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Politics and Strategy Practice:
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Abstract

In this article we aim to contribute to the 'strategy as practice' (SAP) field by studying organizational politics from an ethnomethodological perspective. We argue that it is important to study not only the 'politics of sensemaking', but also the 'sensemaking of politics'. Existing research has examined how power and politics plays a role in the sensemaking processes involved in strategic action, yet we have little understanding to date about how power and politics are made sense of in accounts and used by members to conduct their practical affairs. Drawing on an in-depth qualitative study of a multi-national branded apparel company, we show how politics constitutes a key interpretive method through which organizational reality is constructed and strategic decisions are made. We address two key research questions: How can we study politics as an interpretive procedure rather than a pre-existing entity? What practical actions are achieved through such interpretive procedures? The study reveals how a cross-functional team of senior managers used discourse to collectively co-author a version of the political landscape of the firm during team meeting interactions, with practical implications for how the group sought to undertake strategic change. As such, the paper furthers our understanding of the social construction of politics and strategy and puts forward a new and potentially more insightful form of analysis we call Ethnomethodologically-informed Discourse Analysis (EDA).

Introduction

The so-called 'practice turn' in strategic management has been helpful in moving beyond the question of what strategy an organization *has* towards viewing strategy as something people *do*.[1] However, research in the 'strategy as practice' (SAP) field has yet to satisfactorily address the issue of power and politics.[2] In this article we aim to advance the field by bringing the process of *making sense of politics* to the fore-front of analysis. We adopt Maitlis' view that accounts are a central resource for sensemaking and draw on insights from ethnomethodology and discourse analysis to develop a method of analysis which we call Ethnomethodologically-informed Discourse Analysis (EDA).[3] EDA, we propose, enables us to study the corpus of interpretive methods through which a meaningful sense of the self and/or world is constructed through accounts.[4] We argue that politics, as a "social fact", is not a stable external entity but rather is produced by an ongoing process of interpretation.[5] We advance existing work on sensemaking, strategy and politics by showing how *sensemaking about politics* enables strategists to render the organizational landscape intelligible and action-able.

Drawing on an in-depth qualitative action research study of a strategic change initiative in a multinational branded apparel company, we highlight the role of discourse - practices of language-use in the form of accounts - in making sense of power and politics in the strategy meetings of a cross-functional project team.[6] We follow the tradition of ethnomethodological research in conducting a fine-grained analysis of one specific episode, based on transcribed tape recordings, to show how senior managers (in conjunction with an action researcher) in a cross-functional project team used power and politics as interpretive resources for making sense of key strategic issues such as 'what is going on?' and 'what should we do next'? [7]

Within existing literature, strategy has been studied as a process of *sensemaking* and as a process imbued with *power and politics*.[8] However, there remains a taken-for-granted assumption about how the former relates to the latter. Existing work has been restricted to studying the role of power and politics in shaping sensemaking processes– a kind of 'one way street' of influence.[9] This work views power and politics as something that actors *have* (as a possession or property) and that affects their strategic behavior; including their sensemaking. We challenge this taken-for-granted assumption and propose a different perspective that views politics as an

interpretive procedure that enables actors to author accounts that make sense of the organizational landscape (What political motives and allegiances could be at play?) and envision a strategic direction for the future (Where should we go next?). Thus, our aim is to do more than 'fill a gap' in existing research on power and politics by simply adding another dimension to the influence that politics is understood to wield over strategic behaviour.[10] Rather, our aim is to challenge the dominant assumption that organizational politics is simply an input into – and force acting over – processes of strategic sensemaking.

We propose that sensemaking accounts are important vehicles in and of themselves for bringing politics 'alive' in the "performative language games involved in strategic decision-making".[11] Politics, we propose, is not simply an objective force that *acts over* strategists, but rather is rendered into a 'social fact' through ongoing processes of discursive sensemaking. Moreover, we propose that these accounts make a difference to strategic decision-making by providing answers to the questions 'where should we go?' and 'how should we get there?' In other words, sensemaking about politics is, we propose, central to the very *work* of strategists as they go about conceiving and implementing strategic plans. We conclude by proposing that the *interpretive procedures* for making sense of power and politics should be placed at the centre of the strategy-as-practice research agenda and put forward a new approach to discourse analysis – Ethnomethodologically-informed Discourse Analysis (EDA) – as a theory and method for advancing this research agenda.

Strategy as Practice

The rapidly growing and influential field of 'strategy as practice' (SAP) research focuses on the "micro-level social activities, processes and practices that characterize organizational strategy and strategizing".[12] The value of the SAP perspective lies in moving away from the analytical concern with what strategy *should* be (e.g. based on analysis of external market opportunities or internal core competencies), or how it *should* be done (e.g. top-down formal planning or incremental emergent actions), towards how it is *actually done in practice*. Existing SAP research has focused on the role of managerial sensemaking and leadership, discourse, metaphors, rhetoric, emotion, norms and values, habitus; processes of recursiveness and adaptation and the

mundane practices of crafting together strategy workshops, away-days, artifacts and presentations. [13]

In their review of the 'state of the art' in strategy-as-practice, Golsorkhi et al highlight a number of key themes in the SAP literature, placing sensemaking, discourse and power and politics centre-stage, along with themes of materiality, identity, tools and techniques.[14] This paper develops a new perspective that brings sensemaking, discourse and politics together in a different way, by showing how discourse - in the form of accounts - is central to the processes of making sense of politics.[15]

Power and politics has been central to the strategy literature long before the so-called 'turn to practice'. The classic work of Pettigrew pointed to the myriad of power contests and political behaviour at the heart of strategy-making, ranging from *group* power-contests, such as battles over resources or influence between functions or departments, *sub-group* politics, where a set of actors share a certain interest in securing resources, information or status, and *individual* politics where a person's career, reputation and rewards are at stake.[16] Indeed, the strategic management literature has a long history of highlighting the role of power and politics in strategy formulation or strategic decision-making and the diffusion of strategy across an organization.[17] More recent work has also begun to view power and politics as a necessary and sometimes productive part of organizational behaviour and an important strategic competence for practitioners.[18]

This existing work is founded on a view of power and politics as a property that actors *have*, as an attribute or possession. For example, power is viewed as a property of an actor that accrues from the ability to control resources or manipulate information, and politics is viewed as an attribute of an actor that arises from the desire to protect or further existing 'turf' or self-interest.[19] In this power-as-possession and politics-as-attribute view, power and politics are understood as existing beyond, and impervious to, processes of interpretation and social construction. What this assumption misses, in our view, is the ability to understand how accounts, defined as "discursive constructions of reality that ... describe or explain the world and thus make it meaningful, play a role in shaping who or what is seen as 'powerful' or 'political'.[20] Political allegiances, motives and forces are conceptualised as objective entities that both the practitioner and researcher can observe. For example, in Jarzabkowski and Wilson's study of strategy in a University, the authors assert that

one committee in their study "is a Committee which has a lot of power", leading to high levels of political influence, and that "faculties are relatively weak structures", leading to low levels of political 'sway'. From a practice perspective, the power (or weakness) of certain sub-units and the concomitant level of political influence, should, in our view, be studied as part of the situated practice of the practitioners themselves – as actively made sense of, and oriented to, as powerful (or not) - rather than abstractly stated as a 'fact' by the researcher.[21]

The perspective we advance here has similarities to the work of Maitlis and Lawrence, who advance the SAP field by bringing "the interplay of organizational discourse and politics" together.[22] However, our perspective is distinct in one important respect. Maitlis and Lawrence retain a sharp distinction between the two elements, for example when they claim to have identified "four identifiable stages, two of which are primarily political and two of which are primarily discursive."[22] For us, this separation is theoretically limiting. From our perspective, power and politics should not be separated from discursive processes of language-use. It is not just that language can have power effects and can be used for political ends,[23] but also that language is the primary medium through which the 'politics of meaning' occurs.[24] Our approach therefore focuses on the role of accounts in the "discursive construction of reality", which, for us, *includes* the reality of the power landscape and political terrain of the organization.[25] These accounts, we suggest, enable strategists to address practical questions such as "who has power?" and "what political agendas are at play?"

Our approach is distinct in that it does not seek to provide academic theories that postulate answer to these questions – as per existing theories of power[26] - but rather to provide a different kind of theory that is inspired by ethnomethodology: a theory of *how strategists themselves bring interpretive procedures to bear on these questions, in their everyday practices of strategy-talk*. For ethnomethodology, academic sociological theories of power and politics are "second-order constructs": they are academic constructs of lay-member constructs.[27] They rely upon (are built from) but also typically *gloss over* the members' methods for making sense of situations. Ethnomethodology, then, seeks to make these original 'first-order constructs' (i.e. the sensemaking of members) the topic of study. Members engage in their own "practical sociological reasoning", as Garfinkel called it, which should be, for the ethnomethodologist at least, the focus of analysis. Language and social

interaction, then, is the key medium through which members make, and display, their own sociological reasoning: such as reasoning about power and politics in our case. It is to the issue of discourse that we now turn.[28]

Discursive Perspectives on Strategy

For a long time, scholars and practitioners alike have noticed that senior managers spend much of their day communicating. The so-called 'linguistic turn' has gone hand-in-hand with the 'practice turn' in management and organization studies. Hence, it is no surprise that discourse features as a key theme in SAP research.[29] However, there are distinct bodies of work subsumed within the general term 'discourse'. Those inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, such as Knights and Morgan and Ezzamel and Willmott, examine discourse as a system of thought that creates certain subjects and objects, with attendant power effects upon those who take up the subject positions it offers.[30] 'Discourse' is thus conceived as "a set of ideas and practices which condition our ways of relating to, and acting upon, a particular phenomenon".[31] "Discourse in the Foucauldian sense is less about everyday linguistic interaction, and more about historically developed systems of ideas that forms institutionalized and authoritative ways of addressing a topic". [32] Knights and Morgan describe the disciplinary effects of the discourse of 'strategy', as it provides managers with rationalisations for their actions that enhances and sustains the exercise of managerial power.[33] Alvesson and Kärreman use the term *D*iscourse with a capital 'D' - and later Paradigm-type Discourse Studies (PDS) - to characterise the Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis, with its emphasis on the "general and prevalent systems for the formation and articulation of ideas in a particular period of time … functioning as a powerful ordering force".[34]

Power is also a central theme for scholars adopting a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework following Fairclough, which is underpinned by a critical realist ontology that locates discourse within established 'real' social structures. For example, Vaara and Monin examine the discursive processes of legitimation in a post-merger organization, focusing on the role of discourse in the exercise and legitimation of power.[35] Thus, while discourse is studied at a more micro-level than the Foucauldian tradition, in terms of the linguistic features of specific texts, power is viewed as an extra-discursive component of 'real' social structures that exist

regardless of how they are discursively constructed. In other words, discourse is viewed as a medium through which power is exercised and maintained: power and discourse are analytically separated.[36] It is this analytical separation which our EDA approach questions and to which we put forward a new perspective. Succinctly put, whilst for CDA "the constitutive work of discourse necessarily takes place within the constraints of the complex of economic, political and discoursal ideological structures",[37] for us "(d)iscourse … is thoroughly constitutive".[38]

Another strand of research has focussed more on the role of storytelling and narrative in the sensemaking process.[39] Here, discourse is understood as the actual practices of language-use, rather than more abstract notions of dominant systems of thought in Foucauldian theory. The focus is on the role of language in authoring a meaningful version of events that enables strategic action to follow. A more micro-perspective, inspired by a branch of ethnomethodology known as Conversation Analysis, focuses on the detailed analysis of talk-in-interaction, as strategists collectively formulate, turn by turn, versions of what the strategy (and the strategist) is or should be.[40] Alvesson and Kärreman argue that a key advantage of this more micro approach, which they label *d*iscourse with a lowercase 'd' or Text Focussed Studies (TFS), is that it takes "the close-range level of discourse seriously" (by "being more attentive to the local social context of language use in organizations", including the flexibility and variability of language-use. [41]

Our EDA perspective is located within this more micro TFS tradition of discourse analysis, particularly the body of work inspired by ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, with its emphasis on how members (in our case strategists) work up versions of reality within which they can orient their actions.[42] The central unit of analysis for us is the 'account': an utterance located within a particular conversational encounter that provides a particular version of the self and/or world.[43] Maitlis defines accounts as "discursive constructions of reality that interpret or explain".[44] Thus, a narrative is a type of account (where a sequence of past events is placed in a meaningful order in order to tell a story) but not all accounts are narratives: accounts can also be 'factual' statements, arguments, claims, suggestions, propositions, and so on. We follow Maitlis in viewing accounts as the central resource for sensemaking:

"As discursive constructions of reality that provide members with ordered representations of previously unordered external cues, accounts describe or explain the world and thus make it meaningful. ... Accounts are a critical resource that allow individuals to accomplish work and negotiate their day-to-day lives ... constructing ordered relationships among sets of entities (events, people, actions, things) in ways that enable people to act or at least to decide to act." [45]

The giving of accounts can, for example, be related to the management of responsibility: Sillince and Mueller, for example, found that a project team in a global insurance company gradually reformulated its remit in order for it to fall in line with the 'achievements' (or lack thereof) with regard to its 'mission', failings which were gradually becoming apparent.[46]

According to Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, the sensemaking literature is conspicuous for the lack of studies of "sensemaking in real time", in the "moment by moment accomplishment of work".[47] Samra-Fredericks also highlights the lack of "fine-grained studies of everyday strategic management practice-as-interactionally-done".[48] Our study seeks to address this issue by analysing *sensemaking about power and politics* in the real-time flow and flux of strategy meetings. We draw inspiration from the ethnomethodological focus on how members produce and maintain their social reality that enables "mutually intelligible social encounters" to proceed.[49] Samra-Fredericks refers to the "taken-for-granted methods or [] practical reasoning procedures for producing order that constitutes sense", which we will here term 'interpretative procedures' but are also referred to by ethnomethodologists as 'member's methods'.[50]

The ethnomethodological work of Samra-Fredericks has shown how strategists construct objects and phenomena such as 'markets' and 'environments' in their social interactions, acting as interpretative procedures for making sense of strategy.[51] We extend Samra-Fredericks' work by showing how power and politics constitute an important component of the interpretative procedures used by strategists. Our EDA approach also adopts a different perspective on those supposedly extra-linguistic features, such as power structures, studied by CDA.[52] Rather than viewing power and politics as something that members or organizations 'have' or 'do not have', as in Jarzabkowski and Wilson's study for instance,[53] we instead view power and politics as something that is *actively oriented to, and interpreted, by members themselves*.[54] Hence, we propose viewing power and politics not as pre-existing

entities that exist 'out there', that actors or organizations 'possess', but rather focus the spotlight on the interpretative procedures that render them into "social facts": as more or less stable possessions or attributes of actors.[55] Our guiding principle is to "recover the local practices and procedures that produce local occasions of order" (ibid), such as the ordering of organizational actors and actions into "powerful" and "not powerful", "political" and "not political".

Methodology, Field Site and Context

Methodology

Our methodology was guided by Clegg, Kornberger and Carter's plea to "focus on the ethnomethods of everyday strategists".[56] This meant studying what strategists actually do, in real time, rather than through forms of restrospective reconstruction or rationalisation typical of surveys or interviews.[57] The research was an 'action research' study conducted in the UK office of a large multi-national branded apparel company called Apparat (all names are pseudonyms). The research took an in-depth, qualitative approach in order to investigate what happens on the ground when strategic plans are devised and implemented. According to Tsoukas and Chia, strategy research requires investigation of the actual processes through which strategies are devised and implemented.[58] This demands the detailed analysis of micro-episodes which are located within historically grounded, longitudinal, in depth, ethnographically engaged research.[59] Yin mentions six possible sources of evidence: "documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, physical artefacts".[60] Indeed, our study drew on the first five of these, albeit with a clear emphasis on participant observation (including audio recording) of strategy meetings.

Through immersion in the events in Apparat over a reasonably long process, the research aimed to illuminate how events unfolded *from the members' perspective* during a period of strategic change.[61] However, our aim in this paper is not to 'tell the story' of what happened in the process of strategic change. Our EDA approach follows the tradition in micro approaches to discourse analysis, particularly those inspired by ethnomethodology (EM) and the sub-field of Conversation Analysis (CA), by analysing transcriptions from an audio recording of naturally occurring

conversation in a strategy meeting.[62] EM and CA are critical of the tendency within management and organization studies to rely on empirical sources that are divorced from the 'live', 'real time' practices of organizational members. Audio and video recording of naturally occurring interaction, in contrast, offer records of 'strategists at work' that can be subject to detailed and repeated analysis.[63] The reader is not expected to take on faith the analysts' interpretation of 'what happened', but is able to inspect the transcript and subject it to alternative interpretations. Of course, our interpretation is based on the broader 'transcript-extrinsic' insights garnered from the broader ethnographic study.[64]

EM and CA are also critical of the tendency for analysts to take segments of talk away from their interactional context through the 'coding' process. Accounts are taken through a series of progressively more abstracted 'codes' to be represented in the form of abstract social categories (such as power or politics for example), which are then used to 'explain' what is going on in the particular setting. EM and CA, by contrast, examine how members make sense of the setting for *themselves*, within the setting and in ways that are visibly observable to each other. The warrant for this shift in analytic focus is simple: it is members own sensemaking, not the analyst's post-hoc process of sensemaking whilst 'coding data', that is *consequential* for the practical activities they are undertaking, and therefore demands analytical attention. The analyst may think he or she has 'seen' an instance of power or politics, but unless members themselves also demonstrably orient to, and make sense of, the event in the same way it should not be 'coded' as such. Moreover, the point is not just to put behaviour or accounts into abstract 'codes' which are then used to 'explain' what happened and why, but rather to show how social facts such as 'power' or 'politics' are *methodically* used by members to accomplish organization.

The Study 'Site'

The research was conducted by two 'action' researchers – Barry and Jeremy - within the UK subsidiary of Apparat, a multi-national apparel company. Within its 'sector', Apparat-UK lies third in terms of national market share, behind two other global brands, with annual sales revenue of approximately £250m. Due to the confidentiality agreement between the researchers and the organisation, *Apparat* is employed as a pseudonym in order to protect the anonymity of the firm and individuals involved.

The research project was formed following a discussion at a business awards dinner between the Apparat UK MD and the Dean of the Management School where Barry worked. A plan was devised to construct a 'strategic change' action research project that involved two academics (who also lectured at the Management School part-time) who would act as 'change agents'. We use the term 'action researcher' rather than 'researcher' here deliberately to emphasise the active *participative* role played by Barry and Jeremy, which actually came closer to 'management consultant'. Both researchers had years of industry experience as managers before they decided to become academics, and their role was explicitly framed as one of *intervention* rather than observation.

In terms of research ethics, a formal ethical agreement was signed, with guarantees around anonymity and the protection of commercially sensitive information. On an individual level, all participants in the Steering Group had given full consent to participate in the study, consent for the use of the tape recorder at the meetings, and assurances of anonymity, confidentiality and the right to withdraw before the Steering Group meetings began.

At the time of the study, Apparat UK was facing a difficult market situation and was under serious pressure from its Global HQ to improve its short run financial performance. Though Apparat UK's sales volume had been reasonably stable, their average product selling price had degraded substantially in recent years. As a result, profitability was in serious decline, despite the drastic cost saving measures that had been taken in response. Apparat UK's retail customer base had also consolidated dramatically in the recent past as smaller retailers had withdrawn from the market. The 'action research' project was designed to bring about radical change to the Key Account Management practices of the company. The first stage involved establishing a cross-functional account development team comprised of appropriate managers from across the different functions. An overview of all the fieldwork conducted is given in Table 1.

---- Insert Table 1 here ----

For the purposes of this paper, we draw on data from the cross-functional account development team detailed in the second row of Table 1 (hereafter referred to as simply the "Steering Group"). The remit of the Steering Group was to develop a

comprehensive and detailed Account Development Strategy for one of the key accounts. A potentially radical overhaul of the company's current way of working was proposed. The 'lead' action researcher (Barry) acted as facilitator-chairman of the Steering Group. The second action researcher (Jeremy) acted as a non-participant observer of the Steering Group's formal sessions and a participant observer of the sub-teams they deployed. Both action researchers acted as 'change agents' within the organization, adopting what Gummesson refers to as a 'manager for hire' role.[65] The change-agent work was delivered pro-bono in return for access to collect data for research purposes.

The availability of powerful mobile digital recording devices has transformed the process analysing audio empirical material captured during participant and non-participant observation. This is a particularly serendipitous development given, as Boden comments: "For managers talk is the work".[66] Hundreds of hours of 'talk' were captured and, as a result, the study directly responds to Samra-Fredericks' call for research that comprises " .... ethnographies which are extended to include audio recordings of the naturally occurring talk-based interactive routines of managers over a period of time".[67] The tape recording we analyse below is taken from the first meeting of the steering group, led by Barry, shortly before Jeremy started on the project.

Making Sense of Politics

The extract that follows (see Table 2) is taken from the first meeting of the Steering Group. The action researcher – Barry – is explaining the findings of the first phase of the action research project: the semi-structured interviews that comprised the "Illuminative Evaluation" (row 5 in Table 1 above). Quotes from the interviews are displayed on the projector screen, as Barry narrates what he thinks these interview quotes mean: what issues the business currently faces, and what should be done about them?

---- Insert Table 2 here ----

The extract displayed in Table 2 shows that power and politics were employed as a 'reasoning device' or 'interpretive procedure' through which the group makes

sense of a variety of issues: What are interviewees saying? Why are they saying what they are saying? What problems do we have as a business? Why do we have these problems? What can we do as a group? How should we influence the strategic agenda? Who has the power to block us? Who has the power to help us? What are the political implications of pursuing certain courses of action?

In the analysis that follows (see Table 3 for a summary overview), we shall explore how power and politics were used as sensemaking devices in three distinct practical topics of the interaction: (1) the process of defining the strategy 'problem', (2) the process of talking about the 'problem', and (3) deciding what can be done about the 'problem'.

Part 1: What is the problem?
Barry's reasoning at the beginning of this extract (Lines 1-7) is that the problems in the company – particularly around 'hanging things together for the customer' (i.e. ensuring customers get a good quality product and service from the company) – stem from the "political situation at Board level" (Line 4). Politics, then, from our EDA perspective, is not a "social fact" that is behind-the-scenes activity, or a cognitive process that informs action, that is simply revealed in language. Language is not viewed as a source of information about the social world.[68] Rather, language is here constitutive of the very social reality it describes. As Coulon states, ethnomethodology allows us to study how "ordinary language tells the social reality, describes it, and constitutes it at the same time".[69] In our case, politics serves as an *interpretive procedure* through which the group can make sense of – and decide what to do about – the 'problems' that the company is currently facing. More specifically, it can also be a device to accuse (someone of having political motives), exclude (from a group to which they might have belonged), shift responsibility to a group and so on. The term "departmentalism" (Line 17) also invokes an idea about current strategy as driven by Board members "defending their turf", rather than focussing on what is 'good for the customer'.[70]

By making sense of the current situation in terms of 'politics', the group builds a set of understandings that provide the platform for future strategic action – we should do something to fix this 'political problem at Board level', but because we cannot trust the Board to put aside their political agendas we should undertake the change process ourselves. Politics as an interpretive procedure thus provides not only

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a "definition of the situation" (i.e. what is going on here) but also a practical decision-making method that generates a *recipe for action* (i.e. what should we do about it).[71] Alternative ways of making sense – such as making sense of the problem as one of lack of resources, or lack of information, or indeed as not actually a problem in the first place ('we have no real issues with the customer'), would thus lead to different courses of strategic action: we need more resources from global HQ, we need better information systems, or we need to do nothing at all. As an interpretive procedure, politics directs strategic attention towards not only 'potential solutions to the problem' but 'the nature of the problem' itself: this is not a 'problem of resources', or a 'problem of information', but rather a 'problem of politics'.

Part 2: The politics of talking about politics

Lines 21-26 display a different kind of 'political sensitivity': awareness of the politics of their talk itself. This kind of talk is referred to in the communications literature as meta-communication: talk about talk.[72] It is where speakers talk about how they would like their own talk to be understood. "What I mean is...", "I'm only joking", "Don't take this the wrong way...". Barry makes a point of stating that his prior criticisms of the Board, and particularly Adam, for being 'political' should be read as just "an impression" (as opposed to, say, a 'truth') and should not be read as a personal criticism ("it's no insult to Adam it's the way it is", Line 22-23). Barry had some background knowledge of the Steering Group members from the months he had already spent in the company, but many questions about politics remained. Did one of the Steering Group members have a political allegiance with any of the board members? Would someone 'report back' the less-than-favourable assessments Barry had made of them, jeopardising the entire project? Hence, 'couching' his talk as just an "impression" and not an "insult" - what Conversational Analysts refer to as a 'disclaimer' - helps to mitigate any negative political repercussions from his talk.[73] 'It's no insult, it's the way it is' is very similar to 'the police are only human if they lashed out': by attaching certain descriptions, the recipient of this account is invited not to interpret a certain action as wrong.[74] The action in question is not accountably *wrong*, rather, it is *natural*.

Moreover, as a 'change agent', Barry had to ensure that his own actions were not read as political. Interpretive procedures were used not only to make sense of organizational reality, but also to render his own account 'accountable'. Calling a

person or group 'political' is *itself* an act that can be read as (or dismissed as) political: an act of deflecting blame, scape-goating, attacking, defending your own reputation. Because people "treat reports and descriptions as if they come from groups and individuals with interests, desires, ambitions and stake in some versions of what the world is like", accounts can easily be discounted on these grounds.[75] The Steering Group members could well have been wondering if Barry had his own 'allegiances' with certain power-bases at Board level. In other words, accusing others of being political leaves you open to the charge that *you yourself* are politically motivated: 'you are only saying that because you have a grudge, a vendetta, an ambition' or 'you want to undermine his power and influence to put forward your own sectional agenda'. Stating that his prior talk is not "an insult" handles this potential charge carefully: it implies that Barry's criticisms are for 'good', 'honest', 'a-political' reasons [wanting to make positive changes to help the business], not for 'bad', 'devious', 'political', 'underhand' reasons [wanting to undermine Adam's reputation or influence]. Barry is thus inviting the group to make sense of his account as not politically-motivated. Strategy practice, we propose, involves seeking legitimacy by carefully framing your own past, present and future actions (including your own talk, in this case) as 'a-political' or at least 'sensitive to politics'.[76]

Barry then tells the group that he has removed the last two pages of the report [based on the interviews he has conducted] because they are "about the Directors talking about themselves" (Lines 24-26). He justifies this action by invoking politics as a reasoning device: "because it's so political, a hot potato" (Line 26). This reflexive formulation has striking resemblance to the classic ethnomethodological study by Weider of a halfway house for rehabilitating offenders.[77] Residents who were asked to report the illegal activities of other residents replied with "You know I can't snitch". For Weider, avowing a motive by invoking a social rule or norm for 'not talking' (which he calls the 'Convict Code') acts as a way of displaying (accounting for) the meaning of social action, by appealing to a set of social norms, rules, codes, motives etc that accounts for the current action (not talking).

In our case, invoking politics performs the same kind of accountability. First, the label 'political' provides an account (justification) for the action researcher's own *present* actions, namely justifying why certain pieces of information have been withheld from the group. It presents the action researcher as somebody who is not devious or manipulative, but rather simply someone who is just being *sensitive* to the

political terrain of the firm. Second, the label 'political' is also used to justify why he feels they as a group should address the issue: because it is a "hot potato" topic. The term 'political', then, is used to steer certain issues onto the agenda, and categorize them in particular ways: "A central feature of any description is its role in categorization; a description formulates some object or event as something; it constitutes it as a thing, and a thing with specific qualities", in this case as a 'political' issue.[78] Other categories could have been employed and would have performed other actions: instead of politics, ethics could have been invoked; or rules and regulations; or instrumental rationality. Thus, alternative descriptions would have achieved alternative performances. The indexical (context-dependent) nature of such appeals to social norms, rules, types or forces (in our case, norms around the politics of information) is also important for our EDA perspective. Had the phrase "I have removed the last two pages of the report" uttered by the action researcher to, say, managers from a competitor firm, it would probably be understood through an alternative interpretive device: for instance, a confidentiality agreement around commercially sensitive information. Thus, from our perspective, politics is not an objective social force but rather part of the interpretive process of making and displaying the meaning of social conduct.

Whilst some see formulations – the description or 'framing' of a certain issue or topic - as typically "the prerogative of the powerful", for us such a categorical assertion is unhelpful.[79] What should be done is to analyse the role formulations play *as part of specific discursive actions*. Accounting for certain things in certain ways is a way of *doing* certain things, and making social action *account-able*, such as blaming (others), excusing (oneself), justifying (one's past actions).[80] For instance, the way that Barry described his 'findings' from his interviews with the Board of Directors is interesting precisely because they are framed as 'a-political' (Lines 27-45). By describing the Directors as critical of themselves, Barry implies that their self-reflections in the interviews were, on this occasion, valid and truthful accounts ("they were being honest", "tough on themselves") – not politically motivated accounts designed to pass the buck, build power-bases or play political battles. Thus, politics acts as an interpretive procedure for enabling members to decide what is true and false, objective or subjective, factual and fabricated. Just as researchers have their own 'methodology' for going about collecting, categorising and making inferences

and conclusions from 'data', so do members of other setting, such as strategists in this case. In short, then, politics is a *lay methodology*.

Barry also talks about the potential *political implications* of this information itself (that the Board are not "hanging together as a team", see Lines 42-45) through another instance of meta-communication, the need to keep the information private ("keep this round the table", Line 45-46). Both Barry and Sandra talk about the political sensitivity of this information. Barry acknowledges that it could do some political damage to senior management ("that's not a signal you want out in the business", Line 46-47). Sandra's phrase "they'd allow us to say it as well I think" (Line 51) alludes to the idea that she recognises the political sensitivity of the information: whether or not the Board would 'allow' them to talk about the problems at Board level publicly. This phrase discursively allocates power to the Board, who are vested with the assumed power to 'allow' or 'disallow' something to be said, and presumably to mete out powerful consequences (loss of job, status, influence, future promotions and so on) to those who say something publicly without 'being allowed'. Hence, we see here again that politics provides the methodology through which the members make practical decisions about what can and cannot be said or done.

Overall, the interaction addresses a series of practical concerns about what the members, as change agents, think are the political implications of talking about politics: Could what I am saying be read as an 'insult' and therefore do political damage? Should we interpret the accounts of others as politically motivated or honest and apolitical? Should certain information be treated as too political to be voiced 'in public'? These questions, as we have sought to demonstrate in our analysis, should not be analysed as cognitive processes that inform strategists' sensemaking, but rather as *part of the public, i.e. discursive, sensemaking process itself*.[81] It was through discourse that what *could* or *should* be said about the 'problem' was established.[82]

To sum up, what this extract shows is how interpretive procedures are used, as lay methods, to categorize certain issues or pieces of information into a *social order*: 'too politically sensitive to be shared widely', 'politically sensitive but permitted to be discussed', 'politically sensitive but not dangerous to us', 'not politically sensitive' and so on. These procedures have action consequences, for example, justifying the inclusion or exclusion of certain decisions, people and lines of action.[83]

Part 3: What should we do?

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In Lines 52-61, Barry puts forward his rationale for choosing not to implement the change program with the Board of Directors. Politics again operates as the central interpretive method. The Board, he reasons, are too heavily steeped in power and politics to make it effective: "fixed positions", "history", people with "too much to lose and not enough to gain". In contrast, the current Steering Group membership is framed as relatively 'apolitical'. The vested interests that Barry does attribute to the Steering Group are framed as beneficial to the change process: they have plenty to gain from pushing the change forward but nothing to lose ("everybody round this table has got a lot to gain from doing this", "it's very low risk", Lines 58-59): a stake is attributed to them which is politically useful, for the change process at least. The action researcher then frames his own political relationship by offering himself up as a political scapegoat: "you can blame me if anything goes wrong" (Lines 59-61). He also *denies* a vested (financial) interest ("I'm not being paid", Line 61) and *declares* a vested (research) interest: I will still stand to gain from this as a research opportunity even if the change process itself 'fails' (Lines 59--64). He positions himself as not a 'consultant' and therefore as having less of a stake and vested interest in the process: he has nothing personally to lose in terms of risking his client relationship or future fee income. This talk shows that strategy practice involves directing others towards 'reading' and 'making sense of' the political motives of the *speaker* as well as those *spoken about*.

Barry's "plan [of action]" (Lines 66-73) takes great care to emphasise that it will be the group, not the action researcher as an individual, who will present their radical new change proposal to the Board. Why is the action researcher at pains to discuss who will present the plan? The action researcher orients towards the change proposal as a political and 'risky' manoeuvre: this process could do some damage to your reputation, your status in the organization, perhaps even affect your job. People rarely check whether others are "comfortable" (Line 72) with doing something that is politically neutral, or politically advantageous, or simply routine, action. The use of such terms as "comfortable" provides the context through which members are invited to make sense of the situation: 'this is a politically sensitive decision'. Hence, the action researcher's caution serves to reinforce the idea that their change plan is potentially a politically dangerous manoeuvre. This sensemaking process is, in our view, not simply a trivial matter. Rather, we view sensemaking about politics as an integral part of strategy practice. Making sense of a strategic change plan as

"politically risky", for instance, has implications for who is likely to get involved, what they are likely to say or do, and what the outcome is likely to be. Indeed, as Maitlis suggests, viewing something as "political" or "sensitive" radically changes how actors proceed with their strategizing activities.[84]

Barry alludes to this very idea when he reassures the group that they should not "worry" about presenting their strategic change plan because the Board of Directors already have "confidence" in the group (Line 77-79). Barry displays his understanding that the group *could* have some concern about the political implications of this action, but guides them to interpret this concern as unfounded. Politics, he suggests, is not a blockage to their change process – rather, they actually have political support from the Board. Barry and Sara then co-author a picture of the firm as 'surprisingly non-political' (Lines 80-96) at all levels - aside perhaps from the Board, which is described as "intense" in micro-politics. They discuss a Competitor firm, which two of the members previously worked for, as an 'intensely political' arena, plagued with "secret meetings" (Line 89) and an atmosphere which made people "scared to voice an opinion" (Line 93-94). The group attempt to make sense of what *opportunities* they have from working in a largely 'apolitical' firm. This seems to galvanise the group into action, giving them a sense of optimism about their ability to implement the proposed change.

Table 3 gives an overview of the analysis provided above, identifying the accounts through which politics was used as an interpretive procedure during the practical work of strategic decision-making. As Table 3 shows, politics was a key interpretive procedure used by the Steering Group to make sense of past actions (e.g. what did people tell me in the interviews), present actions (e.g. why am I telling you this now) and future actions (e.g. what should we do to fix this problem).

---- Insert Table 3 here ----

To summarise, our analysis of this extract shows how the strategists frame the change process itself as (a) politically dangerous for the Board, (b) politically beneficial for the Steering Group, (c) politically neutral for the action researcher, and (d) politically easy to implement given the comparatively low level of political behaviour in the firm. The sensemaking process can be summarized as follows:

1. There is a problem in this company, and that problem is politics.
2. The Board cannot sort out the problem because they are the source of the political problem.
3. You (the Steering Group) are best placed to sort out the problem because you are not embroiled in politics.
4. To be successful, you must be sensitive to the political implications of certain information, including this very discussion about politics that we are currently having.
5. You have political support at senior levels, a political scapegoat if you should need one (i.e. the change agent) and a 'leader' (i.e. the change agent) with no ulterior political motive or allegiances to support you. This should encourage you to embark upon a change initiative.
6. Below the Board of Directors level, this company is actually less political than many others. This should encourage you to embark upon a change initiative.

Power and politics, then, provide the interpretive method through which decisions about what the strategic change process should look like: Who should be involved? Who should be excluded? How they should proceed? Should they even proceed at all? As strategy-makers, then, the group are collectively building a shared sense of what the power-bases and political agendas in the firm are, and what it could mean for their attempts to shape the strategic agenda. The issue of politics is taken away from the speaker and is made "part of what is described".[85] Politics is represented as existing 'out there' rather than existing in the descriptions provided. *Strategy is itself framed as a process of finding out about, and navigating, the power struggles and political battles in the firm.* What our analysis shows is that the question of who has power, and who has what political agenda, is not simply something that people 'bring into the room'. Rather, it is an outcome of the strategy sensemaking process and, as such, a central part of the practice of 'strategy-making' itself.

Discussion

The extensive body of work on strategic sensemaking by Andrew Brown is especially relevant to our discussion because it, like us, adopts an interpretivist perspective on power and politics.[86] At first glance, his work seems similar to ours, focussing as it does on sensemaking, discourse and narrative. Hence, it might be useful to look more closely at how our approach differs from Brown's work. In his study of the implementation of a new IT system in a hospital, Brown conducted interviews with

major stakeholders.[87] Power and politics emerged as a key theme in some of these interview narratives. For instance, the Chief Information Officer attributes the resistance to change amongst doctors to their fear of loss of power and control over elements such as waiting lists.[88] Brown views this account as evidence of underlying social forces of power and politics at work, such as struggles over control and preservation of self-interest. Brown uses these interview extracts to conclude that the change process was indeed, as the CIO described, marred with "micro-political game[s]", "power relations", "personal reputations" and "political interests".[89] Again, in Brown's study of strategic change in a confectionery company the analysis proceeds by using the interview quotes as evidence that the change process was dominated by power and politics, as actors sought to pursue their "self-interested goals", further their "personal agendas", and protect their "position power".[90]

Brown's system of analysis can be understood using Woolgar's classic work on the 'splitting' and 'inversion' process used in the construction of scientific knowledge.[91] This process also - and importantly for our purposes - includes social scientific reasoning about the nature of social reality. Woolgar argues that truth-claims are made through a series of five progressive steps:

(1) Document
(2) Document $\rightarrow$ Object
(3) Document   Object [independent existence]
(4) Document $\leftarrow$ Object
(5) Deny (or forget about) stages 1-3.[92]

Here, the 'document' refers to the interview accounts in Brown's studies (such as the CIO's claim that politics was the cause of resistance to change), and the 'object' refers to the notion of 'politics' as an objective social reality or 'force'. We can represent these analytical 'moves' employed by Brown as follows:

(1) CIO interview account
(2) CIO interview account $\rightarrow$ Political motive of clinicians
(3) CIO interview account   Political motive of clinicians [independent existence]
(4) CIO interview account $\leftarrow$ Political motive of clinicians
(5) Deny (or forget about) stages 1-3.[93]

For Brown, the document (interview account) is used to infer the existence of an external social reality (the existence of politics). Brown applies these five analytical 'moves' by invoking the existence of an objective, external social reality (comprised of political forces) that is regarded as independent of the document. Competing accounts, then, such as an account by doctors that it is not 'politics' that motivates their resistance but rather a concern for the welfare of patients, are problematic because they present a 'realist dilemma': who is right?[94] This dilemma can be resolved by sorting accounts into those that provide an objective account of 'reality' - which are taken through stages (1) to (5) above – and, and those which are misguided, misperceptions, biased, erroneous or otherwise false accounts – which are thus left at Stage (1) above (just a 'document' with no underlying 'reality'). Thus, clinician's accounts are treated as follows:

(1) Clinician's interview accounts

[Stages (2) to (5) not applied]

In short, the job of the analyst is presented as one of "sorting" through competing accounts to decide which are 'true' and which are 'false'. The analyst thereby adopts the role of 'judge' or 'adjudicator' of the accounts which he or she encounters (or generates) in the research process. Table 4 provides an overview of how this method of analytical reasoning is employed in Brown's study.[95] ---- Table 4 here ---

Interestingly, politics is one such method - amongst a range of other 'human factors' - for conducting this very sorting process.[96] The analyst claims that some accounts are politically motivated (and therefore a false representation) and others are not (and therefore a true representation). The introduction of 'human factors' such as understandings, perceptions, biases, allegiances, interests and motives is a common-place and established ('professional' social scientific and 'lay') method through which the factuality of a claim [the existence of an object independent of the document] is undermined or rejected (ibid). This is exactly the move that Brown makes when he claims that the notion of 'patient care' was merely a "smokescreen" that was

motivated by a fear of loss of control and autonomy amongst some "highly resistant groups". [97] Doctor's account's (that they have legitimate concerns about patient care) are *relativized*, while manager's accounts (doctors have self-interested concerns about loss of power and control) are *not*. Similarly, in his study of strategic change in a confectionery company, certain accounts are dismissed as "a facade to mask the expression of personal and political prejudices" [i.e. Stage (1) only], whilst others (notably, accounts that include reference to power and politics) are treated as sources of information about 'what really happened' [i.e. Stages (1) – (5)].[98] The same kind of analytical separation is also found in other approaches to sensemaking and power/politics.[99]

What difference does it make to adopt our ethnomethodologically-informed discourse analysis (EDA) perspective on politics, to view politics as "participant's discursive concerns"?[100] Brown, like other sensemaking scholars, 'reads' his interview texts as evidence of an underlying social reality, a reality in which certain actors (clinicians) have certain properties (political motives) that drive their behaviour, laying claim to an objective social reality comprised of political forces. Our perspective, in contrast, regards accounts as constitutive of the social world, not sources of information about it. We view the interview text, or any other interaction for that matter, as *accounts* that are part of *situated social practice*. This involves studying the epistemic (knowledge-producing) and performative (i.e. performing social actions) functions of accounts – paying attention to the document itself as a topic of study in its own right, without using it to invoke the existence of an objective social reality.[101] We would instead study how accounts operate epistemically, as they construct the mind/world (for instance, as a world comprised of political forces and self-interested motives), and how they are used to *do* things, to perform social actions within a specific social situation (such as answering an interviewer's question, presenting a plausible account, discounting rival versions, or deflecting blame and responsibility for a 'failed' IT project). Table 5 provides an overview of how such an EDA analysis might proceed in relation to Brown's study of an IT system in a hospital discussed above.[102]

--- Table 5 here ---

Competing accounts (alternative 'documents'), then, are no longer problematic from our EDA perspective. EDA is thus a 'symmetrical' form of: all accounts are treated in the same analytical manner, none are privileged as more 'true' or 'objective' or 'accurate' or 'complete' than any other analysis.[103] Our approach does not seek to find "non-social, non-constructionist ways of underwriting knowledge claims" by claiming to have found an "irrefutable, just-so, non-descriptive description of reality".[104] Rather, we instead focus the analytical lens on how "knowledge and reality are cultural categories, elements of discourse, invented, used, and defended within social practices".[105] This involves treating all versions of reality as "particular, discursive, socially occasioned productions".[106] For example, conflicting accounts between the CIO and doctors no longer need to be 'sorted' into true and false, but rather can be examined for the epistemic and performative work they achieve. In the context of a strategy meeting, for instance, an account similar to that given by the CIO ("doctors are resisting for political reasons") could be employed to undermine rival accounts, discredit opposition to the IT project and push the change agenda forward. An alternative account - say "our objections are not politically motivated but driven by a concern for patient safety" - could, if widely accepted, completely discredit the IT project itself and lead to it being abandoned. What Brown's system of analysis misses, along with other sensemaking studies, and what our approach provides, is a lens for studying the epistemic (world-building) and performative (social action performing) capacity of discourse.

Conclusion

The field of strategy-as-practice (SAP) has come a long way in helping us to understand the micro aspects of discursive processes of formulating, creating, modifying, adapting, defending, pushing, adjusting, withdrawing (and so on) proposals for strategic change. However, the SAP field has recently, and in our view justifiably, been criticized for its lack of attention to issues of power and politics. According to Clegg, Carter and Kornberger, "understanding of strategy necessitates an engagement with power and politics."[106] In this paper, we have sought to address this seeming "illegitimacy of power" as a form of analysis in mainstream management studies, by examining how power and politics were deployed as an interpretive procedure in the sensemaking of strategy meetings.[107] Our study shows that taking an

EDA perspective can show the methods through which members make strategic decisions and handle strategic issues, including issues of who or what has 'power' and 'politics'.

The insights illuminated by this study are also potentially valuable for practitioners, who need to deal with the political dimension of strategic change in their work.[108] In a recent review of the key themes and concerns of articles published in Long Range Planning, Cummings and Daellenbach noted a trend towards "strategists becoming more politically astute in their practice"; indeed, they call for more research into the "strategist-as-politician".[109] This paper meets this call but takes theorising down a different path, viewing politics as an interpretive resource rather than a pre-existing social force. To illustrate the practical implications of the interpretive procedures we describe, let us consider for a moment what may have happened if the Steering Group had made sense of the situation in a different way. If the Board had been interpreted as too powerful and too politically unsupportive, the steering group members could well have decided not to pursue their chosen change agenda, or pursue it in a different way. Alternatively, if the Board had been interpreted as powerful but politically supportive, the Steering Group could have decided to pursue a much more radical agenda, safe in the knowledge that they had the 'weight' and 'backing' of the Board behind them – or perhaps even invite the Board to come onboard jointly with them. Alternatively again, if they had interpreted the Board as politically unsupportive but lacking in a substantive power base, the Steering Group could have felt confident to pursue their change agenda, regardless of any political repercussions at Board level. Hence, our analysis suggests that talk about politics is not 'just talk', it is constitutive of the very organizational reality that it describes and is central to the very practical work of strategic decision-making.

This study provides several key contributions to the understanding of power and politics in the Strategy as Practice field. Firstly, our study contributes to but also critiques the emerging SAP community, which has made some progress in introducing sociological theory to the field of strategy.[110] Whilst SAP has opened strategy to a broader field of debate, according to Clegg, Carter and Kornberger issues of power and politics have yet to be seriously researched and theorised.[111] Our contribution is to go beyond existing work that shows that sensemaking *is* a political

and power-laden process, by showing that sensemaking is central to the interpretation of strategic actors and strategic action *as* political and power-laden.[112]

Many of the key contributions to the SAP literature, such as Jarzabkowski, adopt a structurationist-realist rather than a discursive-constitutive perspective.[113] From our EDA perspective, this misses the constitutive role of language. We find it problematic to assert the existence of political forces as pre-existing objective social facts, as Jarzabkowski suggests by describing the "authority relationships involved in mobilizing power, which are reflected in the way that the interests of different groups are represented within a social system", without showing how these "social facts" are reproduced (and reified) in the ongoing interaction of members.[114] For us, this kind of analysis "presupposes the existence of an outside signifying world that exists independent of social interaction" and fails to study how the social world is, in fact, the "continuous accomplishment of the actors".[115] Following the process perspective in organization theory, we view actors as not simply *having* political motives or agendas – as if these were stable and objective properties or attributes.[116] Rather, we view power and politics as more or less stable and more or less shared understandings that are generated within interpretive sensemaking processes. The strategy as practice field needs an EDA approach, we suggest, to study these processes. A picture of the power and politics of the organizational landscape is not simply 'already there' for everyone to see: it must be built.[117] Indeed, it is often precisely the *ambiguity* of strategic situations – the existence of multiple possible interpretations of 'what is going on?' and 'what should we do?' – which makes these discursive processes of meaning-making so important for strategy practice.[118]

We agree with Shotter and Cunliffe's view that a central task of managers is to create "intelligible formulations" of "where we are now and where we might go next".[119] These formulations, developed in dialogue with others, work to give "shape and direction to the actions of other participants in the organization".[120] Our contribution has been to show how power and politics are used as interpretive procedures for making strategic decisions about "what should we do" and "how should we do it". This interpretive process involves generating, through dialogue with others, intelligible formulations around questions such as: will other organizational actors seek to block the strategy? What political motives or agendas are driving their behaviour? What power do they have to steer or stall the implementation process? Both the content and process of strategy can be radically altered when actors are

interpreted as too powerful, or too political, to make the strategy viable. This sensemaking process also applies to the strategists themselves. What power do we have to implement this strategy? What political allegiances could we develop to help in this process? In the end, our group built a picture of the Board as powerful and political but ultimately not enough of a threat to abandon their plan – they would instead proceed with caution.

To conclude, we propose that power and politics are not stable social entities that lie outside of sensemaking processes. Rather, as our EDA approach has shown, they are "made within the process itself".[121] The notion that certain actors have more power than others, or have a certain political agenda, is rendered a "seemingly objective and concrete phenomena" thanks to the interpretive work of members: work that can be illuminated, we propose, by adopting an EDA approach.[122] To adopt an ethnomethodological perspective on power and politics is not to recommend that the topic should be *removed* from the research agenda altogether. But it is a plea to *change its analytical status* – just as ethnomethodology has already done for norms, values and rules for instance[123] - from stable social 'facts' or 'forces' that act as causal agents to an *interpretive procedure or device* that people use to make and display the meaning of (i.e. make and give sense to) the behaviour of themselves and others.[124] As such, we urge SAP to follow the ethnomethodological prescription to view strategy – including the organizational topography of power and politics – as "ongoing accomplishments rather than predetermined social facts", as members engage in the reproductive work of producing an intelligible shared social world.[125]

Notes

1. Whittington, 'Strategy as Practice', 'The work of strategizing and organizing: for a practice perspective'& 'Completing the Practice Turn in Strategy Research'; Johnson et al, 'Micro strategy and strategizing: towards an activity-based view'

2. Ezzamel & Willmott, 'Rethinking Strategy: Contemporary Perspectives and Debates'; Carter et al. , "S-A-P zapping the field", 'Strategy as Practice?', 'Re-framing strategy: power, politics and accounting', & 'When science meets strategic realpolitik: the case of the Copenhagen UN climate change summit'

3. Maitlis', 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking'

4. Antaki, *Explaining and Arguing: The Social organisation of. Accounts* ; Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction* ; Edwards, *Discourse and Cognition*

5. Coulon, *Ethnomethodology* , 12

6. Maitlis, 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking'

7. Samra-Fredericks, 'Institutional, professional and lifeworld frames in interview talk', & 'Managerial elites making rhetorical and linguistic 'moves' for a moving (emotional) display'

8. Maitlis, 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking'; Maitlis & Lawrence, 'Triggers and enablers of sensegiving in organizations'; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 'Sensemaking in crisis and change: Inspiration and insights from Weick'; Pettigrew, *The Politics of Organizational Decision Making*; Narayanan & Fahey 'The micro-politics of strategy formulation'; Pettigrew & Whipp, *Managing Change for Competitive Success*

9. Brown, 'Strategy formulation: A social and political process', 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation' & 'Narrative, Politics and Legitimacy in an IT Implimentation'; Marshall & Rollinson, 'Maybe Bacon had a point: The politics of interpretation in collective sensemaking'; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 'Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking'; Tourish & Robson,' Sensemaking and the Distortion of Critical Upward Communication in Organizations'; Abolafia, 'Narrative Construction as Sensemaking: How a Central Bank Thinks'

10. Alvesson & Sandberg, 'Generating research questions through problematization'

11. Clegg, Carter & Kornberger, 'Getup, I feel like being a strategy machine'

12. Golsorkhi et al, 'What is Strategy As Practice?'

13. Balogun & Johnson, 'Organizational Restructuring and Middle Manager Sense making'& 'From Intended Strategies to Unintended Outcomes: The Impact of Change Recipient Sensemaking'; Colville & Murphy, 'Leadership as the Enabler of Strategizing and Organizing'; (Hendry, 'Strategic decision making, discourse, and strategy as social practice'; Heracleous, 'A tale of three discourses: The dominant, the strategic and the marginalized'; Heracleous & Jacobs, 'Crafting Strategy: The Role of Embodied Metaphors'; Samra-Fredericks, 'Strategising as Lived Experience and Strategists' Everyday Efforts to Shape Strategic Discourse' & 'Managerial elites making rhetorical and linguistic 'moves' for a moving (emotional) display'; Mueller et al, 'A Rounded Picture is What We Need': Rhetorical strategies, arguments and the negotiation of change in a U.K. Hospital Trust; Jarzabkowski & Sillince 'A rhetoric-in-context approach to shaping commitment to multiple strategic goals'; Johnson, 'Strategy through a cultural lens: learning from managers' experience'; Jarzabkowski

& Fenton, 'Strategizing and organizing in pluralistic contexts'; Chia, 'Strategy-as-practice: reflections on the research agenda'; Jarzabkowski, 'Strategy as practice: recursiveness, adaptation, and practices-in-use'; Whittington et al 'Practices of strategising/organising: Broadening strategy work and skills'; Hodgkinson et al, 'The Role of Strategy Workshops in Strategy Development Processes: Formality, communication, coordination and inclusion'

14. Golsorkhi et al, 'What is Strategy As Practice?'

15. Maitlis, 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking'

16. Pettigrew, *The Politics of Organizational Decision Making* & 'Strategy formulation as a political process', 81

17. For example Pettigrew, *The Politics of Organizational Decision Making* ; Pfeffer & Salancik, 'Organizational Decision Making as a Political Process: The Case of a University Budget'; Bower & Doz 'Strategy formulation: A social and political process' ; Narayanan & Fahey, 'The micro-politics of strategy formulation'; Mintzberg,). *Power In and Around Organizations* &'The organization as political arena'; Mintzberg and Waters, 'Of strategies, deliberate and emergent; Pfeffer, *Managing with power: Politics and influence in organizations*) & 'Understanding power in organisations: ways of getting things done'

18. Buchanan & Badham, 'Politics and Organizational Change: The Lived Experience'1999; Vigoda-Gadot & Drory, *Handbook of organizational politics*; Kacmar et al., 'An Examination of the Perceptions of Organizational Politics Model: Replication and Extension'; Gunn and Chen, 'A micro-political perspective of strategic management'; Pye and Pettigrew, 'Change as a political learning process, enabled by leadership'

19. Buchanan & Badham, 'Politics and Organizational Change

20. Maitlis, 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking', 23

21. Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 'Top teams and strategy in a UK university', 363, 367

22. Maitlis and Lawrence 'Orchestral Manoeuvres in the dark: Understanding Failure in Organizational Strategizing', 112

23. See e.g. Ezzamel & Willmott, 'Rethinking Strategy: Contemporary Perspectives and Debates'; Marshall & Rollinson, 'Maybe Bacon had a point: The politics of interpretation in collective sensemaking'; Tourish & Robson, 'Sensemaking and the Distortion of Critical Upward Communication in Organizations'

24 Boudes & Laroche, 'Taking off the heat: Narrative sensemaking in post-crisis inquiry reports'

25. Maitlis, 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking', 21

26. e.g. Clegg, S., Courpasson, D., & Phillips , *Power and organizations*

27. Leiter, *A Primer on Ethnomethodology*, 152

28. Coulon, *Ethnomethodology*, 29

29. Golsorkhi et al, 'What is Strategy As Practice?'

30. Knights and Morgan 'Corporate strategy, organizations and subjectivity: A critique'; Ezzamel and Willmott, 'Rethinking Strategy: Contemporary Perspectives and Debates'

31. Knights & Morgan, 'Corporate strategy, organizations and subjectivity: A critique', 253

32. Alvesson & Kärreman, 'Decolonializing discourse: Critical reflections on organizational discourse analysis', 1129

33. Knights and Morgan, 'Corporate strategy, organizations and subjectivity: A critique'

34. Alvesson and Kärreman, 'Varieties of discourse: on the study of organizations through discourse analysis', 1126-7; Alvesson & Kärreman, 'Generating research questions through problematization', 1130

35 Vaara and Monin, 'A recursive perspective on discursive legitimation and organizational action in mergers and acquisitions'

36. For example Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* , 4, 49-50, 59

37. Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* , 59

38. Wetherell & Potter, *Mapping the Language of Racism: Discourse and the Legitimation of Exploitation*, 62

39. Barry & Elmes, 'Strategy retold: Toward a narrative view of strategic discourse'; Brown, 'Narrative, Politics and Legitimacy in an IT Implementation' & 'A narrative approach to collective identities'; Brown et al., Making sense of sensemaking narratives; Brown & Thompson, A Narrative Approach to Strategy-as-Practice'; Rhodes & Brown, 'Narrative, organizations and research'; Sims et al., 'On telling stories but hearing snippets: sense-taking from presentations of practice'; Patriotta, 'Sensemaking on the Shop floor: Narratives of Knowledge in Organizations'

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42. Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*; Edwards, *Discourse and Cognition*

43. Antaki, *Explaining and Arguing: The Social organisation of. Accounts*

44. Maitlis, 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking, 21

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46. Sillince and Mueller, 'Switching Strategic Perspective: The Reframing of Accounts of Responsibility'

47. Llewellyn and Hindmarsh, 'Organization in Real Time', 9, 12

48. Samra-Fredericks, 'The interactional accomplishment of the strategic plan', 198

49. Llewellyn & Hindmarsh, 'Organization in Real Time', 13

50. Samra-Fredericks, 'The interactional accomplishment of the strategic plan', 202

51. Samra-Fredericks, 'Strategising as Lived Experience and Strategists', 'Everyday Efforts to Shape Strategic Discourse', 'Strategic practice, 'discourse' and the everyday interactional constitution of 'power effects'', & 'The interactional accomplishment of the strategic plan'

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53. Jarzabkowski and Wilson, 'Top teams and strategy in a UK university'

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57. See for example Paroutis & Pettigrew, 'Strategizing in the Multi-business Firm: Strategy Teams at Multiple Levels and over Time'

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65. Gummesson, *Qualitative Methods in Management Research*, 39

66. Boden, *The business of talk: organizations in action*, 79

67. Samra-Fredericks, 'Strategising as Lived Experience and Strategists' Everyday Efforts to Shape Strategic Discourse'

68. Coulon, *Ethnomethodology*

69. Coulon, *Ethnomethodology,* 2

70. c.f. Balogun & Johnson, 'Organizational Restructuring and Middle Manager Sense making'

71. Coulon, *Ethnomethodology*, 9

72. Simons, *Rhetoric in the Human Sciences*; Edwards & Potter, *Discursive psychology* 149

73. Hewitt and Stokes, 'Disclaimers'

74. Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*, 193

75. Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*, 110

76. Sarangi, 2003, 'Institutional, professional and lifeworld frames in interview talk'

77. Weider, *Language and social reality: the case of telling the convict code.*

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79. Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 114

80. Edwards & Potter, *Discursive psychology* 1992, Chapter 1

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83. Potter et al., 'A model of discourse in action'

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85. Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*, 113

86. Andrew Brown, 'Politics, symbolic action and myth making in pursuit of legitimacy', 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation', 'Narrative, Politics and Legitimacy in an IT Implementation', 'Authoritative sensemaking in a public inquiry report' & Making sense of the collapse of Barings Bank; Brown & Thompson, 'A Narrative Approach to Strategy-as-Practice'

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89. Brown, 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation', 962

90. Brown, 'Politics, symbolic action and myth making in pursuit of legitimacy', 868, 869

91. Woolgar, *Science: The Very Idea.*

92. Woolgar, *Science: The Very Idea*, 68

93. Brown, 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation'

94. See Brown, 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation', 960

95. Brown, 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation'

96. Edwards, Discourse & Cognition, 57

97. Brown, 1995, 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation', 960

98. Brown, 'Politics, symbolic action and myth making in pursuit of legitimacy', 866

99. Abolafia, 'Narrative Construction as Sensemaking: How a Central Bank Thinks'; Brown, 'Politics, symbolic action and myth making in pursuit of legitimacy',

'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation', 'Narrative, Politics and Legitimacy in an IT Implementation' ; Maitlis, 'The social processes of organizational sensemaking'; Maitlis & Lawrence, 'Triggers and enablers of sensegiving in organizations'; Maitlis & Sonenshein, 'Sensemaking in crisis and change: Inspiration and insights from Weick'; Marshall & Rollinson, 'Maybe Bacon had a point: The politics of interpretation in collective sensemaking'; Tourish & Robson, 'Sensemaking and the Distortion of Critical Upward Communication in Organizations' ; Weick, Sutcliffe & Obstfeld, 'Organizing and the Process of Sensemaking'

100. Edwards, Discourse & Cognition, 60

101. Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction*, Chapter 4

102. Brown, 'Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation'

103. Bloor, 'The strengths of the strong programme'

104. Edwards, *Discourse and Cognition,* 52

105. Edwards, *Discourse and Cognition,* 52.

106. Clegg, Carter & Kornberger, 'Getup, I feel like being a strategy machine', 25

107. Clegg, Courpasson & Phillips, *Power and organizations*, 132

108. Lawrence, et al, 'The underlying structure of continuous change'

109. Cummings and Daellenbach, 'The History of Long Range Planning', 236, 258

110. Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 'Hard to disagree, mostly'

111. Clegg, Carter and Kornberger, 'Getup, I feel like being a strategy machine'

112. For example Brown, Politics, symbolic action and myth making in pursuit of legitimacy, Managing Understandings: Politics, Symbolism, Niche Marketing and the Quest for Legitimacy in IT Implementation, Narrative, Politics and Legitimacy in an IT Implementation , & 'A narrative approach to collective identities'

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114. Jarzabkowski, 'Shaping strategy as a structuration process', 623

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116. Hernes & Maitlis, 'Process, Sensemaking and Organizing'

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118. Jarzabkowski, Sillince & Shaw, 'Strategic ambiguity as a rhetorical resource for enabling multiple interests'

119. Shotter and Cunliffe, 'Managers as practical authors', 20; Shotter, *Conversational Realities: Constructing Life Through Language*, 148

120. Shotter and Cunliffe, 'Managers as practical authors', 20

121. Hernes & Maitlis, 'Process, Sensemaking and Organizing', 27

122. Hernes & Maitlis, 'Process, Sensemaking and Organizing', 4

123. See Leiter, *A Primer on Ethnomethodology*; Coulon, *Ethnomethodology*

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Nature of fieldwork	Duration
Participant & non-participant observation of managers in non-formal settings	Continuous over a period of 30 months
Combination of participant and non-participant observation of the 10 cross-functional Key Account "Steering Group" Meetings	3-5 hours per meeting, over a 12 month period
Full & 'formal' Work-shadows	5-8 days in length of 2 marketing managers and 1 marketing director
Participant observation of 17 cross-functional Key Account Service/Account Plan implementation team meetings	1-2 hours per meeting, over a 12 month period
Interviews with Board Directors and Managers; including regular periodic interviewing of Steering Group members during the 12 months of its operation.	113 of 60-90 minutes each
Document capture: emails, meeting actions-arising notes/minutes, flip-chart work from meetings, presentations, planning documentation etc.	Continuous collection for duration of project

Table 1 Nature and Duration of Fieldwork

Barry – Action Researcher
Sandra – Customer Service Manager
Sara – Senior Product Manager (Product Segment B)
Zeb – Consumer Marketing Manager

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45	Barry:	Now often in a business I think the marketing guy or girl who's running marketing has a sort of hidden responsibility for hanging it together, this, right. And if you have a political situation at Board level where it's not possible to hang it together then it becomes exceptionally difficult, right in terms of hanging this whole thing together for the customer. And I think Adam [*last marketing director*] was in that position to be honest. What is interesting I think is since Adam's left some things seem to be going on that have changed things. I think there's some meetings that are going on. I think, I was talking to you Zeb [*soon to be marketing director*], listening to your guys talking and there are some sessions going on now that weren't particularly going on in as proactive a way as when Adam was there as they are now. Errr [pause] that is also very typical of depar [hesitation] of departmentalism that, right, that when you shake up the top management you get changes going on almost immediately cause what happens at this level, where we sit, is all of a sudden you get on with the job a bit easier. In other words, don't know if you feel that at the moment, but that's the impression I'm getting. And it's no insult to Adam, it's it's it's just the way it is, in organisations. It is right [pause] Now I've taken off here the last two pages which are all about the directors talking about themselves right [pause] mmmm. Now because it's so political, a hot potato obviously and I'll talk a little bit about it. As far as the directors are concerned about themselves they see that they're not working as a team, they give no integrated viewpoint on the business to the rest of the company, they're intensely self-critical. They were devastating about each other and themselves, right so I think you can take it quite well actually because they were quite critical about themselves, you know. [Head of Product Segment B business] right although he was very critical of everybody which I think is his, he was incredibly critical of himself, you know what I mean he called himself a self-opinionated son of a gun you know, err [pause] So all of them, so I think actually think quite validly that they were being honest because they were very you know tough on themselves as well on each other but they, they were, they, you could see that they were saying to each other "Well we're just not getting it right are we? We are just not hanging together as a team. We are not a team as a Board of Directors." You know we

46		have to keep this round the table, I'm being honest with
47		you. But that's not a signal you want out in the business
48		and they don't think they're sending it but they're sending
49		it subliminally 'cause you all know it's the case. And
50		everybody I've interviewed has said this.
51	Sandra:	They get – they'd allow us to say it as well I think.
52	Barry:	Yes. Now we had this discussion about whether or not
53		what I should do is have this with this being the directors
54		round the table [pause] right [pause] Now I've resisted
55		that immensely because it's too difficult, there are too
56		many fixed positions, there's too much history. There's
57		too many people there with too much to lose but not
58		enough to gain, right? Everybody round this table has got
59		a lot to gain from doing this, right. It's very low risk
60		because if anything goes wrong you can blame me and I
61		don't care about being blamed 'cause I'm not being paid.
62		If it fails it's just as good as a research opportunity. So
63		I'm not here as a consultant right, right. So it's all up
64		really in this sense
65		[9 lines omitted for brevity]
66		And then what we'll do is as a group my plan is that
67		we'll, we, that is not individuals, we as a team will have a
68		meeting with the directors. When you say "Well this is
69		what we reckon we should do on [Key Account 1]."
70		Right. Now it won't be me that's saying it - before we go
71		on, you should understand that it won't be me it'll be you
72		guys, right, that are saying it, yeah [pause] You
73		comfortable with that?
74	Sara:	Yeah definitely.
75	Barry:	Yes. It won't be me.
76	Zeb:	Fine.
77	Barry:	Now, it's obviously the directors that picked this team so
78		the directors have confidence in this group so you
79		shouldn't worry about it in anyway. I think it's very
80		positive, I mean that's one of the things that's great about
81		Reebok it's very open, extremely open. I mean it's great.
82		I mean as a research site it's amazing people just talk to
83		you I mean so in in in some ways the micro politics
84		doesn't seem as intense here, I don't know why. At the
85		top level it's intense.
86	Sara:	In comparison to [Competitor 1] it's the next [inaudible] a
87		whole different page here.
88	Barry:	Is it?
89	Sara:	Yes I think so. Little secret meetings in little cubby holes
90		with a few top people, you know it was very very difficult
91		in Competitor 1, wasn't it? [talking to Deputy Sales
92		Director Product Segment B - also ex-employee of
93		Competitor 1]. A lot of the time you were scared to voice
94		an opinion.
95	Barry	Really?

| 96 | Sara: | Yes. Absolutely yes. |

Table 2 Extract from Steering Group Meeting

Framing of politics	Selected extract (see Table 2)	Social action performed by framing politics in this way
Politics is the main source of the company's problems	Barry: "And if you have a political situation at Board level where it's not possible to hang it together then it becomes exceptionally difficult, right in terms of hanging this whole thing together for the customer."	Explaining why the company is facing problems.
Politics is 'natural' and 'normal'	Barry: "that is also very typical of depar [hesitation] of departmentalism that, right, that when you shake up the top management you get changes going on almost immediately cause what happens at this level, where we sit, is all of a sudden you get on with the job a bit easier. In other words, don't know if you feel that at the moment, but that's the impression I'm getting. And it's no insult to Adam, it's it's it's just the way it is, in organisations. It is right."	Performing criticism without insult.
This is politically sensitive information that requires 'secrecy'	Barry: "Now I've taken off here the last two pages which are all about the directors talking about themselves right [pause] mmmm. Now because it's so political, a hot potato obviously and I'll talk a little bit about it. .... You know we have to keep this round the table, I'm being honest with you. But that's not a signal you want out in the business"	Justifying why information is not being shared (removing the last two pages of the report) and why information should not be shared (the group should not repeat this message elsewhere).
This information is not that politically sensitive.	Sandra; "... they'd allow us to say it as well I think."	Suggesting that they could share this information more widely without causing political upset.

Information is true if politics is absent: criticism of others is 'politically motivated', criticism of yourself is not	Barry: "As far as the directors are concerned about themselves they see that they're not working as a team, they give no integrated viewpoint on the business to the rest of the company, they're intensely self-critical. They were devastating about each other and themselves, right so I think you can take it quite well actually because they were quite critical about themselves, you know. [Head of Product Segment B business], right, although he was very critical of everybody which I think is his, he was incredibly critical of himself, you know what I mean he called himself a self-opinionated son of a gun you know, err [pause] So all of them, so I think actually think quite validly that they were being honest because they were very you know tough on themselves as well on each other but they, they were, they, you could see that they were saying to each other "Well we're just not getting it right are we? We are just not hanging together as a team. We are not a team as a Board of Directors."	Rationale for why certain opinions should be regarded as 'true' and others 'false', and therefore who should be believed and who should be discredited.
Politics is the cause of dysfunctional conflict at Board level	Barry: "Now we had this discussion about whether or not what I should do is have this with this being the directors round the table [pause] right [pause] Now I've resisted that immensely because it's too difficult, there are too many fixed positions, there's too much history. There's too many people there with too much to lose but not enough to gain, right?"	Justifying why the Steering Group needs to address the 'problem' themselves, without involvement of Board.
You have something politically to gain from this.	Barry: "Everybody round this table has got a lot to gain from doing this, right. It's very low risk because if anything goes wrong you can blame me."	Persuading the Steering Group to invest in the change initiative by suggesting they have a vest self-interest ('something to gain') and 'nothing to lose'

		politically, because they already have a political scapegoat (blaming the action researcher).
I have no political allegiances or self-interest (being paid).	Barry: "I don't care about being blamed 'cause I'm not being paid. If it fails it's just as good as a research opportunity."	Persuading the Steering Group to invest in the change initiative by suggesting that they can trust the action researcher to lead the change, because he has no ulterior motive (e.g. self-interest in earning money, political allegiances in the business).
You have political support at the top.	Barry: "Now, it's obviously the directors that picked this team so the directors have confidence in this group so you shouldn't worry about it in anyway."	Encouraging the Steering Group to embark upon the change initiative by suggesting they have political support amongst those with power at Board level.
This company (below Director level at least) is less political than many other companies.	Barry: "I mean that's one of the things that's great about Apparat it's very open, extremely open. I mean it's great. I mean as a research site it's amazing people just talk to you I mean so in in in some ways the micro politics doesn't seem as intense here, I don't know why. At the top level it's intense." Sara: "In comparison to [Competitor 1] it's the next [inaudible] a whole different page here. ... Little secret meetings in little cubby holes with a few top people, ... A lot of the time you were scared to voice an opinion."	Encouraging the Steering Group to embark upon the change initiative by suggesting they should find little political resistance to change across the company, which is relatively apolitical compared to other firms in the same industry.

Table 3 Summary of analysis of extract from Steering Group Meeting

Actor	Account	Analytical stages from Woolgar (1998)	Analytical role: "adjudicating judgement"
Managers	Clinician's complaints about the new IT system are politically motivated 'resistance', driven by their fear of loss of power and control over patients	Manager's accounts are taken through Stages (1) to (5)	Managers accounts are **true** (neutral and disinterested assessment of 'reality')
Clinicians	Our complaints about the new system are motivated by genuine concerns over patient wellbeing	Clinician's accounts are taken to Stage (1) only	Clinician's accounts are **false** (politically motivated distortion of 'reality')

Table 4 Overview of Brown's (1995) analysis of competing interview accounts in study of IT implementation in a hospital

Actor	Account	EDA analysis	Analytical role: study member's accounts
Managers	Clinician's complaints about the new IT system are politically motivated 'resistance', motivated by their fear of loss of power and control over patients	Managers use 'power and politics' as a member's method for making sense of the reactions of clinicians to the new IT system	Analyst should study (but not 'adjudicate' on) three things: (a) when, how, and where such accounts are made; (b) what the accounts *do* for members in the contexts of their use (e.g. what decisions or other practical consequences flow from accepting certain accounts); (c) how rival accounts are sorted, sifted and settled by members, with what consequences for those involved.[1]
Clinicians	Our complaints about the new system are motivated by genuine concerns over patient wellbeing	Clinicians use 'patient wellbeing' as a members method for making sense of what it 'means' (i.e. 'bad news for patients') and how they should respond to it (i.e. 'block it')	

Table 5 EDA analysis of Brown's (1995) study of IT implementation in a hospital

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[1] For example, accepting managers accounts as 'true' would mean the hospital would implement the IT system and discount the clinician's concerns.

Accepting clinicians accounts as 'true', on the other hand, would mean the IT system should be abandoned or significantly changed.