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Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent

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Summary
Deliberate and emergent strategies may be conceived as two ends of a continuum along which real-world strategies lie. This paper seeks to develop this notion, and some basic issues related to strategic choice, by elaborating along this continuum various types of strategies uncovered in research. These include strategies labelled planned, entrepreneurial, ideological, umbrella, process, unconnected, consensus and imposed.

How do strategies form in organizations? Research into the question is necessarily shaped by the underlying conception of the term. Since strategy has almost inevitably been conceived in terms of what the leaders of an organization 'plan' to do in the future, strategy formation has, not surprisingly, tended to be treated as an analytic process for establishing long-range goals and action plans for an organization; that is, as one of formulation followed by implementation. As important as this emphasis may be, we would argue that it is seriously limited, that the process needs to be viewed from a wider perspective so that the variety of ways in which strategies actually take shape can be considered.

For over 10 years now, we have been researching the process of strategy formation based on the definition of strategy as 'a pattern in a stream of decisions' (Mintzberg, 1972, 1978; Mintzberg and Waters, 1982, 1984; Mintzberg *et al.*, 1986, Mintzberg and McHugh, 1985; Brunet, Mintzberg and Waters, 1986). This definition was developed to 'operationalize' the concept of strategy, namely to provide a tangible basis on which to conduct research into how it forms in organizations. Streams of behaviour could be isolated and strategies identified as patterns or consistencies in such streams. The origins of these strategies could then be investigated, with particular attention paid to exploring the relationship between leadership plans and intentions and what the organizations actually did. Using the label strategy for both of these phenomena—one called *intended*, the other *realized*—encouraged that exploration. (Indeed, by this same logic, and because of practical necessity, we have been drawn into studying strategies as patterns in streams of actions, not decisions, since the latter represent intentions, too. A paper explaining this shift more fully is available from the authors.)

Comparing intended strategy with realized strategy, as shown in Figure 1, has allowed us to distinguish *deliberate* strategies—realized as intended—from *emergent* strategies—patterns or consistencies realized despite, or in the absence of, intentions. These two concepts, and especially their interplay, have become the central themes in our research, which has involved 11 intensive studies (as well as a larger number of smaller ones),

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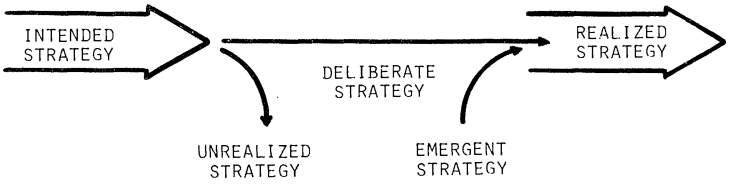


Figure 1. Types of strategies

including a food retailer, a manufacturer of women's undergarments, a magazine, a newspaper, an airline, an automobile firm, a mining company, a university, an architectural firm, a public film agency and a government fighting a foreign war.

This paper sets out to explore the complexity and variety of strategy formation processes by refining and elaborating the concepts of deliberate and emergent strategy. We begin by specifying more precisely what pure deliberate and pure emergent strategies might mean in the context of organization, describing the conditions under which each can be said to exist. What does it mean for an 'organization'—a collection of people joined together to pursue some mission in common—to act deliberately? What does it mean for a strategy to emerge in an organization, not guided by intentions? We then identify various types of strategies that have appeared in our empirical studies, each embodying differing degrees of what might be called deliberateness or emergentness. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of this perspective on strategy formation for research and practice.

PURE DELIBERATE AND PURE EMERGENT STRATEGIES

For a strategy to be perfectly deliberate—that is, for the realized strategy (pattern in actions) to form exactly as intended—at least three conditions would seem to have to be satisfied. First, there must have existed precise intentions in the organization, articulated in a relatively concrete level of detail, so that there can be no doubt about what was desired before any actions were taken. Secondly, because organization means collective action, to dispel any possible doubt about whether or not the intentions were organizational, they must have been common to virtually all the actors: either shared as their own or else accepted from leaders, probably in response to some sort of controls. Thirdly, these collective intentions must have been realized exactly as intended, which means that no external force (market, technological, political, etc.) could have interfered with them. The environment, in other words, must have been either perfectly predictable, totally benign, or else under the full control of the organization. These three conditions constitute a tall order, so that we are unlikely to find any perfectly deliberate strategies in organizations. Nevertheless, some strategies do come rather close, in some dimensions if not all.

For a strategy to be perfectly emergent, there must be order—consistency in action over time—in the absence of intention about it. (No consistency means no strategy or at least unrealized strategy—intentions not met.) It is difficult to imagine action in the *total* absence of intention—in some pocket of the organization if not from the leadership itself—such that we would expect the purely emergent strategy to be as rare as the purely deliberate one. But again, our research suggests that some patterns come rather close, as when an environment directly imposes a pattern of action on an organization.

Thus, we would expect to find tendencies in the directions of deliberate and emergent strategies rather than perfect forms of either. In effect, these two form the poles of a

continuum along which we would expect real-world strategies to fall. Such strategies would combine various states of the dimensions we have discussed above: leadership intentions would be more or less precise, concrete and explicit, and more or less shared, as would intentions existing elsewhere in the organization; central control over organizational actions would be more or less firm and more or less pervasive; and the environment would be more or less benign, more or less controllable and more or less predictable.

Below we introduce a variety of types of strategies that fall along this continuum, beginning with those closest to the deliberate pole and ending with those most reflective of the characteristics of emergent strategy. We present these types, not as any firm or exhaustive typology (although one may eventually emerge), but simply to explore this continuum of emergentness of strategy and to try to gain some insights into the notions of intention, choice and pattern formation in the collective context we call organization.

THE PLANNED STRATEGY

Planning suggests clear and articulated intentions, backed up by formal controls to ensure their pursuit, in an environment that is acquiescent. In other words, here (and only here) does the classic distinction between 'formulation' and 'implementation' hold up.

In this first type, called *planned strategy*, leaders at the centre of authority formulate their intentions as precisely as possible and then strive for their implementation—their translation into collective action—with a minimum of distortion, 'surprise-free'. To ensure this, the leaders must first articulate their intentions in the form of a plan, to minimize confusion, and then elaborate this plan in as much detail as possible, in the form of budgets, schedules and so on, to pre-empt discretion that might impede its realization. Those outside the planning process may act, but to the extent possible they are not allowed to decide. Programmes that guide their behaviour are built into the plan, and formal controls are instituted to ensure pursuit of the plan and the programmes.

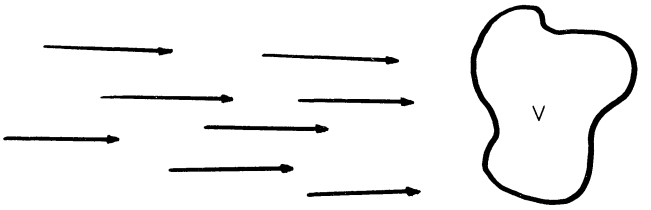
But the plan is of no use if it cannot be applied as formulated in the environment surrounding the organization so the planned strategy is found in an environment that is, if not benign or controllable, then at least rather predictable. Some organizations, as Galbraith (1967) describes the 'new industrial states', are powerful enough to impose their plans on their environments. Others are able to predict their environments with enough accuracy to pursue rather deliberate, planned strategies. We suspect, however, that many planned strategies are found in organizations that simply extrapolate established patterns in environments that they assume will remain stable. In fact, we have argued elsewhere (Mintzberg and Waters, 1982) that strategies appear not to be *conceived* in planning processes so much as elaborated from existing visions or copied from standard industry recipes (see Grinyer and Spender, 1979); planning thus becomes programming, and the planned strategy finds its origins in one of the other types of strategies described below.

Although few strategies can be planned to the degree described above, some do come rather close, particularly in organizations that must commit large quantities of resources to particular missions and so cannot tolerate unstable environments. They may spend years considering their actions, but once they decide to act, they commit themselves firmly. In effect, they deliberate so that their strategies can be rather deliberate. Thus, we studied a

mining company that had to engage in a most detailed form of planning to exploit a new ore body in an extremely remote part of Quebec. Likewise, we found a very strong planning orientation in our study of Air Canada, necessary to co-ordinate the purchase of new, expensive jet aircraft with a relatively fixed route structure. Our study of the United States government's escalation of military activity in Vietnam also revealed a rather planned strategy. Once Lyndon Johnson announced his decision to escalate in 1965, the military planners took over and articulated the intentions in detail (or pulled out existing contingency plans), and pursued the strategy vigorously until 1968 when it became clear that the environment was less controllable than it had seemed (Mintzberg, 1978).

(Note the distinction here between unrealized strategy—that is, intentions not successfully realized—and realized strategy that is unsuccessful in its consequences. The intention to escalate was realized, in fact from Johnson's point of view, *over*-realized; it just did not achieve its objective. In contrast, John F. Kennedy's earlier intention to provide advisers to the Vietnam army was not realized to the extent that those advisers became combatants. It should be noted, however, that the degree of deliberateness is not a measure of the potential success of a strategy. In our research, we have come across rather emergent strategies as well as rather deliberate ones that have been highly successful (see the discussion of the experimental film strategy later in the text for an example of the former) and others of both types that have been dramatic failures.)

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL STRATEGY



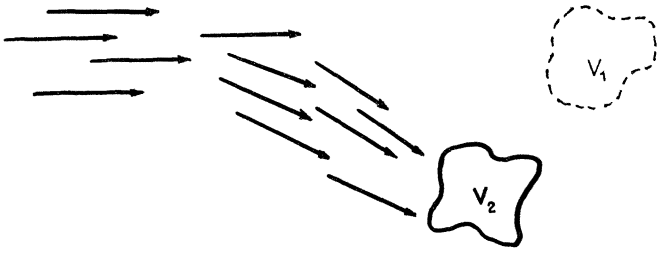
In this second type of strategy, we relax the condition of precise, articulated intentions. Here, one individual in personal control of an organization is able to impose his or her vision of direction on it. Because such strategies are rather common in entrepreneurial firms, tightly controlled by their owners, they can be called *entrepreneurial strategies*.

In this case, the force for pattern or consistency in action is individual vision, the central actor's *concept* of his or her organization's place in its world. This is coupled with an ability to impose that vision on the organization through his or her personal control of its actions (e.g. through giving direct orders to its operating personnel). Of course, the environment must again be co-operative. But entrepreneurial strategies most commonly appear in young and/or small organizations (where personal control is feasible), which are able to find relatively safe niches in their environments. Indeed, the selection of such niches is an integral part of the vision. These strategies can, however, sometimes be found in larger organizations as well, particularly under conditions of crisis where all the actors are willing to follow the direction of a single leader who has vision and will.

Is the entrepreneurial strategy deliberate? Intentions do exist. But they derive from one individual who need not articulate or elaborate them. Indeed, for reasons discussed below,

he or she is typically unlikely to want to do so. Thus, the intentions are both more difficult to identify and less specific than those of the planned strategy. Moreover, there is less overt acceptance of these intentions on the part of other actors in the organization. Nevertheless, so long as those actors respond to the personal will of the leader, the strategy would appear to be rather deliberate.

In two important respects, however, that strategy can have emergent characteristics as well. First, as indicated in the previous diagram, vision provides only a general sense of direction. Within it, there is room for adaptation: the details of the vision can emerge *en route*. Secondly, because the leader's vision is personal, it can also be changed completely. To put this another way, since here the formulator is the implementor, step by step, that person can react quickly to feedback on past actions or to new opportunities or threats in the environment. He or she can thus reformulate vision, as shown in the figure below.



It is this adaptability that distinguishes the entrepreneurial strategy from the planned one. Visions contained in single brains would appear to be more flexible, assuming the individual's willingness to learn,[1] than plans articulated through hierarchies, which are comprised of many brains. Adaptation (and emergentness) of planned strategies are discouraged by the articulation of intentions and by the separation between formulation and implementation. Psychologists have shown that the articulation of a strategy locks it into place, impeding willingness to change it (e.g. Kiesler, 1971). The separation of implementation from formulation gives rise to a whole system of commitments and procedures, in the form of plans, programmes and controls elaborated down a hierarchy. Instead of one individual being able to change his or her mind, the whole system must be redesigned. Thus, despite the claims of flexible planning, the fact is that organizations plan not to be flexible but to realize specific intentions. It is the entrepreneurial strategy that provides flexibility, at the expense of the specificity and articulation of intentions.

Entrepreneurial strategies have appeared in our research, not surprisingly, in two companies that were controlled personally by their aggressive owners—one the food retail chain, the other the manufacturer of women's undergarments. Here, typically, when important aspects of the environment changed, strong new visions emerged rather quickly, followed by long periods of deliberate pursuit of these visions. But as both organizations grew and became more formalized, the visions became the basis for planning (programming), and thereafter decisive changes were less in evidence. This led us to suspect that planned strategies often follow entrepreneurial ones, based on the vision of leaders, sometimes ones who have departed the organization (see Mintzberg and Waters, 1982, 1984).

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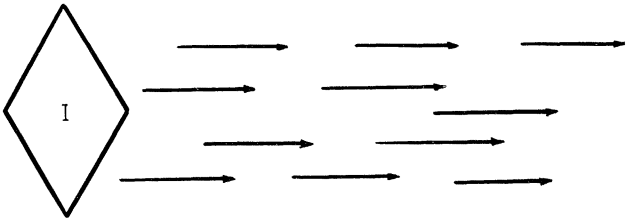
[1] An interesting situation arises when the vision is beyond even the control of the individual himself, so that he or she pursues a pattern of action due to inner, subconscious forces (as, say, when the leader chooses to produce only unconventional products, perhaps because of a phobia about being ordinary). Such 'subconscious' strategies would probably be more difficult to change than those based on more conscious visions.

THE IDEOLOGICAL STRATEGY



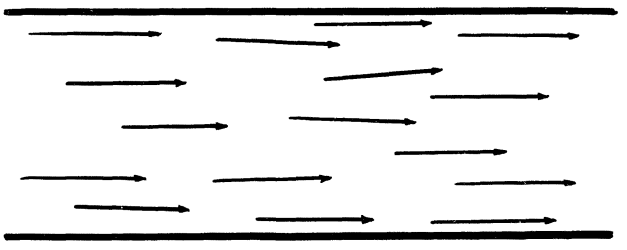
Vision can be collective as well as individual. When the members of an organization share a vision and identify so strongly with it that they pursue it as an ideology, then they are bound to exhibit patterns in their behaviour, so that clear realized strategies can be identified. These may be called *ideological strategies*.

Can an ideological strategy be considered deliberate? Since the ideology is likely to be somewhat overt (e.g. in programmes of indoctrination), and perhaps even articulated (in rough, inspirational form, such as a credo), intentions can usually be identified. The question thus revolves around whether these intentions can be considered organizational and whether they are likely to be realized as intended. In an important sense, these intentions would seem to be most clearly organizational. Whereas the intentions of the planned and entrepreneurial strategies emanate from one centre and are accepted passively by everyone else, those of the ideological strategy are positively embraced by the members of the organization.

As for their realization, because the intentions exist as a rough vision, they can presumably be adapted or changed. But collective vision is far more immutable than individual vision. All who share it must agree to change their 'collective mind'. Moreover, ideology is rooted in the past, in traditions and precedents (often the institutionalization of the vision of a departed, charismatic leader: one person's vision has become everyone's ideology). People, therefore, resist changing it. The object is to interpret 'the word', not to defy it. Finally, the environment is unlikely to impose change: the purpose of ideology, after all, is to change the environment or else to insulate the organization from it. For all these reasons, therefore, ideological strategy would normally be highly deliberate, perhaps more so than any type of strategy except the planned one.

We have not as yet studied any organization dominated by an ideology. But such strategies do seem to occur in certain organizations described in the literature, notably in certain Israeli kibbutzim, 'distinctive colleges', and some charitable institutions (see Clark, 1970, 1972; Sills, 1957; also Mintzberg, 1983: Chapters 11 and 21).

THE UMBRELLA STRATEGY



Now we begin to relax the condition of tight control (whether bureaucratic, personal or ideological) over the mass of actors in the organization and, in some cases, the condition of tight control over the environment as well. Leaders who have only partial control over other actors in an organization may design what can be called *umbrella strategies*. They set general guidelines for behaviour—define the boundaries—and then let other actors manoeuvre within them. In effect, these leaders establish kinds of umbrellas under which organizational actions are expected to fall—for example that all products should be designed for the high-priced end of the market (no matter what those products might be).

When an environment is complex, and perhaps somewhat uncontrollable and unpredictable as well, a variety of actors in the organization must be able to respond to it. In other words, the patterns in organizational actions cannot be set deliberately in one central place, although the boundaries may be established there to constrain them. From the perspective of the leadership (if not, perhaps, the individual actors), therefore, strategies are allowed to emerge, at least within these boundaries. In fact, we can label the umbrella strategy not only deliberate and emergent (intended at the centre in its broad outlines but not in its specific details), but also 'deliberately emergent' (in the sense that the central leadership intentionally creates the conditions under which strategies can emerge).

Like the entrepreneurial strategy, the umbrella one represents a certain vision emanating from the central leadership. But here those who have the vision do not control its realization; instead they must convince others to pursue it. The umbrella at least puts limits on the actions of others and ideally provides a sense of direction as well. Sometimes the umbrella takes the form of a more specific target, as in a NASA that concentrated its efforts during the 1960s on putting a man on the moon. In the light of this specific target, all kinds of strategies emerged, as various technical problems were solved by thousands of different specialists.

The architectural firm in our research provides a good example of umbrella strategy. The partners made it clear what kinds of buildings they wished to design: unique, excellent and highly visible ones that would 'celebrate the spirit of the community'. Under that umbrella, anything went—performing arts centres, office buildings, hotels, etc. The firm occasionally filled in gaps with smaller projects of a more mundane nature, but it never committed itself to a major undertaking that strayed from those central criteria (Mintzberg *et al.*, 1986).[2]

We have so far described the umbrella strategy as one among a number of types that are possible. But, in some sense, virtually all real-world strategies have umbrella characteristics. That is to say, in no organization can the central leadership totally pre-empt the discretion of others (as was assumed in the planned and entrepreneurial strategies) and, by the same token, in none does a central leadership defer totally to others (unless it has ceased to lead). Almost all strategy making behaviour involves, therefore, to some degree at least, a central leadership with some sort of intentions trying to direct, guide, cajole or nudge others with ideas of their own. When the leadership is able to direct, we move towards the realm of the planned or entrepreneurial strategies; when it can hardly nudge, we move toward the realm of the more emergent strategies. But in the broad range between these two can always be found strategies with umbrella characteristics.

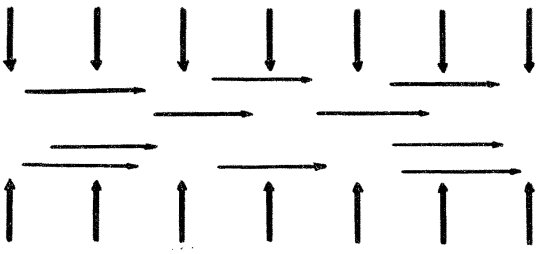
In its pursuit of an umbrella strategy—which means, in essence, defining general direction subject to varied interpretation—the central leadership must monitor the behaviour of other actors to assess whether or not the boundaries are being respected. In

[2] Of course, to the extent that other architects in the firm embraced these criteria, instead of merely accepting them as the intentions of the central leadership, the strategy could have been labelled ideological.

essence, like us, it searches for patterns in streams of actions. When actors are found to stray outside the boundaries (whether inadvertently or intentionally), the central leadership has three choices: to stop them, ignore them (perhaps for a time, to see what will happen), or adjust to them. In other words, when an arm pokes outside the umbrella, you either pull it in, leave it there (although it might get wet), or move the umbrella over to cover it.

In this last case, the leadership exercises the option of altering its own vision in response to the behaviour of others. Indeed, this would appear to be the place where much effective strategic learning takes place—through leadership response to the initiatives of others. The leadership that is never willing to alter its vision in such a way forgoes important opportunities and tends to lose touch with its environment (although, of course, the one too willing to do so may be unable to sustain any central direction). The umbrella strategy thus requires a light touch, maintaining a subtle balance between proaction and reaction.

THE PROCESS STRATEGY



Similar to the umbrella strategy is what can be called the *process strategy*. Again, the leadership functions in an organization in which other actors must have considerable discretion to determine outcomes, because of an environment that is complex and perhaps also unpredictable and uncontrollable. But instead of trying to control strategy content at a general level, through boundaries or targets, the leadership instead needs to exercise influence indirectly. Specifically, it controls the *process* of strategy making while leaving the *content* of strategy to other actors. Again, the resulting behaviour would be deliberate in one respect and emergent in others: the central leadership designs the system that allows others the flexibility to evolve patterns within it.

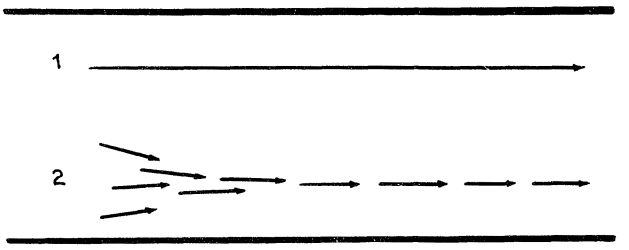
The leadership may, for example, control the staffing of the organization, thereby determining who gets to make strategy if not what that strategy will be (all the while knowing that control of the former constitutes considerable influence over the latter). Or it may design the structure of the organization to determine the working context of those who get to make strategy. Thus, it was claimed recently that '75 per cent of the (Hewlett Packard) plan is devoted to the new product portfolio generation *process*'.[3]

Divisionalized organizations of a conglomerate nature commonly use process strategies: the central headquarters creates the basic structure, establishes the control systems and appoints the division managers, who are then expected to develop strategies for their own businesses (typically planned ones for reasons outlined by Mintzberg, 1979:384–392); note that techniques such as those introduced by the Boston Consulting Group to manage the

[3] Statement by Thomas Peters at the Strategic Management Society Conference 'Exploring the Strategy-making Process', Montreal, 8 October, 1982; emphasis added.

business portfolios of divisionalized companies, by involving headquarters in the business strategies to some extent, bring their strategies back into the realm of umbrella ones.

THE UNCONNECTED STRATEGIES



The *unconnected strategy* is perhaps the most straightforward one of all. One part of the organization with considerable discretion—a subunit, sometimes even a single individual—because it is only loosely coupled to the rest, is able to realize its own pattern in its stream of actions. Our clearest example of this appeared in the study of the National Film Board of Canada, a producer of primarily short films, where the central leadership seldom dictated the content of films. From the 1940s to the mid-1960s, the Film Board produced, among many others, a thin but steady stream of experimental films; after that, their number increased significantly. In fact, with one exception, every single film up to 1960 was made by one person, Norman McLaren, the Board's most celebrated film-maker. McLaren, in other words, pursued his own personal strategy—'did his own thing', as the saying goes—for decades, quite independently of the activities of other film-makers.

How deliberate or emergent are these unconnected strategies? Since they come neither from a central leadership nor from intentions in the organization at large, they would seem to be relatively emergent from the perspective of the entire organization. But from the perspective of the unit or individual involved, clearly they can be deliberate or emergent, depending on the prior existence of intentions.

Identifying intentions is a tricky business in any context. Who can be sure that what was articulated was truly intended. Moreover, in the collective context, there is the problem of determining whose intentions really matter, and of dealing with conflicting intentions. These problems may be absent in the context of the individual, but they are replaced by others. For example, the individual pursuing a personal strategy is unlikely to have to articulate his or her intentions before actions are taken, and that can influence the very existence of intentions. Consider the experimental film strategy of Norman McLaren. Was it deliberate? For McLaren himself, it could conceivably have been. That is, he may have developed a general intention to make a stream of experimental films, at least after his initial successes. But why should he have done so? Surely McLaren did not say to himself in 1943: 'I shall make experimental films for the next 30 years'. More likely, he just decided on one film at a time, in effect being deliberate about individual films (although these too may have emerged) but not about the pattern in the sequence of them.

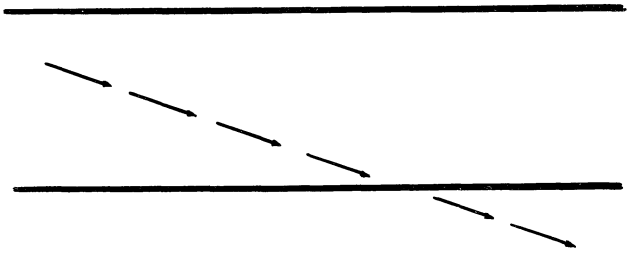
The fact that a Norman McLaren has no need to articulate his intentions (unlike, at least in some cases, a leader in charge of other people) means that no one can ever be sure what he intended (or, more exactly, what he would have claimed he intended). To take another example, used in a previous paper to illustrate the definition of realized strategy (Mintzberg,

1978: 935), Picasso's blue period can be called a personal blue strategy, since there was consistency in his use of colour across a sequence of his paintings. But did Picasso 'decide' to paint blue for a given period of his life, or did he simply feel like using that blue each time he painted during these years?

The fact that neither a McLaren nor a Picasso had to explain their intentions to anyone (McLaren at least not beyond saying enough in his organizational context to get funding for a single film at a time) meant that neither was forced to think them through. This probably allowed those intentions to remain rather vague, to themselves as well as to others around them, and so probably encouraged a degree of emergentness in their behaviours.

The example of Norman McLaren is indicative of the fact that unconnected strategies tend to proliferate in organizations of experts, reflecting the complexity of the environments that they face and the resulting need for considerable control by the experts over their own work, providing freedom not only from administrators but sometimes from their own peers as well. Thus, many hospitals and universities appear to be little more than collections of personal strategies, with hardly any discernible central vision or umbrella, let alone plan, linking them together. Each expert pursues his or her own strategies—method of patient care, subject of research, style of teaching. On the other hand, in organizations that do pursue central, rather deliberate strategies, even planned ones, unconnected strategies can sometimes be found in remote enclaves, either tolerated by the system or lost within it.

As indicated in the previous diagram, unconnected strategies may be deliberate or emergent for the actors involved (although always emergent from the perspective of the organization at large). Also, although they are shown within an umbrella strategy, clearly they can fall outside of these, too. Indeed, some unconnected strategies directly contradict umbrella ones (or even more centrally imposed planned or entrepreneurial ones), in effect developing on a clandestine basis. Allison (1971), for example, describes how President Kennedy's directive to defuse the missile bases in Turkey during the Cuban Missile Crisis was deliberately ignored by the military leaders. We show such clandestine strategies in the figure below as a sequence of arrows breaking out of an umbrella strategy. These arrows signify that even though the strategy is likely to be deliberate from the point of view of its proponents, it cannot be articulated as such: they cannot reveal their intentions. To minimize their risk of exposure, they seek to realize intentions subtly, action by action, as if the strategy was emergent. Of course, that increases the chances that the intentions will get deflected along the way. If they do not, there is still the risk that the leadership will realize what is happening—will recognize the pattern in the stream of actions—and stop the strategy. The leadership can, however, play the game too, waiting to see what happens, knowing it too can learn from clandestine behaviour. If the strategy should prove successful, it can always be accepted and broadened—internalized in the system as a (henceforth) deliberate strategy. Our suspicion is that much strategic adaptation results from unconnected strategies (whether or not clandestine) that succeed and so pervade the organization.



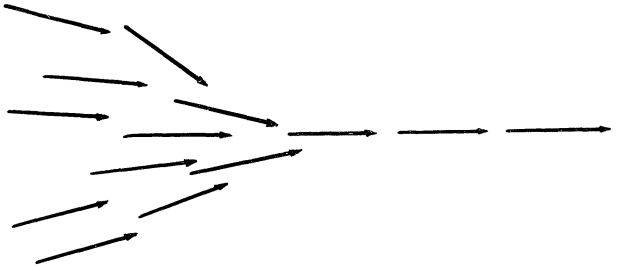
THE CONSENSUS STRATEGY

In no strategy so far discussed have we totally dropped the condition of prior intention. The next type is rather more clearly emergent. Here many different actors naturally converge on the same theme, or pattern, so that it becomes pervasive in the organization, without the need for any central direction or control. We call it the *consensus strategy*. Unlike the ideological strategy, in which a consensus forms around a system of beliefs (thus reflecting intentions widely accepted in the organization), the consensus strategy grows out of the mutual adjustment among different actors, as they learn from each other and from their various responses to the environment and thereby find a common, and probably unexpected, pattern that works for them.

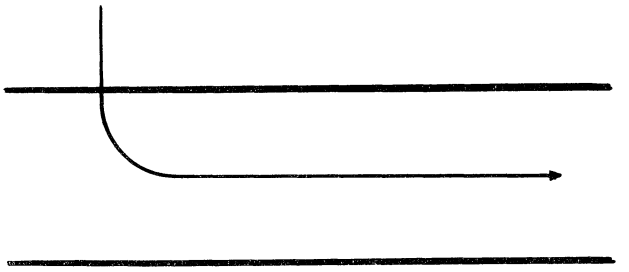
In other words, the convergence is not driven by any intentions of a central management, nor even by prior intentions widely shared among the other actors. It just evolves through the results of a host of individual actions. Of course, certain actors may actively promote the consensus, perhaps even negotiate with their colleagues to attain it (as in the congressional form of government). But the point is that it derives more from collective action than from collective intention.

Our clearest example of a consensus strategy formed so fast that it seemed literally spontaneous. In the early 1950s, the National Film Board of Canada made its first film for television and in a matter of months the organization found itself concentrating two-thirds of its efforts in that medium. Despite heated debate and indications of managerial intentions to the contrary, one film-maker set the precedent by making that first film, and many of the others quickly followed suit. (In fact, the strategy lasted about 4 years and then disappeared just as spontaneously as it began.) Such spontaneity presumably reflects a strong drive for consistency (the Film Board having been groping for a new focus of attention for several years). As soon as the right idea comes along, the consensus crystallizes quickly, much as does a supersaturated solution the moment it is disturbed. We have been speculating on possible uses for the term intuition in a collective context; the spontaneous strategy might be a good example of 'organizational intuition'.

When the convergence is on a general theme rather than a specific activity (such as making films for television), the consensus is likely to develop more gradually: individual actions would take time to be understood and to pervade the organization as precedents. An electronics manufacturer may find itself concentrating on high quality products after it had achieved success with a number of such products, or a university may find itself over the years favouring the sciences over the humanitites as its members came to realize that this is where its real strengths lie.



THE IMPOSED STRATEGIES



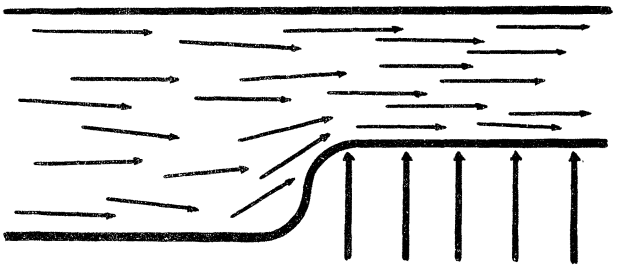
All the strategies so far discussed have derived in part at least from the will (if not the intentions) of actors within the organization. The environment has been considered, if not benign, then at least acquiescent. But strategies can be *imposed* from outside as well; that is, the environment can directly force the organization into a pattern in its stream of actions, regardless of the presence of central controls. The clearest case of this occurs when an external individual or group with a great deal of influence over the organization imposes a strategy on it. We saw this in our study of the state-owned Air Canada, when the minister who created and controlled the airline in its early years forced it to buy and fly a particular type of aircraft. Here the imposed strategy was clearly deliberate, but not by anyone in the organization. However, given its inability to resist, the organization had to resign itself to the pursuit of the strategy, so that it became, in effect, deliberate.

Sometimes the 'environment' rather than people *per se* impose strategies on organizations, simply by severely restricting the options open to them. Air Canada chose to fly jet aeroplanes and later wide-body aeroplanes. But did it? Could any 'world class' airline have decided otherwise? Again the organization has internalized the imperative so that strategic choice becomes a moot point. To draw from another of our studies, did Lyndon Johnson 'choose' to escalate the United States' involvement in Vietnam in 1965? Kennedy's earlier intended strategy of providing advisers for the South Vietnamese became an emergent strategy of engagement in a hot war, imposed by the environment (namely the actions of the Vietcong; of course, to the extent that the military advisers intended to fight, the strategy might be more accurately described as clandestine). The result was that by the time Johnson faced the decision to escalate, the pressures were almost inescapable. So he 'decided', and the strategy became a planned one.

Many planned strategies in fact seem to have this determined quality to them—pursued by organizations resigned to co-operating with external forces. One is reminded here of the king in the Saint-Exupéry (1946) story of *The Little Prince*, who only gave orders that could be executed. He claimed, for example, that he could order the sun to set, but only at a certain time of the day. The point is that when intentions are sufficiently malleable, everything can seem deliberate.

Reality, however, seems to bring organizations closer to a compromise position between determinism and free choice. Environments seldom pre-empt all choice, just as they seldom offer unlimited choice. That is why purely determined strategies are probably as rare as purely planned ones. Alternatively, just as the umbrella strategy may be the most realistic reflection of leadership intention, so too might the partially imposed strategy be the most

realistic reflection of environmental influence. As shown in the figure below, the environment bounds what the organization can do, in this illustration determining under what part of the umbrella the organization can feasibly operate. Earlier we described the umbrella strategy of the architectural firm we studied. During one period in its history, it was repeatedly selected to design performing arts centres, even though it was prepared to work on a wide variety of building types. The environment (namely the clients) made its choices for it and so determined its specific strategy for a time, but only within the strategic umbrella acceptable to it. Just as we argued earlier that virtually all real-world strategies have umbrella characteristics, so too do we add here that virtually all have environmental boundaries.



This completes our discussion of various types of strategies. Table 1 summarizes some of their major features.

EMERGING CONCLUSIONS

This paper has been written to open up thinking about strategy formation, to broaden perspectives that may remain framed in the image of it as an *a priori*, analytic process or even as a sharp dichotomy between strategies as either deliberate or emergent. We believe that more research is required on the process of strategy formation to complement the extensive work currently taking place on the content of strategies; indeed, we believe that research on the former can significantly influence the direction taken by research on the latter (and vice versa).

One promising line of research is investigation of the strategy formation process and of the types of strategies realized as a function of the structure and context of organizations. Do the various propositions suggested in this paper, based on our own limited research, in fact hold up in broader samples, for example, that strategies will tend to be more deliberate in tightly coupled, centrally controlled organizations and more emergent in decentralized, loosely coupled ones?

It would also be interesting to know how different types of strategies perform in various contexts and also how these strategies relate to those defined in terms of specific content. Using Porter's (1980) categories, for example, will cost leadership strategies prove more deliberate (specifically, more often planned), differentiation strategies more emergent (perhaps umbrella in nature), or perhaps entrepreneurial? Or using Miles and Snow's (1978) typology, will defenders prove more deliberate in orientation and inclined to use planned strategies, whereas prospectors tend to be more emergent and more prone to rely on umbrella or process, or even unconnected, strategies? It may even be possible that highly deliberate strategy making processes will be found to drive organizations away from

Table 1. Summary description of types of strategies

Strategy	Major features
Planned	Strategies originate in formal plans: precise intentions exist, formulated and articulated by central leadership, backed up by formal controls to ensure surprise-free implementation in benign, controllable or predictable environment; strategies most deliberate
Entrepreneurial	Strategies originate in central vision: intentions exist as personal, unarticulated vision of single leader, and so adaptable to new opportunities; organization under personal control of leader and located in protected niche in environment; strategies relatively deliberate but can emerge
Ideological	Strategies originate in shared beliefs: intentions exist as collective vision of all actors, in inspirational form and relatively immutable, controlled normatively through indoctrination and/or socialization; organization often proactive *vis-à-vis* environment; strategies rather deliberate
Umbrella	Strategies originate in constraints: leadership, in partial control of organizational actions, defines strategic boundaries or targets within which other actors respond to own forces or to complex, perhaps also unpredictable environment; strategies partly deliberate, partly emergent and deliberately emergent
Process	Strategies originate in process: leadership controls process aspects of strategy (hiring, structure, etc.), leaving content aspects to other actors; strategies partly deliberate, partly emergent (and, again, deliberately emergent)
Unconnected	Strategies originate in enclaves: actor(s) loosely coupled to rest of organization produce(s) patterns in own actions in absence of, or in direct contradiction to, central or common intentions; strategies organizationally emergent whether or not deliberate for actor(s)
Consensus	Strategies originate in consensus: through mutual adjustment, actors converge on patterns that become pervasive in absence of central or common intentions; strategies rather emergent
Imposed	Strategies originate in environment: environment dictates patterns in actions either through direct imposition or through implicitly pre-empting or bounding organizational choice; strategies most emergent, although may be internalized by organization and made deliberate

prospecting activities and towards cost leadership strategies whereas emergent ones may encourage the opposite postures.

The interplay of the different types of strategies we have described can be another avenue of inquiry: the nesting of personal strategies within umbrella ones or their departure in clandestine form from centrally imposed umbrellas; the capacity of unconnected strategies to evoke organizational ones of a consensus or even a planned nature as peripheral patterns that succeed pervade the organization; the conversion of entrepreneurial strategies into ideological or planned ones as vision becomes institutionalized one way or another; the possible propensity of imposed strategies to become deliberate as they are internalized within the organization; and so on. An understanding of how these different types of strategies blend into each other and tend to sequence themselves over time in different contexts could reveal a good deal about the strategy formation process.

At a more general level, the whole question of how managers learn from the experiences of their own organizations seems to be fertile ground for research. In our view, the fundamental difference between deliberate and emergent strategy is that whereas the former focuses on direction and control—getting desired things done—the latter opens up this notion of 'strategic learning'. Defining strategy as intended and conceiving it as deliberate, as has traditionally been done, effectively precludes the notion of strategic learning. Once the intentions have been set, attention is riveted on realizing them, not on adapting them.

Messages from the environment tend to get blocked out. Adding the concept of emergent strategy, based on the definition of strategy as realized, opens the process of strategy making up to the notion of learning.

Emergent strategy itself implies learning what works—taking one action at a time in search for that viable pattern or consistency. It is important to remember that emergent strategy means, not chaos, but, in essence, *unintended order*. It is also frequently the means by which deliberate strategies change. As shown in Figure 2, in the feedback loop added to our basic diagram, it is often through the identification of emergent strategies—its patterns never intended—that managers and others in the organization come to change their intentions. This is another way of saying that not a few deliberate strategies are simply emergent ones that have been uncovered and subsequently formalized. Of course, unrealized strategies are also a source of learning, as managers find out which of their intentions do not work, rejected either by their organizations themselves or else by environments that are less than acquiescent.

We wish to emphasize that emergent strategy does not have to mean that management is out of control, only—in some cases at least—that it is open, flexible and responsive, in other words, willing to learn. Such behaviour is especially important when an environment is too unstable or complex to comprehend, or too imposing to defy. Openness to such emergent strategy enables management to act before everything is fully understood—to respond to an evolving reality rather than having to focus on a stable fantasy. For example, distinctive competence cannot always be assessed on paper *a priori*; often, perhaps usually, it has to be discovered empirically, by taking actions that test where strengths and weaknesses really lie. Emergent strategy also enables a management that cannot be close enough to a situation, or to know enough about the varied activities of its organization, to surrender control to those who have the information current and detailed enough to shape realistic strategies. Whereas the more deliberate strategies tend to emphasize central direction and hierarchy, the more emergent ones open the way for collective action and convergent behaviour.

Of course, by the same token, deliberate strategy is hardly dysfunctional either. Managers need to manage too, sometimes to impose intentions on their organizations—to provide a sense of direction. That can be partial, as in the cases of umbrella and process strategies, or it can be rather comprehensive, as in the cases of planned and entrepreneurial strategies. When the necessary information can be brought to a central place and environments can be largely understood and predicted (or at least controlled), then it may be appropriate to suspend strategic learning for a time to pursue intentions with as much determination as possible (see Mintzberg and Waters, 1984).

Our conclusion is that strategy formation walks on two feet, one deliberate, the other emergent. As noted earlier, managing requires a light deft touch—to direct in order to realize intentions while at the same time responding to an unfolding pattern of action. The relative emphasis may shift from time to time but not the requirement to attend to both sides of this phenomenon.

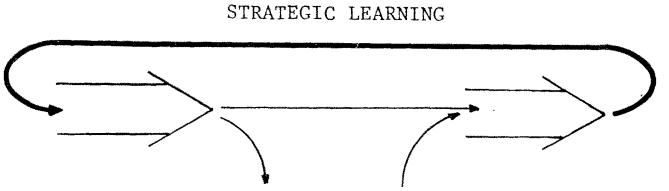


Figure 2

We need to know more about the responding side of this directing/responding dialectic. More specifically, we would like to know more about how managers track the realized strategies of their own organizations. A major component of that elusive concept called 'strategic control' may be in managers doing what we do as researchers: searching for patterns in streams of organizational actions. Pattern recognition is likely to prove a crucial ability of effective managers and crucial to effective organizations may be the facilitation of self-awareness on the part of all its members of the patterns of its own actions and their consequences over time. Strategic choice requires that kind of awareness; a high degree of it is likely to characterize effective managers and effective organizations.

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