected on their actions, it is possible to better understand what strategizing consists of, as we have done, in a companion article, currently under review.

However, developing such links between research and pedagogy requires taking teaching seriously. As highlighted in the rigor/relevance gap, it has become difficult to deal with different academic roles in the professionalization of scholarship and practices (Carton & Ungureanu, 2018): this involves changing our vision of teaching by putting students in a position of responsibility rather than feeding them with new knowledge (Chia & Holt, 2008), and demystifying strategy research by reminding ourselves that strategy remains a practice, that is constantly evolving and that we need to keep up with.

PEDAGOGICAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

This article offers implications for teaching strategy. In fact, the pedagogical program we have designed and detailed in this article can be adapted to any setting, in any country, with any student, and for any length of time for teaching strategy. As a recommendation, we should warn the teacher who wants to develop such a pedagogical program that it requires a heavy investment during the first years of application, the maintenance of long-term relationships with organizations, the adoption of a specific attitude by the academic (see Mintzberg, 2005; Schein, 1999), and that it requires caution regarding intellectual property, which can be resolved through a partnership and non-disclosure agreements. With these elements in mind, this pedagogical setting offers tremendous lessons for students, but also for instructors who can learn from their students and feed the scholarly community with this knowledge.

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