

## Moments of Strategy

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From a practice perspective, studying strategy amounts to stressing that **Strategizing** is something that is *done* in various contexts, an activity that we can refer to as “moments of strategy” (Bencherki et al., 2021; Cooren et al., 2024; Vásquez et al., 2018). Identifying such moments of strategy has typically appeared straightforward to analysts: any event labelled as a “strategic meeting” or involving a sufficient number of top managers who are discussing strategy is, surely, a strategic event worthy of study. However, recent research, especially on the notion of **Open strategy**, now recognizes that strategizing involves diverse people, in a range of settings. Indeed, research now recognizes that strategy involves the **Participation** of a diverse array of stakeholders and employees. Strategy scholars growingly consider that it is an everyday practice (Samra-Fredericks, 2005), that occurs in different places and times, meetings being but a site among others (Balogun et al., 2015; Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008). For these reasons, identifying the specific places and times where and when it happens turns out to be less obvious. Strategy scholars and practitioners cannot only intervene when they assume that strategy will be the topic of conversation; they must also pay attention to other, more quotidian facets of work, as issues may turn out to be strategic (or fail to do so) at any moment.

To address that difficulty, authors have suggested that strategizing takes place during “*fleeting* moments of strategy” (Cooren et al., 2024; emphasis added): it does not only occur during dedicated events, such as a strategic retreat or a board meeting, but may happen in any communicative event. In other words, any interaction may potentially turn to strategizing. At the same time, some meetings dedicated to strategy may in fact include conversations and texts that

are not strategic in nature or even be not about strategizing at all. The notion of fleeting moments of strategy thus avoids external and a priori definitions of what counts as strategizing (e.g., by those who set a meeting's agenda) and invites looking instead at the actual content of interactions for episodes where the conversation turns to strategizing or other forms of talk. Such analysis requires being precise on what defines strategizing and what its recognizable features look like.

Various studies have made suggestions on what defines strategizing. Strategizing, for instance, would occur when participants couple different issues or ideas with strategy, cognitively, relationally and materially (Gond et al., 2018). For instance, as shown by Gond et al. (2018), an organization's management team may, through a succession of moments of strategy, start considering corporate responsibility as "strategic" (cognitive coupling), mobilize internal actors around that issue (relational coupling), and include CSR indicators in auditing systems (material coupling). Researchers can observe how such communicative practices relate an issue to strategy, hence witnessing a shift from everyday talk to strategizing conversation. Other authors have suggested that an issue, or a "matter of concern," may gradually gain more materiality throughout talk and inscription in artefacts, as it is substantiated by others (Bencherki et al., 2021; Vásquez et al., 2018). Such materiality may consist in the choice of words in conversations, as well as in the diversity of **Strategy Texts** and **Artefacts**, such as **Power Point** presentations, which also play a part in those strategic conversations. As it materializes in increasing numbers of ways, that issue may reveal itself to be constraining and guiding the actions of people and teams, thus becoming a "matter of authority." In that sense, an issue gains its strategic character as all participants to a communication episode, such a meeting, collectively materialize it *more or less* in their talk, in their writings on the whiteboard or on flipcharts, and in their other communication practices (Nathues et al., 2023), in specific ways that authorize (or not) specific courses of action (see **Sociomateriality** and **Performativity**). For instance, if the issue of personnel retention is evoked by one person, then repeated by another, written in a PowerPoint slide, and put on the agenda for the next meeting, then participants are, in a sense, committing themselves to dealing with it, and making it harder for their future selves to reject it as a potentially strategic concern.

Another telling example of a fleeting moment of strategy is provided by Cooren et al. (2024): during the management meeting of a community organization, one set of concerns turns out to be recognized as strategic, while another item, which had clearly been marked as strategic in the meeting's agenda, is dismissed as not being as crucial as initially anticipated. On the one hand, while the director of the organization tells an anecdote of having attended a borough council meeting, other people around the table ask him various questions, that eventually lead the

group to realize that an apparently insignificant decision by their local representatives may affect their funding, and that something needs to be done about it. On the other hand, when the group reaches an item on the agenda that is clearly related to strategy, namely a request from their funding agency to produce a strategic plan as a condition to their contract renewal, both the director and the assistant manager dismiss that item as unimportant, based on the fact that the agency's staff is slow to respond to phone calls, which would indicate a lack of concern on their part. Eventually, the group agrees to postpone that agenda item until their next meeting. This analysis illustrates both that strategizing can happen when it is not expected, *and* that it may fail to take place even at moments that are supposed to be dedicated to it. Communication plays a crucial role in the two cases.

Pinpointing fleeting moments of strategy requires that researchers identify how **Strategic Episodes** can be recognized as such, although they are not inherently distinct from routine organizational activities. Indeed, the notion is inspired by communicative approaches to organizing (see CCO; see also Basque et al., 2022). That stream of literature has pointed out that different aspects of organizational reality, such as authority or membership, result from communicative processes and more specifically the interconnection of communicative events (Schoeneborn, 2011). Research must therefore pay attention to the precise ways in which such events are connected together and demarcate a moment when strategizing takes place. Doing so will require researchers to work with practitioners, for instance to participative methods such as action-research and **Shadowing**, to identify what counts for them as strategic, and list a set of analytical pointers for identifying the communicative events and practices through which conversations transition into strategizing, emphasizing the relational and material dimensions involved.

In sum, the notion of “moments of strategy” offers a practice perspective to strategy that is sensitive to the fleeting nature of what takes place during these practices. While **Strategizing Routines** may give the impression of repetition and permanence, we also need to pay attention to the details of what happens when people talk, interact with each other and with artefacts, and, generally communicate, recognizing that important decisions and shifts in activity occur in seemingly ephemeral moments.

#### **See also**

Artefacts

CCO

Open Strategy

Participation  
 Performativity  
 Power Point  
 Shadowing  
 Sociomateriality  
 Strategic Episodes  
 Strategizing  
 Strategizing Routines  
 Strategy Texts

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