



Becoming misrepresentations in strategy and time

Misrepresentations
in strategy and

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper seeks to review some ontological issues in the creation and representation of strategic management and strategic management processes.

Design/methodology/approach – In this paper Whittington's celebrated four school model is taken as a representation of the variety of strategic management theories. First, a philosophy of action perspective is taken to evaluate representations of actions required by a corporate strategy. Second, the decision-making processes represented by each school are reviewed from the perspective of decision deparadoxification using deconstructions derived from Anderson. Third, the paper looks at the representations of time implied by the four schools by examining the transformation from individual to collective action derived from Heidegger.

Findings – The paper finds that what appears to be schools of strategic management thought are no more than the selective attention of scholars upon one contingency reducing approach. Support for any strategic action in each of the four schools will only ever be particle and contingent. None of the four are capable of accommodating Heidegger's authentic relationship of present to future.

Originality/value – The paper shows that, taken together, these ontological insights bring into question the general principles of strategy processes. That is to say that they undermine the notion that an organisation can somehow know about its own range of possible futures, and then make decisions and actions in the present to bring about the most desirable state.

Keywords Schools, Strategic management, United Kingdom

Paper type Research paper

From a certain point of view, the universe seems to be composed of paradoxes. But everything resolves. That is the function of contradiction.

I don't understand.

When you can see everything from every imaginable point of view, you might begin to understand.

Can you do that?

No.

The Famished Road by Ben Okri (1991)

Introduction

It is reasonable to assume that business people have always worried about the future of their firms. No doubt, Egyptian builders puzzled over developing new pyramid

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technologies and applying them with an unskilled, poorly motivated workforce. One imagines that Chinese merchants pondered over distribution issues with multicultural, multiethnic and illiterate customers and franchisees, thousands of miles apart. It seems very likely that Roman vintners fretted about the loss of profitable Northern markets as the political and economic stability of their empire fractured. All would have despaired at their misfortune to be doing business in the most turbulent and ill-fated times there had ever been.

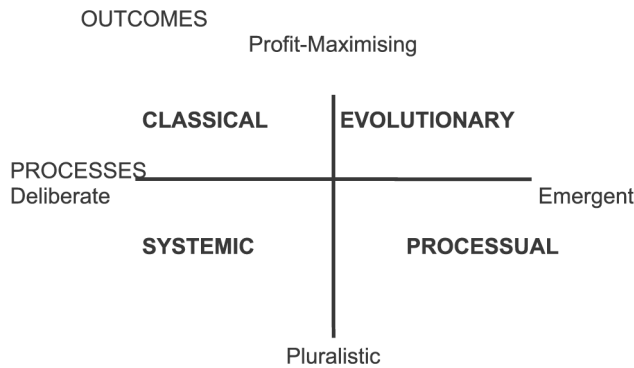
The chroniclers and scholars of ancient times have left texts regarding the management of affairs that form the basis of contemporary literature on politics and economics, but there is no surviving volume of Aristotle on: Excellence, Competitive Strategy according to Confucius or Socrates' Seven Habits of Successful Strategic Managers. In fact the modern strategy literature extends back a little over a lifetime – founding scholars Newman and Ansoff are only recently deceased. These early writers drew on other literature, particularly economics, to build prescriptive processes and axioms to guide professional managers in their decisions. As such writers on strategy are used to debating the nature and rationality of decisions, their political motivations and the possible mismatches between strategic decisions and strategic outcomes. However, the notion that these decisions might be relatively unimportant in the hurly burly of organisational activity is not widely held in the strategy literature. In this paper we follow Chia (1994, 1996) and others by decentering decisions from the Schools derived in Whittington's (1993, 2003) taxonomy – selected because the Schools are constructed around notions of strategic choice. Drawing on Anderson (2003), the paper argues that scholars have created the literature described by Whittington's schools by exaggerating some, and suppressing other, deparaoxing strategies. This representation also removes the temporal dimension of strategic issues by seeking to bring the future into the present. This is reversed by thinking through Heidegger's distinction between authentic and inauthentic time, centred on individual becoming. Taking this as a starting point, the paper searches Whittington's four schools looking for links between individual and collective becoming, and shows that none are capable of satisfying the conditions attunement, standing, discourse and destiny. The four Schools are thus characterised in relation to their frailties; a becoming misrepresentation.

Decisions in strategic management

Whittington's model of strategic is a heroic attempt to classify the strategy literature by two key decision elements – the purpose and process of strategic management. Holding that strategy writers assume strategies to be intentional or emergent, and goals to be singular (profit maximising) or pluralistic (representing a wide variety of interests), Whittington is able to compress the literature into the sort of two by two grid beloved of strategy writers.

The model is admirable in terms of its combination of explanatory power with economy, but follows the literature in ascribing a central role to decision-making and articulated purpose (Figure 1).

The location of the choices, in terms of how choice is made, and for what purpose, is contestable as we explore below, but the ontological premises are held to be unproblematic. It is acceptable shorthand to say that a firm has decided upon an action, but this is a simplification in language as a firm cannot take a decision as such since it



Source: Whittington (1996)

Figure 1.
Strategy schools

has no brain, or cognitive ability. Even defining a firm as a network of actors or agents does not compensate for the lack of a brain, except at the level of metaphor, since these individuals are not discrete components of a net but rather wilful individual. It becomes necessary to ask the reasons why such individuals, even if organised in a network, would act and decide consistently in such a way as to create strategy.

In so far as the tools exist to answer such questions, they are to be found in the Philosophy of Action literature, which is defined as the study of the definition and explanation of actions (Mele, 1997).

Whittington's schools as philosophies of action

Classical writers managerial activity to be rational, and regard profit maximisation as the supreme goal of business, achieved through deliberate strategy – generally evidenced by the existence of formal planning processes. The environment facing the organisation is believed to be dynamic (but essentially predictable), and the organisation sufficiently controllable, to create an effective fit between environmental opportunities and threats on the one hand, and the organisation's resources on the other. Consequently, the strategy planning process is characterised by objective setting, environmental scanning via prescribed tools and matrices, strategy formulation and implementation.

It is worth reflecting on the philosophy of action implied by the parameters of this school. Since the firm itself has no mind or process independent of human action, it cannot be the source of deliberate profit maximising objectives or behaviour. Why then, should employees, particularly managers, deliberately choose to maximize the profits of a firm? There may be some collective benefits if the objective is attained, but it is irrational to behave in the best interests of a community (such as a firm) if this is not equivalently in one's own best interest. This is so whether one's colleagues are, or are not behaving classically, since in the former case one miscreant is likely to cause minimal damage, while in the latter case a conformer would incur costs but not receive the supposed benefit from collective adherence. No matter how rational the corporate strategy making processes aimed at profit maximizing may be (even ignoring bounded

rationality), it is not rational for individuals to accept the goal and its commensurate actions unequivocally.

It is possible that the firm can act as a diminutive Hobbesian Leviathan (assuming some arbitrary enforcing process) requiring or compelling employees to act in their collective rather than individual self interest, but it is far from clear that profit maximisation is necessarily in the best interests of all employees. Since any reasonable information search or subsequent experience would reveal alternative possibilities, it would not be rational for individuals to eschew cheating on the same premise as before. Similarly, subordinating one's interests to profit maximisation, as a duty of employment is not, in itself, rational. One does not take up employment in a business firm in order to accept this duty, but rather to achieve other goals in one's life. To accept the tyranny of duty where it conflicts with those goals is betray oneself irrationally.

Evolutionary school strategists hold that environmental changes are too fast to be predicted in advance, and thus rational long-term planning for an unknown future becomes not only a futile exercise, but also harmful in that it both adds to cost and may distract management. Darwinian processes of natural selection are the underlying mechanics, not the guile and farsightedness of managers. Consequently, efficiency and day to day planning are regarded as essential ingredients for success – or at least survival. Accordingly, management is characterised by discretionary production, together with replication and optimisation of strategic fit with the environment in the short term.

The philosophy of action explicitly rules out rational strategic actions in the evolutionary school. Aristotle's notion of *ta endechomena* (something may turn out one way or another) is a precondition for rational actions; that is, it necessary to be able to influence outcomes by deliberate actions in a reasonably predictable way. Within this school such certainty is confined to operational adjustments, not strategic level choices. Several effective operational adjustments over a period of environmental change can be made to approximate a long-term strategy, particularly if this is defined as a pattern in the stream of actions or decisions when viewed in retrospect. But this would be no more than a reconstruction, a story, based on outcomes that impute a managerial decision process.

Of course, if managers themselves retained a belief that the environment is predictable and strategies controllable, then these perpetual attempts to create long-term profit maximising strategies suffer the same philosophy of action difficulties as the classical school, but in addition are tormented by their expectations (Camus, 2006)

Processual school writers contest the explicit objective of profit maximisation, holding that such an objective is problematic in so much as it not possible to know what the maximum might be without restrictive assumptions that would inhibit the role of strategy development. What is more, the objective would be reckless even if attainable, as many other important stakeholders would not be satisfied by any such achievement – a point well made by Doyle (1992). Processualists thus prefer the notion that firms satisfice their stakeholder's expectations rather than maximise profits to please shareholders, or setting goals that exclude key stakeholders while elevating the needs of customers, employees or any other single agency.

The strategy process is “emergent” rather than “deliberate” for several different reasons, although all share similar assumptions about the environment in which these strategies emerge. The environment is held to be largely unpredictable over the longer term, and confusing in the short term, but not as harsh or unforgiving as evolutionary writers assert. Markets are not particularly efficient at punishing mistakes – in the short run at least – and many firms have considerable power in their market places that may help organisations conceal profit levels from key stakeholders. Thus, organisations pursue a “gradual rational” or incremental approach, rather than “perfect rationality”. Mintzberg (1987) proposed the metaphor of strategy as *craft*, comparing the work of strategists with that of the potter. Like a potter, managers are craftsmen and strategy is their clay. They have intrinsic knowledge of their organisation’s strengths, weaknesses, and market opportunities and must gradually, incrementally, adjust to changes in these. He also asserts that there is no one best way to make strategy, and claimed that effective strategies can show up in strange, unexpected ways (Mintzberg, 1987); as, presumably, would ineffective ones.

In terms of rationality at the individual level, the middle managers commit to a particular strategic technique or process. Political pressures are then brought to bear to make a particular case against other groups of middle managers that champion a different technique. Senior managers sit above these political games, and make rational, holistic decisions about which experiments to run in order to shape the development of their firm. In neither senior management nor middle management do individuals act in their own self-interest, and the individual intentions of senior managers do not seem remarkably different here to those of the Classical school. There is a sense in which this more “realistic” than the Classical approach since it purports to be a representation what managers actually do, and is based upon corporate goals that are more meaningful to managers, but there is no sense in which the actions of individuals can be said to be rational within a process termed logical incrementalism.

Other processual writers take a less “managerialist” view. They argue that strategies and change are greatly influenced by, and are perhaps the result of, wide-ranging political activities within the organisation. Pettigrew (1973) outlines the position that strategic responses of any significant size are likely to “unscramble the current distribution of resources”, thereby creating winners and losers among various groups, subgroups and individuals. If all parties were focused upon achieving profit maximisation, or some other single goal, this would not matter particularly. However, once these component actors are acknowledged to compete for resources, or to have alternative and contradictory ways of identifying and analysing problems, or to have different agendas, or to respond to different pressures, the possibility of generating a single, organisation-wide strategy based upon deliberate action directed towards a common goal recedes. Strategy will then become emergent, pluralistic and satisficing, emerging from organisational and political change rather than preceding it – perhaps with surprising and unintended outcomes.

The philosophy of action is strikingly different here, severing the links between instrumentally rational decisions and actions. Choices are strategic in the sense that they take into account the likely actions of competing groups and individuals – a kind of internal game in which the rules of engagement, rather than rationality, define and moderate what can be said and done. Logos is supplemented and perhaps surpassed by its rhetorical companions ethos and pathos.

Consequently strategy appears to be emergent since it deviates from articulated strategy. However, the category of emergent requires that this articulated strategy represents the deliberate, consolidated intent of the firm, which, under the Processual School rules, cannot exist since the firm consists of competing groups. The articulation of a deliberate intended strategy represents no more than one stage of an ongoing contestation, and may simply represent the ability of some groups to articulate, rather than action, any strategic rhetoric.

Systemic theorists echo Classicists on forward planning and working efficiently to achieve results. However, they contest the classicists' view of a common underlying strategic rationale in every context. For example, they point out that classicists have given scant thought to either the goal or the process implications of operating in different cultures. The Systemic school conveys the message that managers are not isolated individuals interacting in purely economic settings, but people rooted deeply in densely interwoven social systems. Social, business and economic behaviours are embedded in a network of social relations that may involve families, firms, institutions, state, professional expertise and ethics, educational backgrounds and even religion and ethnicity.

The principle philosophy of action here is that of "social habit". Custom and practice, rather than considered choice, is the force behind action. It is not necessary for each institution and stakeholder in society to articulate and enforce its expectations on individuals and business firms. Rather, individuals will not necessarily be mindful of conformance on the wider scale. Deliberate, articulated consideration will only be given to the margins, where limited transgressions and conflicts must be managed.

In this section we have reviewed the Schools of Strategy suggested by Whittington from a philosophy of action perspective. The strategy that emerges from the Classical and Evolutionary schools is shown to require individuals to behave irrationally if strategic decisions are to become strategic actions. Additionally, the notion of Processual strategy appears to be based upon a category error and it might be held that both deliberate and emergent strategies are no more than contested narratives that articulate the actions of individuals and small groups acting in their own political interests. Finally the System school operates from cultural mores rather than independently rational actions or the assertion of internal objectives of individuals or organisations.

Decentring the decisions in the strategy schools

The literature on philosophy of action has suggests a movement away from a decision centred explanation of action. Yet it is not possible to deny that individuals make decisions, even if these are decisions not to act, in the belief that they are somehow deciding for the firm. Consequently, it is necessary to further pursue the link between decisions and strategic actions in order to understand why individual decisions to act strategically may not aggregate into corporate level strategic acts, except when matters are reviewed retrospectively wherein the key decisions and actions can be recognised.

This particular issue has been raised in the literature many times before. Chia (1994) notes that Simon, Quinn and Mintzberg have all raised varying doubts over the links between decision and action. Similarly, actor network theory and autopoiesis (Maturana, 1999) have been applied to strategy in non-decision explanations. In this

section, we problematise the decision based ontology of Whittington's framework, drawing upon Anderson (2003) who, like Chia, draws upon Brown (1969) to deconstruct the nature of decisions.

A decision is usually identified as significant after the event, as an incision whereby many possible outcomes were reduced to a single contingency. That is to say, they are judgements about the point at which many decisions and outcomes that could have been the case were reduced to the retrospectively identified outcome. As Sartre observes, a story is created backwards from its outcome, but written as if from its origin.

Anderson takes this point further, to ask how decision-makers actually make decisions, and discovers a range of further paradoxes that can potentially block decision-making. First, the premise for decisions can only be that one does not know what actions to take – otherwise acts would be automatic, perhaps not even conscious. The decision taker is faced with myriad possible contingencies that will become invisible with hindsight, but almost impossible to evaluate with foresight. Second, decisions reflect social expectations of the future, but are identified retrospectively. Third, retrospective identification of a decision is itself a decision.

The act of decision is thus an act of reducing the possible contingencies by applying some technique. Anderson identifies three such techniques – which he refers to as deparadoxifying strategies – by which choice can be voluntarily restrained in a natural, necessary way that enables the paradoxes to be ignored, a decision to be communicated and actions to be “unblocked”.

First, the range of possibilities can be reduced to a few understandable choices, which can be evaluated according to some criteria understood by the organisation. This can always be presented as rational, since it appears to rank choices against some specified purpose. Anderson refers to this as factual deparadoxification. Classical strategic management for example, groups strategic possibilities in a fashion that enables many to be dismissed cursorily; for example choosing one generic strategy or one of Ansoff's growth strategies will eliminate a huge number of possibilities at a stroke. Those remaining can be evaluated against such criteria as suitability, acceptability and feasibility to produce a workable, if not optimal, strategy that is then communicated and implemented by another process.

Second, actions can be unblocked by assuming that the most powerful stakeholders have in fact, already made the necessary decision and will brook no dissent or deviation. Anderson refers to this as social deparadoxification. This idea resonates with the Systemic school that sees strategy as constrained by powerful social forces that compel particular actions. It is not necessary to seek out or identify any signs that such decisions have already been made in fact; it is merely a device by which contingencies can be reduced such that decision makers can focus on relatively few possible courses of action. Stakeholder intentions and alliances are then likely to form around, rather than ahead, of such actions.

Anderson's third deparadoxification strategy is temporal; the moment of decision can be delayed by simply focusing on some elements that are better understood than the larger, ill-defined problems. Thus strategic issues can be fragmented into smaller, experimental and understandable actions, and these actions allow a strategy to emerge. Purpose thus follows action. Again, much of the work by incremental strategists in the Processual school is accommodated here.

Fourth, we hold that decision makers can use a cognitive deparadoxification strategy, by inferring that a solution has already been derived elsewhere. Thus, it is only necessary to replicate the actions of another firm that has achieved some describable success – it is not necessary to show that the solution replicated is a necessary and sufficient condition for the desired result. Where communication is quite common, these replications may take on the form of “communities of best practice”, benchmarking and industry norms. The strategies advanced from the Evolutionary School support this approach if the decision maker goes beyond replication and attempts to implement the assumed solution more efficiently by control of transaction costs – no matter how problematic this concept may be (Noorderhaven, 1995).

Thus we see Whittington’s taxonomy is not about rational, considered approaches to environmental fit. The distinctions between the Schools are not so much based upon competing techniques, models and literatures, but rather upon a selective focus by academics upon particular contingency reducing strategies that masquerade as decisions. The strength of these particular contingency-reducing strategies is that it is always possible to create plausible narratives retrospectively, about the role of decisions and commensurate actions in creating outcomes, although it does not follow from this that the actors involved in the events under review will have restricted themselves to one contingency reducing strategy.

This derivation of Whittington’s schools is shown in Figure 2; note that we have avoided using a two by two grid because we do not wish to suggest that the contingency reducing strategies are incommensurate in practice. Strategy is represented as a fully conscious decision making process, but deparadoxifying strategy is a matter of rational habit, much as Chia (1994) describes crossing a road and Hollis (1996) describes changing gear when driving a car.

Anderson’s deconstruction also appears to decentre the temporal aspects of strategic choice, that is to say that decisions made about strategic choice are not distinctively related to the question of strategic management at all, since the same

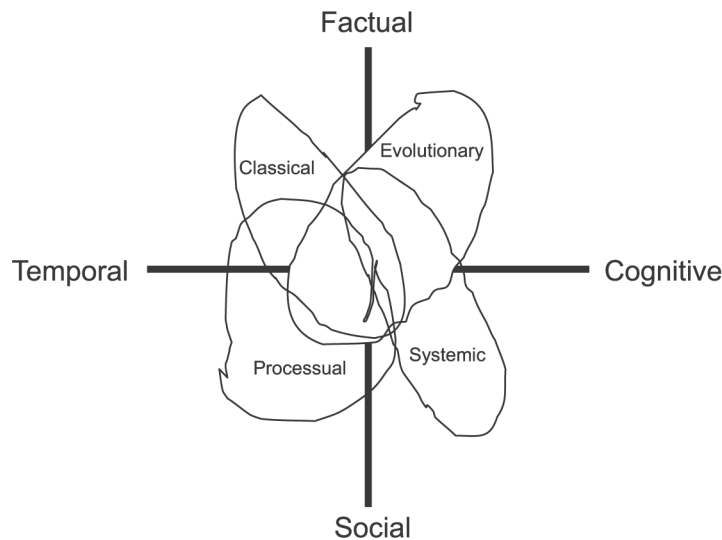


Figure 2.
Deconstructing

contingency reducing strategies apply generically to many other kinds of organisational problem. However, of themselves, these deparadoxifying strategies do not contain an explanation of why individuals would need to unblock actions to create present change in the light of future expectations, or behave in such a way that they are continually faced with decision crises.

Does it matter?

At this point, we might ask, as Whittington asks, does it matter? On the one hand, we might simply accept that strategic choice is an explanatory principal. That is to say, by giving a name to something that is not understood, it becomes possible to discuss it and its related actions intelligibly. This assignment could be supported by fieldwork from several sources. von Krogh and Roos (1995) observe that the terms and phrases, such as competitive advantage, used by senior management in the course of strategizing, have unstable and contingent meanings that allow individuals to act appropriately without actually developing shared meanings and strategies contemporaneously. Similarly, Keleman (2000) observes that such ventures as Total Quality Management require considerable ambiguity in their language so that individuals can act effectively. Mezas and Starbuck (2003) describe misperceptions held by senior managers, but hold that in fact accurate knowledge is not necessary to solve problems, but conscious trial and error commonly suffice well enough when there is an adequate understanding of a general purpose to the actions – an observation supported generally by Popper (1989). Most strikingly, Inkpen and Choudhury (1995) write of strategic absence and the role of academic theories in imputing strategic thinking to situations where none is actually present. We might hold that it is only these notions of management that allow us to make sense of what Chia (1994), p. 781) calls: “Ongoing contestation between order and disorder, routinization”. Prime among these might be the language and expectations of strategic management fads and fashions (Eccles *et al.*, 1992; Thomas, 1999; Fiol and O’Conner, 2002) that guide narratives and sense making.

We hold that it does matter. No matter how beguiling these Schools may be when they serve as explanatory principles, their underlying assumptions displace the individual behaviour and sense of purpose over time. In turn this excludes the origins of a strategy from its representation – a point noted by Hamel (1997, 1998) – and gives us no means of speculating on what business people did before the strategy literature appeared (Morgan and Knights, 1991) nor any theoretical base in which to frame observations on strategy as practice. Consequently, the next section of the paper considers the nature of time represented in Whittington’s model.

Time and strategy

Whittington’s schools represent time as a timeline stretching from past to future punctuated by particular events, the most important of which will be anticipated or not, depending upon the school. This view of time attempts to bring the future into the present where it can be dealt with cognitively. Many recent advances in the literature on the relationship between time and management take this view (Barkema *et al.*, 2000; Goodman *et al.*, 2001), although Albert and Bell (2002) have a striking approach based on music. However, a firm cannot make the distinction between issues that may occur in future as problems or opportunities, since its own existence is not an issue for it; only individuals can have such concerns.

The very nature of work requires individuals to make decisions and think heedfully about what they are doing in processes described as “becoming” (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). That is to say, to find an origin for strategy at the level of the individual it is necessary to go beyond strategic problem solving, and try to understand how a person’s sense, or lack or sensibility, about her or his own future, in the context of what is faced at work, becomes central to the origins of strategic choice (Watson, 2003).

In the same way that Anderson’s work helped our discussion to move upstream from Whittington, further exploration upstream of strategy requires a guide that places the ontology of individual choices in time, and how these may accumulate into collective actions that can be described as strategies and represented as Schools. This accords with the closing remarks of Chia (1996) that call for a reconstruction of our understanding along an “axis of time”. Thus, this next section of the paper moves towards representations of strategizing based upon Heidegger’s “Being and Time” (1996).

In Heidegger’s terminology, the parameters of Whittington’s framework (objectives, environment and method) are referred to as ontical properties, that is to say that they are intelligible attributes of an entity, but not at the heart of it. For example, a strategy may be identified in terms of its associated documentation, or its charts and statistics or the action plans that are generated and circulated. These may pass an inspection that looks for the existence of the strategy, particularly if these properties were identified as definitive in advance of the audit. For Heidegger, such auditable properties of corporate strategy, and the preoccupation with representing time as events, timelines, speed and timeliness are inauthentic views of time, a deficient mode of concerned dwelling leading to an objectification of issues and problems. In such time it would be possible to run through (dream through) any number of strategic processes without any authentic engagement by individuals. In order to grasp a more ontological understanding of the being of a strategy maker, it is necessary to explore how the issues of an individual’s own existence and of how the face their own becoming or future (dasein).

Time is at the heart of dasein, as a struggle between everydayness and becoming – taking a stand against falling from past to present and into the future. This is achieved – when it is achieved – through three ecstasies of present, past and future. The present is revealed as a moment of vision in which the everyday relationships between an individual and her or his daily tasks are disrupted. This vision is precipitated by strong moods and emotions, particularly anxiety and fearfulness, in which the past is retrieved and reinterpreted in terms of becoming in future. Much has been written on the role of moods and emotions in shaping strategy and perceptions (Drucker, 1998; Kets de Vries and Miller, 1989; Gin and Sexton, 1990; Pitt *et al.*, 1991; Thomas and Ramaswamy, 1996; Daniels, 1998; Pratt and Rosa, 2003). These studies are often framed in the context of an inauthentic view of time, that is to say that emotion causes the features of the environment to be seen as unduly hostile, the firm’s competences are thought of as particularly weak, or a particular strategic choice assessed over optimistically. In authentic time, where becoming is possible, such moods and dispositions are fixated on their cause, and herald a moment of choosing, or care about taking responsibility for one’s future. If this concerns the individual’s dasein in the community at work then, for a moment at least, individuals may reassess their current everydayness from past and future, and radically reassess their place in it. Such reassessments are frequently defective in some way, but without them it is not possible to make a stand – the conscious effort of an individual to throw himself, or herself into

the future. This conscious effort of standing consists of interpreting the possibilities of one's capabilities, the potentiality-for-being, and the temporal meaning of references in terms of purpose and uses of entities in a current worldhood. Actions based on becoming require the ability to organise attunement and standing into meaningful patterns. Heidegger uses the term discourse here, but the ability to communicate is predicated on discourse, and requires a similar worldhood and standing between participants, which is not the same thing as subscribing to an organisational mind centred around management (Wood, 1998). When attunement, standing and discourse operate effectively, it is possible to avoid "falling" in the present and an inauthentic treatment of time. When these are experienced by a number of individuals within a community at work it is possible that they can develop destiny; a joint sense of heritage and means of enacting that can throw the community into the future. This destiny is a social becoming, it does not primarily relate to a vision or ideal future state as such, but is more closely tied with seeing individuals, including oneself, as authentic *dasein*. Although inauthentic modes are perfectly adequate for getting through the day, genuine strategy, as an act of individual will and social becoming can only arise through these four structures of attunement, standing, discourse and destiny.

By way of example, consider a young executive at a struggling company who is on a residential staff development and strategizing week. While awaiting the start of an evening seminar, she reflects on the day's events. Her morning was spent on a team building exercise that involved tramping through woods and bogs with her colleagues. The afternoon was taken up with problem solving activities that required building things with Lego. The moment of clarity occurs when she realises that she spent much of last weekend on a similar walk with fellow ramblers and playing Lego with her children. She suddenly grasps that team building and problem solving are natural behaviours, it is only the artificial structures of work and the alien processes of management that requires her to have formal training to carry them out. These are not intellectual reflections particularly. Clearer to her are her feelings of guilt and loneliness at having left her family for this course, anger and betrayal at the pointlessness of the activities and dislocation of the problems, shame at her earlier interest and participation and angst at a lifestyle that takes her away from people and activities she cares for. She loses all interest in the immanent seminar on work-life balance, and instead becomes attuned to her present in an authentic way.

By the following morning, she has thought through her position and reached a point of standing. She likes her job and prospects, feels valued by her colleagues and believes that the organisation's activities are worthwhile. She is not disposed to throw it all away. However, she is equally not prepared to accept the implicit position that problems in the firm are caused by the staff inadequacies that need development. She takes a stand at the departmental SWOT analysis. She is able to articulate her own sense of purpose, or at least those parts of it that do not directly cut across organisational issues. Perhaps she describes the patterns that cause her angst in terms of organisational structures, strategies and processes although we, as observers, know that these words are descended from personal attunement and angst, and may have little content. The ideas are shared amongst the world hood of her colleagues who have learned the same terms and can translate them into something meaning in their own lives. Naturally, this causes emotional reactions. Some may have designed the structures and processes she objects to and feel both a sense of loss and an immanent

threat to their own purpose. Others may be struck by her revelation, and review their own standing differently (although not necessarily more accurately), perhaps seeing the arguments in terms of their own purpose for the first time. It is possible, and no more than that, that a discourse may enable individuals to take a stand and collectively throw themselves into the future together. Note that it is their future, bound with their expectations and purpose, rather than an objective future into which they must somehow accommodate themselves. Others may choose to go along with whatever happens, but this is still a choice and an action and may reflect an interest and future that is independent of the firm itself.

Note that an observer might look at this and describe self-organising systems – confiscating the individual, emotional origins of anything that emerges and investing the organisation with almost magical properties. Others might look at the standing elements and talk of rational, deliberate strategies, while others may focus on the discordant elements of worldhood and speak of political compromises and emergent strategies. All these elements are true enough, but do not capture the ontological basis of strategy in individual and collective becoming, deflecting attention to an artificial, objectified debate about emergent versus deliberate strategy processes and the stated goals, which may well be expedient and rhetorical.

The structural elements derived in this section of the paper allow us to move upstream from Anderson because they offer a means of resolving the paradoxes that block actions. Attunement, not a decision, is the precursor to a choice. Decisions are identified through discourse, frequently retrospectively, and the social expectations are created through destiny. The representations of the becoming: plans, visions, missions and so on, all emerge from, and do not precede, authentic actions. Even though these representations may be inconsistent with each other, they will be logical within themselves, and narrate a logocentricity that entirely obscures the origins of the matters represented.

In this section we have used Heidegger's notion of authentic time to explore the idea that individuals create change by their own sense of becoming. These changes are then represented in various ways as the consequence – deliberate or emergent, of strategic decisions. In the final section of the paper we use the four structures described here to evaluate various representations of strategy widely used in the literature.

Becoming representations

Heidegger's view of *dasein* and time gives us a structure for establishing the deficiencies within any representation of strategizing that may be offered as the basis of a theory or School. The taxonomy given below eschews representations based upon the strategy literature itself, where it can become self-fulfilling, but rather is a methodology for assessing the ability to capture the individual and becoming origins of any representation of strategy. The purpose of this taxonomical method is to throw into relief the elements of strategizing that such representations cannot capture. It should therefore aid scholars and reflective practitioners by identifying where theories at hand are like to lead the wise astray.

The classical school

The logo centricity of the Classical school almost completely annihilates the possibilities for attunement, except perhaps in the case of a visionary leader. Similarly, employees can only stand for the objectives of the firm – even if we relax the profit

maximising goal – an inauthentic and deficient mode. Discourse and destiny are asserted inauthentically in terms of the company. It is only meaningful in terms of a corporate entity rather than the *dasein* of individuals.

Thus, strategizing will only take place in the unlikely event that individuals are subsumed into a corporate body (*leviathan plc?*), a firm, or its management that creates the individual that behaves appropriately and thus becomes an appropriate employee (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Ashforth and Vaidyanath, 2002).

The Evolutionary School, like the classical, does not allow attunement or standing at the level of the individual. Neither are discourse and destiny permitted, as the cruelty of the market will permit only one successful organisational strategy and form.

The Processual school allows a very limited degree of attunement, as self-interest is acknowledged. However, an individual can only stand and discourse at a collective level. Destiny is undermined out by the assumptions of unstable political compromise, and the distinction between strategic agreements and strategic actions. Nonetheless, this school comes closest to accommodating the relevant dynamics.

The Systemic school has no place for attunement and in fact the feelings hitherto associated with attunement may be triggered by transgression from cultural mores. Consequently, standing is undermined by the assumption of social habits that govern individual actions. Further, Whittington suggests that managers might collectively take social norms from outside the parameters of the firm and consciously apply these, and so some degree of destiny is at least possible (see Table I).

Becoming misrepresentations

Acceptance of the decentering of decisions has profound implications for the theory of strategic choice, and the strategic management literature in which this has a central role.

Whittington’s four schools adequately encompass most of the strategy literature, but all are particularly vulnerable to decision paradoxes. These paradoxes arise from an inauthentic view of time disguised by the objectification of ontical properties in the form of opportunities and threats, resulting in logocentric prescriptions of one form or another.

School	Frailty
Classical school	Becoming and learning undermined by objectification of future and adoption of unstable ontical categories in decision making. Lack of attunement leads to uncritical reproduction of formerly successful routines
Evolutionary school	Becoming undermined by limitation of actions to stands taken or performed by others; objectification of present and the unsustainable distinction between understandable, controllable internal environment and uncontrollable external environment
Processual school	Becoming undermined by inauthentic past and present. Future always deferred. Strategic absence and fragmented attunement hidden by patterns of deferral
Systemic school	Becoming undermined by objectification of social relationships into categories, cultures and institutions. Destiny dispersed and diminished by collective limitations. Learning closely akin to accepting

Table I.

The seeds of each school's undoing are created by undue emphasis on some elements that would largely obstruct individual and social becoming. None of the schools identified are able to adequately represent strategizing in the way defined here since both time and becoming cannot be simultaneously captured. We therefore describe the schools collectively as a misrepresentation to draw attention to the frailties of each. The chief advantage of presenting schools in this way is that it may force adherents of a particular school to reconsider, and probably defend, the basic principles upon which their models and prescriptions are constructed, and the veracity of the advice that is plucked from them. It may also help to expose the way that prescriptions thwart what Chia calls "the will to organise"; which we have derived using ideas from Heidegger.

Concluding thoughts

Strategic management is often described in terms of three central questions; where are we now, where do we want to be and how do we get there? This paper suggests that the literature, in so far as it is represented in Whittington's admirable framework, is incapable of developing answers to any of the questions.

Whittington's framework undermines the singularity of the "we", as each school identified different groups as the primary drivers of strategy. Further, a firm cannot learn where it is; quite independently of the turbulent ontical qualities of environmental turbulence and the other various elements of environmental change, as the various theories cannot accommodate the discourse elements of Heidegger's framework, without undermining the other three factors. Similarly, the conclusion drawn from the deconstruction of the schools implies that schools are based upon what is believed to be unknowable, rather than what is known.

Similarly, the inability of the four schools to accommodate Heidegger's processes, together with the conclusions drawn from a review of the philosophy of action underlying each school, suggests that firms can neither decide where they want to be nor what actions will take them there. At best strategic decisions and actions can achieve coherence, rather than purpose, over time.

Consequently, this review suggests that the fundamental premise of strategic management, as theory, craft or practice, is theoretically insecure. Although it is clear that temporal issues are, and have always been, critical, there seems no great reason why strategic management, as it is currently constructed, should be particularly meaningful or effective, and a rather deeper ontological review is required. It may be argued that this is a backward step in the development of a vibrant literature, but this paper concludes that such backward steps are long overdue.

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Further reading

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