

Acting strategically during change: A process and dwelling world-view approach

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ABSTRACT

Strategic change processes are characterised by high levels of ambiguity and uncertainty. Responding to these changes requires a dynamic approach with a wider set of skills and coping mechanisms. In this article, we argue for a broad focus on change that considers the tacit elements of strategising. We adopted a dwelling worldview as well as a strong process ontology combined with a practice perspective to capture the complexity and richness of a strategic change process with a focus on identity and legitimacy dynamics. This article reports on an emerging process model of how individuals in non-managerial positions respond to and make sense of planned strategic change. The study followed a longitudinal, processual approach using a South African business school as the research setting. The findings of the study contribute towards a deepened understanding of the dynamics that occur within strategic change processes, showing that strategising is a dynamic process involving instinct, adjustment and phronetic action. Understanding how individuals respond, adapt and cope during strategic change processes provides potentially helpful insight into how strategic change is enabled or constrained, which could have future implications on how change processes are designed or implemented.

KEYWORDS: Strategic change; Process ontology; Strategy-as-practice, Dwelling world view; Identity and legitimacy-in-process

MAD statement

The intention of this article is to Make a Difference (MAD) by presenting a dynamic and temporal account of strategic emergence and change within an evolving organisational context, from the perspective of individuals in non-managerial positions. We adopted an oblique approach to uncover the dynamic and subtle nature of identity and legitimacy ‘as-process’, viewing these constructs as unstable and always in ‘becoming’ exposing the tacit elements of strategy during a strategic change process. The emerging process model reconceptualises how agency, process and practice interrelate within a dwelling world-view perspective.

Introduction

In everyday reference, strategic action is often linked to navigation. Mapping, modelling, and deliberate planning are core strategic actions and part of so-called ‘navigation’. However, the navigational view is somewhat one-sided focusing less on the tacit elements of strategising and more on the deliberate and planned action. Yet, navigation is marred with unintended

consequences, ambiguity, and complexity. The strategic action associated with navigating strategic change requires a broader set of skills and coping mechanisms rather than just deliberate forethought and planning. The study, on which this article reports, drew explicitly from the Heideggerian perspective and identified two distinct modes of engaging with the world strategically: the building worldview and the dwelling worldview (Chia & Holt, 2006). A dwelling worldview orientation provided the main lens for the study, allowing us to capture the richness and quality of lived experiences often missed when looked at from a traditional navigational point of view (see Chia & Holt, 2009). Within a dwelling worldview perspective, social practices are given primacy, and a relational ontology of individuation is presumed (Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & MacKay, 2007). When referring to the dwelling worldview, Chia and Rasche (2015) state that most of what makes up an actual process of evolving a coherent strategy, consists of everyday coping actions, which are not captured from a building worldview perspective. Chia and Rasche (2015:54) argue that redirection in Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) research is needed to place attention on the ‘subtle manoeuvres’ associated with strategising, as opposed to the declared explicit activities. By doing so, one can focus on the pressing immediate concerns that influence the growth and development of organisations (Chia & Rasche, 2015). There has not been adequate attention given by SAP scholars to the tacit forms of strategising practices, and scholars are only beginning to explore this alternative epistemology, and the possibilities of a dwelling worldview within the SAP framework (e.g. Bruskin, 2019; Bojovic, Sabatier & Coblenz 2020).

As practicing academics, we selected a business school as our case and used faculty staff members as our participants. The strategic change involved a complete makeover of the business school’s flagship qualification to align with mandatory government requirements, strengthen the competitiveness of the business school, and reinvigorate its offerings. In the context of this study, faculty staff were ‘change recipients’ (Balogun & Johnson, 2005, p. 1574), who were crucial in constructing and performing identity and legitimacy work during the strategic change event. The change event occurred within a larger sectorial reform context, which encompassed a restructuring of the national qualification framework, alongside a regulatory review of accreditation regulations and standards. In this contextual setting, the change extended the internal re-curriculumation.

Both identity and legitimacy have been viewed mainly from an essentialist ontology theorizing of these constructs as fixed, permanent features (Prester et al., 2019; Suddaby et al.,

2017). The study departed from other studies concerning strategic change, as it looked at identity and legitimacy dynamics from a ‘strong process ontology’ (Burgelman et al., 2018, p. 10). From such an ontological view, the conceptualisation of identity work and legitimacy-in-process is more generative, interactive, and dynamic (Gioia & Patvardhan, 2012; Suddaby et al., 2017). This also allowed for an approach that points to the inherently dynamic character of strategy emergence in practice; thus, conceiving strategic action as dynamic and evolving (see Chia & Holt, 2009). Following a strong process ontology meant that general temporal process questions guided the study. The over-arching research question was ‘*How do individuals (in non-managerial positions) interpret and make sense of a strategic change process as it unfolds?*’. The aim was to ‘delve below the surface’ into the often unseen and subtle processes and practices embedded in strategic actions.

This article first provides a theoretical background on practice and process perspectives within strategy research, and the need to view strategic action from a dwelling worldview perspective. Next, we discuss the research design and methodological process followed. We then specify the background of the research setting and the rationale for the business school context in which the study was conducted. The article concludes with a review of the findings and a discussion of the main themes and their interrelationships, proffering the emerging process model.

Theoretical background

Practice and process perspectives on strategy emergence and change

In his early work, Pettigrew argues that much research on organisational change has been ‘ahistorical, aprocessual and acontextual in character’ (Pettigrew 1990, p. 269). He maintains that, at that stage, very few studies had allowed the change process to reveal itself in temporal or contextual ways. While a call for a more processual and contextual approach was made evident in the early 1990s, academics have continued to call for research incorporating holistic, dynamic, and processual approaches in the study of organisational and management phenomena (see Burgelman et al., 2018; Hughes, 2022; Langley et al., 2013). Focus has shifted away from contingency approaches towards examining fundamental and dynamic aspects of change and developing ways of theorizing about change (Burgelman et al., 2018; By et al., 2016; Kunisch et al., 2017).

More recently, the evolution of the strategy-as-practice (SAP) perspective into the strategy as process and practice perspective (SAPP) followed because of a new appreciation of process research and acknowledgment that research needs to incorporate processual approaches (see Burgelman et al.; 2018; Kouamé & Langley, 2018; Kunisch et al., 2017; Langley et al., 2013). Over the years, it has been well established in practice and process literature that setting boundaries between content and process is limiting, and combining them can be beneficial, adding considerable depth to the understanding of strategy (see Burgelman et al., 2018; Langley et al., 2013; Langley & Tsoukas, 2010; Pettigrew, 1992).

The current study adopted a processual-contextual approach positioned within the SAPP framework suggested by Burgelman et al. (2018). Therefore, the study ‘casts processes, practices, and actors as all equally made up from ongoing activity’, which allowed for a more comprehensive exchange of questions, concepts, and methodologies between processes and practices (see Burgelman et al., 2018: p. 3). This combinatory approach allowed us to investigate how cognitive categories, such as identity and legitimacy dynamics, evolve over time, and how they are affected by issues and actions within a specific context.

Viewing both identity and legitimacy as a process is unusual in comparison with contemporary debates. Our article used a novel approach, by viewing both identity work and legitimacy processes as dynamic and ‘temporally evolving phenomena’ (Langley et al., 2013, p. 3) as opposed to static features. While there is a growing interest in the more dynamic and processual approaches to strategy research (see Burgelman et al., 2018; Hughes, 2022; Langley et al., 2013; Sorsa & Vaara, 2020), it is not well understood how identity work and legitimacy processes are embedded within and emerge from the daily practices and processes of a strategic change process. Some researchers have explored the dual role of identity and legitimacy (see Brown & Toyoki, 2013; Pederson & Dobbin, 2006; Sahaym, 2011). However, to date, limited research has considered these concepts through the dual lens of practice and process and from a dwelling worldview orientation. There have been calls for research to consider identity as an ongoing process of construction, performance, and legitimation (see Gioia et al., 2012). Subsequently, through imagining legitimacy-as-process, the current study viewed legitimacy as constructed through forms of identity work (see Brown & Toyoki, 2013).

The current study attempted to adopt a ‘truly processual approach’ (Langley, 2007, p. 274) in various ways. Through the adoption of a longitudinal inductive approach, we ‘traced

back’ and ‘followed forward’ by addressing both prospective and anticipatory sensemaking aspects of a strategic change process, and retrospective accounts of how individuals make sense of this change process. This enabled us to see how certain features of a strategic organisation undergoing change emerged in a processual way and how long-term processes and practices were enacted within their contexts over time (Langley, 2007, p. 274). The current study did not view outputs as endpoints; instead, we related processes to outcomes (Pettigrew et al., 2001). We, therefore, accepted change as an ongoing process. Lastly through conceiving both identity and legitimacy ‘as-process’, we questioned their underlying stability and examined how they are constituted through ‘ongoing processes’ (Langley, 2007, p. 275). By adopting a strong process ontology in combination with a practice perspective, we contribute to the current and emerging dialogue on strategy processes and practices and their intersections (see Burgelman et al., 2018; Kouamé & Langley, 2018).

Strategic action and a dwelling world-view approach

For the current study, the focus was on how strategy emerges unintentionally from socialized practices and processes engaged in by people who do not necessarily identify themselves as strategists (Chia & Holt, 2009). This required a dwelling worldview approach where the impetus is on social practices (Chia & Holt, 2006; Chia & MacKay, 2007).

Within the dwelling mode, ‘local adaptation and ingenuity’ and purposive practical coping make up strategic action (Chia & Holt, 2009, p. 133). Two types of knowledge are linked to this dwelling mode of explanation: *phronesis* and *mētis* (Chia & Rasche, 2015). *Phronesis* refers to practical wisdom or common sense (see Flyvbjerg, 2001) and *mētis* refers to the practical intelligence required when dealing with ambiguous situations (Chia & Rasche, 2015). Within a dwelling mode, strategic actions involve small local adaptations and incremental ‘unheroic’ day-to-day actions observed in a specific local context (Chia & Rasche, 2015, p. 49). Here, tacit knowledge is acquired through living within and becoming intimately acquainted with local conditions ‘on the ground’ which often go unnoticed (Chia & Rasche, 2015, p. 49). Both *phronesis* and *mētis* are, however, difficult to capture, and for this reason, it has remained to a large extent a new feature in management academic research (Chia & Rasche, 2015; Nonaka & Toyama, 2007).

While both the building and dwelling modes of explanation can be used to explain the actual practice of strategising, the two modes provide different explanatory outcomes (Chia & Rasche, 2015). Whereas the *building mode* demonstrates action as purposeful or deliberate (Chia & Holt, 2009); the *dwelling mode* focuses on the more tacit forms of strategy-making and practical knowing (Chia & Rasche, 2015). Much SAP research is, however, still rooted in the building epistemology (Chia & Rasche, 2015), and shares a mostly managerial perspective focusing either on top, middle management, or senior management teams (for example Jarzabkowski, Lé & Van de Ven, 2013; Balogun et al; 2015; Davis, Jansen van Rensburg & Venter; 2016; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2017). Non-executives and the role played by academic managers and professors as strategic agents are typically left out in both SAP research and conventional strategy research (Clegg et al; 2011:133; Meyer et al; 2018). However, there is increasing recognition of the importance of involving other employees outside of managerial positions in strategy processes, in line with the emerging concept of ‘open strategy’ (Hautz et al; 2017; Seidl et al; 2021). This study contributes to the emerging discussion on the concept of ‘open strategy’ by focusing on faculty staff members in non-managerial positions and their role as strategic agents within an academic unit.

Methods and research setting

A longitudinal-processual method (Pettigrew 1979, 1990) was used to investigate the process of transition or change that needed to be investigated. This required an inductive qualitative examination and a ‘real-time’, case-based approach (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 271) with a multi-method data collection approach in order to collect data that was processual, pluralistic, and contextual (Pettigrew, 1990; Langley 1999). We gathered our data over a three-year period from four primary sources: (1) reflective diaries; (2) non-participant direct observations; (3) secondary data (documentation and strategic reports); and (4) structured interviews. Table 1 provides the main research questions and data production strategies adopted, showing how these aligned with the eventual outcomes of the study. The focus was on temporal elements involving past, present, and future time, in combination with context and action (Pettigrew 1990, p. 269).

Table 1: Research process questions aligning with data production methods and research outcome

Main research question: How do individuals interpret and make sense of a strategic change process as it unfolds?			
General temporal questions	Process perspective	Data production methods	Research Outcome
Questions relating to the past. (What has happened and how did we get here?)	Retrospective view of past events and experiences	Interviews, Review meetings, Documentation Reflective diaries	A narrative, temporal account of interaction and change.
Questions relating to the present. (What is going on?)	An emergent perspective of key events	Observations (Workshops and strategic sessions), Reflective diaries, Review meetings, Documentation	
Questions relating to the Future. (Where are we going?)	Prospective view of the unfolding future	Interviews, Review meetings, Documentation	

In line with a grounded theory approach, the sampling was theoretically driven (see Mills et al., 2014), and participant selection was purposive and strategic. The research was conducted with small samples of people, nested in a unique context, and comprising faculty staff who were permanently employed for a minimum of two years and directly involved in the change process. A total of 22 faculty staff members made up this target population, while nine faculty staff consented to participate in the study making up the final realised sample. This included the quality assurance and design officer who was interviewed to obtain contextual information as she played an integral role throughout the process.

The study involved three methodological phases. Phase 1 involved two methods of data production. Non-participant observations were conducted by the main researcher to observe key workshops and strategic team meetings arranged in the period leading up to and during the module and curriculum development stage, to observe how the change process was unfolding. Reflective diaries were kept by seven faculty members to track their interpretations of the workshop sessions conducted. This phase took place over a period of 11 months.

Phase 2 constituted the interview phase and took place during the first year of implementation of the newly developed master’s degree qualification over a period of five months. Review meetings and member checking was conducted throughout phase 1 and phase 2 with various participants. Phase 3 involved feedback discussions intended to substantiate and corroborate the key research findings. Throughout the research process, documentation

analysis took place to assist in tracking the change process and gain a better understanding of the historical and contextual aspects of the change process.

To ensure trustworthiness throughout the research process, a combination of Lincoln and Guba's (1985) trustworthiness criteria and Tracy's (2010) eight-point conceptualisation of quality qualitative research was used as the main framework for conducting the research.

Research setting and context

The unique organisational context chosen for the study was a business school situated within South Africa's largest open-distance learning (ODL) university. The scope and aim of the current study were to track the procedure concerning the curriculum and module development process of their flagship master's degree qualification. The school had to design a revised degree structure and curriculum in response to national developments linked to the restructuring of the country's National Qualifications Framework and the promulgation of the revised Higher Education Quality Sub-Framework.

In line with the policies of the institution, The Framework for a Team Approach (FTA) is the main approach adopted during the curriculum and planning development phase of qualifications. The team approach is led by the senior academic designated to a specific qualification and the team typically includes: an academic area coordinator, subject experts, technical support involving the Department of Planning and Coordination (DPAR) as well as industry experts and industry advisors. While the FTA was a formal approach implemented by the business school, the spirit of this approach was to work collaboratively and by negotiation.

The context was deemed appropriate for several reasons. Accreditation involves both identity and legitimacy stakes for an institution. On the one hand, accreditation touches an institution's identity and involves strategic changes (Gioia *et al*; 1994; Gioia & Thomas, 1996). On the other hand, accreditation is often seen as a quality label (Stensaker, 2003), which is also a source of institutional legitimacy for an institution (Durand & McQuire, 2005). This context provided an ideal setting for this investigation, as accreditation processes and the process of developing curricula provide a context where identity had to be maintained/defended by the individuals (faculty staff members) within the institution.

Data analysis

The method that best suited the study in answering the research questions involved integrating a grounded theory approach with thematic and narrative analysis, as this enabled a ‘multidimensional view’ (Floersch et al., 2010, p. 408).

The study involved building theory from data, which generally consisted of collecting data, breaking it up into first level and second-level themes, and then abstracting at a higher level (see Gehman et al., 2018). We used techniques such as intensive interviewing, in vivo and line-by-line coding; constant comparison between respondents, events, and theoretical texts; focused coding; and theoretical sampling. Theory building from cases works well in contexts involving constructs that are ‘hard to measure’, such as identity and legitimacy (see Gehman et al., 2018, p. 287). This approach was particularly useful in the investigation of subtle and more oblique aspects of identity and legitimacy dynamics.

The third analytical method, narrative analysis, was used as a complementary strategy as it added temporality and plot (see Floersch et al., 2010). Narratives are effective in representing events and displaying transformation or change (Tamboukou, 2015).

The last stage of the analysis involved a method called ‘code weaving’, which involved integrating key code words and phrases into narrative form. This aided the researcher ‘to see how the puzzle pieces fit together’ (Saldaña, 2013, p. 248). This analysis stage led to the final stage of the analysis process – narrating an informative story that ultimately led to new concept development (Gioia et al., 2013).

Findings

We first present the findings associated with Phase 1 of the methodological process, which constituted the key themes that emerged during observations (by the researcher) and reflective diaries (by faculty staff members). We follow this discussion with the themes that emerged during Phase 2 and show how they are interrelated.

Phase 1: Observations and reflective diaries

The purpose of this phase of the research was to capture early insights into the evolving context, by observing the immediate real-time reactions and emotions of the participants towards the

unfolding events. We observed how participants referred to two important aspects of the evolving context in this phase of the research, namely key individuals who assisted in driving the process; and how a sense of teamwork was beginning to emerge. These early observations and emerging themes were used as a basis of comparison later in the interview stage.

Theme 1: Change drivers

In this early stage of data collection, we observed how faculty staff members felt overwhelmed by the changes facing them. One faculty member noted, ‘change was bigger than first identified’. During review meetings with faculty staff members, they referred to the evolving context and how certain individuals assisted in driving the change process. Certain individuals were seen as ‘change drivers’ (see Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010, p. 177) who facilitated in the implementation of the change process early on and provided an enabling environment. Change drivers frequently mentioned were the academic director, the quality assurance and design officer, and a faculty staff member with a tenure of 13 years. Table 2 provides illustrative quotes describing how these change drivers were able to create joint understandings during a time characterized by high levels of anxiety and ambiguity. Note that all citations are reproduced verbatim and unedited.

Table 2: Illustrative quotes: Change drivers

<p>Change drivers</p>	<p>[J]ust to say, the current academic director has got a vision and a view and created some excitement for us on the way forward and things like that and in a way it made me, again, relook at where I work, the place that I am, my own opportunities to develop as an individual and things like that, which to me was very, very exciting.</p> <p>...the current academic director has really put some initiative in to developing this and without the immense amount of pressure with the previous development</p> <p>[T]he feedback sessions from Mary [pseudonym for the quality assurance and design officer] around the progress of each module with regards to milestones. It was so well structured by Mary, you can just follow her template and everything.</p> <p>...for me, the structure coming through the forms, the workshops, and Mary’s feedback sessions during the academic meeting, those three, in a way, created the impetus and the effort for us to allow for us to remain on course and to provide a quality product at the end</p> <p>[I]n my mind, a colleague like Jack [pseudonym for senior faculty member], for instance, that ... he just thought differently about the whole ... what the new master’s degree should look like and [...]</p>
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Theme 2: A sense of teamwork emerging

In reflective diaries kept by faculty staff members during the workshop sessions, they mentioned how a sense of teamwork was developing when reflecting on ‘what is going well and why’. Several participants referred to the group dynamics and how ‘there is a sense of teamwork which is emerging’. One participant mentioned how ‘the silo mentality and delivery is being replaced by teamwork’, while another participant reflected, ‘so teamwork is actually becoming a real thing’. One participant described the evolving context:

...there are issues of course which need to be addressed and it looks like issues are now being looked at even of course being able to look back on what was planned and to see whether they are fitting in well...

Retrospective and prospective sensemaking was an important part of the process, reflected in the statement below:

...and another aspect which is going well is the reflections on what has been going on and how that is going to shape what is going to happen in the future.

In a reflection to the question ‘What have been the significant events’, one faculty member mentioned the feedback they received from the previous development they had gone through:

the feedback that we got from the MBA development I think there is a lot of learning that is locked up in that feedback – what people experience and what they think could be done better.

During the workshops, academics that were previously involved in the development of master’s level qualifications shared their experience, challenges and lessons learnt. One faculty staff member indicated, ‘us academics learn as we go along’, which gave us an early glimpse of the learning-through-doing element that became a recurring theme throughout the process, and an important part in progress and learning.

Phase 2: Interviews

The interviews conducted were more structured in style, as the processual nature of the study meant that the questions needed to follow a strictly chronological order to ensure that ‘deep

data’ was gathered for the different stages of the process. The interest was on participants' interpretations and how these evolved over time (Gehman et al; 2018).

Four key themes emerged during the interview phase. The first theme involved the prevalence of an emerging identity and an organisation that was ‘in flux’. The second theme emerged when faculty staff members reflected on how the change event itself forced them to reflect and relook at what they were offering. The third theme refers to the phronetic actions that emerged throughout the process. Lastly, the overall dynamics of faculty staff members and how they interrelated with one another made for a type of community of practice (CoP), which provided for a shared context. Each theme is discussed in more detail in the section that follows.

Theme 1: An emerging identity

Three factors prompted faculty members in identifying an emerging identity. These statements reflected the past, present, and future claims made about the institution and included current positive perceptions the faculty members expressed about the change event; retrospective statements that arose from internal comparisons between what the institution went through prior to the change event compared to where it is now; and a positive prospective outlook expressed by faculty members about the future. Table 3 presents the data structure for the emerging identity theme.

Table 3: Data structure for theme: Emerging identity

Aggregate theme	2nd level category	1st level codes
Emerging identity	Current positive perceptions	Exciting, new, enthusiasm Momentum – moving forward Positive change Dedicated leadership (informal and formal) Progress finding own niche and identity
	Retrospective statements	Then/history High management turnover Instability Holding on to previous value system
	Prospective outlook	Vision is becoming clearer Transformation In flux More stability No clear identity yet – but it is emerging

The notion of an emerging identity reflected the dynamic and flexible nature of identity as the findings suggest a perception of identity as emerging from the ongoing process of ‘how we are becoming an organisation’ as opposed to the more static claim of ‘who we are’ (Schultz and Hernes, 2013, p. 3). Viewing identity as such assisted us in revealing a dynamic understanding of identity as the findings showed how identity can change rather fleetingly in response to processes of strategic change. The notion of an ‘emerging identity’ provided an element of hope and a positive outlook for faculty members. Gioia et al. (2002, p. 632) indicate that successful change ‘requires a union of the valued past with the hoped-for future’.

Theme 2: The change event (reflections)

Faculty staff members shared how the change process triggered them to acknowledge certain aspects of their work they wouldn’t have acknowledged had the change process not taken place. The change process brought people together and triggered individuals to acknowledge that they were part of a larger community. It also provided for an opportunity to self-reflect and to be honest about what the business school was offering. Furthermore, it was a catalyst in creating teams and promoted a type of teamwork that did not exist prior to the change process as depicted in the illustrative quotes in Table 4.

Table 4: Illustrative quotes: The change event (reflections)

<p>The change event (reflections)</p>	<p>First and foremost, the accreditation process itself forced us to look each other in the eye and, in a manner, realise that, when we look at programmes, the student walk is not about the academic content, it’s about the experience. So, it forced us to accept that part and, in a way, pushed us together.</p> <p>When you go out there and speak about the qualification, all of us now have a homogenous knowledge and understanding of what it is.</p> <p>As a collective, first and foremost, they brought us together, which was not there before.</p> <p>The value of this whole change event, I think, was in that it sucked in the participants to take ownership. So the change, although there were some negative experiences around it, is that you didn’t have a choice but to get involved, it’s part of your job to change. I think its part of your job to get involved. So it actually created teams where they did not exist. That’s the positive thing.</p> <p>It was opportunity to understand the product.</p>
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One participant highlighted the value of going through such a change process:

That was the only time that I got to understand what others do and you may be surprised. I think, more or less, we undervalue what others do and overvalue what we do during that team part and then, when you bring everything to the table, you really realise that, for the student who is doing subject-driven modules, how it should be because I come in and I say my piece and go, someone else comes in and says their piece and go, but these two are not integrated in any way, are not consistent in any way, are not aligned in any way. So that was the value that I took and I think, in future, that's the kind of spirit that I'll be adopting moving forward.

In the next section we discuss key tacit knowledge sharing practices which took place through three avenues: (1) phronetic actions; (2) Communities of Practice (CoP) and (3) iterative action and adjustment.

Theme 3: Phronetic actions

In the interview phase, faculty members referred again to the three change drivers mentioned in the first phase of data collection and how they assisted in driving the process. Within the context of the current study, phronetic actions were displayed by both formal and informal leaders. Firstly, the quality assurance and design officer played a crucial role in creating a shared understanding of authoritarian strategic elements, such as the templates, policies, frameworks, and other aspects such as timelines and overall progress. Secondly, participants recognised the informal but critical role played by a faculty staff member from the onset by easing initial tensions and overcoming inertia experienced at the beginning of the process. Through methods of persuasion and negotiating, he was able to create a universal understanding amongst academic staff of what was required in terms of the new master's qualification. He was widely described as a change driver even though he was not allocated a formal change management role. Lastly, the academic director provided an enabling environment for the change event to evolve and to develop positively. Table 4 presents the illustrative quotes for the theme 'phronetic actions.'

Table 5: Illustrative quotes: phronetic actions

Phronetic actions	<p>[S]he was a great help in helping us in developing forms and making sure that we have it all, to say these forms, if you fill them in, it will naturally progress you to complete this and so on, so I think that was done well. She was one of those people that I mentioned earlier that was part of the informal team that just thought it is important enough to make sure that this thing ... we don't drop the ball.</p> <p>[A]nd you must remember, when I said just now when everybody wanted to protect their turf, Jack [pseudonym] was instrumental in saying, yes, we hear what you're saying but ... so he was counter-arguing all the time and slowly and surely trying to bring in a certain way of thinking</p> <p>[T]he most important thing as far as I'm concerned for this that made this successful was the fact that we've got a very good academic director and she was able to drive this and lead this</p> <p>But, as I said just now, I personally look at them as the leaders in this specific event and, whether they are formal or informal, it didn't really matter to me. For me, it was just people that were excited enough to make sure that the momentum is kept.</p> <p>It was leadership that allowed it to evolve and develop it the way it has....in almost softly but insistently pushed this into something that is probably quite great today...</p>
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Nonaka and Toyama (2007) define phronetic leadership as a type of distributed leadership, where the leader is determined by the context and not by a title or position within an organisation. These individuals had an ability to create a shared context that enabled the change event to progress and be perceived as an overall success. Participants reflected that this approach worked well.

Theme 4: Community of practice

Despite the formal and planned nature of the team approach that was followed, the dynamics and interactions between the academic staff and their teams' showed characteristics in line with what is considered as a type of 'community of practice' namely: (1) the evidence of collective learning; (2) the supportive role of management in providing an enabling environment; (3) a common purpose and shared interest amongst members; and (4) the emergence of leadership and phronetic action (Li et al., 2009; Kerno & Mace, 2010). Table 4 presents the illustrative quotes describing the theme 'communities of practice (CoP).'

Table 6: Illustrative quotes: Communities of Practice (CoP)

<p>Communities of Practice</p>	<p>There was some other people looking at policy assurance assisting us in terms of that for instance, for me, I didn't know these level indicators and all of that and, to pitch it from an eight to a nine, that's very important. So those people came along and I think I've learned a lot from them and I think my colleagues as well. So the team approach is a must.</p> <p>...more informal meetings where I went with a couple of colleagues, just sit and say this is the model that I'm proposing, this is how it works, do you think it's sufficient for what we're trying to do? Get their inputs on that and so on.</p> <p>all along the development of those study units and the modules, we also involved the people in the...like QA, for example, in the curriculum development and quality assurance.</p> <p>There were some where we had to really go and source specialists out there to come and sit and help with the day-to-day push of the module design and then the teams would meet and do a high level thinking that things have been done very well.</p> <p>I learnt a lot from the senior people, I learnt a lot from more junior people that were knowledgeable in areas that I'm not knowledgeable in, and I learnt a lot about module development per se</p>
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An early insight into this theme came when participants described the dynamics within the group. Notably, within the specific business school context of the current study, faculty staff members typically had industry experience and associated expertise related to the experience they had gained.

The philosophical approach to the teamwork was one based on competence, not on hierarchy. And you have to have the right team to take the lead from somebody based not on his position in the organisation but on his skills and competence and we had that and that worked very well and I think that drove the success of the module development.

Within the larger circles of interaction, we observed that learning took place through various avenues, including learning from team members (regardless of academic rank), from experts, and the process itself, which provided for a rich learning opportunity.

Iterative action and adjustment

A key insight was the evidence of back-and-forth interactions and processes of adjustment involving the tacit knowledge sharing practices and objective knowledge sharing practices. These iterative cycles enabled individuals to make sense of the change event. During the high-level code-weaving phase of data analysis, this was categorised as a stand-alone theme, 'iterative action and adjustment' (see Table 7).

Table 7: Illustrative quotes: iterative action and adjustment

<p>Iterative action and adjustment</p>	<p>And that was, essentially, a process of reading, writing, reading, writing, rethinking, deleting and so on.</p> <p>There was the approach to meeting where the module leader would step in and ask what do you think about this or what is your feeling on that? And whenever one of our colleagues completed their particular section pertaining to a module, it was sent out to everybody else who was part of that particular team for developing that module so that they could also then critically read it, give their inputs</p> <p>And, from the module point of view, having to start thinking about content and assessment criteria became very, very critical...we needed to spend so much time thinking about the experience of the student and how they will then be able to handle it in such a manner they may be completely new to them</p> <p>there was a lot of communication back and forth in terms of documentation.</p>
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One participant indicated, ‘it was like a puzzle’, when describing the process. It was these iterative social processes that helped participants accomplish certain activities and enabled individuals to make sense of the change process – aptly described by a participant as ‘it all came together’.

Discussion

In this discussion, we first present the dynamic social process model of change that emerged from the data, and then highlight the main contributions of the study.

A dynamic social process model of change

In answering the overarching research question: ‘How do individuals interpret and make sense of a strategic change process as it unfolds?’ the study presents a dynamic process model of change to guide future research aimed at understanding the dynamic and generative processes and practices that underlie strategic changes processes (presented in Figure 1).

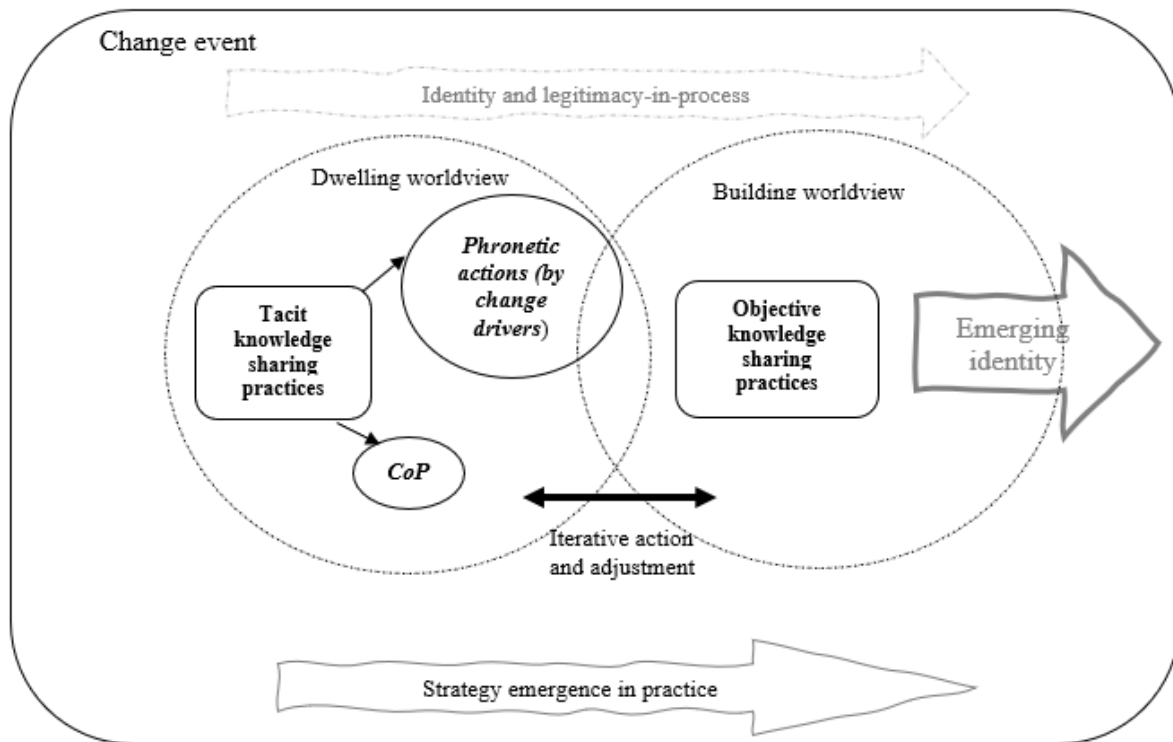


Figure 1. Model representing a dynamic social process of change

Source: Authors' own compilation

Through a dwelling worldview orientation, we were able to focus on individuals (outside of managerial roles) and provide their own accounts of the significant changes they had gone through over time within a strategic change process bringing to the surface the relational and interpretive contexts in which they are embedded.

The study contributes towards the SAP research agenda, as we went 'inside the process' (Brown & Duguid, 2000) to reveal elements of praxis. We examined actors beyond 'managerial elites' (Burgelman et al, 2018) by including faculty staff members as strategic agents. Subsequently, we were able to bring to the surface the 'less accessible' type of personal knowing showing how tacit knowing emerged through phronetic actions, temporal structures such as communities of practice and how an emerging identity constituted important aspects of praxis. Balogun et al., (2015) points out that praxis is intrinsically linked to identity and therefore identity can provide a route to understanding praxis. However, despite this clear link, not much attention has been given to this strategy-identity nexus and how strategists shape strategising activity through who they are (Ravasi et al., 2017). Phronetic action is also intrinsically linked to identity as, within a dwelling worldview, what one does is inseparable

from what one is (Chia & Rasche, 2015:47). Dunne (1993:244) explains that phronesis differs qualitatively from episteme and technè as it ‘expresses the kind of person that one is’ (Dunne 1993:244). Chia and Rasche (2015) maintain that the intimate relationships between being and doing, and between identity and strategy, makes phronesis extremely difficult to apprehend, and therefore it remains an unexplored aspect in strategy research.

Few studies within organisational or strategic management theory, have mentioned phronetic action as a component of emerging practice. Nonaka and Toyama (2007) refer to phronesis as distributed wisdom and suggest that phronetic strategy is realized by individual ‘leaders’ within a specific situation. They have, however, been criticized for still committing implicitly to strong methodological individualism by referring to individual leaders within an organisational context (Chia & Holt, 2009). Chia and Holt (2010) look at phronesis and phronetic awareness as an important element in understanding the practice of strategizing of ‘any strategic actor’ Chia & Holt, (2010: 135) and therefore depart from Nonaka and Toyama’s findings. In line with Chia & Holt, (2010: 135) we show that phronesis is not a characteristic of an isolated individual, but rather an expression of being a ‘system-in-a-system’ and involves various strategic actors.

Through the phronetic actions displayed by certain individuals and the emergence of the community of practice theme, the study shows how legitimacy is inherently a distributed effort of diverse change agents at multiple levels who engage in the day-to-day effort of legitimacy work (Johnson et al; 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). The findings support the notion of ‘distributed leadership’ (see By et al., 2016; Chia & Holt, 2009), and we contribute towards the argument that change implementation goes beyond formal leadership (By et al., 2016; By et al., 2018) and instead involves change drivers (Whelan-Berry & Somerville, 2010) at various levels who are ‘active participants in change processes’ (Rafferty & Griffin, 2008, p. 611). This process of legitimation involves both formal and emergent activities, and the current study was able to show how change agents obtained affiliation within an existing social order (community of practice) (Suddaby *et al*; 2017). In line with Chia and Holt (2006), the current study commits itself to methodological relationalism, as opposed to methodological individualism, and provides a more dynamic view of phronesis.

Lastly, we observed that despite the formal team approach implemented from the onset, the notion of a CoP grew organically as the process evolved. The development of the CoP required

time and a process involving social interactions to advance and progress. This type of team approach was an important object of change (By et al., 2018) as it enabled an environment where faculty staff created a shared context and deepened their knowledge and expertise through ongoing interactions (Wenger et al., 2002). Similar to Wenger's (1998, p. 12) work, identity dynamics and a community of practice were central aspects of the process. The findings revealed how learning occurred through the engagement of social practices and within a collaborative structure and 'not simply in an individual's mind' (see Kerno & Mace, 2010, p. 79). This study thus contributes to existing theory by providing a holistic understanding of organisation life, as it acknowledges and revealed the interplay between the more subtle and relational aspects of strategy-making, with the more purposive elements of strategy. We shed light on the beneficial role phronetic leaders play within ambiguous and complex situations, and how a CoP network enabled a rich learning environment where knowledge, experience, and insight were successfully exchanged. We suggest that a more informal collaborative approach such as CoP type team and the allowance for distributed leadership may be a more viable approach towards implementing strategic change, particular within higher education structures since the silo affect is oftentimes prevalent within this context.

Future research directions

In terms of the SAP research agenda, most of the evidence presented in literature remains the 'deliberate doings' of intentional agents rather than practices, which are 'constitutive of the agents' themselves' (see Chia & Holt, 2009, p. 125). Chia and Holt (2009) call for research that marks a weakened individualism involving a phronetic approach, as opposed to a purely intellectual approach. Phronesis however remains a new aspect in strategy research worthy of further investigation. More research needs to consider multiple actors, outside of managerial roles as 'change drivers' or as phronetic leaders.

The present study provided insight into communities of practice from the perspective of faculty staff and within the context of a strategic change event. Future research could focus on communities of practice as the unit of analysis to explore the effect on emergent learning processes and on enhancing learning in everyday organisational life – not just within the context of a change event. Further, comparative research may be useful to investigate how communities of practice differ in diverse organisational settings, within different industries, and within different sociocultural environments.

Conclusion

The current study took a novel approach within the SAP lens, by bridging a practice-based approach with strategy process research and adopting a dwelling worldview orientation. Chia and Rasche (2015:46) maintain that SAP research is still mostly rooted in the building worldview, with a dominant focus on knowledge involving episteme and techné. Knowledge aspects involving phronesis linked with the dwelling worldview, are still relatively unexplored; however, ‘they constitute the authentic art of strategising that is uniquely sensitive to time-duration’ (Chia & Rasche, 2015:40). Through this dwelling worldview orientation, the study was able to expose the ‘intrinsically durational character of strategy emergence in practice’, thus conceiving strategic action as dynamic and evolving (Chia & Holt, 2009:163-164). We show how both retrospective and prospective sensemaking played a key role in the sensemaking processes of faculty staff and provide insight into how individuals and groups respond and adapt to change, suggesting that a broader set of skills or coping mechanisms is required, than just deliberate action.

In this study we reveal some of the more subtle, tacit, and dynamic elements captured through a dwelling worldview orientation. Observing interactions of practice, process, content, and context of change jointly over time was necessary in developing a comprehensive understanding of the progression of strategic change, considering the nuances and complexity of such a process. We therefore contribute towards a deepened understanding of how identity work and legitimacy processes are embedded and emerge within daily practices of strategic change processes.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Ethical clearance statement

Ethical clearance was obtained by the Department of Business Management Review Committee in line with the Research Ethics Policy of the University of South Africa (Ref#:2015_CRERC_021). Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to conducting the research. Ethical clearance certificate expires 31 December 2024.

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