Les stratèges face à la stratégie : Tensions et pratiques[1,2]

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Résumé :

La formation des choix stratégiques dans les organisations est un thème de recherche ancien, mais qui connaît une évolution constante depuis les travaux de Bower sur l'investissement (1970), le développement de la perspective processuelle (Pettigrew 1992) et plus récemment les approches centrées sur la notion de micro-pratiques ou « strategizing » qui s'intéressent simultanément à deux niveaux d'analyse : individuel et organisationnel (Whittington 2007).

Ces différentes approches de la formation de la stratégie assimilent souvent dirigeants et stratèges, même si la participation d'autres acteurs est reconnue et analysée (Mantere & Vaara 2008). Depuis quelques années, la notion même de « stratège » est questionnée par la littérature, mais cette sorte de chimère organisationnelle, à laquelle on attribue de nombreuses qualités et faits d'armes, est finalement peu connue (Ericsson et al. 2001).

A partir de l'analyse du discours réflexif des stratèges, cet article a pour ambition d'identifier les principales caractéristiques de leur activité, telles que les stratèges les appréhendent eux-mêmes dans leur pratique quotidienne et dans un contexte d'intelligence stratégique distribuée.

La problématique peut donc se formuler de la manière suivante : qu'est-ce que la construction des choix stratégiques pour les stratèges ? Deux questions de recherche émergent alors : d'une part, quelles sont les caractéristiques de l'activité des stratèges ? D'autre part, l'activité des stratèges est-elle différente selon leur statut dans l'organisation ?

Le cadre d'analyse retenu est celui proposé notamment par le courant « *strategy as practice* » (Whittington 1996, Jarzabkowski et al. 2007) qui articule praticiens, praxis et pratiques.

La démarche méthodologique est qualitative. 68 entretiens semi-directifs ont été réalisés avec trois types de stratèges : des dirigeants, des cadres intermédiaires et des experts, impliqués dans des organisations de taille et de secteur différents. Les entretiens ont été enregistrés et intégralement retranscrits. L'analyse de contenu est émergente dans un premier temps, avec l'ambition d'identifier les concepts sous-tendant l'activité des stratèges. Dans un second temps, le discours des stratèges est analysé au travers de la distinction des trois types de stratèges et l'analyse de leurs similitudes et différences.

Le premier résultat de l'analyse du discours des stratèges est la conceptualisation de leurs activités sous forme de 4 tensions : cognitive, sociale, temporelle et focale.

L'analyse comparative des trois différents types de stratèges permet ensuite d'ébaucher une réflexion sur la co-existence de rationalités multiples et complexes dans le contexte d'une intelligence stratégique distribuée. Dirigeants, experts et managers, bien que faisant face aux

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[1] Une première version de cet article a été présentée lors de la conférence annuelle de la Strategic Management Society (SMS) à Washington, en octobre 2009.

[2] Cette proposition de communication en anglais sera traduite et adaptée en français si elle est retenue pour présentation lors de la conférence annuelle de l'AIMS 2011.

mêmes tensions, ne les mobilisent pas de la même manière pour définir leur activité de stratège.

Cette recherche permet d'approfondir la connaissance que nous avons du stratège en situation. En analysant le discours comme un construit cognitif qui influence les pratiques, nous proposons une conceptualisation de la fabrique de la stratégie autour de 4 tensions principales qui structurent les activités de conception de la stratégie. Le stratège ne peut plus être perçu comme une figure unidimensionnelle et homogène. Différents types d'acteurs ayant des rationalités propres participent ainsi à la construction des orientations stratégiques, chacun projetant ses propres compétences dans son identité de stratège, afin de conserver et développer son pouvoir dans le processus stratégique.

Mots clés : théories de la stratégie comme pratique, conception de la stratégie, discours

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Introduction

The financial crisis that globalized economy has been facing for more than a year put the stress on financial performance and criteria, but it may be time as well for a renewal in management, paying more attention to decisions that construct the future : strategic decisions. More and more voices call for a new way of thinking about strategy as a social construct to develop collective strategic intelligence in firms (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). This social perspective on strategy needs to better understand the way individuals interact in the strategy process and actually do strategy.

The study of strategy formation, as an academic field is quite recent and has known many evolutions, from the leader-focused approach (Selznik 1957), the decision-focused perspective criticized by Langley et al. (1995) and the process-content debate (Pettigrew 1990, Porter 1996).

More and more scholars call for integrative approaches of strategic management, especially for the problematics raised by strategy formation (Mintzberg & Lampel 1999, Hafsi & Thomas 2005).Strategy formation is of course linked to decision-making (Andrews 1971), to strategic analysis (Porter 1996), to individual cognitive processes (Calori et al. 1994) and political/social organizational processes (Pettigrew 1985). It is complex and multiform (Chakravarthy & White 2002) , often centralized (Mintzberg & Westley 2001), sometimes due to local initiatives (Burgelman 1983), always rationalized by top management (Bower 1970, Marsh et al. 1988). It can be studied through many lenses, from cognitive mapping (Calori et al. 1994) to change or innovation processes (Dougherty & Hardy 1996), and all these approaches have brought much to our understanding of this organizational mystery.

The interrelations between individuals and groups are often at the heart of strategy formation and Chakravarthy & White (2002) showed how much individual, organizational and even societal levels of analysis are intertwined and therefore needed for integrative works.

The practice turn in strategy (Whittington 2006) aims at developing such an integrative framework, by assuming that strategy formation is a social activity, organized around and through praxis, practices and practionners (Whittington 2003). Therefore, it helps dealing with levels of analysis that previous trends in strategy research could not handle (Balogun et al. 2003). Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) argue that practice-oriented studies, in order to

strengthen and clarify the field, should position themselves regarding to the conceptual framework of strategy-as-practice : "The challenge for strategy-as-practice research is, therefore, not wether it can develop outcomes that go beyond description, but to clearly identify the focus of the research and develop research designs that adequately address these foci." (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007 : 19).

Referring to the conceptual framework for strategy-as-practice (Whittington 2006, Jarzabkowski et al. 2007), this paper aims at investigating the practioners-practices couple, by analysing the main and recurrent individual characteristics of practitioners and the way they interact with their troubled environment and the strategy formation process of the organization (formalization, intuition, market or organization-focused, communication mode, ...). Hence, we focus on strategists and their strategizing practices. Our findings can be useful for a better understanding of the driving forces that generate strategizing activities. By investigating the practitioners-practices relations (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007), we seek to better understand the nature of strategic work, through the lenses of strategists themselves, whereas they act as "sense givers" or "sense takers" (Whittington et al. 2003). We propose an in-depth incursion in strategizing, not from a single case-study, but from many interviews with people who *do* the strategy.

1. IN SEARCH OF THE STRATEGIST

The difficulty for defining strategists is linked to the evasive definition of what they are supposed to do : strategy (Nyström & Starbuck 1984, Whittington 2001), but this does not mean that the strategist disappeared or is less important, as Mintzberg's criticisms (1994) against formal strategy processes could lead : "Our conclusion is not that the strategist is missing but rather that the social actor perspective in general is poorly developed in schools of thought" (Ericson et al. 2001 : 58).

As many authors noticed (Whittington 1996, 2006 ; Balogun et al 2003), the definition of strategists remained quite strictly focused on top-managers, even in the process litterature (Whittington 2007). Recent articles in the Harvard Business Review tend to reinforce the identification between strategists and leaders (Breene et al 2007, Montgomery 2008). Hafsi & Thomas (2005), arguing that the field of strategy is in search of a "walking stick", propose a

model of strategy as a theory of action. They often refer to the practitioners of strategy, mainly as clients or users of models and results drawn by researchers. Nevertheless, they mostly identify practitioners as leaders and top managers, relying on the traditional view of strategy as a "leader's statement" (2005 : 514).

Ericson et al (2001) explicitly write on strategists. They define them as "an umbrella concept to focus the human actor(s) who could be expected to play a rather crucial role in strategy process (if any single human actor really does), such as the CEO, the president, the owner-manager, the managerial elite, the upper echelon top manager(s), the top management team." (2001 : 58). Analyzing the classic strategy litterature, they identify five broad themes on strategists[3] and consider that "these themes illustrate the general tendencies in the literature and are rather disparate which stresses the fact that the role of the strategist in the strategy process is a complex phenomenon." (Ericson et al. 2001 : 64). The characteristics and even the roles of sthe strategist are indeed difficult to find in the strategy literature. Themes like leadership and top-management teams are quite frequently treated by researchers, but we finally know little about strategists, who sometimes appear more like a conceptual fantasy than like a well defined and structured concept (Samra-Fredericks 2003).

Nevertheless, when defining strategy as a social activity, the notion of 'practitioner' offers a more convenient concept to capture strategic ideas formation, circulation and implementation. Whittington defines practioners as "those who do the work of making, shaping and executing strategies" (2006 : 619). Practitioners can then be senior executives, middle and operational managers, strategic planners, consultants, investment bankers, corporate lawyers or business school gurus (Whttington 2006, King 2008). A strategy-as-practice perspective on strategists must adopt a broader definition and look outside the organization (Jarzbakowski et al. 2007).

Following Jarzabkowski (2008), it is also important to contextualize the action of the strategist and to understand the interactions between strategy practitioners and practices.

In this paper, we focus on practionners, which are, from a practice perspective, "obvious units of analysis for study, being active participants in the construction of activity that is consequential for the organization and its survival. They shape strategic activity through *who*

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[3] The five themes identified by Ericson et al. (2001) are : the contingency of strategists' action, the identification to top management, the motivational and symbolic role of the strategist, the role of new strategists in change processes, the rather rational cognitive structure of the strategist (2001 : 65-66).

they are, *how* they act and *what* practices they draw upon in that action" (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007 : 10).

Two main questions are raised by the literature : Which are the main characteristics of strategists and how do they shape the strategy process ?

2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The aim of this article is to explore how practitioners experience the activities of strategizing. The aim is to build grounded propositions on the characteristics of these activities. It requires an in-depth qualitative research methodology to generate a theoretical framework (Miles and Huberman 1984, Yin 1989). Furthermore, we adopt an interpretive stance such that diverse meanings are assumed to exist and influence how people understand and respond to the objective world. According to Rynes & Gephart (2004:457), interpretative research "describes how different meanings held by different persons or groups produce and sustain a sense of truth, particularly in the face of competing definitions of reality". Rather than producing qualitative facts to evaluate hypothesis, this research seeks to understand strategists' meanings of their practice through their stories of strategy work. According to this view, we rely on in-depth interviews of individuals embedded in economic organizations who define themselves as having experiencing strategizing activities even if they don't have a formal strategy role.

The data collection relied on open ended interviews with 84 strategists coming from seventy five different firms and organizations. Jarzbabkowski et al. (2007) consider that "through a broader definition of who is a strategist, incorporating lower-level employees and external actors as well as top managers, we may be able to discern a wider range of practices" (2007:13). Referring to Mintzberg's typology of the five parts of an organization, we identified three types of formal role related to strategy activities: the leader, the expert and the manager. The former is located in the "strategic apex" and the latter (the manager) comes from the middle management and took part to one or more strategic processes. The expert is outside the line, often directed towards the standardization of the strategy work such as the head of the strategy department, an external consultant or an investment banker.

We started by collecting information on strategists' general background and career path. We then broached the following subjects: formal role of the interviewee, activities related to his position and which are strategic, definition of strategizing activities, using of tools or heuristic models for these activities. We eventually asked the informants to tell the story of two or three processes that they experienced as strategic for the organisation by focusing on the part they played in those processes[4]. The interviews lasted between an hour and a half and three hours. They were recorded and transcribed in their original language, many in French, some in English or Spanish. A first analysis led us to retain sixty eight out of the eighty four interviews conducted; some of the interviewees overestimating their strategizing activities or focusing mainly their discourse on the strategy of their organisation and recalling not much their own role in strategic processes. These sixty eight interviews, representing more than one hundred and eighty hours of recording, split the following way : 33 leaders (49%), 16 experts (24%) and 19 managers (27%). These informants came from sixty four different firms ranging from the small business (less than ten employees) to the large company (such as Orange, Air France-KLM, Mc Kinsey, Carrefour or IKEA)[5].

We started the analysis with the set of 68 interviews. An emergent coding of interviews was done based on the objectives of the inquiry. The coding aimed to identify recurring themes in the actors' discourse of their strategizing activities. The resulting categories were refined as we progressed in our analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to interpretativist principles, our categorization was thus directly rooted in the discourse of the interviewees. One of us began to code three interviews, one of a leader, one of an expert and one of a manager. The emerging categories were used by the second author to double-code three other interviews. We reviewed the points of disagreement and discussed them until an agreement was reached.

Thirteen codes emerged from this analysis. Each of these codes was at least present in 4 on 5 interviews. The thirteen codes are :

- the nature of strategy ;
- the nature of strategizing ;
- the loneliness of the decision-maker ;
- the part of intuition in strategic thinking ;
- the place of action and experimentation in the strategic process ;
- the analytical and formal dimension of strategizing ;

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[4] See appendix A for the interviewer's guide
[5] See appendix B for a synthesis of firms' main characteristics and interviewees' function

- the sharing of strategic intelligence ;
- The thinking process in strategizing
- the attention to customers and market ;
- the political dimension of strategizing and the need for explanations ;
- the place of organizational resources in strategizing ;
- the passion for the sector, the firm, the job ;
- the role of values in strategizing.

Once the codes were identified, we coded the interviews.

3. RESULTS

Building on this raw material, we conceptualized our analysis and identified 5 main themes that are structuring to understand what stragists do and how they do it. The codes which where linked to the same concept were gathered to create a conceptual theme. The verbatims composing each theme are the basis level of analysis and allow a more conceptualized discussion. This conceptual framework is by itself an empirically-based representation of the structuring dimensions of strategists' activity.

The following table shows the link between the codes that emerged from the content analysis and the themes which are recurrent in strategists' discourse on their practices.

Dimensions of the strategizing activity	Emerging codes in the interviews
Strategy definition	▪ The definition of strategy ▪ The definition of strategizing
Social orientation	▪ The sharing of strategic intelligence ▪ The loneliness of the decision-maker ▪ The role of values in strategizing
Process focus	▪ The attention to customers and market in strategizing ▪ The place of organizational resources in strategizing
Cognitive orientation	▪ The part of intuition in strategic thinking ▪ The analytical and formal dimension of strategizing ▪ The passion for the sector, the firm, the job
Process dynamics	▪ The thinking process in strategizing ▪ The place of action and experimentation in the strategic process ▪ The political dimension of strategizing and the need for explanations

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3.1. WHAT IS STRATEGY FOR STRATEGISTS ?

The interviews were conducted with people dealing with strategic issues in their organization (leaders and managers, some functional experts) or for their clients (outside experts, consultants). This implicit broad definition of the strategist aims at capturing the organizational, interactive and complex nature of strategy work. We interviewed people who do strategy, not only people who are in position to decide strategy for their organization and are therefore traditionnaly considered as strategists. Ericson et al. (2001), when looking for the strategist in the academic literature, note that "the strategist is, of course, related to the existence of strategies to formulate, strategic issues or problems to tackle, and strategic decisions to make. However, what is strategic is not entirely clear" (2001, p. 58). We asked interviewees to define strategy. Their answers show that they rely on classical definitions to develop a quite modern perspective on strategy : strategizing is a practical art, based on conceptual analysis methods. Maybe more important, there are no significant differences between leaders, managers and experts when they define strategy.

3.1.1. A classical perspective on strategy

Most of the interviewees, and independantly from their formal role in the organization, share a quite classical definition of strategy, based on a SWOT-like approach : "*Strategizing consists in identifying our problems, our weaknesses and our strengths, for different levels. It is trying to undertand our opportunities. Then, we need to stand back to understand what we can do else. Strategy is the art of development.*" (CEO, Gemstar, jewelry).

Strategists often refer to classical managerial literature (Peters, Sun Tsu, Mintzberg) : "*Defining strategy is a complex exercise. I think that the basis remains the definition of Philip Kotler, the 3 Cs rule : costs, customers and competitions. Strategic thinking is a profession which consists in collecting the largest data on these three elements to deduce which way the firm should go.*" (CEO of LD&A Advisors, strategic consulting firm).

The organization/environment dyptical view of strategy seems to be embedded in their practices, but what makes choices strategic remains the potential consequences on the organization : "*Important decisions are strategic. I think that decisions are strategic when failure is catastrophic.*" (CEO of Aquarelle.com, online florist company).

Strategy is also often linked to the ability to develop a vision of the future environment and of the positionning of the firm in the future : "*Strategizing consists in answering the following*

questions : considering what we are, considering the environment, where should we go and where should we be in 20 years ?" (Innovation and marketing VP, Sodiaal, milk producer). These three dimensions (a SWOT-like perspective, a large scope and vision) are the foundations of strategy for most of the strategists. They implicitly or explicitly refer to classical managerial literature on strategy, which keeps a large audience and explains in a simple way many of the issues strategists have to deal with.

3.1.2. A modern perspective on strategy

Strategists propose as well some more modern definitions of strategy, denying the distinction between formulation and implementation : "*Classical definitions lack the implementing part of strategy, I think strategy is an art of execution. Moreover, strategy must be desanctified. The butcher at the corner has a strategy because he observes people in the neighborhood, their buying power, their tastes and he adjusts his choice of meats, the quality level, prices. Doing so, he thinks strategically, he does strategy. We have to admit that strategizing is not an exercise you can afford to do only once in 5 or 10 years. It is a daily exercise because the environment always changes*" (CEO of LD&A Advisors, strategic consulting firm). Strategizing is then perceived as an on-going process, in which the strategist keeps on adapting his choices and the organization to reach his vision : "*Strategy is like impressionist painting : there are many little paint touches, and suddenly you can see the whole thing. The strategists is always painting and the big picture comes afterwards*" (CEO, Clarins, Cosmetics). Strategy is hazardous and complex, depending on evolutions that can't be anticipated : "*you can do strategic plans for three years, but you must know they will probably be changed. Nobody can know where we will be in five or ten years. Strategy nowadays is a daily work, a succession of tactical choices*" (Marketing VP, Xerox Global Services Europe). The link between tactics and strategy is at the heart of strategists' view on their work and many of them recognize that strategy is often written afterwards : "*Do you know what strategy is ? This is a tactic that succeeded. Afterwards, you just claim that you had a good strategy*" (CEO, Clarins, Cosmetics).

Strategy practitionners tend to have an all-in-one classical and modern definition of strategy. Building on classical academic perspectives (SWOT, long term, vision), they are fully aware that strategizing is not as simple as a long-term plan based on the analysis of the environment and the organization's resources. They present strategizing as a complex, iterative and

practice-oriented art. Strategy is not tactics, but strategy is constructed by successive tactical choices which shape a strategic direction.

Whereas they are leaders, managers or experts, strategists share the same vision of strategy. Moreover, the same four dialogic tensions emerge from their discourse on their work : sharing vs solitude, intuition vs analysis, market vs organization-focused strategic thinking, deliberation vs action.

3.2. THE SOCIAL ORIENTATION : SHARING VS SOLITUDE IN STRATEGIZING

If strategy making has been described as a rather individual process for many years, more and more academic works show that strategy is often thought, challenged and sponsored by several individuals, inside and outside the organization. When analysing the discourse on strategy process, we found that this dimension of the process remains one of the most important to caracterize and discriminate practioners' practices. Some strategists naturally tend to oversize their own role in the strategy-making process, but all of them mention interactions with other individuals and groups as a fundamental dimension of the process.

Three main findings emerge from the analysis of interrelations between strategists and their social environment : strategists do not think strategy on their own, but they experience the solitude of decision and they are looking, amongst their nearest collaborators, both complementary competencies and personality homogeneity.

3.2.1. The sharing of strategic intelligence

Many academic works have claimed for a more systemic and organizational perspective on the strategy process. Strategists largely confirm that strategizing is not a lonesome activity. From data gathering to strategy formulation, many contacts are made with organizational members as well as outside actors to develop strategic thinking. Functional and middle-managers are at the heart of this sharing practice : "*Division managers have a deep knowledge of their activity, so they logically inform me on the main evolutions in their sector, on emerging ideas. Good strategies come with this intelligence sharing*" (CEO, Euromedis Group, medical material supply). Most strategists refer to informal data gathering and discussions. They tend to minimize the role of external consulting or formal planning processes on their choices and, on the other hand, they put the stress on informal contacts inside and outside the organization : "*it is much more important to know what your nevev or your old friend has to say about your ideas than to present it to consultants : your old friend*

will challenge you, the consulting frim will try to understand just in order to say that you have the good intuition, but with complex and costly concepts" (CEO, Urban food, food design).

Most strategists do not make a difference between their contacts with experts, top managers, operational managers or employees : "*There is no formal process, but I listen to every idea, wherever it comes. I take time to speak with everyone in the firm. It is because people are used to speak with one another that good ideas can emerge.*" (CEO, Euromedis Group, medical material supply).

Moreover, many of them explain that the relevant information often comes from lower-levels employees, who are deeply in contact with the external environment, particularly the clients : "*to make decisions when you are at the top, you need to know what is going on on the field. Every two weeks, sellers in ou shops have to write a short note in which they detail their results, with comments on competitors, on clients' expectations, on what they heard. For many years, I have read them all, I asked these notes to be translated from german, japanese, chinese. In our sector, the true strategic treasury are the sellers : they know what works, why and what the clients want.*" (CEO, Clarins, cosmetics).

Strategists are aware that they are dependent on others for strategic thinking. They do not pretend being solely in charge for strategic ideas and put the stress on tne hatural social dimension of their practice.

3.2.2. The solitude of decision-making

Nevertheless, if sharing ideas, challenging plans and gathering data implies many interactions with others, strategists remain alone when it comes to the consequences of strategic decisions. This solitude in the decision is a dominant aspect of strategists' discourse on their work : "*in front of decision-making, you are just alone in the whole world*" (President, AnalogWay, Professional brodcasting material producer).

This solitude is not strictly linked to the ability od making decision for the organization. Managers in charge of strategic orientations feel the same solitude : "*I do not make decisions. That's the strategic comitee which decides. But I know that if there was a problem afterwards, I would be identified as responsible for it. Even if you don't decide, you are seen as the strategist, espcially when it goes wrong...*" (Tenchnology manager, Bouygues Telecom, Telecommunications).

This loneliness is sometimes hard to live for strategists, especially in front of shareholders. Financial stakeholders, and particularly shareholders, are the actors strategists fear the most : "*the worst thing is when you are sure that you have the good idea, the good people and your*

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shareholders don't accept your proposal. You are alone in front of their figures." (CEO, Smartrade and Co, gadgets production).

3.2.3. The role of values in strategizing

The last finding on strategists' relations to others is at once the need for competencies they do not have and the search for a friendly and alike-minded collaborators.

Many strategists recognize that they do not know everything and that they need to work with people who can fulfill their shortcomings : "*I am not good at technology. My domains are the market and the clients. I have always tried to hire people who could teach me something and I hope I taught them a few things as well. A top manager, a strategist, can not be on his own. One quality for being a strategist, is to surround oneself with the right people.*" (CEO, Eolfi, energy production).

This need for collaborative work in the strategy process does not prevent strategists from being alone for decision making. They think with others, they listen to collaborators, but one of their hardest task is to give sense to these conversations : "*The good strategist is someone who accepts to become a leader, but who practically works intensively with managers in order to make sense from all this*" (President, AnalogWay, Professional brodcasting material producer).

In order to enhance strategic efficiency, strategists try to work with people who can complete their own competencies. Nevertheless, they also seem to be in search for an homogeneous way of thinking. If technical skills can and should be different amongst their collaborators, strategists want to minimize conflicts in decision-making. Many of them, especially in smaller firms, choose to hire people who think like them : "*I 've been looking for clones in my teams, people who share my values. It is easier to work with people who can see things the same way as you. It's different when it comes to skills : I need more diversity to balance the overal competencies profile*" (CEO, SmartBox & Co, Entertainment). This dichotomy between skills and values is present in many interviews : strategists know that they are not omniscient and that they must rely on their collaborators' competencies, but as leaders, they also look for a comfortable organizational environment by hiring people who share the same values : "*I undeerstood what I really need : I need managers who can do what I can't do, but who want to do what I want to do. We can't waste time to discuss our values and objectives.*" (CEO, PlusAgenda, online services).

Strategists can't think strategically on their own. They try to capture and give sense to others' ideas to build their own strategic way. To do that, they rely on people with complentary skills but identical values.

3.3. THE PROCESS FOCUS: MARKET VS ORGANIZATION

As we discussed earlier, most of the definitions of strategy and strategizing given by strategists included a SWOT-like perspective. This distinction between inside and outside organization issues in strategic thinking, yet classical, remains structuring for strategists. Moreover, some strategists have a very precise point of view on the balance between these two sides of strategy.

3.3.1. The attention to customers and market in strategizing

Many of the strategists consider that market is the heart of their activity. They have to understand its evolutions, the clients' needs and the competitors' strategy : "*strategy relies on the analysis of the environment. A good strategist is one who perfectly knows his customers and clients*". This focus on market in strategizing is present in most of the interviews, independently from the size of the firm, its sector or the position of the strategist.

Three components of the external environment emerge from the analysis of verbatim.

At a micro-level, clients come first and their needs and will are the foundations of strategic thinking for many strategists : "*Strategy consists in anticipating the clients' needs. You have to be there for them.*" (CEO, Degroof&Philippe, Banking). Strategists must listen to their clients and help them to express their needs : "*The first skill of a strategist is the ability to listen. To answer your client's question, you need to listen carefully to understand the question, because your client may not be able to express objectively the strategic issue he is facing. So this is fundamental to listen, to reformulate in order to understand beyond words.*" (CEO, LD&A Advisors, Consulting).

The understanding of competitors' strategy is the other important dimension of this market screening activity for the strategists. Many of them rely on benchmarking tools to adapt their strategy and to position themselves in the competition : "*Strategic thinking is based on benchmarking, the analysis of the environmental context and of the competitors' actions.*" (Commercial VP, DIAC, banking). This benchmarking process seems sometimes quite complex : "*We define our goals after an in-depth analysis of our competitors : costs, technology, quality. It is this benchmark that drives our strategy.*" (Production manager, Les

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Echos, Press). Strategists rely on experience, networking and intuition to complete their competitors' profile.

At a macro-level, strategists try to anticipate the macro evolutions in the environment : "*My goal as a strategist is to decide what we want to do and how we can do. You need to have a good understanding of your environment and to be able to anticipate its evolutions.*" (CEO, MACSF, Insurance). The understanding of environmental trends must also balance long-term and short-term issues and goals : "*The first work in strategizing is to understand market trends. We adapt our strategy and try to coordinate our long term vision with short-term disturbances.*" (Strategy and Economic intelligence VP, Total, Energy).

3.3.2. The place of organizational resources in strategizing

When defining strategy, most strategists adopt a SWOT-like perspective and take into account the organization as a central dimension of strategy : "*Strategy is the art of resource allocation. This is a classical view, but I think it remains the best one : you have to deal with financial, human, technological and political resources in order to reach your goals, to obtain a well-defined vision.*" (Strategic planning VP, Disneyland Resort Paris, entertainment).

However, when it comes to their strategizing practices, they more likely evoke the external environment as the main source of strategic thinking : "*The analysis of the environment is the first step in strategizing. Understanding the environment is the first skill for a strategist, far before knowing your organization.*" (Commercial VP, DIAC, banking).

Organizational dimensions of strategizing are often considered as secondary in the process :"*Strategizing is the art ok making good choices. You need to measure the technological environment, the market, the competitors. Then you look at financial and human implications.*" (CEO, Jacret, adhesive production).

. This doesn't mean that organization isn't important in strategizing, but that, in many strategists' mind, structure naturally follows strategy. Leaders and experts seem to be more specifically focused on the outside environment, whereas managers are more likely to evoke organizational issues : "*That's not enough to have the great idea. I know that the top management feels concerned by clients first, but strategy is made by people inside the organization and if you don' understand that, you can't be a strategist. For me, strategizing starts with available resources in the firm.*" (Project manager, Dassault, aeronautics).

This orientation of the strategizing process can be explained by the necessity for managers to integrate organizational characteristics to improve their legitimacy in the process : "*You can't*

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think the strategy without knowing exactly your environment and the way your organization works. In my position, I tend to focus on internal issues, because I know that I have to find sponsors inside to get my ideas implemented." (Internal consultant, Car distribution).

3.4. THE COGNITIVE ORIENTATION : INTUITION VS RATIONALITY IN STRATEGIZING

The education and even research in strategic management mainly focus on analytical approaches and tools, the swot approach seems dominant in the cognitive part of strategizing activities. The strategists interviewed present a different view of the way they take decisions. They experience analytical tools more as a means to present and defend strategic decisions and control their implementation than as useful devices to take strategic decisions. Strategic thinking is mainly based on intuition, intimate conviction and data intelligence. Passion for the business and thorough knowledge of the industry are central in the cognitive process of strategizing.

3.4.1. Analytical tools as means to control the strategic implementation and to defend strategic decisions

All strategists specify indicators to control the strategic implementation process and to readjust day-to-day plans if necessary. Quantitative indicators are used, such as turnover, profit margin or profitability to measure the financial performance of the firm compared to direct competitors : "*We use many measure tools daily. Strategy is based on good ideas, but these ideas must impact the performance of the firm. We mainly use quantitative tools which allow comparisons of performance with our competitors and market evolutions.*" (Strategic planning officer, Casino, retail). Some indicators are more focus-oriented to the specific business of the firm, and strategists may create their own specific tools to control their competitive positioning, in doing so they innovate and develop their internal strategic competencies : " *We use many control and measure tools, especially the CSI for Customer Satisfaction Index. Every 6 months, we ask 500 to 600 customers to fill in a questionnaire with nearly 50 questions. This helps us to position ourselves in terms of services, products and image.*" (branch manager, IKEA, Furniture production and distribution)

Moreover some analytical approaches and strategic concepts are widely known by the three types of strategists, such as business modelling, swot analysis, value creation, or BCG matrix. For expert strategists, an analytical approach is central to defend the strategic orientations they recommend: "*The basic principle in strategic consulting is to be irreproachable in your*

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analysis." (Consultant, Eurogroup, Consulting). The main strategic concepts have been widely disseminated into the managerial culture and create a kind of strategic literacy that may be useful to speak the same language between managers ; "*The firm needs to follow an efficient and realistic business model, which is based on the structure of costs, on cost-effectiveness, and the perfect understanding of value creation in each step of the production process. That is thanks to these analyses that strategic decisions can be made, for a new activity launching, as well as for the delocalization of CRM supports*", (Subsidiary manager, Groupama, Insurance industry).

Nonetheless, the analytical orientation affects essentially the post-thinking stage of the strategizing process, whereas strategic thinking is mainly based on intuition, feeling and experience.

3.4.2. The main part of non rational orientation in strategic thinking

Strategists rely on experience, networking and intuition to complete their competitors' profile, and most of them consider that analytical approaches or consulting firms are not necessary to be strategists and take strategic decisions : "*I don't' need McKinsey or BCG to learn what I already know*" (CEO, MACSF, Insurance). Moreover, they often deny any use of analytical tools to highlight other sources of strategic thinking : "*I never use any particular tool. You just need 80% of common sens, a little bit of vision and a much conviction. […] Strategizing is feeling.*" (CEO, Telemarket, retail).

Intuition plays a main part, notably for leaders, even if strategists have difficulties to define it or use other terms such as feeling or vision: "*The main characteristic of a strategist is his capacity to feel the business, to be intuitive in the business*" (CEO, Maison de famille, seniors housing). Data intelligence is a major strategists' skill so that they are able to understand and "see" the big picture of an industry and to foresight the main scenarios : "*We need to have an accurate and wide eye. A strategist is someone who has a very large capacity to catch and store data and then, to present the most magical synthesis possible. This is what a good strategist looks like. Some people are very impressive in the way they link data and make an evident and coherent synthesis. A good strategist has synthesis, analysis, vision and forecast abilities.*" (Subsidiary manager, Groupama, Insurance industry).

Experience, learning, curiosity, open-mindedness are some of the ingredients of the recipe for developing strategizing capabilities: "*You need to be interested in the sector, the job. You need to learn, and to read helps. There are specialized diplomas, but it is not necessarily at school that you will learn the most useful things for this job. The most useful things are travel,*

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Torset 30/6/09 20:19
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Torset 30/6/09 21:46
Mis en forme ... [7]

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Torset 30/6/09 23:01
Mis en forme ... [8]

anecdotes, what you read, what you hear, what you catch, the knowledge you construct, your experience. You share all of this with your clients everyday. [...] All of this comes from real life, not from books, and it requires some important skills you can't learn at school : altruism, to be in touch with others, ..." (CEO, Selectour, Leisure Industry)

Being involved in their business and being passionate by the industry may be the underlying driving forces that explain the non rational part of the cognitive orientation in strategizing.

3.4.3. Involvement in the business

Strategists and more precisely the leaders are totally involved in their business. The future of their firm becomes a sort of obsession. This involvement implies even sometimes pleasure and joy: " I only have in mind my present project. I think that I will stay as long I have fun and I have something to do here. After that, I will leave." (Subsidiary manager, Groupama, Insurance industry). "At the present, I am living a great adventure and I am in fully.", (CEO, Telemarket, retailing). Strategists have a thorough knowledge of an industry with a positive representation of its role in society : "The Internet and e-commerce are part of History." (CEO, Telemarket, retailing).

Conversely, if they do not reach an agreement with the main stakeholders concerning the main strategic decisions, they express the will to quit : "I thought it was a strategic mistake I said : 'I leave, I don't believe in the story anymore., so I quit." (CEO, Selectour, leisure industry).

3.5. THE PROCESS DYNAMICS : ACTION VS THINKING

This dimension describes the way managers conceive the balance between action and thinking. Thinking is here defined in a global way ; it includes all cognitive, social, analytical activities from the identification of the issue to the deployment of the strategy, including it. It is the time during which strategists listen to many people, discuss, bargain, learn, read; it is the "free-for-strategy" cognitive activity. The interviewees oppose thinking to action. Some of them, mainly the leaders, express a clear preference for testing first their ideas and rationalize them in strategic terms after. The negotiation skill is then crucial to implement new ideas and articulate thinking and acting.

3.5.1. Thinking as a social activity

Many of the interviewees consider that thinking phases are fundamental during the strategizing process. Thinking requires empathy, notably for the clients and more broadly for

the market: "*The first skill of a strategist is the ability to listen. To answer your client's question, you need to listen carefully to understand the question, because your client may not be able to express objectively the strategic issue he is facing. So this is fundamental to listen, to reformulate in order to understand beyond words*" (CEO, LD&A Advisors, Consulting). Strategists listen to organizational actors as well : "*The most important is to have conversations with people on the field, people who see and listen to the clients, who live with competitors. Discussions are important means to analyse what is going on. One man can't see and know everything.*" (Strategic planning officer, Casino, retailing). The ability to observe is another way to get a better understanding of the environment: "*You take notes, you observe what is happening, how people work*" (CEO, Selectour, Leisure industry). Thinking , also means introspection : strategists think, often on their own, about their ideas, trying to be as much objective as possible : "*You must question yourself, you must stand back a bit, be critic.*" (CEO, Telemarket, retailing). This cognitive part of the process includes deliberation with the other managers, taking place notably in formal meetings : "*Each three months, we have a meeting and we really speak about strategy. One of the recurrent dimensions is the organization inside the stores.*" (Branch manager, IKEA, Furniture production and distribution). During this phase, the strategist acts like a sense-maker : "*A good strategist is someone who makes sense from things and who gives sense to people who will implement it*" (Production manager, Les Echos, Press). Strategy is intellectually constructed and formulated. The strategist is then a sense-maker and a sense-taker (Whittington et al. 2003) when he listens to and adopts others' ideas. Deliberation and introspection are intertwined and continuous processes.

3.5.2. Action, time hurry and experimentation in strategizing

If strategists do not deny the importance of thinking, discussing and formulating the strategic orientations, most of them claim that action is a fundamental phase of strategizing : "*There is no good strategy without execution. Good strategies are the ones who are executed. Strategies can't be disconnected from execution.*" (Subsidiary manager, Groupama, Insurance industry). Moreover, even if a clear vision is a necessity, strategists must continuously readjust their actions and be very reactive to fit in "*The only way is to identify your priorities and to keep the direction. Of course, the difficulty is that the environment changes. The weather changes and it is not because you have a direction that you can't take a different road*" (*(strategic planning officer, Casino, retail).

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Action is linked to change and evolution in strategists' mind. They often compare or merge strategic action and change : "*Strategy is change. The execution of strategy always generates changes, from small operational changes to the complete reorientation of everything… Action and change are very important because move is life.*" (Investment VP, Chateauonline, retail).

Action is not only perceived by strategists as a necessity to enrich strategic thinking. Strategists consider action as a test for their ideas and many of them oppose the thinking and to action : "*I act firt, I think afterwards. I don't like too much thinking. Consultants often explains that you shouldn't, they claim for status quo. I prefer action, even if I am wrong One should always be acting.*" (CEO, Telemarket, retail).

3.5.3. Negotiation as a central process articulating thinking and acting

This tension between thinking and acting is dialogic : every strategist has to face the paradox between the need for analyzing the context of strategic choices and the need for action. This dialogic tension is fully expressed by this strategist : "*I have a philosophy of action. When you have a choice to make, the worst is to not decide. Making a bad decision can have consequences but most of the time you can readjust. The worst thing is to stand back and wait. The worst decision is the one you regret not to have made […] I always take my time before deciding. To be sure, I never decide in a hurry.*" (CEO, Ooprint.com, online printing).

This link between thinking and action is highlighted by many strategists. For them, negotiation is fully part of the strategic process. It enriches the original vision and generates change : "*Implementing strategy consists in convincing the actors of change and to be sure they will change.*" (Strategic planning officer, Casion, retail). Negotiation is mainly political : strategists must negotiate with their stakeholders : "*These power issues in strategizing are very important. You can't make strategic decisions without thinking about the political consequences.*" (COO, Uniteam, advertising and consulting). This political phase is of course different according to the characteristics of the firm or the function of the strategist. Managers and experts are much more concerned by this political phase than leaders are : "*When I wish to make a strategic decision, I have to convince the president. I can bargain, I can refuse to sign my budget for example.*" (Commercial VP, DIAC, banking). This political phase can generate conflicts and many strategists fear them : "*I say to my collaborators 'Enemy is outside, no time to waist with internal conflicts.' We need to focus on our strategy and everyone is responsible.*" (COO, Uniteam, advertising and consulting).

Negotiation is also a managerial process, strategists have to explain and convince inside the organization : "*At the beginning of the year, I present to all collaborators the strategic*

orientations, department by department : the structures, the projects, everything.[...] the human dimension must not be under-estimated. You don't live without men and women, you do with them" (CEO, Selectour, leisure industry). During this phase, the strategists acts as a sense-giver : *"A strategist must have a vision and must give sense for the strategy to be accepted by everyone."* (Production manager, Les Echos, Press).

4. DISCUSSION

This empirical research aimed at confronting strategists' discourse on their practices to existing knowledge on strategic process, in order to understand how they really work.

4.1. STRATEGIZING : THE ART OF BALANCING TENSIONS

The analysis of strategists' discourse on their work, activities and environments shows that strategizing can be described through 5 main themes (strategy definition, social orientation, process focus, cognitive orientation and process dynamics).

4.1.1. Strategy : plan and social practice

The first theme, strategy definition, can be seen as a control variable, enabling us to understand what strategy is for strategists and to control the conceptual homogeneity between interviewees on the central concept of this research. Unsurprisingly, strategists largely share a theoretical common ground on strategy and strategizing. Two different approaches are present in their answers : strategy as an analytical plan and strategy as a social practice. We named the first approach the "classical view of strategy" because it relies on classical definitions, mainly from the industrial economics authors (Ansoff 1965, Porter 1980). Strategizing is then defined as the analysis of environment and the definition of long term goals. The second approach is more "modern". It is built on strategic processes and change literature (Pettigrew 1992), which considers that strategy is also built on organizational dynamics, by many actors who socially interact in an on-going process. These two sides of strategy and strategizing are at the heart of research debate in strategic management, opposing content-focused and process-focused approaches (Chakravarthy & Doz 1992 ; Papadakis et al. 1998). This correspondence between academic research and practitioners' perspectives on strategy shows that the content-process debate should not be closed and infuses managerial practices. It stimulates as well new theoretical backgrounds, such as strategy-as-practice, which seek to go

beyond this debate by adopting a multi-level and empirically-based new paradigm on strategizing.

4.1.2. Towards a conceptual framework of strategists in action

The four other dimensions (social orientation, process focus, cognitive orientation and process dynamics) we identified in strategists' discourse compose a dialogic model of strategizing.

Indeed, the analytical codes composing the 4 dimensions reveal intrinsic four dialogic tensions that interviewees experience in their practice of strategizing activities : tension between "action" and "thinking" (process dynamics), tension between "market-focus" and "organisation-focus" (process focus), tension between "intuition" and "analysis" (cognitive orientation), and, eventually, tension between "solitude" and "sharing" (social orientation). Those tensions are dialogic because one strategist may develop strongly each pole of a same tension, for instance experiencing the feeling of the solitude as he wanders off the beaten track and willing strongly to convince and to share his vision with other stakeholders. The following figure depicts how managers experience their strategizing activities :
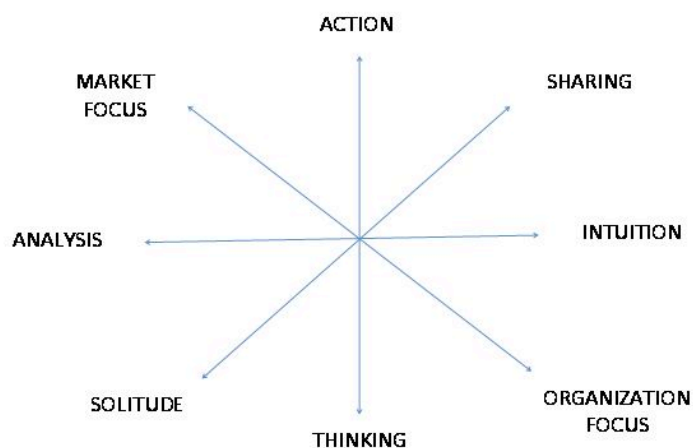
Figure 1 : four main tensions in strategizing activities

4.2. CONCEPTUAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The dialogic tension in social attention between sharing and solitude shows how complex the social interactions of the strategist are. Recent works put the stress on the social nature of strategizing, considering that the strategist is embedded in a complex social environment which is at once a constraint, an informal guide and an inspirational and productive social system for strategizing (Samra-Fredericks 2003, Jarzabkowski 2008). The strategists confirm this vision of their embedded activities, showing the multiple sources of their strategic thinking and the importance of discussion, listening and collaboration inside and outside the firm to understand and treat strategic issues. Nevertheless, when analyzing the tension between solitude and sharing, we can see that strategists make a distinction in the strategizing process between strategic thinking and strategic decision-making. Whereas they experience and look for rich and complex social interactions in strategic thinking, they also feel lonely in front of the responsibilities driven by decision-making. To face this paradox, they try to work with actors who bring them complementary skills to enrich the thinking process, but who shares similar values to reduce conflicts and, in some way their responsibilities, in decision-making. Comparing to the literature on the role of the strategist in the strategy formation process, we can propose that strategists themselves do not consider that the strategist is necessarily a top manager, on the contrary of the assumption generally made (Ericson et al. 2001). Moreover, the role of the strategist seems to be more like a catalyst role than only inspirational (Hamel & Prahalad 1989) or context-setting (Noda & Bower 1996).

The dimension "process focus" reflects the diversity amongst strategists' influences in strategizing. All of them are aware of the importance of both internal (organizational) and external (competitive) factors influencing strategy formulation and the strategic way of the firm. However, we can observe a slight difference between leaders and managers in the balance between organization and market. Leaders tend to emphasize market and external factors for strategizing, whereas managers are more focused on organizational issues. This can be explained by leaders' most frequent interactions with extra-organizational actors, the diffusion of the popular strategic intent and strategic vision amongst leaders (Hamel & Prahalad 1989) and their voluntarism in strategizing. On the contrary, managers have to deal with formal processes inside the organization to express and develop their strategic thinking. Their social desirability and their organizational distance (March 1991) from leaders engage them in a social sponsoring of their ideas that requires a great attention to organizational

dynamics. Referring to the old debate between structure and strategy (Chandler 1962), we could synthesize by considering that leaders have a strategy-dominant view of the debate, whereas managers, due to their position in the firm, act with structure-dominant and structure-constrained practices in strategizing.

One of the oldest debates in literature concerns the respective roles and consequences of analysis and intuition in strategy formation. Mintzberg's provocative article on "Planning on the left side and managing on the right side" (1976) opened a debate with Herbert Simon (Mintzberg 1989). Mintzberg proposed a seductive but reductive analogy between the analysis skills of strategists and the more intuitive, social and synthetic skills of managers. This first article lead to many others and to books in which Mintzberg claims that strategizing formal processes tend to dehumanize strategic thinking and to prevent strategists from being creative (Mintzberg 1994). The debate is not closed, but most of works on strategizing propose a rational and analytical predominance in strategist's cognitive structure (Ericson et al. 2001). Our data can not be used to confirm or not the destruction of creativity caused by analytical cognitive structures and formal processes. However, our results show that intuition is very important for most of the strategists, especially leaders. They rely on intuition to understand their environment and create a strategic vision and many verbatims sound like Duggan's introduction in his recent book : "It's an open secret that good ideas come to you as flashes of insight, often when you don't expect them" (Duggan, 2007). This intuition seems to be linked to the passion strategists express for their work or their sector. Strategists often appear passionate and they claim for being passionate and intuitive in strategizing. Another explanation of the role of intuition could be found in the need for strategists to reduce the cognitive diversity and the complexity of their environment and of the issues they have to deal with. Newest advances in neurosciences and in decision-making empirical studies draw attention on this "old" and recurrent question about the role of intuition. Moldoveanu (2009) shows that managerial algorithmics, based on a computational analysis of managers' decision and formulation cognitive process, can't explain why managers often choose not to deal in an analytical way with non-programmatic problems. Duggan (2007) implicitly proposes that strategic decision being complex and non-programmatic by nature, strategists tend to rely on simple rules and limited conceptualization, thinking them intuitively. This is quite far from the traditional view of strategy as an analytical process, based on structured tools and methods.

Finally, the place of action in strategizing is a dominant dimension of strategists' concerns about their activities. The tension between action and thinking (process dynamics) partly refers to the action/decision debate which was very active in the 1980S and 1990s in academic literature (Laroche 1995). Langley et al. (1995) call "reification" the decision-focused perspective on strategizing. This view of decisions as discrete events has been criticized by many authors. Laroche argues that "more and more theorists are reluctant to use the concepts of decision and decision-making or allow them only a minor role in their propositions about organizations" (1995 : 62). In fact, many studies have shown the difficulty to establish a direct and causal link between decision and action (Quinn 1980 ; Starbuck 1983, 1985 ; Brunsson 1982, 1985). Strategic actions can be initiated without any decision, and many decisions are not followed by action. Our results show that decision is not only a "construct of researchers' mind" (Langley et al. 1995 : 266), but remains also a structuring concept for strategists, since they intensively refer to it. They do not oppose decision and action, but many strategists develop an action-oriented philosophy of strategizing. They think that action is the only judge of strategic thinking and most of them try to limit deliberation and observation in order to rapidly experiment on the field their strategic ideas. This action-oriented posture of strategists reinforces the interest of a practice-oriented perspective on strategy formation (Wittington 2003), but the term "action" should not be understood in a restrictive way : when managers evoke "action", they do not make a strict opposition between action and thinking. They think strategically while acting and act while thinking.

This research highlights the social nature of strategizing and some specifics characteristics of strategists. Being a strategist probably requires some specific individual skills. According to the research, strategists are often intuitive, introspective, visionary and volunteer. Their main qualities are empathy, the ability to listen to carefully and to give sense to weak signals, but they also claim for transgression and disruptive thinking.

Beyond these individual determinants, strategizing is fundamentally a social activity, including learning while acting, negotiation, discussions, political issues, communication. As Mintzberg (2004) critically pointed out in his provocative book "Managers not MBAs", the way strategy is taught in business schools may not allow students to fully realize how complex strategizing can be. Strategic management education is still much concentrated on analytical tools and methods, mainly derived from the content-perspective on strategy (SWOT analysis, portfolio matrixes, case studies, …). If many professors and books include a more organizational and even behavioural approach of strategy in the firm, students can still not

experience the social complexity and the cognitively confusing nature of strategizing. Building on our results, we argue that strategic and business simulations can be of great help to contextualize strategic choices and make students aware of the different intellectual, social and political issues that they will have to face beyond the formal analytical strategic thinking. This requires complete business simulations which include many "hard" parameters (for instance : finance, marketing, social, production decisions), but also which offer the possibility to integrate behavioural and unattended events (breakdown in negotiation, social problems, important changes in the environment or the organization, …). This could help students to get a more accurate and reflexive view on what strategizing is, even if we must keep in mind, as many strategists told us, that being a strategist can not be learnt at school...

Conclusion

Literature on strategy formation has known many (r)evolutions for the last two decades. The single-analytical strategist has been questioned and new perspectives emerged. The strategy as practice is to date the most stimulating corpus for the study of strategizing. The conceptual framework of strategy as practice is not stabilized, but the overall philosophy (studying strategizing through practitioners and their daily practices) opens a new area for the understanding of how strategy are really constructed and how individuals bring their different contributions to it.

This paper is based on the content analysis of 68 interviews with strategists who hold different position in or outside the organization (leaders, managers and experts). Our results highlight four main dimensions of strategizing activities : social orientation, process focus, cognitive orientation and process dynamics. These dimensions correspond to dialogic tensions that strategists have to face when strategizing. Their analysis shows that strategists rely on social interactions, complementary collaborators, intuition and action to develop their strategic agenda. The role of intuition and action are noteworthy. These two characteristics of strategizing have long been undertaken and our results show that they are at the centre of strategists' practices.

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-- APPENDIX A --
-- Interviewer's guide –

1- Interviewee's background :

- Academic background

- Professional experiences

2- Interviewee's present situation :

- Presentation of the organization

- Function and responsibilities

3- Interviewee's definition of strategy

4- Interviewee's activities as a strategist

5- Examples of strategic activities performed

6- Interviewee's relations with others as a strategist

7- Description of the strategic process

8- Tools used for strategizing

9- Qualities needed to be a good strategist

10- Agenda of a strategist

Distribution of interviewees and size of their firm

Interviewees' function	Size of the firm			Total
	100 <	100 < & < 2 000	2 000 <	
Leaders	17	12	4	33
Managers	5	8	3	16
Experts	4	4	11	19
Total	26	24	18	68

Distribution of interviewees and sector of the firm

Interviewees' function	Sector			Total
	Industry	Services	Non profit	
Leaders	10	18	5	33
Managers	6	9	1	16
Experts	8	10	1	19
Total	24	37	7	68

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Police :Italique

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Police :Italique

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Non Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Non Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Non Italique

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Police :Italique

Page 16 : [4] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 20:19

Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

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Page 16 : [6] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:25

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

Page 16 : [7] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 21:46

Anglais (G.B.)

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Page 16 : [7] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:01

Police :Italique

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Page 16 : [8] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:01

Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

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Police :Italique

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Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

Page 17 : [9] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:01

Police :Italique, Anglais (G.B.)

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Police :Italique

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 when it works

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

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Anglais (G.B.)

Page 17 : [13] Mis en forme	Torset	01/07/09 00:10

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screening the market and the competitors, and

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This data collecting phase is not only outside the organization ; s

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. Strategists seem to develop a skill for gathering information, from many sources, including their own experience : "*The good strategist is the one who knows perfectly his environment. For that, either he had different jobs in the structure, or he listens to his managers.*" (CEO, Neil Investment, Private investment).

The second phase in t

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steps

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Non Surlignage

This phase is the one when

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The third phase is political : strategists must negotiate with their stakeholders : "*These power issues in strategizing are very important. You can't make strategic decisions without thinking about the political consequences.*" (COO, Uniteam, advertising and consulting). This political phase is of course different according to the characteristics of the firm or the function of the strategist. Managers and experts are much more concerned by this political phase than leaders are : "*When I wish to make a strategic decision, I have to convince the president. I can bargain, I can refuse to sign my budget for example.*" (Commercial VP, DIAC, banking). This political phase can generate conflicts and many strategists fear them : "*I say to my collaborators 'Enemy is outside, no time to waist with internal conflicts.' We need to focus on our strategy and everyone is responsible.*" (COO, Uniteam, advertising and consulting).

The fourth phase in strategic thinking is managerial : strategists have to explain and convince inside the organization : "*At the beginning of the year, I present to all collaborators the strategic orientations, department by department : the structures, the projects, everything.[...] the human dimension must not be under-estimated. You don't live without men and women, you do with them*" (CEO, Selectour, leisure industry). During this phase, the strategists acts as a sense-giver : "*A strategist must have a vision and must give sense for the strategy to be accepted by everyone.*" (Production manager, Les Echos, Press).

These phases

Surlignage

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Surlignage

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Surlignage

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do not necessarily follow this order, they interact

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are

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Strategic thinking takes time : "*Strategic issues are so important that decision-making is long.*" (Subsidiary manager, Groupama, Insurance industry). Strategists, especially leaders face difficulties to deal with a long-term strategic thinking and short-term problems at the same time : "*The only way is to identify your priorities and to keep the direction. Of course, the difficulty is that the environment changes. The weather changes and it is not because you have a direction that you can't take a different road*" ((strategic planning officer, Casino, retail).

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Page 18 : [30] Mis en forme	Torset	13/01/11 17:01

Police :Gras, Non Italique

Page 18 : [30] Mis en forme	Torset	13/01/11 17:01

Police :Gras

Page 18 : [31] Mis en forme	Torset	13/01/11 17:01

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negotiating

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| Page 18 : [35] Mis en forme | Torset | 01/07/09 13:19 |

Non Surlignage

| Page 18 : [36] Mis en forme | GF | 01/07/09 11:16 |

Surlignage

| Page 18 : [37] Mis en forme | GF | 01/07/09 11:16 |

Surlignage

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Surlignage

| Page 28 : [39] Mis en forme | Torset | 01/07/09 13:23 |

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| Page 28 : [40] Mis en forme | Torset | 01/07/09 13:23 |

Corps de texte 2, Retrait : Gauche : 0 cm, Retrait négatif : 0,63 cm, Espace Avant : 9 pt

| Page 28 : [41] Mis en forme | Torset | 01/07/09 13:23 |

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| Page 28 : [42] Mis en forme | Torset | 01/07/09 13:23 |

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Page 28 : [43] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:39

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Page 28 : [43] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:39

Police :12 pt

Page 28 : [43] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:39

Police :12 pt, Non Italique

Page 28 : [43] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:39

Police :12 pt

Page 28 : [43] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:39

Police :12 pt, Non Italique

Page 28 : [43] Mis en forme	Torset	30/06/09 23:39

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