Universität Zürich^{UZH}

EXPOSÉ MASTER THESIS

POWER AND POLITICS IN STRATEGY MEETINGS

[Title and subtitle to be adapted]

Chair of Organization and Management

University of Zurich

Prof. David Seidl, PhD

Supervisor: Tania Weinfurtner

Author:

Field of Study: Management and Economics

Student ID:

Address:

E-Mail:

Date:

I.   LITERATURE REVIEW AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

"Power is central to organizational life (Clegg, 1989) and underpins the strategy-making process. Understanding of strategy necessitates an engagement with power and politics." (Clegg, Carter, & Kornberger, 2004: 25)

The recent turn in strategy research (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington 2003; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington 2007; Whittington, 2006) has strongly been influenced by contemporary social scientists such as Anthony Giddens and Michel Foucault (Whittington, 2006). Many scholars draw on Giddens' (1984) structuration theory and on Foucault's (1994) works in order to analyze issues of power in the context of strategizing. For instance, Knights and Morgan (1991) examine strategic discourse as a mechanism of power while Mantere and Vaara (2008) focus on power relations and social identities in order to explain participation in strategy work. Also other authors such as Laine and Vaara (2007) and Hardy and Thomas (2014) look at issues of power by analyzing strategic discourse and power relations. However, the authors Clegg, Carter and Kornberger (Clegg, Carter, & Kornberger, 2004; Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger, 2008) argue that the role of power in strategy-as-practice research remains under-researched. Another point of criticism is that the practice-based research on strategy conceptualizes power as a commodity of top managers while neglecting the potential ability of lower-level employees to influence strategy work (McCabe, 2010). Motivated by this critique, this thesis aims to contribute to strategy-as-practice research by examining issues of politics and power in strategy meetings.

Since strategy meetings do not only have large effects on the future of the organizations by shaping its processes (Boden 1994; Schwartzmann, 1989) but also provide an opportunity for participants to exert influence through different meeting functions (Dittrich, Guérard, & Seidl, 2011), they serve as a unit of analysis to study power and politics in the context of strategizing. Dittrich et al. (2011) suggest that strategy meetings can be classified according to five different functions: *Coordination function*, *symbolic function*, *social function*, *cognitive function*, and *political function*. According to the literature review of Dittrich et al. (2011), strategists can politically use meetings to influence the strategy process by *setting and advancing the agenda* (Adams, 2004; Tepper 2014), *exerting influence* (Clifton, 2009; van Praet, 2009, Wodak, Kwon, & Clarke, 2011), *bargaining* (Boden, 1995; Mintzberg, 1973), *keeping topics on the agenda* (Jarzabkowski & Seidl, 2008; Tepper 2004), *suppressing new ideas* (Jarzabkowski &

Kommentiert [TR2]: In thesis itself: develop motivation/part on power even more systematically: Why is it important to study this topic, what do we know about it already, what do we still need to know?

1

Seidl, 2008; Schwarz 2009), and *forming alliances and building support* (Adams 2004; Kangasharju, 1996, 2002). These six dimensions of the political function of meetings are of particular interest for this thesis. However, also the other functions of meetings allow employees to influence other participants and therefore the whole strategy process (Dittrich et al., 2011). For instance, different studies analyzed how purposeful behavior and discursive practices (Clarke, Kwon, & Wodak, 2012; Kwon, Clarke, & Wodak, 2014) as well as sense-making in meetings (Weick, 1995) can have profound consequences for strategy work. Furthermore, Seidl and Guérard (2015) point out that the different meeting functions are not mutually exclusive and that they are related to each other. For this reason, meeting functions besides the political one should not be neglected for the analysis of power and politics in the context of strategizing.

During these two sections, relevant research findings on power, organizational politics and meetings in the context of strategizing have been outlined. However, the political verbal as well as nonverbal behavior that different types of strategists use in meetings is currently under-researched. For instance, Seidl and Guérard (2015) argue that meeting practices should not only be analyzed regarding top managers but also regarding middle managers and other employees. Based on these findings, it can be expected that the way how strategists politically use meetings to influence the strategy process differs significantly from the top management level to the middle management level (Seidl & Guérard, 2015). In addition to this, the recent coronavirus outbreak has accelerated the trend towards online meetings. According to the Work Trend Index of Microsoft, the meeting minutes in one day have increased from approximately 900 million to nearly 2.7 billion within a few weeks (Spataro, 2020). The author of this thesis claims that this massive trend towards online meetings changes the political function of them. On the one hand, various power mechanisms that strategists mobilize in physical meetings might disappear in online meetings. One the other hand, online meetings offer the participants new power mechanisms such as the invisible chat to politically use meetings and, thus, to influence the strategy process.

As one can see, we need to dive deeper into the concepts of practices and practitioners in order to fully explain how different strategists can make use of power and politics in physical and online meetings.

II.   RESEARCH QUESTION AND RELEVANCE

Given the theoretical background and the need for future research, this thesis poses the following research question:

How do strategists politically utilize online and offline meetings to influence strategy work?

More precisely, this thesis focuses on two aspects: On the one hand, it examines how strategists mobilize different sources of power and rely on different power mechanisms in order to promote their ideas and gain control over the discussion during strategy meetings. On the other hand, it explores how the strategists' political tactics are changing due to the increasing trend towards online meetings. Hereby, it is focused on a wide range of strategists working in different companies on different hierarchical levels in order to capture differences across positions in the hierarchy.

The purpose of this work is to close the research gap between power and meetings in the context of strategizing by integrating existing organizational and social theory into the analysis of strategy-as practice. According to Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger (2008) "studies of power and strategy would advance our understanding of the practice perspective" (Carter, Clegg, & Kornberger (2008: 93). Therefore, by integrating a micro-political approach into the theoretical basis of the strategy-as-practice perspective, this thesis contributes to the existing literature. According to Hansen and Küpper (2009) this "offers a power related contextualization of strategizing" (Hansen & Küpper 2009: 24). Furthermore, the way in which technology, which is fundamental to contemporary organizations, can be used has not been sufficiently explored from a strategy-as-practice perspective (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, & Vaara, 2010; Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Hence, this thesis stresses the importance of focusing on the political function of online meetings from an activity-based view. In practical terms, this work aims to improve managers' understanding of the psychology of the political function of physical as well as online meetings.

III.   METHOD

In order to answer the research question mentioned above, the following method is proposed: First, the strategy-as-practice perspective and the practice-practitioner-praxis framework is introduced. Second, the central terms of power, politics and strategy meetings are defined and the respective literature in the context of strategizing is presented. This is done by integrating the concepts of power and politics into the strategy-as-practice perspective. After this literature

Kommentiert [TR3]: Quite quickly focus on meetings. Introduce perspective briefly.

review, a qualitative research approach follows to answer the research question. A qualitative approach seems to be suitable for this study since it serves to analyze the complexity of a phenomenon more deeply from the perspective of the researcher (Williams, 2007). The political function of physical meetings is compared to that of online meetings within the scope of a case study (Eisenhardt, 1989). More precisely, it is planned to compare audio recordings of a physical meeting to the findings of semi-structured interviews with people that experienced the politics of online meetings [At this point in time it is not yet clear how many audios will be made available and how many interviews will be conducted]. In addition to this, it is proposed to record at least one online meeting on video in order to see whether the answers of the interviewees match with the author's observation. The findings of the empirical data are presented using a first- and second-order analysis as suggested by van Maanen (1997). The results are then set in relation to the theoretical background. Last but not least, theoretical contributions and practical implications are highlighted, and limitations of the research design are discussed.

The following important literature has not yet been used in this research proposal:

(Balogun & Johnson, 2004)

(Hendry & Seidl, 2003)

(Hope, 2010)

(Hodgkinson, Whittington, Johnson, & Schwarz, 2006)

(Küpper, 2004)

(Küpper & Ortmann, 1992)

(Mintzberg, 1983)

(Murnighan & Brass, 1991)

(Pettigrew, 1977)

(Pfeffer, 1992)

(Samra-Fredericks, 2003)

(Samra-Fredericks, 2005)

(Whittington, 2014)

(Yin, 2003)

Kommentiert [TR4]: Cover both online and offline meetings in interviews

IV. PRELIMINARY TABLE OF CONTENT

Abstract

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

1.   Introduction

2.   Literature Review

2.1 Meetings

    2.1.1 Definition and conceptualization of meetings

    2.1.2 Characteristics of offline meetings

    2.1.3 Characteristics of online meetings

    2.1.4 Meeting functions

    2.1.5 Framework for studying meetings

2.2 Power and politics

    2.2.1 The concept of power

    2.2.2 Power and politics in strategizing - A micropolitical approach

2.3 A power-related perspective of meetings

    2.3.1 The political function of meetings

    2.3.2 Micropolitical practices in meetings

3.   Empirical Setting and Methods

3.1 Research design

3.2 Data collection

3.3 Data analysis

4.   Research Findings

4.1 First-order findings

4.2 Second-order findings

Kommentiert [TR5]: Structure can still be adjusted during the writing process

5

6

V. PRELIMINARY LIST OF REFERENCES

Adams, B. 2004. Public Meetings and the Democratic Process. *Public Administration Review*, 64 (1): 43-54.

Balogun, J., & Johnson, G. 2004. Organizational restructuring and middle manager sensemaking. *Academy of Management Journal*, 47 (4): 523-549.

Boden, D. 1994. *The business talk: Organizations in action.* Cambridge: Polity.

Boden, D. 1995. *Agendas and arrangements: Everyday negotiations in meetings*. In: Firth, A. (Ed.). The discourse of negotiation: Studies of language in the workplace: 83-100. Oxford: Pergamon.

Carter, C., Clegg, S. R., & Kornberger, M. 2008. So!apbox: editorial essays: Strategy as practice? *Strategic Organization*, 6(1): 83–99.

Clarke, I., Kwon, W., & Wodak, R. 2012. Analysing Talk in Strategy Meetings. *British Management Journal,* 23(4): 455-473.

Clegg, S. R. 1989. *Frameworks of Power*. London: Sage.

Clegg, S. R., Carter, C. & Kornberger, M. 2004. Geetup, I feel like being a strategy machine. *European Management Review*, 1: 21-28.

Clifton, J. 2009. Beyond Taxonomies of Influence: "Doing" Influence and Making Decisions in Management Team Meetings. *Journal of Business Communication*, 46 (1): 57-79.

Dittrich, K., Guérard, S., & Seidl, D. 2011. Meetings in the strategy process: Toward an integrative framework. *Best paper proceedings of the Academy of Management Annual Meeting*.

Eisenhardt, K. M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of management review*, 14(4): 532-550.

Foucault, M. 1994. Power: Essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984. Volume 3, Ed. J. D. Faubion, New York: The New York Press.

Giddens, A. 1984. *The constitution of society*. Oxford: Policy.

Golsorkhi, D., Rouleau, L., Seidl, D., & Vaara, E. (Eds.). 2010. *Cambridge handbook of strategy as practice*. Cambridge University Press.

Hansen, N., & Küpper, W. 2009. Power Strategies and Power Sources of Management: The Micropolitics of Strategizing. *Paper presented at 25th EGOS Colloquium 2009*, Barcelona, Spain.

Hardy, C., & Thomas, R. 2014. Strategy, discourse and practice: The intensification of power. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51(2): 320-348.

Hendry, J., & Seidl, D. 2003. The structure and significance of strategic episodes: Social systems theory and the practice of strategic change. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40 (1): 175-195.

Hodgkinson, G. P., Whittington, R., Johnson, G., & Schwarz, M. 2006. The role of strategy workshops in strategy development processes: Formality, communication, co-ordination and inclusion. *Long Range Planning*, 39(5): 479-496.

Hope, O. 2010. The Politics of Middle Management Sensemaking and Sensegiving, *Journal of Change Management*, 10(2):195-215.

Jarzabkowski, P., Balogun, J., & Seidl, D. 2007. Strategizing: The challenges of a practice perspective. *Human Relations*, 60 (1): 5-27.

Jarzabkowski, P., & Seidl, D. 2008. The role of meetings in the social practice of strategy. *Organization Studies*, 29 (11): 1391-1426.

Johnson, G., Langley, A., Melin, L., & Whittington, R. 2007. *Strategy as practice - Research directions and resources*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Johnson, G., Melin, L., & Whittington, R. 2003. Guest's editors' introduction: Micro strategy and strategizing: toward an activity-based view. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40: 3-22.

Kangasharju, H. 1996. Aligning as a team in multiparty conversation. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 26(3): 291-319.

Kangasharju, H. 2002. Alignment in disagreement: forming oppositional alliances in committee meetings. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 34 (10-11): 1447-1471.

Knights, D., & Morgan, G. 1991. Corporate strategy, organizations, and subjectivity: A critique. *Organization studies*, 12(2): 251-273.

Küpper, W. 2004. Mikropolitik. In: Schreyögg, G. & Werder, A.v. (eds.). *Handwörterbuch Unternehmensführung und Organisation*. 4., völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage: 861-870, Stuttgart: Schäffer-Poeschl.

Küpper, W., & Ortmann, G. 1992. *Mikropolitik. Rationalität, Macht und Spiele in Organisationen*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.

Kwon, W., Clarke, I., & Wodak, R. 2014. Strategies for Constructing Shared Views. *Journal of Management Studies*, 51: 265-290.

Laine, P. M., & Vaara, E. 2007. Struggling over subjectivity: A discursive analysis of strategic development in an engineering group. *Human relations,* 60(1): 29-58.

Mantere, S., & Vaara, E. 2008. On the problem of participation in strategy: A critical discursive perspective. *Organization science*, 19(2): 341-358.

McCabe, D. 2010. Strategy-as-Power: Ambiguity, Contradiction and the Exercise of Power in a UK Building Society. *Organization*, 17(2): 151–175.

Mintzberg, H. 1973. *The nature of managerial work*. New York: Harper & Row.

Mintzberg, H. 1983. Power in and Around Organizations. Englewood Cliffs, NH: Prentice-Hall.

Murnighan, J.K., & Brass, D. J. 1991. Intraorganizational coalitions. In: Bazerman, M.H., Lewicki, R. J., & Sheppard, B. H. (Eds.), *Research on Negotiation in Organizations*. Greenwick, CT: JAI Press.

Pettigrew, A. M. 1977. Strategy formulation as a political process. *International studies of management & organization*, 7(2): 78-87.

Pfeffer, J. 1992. *Managing with power. Politics and influence in organizations*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.

Samra-Fredericks, D. 2003. Strategizing as Lived Experience and Strategists' Everyday Efforts to Shape Strategic Direction*. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40: 141-174.

Samra-Fredericks, D. 2005. Strategic practice, 'discourse', and the everyday interactional constitution of 'power effects'. Organization 12(6): 803–841.

Schwartzmann, H. B. 1989. *The meeting: Gatherings in organizations and communities.* New York: Plenum.

Schwarz, M. 2009. Strategy workshops facilitating and constraining strategy making. *Journal of Strategy and Management*, 2(3): 277-287.

Seidl, D. and Guérard, S. 2015. "Meetings and workshops in the practice of strategy". In: Golsorkhi, D., Rouleau, L., Seidl, D., & Vaara, E. (eds) *Cambdridge Handbook of Strategy as Practice:* 564-581. 2nd Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Spataro, J. 2020. Remote work trend report: meetings. Microsoft. Retrieved from https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/microsoft-365/blog/2020/04/09/remote-work-trend-report-meetings/.

Tepper, S. 2004. Setting agendas and designing alternatives: Policymaking and the strategic role of meetings. *Review of Policy Research,* 2: 523-542.

van Maanen, J. 1979. The Fact of Fiction in Organizational Ethnography. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24 (4): 539-550.

van Praet, E. 2009. Staging a Team Performance: A Linguistic Ethnographic Analysis of Weekly Meetings at a British Embassy. *Journal of Business Communication*, 46 (1): 80-99.

Vaara, E., & Whittington, R. 2012. Strategy-as-practice: Taking social practices seriously. *Academy of Management Annals*, 6(1): 285-336.

Weick, K. E. 1995. *Sensemaking in organizations*. London: Sage.

Whittington, R. 2006. Completing the practice turn in strategy research. *Organization studies*, 27 (5): 613-634.

Whittington, R. 2014. Information systems strategy and strategy-as-practice: a joint agenda. The Journal of Strategic Information Systems, 23(1): 87-91.

Williams, C. 2007. Research Methods. Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER), 5(3).

Wodak, R., Kwon, W., & Clarke, I. 2011. "Getting people on board": Discursive leadership for consensus building in team meetings. *Discourse & Society*, 22 (5): 592-644.

Yin, R. 2003. *Case study research* (3rd edition), Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

VI. TIMETABLE

In order to be able to submit the exemplary work in due time, the following timetable is proposed:

June	- First literature research - Narrow down / precise the topic - Development of research question - Determination of research method - Systematic literature research according to research question (power, politics) and method (case study) - Reading and evaluating the literature - Searching and finding a suitable research setting - Writing and revising exposé
July	- Collecting further sources and data (library, documents of firm etc.) - Formulating the written raw version of the theoretical part (literature review on meetings and politics / power)
August	- Formulating the written raw version of the empirical part (research design, data collection, research analysis) - Analyze audios and conduct interviews
September	- Data analysis of audios and interviews (first-and second order analysis) - Summarizing research results of first- and second order analysis
October	- Answering the research question - Highlighting contributions and limitations - Writing introduction and conclusion
November	- Editing according to linguistic aspects and scientific standards
December	- Proofreading - Final correction - Printing and submitting thesis