THESIS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Strategizing in construction: Exploring practices and paradoxes

MARTIN LÖWSTEDT

Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

CHALMERS UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

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Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering
Chalmers University of technology

ABSTRACT

The starting point of this thesis was an identified lack of strategy-related research within the construction industry as well as a lack of comprehensive strategy management at the organizational level in construction. A growing number of researchers have highlighted the importance of strategy research in construction in regards to increase understanding of long-term development and change on the organizational levels of construction companies. The overall purpose of this thesis is to explore how strategizing in construction is deployed using a Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) lens. Two main research questions have driven the research: 1) How is strategy perceived and enacted at the micro level in a construction company? 2) What practices enacted at the micro level can be linked to organizational outcomes and change on various macro levels in a construction company?

In order to answer these questions, I draw on rich empirical data from an in-depth case study of a large construction company (Alpha) and combine insights from using three different methodological approaches: narrative analysis of interviews, observation studies, and a short ethnographic study. The findings show that traditional strategy practices such as annual reviews, strategic planning, and strategic workshops did not seem to be overtly consequential for organizational outcomes and directions in the organization. Instead the findings reveal how the managers collectively identify with and foregrounded the craftsmanship of to the building site. This over time seems to have embedded a common set of practices that permeate all the organizational levels, including project levels, middle-management levels, and higher levels, through a top-down as well as bottom-up negotiation encompassing mainly those with the appropriate and legitimate craftsmanship-grounded habitus. This phenomenon could be considered as a pattern of strategizing in itself and it highlights that there is a tension (paradox) in regards to what the key practices are and what the actors actually do in relations to strategy in construction.

It is suggested that the social process relating to the strong collective identification may have negative consequences for long-term change and development in the construction industry since one of its main mechanisms is to self-reinforce itself to remain the same. This thesis also contributes methodologically and theoretically, both to SAP and to construction, by showing how underlying logics of practices are more readily discerned by studying them as they are enacted between different groups interacting at boundary interfaces.

Keywords: construction industry, organizational change, practice, social identity, strategy, strategizing, strategy-as-practice (SAP)

APPENDED PAPERS

Paper I

Löwstedt, M. and Räisänen, C. (2012). `Playing back-spin balls´: narrating organizational change in construction. *Construction Management and Economics*, 30(9), 795-806.

Paper II

Räisänen, C. and Löwstedt, M. (2014). Stakes and struggles in liminal spaces: construction practitioners interacting with management-consultants. *Engineering Project Organization Journal*, 4(2-3), 123-133.

Paper III

Löwstedt, M. and Räisänen, C. (2014). Social identity in construction: enactments and outcomes. *Construction Management and Economics*, 32(11), 1093-1105.

Paper IV

Löwstedt, M. (2014). 'Taking off my glasses in order to see': exploring practice on a building site using self-reflexive ethnography. *Construction Management and Economics* (accepted subject to "minor revisions", revised version submitted).

DISTRIBUTION OF WORK

Three of the four appended papers in this thesis have been developed and written collaboratively. This brief section clarifies the distribution of work among the authors.

Paper I

Löwstedt collected and analyzed the data, and developed the overall idea for the paper as well as wrote most of the paper. Räisänen contributed with continuous feedback and fruitful discussions.

Paper II

Räisänen developed the overall theoretical approach for the paper. Löwstedt collected most of the data. The analysis and writing of the paper was done jointly, in close collaboration.

Paper III

Löwstedt collected and analyzed the data, and developed the overall idea for the paper as well as wrote most of the paper. Räisänen contributed with continuous feedback and fruitful discussions.

Paper IV

Löwstedt is sole author of the paper.

ADDITIONAL PUBLICATIONS

Räisänen, C. and Löwstedt, M. (2014). Game of experts: Management consultants vying for power in unfamiliar fields. *In EGOS conference, Rotterdam, 3-5 July, Sub-theme 41: The Power of Management Experts in Organizations and Society*.

Löwstedt, M. (2014). (Awarded "Best Paper") ´Taking off my glasses in order to see´: exploring practice on a building site using self-reflexive ethnography. *In: Raiden, AB and Aboagye-Nimo, E (Eds) Procs 30th Annual ARCOM Conference, 1-3 September 2014, Portsmouth, UK, Association of Researchers in Construction Management, 247-256.*

Räisänen, C., Stenberg, A. C. and Löwstedt, M. (2013). Strategy workshops: The fusing of the past and the future in the present. *In CIB World Building Congress, Construction and Society, Brisbane, 5-9 May 2013.*

Räisänen, C., Stenberg, A. C. and Löwstedt, M. (2012). Using positioning theory to understand construction of selfhood in strategy audits. *In 28th Egos Colloquium, Helsinki, Sub-theme 05 Strategy-as-Practice.*

Löwstedt, M. (2012*). Exploring the concept of strategy using a practice lens: The case of a large construction company.* Thesis for licentiate degree. Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg.

Löwstedt, M. and Räisänen, C. (2012). Bringing on-site identities into the boardroom: A self-reinforcing mechanism in construction. *In 28th Egos Colloquium, Helsinki, Sub-theme 21 Self-reinforcing processes in organizations.*

Löwstedt, M. and Räisänen, C. (2012). (Awarded "Best Paper") ´Being a construction worker´: Identity effects as a self-reinforcing mechanism in construction. *In CIB 2012 Conference Proceedings, Montréal.*

Löwstedt, M., Räisänen, C. and Stenberg, A. C. (2011). (Awarded "Best Paper") How does change happen in a large construction company: Comparing objectified and lived versions of change. *In 27th Annual Conference of the Association of Researchers in Construction Management, ARCOM 2011. Bristol, 5-7 September 2011 (Vol. 1, pp. 85-94).*

Löwstedt, M., Räisänen, C., Stenberg, A. C. and Fredriksson, P. (2011). (Awarded "Best Paper") Strategy work in a large construction company: personified strategies as drivers for change. *In 6th Nordic conference on Construction Economics and Organisation, 13-15 April, 2011, Copenhagen, Denmark.*

Räisänen, C., Stenberg, A. C. and Löwstedt, M. (2011). ´Two strides forward, one stride back: ´Strategy practice as chains of conversations. *In 27th EGOS Colloquium, Gothenburg, 2011.*

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This is nothing like I imagined it to be. Writing this part I mean. I always imagined it do be a peaceful moment of writing when all the other writing was already done. I imagined sitting outside, on a bench, on a boulevard, with a coffee, and there were birds also. Instead I am up with the robbers of the night and can almost already discern the sound of the printing press starting relentlessly at dawn. Regardless of this I really hope that I can manage to make you feel properly acknowledged here, because there are many of you that really deserves that.

First and foremost I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my main supervisor Christine Räisänen. You are caring, you are present, and you are extremely generous with both your time and your mind. All your tough love has really made me the very best that I could be and I will forever be extremely grateful for that!

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Göteborg, May 2015.

Martin Löwstedt.

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Chapter I: INTRODUCTION

Why study strategy?

The starting point of this research project was an identified lack of strategy-related studies within the construction industry (e.g. Björnström 2007) as well as a lack of comprehensive strategy management at the organizational level in construction companies (e.g. Chinowsky and Byrd 2001; Langford and Male 2008). Research in construction seems to have focused mainly on the actualities of building projects (e.g. Love et al. 1998; Nicolini et al. 2001; Dubois and Gadde 2002) rather than on the organizations to which the projects are subordinated (Chinowsky and Meredith 2000). To increase understanding of the complex interdependencies between an organization and its projects as well as those between strategy management and long-term organizing in construction companies have been considered to be imperative issues by several researchers, especially in the increasingly complex, international and uncertain construction markets of today and of the future (Junnonen 1998; Price and Newson 2003; Chinowsky and Byrd 2001; Langford and Male 2008).

The importance of strategy has been widely stressed in the literature. Whittington (2003: 177) called strategy work a "serious business", and Barry and Elmes (1997: 430) ranked it "the most prominent influential and costly stories told in organizations". A common view among scholars is that strategy is of unquestioned importance and therefore demands critical attention (Knights and Morgan, 1991; Cummings, 2003; cited in Clegg et al. 2004). It is also common in business educations, especially for MBA degrees, to teach strategic management as a central core subject (Pettigrew et al 2001; Pfeffer and Fong 2002).

Conversely, at the backdrop of this widely presumed importance of strategy is an extensive and open-ended discussion regarding what "strategy" actually means and encompasses. Wit et al. (1998: 3), for example, stated that "there are strongly different opinions on most of the key issues within the field and the disagreements run so deep that even a common definition of the term strategy is illusive". Norton and Irving (1999) argued that adding more definitions of strategy to the myriad that already exist merely confuses the issue rather than clarifies it. The highly renowned strategy scholar Henry Mintzberg maintained that strategy scholars seem to agree on mainly two things in regards to strategy: that there exists no universal definition of strategy (Mintzberg and Lampel 1999); and that regardless of this lack strategy is something important, something that companies need (Mintzberg 1994). These two juxtaposed notions could thus be seen as a somewhat peculiar paradox needing to be unpacked, and in the case of construction this requires an in-depth exploration of how strategy is used in the industry.

Background and research context

Although somewhat difficult to delimit, construction undoubtedly represents one of the largest industrial sectors in the world economy (Chinowsky and Meredith 2000; Dainty et al 2007); it is a cornerstone of the economies of most countries (Marceau et al 1999; Gann and Salter 2000; Widen and Hansson 2007; Seaden and Manseau 2001).

At the heart of this industry is the building project. In fact the industry is commonly referred to as "the epitome of a project-based industry" (Dainty et al 2007), in which a seemingly one-of-a-kind temporary organization is set up for each new building project (e.g. Eccles 1981; Koskela 1992).

Building projects are characterized by extensive use and reliance on subcontractors (Bryman et al. 1987; Hughes and Hillerbrant 2003; Gadde et al. 2010), and the geographic aspect of site production means that the supply structure varies for each new product (Vrijhoef and Koskela 2000; Frödell 2014). Much of the productive capacity related to building projects is furthermore accounted for by small and micro-sized enterprises (Bosch and Phillips 2003; Green et al 2004; Knauseder 2007)

The structural fragmentation and the wide array of different actors and activities that directly or indirectly relate to the outputs of the industry make it hard to delimit its boundaries and scope. The related outputs of the industry are extremely varied and include design, construction and maintenance services across various sectors of the economy (Chan et al 2010), involving a wide variety of professional fields (Dainty et al 2006; Fellows and Liu 2012). In fact what precisely constitutes the "construction industry" is itself subject to a range of different boundary definitions (Dainty et al 2007). It has even been argued that the construction industry is better defined as a set of related, but relatively heterogeneous sub-industries (Ive and Gruneberg 2000).

From a Swedish perspective the construction industry is a sub-industry of the much larger construction sector, which also includes the real-estate industry (public and private), the building-materials production industry, architectural firms, and technical consultancies (The Swedish Construction Federation 2014).

For several decades, concerns have been raised globally by policy makers and politicians that the construction industry is underperforming in regards to a number of areas, such as innovation, productivity and quality, and that the industry furthermore is slow to change and improve (e.g.

Latham 1994, SOU 1997, Egan1998; Barlow 2000; SOU 2002; Widen and Hansson 2007; SOU 2009). These oft-repeated views are probably the origin of the "uniquely backward" label often mentioned in the research community and echoed by politicians and policy makers (e.g. Kadefors 1995; Hayes 2002; Winch 2003; Woudhuysen and Abley, 2004).

These concerns are furthermore reflected within the construction research agenda, which to a large extent has been focused on developing technical systems, processes, and concepts predicated upon an underlying assumption that the industry is indeed underperforming and needs to be improved. Many of these new conceptions, BIM, Partnering, Purchasing, Lean Construction, Industrial Housing, Innovation arenas, now dominate the technical rationalistic discourse and are advocated to and by practitioners and researchers (e.g. Seymor and Rooke 1995; Chan and Räisänen 2009). These prescriptions are often based upon benchmarking arguments, i.e., that the construction industry has failed to adopt systems and processes that have improved performance in other industries, such as just-in-time (Low and Mok, 1999), total quality management (Shammas-Thoma et al 1998), partnering with suppliers (Cox 1996), supply chain management (Vrijhoef and Koskela, 2000) and "industrialization" of manufacturing processes (Gann, 1996), as cited in Dubois and Gadde (2002: 621).

However, a question that is much less often posed is why the industry looks the way it does. An increasing number of researchers have criticized the current prescriptive change-reform discourses for being insufficient in providing explanations of the linkages between industry practices and performance (e.g. Green and May 2003; Barrett and Barrett 2004; Fernie et al 2006). These critical streams argue that in order to address the structural challenges of the industry, practices and outcomes should

instead be viewed from a socio-cultural perspective as having been developed over time and tied to a socio-historical context (Higgin and Crichton, 1966; Dubois and Gadde 2002; Winch 2003; Cicmil and Marshall 2005; Harty 2008; Ness 2010).

The ambition of this thesis is to contribute to this stream by exploring how strategy practices unfold at the micro level in construction and how they may be related to outcomes on various organizational levels. That is, rather than posing the question why the industry looks the way it does, I address another gap in construction research and pose the questions *why people in the industry do what they do* (e.g. Green and May 2003; Dainty et al. 2007), and *how what they do can be related to industry practices and vice versa*.

Strategy research in construction

As mentioned earlier, construction research is largely based around the actualities of the building projects (Love et al. 1998; Chinowsky and Meredith 2000; Nicolini et al. 2001; Dubois and Gadde 2002), and while project management topics receive significant focus from construction researchers and practitioners, a number of researchers have highlighted that significantly less attention has been paid to strategic management in construction organizations (Chinowsky and Meredith 2000; Chinowsky and Byrd 2001; Goodman 1998; Cheah and Garvin 2004 Cheah and Chew 2005; Björnström 2007).

The few studies on strategy in construction tend to draw on already existing definitions and conceptions of strategy. Price and Newson (2003:190), for example, conclude that: "the construction industry does

not need to develop its own terminology for strategic management. There are already many relevant definitions […] additional definitions would only add confusion". Common for most of these studies is that they are prescriptive and conceptual rather than descriptive and empirical (e.g. Junnonen 1998; Price and Newson 2003; Flanagan et al 2007; Langford and Male 2008). They delimit "strategy" to the particular analytical processes defined in studies which sort under rational schools of thought within strategic management (e.g. Chandler 1962; Ansoff 1965; Wernerfelt 1984; Porter 1985; Barney 1991; Porter 1996). These studies are therefore typical for the broader and general discourse in construction research, namely that of a prescriptive and deterministic technical rationalism (for a critique of this discourse see e.g. Seymore and Rooke 1995; Chan and Räisänen 2009). In a sense they reinforce the problem they describe, namely that there is a lack of empirical studies that explore *how* construction companies actually work with strategy as it happens in practice.

Cheah and Chew (2005) speculate why so little focus has been paid to strategy in construction, and suggest that it might be related to the fragmented nature of the industry and that the complexities relating to this raise barriers for researchers of a more generalist nature to conduct insightful studies in regards to strategy. This reasoning is similar to Flanagan et al (2007), who argue that it is harder to apply strategic analysis on the construction industry because of its high level of heterogeneity compared with other, more "general", industries (ibid. 989). Cheah and Chew (2005) also argue that it may be that the construction industry sometimes is portrayed as a "low-growth, low-tech" industry, which lessens its appeal as a research context for strategy studies.

It has been argued that the changing conditions in the construction industry, such as increasing awareness of its environmental impact (Pries and Janzen 1995) and increasing globalized and fluctuating markets (Junnonen, 1998; Langford and Male 2008) render it imperative for construction organizations to think strategically about their future directions (Junnonen 1998 Price and Newson 2003; Chinowsky and Byrd 2001; Langford and Male 2008). Focusing on strategy on the organizational level specifically, this thesis therefore hopes to contribute further insights to the challenges mentioned above regarding long-term development and long-term change in organizations in the construction industry.

Purpose and research questions

The purpose of this thesis is to explore how strategy practices unfold in a large construction company. To fulfill this purpose, I have collected and drawn on rich empirical data from an in-depth case study of a large Swedish construction company. Two main research questions have driven the research:

> *RQ 1:* How is strategy perceived and enacted at the micro level in a large construction company?

Rather than using preconceived conceptions of strategy, the thesis is based on an explorative study that gives voice to the actors themselves in order to try to discover new, situated conceptualisations rather than imposing existing ones (Gioia et al 2013). This explorative approach was inspired by the Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) perspective which has framed much of the initial work of this PhD project. This means that strategy here is viewed as

a socially accomplished activity within a situated organizational context (e.g. Whittington 2006; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007 Johnson et al. 2007).

In order to navigate amongst all the socially accomplished activities that unfold in an organization, this thesis has used the alleged "importance" of strategy (e.g. Mintzberg 1994; Barry and Elmes 1997; Whittington 2003) as a pointer for the second research question:

> *RQ2:* What key practices enacted at the micro level can be linked to organizational outcomes and change on various macro levels in a large construction company?

This question revolves around how a construction company is organized. It is based on the assumption that strategy practices will overlap with those key practices that can be linked to organizational outcomes and change. The notions of accomplishment and practice are further elaborated in the theory chapter of the thesis.

These research questions can therefore be seen as querying the aforementioned paradox in strategy research in which strategy is seen as something important, even though its actual meaning is yet to be attained (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg and Lampel 1999). By pursuing both these questions this thesis also explores the tensions that unfold as the paradox is being unpacked.

Brief outline of the thesis

The thesis is divided into five chapters. Following this introduction is *Chapter II* that describes the Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) perspective that has been used as the overall theoretical framework. After a brief general introduction to SAP, I explain how it has been used to frame the two research questions and also elaborate on some of its theoretical and methodological issues in regards to studying strategy. *Chapter III* first provides a brief description of the case company Alpha and then describes the case study design and briefly introduces the methods used, focusing particularly on how they have related to each other and to the theoretical perspective. I outline how the various methods have been used to triangulate emerging findings, and how they have complemented each other's strengths and weaknesses. A summary of the methods and the data is provided in a table (table. 1) while elaborations of the details are found in the appended papers. *Chapter IV* briefly presents the findings in summaries of the appended papers. The papers are presented in the order that corresponds to the research trajectory. I also provide a brief description of the rationale underlying each paper in regards to how the overall research project progressed. *Chapter V* discusses the findings as well as highlighting the conclusions, and the methodological and theoretical contributions. Finally, *Chapter VI* describes the implications that these findings have for construction and suggests some future research relating to them.

Chapter II: THEORETICAL FRAMING

The Strategy-as-Practice perspective

Research on organizational strategy can be traced back to the 1960´s and
to Alfred Chandler, who has been acknowledged as the founder of the
strategy-management research field (e.g. Hermann, 2005; Furrer *et al.*
2008). Chandler (1962) viewed strategy as the analytical work that top
management does in order to formulate the overall plan and direction of
their company. This notion of strategy gradually developed into a major
research field of its own, focused on rational techniques for managing
complex businesses in changing environments (e.g. Chandler 1962; Ansoff
1965; Wernerfelt 1984; Porter 1985; Barney 1991; Porter 1996). In the
relatively few studies that exist on strategy in the construction industry, it
is these earlier strategy scholars that have informed most of the research
(e.g. Junnonen 1998; Price and Newson 2003; Flanagan et al 2007).

However, other schools of thought challenged Chandler´s conception of
strategy by questioning the extent to which strategy actually embodies
rational processes (e.g. Mintzberg 1978; Mintzberg and Waters 1985;
Mintzberg and McHugh 1985; Pettigrew 1985; 1988). These schools are
predominately concerned with *what* "strategy" actually is or may be and
how "strategy" may be formed, paying attention to the social nature of
strategy processes. They question, among other, the ability of rational
models to account for the uncertain direction and speed of organizational
change.

Mintzberg defined strategy as "a pattern in streams of decisions"
(Mintzberg 1978:936), and later, as "a pattern in streams of actions"
(Mintzberg and Waters 1985:257). His notions of patterns and streams
seem to challenge the privileging of top managers and formal plans in

regards to strategy, since the "patterns of streams of actions" encompass all the combinations of *intended as well as unintended* activities (Mintzberg 1978; Mintzberg and Waters 1985) that emerge over time rather than a forthright following of a pre-designed path (Mintzberg 1994). Mintzberg´s research highlights the complex and multifaceted nature of strategy patterns, arguing for multiple, overlapping and interdependent notions of what strategy may be, i.e., his well-known "5 p´s for strategy" – strategy as a plan, as a position, as a pattern, as a perspective, and as a ploy (Mintzberg 1987).

The recent Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) perspective adds a sixth *p* to Mintzberg´s 5 p´s – namely, strategy as ongoing *practice*. Influenced by the "practice turn" in the social sciences (Schatzki et al. 2001; Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Schatzki 2005), the SAP perspective focuses predominately on the micro-social practices of organizations (Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Chia and Mackay 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010). Hence, SAP recommends a shift in attention, from strategy as something a company *has* (possesses), i.e., which exists per se, to something that people *do* (e.g. Whittington 2004; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2007; Jarzabkowski 2008). This fundamental shift in perspective can be seen as part of a broader concern to humanize research in general and strategy research in particular (Ghosal and Moran 1996; Lowendahl and Revang 1998: Pettigrew et al. 2002; Tsoukas and Knudsen 2002; Jarzabkowski 2004) by bringing the actors back into the "research landscape" (Whittington 2006).

Using a SAP lens in the context of construction is thus not only to contribute empirical data and insights concerning situated strategy practices-in-the-making, but also to contribute to bridging the contextual gap that exists in regards to of how actual enactments at the local people's

level link to outcomes on various other levels in the construction industry (Green and May 2003; Dainty et al. 2007).

In accordance with the turn toward practices, SAP thus describes strategy as being *a situated and socially accomplished activity, which is consequential for the outcomes, survival and competitive advantages of an organization* (Johnson et al. 2003; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). It is important to note that this description includes not only formulated, intended strategy, but also unintended ones (Whittington, 2007; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). Unintended strategy is what Mintzberg and Waters (1985) termed as "emergent", meaning all the organizational activities that arise and that are unrelated, or very loosely linked, to a deliberate strategic plan.

Whittington (2007) criticized Mintzberg and Waters for using emergent strategies as to trivialize strategy as a scholarly subject of interest because strategic intent is so often detached from what actually happens in an organization. According to Whittington (2007), arguing that to disregard strategy merely because only some of them are actually implemented as intended would be analogous to a sociologist refusing to study the practice of marriage because so many marriages end up in divorce. Instead Whittington stressed the importance of taking strategy seriously, by including unintended strategy directions as important elements of strategy research and consequentially of practice since they too result in accomplished activity that may be consequential for organizational outcomes (Whittington et al 2003; Whittington 2007).

This argument resonates with the strategy paradox highlighted in the introduction of this thesis since it again implies that strategy is something that is important for a company yet its nature is difficult to specify or

define (e.g. Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg and Lampel 1999). In regards to the SAP perspective, such a broad approach to what the doing of strategy actually may be makes it difficult to pin down which activities can be labeled "strategy" and which cannot, resulting in further ramifications of the strategy debates among the different strategy schools. For SAP the challenge remains to strengthen their agenda by addressing this paradox (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010).

In their editorial paper Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) draw upon three different directions that can be used to define strategy from a SAP perspective. They argue that a distinguishing element that can be used to differentiate strategic activity from non-strategic activity is its connection with specific named strategic practices. For this they draw on Latour (1987) who reasoned that just as science may be defined as those activities that draw on named scientific practices e.g. methods, tools, scientific language, so may strategy be defined as those activities that draw on particular named strategic practices e.g. annual reviews, strategy workshops, strategic planning (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007:8). From this perspective, the widespread conception of strategy as a formal and rational organizational plan as defined by former schools of thought (e.g. Chandler 1962; Ansoff 1965; Wernerfelt 1984; Porter 1985; Barney 1991; Porter 1996) would thus merely represent one example, among many others, of a strategic practice.

A further approach to distinguish strategic activity from other activity has been to define it in terms of the actors: those practices are strategic that are carried out by strategists (Jarzabkowski et al 2007). Within SAP there is a call to consider strategists in a broader sense than the one used in other strategic-management literature (e.g. Chandler 1962; Porter 1980; Papadakis et al. 1998) thus looking beyond top-managers as the

"strategist" and instead expecting to find strategists occupying other positions and spaces (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). These positions range all the way down to lower-level employees (Regnér 2003), even including external actors such as consultants (Whittington et al. 2003). From a SAP perspective, it seems that the strategists are not defined in terms of any formal position, but in terms of the activities they undertake, i.e., the strategists are those that do strategy (Whittington, 2006), even if this is in more informal roles (as informal "strategic champions", see Mantere, 2005). As Jarzabkowski et al. (2007:11) put it: "the practitioners [strategists] are those that shape the construction of [strategy] practice".

However, Jarzabkowski et al. (2007) also argued that while the study of specific practices or practitioners can be helpful, it tends to narrow the analytical scope to how practitioners [strategists] interact with and deploy particular strategic practices while within the wider SAP agenda there lies a concern for all the different flows of activity by which strategy is actually done (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2005; et al. 2007; Whittington 2006; Johnson et al. 2007). This notion underpins the broader definition of strategy as being a situated and socially accomplished activity consequential for the outcomes on various organizational levels (Johnson et al. 2003; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007).

Reviewing these three directions, it is clear that the SAP perspective broadens the conception of strategy and strategizing, taking strategy from being about less to being about more, and including more activities and more organizational members[1]: from something that top managers *formulated* (e.g. Chandler 1962; Porter 1980) to something that almost anyone may *do* (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007). From

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[1] Whether or not this development reflects a similar development within the organizational realities over time is an interesting and important question, but beyond the scope of the discussion here.

being the practice of formulating strategy plans (e.g. Ansoff 1965; Porter 1980), it has been expanded to be conceptualized as a socially and situated accomplished activity which is consequential for organizational outcomes (Johnson et al. 2007), regardless if it is intended or not (Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Whittington, 2007; Jarzabkowski et al, 2007).

In developing these lines of thought, SAP has contributed a substantial body of empirical studies, drawing on a wide range of theories and contexts. However, to my knowledge, none of these have yet addressed strategy as practice in any fields related to construction. Since, as discussed earlier, most of the research on strategy work in construction has drawn on the earlier formalistic school of thought, I argue that using an overall SAP lens to study the unfolding of strategy work over time in a construction company will benefit the construction literature both theoretically and methodologically. Yet, as I will discuss later on in this thesis, an SAP lens has a number of inbuilt tensions and contradictions, which require critical reflection and further testing in other construction contexts. Some of these are highlighted and discussed in later on in this thesis.

While I do contend that the different SAP lines of though may be contradictory and inconclusive in regards to arriving at a definite definition of strategy, it seems also that the broader perspectives they offer with the inbuilt tensions encourage a more open and exploratory, i.e. inductive approach to an investigation of strategy work in organizations.

In order to identify and navigate the situated socially accomplished activities that unfold in an organization, I came to realize that paying attention to organizational change (RQ2) could provide a fruitful avenue. This assumption was based on the notion that key strategy practices

would overlap with key drivers of organizational change, which is described in the following section.

Organizational change and strategizing

Within SAP, the *doing* of strategy, has been referred to as *strategizing* (e.g. Johnson 2003; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). The intentional use of the verb rather than the noun, reflects the ontological shift towards portraying organizations as dynamic processes, practices, and activities, rather than formal structures, states or products (e.g., Whittington 2006). This implies an ongoing intrinsic relation to time and change, which are vehicles through which organizational outcomes (Johnson et al 2003) are created and (re)composed.

This reasoning relates to the second research question of this thesis. In order to navigate all the socially constructed activities that happen in an organization, I started by exploring the vehicle of organizational change, based on the assumption that strategy is something that inherently relates to organizational change (e.g. Melander and Nordqvist, 2008), particularly from a SAP perspective. By investigating actors' perceptions and reactions to change, I thought that I would be able to obtain notions of strategy and strategizing without needing to put these terms into the mouths of my respondents.

Organizational change itself has been described as happening in numerous different ways: as consisting of unfreezing, moving, and refreezing (Lewin, 1947); as (re)combinations of discontinuous and continuous change (e.g. Schumpeter 1950; Christensen 1997), as radical or incremental (e.g. Ettlie et al. 1984) or as cyclic (e.g. Tushman and Andersson, 1990; Mintzberg and Westley 1992). Following the tradition of modernist in the social sciences,

single-snapshot methods have generally been used to study change in organizations (Avital 2000), portraying an organization as timeless, neither connected to a past nor to a future. This stance is problematic as it discounts the historical role played by organizational dynamics and the influence of various contingencies over time (Armenakis et al, 1999; Pettigrew et al, 2001; Farjoun, 2002).

Pettigrew et al. (2001) criticized the tendency to view organizational change as enacted in discrete episodes rather than as path-dependent processes that emerge, progress and recede in a socio-cultural time and space, stating: "time is just not "out there" as a neutral chronology, but is also "in here" as a social construction of events in the context of the organizational time cycles that modulate the implicit rhythms of social systems" (pp. 700). Thus history matters, it is not just a photo album representing discrete instances of past events strung together, but holds meanings that are carried forward, and backward, in human consciousness. For each of these backward-forward iterations, events are subtly rationalized and reconceptualized to suit the various individuals' and the organization´s preferred interpretations of the past and the present (Räisänen et. al 2011; Räisänen et al. 2013). History is alive in the present and, more importantly, it shapes the future. This is what is meant by organizational change being path-dependent, and it is this dependency that needs to be accounted for when studying change. The dynamics of path-dependency in respect are already well acknowledged and central in other theoretical fields, e.g. epistemology theories (Radnitzky and Bartley 1987), discourse theory (Wetherell et al 2001), industrial wisdom (Melander and Nordqvist 2008), but less discussed in SAP and the construction literature.

Researchers have therefore argued for a repositioning of change in organizational research; to view change as a "given" (Stoltz, 2004), as a constant and path-dependent process that emerges, progresses and recedes in a socio-cultural space, rather than as discrete episodes that are enacted (Räisänen et. al 2011; Löwstedt et al 2011; Räisänen et al. 2013; see also appended Paper I). Such a repositioning of change in organizational-change research can be seen as a reversal of the current ontological priority: rather than change being viewed as a given property of an entity – an organization – the organization needs to be viewed as an emergent[2] state of continuous organizational change (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). This perspective seems to overlap with an SAP agenda in which strategizing is seen as an ongoing interaction between multiple actors that socially construct and accomplish a collective activity, using the verb *strategizing* to denote the same ontological priority of a continuous emergent state (Johnson et al, 2007; Jarzabkowski et al 2007).

Using a SAP lens to study strategizing: Some theoretical and methodological pointers

SAP researchers argue for theoretical and methodological pluralism as well as interdisciplinary research, and encourage the expansion of already existing theories rather than only pursuing attempts to develop new ones (Whittington 2004; Johnson et al. 2007; Jarzabkowski, 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010). It has often been questioned what exactly the theoretical basis of SAP is, and how it aligns with existing organization and social-theory approaches. Jarzabkowski et al's (2007), among others', response is that the SAP stream is characterized less by which theory is adopted than by what problem is explained.

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[2] It is important to note that "emergent" here denotes a general ontological re-positioning of change and is not related to Mintzberg´s use of "emergent" as to denote all unintented strategic activity.

So far researchers within SAP have recognized contributions from a wide range of sociological and organization theories (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007: 15) e.g. practice (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2003; 2005), sense-making (e.g. Rouleau 2005), culture (e.g. Melander and Norqvist 2008), power (e.g. Maitlis and Lawrence 2003), narrative (e.g. Boje 1991; Weick 1995; Rouleau 2003; Czarniawska 2004), actor network theory (e.g. Denis et al. 2007), (neo) institutional theory (e.g. Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott 2008) and discourse (e.g. Vaara et al. 2004; Mantere and Vaara 2008; Räisänen et al 2011).

This pluralistic and interdisciplinary outlook of SAP has informed this thesis in regards to the various more specific theories used and complements the overall framing of SAP. Jarzabkowski et al (2007) state: "outcomes from strategy-as-practice research need to be related to the definition of strategy as a situated, socially accomplished flow of activity that has consequential outcomes for the direction and/or survival of the group, organization or industry. The objective of strategizing research is, then, plausibly to explain some aspects of an activity which may be considered consequential at the chosen level of analysis" (pp. 17-18). Following this credo, I have focused on theories that have enabled me to link micro-level enactments with outcomes on various macro levels, which previously have tended to be considered separately in strategic-management and in organizational research (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010).

"Level" here implies a hierarchal relationship among activities, in terms of a hierarchy of systems within which there are advanced or higher levels consisting of lower levels and less complex systems (Miller 1978). The "practice turn" offers a means of bridging the micro-macro dualism so

often sought by organizational researchers (e.g. Chia and MacKay 2007), who argue that various levels mutually and recursively co-create one another throughout time, i.e., a certain societal totality (hierarchal level) in the organizational context is both the medium and the outcome of lesser level activities, and vice versa (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; 1990; 1998; Giddens 1984; Whittington 2006; Chia and MacKay 2007). Examples of such co-creations include: the co-creation between individuals and organizational practices and praxises over time (e.g. Whittington 2004; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2007; Chia and McKay 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010), between individuals and organizational strategies and outcomes (e.g. Mintzberg and Waters 1985; Burgelman 1991); between organizations in their networks (Porter 1998)) between organizations and their industries (Melander and Nordqvist, 2008), and between projects and their organizations (e.g. Engwall 2003; Bresnen et al. 2004; Sydow et al, 2004). Furthermore, as already mentioned, such co-creations are not static, but may shift, merge, or dissolve throughout the course of time (e.g. Klein et al. 1999).

These multi-level interdependencies make the practice of strategy a complex phenomenon, both for the practitioners that practice it and for the researchers that study it. In relation to the multi-dimensional nature of organizational phenomena, Felin and Foss (2005) mention the problem of upward infinite regress. That is the notion that an ever-higher level can in fact be applied over and over again in order to explain certain organizational phenomena. Every argument for a certain fundamental level of analysis, explaining for example a certain relationship of co-creation, can be trumped by referring to the importance of a higher level of analysis (Collis 1994) – or a lower level, or a cross level (Rousseau 1985). Put in another way, it is very hard to isolate a certain relationship within

the organizational context, and therefore also hard to establish cause and effect.

Klein et al. (1999) argued that the difficulty of developing organizational multi-level theory is to determine the appropriate scope for such theory. Some studies of multi-level theory appear somewhat simplistic: a theorist builds on a set of single-level propositions by adding a construct or two from a higher or lower level of analysis; or, a theorist shifts a theoretical proposition from one level of analysis to another: "We know that when individuals do x, y occurs. Therefore, when groups do x, y must also occur".

Such simple translations may not yield profound theoretical insights. Admittedly, at the opposite extreme multi-level theories are overwhelmingly complex, describing a jumble of moderating and mediating variables and relationships at several levels of analysis. The main insights drawn from these theories may therefore be overshadowed by the number of relationships posited in the models. The appropriate middle ground – not too simple, yet not too complex – may be difficult to find (Klein et al. 1999: 244).

Interpretative research would claim that this "middle ground" is not primarily for the researcher to find, but rather interpretative researchers try to access realities through the meanings that the participants, and the researcher assign to them (e.g. Orlikowski and Bardoudi, 1991; Schwandt, 2000; Walsham, 2006) Interpretative research is predicated on the general view that all knowledge of "reality", including all the domains of human action is socially produced by the human actors involved (Schwandt, 2000; Walsham, 2006). As appended Paper I concludes, there is more than one truth out there.

While the SAP agenda does not advocate any particular methodological directions as such (e.g. Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Whittington 2007), it views "an organization" as a socially accomplished reality the institutionalization of which is the social process by which its human actors come to accept a shared definition of its social reality. This definition is seen as independent of the individual actors own views or actions, but is also taken for granted as defining "the way things are" and "the way things are to be done" in the organization (Zucker, 1977, Weick and Kiesler 1979, Perrow 1986). In this thesis I have therefore given voice to the actors' own interpretations of their situated realities when I have tried to frame and navigate amongst the complex and various co-created "levels" that constitute the given organizational contexts studied.

In a recent paper regarding an SAP agenda, Seidl and Whittington (2014) highlighted ontological positions and theories that may enable researchers to link local strategizing with larger social phenomena, emphasizing that micro-level strategizing depends hierarchically on, and co-produces, larger macro structures and systems. Among some of these are perspectives and theories drawing on Giddensian structuration theory, Foucauldian discourse analysis, Bourdieusian culturally mediated dispositions, and narrative theory. The two latter theoretical streams have informed the research in this thesis. In the following, these streams are briefly described in order to exemplify how various more "specific" theories can be applied within the broader SAP perspective. Further discussion of my own use of the narrative and Boudieusian streams can be found in Papers I and II, respectively (and to some extent also in Paper IV).

Giddensian structuration theory (Giddens 1984) has been used extensively by strategy-as-practice scholars (Jarzabkowski 2004; Whittington 2006; 2007; 2010; Hendry 2000; cited in Seidl and Whittington 2014). This

perspective suggests that the relation between micro-level strategizing activities and the wider society can be captured by focusing on "management practices-in-use" as the primary unit of analysis (Jarzabkowski 2004: 551). The underlying assumptions are that actors draw on the strategy practices that the organization holds in stock and their local actions are furthermore a source of outcomes on various macro levels (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2004; Whittington 2006). Drawing on these notions, Whittington (2006) developed the integrative framework of *Practitioners* (those people who do the strategy work), *Practices* (the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done), and *Praxis* (the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished (e.g. Jarzabkowski 2005; et al. 2007; Whittington 2006; Johnson et al. 2007). It is at the nexus of these three dimensions: practitioners, practice, and praxis, where the doing of strategy takes place (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007:11).

The studies drawing on the Bourdesian perspective on strategy link Bourdieu´s concept of culturally mediated dispositions ("habitus") (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; 1990; 1998) of the wider social field with the local strategizing situation (e.g. Chia and Holt 2006; Chia and MacKay 2007; Splitter and Seidl 2011; se also appended paper II). For example, Chia and Holt (2006) argue that embedding practices in a social field shapes the strategists' individual dispositions, which in turn guide their local strategizing activity. However, Hurtado (2010) expressed criticism in regards to a too superficial use of Bourdieu by SAP scholars (see also Paper II).

While the Giddensian and Bourdiesian perspectives are more about the "doing", Foucaultian and narrative theory are more about "sayings" (Siedl and Whittington 2014). Knight and Morgan (1991) draw on Foucauldian

discourse analysis (Foucault 1980) to conceptualize strategy as a historically situated, macro-level discourse, constituting a field of knowledge and power which defines what the "real problems" are within organizations and what the "real solutions" to these problems are (see also Mantere and Vaara, 2008). Here the power effects disable particular actors from the strategy discourse, and empower others.

Finally, narrative theory (e.g. Gabriel, 2000 Boje, 2001) represents the concepts of narrative infrastructure. Fenton and Langley (2011) argue that the practice of strategy has to do with the production and consumption of strategy narratives; narratives can be found in the micro-stories told by managers and others as they interact and go about their daily work in the macro-level institutionalized practices that people draw on when practicing strategy. Similar conceptualizations of micro-macro links have been established with regard to narrative sub-genres, e.g. dominant narratives (Isabella 1991; Buchanan and Dawson 2007; Geiger and Antonacopoulou 2009; see also Paper I) narratives as "blood vessels" of organizational life (Boje 1991) consumption of "macro-narrative" (de La Ville and Mounoud 2010) or "meta-narrative" (Clarke et al 2009).

Besides using narrative theory and Bourdesian perspectives, this thesis has also drawn on social-identity theory (e.g. Ashforth and Mael 1989; Haslam 2002; Alvesson et al. 2008). Identity involves the ongoing cyclic interaction between both narration and action (Ezzy 1998), and I have used a social-identity lens in an attempt to link micro level enactments with outcomes on other organizational levels (Paper III). In the discussion of this thesis I argue that a social-identity lens can contribute both to the SAP perspective and to the construction-management literature.

Chapter III: RESEARCH CASE, DESIGN, AND METHODS.

Description of the case

This thesis draws on data from a large Swedish construction company, here referred to as Alpha. Alpha´s business areas include construction of buildings and infrastructure, project development, including commercial properties, homes and Public Private Partnerships. While much of the construction industry consists of small and micro-sized organizations (Bosch and Phillips 2003; Green et al 2004; Knauseder 2007), Alpha is one of a few large multinational construction organizations in Sweden. It employs approx. 60.000 people worldwide and compared to many actors in the construction industry, it is considered a "dominant organization" (Cheah and Chew 2005) characterized by much the same traits as large organizations in every other industry, including centralized large-scale organizational functions supporting the production in the individual projects. In this regard, Alpha could therefore be seen as an appropriate initial case to study strategy in construction (Cheah and Chew 2005; Flanagan et al. 2006).

In order to provide some context for the reader, the following is a brief description of the development of Alpha over the past 20 years. However, in regards to the interpretative nature of this thesis, I should probably emphasize here that this is my own description, based on formal documentation collected from Alpha. This description could thus be compared with the findings in this thesis that elucidate contingent and parallel narratives and interpretations of developments and events at Alpha.

This case study has focused on Alpha´s Swedish-based organization,

currently employing over 10.000 people and generating a yearly turnover exceeding 30 billion (SEK). In the 1990´s, Alpha was organized into different geographical units that operated independently from each other, with only a few if any common strategic directions. Back then, the company seemed to be characterized by a rather opportunistic way of doing business. The different geographical units took on all kinds of projects (both in Sweden and abroad) as long as they were considered to be profitable and the corporate board operated with an entrepreneurial spirit and invested in the stock markets as well as in several companies unrelated to the construction industry.

In the beginning of 2000 this state of affairs changed. The corporate board decided that in order to increase profitability Alpha needed to increase its efficiency and strive toward standardization and a higher degree of specialization. Therefore the board sold a large part of its stock-holdings as well as the proprietorships they had in other industries, and formulated a new strategic direction that was supposed to apply for the whole company. This strategy was divided into two main tracks: the first was to "increase the performance in the current organization", and the second was to "develop significantly more efficient building projects". With this, the board wanted Alpha to coordinate and make use of all the knowledge that already existed within the company and to capitalize on their scale and their large capital of experience in running building projects. With this initiative, Alpha intended to become a more efficient construction company and a "role model for Swedish construction".

This strategic direction remained more or less the same throughout the first decade of the 2000´s while top management decided on a number of organizational changes, motivating these based on the overall vision of a more efficient and profitable construction company. In 2003, Alpha´s CEO

reorganized and deleted a complete hierarchical level in an attempt to centralize the organization. At the same time an in-house, tailor-made balance-scorecard based tool was implemented in order to measure performance in the different geographical units; a common organizational code of conduct was formulated, and a central purchase organization was created. In 2008, the HR, finance and organizational support functions were moved out from the geographical units to sort under a common centralized unit. The main focus during the first decade of the 2000's was thus on increasing efficiency and profitability. In the beginning of 2010, Alpha started to develop yet another strategic direction in which "business volume growth" was added as an additional focus. It is at this point in time that my research at Alpha was initiated.

Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this thesis was to explore strategizing in construction, using Strategy-as-Practice (SAP) as an exploratory lens. This particular lens has provided the overall framing of the research, especially in the earlier stages. More specifically, the SAP lens has been used in regards to the ontological standpoint and the units of analysis of strategy. In line with SAP, several theories have been used as exploratory and explanatory tools for a deeper inquiry of the data and the chosen framing. As mentioned earlier, SAP does not privilege, nor does it exclude the use of complementary theories to interrogate SAP assumptions; rather, the argument is that these complementary theories should be chosen based on the nature of the problems investigated and what elements of the SAP framing is in focus.

In this thesis, I draw on narrative theory, practice theory, and social-identity theory. These theories are acknowledged in the literature as relevant in regards to studies of micro-level encounters; they have also been chosen in regards to their "abilities to link these micro level encounters to outcomes on various levels", which underpins the wider definition of a strategizing approach in SAP (e.g Jarzabkowski et al 2007; Siedl and Whittington 2014).

This thesis draws on rich data from a single, extended case study of a large Swedish construction company, here referred to as Alpha. It has been argued that a case study design is particularly appropriate when studying new topic areas (Eisenhardt 1989) and the unfolding of complex social phenomena (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000), especially when boundaries between the phenomena and the context remain unclear (Yin 2010). All these aspects seemed to apply to my purposes as well as aligning with the overall framing predicated by the SAP. Furthermore, in-depth studies of strategizing in construction remain scarce, especially on the micro level. It therefore seemed unwise to rely on preconceptions of strategy proposed in the traditional literature.

An overall explorative interpretative approach coupled with different methods common for case studies (e.g. Dainty et al. 2006) have been applied: interviews, focused observations and ethnography. These methods have been used to complement each other, and have built an interconnected progression throughout the research. However, this has not been a linear progression, but an iterative one; moving back and forth and alternating between enquiry of theory and empirical data is something that characterizes explorative research (e.g. Eisenhart, 1989; Langley 1999). Just as outcomes in organizations seldom represent the

original strategic plan (Mintzberg 1994) so has this research taken various turns along the way.

Throughout this research I have therefore revisited my data several times, putting on different glasses. I have followed-up emergent hunches acquired during my scrutiny of the transcriptions, e.g. interviews (Paper I) by following the actors as they enact strategy, e.g. observation study (Paper II and Paper III) to finally divest myself of my research glasses to reflect on my experiences and insights from living on site for 4 weeks, e.g. short ethnography (Paper IV).

It has been argued that using multiple methods can help provide the researcher with multiple perspectives (e.g. Dainty et al 2007, see also my discussion in Paper IV). Thus, the use of multiple methods also helped me to engage with these different perspectives, and strengthened the triangulation of my findings, enabling me to shed light on the complexity of attitudes, beliefs and assumptions that obtained in the organization and how these influenced individual and collective actions (e.g. Räisänen and Gunnarson 2004). However, triangulating multiple methods is not only about combining their different strengths, but also about testing and explaining their weaknesses, not only in methodological terms, but also in practical terms.

Paper I draws on data from 27 interviews (see table 1) concerning organizational change in Alpha. Analyzing the interviews we found strong similarities in how the managers in Alpha perceived organizational change to happen. Applying narrative analysis we argue that not only can organizational change be explained retrospectively using narratives, change can also be influenced through narratives (e.g. Boje 1991; Buchanan and Dawson 2007; Veenswisjk and Berendse, 2008). The

collective interpretation of organizational change that the managers were drawing from in their individual stories can thus seen as representing a dominant logic on the organizational level (Boje 1991; Isabella 1990; Weick 1995). From a more practical perspective, using retrospective narratives regarding 20 years of organizational change seemed to be a reasonable method to try and grasp the historical context of organizational change emerging through comparing the stories of the individual actors (Armenakis et al, 1999; Pettigrew et al, 2001; Farjoun, 2002).

However, even though these retrospective narratives provided a context in regards to an overall organizational logic in Alpha, they could not account for the complex situated enactments on the micro levels (even though some narrative theorist argue that narratives are effective predictors of behaviors). In order to be able to address the research questions posed in this thesis, and to be able to explore strategy-practice in-use (Jarzabkowski et al 2007) I needed also to study micro-level enactments as they unfolded in their situated context.

Paper II therefore draws on data from an observation study of strategy workshops (away days) during ten days, which involved around 50 of Alpha´s managers as they were engaging in a certain strategy practice (see table 1). This method allowed us to collect data on micro level processes relating to strategy as they unfolded and thus provided invaluable data for addressing RQ 1. However, the observation data of a certain practice in-use could not account for the broader phenomena sought in RQ 2. Observing the managers provided valuable insights in regards to *how* they acted, but it was only by also revisiting my interview data that I gained deeper insights into *why* they acted the way they did.

Paper III draws on both the interview data and the observation data. Using a social-identity lens, I linked the dominant narrative of organizational logic with the unfolding of micro-level practices. More specifically, by looking at both data sets through a social identity-lens, the interview data and observation data could inform each other through an ongoing cyclic scrutiny of narration *and* action (Ezzy 1998). I argue in the discussion that an observation method can be used to uncover the underlying social capital mobilized by various in-groups and out-groups, especially at boundary interfaces where social capital is challenged and resisted. However, as others also have argued, an observation method is less appropriate to explore the underlying logics of practice-as-usual in a certain field (e.g. Tutt et al 2012).

It has been argued that use of an ethnographic method is particularly apt to enable understanding of practices of a field (Dainty 2008; Pink et al. 2012), which are not accessible through standard interviews or observations (Tutt et al 2012). In order to explore the underlying logic of the practices of a building site, the heart of construction, I therefore carried out a four-week ethnographic study (see Paper IV). However, one of the weaknesses of an ethnographic method is in regards to its practical use, i.e., it is less available compared to other methods, in regards to time and accessibility. In Paper IV, I therefore explore how a shorter ethnographic study can be used as a valuable complement to longer ethnographic studies and to other qualitative methods.

Table 1 provides an overview of the different methods and the data collection they facilitated. An in-depth explanation of the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of each of these methods, and how they have related to each other throughout the study is provided in each of the four appended papers and is further discussed in Chapters V and VI.

	Paper I *Data collected:* *Spring 2010 and Autumn 2010*	Paper II *Data collected:* *Autumn 2011 and Spring 2013*	Paper III *Data collected:*	Paper IIII *Data collected:* *Spring 2014*
INTERVIEWS	27 interviews Open-ended interviews, audio recorded, transcribed verbatim 1-2 hours /interview High and middle level managers/central functions/ line organization 1 HR manager 2 regional managers 8 district managers 1 project manager 1 economy manager 2 market managers 1 control manager 2 business development managers 3 strategic group members 4 regional managers 1 "environmental" manager	5 interviews 5 follow-up interviews with participants from the strategy workshops	Paper III use a conflation of all the data from both Paper I and Paper II	
WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION	internal strategy documentation, annual reports covering the past 20 years, business pamphlets, organizational website, intranet material	100 pages of written field notes / written visions and goals, planning documentation, workshop handouts: agendas, presentations slides, group exercises, summary group exercises		50 pages of written field notes /pamphlets and official materials collected on site / internal document about the project downloaded from the intranet
FIELD OBSERVATIONS		9 full days of workshop activities 1 group with 10 high level managers 1 group with 20 district managers 1 group with 20 project managers		4 weeks of participatory observation study of a building site, occupied by around 40 construction workers, 3 team leaders, and 1 site manager
MISCELLANEOUS	time spent at Alpha´s office/ informal conversations/notes taken	informal conversations/ breakfasts, lunches, dinners, after work beer, with the managers during the workshop days/notes taken		300 pictures taken on site informal after work get-togethers with the team leaders and site workers

TABLE 1. Overview of methods and data

Chapter IV: SUMMARY OF APPENDED PAPERS

The results in this thesis are represented in four appended research papers. These papers also correspond respectively to the various theories and methods used in the research, as well as the various organizational levels studied in Alpha. This section provides a brief summary and highlights the main findings of each of the papers. The papers are appended in the same order as they emerged in the research project.

PAPER I

Löwstedt, M. and Räisänen, C. (2012). 'Playing back-spin balls': narrating organizational change in construction. *Construction Management and Economics,* 30(9), 795-806.

Purpose:
The purpose of this paper was to understand how managers in a large construction company make sense of organizational change, and also to explore how a comparison of formal and lived individual versions of change can inform theories of change in construction.

Rationale and method:
The study underlying this paper was based on the direction within SAP that defines strategizing as being a social pattern that is consequential for organizational outcomes and change (e.g. Johnson et al. 2007; Jarzabkowski et al 2007; Melander and Nordqvist 2008). Instead of articulating the term "strategy", we draw on the assumption that allusions to strategy and strategising would overlap with the key activities and

practices that are linked to organizational outcomes and change over time. To explore this avenue, we interviewed 27 managers from a wide variety of different organizational units and position in Alpha using open-ended interviews regarding organizational change, asking them to describe organizational key events and the underlying drivers of change. Using this approach we were interested to explore the concept of strategy insofar as it emerged in the managers' own stories of organizational change over time.

Findings:

In the analysis of these interviews, a dominant narrative of organizational change emerged, which included common organizational key events and drivers as well as an underlying modus operandi in regards to characteristics of change. The characteristics and drivers of change revolved around a pragmatic, reactive, and short-term based opportunistic pursuit of immediate challenges,rather than following a common long-term pre-formulated path as assumed in the traditional strategy literature, as the notion of a strategic plan predicates (Barney 1991; Porter 1996). This contrast is furthermore emphasized in the paper by a comparison between the managers' dominant narrative of change and formal strategic plans.

Contributions:

Besides highlighting a dominant narrative of change in a construction company, this paper also contributes by showing how a narrative approach may be used to link micro- and macro level phenomena. It also explicates how a narrative approach enables the capturing of the significant variations, contradictions and tensions, embedded in the various levels of organizational change.

PAPER II

Räisänen, C. and Löwstedt, M. (2014) Stakes and struggles in liminal spaces: construction practitioners interacting with management-consultants, *Engineering Project Organization Journal*, 4(2-3), 123-133.

Purpose:

The purpose of this paper was to explore how a Bourdiesian lens can be used to explore and explain micro-level enactments unfolding when two groups that draw on different social capital interact at a certain boundary interface, here being the liminal space of a strategy workshop (away day).

Rationale and method:

In contrast to Paper I, this paper approaches strategy directly by studying a common "strategy practice in use" (Jarzabkowski, 2004: 551). In order to explore the micro-level unfolding of a strategy practice, we collected data from an observation study of Alpha´s managers engaging in strategy workshops (away days), which have been established as a common strategy practice from a SAP perspective (Hendry and Siedl 2003; Jarzabkowski 2007 Johnson et al. 2010). These strategy workshops were furthermore organized by external strategy consultants, which from a SAP perspective could be viewed as strategists, i.e., actors that do strategy in companies (Whittington et al 2003). The data consist of observations of nine full-days of strategy workshop activities, involving over 50 of Alpha´s managers representing three organizational levels (high-level managers, district managers, project managers).

Findings:

The findings show how Alpha´s managers collectively resisted the strategy practices that were proposed by the consultants. Drawing on Bourdieu

(e.g. Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), we explain this resistance as a struggle between two groups belonging to different professional fields with very different habitus (e.g. Bourdieu 1990). The Alpha managers mobilized sufficient symbolic capital relating to a signaled uniqueness of the construction field, and enacted this capital as a resistance to uptake of the strategy practices suggested by the external consultants.

Contributions

The paper first and foremost contributes to empirical examples of strategy workshops in the construction context as well as contributing to the consultancy expertise literature. It also contributes theoretically by showing how Bourdieu's concept of practice, field, and capital can be used to understand power struggles at intra- and inter-organizational boundary interfaces. We argue that such studies can be seen as being of particular interest for construction, which largely depends on the ability to negotiate various boundary interfaces (Dainty et al. 2006; Fellows and Liu 2012).

PAPER III

Löwstedt, M and Räisänen, C. (2014): Social identity in construction: enactments and outcomes, *Construction Management and Economics*, 32(11), pp. 1093-1105.

The purpose:

The purpose of this paper was to examine processes of identification in construction, focusing on the relational aspects between self and the social (collective and structure) in order to determine possible links between micro-level enactments and outcomes on various macro-levels.

Rationale and method:

The results in Paper I and Paper II prompted reflections about the data in new ways, resulting in the question: if common strategy practices such as strategy plans (Paper I) or strategy workshops (Paper II) do not overlap with the key practices that are consequential for organizational directions and outcomes in Alpha, then what practices do? That is, relating to the second research question in this thesis we explore the concept of strategizing as those key patterns of activities and practices that produce outcomes on various organizational levels. We therefore revisited both the interview data and the observation data. By triangulating and combining these two data sets we found that both narratives and behaviors seemed to be embedded in a particularly strong collective identity.

Findings:

Drawing on theories of social identity (e.g. Mael 1989; Haslam 2004; Ashforth et al. 2008) and self-reinforcing processes (e.g. Sydow et al. 2009; Schreyögg and Sydow 2011), and using a conflation of both the interview data and the observation data, this paper shows how the managers at Alpha create, consume, and re-produce a collective identification that

appears to be related to the craft and trade of the construction work carried out on building sites. We furthermore argue that this particular identification is enacted as common organizational practices permeating all the organizational levels in Alpha.

Contributions:

Focusing on the local people level, which remains under-researched in construction (Green and May 2003; Dainty et al. 2007), a social-identity lens is used to highlight characteristics and dynamics of certain in-groups and out-groups relating to the construction industry. Furthermore the paper contributes by exploring the links between the micro-level enactments of a certain construction-based identity and with outcomes (and/or non-outcomes) on various macro levels (e.g. group levels, organizational levels, and even industry levels). We argue that these findings contribute important contextuality to the practices in the construction industry.

PAPER IV

Löwstedt, M. (2014) "Taking off my glasses in order to see": exploring practice on a building site using self-reflexive ethnography. *Construction Management and Economics* (accepted subject to "minor revisions"; revised version submitted).

Purpose:
The purpose of this paper was to explore how a short self-reflexive ethnographic study can generate new perspectives of the complex practices of a building site.

Rationale and Method:
The findings in Paper III show how the managers in Alpha collectively identified with the craft and trade of construction work carried out on building sites. Leading on from the reflections in the previous papers, the main purpose of Paper IV was to explore the space that seemed to lie at the heart of the collective identification perceived, i.e. the building site. It has been argued that the practices on building sites reside in a situated body of construction knowing, which can only be known by being in place, amidst the actual activities as they unfold (Pink et al. 2012). Therefore, rather than only observing the practices of a building site, I engaged in an ethnographic study of one of Alpha´s building site in which I embedded myself as a dogs-body worker, both observing and participating in the practices during four weeks.

Findings:
The insights I collected from this ethnographic study support many attitudes and behaviors reflected in the accounts of higher-level managers at Alpha, including resistance towards planning and a foregrounding of

practical reactive-based problem solving, and thus relate to the findings in all three of the preceding papers. However, this study also increased my understanding that the practices of a building site need to be viewed and studied as complex, interdependent recursive loops in which materialities and socialities are intertwined. More such studies would be warranted.

Contributions:

This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion regarding ethnographic approaches in construction research by showing how valuable insights and critical awareness through a self-reflexive stance can be drawn from shorter "ethnographic episodes". While the kind of knowledge that can be generated from this approach differs from that of longer ethnographies, I argue that it can be used as an invaluable complementary method in order to generate new perspectives of the practices of building sites.

Chapter V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Strategizing in Alpha

This thesis has attempted to look at strategy with a "sociological eye" (Whittington 2007) by using a SAP lens (e.g. Whittington 2004; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Jarzabkowski 2008; Golsorkhi et al. 2010). As described earlier this perspective predicates an overall shift in focus from strategy being something that a company *has,* i.e. which exists per se, to strategy being something that people *do* (e.g. Whittington 2004; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson *et al.* 2007; Jarzabkowski 2008). Drawing on rich data from an in-depth case study of a large construction organization (Alpha) it is this *doing* of strategy; the *strategizing* (e.g. Johnson 2003; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007) which has been pursued here.

A challenge using a SAP perspective was to distinguish which activities could be labeled strategizing and which could not (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010). Paper I approached strategizing as being a socially accomplished activity that is consequential for organizational outcomes and directions (Johnson et al. 2003; Whittington, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007). Using an interpretative approach, conceptions of strategy were studied insofar as they were considered and perceived as important (Whittington 2003; 2007) in the actors' own stories about organizational outcomes and change (e.g. Johnson et al. 2003; Whittington, 2006; Melander and Nordqvist 2008). Strategizing was also approached more directly by studying a particular "strategy practice in use" (Jarzabkowski, 2004: 551), here exploring the activities unfolding when Alpha´s managers engaged in strategy workshops (Paper II).

The findings of these studies show that traditional strategy practices, such as annual reviews, strategic planning, strategy workshops (Jarzabkowski 2007) did not seem to be overtly consequential for the organizational outcomes and directions in Alpha. There were indeed some actors in Alpha that had formulated strategic plans; some that had commissioned the strategy workshop; some that had been employed based on their skills in regards to strategy practices. Their actions had most likely been perceived as important and consequential to them at the time of acting/deciding; however, from a historical perspective these proved to have weak uptake among organizational actors broadly speaking. To be consequential for organizational outcomes and directions, strategic decisions need to emerge in top-down bottom-up negotiations that link micro and macro levels together (e.g. Whittington 2004; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2007; Chia and McKay 2007; Golsorkhi et al. 2010), which did not seem to be the case in the contexts studied in this thesis.

Paper III highlights a collective identification among the majority of Alpha´s managers. The social processes revolving around this collective identification embed a wide intersubjective "discourse of truth" (Foucault 1984: 299) regarding the "real problems" and "real solutions" in Alpha (Knight and Morgan 1991). The findings show how the enactments of a collective identification neutralized formally appointed strategic managers in Alpha largely due to the collective´s turning a blind eye to that which "is not invented at home" (Paper II and III), or by delegitimizing its strategic value by mobilizing their own collective symbolic capital and explicitly and strongly articulating its irrelevance to the company (Paper II and III).

While the managers in Alpha neutralized and marginalized those they considered (il)legitimate actors, they collectively also empowered others (Knights and Morgan 1991). Actors bestowed with full legitimacy in Alpha

were those that had construction-craftsmanship experience on site and who adhered to a practical problem-solving mind-set; these readily earned accreditation for promotion to higher organizational levels (like themselves).

The ethnographic study of one of Alpha´s building sites supported the on-site identities and practices that the higher-level managers had identified with in the interviews and signaled in the strategy workshops observed, including a proclivity towards reactive based problems solving and a resistance to planning (Paper IV). The findings in this thesis thus link the traits of on-site identification and practices with identities and practices of the higher-level managers in Alpha, which in turn strengthens this identification at the lower levels. It also highlights the social process that brings about and reinforces these attitudes and behaviors (Paper III). Or put differently, the findings show how a collective identification revolving around a dominant discourse of the "real problems" and "real solutions" (Knights and Morgan 1991) reinforces itself through a top-down, bottom-up, emergence throughout all the organizational levels of Alpha.

Even though the managers in Alpha seemed to resist strategy practices per se, the findings show how the social processes revolving around collective identification can be seen as bridging the micro and macro levels in Alpha. In SAP terms this could be seen as characterizing a pattern of *strategizing* (Whittington 2006; Chia and MacKay 2007; Siedl and Whittington 2014). The core, content, and behavior (Ashforth et al 2008) of this collective identification overlapped and were mutually constitutive dimensions linking together narratives and actions (Ezzy 1998), and linking outcomes on various organizational levels with enactments on the micro-levels, for example, by local consumption of a collective narrative of organizational change (Paper II), and a specific construction-habitus mediating

interactions with those that stand outside it, whether they are from outside of Alpha (Paper II and III); inside (Paper III); or as enacted in practices and actualities of a building site (Paper IV).

One of the purposes of a strategic plan is to reduce the uncertainty and ambiguity in regards to an uncertain future (Rhodes and Brown 2005) by providing a collective "future perfect strategy" (Schutz 1976; Pitsis et al 2003). While the managers in Alpha collectively resisted the uptake of the designated strategist´s plan for the future, the social process revolving around the collective identification constructed a socially embedded blueprint linking the past with the future through the present. Even though this thesis views organizations as emergent states (e.g. Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Stoltz 2004), a number of mechanisms at the heart of the collective identification self-reinforce particular states throughout time in a process of "becoming to remain the same" (Paper III).

Given that the social processes underlying the collective identification may be perceived as *strategizing* from a SAP perspective, the question of who then should be considered the *strategists* is raised. While top-level managers have traditionally been privileged in the " strategy literature " (e.g. Chandler 1962; Porter 1980; Papadakis et al. 1998), SAP posits that strategists may also occupy a wide variety of other positions and spaces (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007), including, for example, lower level managers (Regnér 2003), and external actors (Whittington et al 2003), including not only formal, but also informal roles (Mantere 2005).

So, who are then the strategists at Alpha? Are they those managers that formulated the strategic plans, even though the majority of managers did not perceive the plan as important for organizational outcomes? Are they the management consultants, even though they were unable to achieve an

uptake of their strategic practices? Or are they those individuals that were highlighted to have managed to realize organizational outcomes in Alpha, not through their formal roles, but through their person-based and energetic actions, empowered by the collective identification (Paper I). The issue of who to consider the strategist seems to be part of a circular argument regarding what is considered as strategizing in the first place, i.e., the strategists are those that strategize and vice versa (Jarzabkowski et al 2007).

The social processes highlighted in the papers did not seem to be related to any particular individuals that could be pinpointed, rather they better reflect Bourdieu´s conception of practice as providing a "structuring structure", which, in turn, is collectively orchestrated without being the product of an organizational actor as "conductor" (Bourdieu 1990: 53). The collective identification empowered all managers to collectively act as strategists ("conductors") insofar as they were provided with the legitimacy to define what "the real problems" and "real solutions" in Alpha were and thereby also reject the capital of those proposed by the (il)legitimate strategists, i.e., the consultants (Paper II), or the "outsiders within" (Paper III). This cannot, however, be understood only as an internal process reinforced by social-based stimulus but something embedded in wider external contextualities of the construction industry (Paper IV; see also the discussions in Paper I and III).

Jarzabkowski et al (2007) argued that the SAP agenda would benefit from deeper understanding concerning the identities of "strategists", since their identities influence how they shape strategies. The findings of this thesis contribute to this understanding; however, they also show that the collective identification did not only make the managers in Alpha do something, they were also "doing identity" for their own reasons and

purposes (Jenkins 2008). What I mean here is that the collective construction-based identity was not only a mediator of how the managers interpreted their challenges, but the challenges were rather embedded in their construction-based identity. The managers' self-definition was based on what needed to be done and how it should be done (Paper II and III).

This finding challenges the conception of whether a strategist should only be seen as a "conductor", i.e., as someone who actively organizes and produces future directions. *Strategizing,* in my view, is both the medium and the outcome of individual practices (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; 1990; 1998; Giddens 1984; Whittington 2006; Chia and MacKay 2007). This means that in order for strategizing to occur, there have to be both producers and consumers of strategy. However, the analytical focus predicated by the SAP perspective seems to broadly favor those actors that are producers of strategies, i.e., those that are involved in "strategy-making" (Jarzabkowski et al 2007), those that "create and develop" strategy (Regnér 2003), or those that "influence opinions" and "influence organizational change" (Mantére 2005). The roles of other vital actors, those that consume strategy in order for a strategizing discourse to emerge are downplayed, rendering an incomplete picture of strategy-as-practice. My findings furthermore challenge the distinction overall, by showing how the multiple dimensions and relational aspects of identity unfolds in a social process in which Alpha´s managers can be seen as both producing and consuming their own strategies.

While the SAP perspective has contributed to both of the research questions posed, it has not offered answers in regards to the unpacking of the tension highlighted in between these two questions. In fact, in the case of construction, this tension seems larger than ever as the findings indicate a rather weak link between certain common and pre-defined strategy

practices (Jarzabkowski et al 2007) and organizational-level outcomes in Alpha. This tension would however encourage more SAP informed studies in the construction context, in order to further explore what the key practices are, and what the key practitioners do in regards to outcomes on the organizational levels in the construction industry.

Reflections on studying practice

This thesis is largely based on explorative and interpretative research. The approach allowed me to take occasional turns away from strategy as such, and explore wider interpretations of the linkages between micro-level enactments and outcomes on various organizational levels. Bourdieu has criticized interpretative research for only taking into account the experiential and of explaining the world solely as experiences by the individuals situated in it (Bourdieu and Waquant 1992). In Bourdieu´s conception of "practice", the objective and subjective are instead fluid, continuously interacting and relational.

While this research has relied on interpretative methods, the results can be seen as spanning beyond merely experiences of the actors. For example, the social mechanisms of identification underlying the specific practices found can be seen as a forming "structuring structure" (Bourdieu 1990: 53) that regulates and facilitates enactments beyond the actors immediate consciousness, i.e., this social structure emerged in my own analysis (interpretation) of their realities. From a strict epistemological viewpoint, this thesis has therefore partly moved outside "interpretivism" and into "hermeneutics", with the difference being that interpretivism strives to capture and reproduce the original and intended meaning of an action from the actors own viewpoint while a hermeneutic standpoint acknowledges the interpreter as an active co-producer of meaning (cf.

Schwandt 2000). That is, even though the actors' own voices have largely been represented in this thesis, it also recognizes what Czarniawska (2007:21) suggests: that "an outsider can never know better than an insider, but an outsider can see other things", thereby acknowledging myself as being an active co-producer of the meaning being retold in this thesis. The question is whether from a SAP perspective it is necessary to take on such a stance of interpretation since *strategizing* includes not only intended socially accomplished activity, but also unintended ones (Whittington 2007; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007).

Whittington (2006) proposed an integrative framework where the practice of strategy should be studied as it unfolds in the nexus of three dimensions (the practitioners, practices, and praxis). The methodological assumptions on which this framework is based are the same as those underlying the wider SAP agenda, being that the practice of strategy is to be studied within the realms of its own self-defining. The meaning of this is that a certain practice is to be studied in regards to how it usually is practiced ("practice-as-usual"), focusing particularly on, for example, "everyday behavior" and "day-to-day strategy practice" (Balogun et al 2003), "strategy practices-in-use" (Jarzabkowski 2004), or a strategist doing strategy (Whittington 2006; Jarzabkowski et al. 2007; Johnson et al. 2007).

However, the findings in this thesis can be seen as explicating how underlying logics of practice emerge much more clearly in the digressions and the one-off of certain practices than in the "everyday behavior" and "practice-as-usual". While many aspects of the practices readily found could be confirmed and triangulated retrospectively using the various methods and data (interviews, observation, participatory ethnography), the initial findings emerged mainly through contradictions and

digressions. Because many of the key aspects of the practices found in the research seemed to remain latent until the practice-as-usual was challenged or triggered by tensions that arose when people were forced to act in (slightly) divergent circumstances and manners.

The managers identifying with the construction-based habitus did not need to signal to each other "who they were" or "what they did", nor did they need to mark their habitual behaviors. This renders the practice and behavior difficult to discern by an outsider researcher; it is through the marking and signposting in contradictory stories (Paper II) or in perceptions of being challenged in interactions with significant others (Paper II and III) that particular traits and behaviors become visible. Furthermore, Paper IV illustrates how easy it is to be deluded in regards to underlying logics of practices of a field when merely one is merely a passive observer of the "practice-as-usual". Instead I have come to realize how many of the key findings underlying the actualities of a construction site emerged only as I reflected on my own different selfhood in this context.

These findings could thus be seen as methodological contributions of this thesis, which in turn are related to the theoretical contributions. The previous section discussed the findings in this thesis largely by using aspects of a collective identification as a red thread. This reflects not only how a social-identity lens (e.g. Ashforth and Mael 1989; Haslam 2004) was used to recognize *strategizing* discourse in Alpha, but also how much of the logics of the practices were discerned initially. Processes of identification are used by people to define themselves, communicate their selfhood to others, and use that defined selfhood to navigate their professional lives (Ashforth et al 2008). The findings in this thesis show how such processes are particularly useful to probe underlying logics of

practice as they emerge as contradiction and tensions between certain in-groups and out-groups, and could thus be seen as a theoretical lens that can add not only to the SAP agenda (Seidl and Whittington 2014), but also to wider studies of practice. Such studies of in-group out-group interactions can furthermore be seen as being of particular interest for construction, which performance and outcomes largely depend on the ability of a wide variety of professional fields to negotiate tensions in boundary interfaces (Dainty et al. 2006; Fellows and Liu 2012).

Chapter VI: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSTRUCTION, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings in this thesis show how the managers in Alpha collectively identify with and foreground the original craftsmanship relating to the building site. This over time seems to have embedded a common set of practices that permeated all the organizational levels, including project levels, middle levels, and higher levels, through a top-down as well as bottom-up negotiation encompassing mainly those with the appropriate and legitimate grounding or habitus. It can indeed be considered a significant organizational strength to have managers unite and socially organize themselves around the special challenges adhering to running building projects in the construction industry (Higgin and Crichton 1966; Dubois and Gadde 2002; Winch 2003 Cicmil and Marshall 2005; Harty 2008; Ness 2010). However, the contribution here is a warning that the salient foregrounding of these types of skills and practices might be at the expense of other important skills and practices that relate more to running a construction organization as a whole (Chinowsky and Meredith 2000; Langford and Male 2008).

It is imperative for large organizations to manage both short-term efficiency based on exploitation of existing knowledge, and long-term development based on exploration of new knowledge (Cohen and Levinthal 1990; Benner and Tushman 2003; Raisch et al. 2009; Eriksson 2013). However, fostering and embedding a collective identification in the ways discussed in this thesis seems to be a prioritized concern which largely favors those practices that concern the short-term operational exploitation rather than long-term strategic exploration.

This thesis has problematized the overall conception of strategy and argued that managers in Alpha participate collectively in a discourse of strategizing. However, those strategy practices intended for more proactive strategizing, such as strategy plans and strategy workshops, were downplayed, and those actors that had been appointed specifically to work with these practices were delegitimized. Proactive strategizing and organizing Alpha for future challenges tended to be subordinated due to the strong collective focus on the more immediate challenges of running building projects (Chinowsky and Meredith 2000) and of maintaining a status quo. It is also in these regards that the importance of strategy has been advocated for the construction industry by a number of researchers: as a way for construction companies to work more proactively on an organizational level by thinking "strategically" about future long-term directions (Junnonen 1998 Price and Newson 2003; Chinowsky and Byrd 2001; Langford and Male 2008).

In Alpha´s case this necessitates letting go of collective ideals and allowing "strangers" into their midst. The findings show that it is not enough to appoint particular strategy positions as long as there exists underlying social processes and structures that delegitimize the actions of the appointed actors on the margins of the collective. An extract in Paper III (Löwstedt and Räisänen 2014) is very suggestive in regards to the dominant conception that managers in construction companies should foremost be "construction workers" (pp.1101).

The views on who belongs to a certain legitimate "in-group" raise questions in regards to competency hybrids among managers in construction. As already argued, although the collective identification found could be considered an organizational strength, in regards to long-

term change and development the organization would benefit if the in-group welcomes new competency hybrids, including those that are appointed strategists and who hold support functions in the organization. From an organizational-learning perspective, the self-reinforcing properties of this construction-worker self-sufficiency could be a barrier for knowledge sharing and innovation.

While there is an increase in studies regarding diversity of the workforce in the construction industry, these studies are still mainly limited to diversity in terms of gender and race. The findings in this thesis warrant an expansion of this ongoing discussion to also include diversity in terms of competencies of the workforce throughout all the various roles and organizational levels. This because, even though this thesis is based on the actualities of a single construction company, there are indications that the micro-level practices highlighted here can be linked to wider social phenomena relating to the construction industry at large (Siedl and Whittington 2014).

The collective identification found was not mainly related to Alpha, but to the industry-specific trade of doing on-site construction work. This suggests that the collective identification found seems to be embedded in the industry level, and therefore apply to construction more generally. The speculation on this point seems to be supported by Applebaum´s (1999) study of construction workers in the US, where he found a similar identification with the trade rather than with the job or the organization. Furthermore, many of the core traits of this identification have been found in other studies in construction, such as a shared sense of self-sufficiency and autonomy rather than relying on common technical or managerial systems (Applebaum 1999; Hayes 2002; Styhre et al 2004; Knauseder

2007), and a proclivity towards reactive problem solving and a resistance towards formal planning (e.g. Bröchner et al. 2002; Christiansen 2012).

This suggests that a better understanding of how the workforce in the construction industry identifies and enacts this identification could provide significant contextual ramifications to the on-going discussions regarding the relations between industry practices, structural circumstances, and performance in the industry (Green and May 2003; Barrett and Barrett 2004; Fernie et al 2006).

One salient dimension underlying the dominant practices emphasized in this thesis is the empowering effect of having worked and learnt on building sites in order to earn accreditation for promotion and legitimacy. This could be considered as an example of a tangible aspect of the findings that can be used to guide future studies in regards to the generalizability of the phenomena highlighted. Doing, for example, a wider quantitative-based study, mapping the professional backgrounds of construction managers at all organizational levels in the industry could provide an indication of the implications of these findings for construction more generally.

Finally, it would also be valuable to compare these findings with other industries. Do higher-level managers in other industries identify with a certain industry trade, or rather with aspects relating to their managing responsibilities? Can we discern a similar career path among managers at different organizational levels, in which they earned accreditation for promotion first and foremost by working with and knowing the production-related craft? How do competency hybrids of higher-level managers in other industries compare with construction? And how do strategists in other industries perceive their legitimacy for action? Such

comparative studies could provide important insights in regards to the meaning and long-term consequences of the *strategizing* discourse found in this thesis.

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