

Strategic Management of the Local Information Society

– a Constructionist Perspective on the Production and evaluation of Strategy Documents

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the purpose and consequences of information society strategies at the local and regional levels of political-administrative action. The main objective is to analyse the value of strategy making from the strategy makers' point of view and to offer some insights into how the established presumptions of strategic management direct strategy making and its evaluation. This article suggests that it is useful for both the researchers and practitioners to open up the presumptions underlying the realist perspectives of strategic management, which we suggest are the dominant approaches in current strategy literature. In this article, we outline a specific constructionist approach which has a focus on language practices. We suggest that the constructionist perspective reveals new aspects for strategy making and strategy evaluation. The more specific goal of this article is to show how a constructionist perspective provides a way first, to question the taken-for-granted nature of strategic management and strategic leadership and second, to consider practical solutions to such issues as the problem of participation, which are discussed at the end of the article.

Key words: strategic management, strategy evaluation, leadership, participation, information society, constructionism

INTRODUCTION

'There can only be one justification for introducing strategic management into an organisation: a belief that it will lead to a successful future' (Hussey 1998: 26).

The dominant understanding of strategic management describes it as a modern management technique, the main purpose of which is to secure the success of the organisation in the future. Stacey (1993: 1) offers a detailed specification of the purpose of strategic management. According to him, the objectives are first, to reduce the level of surprise and second, to make the uncertain future more predictable and thereby to improve the

ability of those at the top to control the long-term destiny of their organisation.

This article discusses the purpose and consequences of information society strategies at the local and regional levels of political-administrative action. Our main objective is to elaborate the value and benefits of strategy making from the strategy makers' point of view and to offer new insights into how the presumptions of strategic management direct strategy making and its evaluation. We suggest that it is useful for both researchers and practitioners to open up the dominant presumptions of strategic management. By so doing, we are able to critically assess and, perhaps also to improve the practice of strategic management. Furthermore, we are able to look for alternative perspectives on strategic management that could be used in the making of the future.

In this article, we distinguish between two broadly defined approaches to strategic management which are based on different conceptions of the nature of knowledge. We name these as 'the realist' and 'the constructionist' perspectives on strategic management. Currently, strategic management theory most often applies different variations of the realist perspective, which emphasise the ability of strategic analyses to reflect the 'external' reality as accurately as possible. Constructionist perspectives are not as widely applied yet, but we argue that they are highly relevant because of their ability to pay attention to the nature of strategic management as produced and reproduced by the actors involved in strategy making (e.g. Knights and Morgan 1991; Watson 1995). In this article, we are particularly interested in developing a constructionist perspective, which focuses on language practices and meanings produced in strategy discourse and strategy texts (i.e. speech and writing).

Although widely criticised, strategic planning persists as one of the main tools of strategic management in various types of organisations (e.g. Whittington 1993; Santalainen and Huttunen

1993; Mintzberg 1994). One indication of the continuing relevance of the planning aspect of strategic management in Finland is the number of strategy documents produced within the public sector (cf. Karppi and Sotarauta 1995) which is the empirical context of this article. The Finnish government organisations (ministries, offices etc.) as well as cities and municipalities (cf. Haveri 1994 and 1995; Sotarauta 1995) are making their own strategies focusing on 'how to be prepared for the future?' and 'how to manage the transition from the industrial society to the information society?'

Obviously, the local and regional level public organisations see certain benefits in strategy making and, particularly, in strategic planning. The purpose of this article is to show how the benefits and value of strategy making and strategic planning look rather different when approached from a constructionist perspective as compared to a realist perspective. We argue that in order to make sense of the strategy making processes and their consequences, the strategy makers – not only in public administration but also in private organisations and companies – need to widen their horizons by including alternative ways of analysing and practising strategic management besides the currently dominant realist perspectives.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to show how the specific constructionist perspective that we outline provides a way to enrich the theory and practice of strategic management in giving a means to critically reflect the meaning and implications of strategic planning and thereby, to question the assumed nature of strategic management. At the same time, the constructionist approach of this article provides fresh starting points in evaluating strategy documents and their consequences, such as the textual production of top-down strategic leadership and the problem of implementation and participation. The problematic link between top-down strategic leadership, strategy implementation and participation is discussed by both researchers and practitioners (e.g. Whittington 1993: 43–61; Karlöf 1995: 209–213; Johnson and Scholes 1997: 358) and yet, detailed analyses of the problem are in scarce supply. We propose that the constructionist perspective outlined in this article – which emphasises the ability of language practices to produce reality – could offer useful starting points in analysing some of the current problems of strategic management, such as the link between strong leadership and lack of participation, for example.

The second section of this article describes the data and the textual methods that we have used in analysing the strategy documents from the constructionist perspective, in particular. Section three gives an overview of the purpose and consequences of two local/regional strategy documents and an evaluation report when approached from the realist perspective. Section four offers an analysis of the same strategy documents and the evaluation report within the constructionist perspective. This section has an emphasis on the question of how strategic leadership is produced in strategy texts through narrative and rhetoric. The problem of participation and its link to strategic leadership is discussed in section five, which also outlines some practical suggestions on how strategy makers could become more conscious of the power of language. Finally, section six gives our conclusions.

DATA AND METHODS

In this article, we analyse two local/regional strategy documents and one evaluation report¹. All three publications were produced by the City of Tampere and the Council of Tampere Region and they are titled: THE FUTURE OF TAMPERE IS KNOWN – GUIDELINES OF CITY POLICIES FOR YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND and THE TAMPERE REGION SUCCESS STRATEGY 2000+. The titles of the strategy documents and the evaluation report explicitly target the future of the city and the region. Furthermore, one of the five purposes of the Tampere Region strategy is 'to meet the future with an awareness of its challenges'. The documents identify strategy making and, particularly strategic planning as the main vehicles through which the region is able to reduce the level of surprise and to make the uncertain future more predictable.

¹ 'The Future of Tampere Is Known – Guidelines of City Policies For Year 2000 and Beyond' document is printed only in Finnish and it is available in the world wide web. A short version of the strategy document, which the city officials call 'the People's Edition' is published both in Finnish and in English. 'The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+' and 'An Evaluation of Regional Development Potential and Strategic Planning in Tampere Region' are both available in Finnish and in English. Whenever possible, the quotations in our text have been taken from the strategy texts written in English. Other quotations have been translated from Finnish into English by the authors of this paper and these were checked by Joel Kuortti and Jeff Long.

'Finnish society is undergoing a period of historical changes. This applies to both our internal structures and our international position. The conditions for regional success in the near future are totally new in both the domestic and European contexts. For this reason, regional strategy is of utmost importance for the success of the Tampere Region.' (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+: 1).

Within the constructionist perspective that we outline in this article, the language that we use when talking and writing about strategy issues does matter in terms of what we produce as useful, necessary, desirable or self-evident. Naming activities as 'strategic management' makes these activities relevant and gives people a legitimate reason to devote their time to these activities. Furthermore, adopting the strategic management frame brings along a number of management practices such as establishing teams for preparing external and internal analysis, appointing specialist managers or staff for strategic planning, discussing visions, values, goals and means, preparing a written strategy document etc.

In this article, we analyse the strategy discourse and the three strategy texts by laying bare the rhetoric (metaphors and lines of argumentation) and the narrative structure of the strategy texts. Our purpose is to 'unpack' the strategy texts by questioning their textual material (concepts, metaphors and arguments.) (cf. Fairclough 1992; Vihinen 1996). Following Alasuutari (1995, p. 100) our purpose is 'to find out how linguistic choices and practices construct reality, how they bracket off alternative solutions and create commitment to certain thought patterns'. We do not attempt to go 'behind' the text and find its 'true' or 'original' meaning as intended by the author(s). Rather, we approach the text as a sample or a piece of reality, which is (re)constructed in interaction between the reader and the text (Alasuutari, 1995). Therefore, we analyse the strategy texts questioning the meanings produced through the choice of metaphors, the lines of argumentation and the narrative structure of the text. We position ourselves among those who believe that 'rhetoric is involved in all processes of human communication and reality construction' (e.g. Billig 1987; Burke 1969; Watson, 1995: 807). Our study follows the new rhetoric perspective (for a review, see Summa, 1996), which means that we do not base our analysis on a division between rhetoric and reality. To us, rhetoric is reality.

Scholars in philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and social sciences have a surprisingly similar perspective on the essence of metaphors in

our thinking. It has been argued that, since our observations presuppose conceptualisation and, what we see depends, at least to a certain extent, on what we expect to see, it is difficult to develop fundamentally 'new' concepts. Thus, we all grow up using metaphors, thinking of one thing in terms of something else. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) provide a categorisation of metaphors in which structural metaphors are those in which one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another. For instance, 'strategic plan is a road map'. Van den Bulte (1994) distinguishes between three types of metaphors: lively, dormant and extinct. Lively metaphors are the ones which we constantly use, fully aware of their "as-if" nature. In this article, we analyse the structural and lively metaphors of the strategic management literature and show how the use of metaphors is linked to the conceptions of what strategic knowledge is like.

Besides analysing the rhetoric and metaphors of strategy texts, we also use narrative analysis (in Greimas 1987, see Alasuutari 1995: 80–82) as an example in elaborating how the Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+ constitutes and (re)produces specific roles for the strategy maker(s) and for the other actors within the region. Strategy documents do not have a traditional plot, but they introduce a number of actors and outline specific roles for each actor. Therefore, it is fairly easy to identify the hero, the enemies and the facilitators of the story.

As other stories, strategy documents also follow certain structural patterns: they formulate visions, objectives and goals on the basis of internal and external analysis and identify strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities based on the SWOT analysis. The documents that we study follow the typical structural patterns of a legitimate strategy document. In general, both the writers and the readers of strategy documents know what a legitimate structure and content of a strategy document are. On the other hand, following the established rules of writing guarantees the fulfilment of the audience's expectations. Actually, the structural patterns of strategy documents are so well known that they are considered self-evident for most of the time (for an exception, see e.g. the Communication Strategy by the City of Tampere called 'Västaräkin siivellä').

In the next sections, we give examples of how the strategy texts that we have analysed are able to produce various types of consequences. We suggest that the examples that we give are rather typical of many strategy processes and there-

fore, their relevance extends beyond the specific local and regional strategy processes and beyond the documents studied.

REALIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Strategy literature is full of lively metaphors, which help us to understand what strategic management is and how it should be practised. Strategy making is conceptualised as a war, a battle or a fight (e.g. Quinn 1988: 4–7; Porter 1980; 1985), and strategies as plans, patterns, positions or perspectives (Mintzberg 1988: 13–18). Strategic planning may be approached as control (cf. Mintzberg 1994) or magic (Gimpl and Dakin 1984), for example, and strategic plans as *road maps* (Karlöf 1994: 39) to be used when moving from the present to the future. The road map metaphor, as used in most of the strategy literature, makes us think of a strategy document as a store and supply of truthful and factual information about the external environment, the organisation and its management. Furthermore, the objective nature of information is emphasised by providing facts and figures.

'Tampere companies are forerunners in many growth sectors, even in the international context.' (People's edition of the Tampere city strategy).

Regional strengths include the service sector. As a centre of trade and public services, the Tampere region caters to a population of 1.3 million.

The value-added potential of internal interests is high. Gross regional product per capita in Tampere is the 3rd highest in Finland... (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+: 7).

Yet another metaphor conceptualises strategic plans and, particularly, strategy documents as 'mirrors', which reflect the environmental and organisational reality around us. By so doing, strategies are assumed to provide a basis for adjusting the direction of the organisation (Sotarauta 1995). The road map and the mirror metaphors – and the way they are used in most of the strategy literature – explicate a presumption of the existence of a shared (objective) reality that the strategy document is able to reflect or represent more or less accurately (for examples of this type of arguments, see e.g. Porter 1980: 20 and Mintzberg 1994: 25). The meanings given to the road map and the mirror metaphors in strategy texts focus attention to the accuracy, reliability and finally, objectivity of the data and information which is used by the strategy makers. In this article, we name this type of ap-

proach 'the realist perspectives' on strategic management.

Within the realist perspectives strategy evaluation is based on an assessment of the quality of information presented in strategic plans and other strategy documents (cf. Porter 1980). The high quality of information (accuracy, clarity, consistency, relevance etc.) is believed to lead to the implementation of 'right things' (Hussey 1998: 478). This line of thinking has important implications for a commonly stated problem of strategic planning. Producing plans about the future is criticised by the scholars of strategic management because '*we are not capable of predicting the future, we cannot make reliable forecasts about future events*' (Hansén 1991: 125). In other words, it is impossible to have accurate and objective information about the future.

Part of the solution to the planning problem is to analyse and describe the present environment and the strategy makers' own organisation in a systematic and detailed manner (cf. Porter 1980). Strategy literature is full of tools for such analyses. SWOT-analysis is among the most commonly used tools, the purpose of which is to provide a description of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats concerning the organisation and the environment in question.

'Strengths and opportunities as well as threats and weaknesses, are a fact of life. The strengths and opportunities of a region are its keys to success. This is why they will be chosen as strategic priorities.' (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+: 1).

The realist perspectives on strategic management are built on a presumption that providing a detailed description of the present with all the relevant information reduces the level of surprise and provides a basis for the definition of clear, concise, rational and sensible objectives and goals.

Another part of the solution to the planning problem, as illustrated by the examples below, is to provide a vision, guidelines, or value statements from which the more specific priorities, objectives and goals can be derived as the process of strategy implementation proceeds into the future and as more accurate information comes to hand (e.g. Mintzberg 1994: 25, Sotarauta 1995):

The (strategy) programme defines the guidelines for developing Tampere... (People's edition of the Tampere city strategy).

'Expressed as an inspirational "vision" it (the mission statement) can serve a useful role in ... and focusing appropriate action' (An evaluation of re-

gional development potential and strategic planning in Tampere Region: 13).

Within the realist perspectives strategy implementation most often concerns the translation of clear and quantifiable strategic objectives from a plan into real action. The requirement to produce reliable, consistent and factual information in strategy plans is, in turn, justified by referring to effective implementation with quantifiable evaluation indicators, as the following text examples show:

'Strategic objectives that are not quantifiable by indicators may end up as being little more than vague statements of intent rather than elements of a strategic programme of action.' (An Evaluation of Regional Development Potential and Strategic Planning in Tampere Region: 14).

These evaluation criteria, among others, draw attention to a classic presumption that strategic thinking and planning can be separated from strategic action. Taking thinking and acting apart is inherent in separating deliberate strategies from emergent strategies (e.g. Mintzberg 1988) and in making a distinction between strategy formulation and implementation in the following way, for example:

'Strategy-making is only one part of the strategic process: implementation of the strategy is equally important and should receive attention at an early stage if the strategy is to be successful'. (An Evaluation of Regional Development Potential and Strategic Planning in Tampere Region: 32).

The division between thinking and acting has been criticised by arguing that strategy making is a process where thinking and acting follow each other all the time (Lahdenpää 1991: 95; Mintzberg 1994). However, not many strategy scholars have suggested that thinking and planning are acting as much as is implementation. This is one of the most important starting points when elaborating strategy documents within the constructionist perspective in the following section.

CONSTRUCTIONIST PERSPECTIVES ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Approaching strategic management from the constructionist perspective gives us a chance to enhance our understanding of the purpose, benefits and consequences of strategy making. In this section, we focus our attention particularly on the value of written strategy documents for

the strategy makers and on the relevance of taking into account the ability of strategic management language practices to produce consequences on the relationship between the strategic leader(s) and the other local and regional actors.

The constructionist perspective that we outline in this article does not take the strategy plan as a mirror which reflects what is around us, but focuses on the ability of the strategy plan and more specifically, strategy language to construct our world in several ways. Let us elaborate this argument. First, the decision to make a strategy statement (e.g. to have a strategy meeting or to write a strategy plan) is a commitment to take strategic management as an important instrument in making the future. Second, the process of planning, documentation and implementation proceeds through choices of what issues are included and what are excluded from the document, which defines a particular reality and excludes other alternative realities. When approached from this angle, the linguistic choices of strategy making become an important issue.

The strategy document as an artefact

The constructionist perspective that we offer focuses attention on the strategy document as an artefact, which is capable of acting in relationships with people and other artefacts (cf. Latour 1993). Within this perspective, strategic plans and strategy documents are not evaluated merely on the basis of the clarity and coherence of the aims, objectives and means specified in them, but on the basis of their ability to construct alternative social realities and to establish social relationships. Furthermore, it is not assumed that there is one 'true' view of the world, the understanding and control of which leads to success. In other words, there are several positions from which the world can be understood and constructed. Strategy documents are written from the position of strategic management and as such, they reproduce the social world of managers and leaders.

There is an argument in the strategic management literature that strategic planning is not capable of producing any new strategies, but that it merely marks down the current strategic actions (cf. Mintzberg 1994: 111). Sotarauta (1995: 228) illustrates this with a quotation from the University of Tampere strategy process as described by the rector of the university.

There was actually nothing extremely new presented in our strategy (document), but for the first time we got these familiar issues 'officially' on paper.'

This quotation partly illustrates the value that the strategy makers see in getting things and issues onto paper, although no new strategies are suggested in the document. Printing the strategy on paper – or publishing it in the world wide web – obviously makes it more visible (e.g. official or justified) and more material compared to thoughts, ideas or conversations that are not written down or published.

We can find an analogy between strategy documents and statistics, graphics and maps as discussed by Latour (1986, see also Häkli 1994: 71 and 1997: 39–40). Latour suggests that the most important task of statistics, graphics and maps is to document the social world in a way that makes it visible, collectable and movable. When maps are drawn and printed on paper, it is possible to circulate them around and to collect them in certain places. Following Latour's suggestions, there is much value for the strategy makers in printing their strategy on paper, or writing it down on the pages of the world wide web. Within the local and regional context of the information society, this value is highlighted by the popularity of publishing the strategy statements.

There are several aspects to be considered concerning the relevance of strategy documents to strategy makers. First, printing the strategy document on paper enables the strategy makers to take it through a series of formal procedures (e.g. meetings) by which the strategy statements are made public and, at the same time, given their legitimacy as the 'common will' of the city or the region.

'The regional strategy was accepted at the regional council of the Council of Tampere Region on November 20, 1996.' (Foreword of The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+.)

'The City Council accepted the Strategy of Tampere in its meeting on March (1997)'. (Accompanying letter of The Future of Tampere is Known).

Second, it is rather difficult to systematically circulate a strategy which is not available in printed form. In contrast, it is easy to take a written strategy document through a series of evaluations and to ask others to give their opinions on it. Circulating strategies extensively for statements is a common practice within the public sector organisations in particular.

'A draft of this strategy was on the agenda of the planning meeting of the City Board of Management on 6th May 1996. The strategy was refined into its

current form according to the feedback from the City Council seminar in Muikka on 23th May 1996, statements from 16 collaborative partners and two planning meetings of the City Board of Management on 9th September and 4th November 1996.' (The Future of Tampere is Known: 1.)

Third, writing down the strategy of an organisation makes it more concrete and material, but also more readily comparable with other strategy documents. It is easy to compare the structure of the two strategy documents and the evaluation report that we have analysed and conclude that they follow the legitimate lines of strategy texts built on the identification of the basic variables of strategy making and on making a SWOT analysis, which provide the basis for the definition of priorities, guidelines, objectives, goals and means in the following way:

'The regional strategy (document) defines the common aims, objectives and priorities that direct the regional action.' (Foreword of The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+.)

Fourth, when the strategy is written down and publicly available it becomes possible not only to make comparisons between strategies and to look for good examples (e.g. benchmarking), but also to refer to a specific strategy document and to use the statements of one strategy document to support another actor's strategy. The mushrooming of local and national strategies has indeed produced a number of intertextual relationships among the strategies of the public sector organisations in Tampere Region.

'At the same time with the strategy process of the City of Tampere, a re-evaluation process of the development program of the Tampere district has been undertaken partly by the same people. During this process, the surrounding communities have had a chance to comment on the Tampere City Strategy.' (Information is the Key to the Future: 1)

University of University has placed strategic emphasis on the information society and its various components... (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+: 7).

The production of strategic leadership through rhetoric

We have analysed the Tampere City and the Tampere Region strategy texts word by word, questioning the meanings produced through the language practices and, at the same time, we have examined how the lines of argumentation convince the readership of these texts (see Eriksson and Lehtimäki 1998a and 1998b). The main point is to understand how the text argues for

the truthfulness of the issues and events in the text (Juhila 1993: 152).

The dominant rhetoric of strategic management is normative (arguing by necessity), hierarchical (arguing for the top position of management and experts) and technical (arguing for the use of tools and techniques) (cf. Knights and Morgan 1991; Alvesson and Willmott 1996). The classic strategy rhetoric is present in the Tampere City and in the Tampere Region strategy texts and in the evaluation report that we have analysed. Typical of the classic rhetoric of strategy; these strategy texts are imbued with normative talk (cf. Alvesson and Willmott 1996) and developmental optimism, which is also present in political-administrative (cf. Stenvall 1997) and information society documents (cf. Aro 1997: 32; Pantzar 1996). Overall, all three strategy texts are very efficient in producing hierarchical positions between the strategy makers and the other actors.

The Tampere City Strategy text draws on an argumentation strategy where the City is an expert with the ability, competence and knowledge required for creating a shared vision for the future. The other actors are primarily constituted as followers or subordinates who need to adopt the vision and to join the City Management in realising it. By constructing power relationships, this strategy text convincingly reproduces the top hierarchical position of the strategy maker(s). The quotations below show how 'consensus' and 'co-operation' are the key resources of this rhetoric.

'The purpose of this strategy is to create sufficient consensus and institute co-operation between the most significant regional actors in order to utilise the potential created by the information society.' (Information is the Key to the Future: 14).

'Success strategy 2000+ is the result of broad regional collaboration and a joint definition of targets prepared by the regional agents, aiming at the overall success of the region for the benefit of its citizens'. 'Even the implementation of the strategy is based on regional cooperation.' (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+ :1).

The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+ uses a rhetoric of 'we' in a skilful way in the subtitles of the document: *'What can we do?'*, *'This is how we develop our resources'*, *'These are our strengths'* and *'This is how we do it'*. The rhetoric of 'we' is only present in these four subtitles and in a few sentences in the beginning and at the end of the document. However, combined with the deterministic sentences of the text, the rhetoric of 'we' is able to produce strong strategic leadership for the strategy makers.

Although the strategy text does not name any group of actors as followers, it constructs an implicit leader – follower relationship between the strategy makers and the other actors in the text. The text produces 'you' as the object that 'we' are able to semantically integrate and direct. Therefore, 'we' invoke a collective – all of us – whom 'we' claim to have a right to speak for. By the use of the rhetoric of 'we', the text portrays a harmonious world in which all of us speak with one voice – the leader(s) voice. (Billig 1995: 166). The leader(s) have the unquestioned privilege of talking about what 'we' think or do. In other words, when talking in the position of 'we', the strategy text legitimises the top position of the leader(s) as strategy makers. (Hyvärinen 1994: 73).

The rhetoric of 'we' also efficiently constructs a 'we-they' opposition; if there is 'us', there must also be 'them' from whom we distinguish ourselves. (Billig 1995: 163). Even though loosely defined in the text, 'we' seems to generate an idea of 'we who live and operate in the Tampere Region'. 'They' seem to be posing a threat to the development and survival of the area and 'we' need to be prepared for what 'they' might be doing or intending to do. In other words, the rhetoric of 'we' carries the shadow of 'they' as its opposite. The loose definition of both 'we' and 'they' allows freedom to the audience in constructing their own meanings, and thereby, makes the text influential. (Hyvärinen 1994: 72). As a conclusion, the rhetoric of 'we' as used in the subtitles of this strategy text, is an effective means in constituting the competence and authority of the strategic leader(s) and in convincing the audience of the importance of fighting the loosely defined enemies.

The production of strategic leadership by narrative

We use narrative analysis (in Greimas 1987, see Alasuutari 1995: 80–82) as an example here to illustrate how the Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+ constitutes and (re)produces specific roles for the strategy maker(s) and for the other actors within the region. Combined with the rhetoric of 'we' discussed earlier, the story line of the Tampere Region strategy document also constructs the authority of the leader(s) over the followers. The story follows the typical structural patterns of a strategy document: it is based on the SWOT analysis model and it is structured around aims, priorities, objectives, goals and means.

Tampere Region is the powerful hero-subject of the story, whose objective is to become successful in the future. The success is defined as '*deriving prosperity from work and enterprise*', '*high standard of living*' and '*clean nature*'. The enemy of the story is 'they', which includes first, those living and operating within the area, but who are not willing or able to 'cooperate', and second, the other regions who are also battling for their own success in the future. Assistants to the hero are named as: '*the people of Tampere Region*', '*local and regional authorities*', '*citizens*', '*entrepreneurs*', '*companies*', '*financing institutions*', '*educational institutions*', '*environmental resources*' and '*high technology sectors*' – Strategy making and its implementation are the means by which the Tampere Region can achieve the objective. The text emphasises '*co-operation*' and '*collaboration*', in particular, as important features of a successful strategy process.

The interest in the story builds-up around the tension between the hero-subject and the enemy. The strategy story produces the world as a complex place, where progress and success are self-evident virtues which can be achieved by rational and instrumental choices and insightful activities. The text motivates the reader to approve the objectives of the 'hero' by presenting it as an unselfish actor who will generously distribute the prosperity won in the battles among all actors living in the region. Such an heroic story produces the proficiency of the author in an interesting manner. Although the author is not present in the text, the story portrays its author as an ingenious and competent actor who is able to identify what is important for the hero to achieve and how he can achieve it in the best way (see Sulkunen – Törrönen 1997: 82). By making statements on the strengths, future events and explicit goals of the hero as objective facts, the text produces an author who is capable of reporting the world as it 'really' is.

PROBLEMS OF PARTICIPATION IN STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

The problems of participation and commitment are discussed in management and organisation literature, including strategic management at the local and regional levels (e.g. Pettigrew and Whipp 1991, Stacey 1993; Whittington 1993; Mintzberg 1994; Nonaka 1994; Karppi and Sotarauta 1995). The main question seems to be 'how to get the middle management, the employ-

ees or the external partners involved in the strategy process and committed to the strategic aims and objectives formulated by top management?'

The most popular solution to this problem is decentralisation of strategy making to the lower levels of the hierarchy (e.g. Mintzberg 1994) which leads to forms of participation in which the leader(s) tell others to participate and furthermore, the leader(s) tell others how they should participate (cf. Dachler and Hosking 1995). The paradox of participation in most strategy texts is that as the leader(s) voice dominates the discourse, the voices of the follower(s) are silenced (cf. Mir, Calás and Smircich 1997).

The purpose of strategic management is – by definition – approached from the point of view of the leaders and managers. The issues and priorities defined in strategy documents are obviously useful to managers and leaders, but less understandable or desirable from the point of view of the other actors, whom we call the followers. This state of affairs and the related commitment problems provide one explanation for the popularity of the current requests to make the strategy process more open and shared by inviting an increased number of actors to join in (e.g. Karlöf 1996: 56; Pettigrew and Whipp 1991). The argumentation of the two local strategy documents and the evaluation report exemplify the concerns of the strategic leaders and their request for increased level of participation and interaction in the following way:

'The strategy should be a process open to maximum participation.' 'The strategy was prepared as a joint project of specialists, authorities, public officials, sub-regional representatives and other private and public sector agencies with a wide variety of backgrounds.' (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+: 1)

'The information society is a community of networks, where interaction is the key success factor.' (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+: 11)

'The city will network to become a preferred partner for national and international projects, facilitating the international links that are essential to industry, public services, education research, arts and culture (People' Edition of the Tampere City Strategy).

Talking about participation and networking does not necessarily mean that the voices of several actors are heard in the process, nor that they would leave any marks on the written strategy document. The local and regional strategy texts that we analyse are typical examples of how one voice, the voice of the leader(s), tells the story. The texts constitute the Tampere Region

as an abstract space which comprises a multitude of actors. The texts do identify and name multiple actors but yet, the leaders are allowed to speak on behalf of all the actors, or for all of us. The rhetoric of 'we', the content of the stories, and the way in which the stories are narrated reproduce an authoritarian and masculine strategic leader (cf. Alvesson and Billing 1997) whose voice rules strategy making. Other actors are named and assigned the tasks of assistants, but little space is given to them to speak about their own values and preferences with their own voices.

It is rather rare to find strategy documents speaking from several standpoints and with many voices. Conferring order, reducing uncertainty and finally, making the future is obviously easier if there is one voice – the leader(s)' voice – speaking for all the others. Indeed, it is often explicitly assumed that there must be either one, or a few actors who are responsible for strategy making and furthermore, that the leader(s) should be named clearly in the way that the following examples show:

... two sets of organizational links will need to be addressed to improve strategy implementation: strategic leadership and coordination at the centre, especially with the creation or designation of an organization with an overall responsibility for the strategy... (An evaluation of regional development potential and strategic planning in Tampere Region: 24).

'The successful implementation of the strategy requires close co-operation, adequate resources and a strong commitment. Implementation responsibilities should be allocated to the respective facilitators at municipal, sub-regional and regional level. The Council of Tampere Region holds the organisatory responsibility for the strategy, drafting programs of measures for all strategic priorities. These programs designate the operational responsibilities and define the evaluation and follow-up of the outcomes of the strategy.' (The Tampere Region Success Strategy 2000+: 14).

We argue that the persistence of the participation problem in strategic management is due to the dominant belief that the leader(s) are able to, and also entitled to speak for everybody else (cf. Dachler and Hosking 1995; Mir, Calás and Smircich 1997, see also Whittington 1993: 43). This means that within the strategic management discourse the metaphors of participation and co-operation are given specific meanings which could be named as 'participation by command', for example. The dominant language practices of strategic management produce 'participation by command' as a natural and self-evident request in making the future. By having first shown

how the production of strong leadership actually happens in strategy texts, we may proceed and ask what the alternatives are: how could the strategy makers approach the strategy discourse and the strategy plans and documents if they wished to leave more space for multiple voices to be heard and for more democratic relationships to be constituted?

We suggest that first of all, the strategy makers should be more sensitive to the language practices that they draw on and reproduce and to the consequences of their talk and writings. Language and the meanings (re)produced in strategy documents are often the last issue for which the strategy makers have time and motivation. However, being aware of the power of the strategy language could provide help in making sense of some of the paradoxes of strategic management, such as the problem of participation.

We propose that the strategy makers could consider the following issues in order to ease the chains of 'participation by command' although the basic presumption concerning the legitimacy of leader-follower relationships would be untouched. First, strategic leaders could respect the knowledge, experience and intuition of a variety of different types of participants by allowing them easy access to the strategy making processes. Often the participants are chosen on the basis of their prior knowledge and experience of strategic management discourse and practice. These participants are unlikely to present radically different ways of approaching the future. When new approaches are sought, there should be room for participants who are not committed to the ideas of strategic management nor speak the language of strategic management. The strategy makers could give the other actors a chance to frame the issues at hand from several and even contradictory points of views instead of forcing through a consensus view of the future as the strategy process evolves (cf. Healey 1995: 62).

Second, strategic leaders could actively make space for the other actors to start their own processes concerning the future. Preferably, at least some of these processes would not draw resources from the strategic management discourse. Instead, they would be based on other discourses such as sustainable development, cultural production, gender equality, and others.

Third, the strategy makers could also learn to draw on resources from discourses familiar to a variety of local and regional level actors instead of forcing the interaction into the frames and lan-

guage games of the highly specialised management discourses. Fourth, the strategy makers themselves could question the taken-for-granted nature of the strategic management frame as the maker of the economic aspects of the future. The strategy makers could experiment with other frames that have currently been integrated with and to a large extent, taken over by the strategic management discourse. One example of an alternative frame is the frame of 'entrepreneurial innovation' (cf. Knights and Morgan 1991), which would allow for experimentation, intuition, creativity and flexibility in comparison to the tendency of strategic management to avoid uncertainty and to build on predictability.

In conclusion, instead of presenting deterministic statements and arguing for the necessity of accepting certain facts, the strategy maker(s) could allow for discussions of several alternatives constructed from different standpoints. The strategy maker(s) could also show more hesitation and try to avoid positioning themselves as the 'one who knows it all' and thereby respect the autonomy of the other actors to construct alternative realities.

CONCLUSION

The objective of this article was to elaborate the value and benefits of strategy making within two broad perspectives – the realist and the constructionist – and by so doing, to offer an insight into how the presumptions of strategic management direct strategy making, its consequences and its evaluation. We analysed two local/regional strategy documents and one evaluation report by investigating the metaphors, the rhetoric and the narrative structures of these strategy texts.

We suggested that strategic management can be analysed and evaluated within at least two broad but different perspectives, which have their own epistemological backgrounds, i.e. they offer representational alternatives (Gephart et al. 1996: 7). The realist perspectives are based on the belief that there exists one 'objective' reality that the strategy document is able to reflect more or less accurately. In strategy evaluation, this leads to emphasising the accuracy and reliability of the data and information which is used and produced by the strategy makers. The constructionist perspectives, in turn, consider the reality to be what we make out of our experiences and observations through sense making (e.g. Berger and Luckmann 1966). In this view, there are several

positions from which the world can be (re)constructed and understood and consequently, attention is directed to the ability of the strategic management frame and its language practices to construct our world. Within the constructionist perspectives, strategic plans and strategy documents are evaluated on the basis of their ability to construct alternative social realities and to establish social relationships.

We suggest that it is useful for both researchers and practitioners to carefully consider the presumptions of strategy management by bringing into the open the starting points of strategy making. By so doing, we are able to critically reflect the practice of strategic management and, furthermore, to look for alternative frames and discourses to be used together with, or instead of, the strategic management frame. This could be done by being more sensitive to the consequences of the language practices of strategic management and by openly questioning the self-evident dominance of the strategic management discourse.

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